

Place: Lurgan Baptist 20:3:2007

Reading: Acts 8:26-40

THE CHURCH ABLAZE

17. PHILIP: THE TOUCH OF GOD

When I was a fairly young man I felt the Lord wanted me to preach the gospel. I don't know how that thought got into my mind as a matter of fact I was terrified at the thought of standing up before the people and preaching. But I now know that the Lord put that thought there. At first it was a question, “*Lord do you want me to preach ?*” Then after a period of time it was, “*Lord I think You want me to preach.*” Then later it was, “*Lord if you don't want me to preach you had better let me know.*” Then it became a decision as I knelt one night in our lounge and broken before the Lord I said, “*Where He leads me I will go.*” Now this is in essence what Philip the first missionary said. As you trace the expansion of the gospel during this transition period you begin to see how the Holy Spirit reaches out to the whole world.

In (Acts Ch 8) the Ethiopian who was converted was a descendant of Ham. (Gen 10:6) In (Acts Ch 9) Saul of Tarsus will be saved, a Jew and therefore a descendant of Shem. (Gen 10:21) In (Acts Ch 10) the Gentiles find Christ and they are the descendants of

Japheth. (Gen 10:2-5) Now the whole world was peopled by Shem, Ham, and Japheth (Gen 10:1) and my God wants the whole world, all of their descendants to hear the message of the gospel. (Mk 16:15) Now reading Acts for the first time none of us would have realised when we came to the dawn of Philips ministry in (Ch 6) that he would ascend to such spiritual heights in (Ch 8) Philips ministry began as a servant, humbly doling out the widows portions in the Jerusalem church.

But it soared to unimagined heights when persecution hit. Though he was not an apostle, God's power coursed through him to the despised Samaritans, and large numbers of them believed the good news and were saved. In the last half of (Acts Ch 8) Philips ministry is still at its zenith. However, instead of the vast multitudes of Samaria, the transforming touch of God now comes through Philip to one man in a desert place far from the teeming city. My God valued that individual as much as the multitudes, and He used to Philip to touch his life.

*“ But the Master comes, and the foolish crowd,
Never can quite understand,
The worth of a soul and the change that's wrought
By the touch of the Masters hand.”*

Now each of us, like Philip can bear the gracious touch of God to others. You see, I want us to look at Philips portrait as its presented to us here in a three fold way.

(1) A MAN IN TOUCH WITH GODS WILL

Do you recall Paul's prayer for the church at Colosse ? He says, " *For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding.*" (Col 1:9) When Philip was appointed as one of "***the seven,***" he was full of the Holy Spirit. And being in touch with the Holy Spirit Philip was open to the Spirit's guidance. My his sensitivity to divine guidance was a major factor in him becoming a blessing to others. Philip was a man in touch with Gods will. Now God has a plan for you, just as He had a plan for Philip long ago, and Philip was an ordinary person that God used in an extraordinary way. Let me show you something about the working of the Lord in Philips life. Notice for e.g.

(a) GODS GUIDANCE IS REVEALED TO PHILIP:

Its so easy is it not, to develop certain rigid ideas about guidance ? We suppose that because the Lord dealt with us one way, one time that He is under obligation to deal with us the same way, the next time and He is not. For example, some preachers look down on others because they prepare their messages beforehand, and thus they say, they are not being subject to the Spirits guidance while preaching. The other side of the coin is the story of the preacher who told his congregation one Sunday morning, " *I have had a terrible week, and have not been able to prepare, so I am going to have to depend on the Holy Spirit. But let me assure you, this will never happen again.*" My we must never confine the Lords guidance to the box of past experience. He just will not fit. You see Philip was,

(1) Flexible as to HOW the Lord would lead him:

He was wise enough and well taught enough not to be put off by the varied guidance of the Lord. For e.g.

** Philip was led by ADVERSE CIRCUMSTANCES:*

(8:1,5) The Lord employed the pressure of persecution to lead Philip out from the mother church in Jerusalem, to a wider sphere of ministry in Samaria and elsewhere.

