

***RUNNING TO HELP*****Acts 8:4-8; 26-40****(Read Acts 8:4-8; 26-40)**

**Intro:** A hero is someone who runs towards danger while others are running from it. One of the visuals that is burned into our memory from the September 11, 2001 attacks in New York was the people running from the burning and soon to be crumbling buildings. And it was not surprising. It was horrific. But even more memorable were the thousands of police and firefighters who ran directly into the danger to do what they could. 343 first responders died because they ran to danger rather than away from it. They knew the need and they ran to help.

In the text I just read from Acts 8, the words that stood out in the midst of so many powerful things was *And the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over and join this chariot."* So Philip ran to him . . . Acts 8:29-30a. Philip was a first responder. He had a lifesaving message and like those New York heroes, when the call came, he was running to help.

Philip was just a regular guy – just like any of us here at ABC. Regular guys can have kingdom impact like Philip, so let's look at him and learn.

First, some background to our passage:

In Acts 6, beginning at verse one, we see a thriving church that was experiencing growing pains. The disciples were the leaders of the church and they were very busy with preaching the Good News and coming up short with caring for the very real needs of the often neglecting parts of society, the widows and orphans. It was especially the Christ Followers of Greek background who were the most neglected. The solution was the selection of . . . *seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom* Acts 6:3b. All of them had Greek names though they were all Jews. Still, they were able to minister to the hurting and needy people in the church. One of these men was named Philip.

These men were also great preachers who augmented the ministry of the apostles. One of them was preaching so powerfully that he caught the attention of the Jewish authorities. His name was Stephen and in chapters 6 and 7 we witness his preaching, his trial, and his murder by stoning by the angry Jews. We also notice that the person who held the coats of the crowd was a zealous Pharisee whose name was Saul who later became Paul, but that's another sermon series.

After this, persecution picked up and we see in verse 4, the people of the fledgling church scattered throughout the region and that's where we pick up our talk for today with this . . .

**The church scattered is a good thing**

- The Christians who were scattered by the persecution that followed Stephen's execution went about preaching the word. They didn't go into hiding. They shared the gospel. Defeat doesn't mean giving up. In fact, as we see here, Christ followers ramped up and did even more.
- Being scattered isn't a bad thing. I don't want to belabor the drubbing that the cause for good took on Tuesday at the polls. And I don't want to take the analogy too far, but that evening, as I discovered that Issue One and Issue Two had passed, I felt very scattered. I actually thought that I wouldn't sleep well. But the next day, I realized that we needed to get down and do what Christians are supposed to do. We need to share the hope that only Jesus can give. Scattering broadcasts the Good News more effectively. Let's ramp up the Good News that changes hearts.
- Philip and the Church may have been scattered by persecution, but they made the best of their time. In Philip's case you see that he ended up in Samaria, and instead of licking his wounds, and worrying about who might be pursuing him...

**Philip preached**

- The interesting thing is, something that you probably already know, Samaritans and Jews did not get along. There was a deep, almost racial, hatred between the two peoples. The hatred was certainly mutual, but for the Jews it was especially visceral. The people of Samaria had been enemies from the time of Solomon's death and were seeing as traitors. Later when the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah were carried off into captivity, their captors colonized the area of Israel and its capital of Samaria with their own people. This

meant that non-Jews were now living on Jewish land. They intermarried with the Jews who were there and the result was a hated mongrel race.

- We have an example of this in familiar account of the Samaritan woman in John 4. In that case, the disciples come back to find Jesus talking to a woman at the well. This was a double whammy, a good Jewish man never spoke to a woman who was not his wife, daughter, or mother, and he certainly didn't speak to a Samaritan, let alone a Samaritan woman! But now we see Philip, a Jew, actually going to Samaria and preaching Christ to them. He didn't hesitate to proclaim that Jesus the Messiah was for all humanity and he received them into the kingdom and baptized them. I love the simple, yet understated, words of verse 8, *So there was much joy in that city.* Acts 8:8. The Gospel brings great joy.
- Our text tells us that Philip, . . . *proclaimed to them the Christ.* Acts 4:4. We have the wonderful words of life so we must do what Philip did. No matter who we are mixing with, we need to be preaching Christ to them. How? Do we need to stand on a soapbox on the street corner or get behind a pulpit and shout "Repent! The End is near! No. Just be Jesus to people. Allow Jesus to shine through you and then when people ask you why you shine you can tell them what he's done for you. Speak from your own experience. Do as Philip did – he followed the Holy Spirit and people came to Christ.
- Now back to our text, Philip was having such great success and then the Holy Spirit gave him a job transfer. And, of course . . .

