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PHILIP THE EVANGELIST

Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them. And the multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. For unclean spirits, crying with a loud voice, came out of many who were possessed; and many who were paralyzed and lame were healed. And there was great joy in that city. Acts 8:5-8.

Sometimes a sermon may be based on a certain *subject* (salvation); or a certain *text* (John 3:16); or a certain *book* (Romans) or a chapter of the Bible (Psalm 23). Sometimes a sermon may be based on a Bible *character* like Moses, Elijah, Peter, or Paul. But our focus this morning will be on *Philip*.

The name Philip means "Lover of horses."

One of the Greek words translated "love" in the New Testament is *phileo*. As in the name Philip, *phil* provides the prefix for terms like:

Philosophy "Lover of knowledge."

Philanthropy "Lover of mankind."

Philology "Lover of literature."

Philadelphia "Brotherly love."

It is not well known, but *philadelphia* is a Greek word; it is translated "brotherly love" in Hebrews 13:1. When applied to a *city*, it means "City of Brotherly Love." A city by this name is mentioned in the Bible (Rev. 3:7); and there is, of course, Philadelphia, the famous American city.

The name Philip even has a link with the Philippine Islands. They were named in honor of King Philip of Spain. Much earlier, another Philip, King Philip (father of Alexander the Great) founded *Philippi* (mentioned in Acts 16:12) and, consequently, we have the biblical book *Philippians*.

In the Bible, Philip is called an "evangelist" (Acts 21:8). It often goes unnoticed, but embedded within the word evangelist is the word *angel*: Ev ANGEL ist. This is also the case with the words evangelical, evangelistic, and evangel. We usually think of angels as *heavenly* messengers. But the same Greek word is also used of *earthly* messengers (James 2:25; Lk. 7:24). Phillip was an angel (messenger); an evangelist, a man with a message. And his message was *Christ*.

I like to say the book of Acts is a book of *action*! This certainly was the case when Philip ministered in Samaria. The results were spectacular, impacting the entire city. Demons were cast out; the sick were healed. As a result, many believed in Christ and were baptized.

It was not a religious "campaign" in which a preacher *camped* a while and left a *pain*! It was more than putting out signs announcing a "revival" signs *preceding* this was a miraculous ministry of "signs *following*" (Mark 16:20). Truly Philip was used of God in a great way!

But Philip was not always a successful evangelist. His beginnings in the Lord's work were quite small in comparison. The growing church at Jerusalem had a food outreach to needy widows. Some were being neglected. The twelve apostles could not take care of everything themselves help was needed! They asked that seven men be chosen for this purpose. One of those men was Philip (Acts 6:3, 4).

The apostles did not want just "anyone" doing church work, even though it was only waiting on tables. They were to be men "of honest report, full of the Holy Spirit, and wisdom."

They did not want men who exaggerated. Those who tell little "white lies" commonly go colorblind and tell all kinds of lies! One lie leads to another. These were to be honest men, and of honest *report*.

They were to be *full* of the Holy Spirit a *present-tense* experience. Yesterday's experience cannot substitute for today. And *wisdom*. As in our time, some, even though believers, did not have wisdom and needed to pray in faith that such be given them (James 1:5-7).

Helpers were needed so the apostles could "give themselves continually to prayer and the ministry of the word." This they did. Is it any wonder the early church was powerful!

Waiting on tables was not the most inspiring ministry in the church! But this is what God had given Philip to do at the time, and he did it faithfully. If we are faithful in little things, God will make us faithful in greater things. Remember, even giving a cup of water is not without its reward!

Many would like to do something "big" for God, but are not faithful in what God has already given them to do. Some

want more power in prayer, but spend very little time in prayer with the power they already have. Some want more light, but fail to walk in the light they already have!

Having been faithful in little things, God now used Philip to stir an entire city. One could easily assume he should remain there and direct the activities of this megachurch. But something unusual was about to happen.

“The angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, saying, ‘Arise and go toward the south along the road which goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza. This is desert.’” (Acts 8:26).

Philip was living close to God, could hear and know God’s directive. He didn’t question God or make foolish excuses. He did not contact a university professor, a psychiatrist, the Samaria Social Director, or Dr. Daniel Dry-as-dust, pastor of the First Church of the Frigidaire, in order to have a panel discussion about the “pros” and “cons” of his departure.