Here is God guiding through circumstances and of course He still uses this means today. My we must never forget that the Lord is the Master engineer of circumstances, and this is a means of guidance, if the arrangement of those circumstances is left to Gods hand alone. Coming to the junction of two roads a gypsy threw a stick into the air. Three times she did this and then set off along one of the roads. Someone who was watching her, overtook her and asked for an explanation, " *Why,*" she said, " *I always throw up a stick at the cross-roads to see which way to go.*" " *But why did you throw it up three times ?*" " *Because it pointed to the other road the first two times and I wanted to come along this one.*" My if we ask God to order our circumstances in such a way that we might understand His direction, then the arrangement must lie solely in His hands and not ours !

** Philip was led by the MINISTRY OF AN ANGEL:*

(8:26) Some versions gave the translation, " *An angel of the Lord.*" The Lord sent one of His angels on this

unexpected mission. Angels appear on several important occasions in the book of Acts. And the book of Hebrews tells us that they are “ *ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation.*” (Heb 1:14) Notice again,

* Philip was led by THE HOLY SPIRIT:

(8:29) Now the New Testament is replete with instances of guidance being given by the Holy Spirit. Do you recall what happened on Paul’s second missionary journey ? (Acts 16:7) Sometimes the Holy Spirit **Restrains**, but look at (Acts 16:9-10) Sometimes the Holy Spirit **Constrains**, (Rom 8:14) But lets keep this in mind. The Holy Spirit will never lead us to do anything that is contrary to the Word of God. My if that inner voice tells you to do some foolish thing, something that is contrary to the plain teaching of Scripture, then you can be sure that it is not the Holy Spirit who is speaking. But my do you see how flexible Philip was as to how the Lord would lead him ?

Philip didn’t say, “ *Well now, the last time God guided me an angel came. I’ve got to have an angel this time.*” Just the gentle inner speaking of the Holy Spirit was enough. Nor did Philip say, “ *Well, the Lord really spoke to me the other time. I don’t hear any voice now.*” He recognised the pressure of circumstances as being a form of guidance. Now tell me, are you flexible as to how God might lead you ? Or do you look on this matter of guidance as something which is stereotype ?

(2) Flexible as to WHERE the Lord would use him:

Look at (8:26) Now you put yourself in Philips shoes. Try to imagine Philips situation. Here in Samaria, immense success. The whole city stirred. Masses of people turning to Christ ? Great joy filling the city. My it’s a happy time, a marvellous revival, and suddenly the Lord tells you to take a journey, to all places, the desert. Philip went from an exciting city and a growing congregation to a lonely desert road and a congregation of one. It would have been so easy to be discouraged, to question God. “ *Lord do you really want me to go to the desert ? There is nothing there but lizards. Have I not proved myself worthy of a broader ministry ? I have been faithful in the small things. I even waited on widows. And now the desert ? Lord,*” But that is not how Philip responded. He was ready to serve anytime, anywhere. “ *And he arose and went.*”

Do you believe that God wants people who are flexible like this ? I do. My, if God has done some great thing through you. Something that perhaps has been taken note of by many people, don’t be so big and important that you cannot serve Him joyously in some little sphere or in dealing with only one person. Oh, for believers who are flexible as to where God wants to use them.

Tell me, are you ? Have you placed yourself absolutely at His disposal ? Can you say, “ *O use me Lord, use even me, just as Thou wilt, and when and where ?*”(a)

**(b) GODS PURPOSE IS RESERVED FROM
PHILIP:**

That is Philip had no way of knowing that he was going to be used of God to lead a very important person to Christ. Luke does not give us the subsequent history of the Ethiopian eunuch after he had come to Christ.

But according to the church Father Irenaeus, he became a missionary to the Ethiopians. Someone who opened all North Africa to the gospel. Now Philip had no way of knowing that. All that he knew was that God had spoken to him and just said, “ *Go south to Gaza.* ” and Philip said, “ *Yes I'll go.* ” My you have no way of knowing how God will use you if you obey Him ! About a century ago a Mr. Kimball led D.L. Moody to Christ. Now who was Moody ? Well, he was a world famous evangelist. Moody was an orphan at the age of four. He did not have the opportunity to get a formal education. As a matter of fact in the last letter Moody wrote before his death there were at least forty grammatical errors. He murdered the Kings English but he not disappoint the King. He loved the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Now Moody the shoeclerk came to Cambridge, England to preach. There in Cambridge was a young athlete whose name was C.T.Studd. Now Studd was one of the greatest athletes of his time. He played cricket and as one of the Cambridge eleven he was a star. He was a man of great ability, culture, charm, and wealth. Indeed C.T. Studd's father was a personal friend of the Queen, and was a multimillionaire. C.T.

