

## Sabbath School Lesson #10 – Philip as Missionary – 29 Aug - 5 Sep 2015

**C**hrist wants to lead us into missions as He led Philip. To minister like Philip, we must be willing to be led by the Spirit of Christ. “But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

One of the most interesting missionary narratives in the New Testament is that of the meeting of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch, which is recorded in Acts 8:26-40. Philip had gone “down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them” (Acts 8:5), and he was having a wonderful success, for “the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake” (verse 6). Multitudes were healed, and when those who had been bewitched with sorceries “believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women” (verse 12).

But in the height of this interest “the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert” (Acts 8:26). There is much in this for our instruction. Our natural inclination would be to question such an order, and to doubt if it came from the Lord. ‘Surely it is a mistake to leave such an interest as this,’ some would say, and the people would feel that they could not possibly as yet let go the man who had been the means of bringing them such light and blessing. ‘We must keep him with us to guide us in the way into which he has led us,’ we can hear them say; ‘what shall we do if Philip leaves us?’ But God would teach us that the church is not to be dependent upon any man; and also that when a minister of the Gospel has brought people into the truth, and established them, they are not to expect him to stand and hold the light for them to see by, but are themselves to be light bearers to other souls.

So Philip “arose and went” (verse 27), just as content and willing to go out into the desert, not knowing whom he should see or whether he should meet a single soul, as to remain and labour in the crowded city – a lesson for the labourers in this latter rain. “And, behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship, Was returning, and sitting in his chariot read Esaias the prophet” (verses 27-28). See how mysteriously the Lord works, and how He times all circumstances to fit another exactly. The eunuch had been to Jerusalem to worship, but although all the apostles were there he had not received the light of the Gospel of Christ. He was devout, but uninstructed. Not in Jerusalem, ‘the centre of the work,’ with all its teachers, but in the lonely desert, he found the Lord and got instructed.

At the very time just as the eunuch was reading aloud to himself a passage of Scripture that was dark to him, Philip came along and, overhearing him, Philip questions him as to his knowledge, and was able and willing to enlighten him. The angel of the Lord sent Philip just in time to meet the man at that spot. If Philip had stopped to question the Lord’s order, he would have been too late. His prompt, unquestioning obedience, – his willingness to leave a city full of people, to go into the desert, – made Philip the means of giving the Gospel to one who would carry it to an entire nation. Philip left Samaria and went into the desert, to preach to all Ethiopia; but he did not know it when he started. From this event, we may know that God is working to bring about many providential meetings behind which we cannot see, and the outcome of which we may never learn. The Most High God rules in the kingdom of men, and if all were fully submitted to Him, fully acquainted with His voice, and prompt to move at every breathing of His Spirit, His will would be done on earth even as it is done in heaven.

Most important of all, however, is the lesson to be learned from the scripture that the Ethiopian was reading. We are doubtless all a little better informed than he was, in that we know that the prophet was not speaking of himself, but of Jesus Christ; but how do we know, even yet, of the depth of the meaning in that “sure Word of prophecy” (2 Peter 1:19). Let us study it with Philip, and see if it does not contain more for us than we have hitherto thought.

“The place of the Scripture which he read was this, He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb down before His shearer, so opened He not His mouth: In His humiliation His judgment [not His good sense, but His right to a fair trial] was taken away: and who shall declare His generation? for His life is taken from the earth” (Acts 8:32-33).

It was the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah that the Ethiopian official was reading, and when he asked of whom the prophet was speaking, "Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus" (verse 35). Philip "preached unto him Jesus," not merely about Jesus. But from the text we know that he must have told the story of Christ's sufferings and death, for that is the one theme of the chapter. Thus we have it vividly set before us that to preach Jesus is to preach His death; we cannot know Jesus except as He is crucified. "Jesus Christ, and Him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2) is the only thing necessary for anybody to know; and whoever should know it to perfection would know everything in the universe; for in Him "we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins: who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: for by Him were all things created, that are in heavens, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by Him, and for Him: and He is before all things, and by Him all things consist;" and we who were once enemies, "hath He reconciled in the body of His flesh through death" (Colossians 1:14-22).

As Philip and the Ethiopian official rode along, and Philip continued preaching Jesus, – Christ and Him crucified, – "they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him" (Acts 8:36-38). From this we learn that the preaching of Christ leads the one who accepts it to wish to be baptized. The narrative make it plain that baptism is connected with the death of Christ, since Christ cannot be preached except as crucified. The fifty-third chapter of Isaiah from which Philip preached is devoted to the suffering and death of Christ, and it was this that made the eunuch wish to be baptized.

To be missionaries like Philip, we must be willing to hear the voice of God. When Philip went down toward Gaza and met the Ethiopian eunuch returning from Jerusalem, he was in no perplexity to know what he should do, but went immediately at the direction of the Spirit, and joined himself to his chariot, and instructed the eunuch in the knowledge of Christ. It was that Philip's ears were open to hear the words of the Spirit, and when an opportunity came to him to lead a soul to Christ, he saw it and knew immediately how to improve it. But how often is it the case with us that the opportunity comes and passes without being even discerned; or that we find ourselves in perplexity as to its nature and the way to improve it.

When opportunities come, we are often not sure whether it is an opportunity or not; yet an impression comes to us and something seems to say to us that a providence is before us to say or do something that will advance – we know not how greatly – the cause of Christ; and while we are pondering and settling the matter in our own minds, the opportunity is gone! And perhaps just an instant too late, we discern its nature, and see the advantage that we might have gained by its means and the line of that for which we are working. The brightest opportunities, oft times require to be most quickly seen and seized. If we were only where we could hear, and hear clearly, the voice of the Spirit, we should not at such times have the mortification and sorrow of seeing golden opportunity slip through our fingers. And may we not come into that condition where, like God's servants of old, we shall hear and know what His Spirit says to us, as well as what is said by the spirit of evil? We have no difficulty in knowing the promptings of the latter. Sadly, if self predominates in our natures, when the opportunity for temptation comes we have no trouble in knowing what evil thing it is that we are urged to do. If self is subdued and we are led by the Spirit, should we not be able just as readily to discern the promptings of the Spirit in opportunities that come to us from God?

If we are sons of God, His Spirit will lead us (Romans 8:14). But God never chains our will; those who are led by His Spirit must see the path and choose to follow in it. If the Spirit would lead us, – if we would discern and know how to improve the fleeting opportunities of our daily lives – we must be familiar with the word of God. You may hear the voice of God; "But your iniquities have separated between you and your God" (Isaiah 59:2); and "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me" (Psalm 66:18). If we confess all our sins and depart from all iniquities, then "thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left" (Isaiah 30:21).