Even though it was not revealed to Philip what he was going to do when he got to the Gaza desert, “He arose and went!”

On a personal note, in 1983 I was with a group of pastors that included my long-time friends Fred Horner and Doug Young, traveling from Jerusalem to Egypt on a bus. Somewhere on the desert between Gaza and the Egyptian border, the bus broke down, causing several hours delay. During this time, it was interesting to see a train of camels passing along the nearby sand dunes and crossing the highway close to us, a mode of travel extending back to ancient times.

A couple days later, while touring some Egyptian ruins on the Nile River, it was a surprise to meet up with (former) President Jimmy Carter. When he learned we were a group of Christian ministers, he came right over to where we were, shook our hands and visited with us.

Once Philip got to the place the Lord told him to go, he received further direction. If we want to be used of God, we should get to where he has already shown us. God often leads step by step. We walk by faith, not by sight.

Having now gone to where he was told, there was a government official from Ethiopia who was in charge of all the treasure of Candace the queen. He had been to Jerusalem and was now returning home in his chariot. Then the Spirit said to Philip, “Go near and overtake this chariot” (Acts 8:27-29). With enthusiasm Philip “ran” to catch up. The Ethiopian official had in his possession the scroll of Isaiah which he may have purchased while in Jerusalem and was reading from it *out loud*.

It is said that Abraham Lincoln used to read the newspaper out loud. When asked why he did this, he replied, “By reading out loud, I not only *see* the words but also *hear* them; it makes twice the impression on me and I can remember the matter twice as long.” Modern scientific studies have confirmed this.

When Philip, having now caught up with the chariot and possibly running along beside it heard the official read about one who was “led as a sheep to the slaughter,” he called to him and asked if he understood. He did not; and invited Philip up

into the chariot to explain. “Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, *preached Jesus to him*” (Acts 8:35).

Philip’s preaching was not that of prophetic speculation, like: “How Many Warts Will the Antichrist have on His Left Toe?” or “The Rise and Fall of Hitler’s mustache!” Nor did he try to present some profound, highly intellectual, deep, message on “The Symbolic Significance of the Knotholes on Noah’s Ark!” His message was Jesus Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 2:2-4).

As they rode along they came to water and the Ethiopian wanted to be baptized. Making certain he had come to believe in Jesus Christ with all his heart, Philip baptized him. Then upon coming out of the water, Philip suddenly disappeared! The Ethiopian looked around, but Philip was gone!

Though the name Philip means “Lover of horses,” there is no indication he had a horse to ride as he went from Samaria to the Gaza desert. He evidently went by foot. The wording that he *ran* to the chariot tends to confirm this. And when his ministry to the Ethiopian was completed, he was far from home!

A funny story comes to mind: A doctor told a man who was not feeling well that he needed *exercise*: “I want you to walk 10 miles a day, do this every day for a week, then call me back and let me know how you are doing.” In a week the man phoned, told the doctor he was not any better, and to make matters worse: *he was now 70 miles from home!*

In the case of Philip, now far from home, the Lord blessed him with supernatural transportation, something only a few have ever experienced. He was *caught away* (same Greek word as used in 1 Thess. 4:17) to Azotus, a distance of about 34 miles. “Philip was found at Azotus. And passing through he preached in all the cities till he came to *Caesarea*” (Acts 8:40).

Though Philip had lived in Jerusalem (Acts 6:1-5), at some point he settled in Caesarea. Paul and those traveling with him stayed at his house many days. Philip’s four daughters who prophesied are specifically mentioned (See Acts 21:8-10).

The Ethiopian, having now found Christ through Philip’s ministry, “went on his way rejoicing” (Acts 8:27-40). Upon his return to Ethiopia, according to the history given by church fathers Eusebius and Irenaeus, he preached the gospel there, a fulfillment of Psalm 68:31. Later tradition says that even Candace the queen received Christ and was baptized by him.

So there was a divine plan being worked out when Philip left the *crowds* in Samaria to go to the desert to talk to *one* man. But that man was, apparently, a key man in God’s program to reach many more.

There are some valuable lessons we can learn from Philip’s life and experiences. If we are faithful in little things, God can make us faithful in greater things. If we want to move on with God, we should get to the place he has already directed. “The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD” (Psa. 37:23).

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