

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS
Commentary by Michael Sigler
October 28, 2012

Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch

Read Acts 8:26-39

Key verse: “The eunuch said, ‘Look! Water! What would keep me from being baptized?’” (Acts 8:36)

In his book *Disciples in Action*, Leroy Eims describes the following strategy session:

Picture the demons of hell gathered around the devil in a high-level meeting to stop the spread of the message of Christ....What should they do?

“How about telling them [the disciples] that Jesus didn’t really rise from the dead,” one suggested.

“Don’t be stupid. He was seen by more than 500 people after his resurrection.”

“How about telling them the gospel really has no power?”

“Are you crazy? They are seeing thousands converted and watching lives being transformed under the power of the gospel!”

So they strategized some more. Finally one suggested, “How about persecution—a really big one?” That suggestion pleased the devil.

“Now you’re talking,” he said. “That’s a good idea. What’s your rank?”

“I’m a second lieutenant, sir.”

“Not anymore. For such a good idea I’m promoting you. You’re now a colonel!”

So the attack was launched, but it backfired completely. Rather than stopping the message, the gospel began spreading like a fire driven by a hot west wind on the prairies of Nebraska. The legions of hell were stunned. They met again.

“Where is the colonel who suggested the persecution?” asked Satan.

The colonel stood and identified himself. “Sit down, private!”

God had once again used the devil-inspired wrath of man to bring praise to himself.

Though imaginary, Eims’ scenario accurately describes what happened to the church in Acts: “At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of

Judea and Samaria....Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word” (Acts 8:1b and 4).

If we let Acts 8 speak to us today, as disciples of Jesus, we will be challenged and encouraged in the following ways:

1. We will be challenged and encouraged to see *the importance God places on Christians sharing faith out in the world*. Jesus had told them, “You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). This plan was so important that the Lord would use even persecution to see that His followers spread the message of Christ.

2. We will be challenged and encouraged to see *our difficulties as doors of opportunity for God to work through us*. It would have been so easy for those first disciples to give up when opposition and adversity came their way. Instead, they trusted God to turn their difficulties into doors of opportunity: “those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word.”

One of those disciples was a man named Philip. Philip was one of the seven believers, “full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom,” who had been appointed to share leadership in the Jerusalem church (Acts 6:1-6). When persecution came, Philip first fled to Samaria. He shared Jesus there, and revival broke out! (Acts 8:4-8)

But when God spoke to Philip telling him to head toward Gaza, Philip obeyed the Lord (Acts 8:26-27). On his way, on a desert road, Philip met this man from Ethiopia, and led him to Christ (Acts 8:27-39). It is a beautiful story, and it is worth reading carefully. Again, if we read it as something more than ancient history, the story of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch will blast off the page and into our hearts. It will challenge and encourage us, as 21st century followers of the risen Christ. Here are some ways that Philip’s story challenges me:

1. *Philip’s story challenges me to be Spirit-led*. First, God asked Philip to interrupt a thriving ministry in Samaria to head out on a desert road with no obvious goal in view. Philip obeyed God’s leading. Then when Philip saw the Ethiopian man in his chariot, the Holy Spirit told Philip, “Approach this carriage and stay with it” (v. 29). Philip’s response? He immediately ran to the carriage! (v. 30). Then he shared Jesus with the Ethiopian man.

The application is clear. Jesus wants to use us as His “witnesses.” In fact, that is one of the main reasons He sent us the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8). What if we would simply pray daily, “Lord, give me the opportunity to tell someone about you today.” What if then we began to listen to the Spirit’s still, small voice of guidance. Do you think we might see God use us more as His witnesses in the world?

2. Philip's story challenges me to be more bold in sharing Jesus beyond the walls of the church. So often, we want to experience the Holy Spirit's presence in church. Sometimes we forget that Jesus calls us beyond the church walls, out where sharing Jesus is scary and uncomfortable. But it is as we go there that Christ has promised to be with us and to make His presence known to us: "Go therefore and make disciples...and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:19).

Could it be that we don't experience more of God's presence in our lives because we refuse to go where God calls us to go and to do what God calls us to do?

Leroy Eims says it well: "The church does its real work Monday to Saturday when the church building is empty. Church work is necessary. Do it well; do it heartily as unto the Lord [as did Stephen and Philip]. But imitate Stephen and Philip as well. Be out there like Stephen, 'among the people,' planting the seed of the gospel. Be out there, like Philip, sharing Christ. Jesus said the field is the world and we are the good seed. Ask him to scatter you abroad in the world where you can die and bring forth fruit unto eternal life."

The Book of Acts is the record of how first-century believers lived out their faith and spread the message of Jesus. But Acts is not just history. It is meant to challenge and inspire us to be "witnesses" as we live for Christ in our day. Just in this eighth chapter of Acts, we are challenged and encouraged to:

- 1. See the importance God places on Christians sharing faith out in the world.**
- 2. View our difficulties as doors of opportunity for God to work in our lives.**
- 3. Be Spirit-led in our witness for Jesus.**
- 4. Be bold in taking the Good News of Jesus beyond the walls of the church.**

Lord help us to do it.

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