Studd had it all. I mean he had the looks, mind, money, athletic ability. But when C.T. Studd heard Moody preach, God touched his heart and Studd resigned from athletics and no longer was he a member of the Cambridge eleven. But he got involved in what became know as the Cambridge seven, who went to China, and established one of the mightiest movements in modern missions that this world has ever seen. Do you know what C.T.Studd said ? This man who was so mightily used of God under the influence of Moody ! They said, “ *What motivated you to do what you did ? To leave the wealth, prestige and everything else behind ?* ” Do you know what he said, “ *If Jesus Christ be God and died for me, then no sacrifice can be too great for me to make for Him ?* ” I mean the man who led Moody to Christ had no idea that Moody would be used of God as he was. My you have no idea of knowing how God will use you if you obey Him. (a)
(b)

(c) GODS TIMING IS RECOGNISED BY PHILIP:

Do you see here the wonderful working of the Lord ? You see God directed Philip to the right person at the right time. My is this not how the Holy Spirit works ? From above we see the sovereign God working in a mans heart in such a way that after making a pilgrimage to Jerusalem he remains spiritually hungry. And while reading a scroll of Isaiah as he is borne across the desert, he encounters a Spirit sent ambassador of Christ, Philip who leads him to the Saviour. From ground level we see the role of human

obedience. Would the eunuch have been saved even if Philip had disobeyed ? The question is irrelevant. God chooses to use human obedience to carry out His plan. Here's Philip away up in Samaria and here is the Eunuch a way down on the Gaza road and God brings the two together. You see Gods sovereign work plus mans obedience brings the touch of God to needy human lives. Put another way, there are all kinds of " *chance,*" meetings ready to take place in a life that is sensitive and obedient to Gods leading. Some years ago late one afternoon I was completing my visitation when I felt constrained to visit a young married woman and her children who had been attending the services in Carryduff. I had called before and but unknown to me at the time she saw me coming and did not let me in. But this time it was different. For within a short period of time she opened her heart to Christ and was born again. Believe me I was glad when on that day I was sensitive to the prompting of the Holy Spirit and little did I know, what results that step of obedience would bring !

For since then, through that mother's testimony to her family I've had the privilege of leading others in her family to Christ. Like Philip are you in touch with Gods will ? Are you sensitive to the Holy Spirit ? Do you hear His whisper ? My have you wondered how many opportunities you and I have missed ? Because we've argued with God, questioned God, hesitated ?
(1)

(2) A MAN IN TOUCH WITH GODS WORD

Can you imagine how Philips heart missed a beat when he saw the Ethiopian's entourage out there in the desert ? It must have been an impressive caravan because the man was the secretary of the treasury for the Candace Dynasty of the kingdom of what was then known as Ethiopia. Now Ethiopia in that day was a large kingdom located south of Egypt. To the Greeks and Romans it represented the outer limits of the known world. It corresponds in our day to the modern region called Nubia. This was a black man and therefore a Gentile. He had just completed a thousand-mile religious pilgrimage to Jerusalem and had a searching heart. Evidently while in Ethiopia he had come under the influence of Judaism and had gone to Jerusalem to become either a proselyte (Deut 23:1) or a near proselyte.

