

# Gamma

## Acts 8

### Study 8 Philip presents the gospel

**Q 1 Acts 8:1-4. Who is doing the preaching of the word in these verses and what is the significance of that?**

One of the most significant little phrases in the book of Acts is in v.4 *“they who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went.”* Who was scattered? Not the apostles — they stayed in Jerusalem (v.1). *“All were scattered except the apostles”* (v.1) It was everyone else, the “laypeople”, not the clergy, who were scattered. And the Greek word rendered by the NIV translation as *“preached the word”* is the Greek word *evangelizdomai*, the word “evangelize”. This then is how Christianity in 300 years spread from this little handful of people into every nook and cranny of the Roman empire, until it even converted the leadership and made that old pagan culture into a Christian society. Why did Christianity triumph in a world of dozens and dozens of competing religions and philosophies with far more and far more influential adherents? Every Christian evangelized wherever they went.

Apparently, when the Christians were all together under the powerful and gifted leadership of the apostles, they had been fairly passive in their ministry. They had simply brought their friends to hear the “great preaching” at the church in Jerusalem. But when they were scattered, away from their leaders, they gathered up the courage to communicate themselves what they had learned. The result was that, though they were probably less eloquent than the apostles, they were in the end more effective. Why? Because lay people (being 100 times more numerous than “professionals”) can reach more folk, and because a lay person’s testimony often has a more authentic ring to the listener than a well-polished articulate speech.

This is one of the key practical differences between the other faiths and religions and Christianity. It was not the job of the clergy to do evangelism. They did it to model and encourage the people, who had the main task of “preaching the good news”.

**What implications does these verse have on how FBC can fulfill its task of gospel ministry?**

**What must I do to be part of an organic movement like this? How must I prepare myself**

**Can you share instances of being able to testify?**

**Q2 .Acts 8:5-25. What was so amazing about Philip’s act of going to Samaria? What were the elements in his effective ministry? What would be the equivalent of his bold ministry action today?**

You don’t have to much reading in the New Testament to know that the Jews and the Samaritans hated one another fiercely. It was a bitter ethnic rivalry on the order of the most terrible conflicts we have in various parts of the world today(Beirut, Belfast, S.Africa, etc.) When Assyria conquered the northern tribes of Israel (which had Samaria as its capital) most of the people were deported. The Assyrian government then repopulated Samaria with foreigners, who intermarried with the Jews who were left. The result was what the nation of Judah saw as a “mongel” race. The Samaritans built their own temple on Mt.Gerizim and repudiated most of the Old Testament Scripture, so the Jews saw them also as heretics. Thus the hostility between Jew and Samaritan was far worse than relationships with the Greeks or Romans or any other pagans. Cf.John 4:9, where the writer simply observes that “*Jews do not associate with Samaritans*”.

But here we are told that Philip went to preach the gospel to a city in Samaria. He did urban ministry (“*a city*”) among the most despised people group that he as a Jew could know (“*Samaria*”). What does

that tell us? It means that the gospel had changed Philip's whole way of looking at the world. He did not feel superior any more to the Samaritans. Before the gospel came to him, Philip would have regarded the Samaritans as too hopeless and too evil for salvation. Now the gospel has shown him that a) everyone is as hopeless apart from the gospel, and b) everyone is evil and lost apart from the gospel and c) therefore, no one is really more hopeless and evil than anyone else and so d) anyone can be saved and changed and incorporated into the family of God.

What were the elements in his ministry? Philip did two things, and then two things resulted. First, Philip came with words. He "*proclaimed the Christ*" (v.5) which showed that he did not come teaching morality and religion in general, but the gospel in particular. Christianity IS Jesus. It is making Jesus your Everything. Second, Philip came with deeds. He healed sick people and cast out demons (v.7). What were the results? First, Philip's deeds made the crowd pay close attention to Philip's words (v.6). That is a very interesting statement. Philip demonstrated the power of the gospel by changing lives, and as a result, the crowd listened to his words. Finally, then, the ultimate result was that "*there was great joy in that city*". (v.8) The spiritual and physical healing lifted the whole city into a state of joy.

These statements are so simple that we may overlook the wisdom herein. The only way we will see a movement of God that lifts our whole city is if there is a combination of word and deed. We must not be too distracted by the fact that Philip's "deed-ministry" was miraculous. We have several times discussed the fact that we should neither insist that all miracles have ceased, nor insist that the church exhibit the same kinds and number of miracles at every time and place. The fact was the Philip saw physical misery around him and worked on it ("healed the sick"). Also he saw spiritual bondage and healed it ("cast out demons"). They the crowds flocked to and listened to the preaching. In the same way, the people of a city need to see a) Christians having compassion on the physically suffering (e.g. the poor, the dying, the orphans, etc.) and they need to see b) the changed lives of people who through Christ have been delivered from psychological and spiritual bondage. Then they will listen to the gospel *en masse*.

What would be the equivalent for us today, to do Philip's kind of ministry? Well, for everyone it would be different, somewhat. It depends on who you are. The most obvious equivalents to Philip's ministry would be when, for example, blacks and whites share leadership in a church in South Africa, or when Ulster Scots and Irish blue collar workers share the leadership of a church in Belfast. But a milder form of this would be when middle class people from American suburbia move into New York City and minister there with love and respect for all the different types of people around them. In any case, to do "Philip" ministry in a city, you must: a) combine word ministry with deed ministry, and b) combine intellectual argument with demonstration of personal changed lives.