### **Philip obeyed**

- Philip was very successful in Samaria. People were coming to the Lord in droves. It seems crazy that God would call someone away from that, but he does. Philip could have said, "I have it really good here! It's really going well, can't you send someone else?" Or he could have said, "I'll go anywhere, but not there, not now. I'm having the time of my life here" But he didn't. Phillip obeyed the Holy Spirit. Again, the Holy Spirit worked in Philip's life, and called him to a desert highway where a man who was seeking after a closer walk with God was primed and ready by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit called, and Philip obeyed.
- In fact, he didn't just obey . . .

### **Philip ran**

- The Holy Spirit said rise up and go and Philip rose up and went. And then when he saw the Ethiopian official in his carriage struggling over the words of Isaiah, like a first responder hearing gunfire or seeing a burning house with screams of terror coming from inside, he ran to help. The exact words are, *And the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over and join this chariot."* So Philip ran to him . . . Acts 8:29-30a. People need to be rescued from their despair and lostness. Philip knew that and we do too in our heart of hearts. Don't hang back and hope they figure it out for themselves (they probably won't). Don't walk, RUN, when you see the need. Again, when the Holy Spirit is urging you, you'll know it, and he will help you know what to say.
- Listen how Philip opened the conversation . . .

### **Philip asked, do you understand what you're reading? (Acts 8:30)**

- It was exactly what the Ethiopian needed to hear. His answer is the cry of humanity in need of the Good News, *"How can I, unless someone guides me?"* Acts 8:31. This week my friend George was telling me about a 4<sup>th</sup> grader in his LifeWise class at Black River who had no idea what prayer is and she had never heard the Word. George was incredulous. But, in a way, I'm incredulous at his naiveté. Fewer and fewer people are coming to church. So we need to go to them. So I'm glad for George and LifeWise and anyone who is taking the Good New TO the world rather than waiting for it to come to them.
- And then, it's imperative that you know about this Good News. Philip was ready and our text says, *Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus.* Acts 8:35. Philip recognized that the man was reading from the Prophet Isaiah. He also knew that the Holy Spirit had revealed that passage to the Ethiopian and why. It was about Jesus who is the way, the truth and the life. Do you know that scripture like that? Don't be discouraged. Just get down to getting to know it better. They are words of life.
- And then he followed through . . .

## Philip baptized

- The Ethiopian asked for baptism and Philip did it! Baptism is an outward proclamation of an inward change and there had definitely been an inward change in this royal official's life. And Philip affirmed it. He didn't mess around and tell him he needed a class for it or that he needed to dress differently or speak differently. Philip affirmed the man by recognizing that the old Ethiopian was dead and a newly resurrected Ethiopian came up out the water – full of joy and an infectious urge to tell others.
- Wow! What a victory! Philip could have said, "Let me ride along and take the Good News to Ethiopia! Let me keep this string of victories going!!!! Better yet, let me right a book about my strategy and sell it on Amazon! It'll make gajillions and I can give the profits to missions!" That's the expected and human response. But the Holy Spirit knows otherwise and he immediately moved Philip over to the coast and Philip continued his mission work. Our text ends with *But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through he preached the gospel to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.* Acts 8:40

**Conclusion:** God, by his Holy Spirit, called and Philip was on mission running to help. That's what first responders do. What's your first response when the Holy Spirit calls? What is your Samaria? The last people you feel like ministering to? What do you respond when it's going well and the Holy Spirit says go to the desert and share with a confused soul?

Let it be said of us that we passed through and we preached the gospel to all . . .

Let it be said of us that whenever we saw a soul in need, we were ever running to help. Amen.