My here was a noble man on a noble search. And as he travelled along in his chariot, he was reading (Is 53:7-8) aloud, as was the universal practice in the ancient world. And suddenly there stood Philip, Gods hitchhiker. " *Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near and join thyself to this chariot.*" (8:29) And Philip was so much in touch with Gods Will and Gods Word that what followed came naturally. Now if we are going to be used of God we'll need to be (2) This chapter is full of what these early Christians preached. Look at (8:4) look at (8:5) look at (8:14) look at (8:35) You see from God's Word Philip showed the Eunuch:

(a) THE CONDITION OF THE LOST:

He showed this man that he was a sinner and that Christ had died for his sins. (1 Cor 15:3) The 53rd chapter of Isaiah which he was reading says, “ *All we like sheep have gone astrayall.* ” (Is 53:6) My I have no doubt that Philip took that to explain why the Lord Jesus went as a lamb to the slaughter, why He was dying for our sins. Now no one has ever been saved who has not admitted that he or she is sinner. In the average congregation you have two classes of people who don't get saved. Those who think they are too *good* and those who think they are too bad. But my ... there is nobody so good that he need not be saved and there is nobody so bad that he cannot be saved. But we have to admit that we're sinners ! Have you made that admission ? Have you prayed and meant it, “ *God be merciful to me a sinner ?* ” (a)

(b) THE CHARACTER OF THE LAMB:

For this very passage that he was reading (Is 53:7-8) was all about the Lamb. What greater gospel text, and what greater opening for Philip, could be found in all the Old Testament ? Here was a seeking sinner, reading in the Scripture all about the Saviour. The Eunuch had come to the great passage in Isaiah that described Christ on the Cross, and he asked Philip the question, “ *I pray thee of whom speaketh the prophet this ? of himself, or of some other man ?* ” (8:34) Do you see what Philip did ? He led him by the hand to Calvary and introduced him to Jesus. It was just a short step from the Scripture portion to the Saviours person. But how Philip would have delighted to relate that great Isaiah passage to the Christ of Calvary. “ *Why sir,* ” he

would say, “ *the prophet speaks of some other man.* ” And what a Man.

And Philip would retrace the tragedy of Calvary. He would speak of the resurrection and the ascension. He would tell of the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, of the birthday of the church, of the Great Commission to go into all the world to preach the gospel, baptising believers in the name of the Triune God ! My no matter what else you preach if you don't tell folk of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ you've missed the mark. “ *Then Philip preached unto him Jesus.* ”

(8:35) In your ministry are you making much of the Lord Jesus ? The glory of His person: the sufficiency of His work ? Are you determined to know nothing among the people “ *save Jesus Christ and Him crucified ?* ”

(1 Cor 2:2) From Gods Word Philip showed (a) (b)

(c) THE COMMAND OF THE LORD:

For we read (8:36-39) Obviously Philip had made clear to the eunuch that faith in Christ is followed by confession of Christ in baptism. Belief always precedes baptism. For baptism is the outward expression of an inward experience. My the eunuchs experience makes very clear the Subjects of Baptism. Believers and believers only. The eunuchs experience makes very clear the Mode of Baptism. For (8:38) says, “ *And they went down both into the water.* ” This was baptism by immersion. Still again, the eunuchs experience makes very clear the Outcome of Baptism. “ *And he*

went on his way rejoicing.” (8:39) Could it be that you have no joy because you've been disobedient to the command of the Lord to be baptised ? (Matt 28:19) Philip (1) (2)

(3) A MAN IN TOUCH WITH GODS WORK

Many years ago a man stood up in one of D.L.Moodys meetings and said, “ *I have been for five years on the Mount of Transfiguration.*” “ *How many souls have you won to Christ ?*” was the sharp question that came from Moody in an instant. “ *Well, I do now know.*” “ *Have you won any, ?*” persisted Moody. “ *I do not know that I have,*” answered the man. “ *Well,*” said Moody, “ *sit down then. When a man gets so high that he cannot reach down and save others, there is something wrong.*” My it does little good to be in touch with Gods Will and Gods Word if we are not in touch with Gods Work and that means people. You see at,

(a) THE DAWNLIGHT OF PHILIPS MINISTRY:

He was in touch with Gods work. Do you recall what the apostles said ? “ *Let our hands be freed from this responsibility of looking after the temporal needs of widows, and let us have men who are specially appointed for this purpose.*” Philip was chosen as one of “ **the seven,**” to serve tables and he not despise it ! My are you too big to be involved in Gods work ? Apart from warming a pew and throwing a few pound into the collection, what contribution do you make, to your local church ? (a) And at,

