

Session #4

Philip: The Model Evangelist Acts 8

The word “evangelist” (EUANGELISTES) is a compound word composed of the prefix EU (= good) and ANGELOS (= messenger). The evangelist is literally a “good messenger.” He is one who comes with an announcement of **good news!**

Although the verb “evangelize” (EUANGELIZOMAI) (= to proclaim good news) and the noun “gospel” (EUANGELION) (= good news) occur scores of times, the word “evangelist” occurs only three times in the New Testament:

- *It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be **evangelists**, and some to be pastors and teachers.... (Eph. 4:11).*
- *But you (Timothy), keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an **evangelist**, discharge all the duties of your ministry. (II Tim. 4:5).*
- *Leaving the next day, we reached Caesarea and stayed at the house of Philip the **evangelist**, one of the Seven. He had four unmarried daughters who prophesied. (Acts 21:8-9).*

In Acts 8 we see something new occurring for the first time: the Gospel is beginning to cross **cultural boundaries**. First in Samaria and then to an Ethiopian official, the Good News of Jesus breaks out of its Jewish identity and begins to touch the world. Acts 1:8 is becoming a reality! At the center of pivotal moment in history is Philip.

As one of the Seven, Philip was “only” a deacon (a “layman”). As such his assignment was to “wait on tables” so that the apostles could be free to devote their attention “to prayer and the ministry of the word” (Acts 6:1-6). However, Philip’s influence spread far beyond the “food pantry.” He was the key figure in the revival of Samaria and the spread of the Gospel into Ethiopia! He is our model for understanding **evangelism**.

In Acts 8 we see Philip in action. The verb EUANGELIZOMAI occurs five times:

- *Those who had been scattered **preached** the word wherever they went. Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Christ there. (Acts 8:4).*
- *But when they believed Philip as he **preached the good news** of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. (Acts 8:12).*
- *When they had testified and proclaimed the word of the Lord, Peter and John returned to Jerusalem, **preaching the gospel** in many Samaritan villages. (Acts 8:25).*
- *Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and **told him the good news** about Jesus (Acts 8:35).*
- *Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and traveled about, **preaching the gospel** in all the towns until he reached Caesarea. (Acts 8:40).*

I. Outline of Acts 8:4-40

Philip the Evangelist					
Philip sharing Christ with the Samaritans Mass evangelism			Philip sharing Christ with the Ethiopian One-on-one evangelism		
Phase I	Phase II	Phase III	Led by the Spirit	Conversation	Baptism
Many believe and are baptized... even Simon!	Peter and John come and the Samaritans receive the Holy Spirit	Church discipline. Not all the converts have authentic faith	This is a divine appointment	The Scripture is used to introduce the Ethiopian to Jesus	A "decision" is called for and formalized by baptism
1 13	14 17	18 25	26 29	30 35	36 40

II. Understanding Evangelism

Acts 8 is an excellent passage to help us understand the nature of evangelism. Through the life of Philip the Evangelist, we learn at least seven fundamental truths about evangelism.

1. There can be no evangelism without **an evangel** (Gospel, a message of Good News).

We have already seen that evangelism is the announcement of Good News (= the Gospel). But what is the content of this message?

In Philip's life, we see the message in its most basic form. Although his ministry included signs and wonders (vv. 6-7, 13), the essence of his ministry of evangelism was in the message he preached.

- *Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed **the Christ** there (v. 5).*
- *...Philip...preached the good news of the kingdom of God and **the name of Jesus Christ**... (v. 12).*
- *Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about **Jesus** (v. 35).*

Philip was doing what other evangelists in Acts were doing: offering Christ.

- *Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, (the apostles) never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that **Jesus is the Christ** (5:42).*
- *At once (Paul) began to preach in the synagogues that **Jesus is the Son of God** (9:20).*
- *(Some of those who were scattered by the persecution)... went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about **the Lord Jesus** (11:20).*

In its most essential and fundamental form, evangelism is not:

- teaching doctrine or ethics
- telling my testimony
- preaching a sermon
- offering salvation
- a call to change your life-style
- calling for a decision.