**Q3. 8:9-25. Did Simon really believe (cf.v.13 with v.21-23)? What was Simon's main problem? How can we avoid his mistake? Do you think he repented?**

Verse 13 says that "Simon believed and was baptized", yet Peter says later that his heart is "not right with God" (v.21), which means that he is not a Christian. Some would say that Simon had been converted, but had fallen away from grace, had lost his salvation. But Peter's words in verse 23, "For I see you are (lit.) in the gall of bitterness and captive to sin" has the sense of "now I perceive your true state". The best way, then to read v.13, is the Simon intellectually was convinced of the truth of Christ, but there was no real change of heart, no new birth.

Why? Verse 19 shows that his interest was "this ability". He saw the power to heal people physically and spiritually, and he wanted that power for himself. He had been a magician, and the work of a magician is to have power. Now in the gospel he saw a greater power, and he just wanted this for himself, too. In other words, Simon's fundamental and basic heart attitude had not changed at all. He had just gotten into Christianity because he hoped to use it as a more effective way to rise up and get power over people. He was still, in a sense, trying to save himself and keep control of his life. The way he had always done that was through gaining power over people. Now he wanted to do this through this new religion.

This is subtle and a great warning to us all. Some of us feel that we need approval in order to have happiness and value. So we may appear

to “convert”, but we may be getting into Christianity just to get this nice group of people to love and approve of us. So our real “salvation” is not Christ, but the approval of other Christians. There has been no real heart change, no real abandoning of our good works for faith in Christ’s work for us. We are just doing the old self- salvation in a new way. Or, here’s another example, closer to Simon’s pattern. Some of us feel that we need power over others in order to have happiness and value. We may always feel that we need to be running things, be telling others what to do. So we may appear to “convert”, but we may be getting into Christianity just because we see a new place where we can run things and pontificate and tell people how they ought to live. So our real “salvation” is not Christ, but power over others. There has been no real heart change, no real abandoning of our good works for faith in Christ’s work for us. We are just doing the old self-salvation in a new way.

So this mistake of Simon is much easier to do than you think! It is being done in the church all the time!

Did he repent? We cannot be sure, from his reply in v.24, but John Stott does not think his reply indicates that he did.

**Q 4. Acts 8:26-40. What do we learn about sharing our faith from the story of the Ethiopian’ conversion?**

We need to know several things about the Ethiopian. First, “Ethiopia” in those days corresponded to the Upper Nile region from Aswan to Khartoum. The Ethiopian was a eunuch, a person castrated in his youth, so that he could work in the royal court with out distraction. (This was fairly common at the time among men who were going to be groomed for administrative leadership.) This man was a black African, and a high official. He *“had gone to the temple to worship”*, which means that he was a believer or at least a seeker after the God of the Bible. However, we can doubt that he got a warm reception there, for the Old Testament forbid eunuchs from going into the presence of God (Deut.23:1).

Why was the Ethiopian reading the Isaiah scroll? (v.28) It is possible that he was doing so because in Isaiah 56:3-4 the prophet predicts a time in which eunuchs will be accepted by God into his courts and into his family. Philip finds him reading one of the Servant Songs of Isaiah about the Messiah to come, from Isaiah 53:7-8. He explains the gospel of Jesus on the basis of this passage. The Ethiopian responds in joy. Perhaps he now sees how eunuchs can be given “*an everlasting name that will not be cut off*” (Is.56:4). He sees that, through this Messiah, we can live on, even if we do not have children. He responds in joyful faith.

What do we learn about evangelism? First, God guides us into “divine appointments” (v.26). We need to look around us, for the people God brings into our paths are people we are to share our faith with. Second, we must not be put off from talking to someone who is extremely different from us. Obviously, an African official was very different than a Jewish commoner! Yet God can use us in the lives of people who are utterly different. Third, we must not be prejudiced. Isn’t it amazing that one of the first conversion stories we have in Acts is the story of a Jew leading a black man to Christ? In Christ, these divisions dissolve. Philip did not let prejudice keep him from being a warm, respectful witness. Fourth, Philip started by asking a question. Instead of giving a “canned” presentation, he discovered what was on the eunuch’s mind and heart. Philip essentially asked him “what is your point of interest and need right now? What is your main question?” Philip did not answer questions that the eunuch was not asking! He made sure to present the gospel as an answer to the particular concerns of this man. Fifth, Philip evangelized through a small group Bible study! So often, this works well. It is natural, it gives the Christian the “backing” of the Bible’s authority, so it is clear that the gospel is not just something you have made up. Often this is one of the best ways to share your faith — to have both Christians and non-Christians discussing a passage of the Bible. Sixth, Philip did not just talk in general terms, but he helped the eunuch to the point of decision. The only reason the eunuch would have asked for baptism (v.36), is if Philip had been explaining it to him. We must encourage people to a point of decision.

Keep in mind that Philip was a public speaker (8:4), and not everyone can do that. But here we see Philip evangelizing in a way

we all can do.