

Obedient
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Acts 8:26-31,35,38-39

Opening discussion: Think about “first responders” – fire fighters; EMTs; police officers; and so forth. Question: **What are the things that make them READY when the call comes? What are they NOT doing when that alarm sounds?**

Big Idea: Opportunities to share the gospel message come through obedience.

If we’re to be a “first responder” in sharing the gospel we need to be prepared when the call comes. We need to listen the Holy Spirit; know the truth of scripture; and speak up about what we know.

Picking back up where we stopped last week, after Stephen was martyred for his faith, Saul and others began to persecute the church. This persecution drove the disciples and the message to other places beyond Jerusalem. Philip was one of the seven men who were chosen to serve those in need (last week’s lesson.)

Acts 8:5–8 (NLT) tell us...

⁵ Philip...went to the city of Samaria and told the people there about the Messiah. ⁶ Crowds listened intently to Philip because they were eager to hear his message and see the miraculous signs he did.

⁷ Many evil* spirits were cast out, screaming as they left their victims. And many who had been paralyzed or lame were healed. ⁸ So there was great joy in that city.

- Philip was one of the first Christians to preach the Gospel outside of Jerusalem...the first missionary to Samaria.¹
- **What do we remember about the Jews and the Samaritans?**
- Our Explore the Bible Commentary: Social and religious barriers had separated the Jews and the Samaritans for hundreds of years. The sins of the northern kingdom led to judgment by God at the hands of the Assyrians. The intermarriage of Jews with Gentiles following their defeat led to animosity with the Jews of the southern kingdom. These

differences intensified following the return of Jews from exile. The Samaritans established their own place of worship on Mount Gerizim when they were no longer welcomed in Jerusalem. Jesus did not share the prejudice of the Jews toward the Samaritans. He specifically called on His followers to carry the gospel to the Samaritans before His ascension (1:8).²

- Truly, Philip had moved into a difficult mission field and God was blessing!
- This morning's text shows us that Philip didn't only engage in "mass" evangelism with crowds of people. He also shared the gospel personally. In this text, he shared with a foreigner from another culture. A prominent man who had been in Jerusalem searching for answers. Let's read this story beginning in verse 26. We'll see there are lessons for you and me!

Acts 8:26–40 (ESV)

Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch

²⁶ Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." This is a desert place. ²⁷ And he rose and went. And there was an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure. He had come to Jerusalem to worship ²⁸ and was returning, seated in his chariot, and he was reading the prophet Isaiah. ²⁹ And the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over and join this chariot." ³⁰ So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" ³¹ And he said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. ³² Now the passage of the Scripture that he was reading was this:

"Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter
and like a lamb before its shearer is silent,
so he opens not his mouth.

³³ In his humiliation justice was denied him.

Who can describe his generation?

For his life is taken away from the earth."

³⁴ And the eunuch said to Philip, "About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?" ³⁵ Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him

the good news about Jesus. ³⁶ And as they were going along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, “See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?” ³⁸ And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. ³⁹ And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing. ⁴⁰ But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through he preached the gospel to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

- Let’s observe verse 26: **Who directed Philip to go to Gaza? What do you think was missing from the instructions?**
- When God calls on us through His Holy Spirit, He rarely shares all the specifics up front. **Why do you think God calls us in that way?**
- In verse 26, an angel of the Lord delivers Philip’s orders. Later in verse 29 we see that the Holy Spirit directed him. Though angels are very real, modern day believers don’t typically report hearing from them. However, EVERY believer has the Holy Spirit living within us.
- The place to which Philip was called was a “desert place,” literally the last “watering hole.” This is where travelers “fueled up” before a long journey to other countries.
- Verses 27 and 28: **What are we told about the man Philip was to encounter? Who was he? What do we know about him? Why was he here? What was he doing?**
- He was an Ethiopian, so there was cultural difference.
- The nation designated *Ethiopia* by Luke does not correspond geographically with the modern nation of Ethiopia. Ethiopia in this context was the equivalent of the Old Testament region of Cush located south of Egypt, also known as the kingdom of Nubia.³
- What does the term “eunuch” mean? We wonder why this was important?
- This man may or may not have been an actual eunuch (castrated.)
- *In ancient societies eunuchs were castrated males chosen to oversee royal harems (see Esth. 2:3). The term later became used for government officials with or without the physical deformity. The Ethiopian eunuch was in charge of the royal*

treasury and was therefore a high official in his country. ⁴ Many scholars believe that since both “eunuch” and his title are in the text, it’s likely he was both.