No. At its most fundamental level evangelism is **introducing others to Jesus**. The evangelist is not preaching a religion, he is rather inviting people into a **relationship** with Jesus Christ.

But what specifically does it look like to “preach Jesus”? The Book of Acts helps us to understand the specific content of such a message.

- a) Jesus **came**. (John 3:16; Gal. 4:4).
- b) Jesus **died**. (Acts 2:22-23; 3:13-15; 13:27-29; Rom. 5:8; I Cor. 2:2)
- c) Jesus **rose**. (Acts 2:24-32; 3:15; 10:39-41; 13:30-37; 17:18).
- d) Jesus **reigns**. (Acts 2:33-36; 5:29-32; Rom. 8:34; Heb. 9:24-28).
- e) Jesus **is coming again**. (Acts 3:19-23; 17:30-31; I Thess. 4:16 – 5:11).

Paul summarized the core content of the Gospel message in I Corinthians 15:1-5.

Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you.... By this gospel you are saved.... For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve....

2. There can be no evangelism without **an evangelist** (a messenger).

The Good News is not delivered by an angel or a Voice from heaven. It does not come initially to most people in written words. Rather, God has chosen to send His message to lost men and women through messengers, both men and women, like Philip.

This awareness makes us want to know more about Philip. As the model evangelist in the Book of Acts, what characteristics did he have? What made him effective?

- a) Philip is a "**layman**." He was not one of the apostles, the Twelve (don't confuse this Philip with Philip the apostle). He was, rather, a deacon, one of the Seven (Acts 6:1-6; 21:8).
- b) As a deacon, Philip's job was to "**wait on tables**" (Acts 6:2). There is irony in the fact that although deacons were to do administrative matters so that the apostles could give themselves to the "ministry of the word," both Philip and Stephen were perhaps the most effective preachers and ministers in this period of the church.
- c) He was full of **the Spirit** and **wisdom**. (Acts 6:3). Spirit-filled living is not reserved for apostles and missionaries. The Spirit is poured out on "all people" (Acts 2:17). Philip models evangelism in that he reminds us the Gospel spreads through men and women like him.
- d) Because Philip was the first one to cross cultural boundaries with the Gospel and even conducted a baptism service (a layman!) for a eunuch, we can assume that he was both **bold** and **discerning** (see Deut. 23:1).
- e) Because he performed signs and wonders (8:6-7, 13), we can assume that Philip had **great faith**.
- f) Because Philip had four daughters who were prophetesses (21:8-9), we can assume that he managed "**his children and his household well**" (II Tim. 3:12).

3. Evangelism can be **to the masses**.... or **one-on-one**.

In Samaria (vv. 4-25), we see an illustration of mass evangelism. The Gospel is preached to large crowds and there is a movement of the Spirit in a geographic area. The emphasis here is on "crowds" (v. 6), "many" (v. 7), the "city" (v. 8), "men and women" (v. 12). Indeed, it could be said that "Samaria had accepted the Word of God" (v. 14).

But in the second half of this chapter (vv. 26-40), the situation changes dramatically. Here the Gospel is presented not to a crowd, but to a single individual. Indeed, God

specifically calls his messenger to **leave** the revival going on in Samaria and go to the desert where he can share the Gospel one-on-one.

In considering this dual emphasis in this single chapter, we can learn:

- a) Both kinds of evangelism are necessary.
 - b) Though methods may **change**, the Gospel remains **the same**.
 - c) One kind of evangelism is not more important than the other.
 - d) Even in mass evangelism, the reception of the Gospel is always an intensely personal affair.
 - e) The gift of evangelism makes a man effective both in public and in private.
4. Evangelism usually occurs in a series of **phases/stages**.

