

A GOSPEL WITNESS

“Preach the Gospel all the time; if necessary, use words.” That quote, attributed to St. Francis of Assisi, captures the essence of how we are to tell the world about what Jesus has done. Our very lives witness to the impact the life of Christ has on us! We may be telling the world that He has impacted us in a significant way or that His death and resurrection has had no real practical significance. Witnessing to the Gospel is more than just being able to relate the plan of salvation as given in the Bible, it is Christ living and manifesting His life through our lives. The other side this coin is that if our lives are holy and good, then we should not refrain from giving a verbal witness so that no one has any doubt of the Source of that holiness and goodness. God’s plan of salvation as revealed in the Holy Scriptures is powerful on its own merit and the message is capable of bring conviction and leading the hearer to conversion even if they do not know anything about our lives. The combination the witness of a life that is led by the Spirit and the witness of the Scriptures is synergistic and it is the key to rescuing those who are lost.

Someone said that man is “incurably religious.” That statement could mean a lot of things. It, at least, means that man realizes that there is a God (or gods in the case of pagan religions) and that God has requirements for people. As we looking to the Bible for instructions (regarding the requirements) we quickly realize our limitations in keeping all the requirements. Many will see the impossibility of keeping all points of the law and then drift away from God and not even attempt to follow the law or the instructions of God. However, eventually, we are confronted with the reality of missing the mark. Once we are confronted with the reality of sin and its consequences, then we start looking for means of salvation. This is where the good news of the Gospel brings encouragement and a message of salvation. In the Gospel we find that God loved us so much that He Himself came in the flesh to bear the consequences of sin for us. The Bible is primarily about God’s means of providing salvation to a fallen human race that is perishing.

Those who have discovered the good news and have experienced the forgiven and new life that God has for us are called to share this good news with others. Jesus promised the early church they would be His witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the world. When the persecution of the church started this promised influence became a reality. One of the early Christians who was displaced from Jerusalem was Philip. When Philip left Jerusalem, he went to Samaria and because of his witness many believed on Jesus. However, God was not through with Philip. We find some seemingly strange things happening to Philip.

ACTS 8:26 Some are so sophisticated that the idea of angels speaking to people is totally rejected. Yet, in the early church, we find many instances of angelic appearances. Very specific instruction we given to Philip as to where he was go; however, he was not told what he was to do at the beginning of this adventure.

ACTS 8:27-28 Philip obeyed the instructions of the angel of God. Part of the reason the church is not accomplishing more today is the lack of Christians who are willing to be obedient to God. Because Philip was obedient he found an opportunity for ministry out in the middle of the desert. This opportunity was in the form of an important Ethiopian government official. This person was minister of finance for the queen. He was either a Jew or a proselyte and he believed in the God of the Jews. In fact, he had just returned from Jerusalem where he had been to worship and he was reading the prophecy of Isaiah when Philip first saw him.

There is an important lesson here for those who are concerned about people who have never heard the gospel message. If a person is truly seeking God – to know Him and to be obedient to Him

– then God will find a way to get Gospel message to that person. A similar story was related about Peter and Cornelius.

Now that Philip had arrived where God wanted him to be, the “what” of the mission was revealed.

ACTS 8:29-33 When Philip moved in closer to the chariot and heard what the man was reading, then the purpose of his mission became clear to him. Philip indicated his availability to the Ethiopian and this politically powerful government official was not so proud that he would not accept assistance. The fact that he would receive help indicated his humility. We know that the eunuch was reading from the passage in Isaiah that told about the Suffering Servant and the sacrificial service Jesus was to carry out in taking away the sins of the world. The prophetic implications of this passage is perfectly plain to us with our 20-20 hindsight. However, the Ethiopian was unsure of what this passage meant.

ACTS 8:34-38 Philip used the word of God (the Old Testament Scripture) to lead this man to Jesus. The witness of the word along with the witness of the influence of Jesus on our lives is a powerful combination to lead others to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus. Immediately, the eunuch wanted to obey the instructions of Jesus about being baptized. This is a good indication of salvation in a life – the desire to please God by obedience. We see here the conditions of salvation: believing (faith) in the Lord Jesus. The Greek word translated “believe” is stronger than just mental acceptance of an idea. It implies a concept of commitment. The act of baptism had more meaning to these people than it apparently has to modern Americans. It also has more significance today to those who come out from other religions as they accept Jesus as Lord and Savior. It is not something to be taken lightly.

What a great day for Philip! He had a visitation from an angel, he had direct messages from the Holy Spirit, he led a person to Jesus, and he had an opportunity to baptize a new convert. But wait, Philip is about to experience something else!

ACTS 8:39-40 The way this passage reads is that Philip disappeared (was translated) from the place where the baptism took place and he appeared in another place. This is definitely not one of your everyday occurrence. Philip went from town to town sharing the gospel message. He eventually settled in Caesarea.

Because Philip was available to God, because he knew the word of God, and because he, himself, had been saved by the grace of God, he was able to participate in one of the most unusual witnessing experiences to ever happen. We may not be visited by angels, nor hear audible messages from the Holy Spirit, and we may never be translated from one place to another; however, we can participate in leading a lost person to a saving knowledge of Jesus.