- What we know is this man was prominent in a foreign realm. The fact he rode in a chariot says a lot! Some historians believe his status was significant in the spread of the gospel to other places. [Historian] Irenaeus wrote in the second century that this Ethiopian became a missionary among his people.⁵ We don’t know for sure, but it’s interesting to consider.
- **Why did he come to Jerusalem? What does this tell us about him?**
- The fact that he came to Jerusalem to worship might indicate he was a convert to Judaism. However, his physical situation might have been a roadblock to worshipping in the temple. Under the Old Covenant, physical eunuchs were not allowed to assemble at the temple (see Deut. 23:1). All such limitations were abolished under the New Covenant.⁶
- This has significance. The Jews would not fully accept a eunuch. This man was about to discover that Jesus had made everyone acceptable.
- What’s obvious by his long and difficult journey, and his struggle to read and understand scripture (verse 28,) he was seriously seeking God.
- As this man was reading from Isaiah and trying to figure it out, The Holy Spirit gave direction to Philip. Beginning in verse 30, let’s observe how Philip responded. **What does the fact that Philip even heard this voice tell us about him and his spiritual life?**
- The first thing we see is that **Philip listened** to the voice of the Spirit.
- Philip’s “spiritual antenna” was tuned to the voice of the Spirit of God.
- Let’s consider this as it applies to US sharing the gospel. On the one hand, every follower of Christ is called to be a witness and to share the good news of the gospel. This passage doesn’t say that Philip only evangelized after he heard from an angel or the Spirit. We’re also not told to wait for an angel to tell us to share the good news.
- On the other hand, let me address those who are PROACTIVE (or maybe hyperactive) by nature. **Why even bother to wait**

for the Holy Spirit? Why don't we just confront every person we meet with the gospel?

- How many opportunities to share the gospel are missed because we weren't listening to the Holy Spirit? On the other hand, how many opportunities are "blown" because we charge ahead without listening to what the Holy Spirit is telling us?
- Truth: We're called to be a witness. To be a faithful and effective witness for Christ, we must develop our "ear" for the voice of His Holy Spirit.
- Another truth: Remember, our job is to deliver the good news; the Spirit does the convicting, and Christ does the saving!
- Verse 30: Philip took action in several ways. **What ACTION did he take?**
- I see four things that Philip did in response to the Spirit's leading. Four things that can apply to you and me TODAY:
 1. **Philip "ran"** - **What does that tell us?** (immediate obedience.)
 2. **Philip "heard"** (he was paying attention to the situation)
 3. **Philip recognized** the scripture being read – (he knew his Old Testament)
 4. **Philip spoke up** (he engaged with this man)
- **What is significant about how Philip started the conversation? What was Philip's 'technique?' What did Philip offer to do for the man?**
 - He started with where the man was (seeking answers).
 - Philip began with a question about the man's situation.
 - Philip offered to provide guidance in understanding the scripture.
- Verse 35 is so simple, yet so profound: Acts 8:35 (ESV) ³⁵ Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus.
- If that's not a three-step formula for sharing the gospel, you'll never find it!
 1. Philip opened his mouth – That's the most frightening step!
 2. Philip began with scripture – You can't share it if you don't know it!
 3. Philip told him the good news about Jesus. If you've truly trusted Christ as Savior and Lord, you know enough to share the good news.

- If you don't understand the good news well enough to share it, there might be a question about whether you understand what YOU did in trusting Christ. If there is a question, settle it TODAY!
- If you DO understand your faith in Christ but struggle with how to explain it, there's plenty of help (tracts; books; etc.)
- **How do we know that the man confessed Jesus as Lord?**
- Verse 36: Philip's obedience led to the Ethiopian being obedient.
- **What happened to verse 37? Is it missing in your Bible?**

Acts 8:38–39 (ESV)

³⁸ And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. ³⁹ And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing.

So, What's the Takeaway?

- When God calls us to a task we're to act with IMMEDIATE OBEDIENCE.
- Every believer is called to be a witness to how Christ has changed our lives, and to point them to Him by sharing the good news of the gospel.
- If we're to be a "first responder" to this call to share the gospel we need to be prepared when the call comes.
- Like Philip we should do several things:
 - Philip opened his mouth – That's the most frightening step!
 - Philip began with scripture – You can't share it if you don't know it!
 - Philip told him the good news about Jesus.
- If you've truly trusted Christ as Savior and Lord, you know enough to share the good news. We may need some help in learning HOW to share it. That's should be a priority for all of us in preparing to be a "first responder" to those in need of the good news!
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¹ Roberts, R. (2012, 2013, 2014, 2015). Philip the Evangelist. In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, ... W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

² Lifeway. (n.d.). *Explore the Bible Commentary on Acts 8*.

³ Lifeway. (n.d.). *Explore the Bible Commentary on Acts 8*.

⁴ Lifeway. (n.d.). *Explore the Bible Commentary on Acts 8*.

⁵ *Against Heresies* iii.12.8; cf. Psalm 68:31; 87:4.

⁶ Lifeway. (n.d.). *Explore the Bible Commentary on Acts 8*.