

CONTAGIOUS CHRISTIANITY 7-27-14

Acts 8:26-40

(Acts 2) We read from this chapter a description of the church in Jerusalem in its infancy, in all the fresh beauty of the new-birth. Peter had preached on Pentecost and 3,000 came to faith in the Messiah Jesus. Then we read this **41-47** *So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls. 42 They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. 43 Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. 44 And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; 45 and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. 46 Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.* We have spent the last couple of week considering the subject of revival. In this passage in Acts 2 we read of the original Christian revival or awakening. It was extraordinary. Here was a church alive, active, freshly touched by God's Spirit. Good teaching? The Best. Friendly and caring? Outstanding Giving? Terrific. Committed to prayer? Definitely. How was worship? I don't know about the music, but they were a people praising God. Now that's a church! All the vital signs are there. It's healthy. Jesus Christ was alive and well in the First Christian Church of Jerusalem.

Now, what I want us to notice here is the last part of **47c** *the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.* What we see here is that this vibrant Christianity is apparently contagious. The following chapters of Acts confirm this **5:14** *All the more believers in the Lord, multitudes of men and women, were constantly added to their number. 6:7* *The word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem.* In the first century there was a downright epidemic of salvation fever. Several years ago I tried to plod my way through Edward Gibbons massive work, "The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire." That book is very tough going, but the part on the church interested me. Gibbon, who was a secular writer, of the 18th century wrote that the amazing expansion of the church in its early days was -quote- *Owing to the convincing evidence of the doctrine itself, and to the ruling providence of its great Author.* But then Gibbon goes on to list five secondary causes of the church's expansion.

He mentions the pure morals of the Christians, the miracles of the apostles, the doctrine of the future life, but the first thing to which he attributes the growth of the church is the zeal of the believers. (I:179) Those walking in the power of the Spirit, will be zealous, committed to the advancement of the kingdom of Christ Jesus. That scares some people, but others find it contagious. Do we want our Christianity to be contagious? Many things, many diseases are contagious, but one thing we know is that not all are contagious in the same way. Some diseases are transferred by breathing, some by contact with the skin, or mouth. I remember in high-school when someone got mononucleosis we'd joke about it resulting from too much smacky-mouth. Different germs are spread in different ways. When there is an outbreak of disease our medical leaders want to know how it is being spread. And, for our purpose, we want to ask that question about Christianity. I have said, and we have seen in Acts and in church history that vital Christian faith is contagious. But how is it transmitted? The answer really is simple. Acts chapter 8 gives us an example of how it spreads. We see here that Christian life is something that is in a person's heart and so in his blood - but it spreads via the mouth of an infected carrier. Are you an infected carrier? Philip was. We read of him in Acts 8:**26-40** *But an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip saying, "Get up and go south to the road that descends from Jerusalem to Gaza." (This is a desert road.) 27 So he got up and went; and there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure; and he had come to Jerusalem to worship, 28 and he was returning and sitting in his chariot, and was reading the prophet Isaiah. 29 Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go up and join this chariot." 30 Philip ran up and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet, and said, "Do you understand what you are reading?" 31 And he said, "Well, how could I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. 32 Now the passage of Scripture which he was reading was this: "He was led as a sheep to slaughter; And as a lamb before its shearer is silent, So He does not open His mouth. 33 "In humiliation His judgment was taken away; Who will relate His generation? For His life is removed from the earth." 34 The eunuch answered Philip and said, "Please tell me, of whom does the prophet say this? Of himself or of someone else?" 35 Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him. 36 As they went along the road they came to some water; and the eunuch *said, "Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?" 37 And Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." 38 And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as*

well as the eunuch, and he baptized him. 39 When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; and the eunuch no longer saw him, but went on his way rejoicing. 40 But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through he kept preaching the gospel to all the cities until he came to Caesarea. This Philip was quite a carrier. Let's study this story of his encounter with the eunuch of Ethiopia.