In the mass evangelism going on in Samaria, we are able to discern three phases:

- a) The people hear the Gospel. They **believe** and are **baptized**.
 - *But when they **believed** Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were **baptized**, both men and women (v. 12).*
 - *When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God.... (v. 14).*
- b) The people receive the **Holy Spirit**.
 - *When (Peter and John) arrived, they prayed for (the Samaritans) that they might receive the Holy Spirit, because the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them; they had **simply been baptized** into the name of the Lord Jesus. Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. (vv. 15-17).*
- c) Church discipline helps to distinguish the good fruit **from the bad**.
 - *Simon himself **believed** and was **baptized**. And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw. (v. 13).*
 - *...Simon...offered them money.... You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is **not right** before God. Repent of this wickedness... you are full of bitterness and captive to sin. (vv. 18-23).*

Look again at the first two phases. The theological question here is this: Does salvation come in **two stages**? (Stage one being forgiveness and stage two being the infilling of the Spirit.) Should I expect to be filled with Spirit at conversion or sometimes afterwards?

No one really questions the fact that this progression is how the Gospel came to Samaria. The debate begins on whether this progression should be considered **normative** for others. Does Luke write this story so that we will understand that the Samaritan experience of two stages should be regarded as the usual pattern for Christian experience?

The debate on this matter is complex! (See Stott pages 151-159).

- A. Many believe that salvation does indeed come in two basic stages. Proponents may be found among various forms of “deeper life” theologies, Wesleyan holiness groups (justification and sanctification), Pentecostals and Charismatics (being born again and being baptized in the Spirit), and Catholics and Anglicans (baptism and confirmation).

For support of this position, these groups may appeal to:

- 1) The Red Sea and Jordan River (two stages for Israel).
- 2) The experience of the disciples.
- 3) Acts 8:14-17 and 19:1-7 should be considered typical, normative.
- 4) Repeated calls, commands and prayers in Scripture to believers:
 - i. Be filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18).
 - ii. Offer your body a living sacrifice (Rom. 12:1).
 - iii. Be holy (I Thess. 5:23-24; I Pet. 1:15-16).
 - iv. Jesus’ prayer in John 17:17. “Sanctify them.”
- 5) Many testimonies through the years of a kind of second crisis experience when God did something new and deep that had not been taken care of in initial salvation.

- B. Many others (Reformed, generic Evangelicalism, Dispensational, etc.) believe that salvation comes in a single moment and then believers simply (!) need to work out the implications through time. They will emphasize the importance of growth in grace, the need for numerous experiences of going deeper, gradual sanctification, progressive levels of surrender and trust, etc.

For support of this position, these groups may appeal to:

- 1) The cross of Christ contains all we need.
- 2) We get all of Christ when he comes in our hearts... not part of him.
- 3) There are numerous occasions when believers need to go deeper... not just two.

- 4) Acts 8:14-17 and 19:1-7 are simply the accounts of how God worked in particular settings. They should not be considered normative.
- 5) We are called to grow in grace (II Pet. 3:18).
- 6) We are called to work out what God has worked in (Phil. 2:12-13).

TABLE TALK

1. Do you believe the description of what happened to the Samaritans is meant to be taken as normative? Or was it just unique to those people at that time? Is Luke, the author, writing theology... or just history?
2. What do you believe about the infilling of the Holy Spirit? When does it happen? How? What is the evidence of the infilling of the Spirit? Can you support this position biblically?
3. Is your personal experience of the Spirit in harmony with your doctrine of the Spirit? If not, which one needs to change: your doctrine? Or your experience?

5. Evangelism will sometimes produce converts of **questionable character**.

It is interesting to note that the word “simony” (the buying or selling of ecclesiastical offices or favors) is derived from this slippery character in Acts 8.

The Book of Acts contains several stories of persons in the early church who are shown to be inauthentic: notably, Ananias and Saphira (5:1-11) and Simon the Sorcerer (8:9-25). What lessons should we draw from the presence of these characters?