(b) THE NOONLIGHT OF PHILIPS MINISTRY:

He was in touch with Gods work. My if Philip had not loved people with Christ’s love, he would never have reached across the substantial barriers between Samaritans and Jews. It was the same with the Gentile Ethiopian here in (Acts Ch 8) You see Philip loved Jews, Samaritans, Gentiles, whites, blacks, it made no difference. He was in touch with people and genuinely cared about them. My has Calvary love stripped you of racial and social haughtiness ? There was a Christian woman many years ago who was riding in what before the Civil Rights Act in America was called a Jim Crow car on the railway. Part of it was for blacks only and part for whites only. The black section was full, so when the train made a stop an elderly black man attempted to get on. The guard said, “ *No, you cannot ride we are full.*” He said, “ *My son is dying, and I have got to go.*” Overhearing this the lady spoke up and said, “ *Allow him to sit here by me.*” The guard looked at her startled and said, “ *Do you mean that ?*” She said, “ *I mean it,*” so he was permitted to travel. As they rode she conversed with him. When he left the train the lady sitting behind her said, “ *How could you do that ?*” “ *Do what ?*” “ *Oh, have that black man sit beside you, and talk to him as you did.*” “ *Why,*” she said, “ *that’s easy to answer. I could do it because I serve a Master who is colour blind.*” Do you not think Philip would have loved that ? For Philip loved people just because they were people for Christ died. (a) (b) And at,

(c) THE TWILIGHT OF PHILIPS MINISTRY:

He was still in touch with Gods work. The book of Acts provides us with a brief peek at his life near sunset. Look at (21:8-9) This is the final glimpse we have of Philip, and here we see a thrilling career drawing to a quiet close. Some 20 years have elapsed between the time of Philips Samaritan ministry and his receiving Paul as a guest in his home in Caesarea. The big meetings are over. The hugh throngs are no more. The lilt and lift of the sensational went with the yesterdays. The noonlight has gone, the twilight has come. But Philip is still serving the Lord albeit in a different sphere ! Philip had learned in the school of Christ to grow old gracefully. I like to think that while Philip,

(1) Faded from Prominence he did not fade from Obedience:

Demas faded, tragically. He forsook Paul. He forsook the Lord. (2 Tim 4:10) But not Philip. The obedience that took him from Jerusalem to Samaria, from Samaria to the desert, from the desert to a royal chariot, was still his holy habit when last we have a look at him. Let our popularity with others pass if only our loyalty to Him remains.

(2) Faded from Fame, he did not fade from Fruitfulness:

There were those “ *four unmarried daughters who prophesised.*” (21:9) Instead of being frustrated

maidens they were radiant and articulate spinsters. What a tremendous influence Philip exercised over his family and how wonderful to see four girls walking in their Dads footsteps. My think of the prayers, tears, precepts that had gone into the making of these four gifted girls. You see Philip was still bringing forth fruit in old age. (Ps 92:14)

(3) Faded from the ministry of Signs he did not fade from the ministry of Saintliness:

Here in this quiet Caesarean home “ *far from the madding crowd,*” the man who once travelled to points remote and risky now bore his witness mostly, it would appear with the constricted orbit of his home. My think of the contrast between the past and the present ? In Samaria 20 years ago “ *the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did.*” (8:6) Where were the signs now ? Gone ! Big crowds, big miracles, big tumult all gone. Yet something bigger than signs remains. The character atmosphere of Christlikeness which is the hallmark of a saint. My its a beauty that banishes bitterness: a sweetness that surmounts sourness, a tranquillity that triumphs over turbulence. The mark of a saint is that, when career glamour is utterly gone, character glow shines on. Philip maintained his spiritual glow right to the end. (Rom 12:11)

For as the shadows lengthened with the years, Philip one of “ *the seven,*” was still in touch with God’s Will,

God's Word, and God's Work and so continued to be
the touch of God to others, his family: his friends
finding refreshment under his roof.

*“ But the master comes, and the foolish crowd,
Never can quite understand
The worth of a soul and the change that's wrought,
By the touch of the Masters hand.”*

Will you bring a touch of the Masters hand to others.