- a) When God is moving... so is **the devil**.

Satan works overtime when the Spirit of God is moving in power. He works to deceive, to counterfeit, to destroy, to discredit, to discourage. The Bible makes it clear, that we should expect to be in **spiritual warfare** if we are living for Christ.

- b) It is sometimes hard to discern the real from the **counterfeit**.

Luke tells us that Simon “believed and was baptized” (v. 13). There is no indication that he was faking it or that his baptism was not valid. Apparently, he was initially accepted as a true believer. Was he?

- c) We should work and pray that sin will be exposed... **wherever it is!**

Thank God for men like Peter who have the spirit of discernment to see behind outward actions and see into the heart:

- With Ananias and Saphira (Acts 5:3-4).
- With Simon the Sorcerer (Acts 8:18-24).

When sin is exposed, then it is appropriate to implement **church discipline** to make sure that the poison of sin does not infect the body.

- Matthew 18:15-20.
- I Cor. 5:1-13
- Titus 3:10-11

- d) Jesus told two parables that should have prepared us for this.

- The Parable of the Weeds (Matt. 13:24-30).
- The Parable of the Net (Matt. 13:47-50).

TABLE TALK

1. Was Simon's conversion real?
2. If it was, how do you explain his behavior after conversion?
3. If it was not real, why would Luke tell us that he believed and was baptized? Why wouldn't Philip have recognized the deceit?
4. Have you ever known a believer who fell into serious sin? How did you explain it when it happened? How do you explain it today?
5. How does your theology account for stories like these?

6. The goal of evangelism is a decision for Christ that is **formal** and **public**.

In both the mass evangelism of the Samaritans and the one-on-one evangelism of the Ethiopian, Philip's goal seemed to be the same: baptism. He wanted his hearers to come to a place of decisive faith in Jesus that marked a turning point in their lives forever.

Although the act of evangelism is "complete" if the Gospel has been presented clearly and accurately, the real goal of the evangelist goes further than the question "Did I present Christ?" The desired result is that the hearers will respond... favorably... The evangelist hopes and prays that his hearers will repent, believe and be baptized.

Therefore, a Gospel presentation should always ultimately include the call to:

- a) **Believe!** (vv. 12-13) (v. 37?)
- b) **Repent!** (v. 22).
- c) **Be baptized!** (vv. 12-13. 36-39).
- d) **Now!**

One of the primary evidences that this goal has been attained will be the presence of **joy**.

- *So there was great joy in that city (v. 8).*
- *The eunuch...went on his way rejoicing (v. 39).*

7. One-on-one evangelism.

Philip's model of evangelism gives a picture of what it takes to spread the Gospel effectively:

- a) **Obedience** to the Lord's command (Matt. 28:19-20; Acts 1:8).
- b) A **passion** for the lost.
- c) **Boldness** and courage.
- d) **Wisdom** and discernment (Acts 6:3).
- e) Being led **by the Spirit** (Acts 8:26, 29, 39).
- f) Knowing our audience and **listening** to their felt needs (Acts 8:30).
- g) Knowledge of **the Scriptures** and how to use them (Acts 8:30-35).
- h) Clarity in calling for **a decision**.

TABLE TALK

1. Do you know the Gospel well enough to present it to someone else?
2. In re-reading the list above of those qualities that made Philip the model evangelist, which ones are most lacking in your life?
3. Why?
4. Pray for one another that you would be good witnesses in this coming week. Be specific.

You have nothing to do but to save souls. Therefore spend and be spent in this work. And go always, not only to those that want you, but to those that want you most.

Observe: It is not your business to preach so many times, and to take care of this or that society; but to save as many souls as you can; to bring as many sinners as you possibly can to repentance, and with all your power to build them up in that holiness without which they cannot see the Lord. - John Wesley.