If you do not know what a eunuch is I refer you to Webster's Dictionary. If a eunuch said, "Moo" we would call him a steer. Maybe that will help. Some of you have canine eunuchs. Eunuchs in days of old were often used as high officials of royal courts. This eunuch was the chief treasurer of Ethiopia. Eunuchs were used for such high positions because they could not be bribed by sexual favors and their loyalty to the throne was never threatened by romance. This particular man was a big shot in his land. He was obviously a convert to the religion of Israel and is on his way home from a visit to Jerusalem.

26a *An angel of the Lord spoke to Philip.* Let's open up this divine interaction to see five main things in our story. The first is this: Notice God's concern for the eunuch ®. Here is one upon whom God has placed electing mercy. He has called him out to be one of His. His name is in the Book of Life but God does not therefore sit up in heaven and say, "Oh my, I hope that, by chance, some Christian happens to meet up with my Ethiopian friend." No, no. God sovereignty appoints a messenger to bring the truth to this man. He makes sure that His message gets to His sheep. In your case it was no accident that you met that friend who spoke to you of Christ. It was no accident that you attended a certain meeting or went to a certain church or even that you had the parents you did. God was moving billions of events in such a way that you would hear His word as you heard it. In the eunuch's case he sent an angel to Philip. He did it out of love for this one man and out of love for all those who would be influenced by this eunuch. Remember the eunuch carried this Jesus bug back to his own land. But see that God so loved him that He sent His Son first and later an angel who told Philip where to go 29 *Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go up and join this chariot."* God didn't even leave Philip to figure out why he sent him where he did. He made sure Philip found the eunuch. Isn't that marvelous! I just think this is super to see that our Lord who loves us executes for each who are his a perfect plan designed to bring us the word of life. He didn't leave it to chance, He made sure because he loves us. Note first, God's concern for the eunuch.

Note, secondly God's employment of a believer ®. Why, if God wanted to save this man, did He not just send the angel to the eunuch? That seems like it would be much quicker and simpler. But

instead the Lord got Philip involved in all this. Here we see God's plan to make frail humans the instruments for spreading His word. His life-giving disease is spread by infected carriers like Philip, like you, like me. Why does God do it that way? I don't know - but it is our privilege. He has made us His ambassadors and given us, not angels; He's given us the ministry of reconciliation. To bring the gospel to the eunuch was Philip's God-given duty and it was his God-given privilege. Philip was glad to do it for when Christ lives in the heart there is a desire for others to know Him. Do you have that? Are you ready to be sent as an ambassador for Christ? Note secondly, God's employment of a believer.

Note thirdly - we've seen God's concern for the eunuch - now see Philip's concern for him. This is evident in verse 30. In verse 29 the Spirit told Philip to 29b *"Go up and join this chariot."* And Philip said, "No, Lord, It's not good to be real pushy with your religion. They might think I'm weird. They might get turned off. People don't want you talking about spiritual stuff." Hardly. The Spirit said, "Go up." Verse 30 says Philip ran up. He heard the man reading aloud the book of Isaiah, and he spoke to him 30c *"Do you understand what you are reading?"* Now, we see here Philip initiating a dialogue with this man. He didn't walk along and hope the man would ask him to preach a sermon. He took the initiative. He didn't go up and say, "Friend are you saved?" But he did ask a rather natural question. He didn't choose to be obnoxious but he did choose to get involved in this man's life. Why did he do it?

Think on that while I add a few thoughts here. In the US of A we have become afraid of involvement. I want you to mind your business and I'll mind my business. People who try to enter into my life, like Philip does here, are considered weird and annoying. So, we become fearful, but when the life of God is throbbing in my soul I have to get involved! We cannot sit idly by while the world goes to hell - ignorant of the Savior! Why did Philip get involved? Because He loved Jesus and cared for this man. Philip had found true life in Christ and he was compelled to pass it on. He was like Paul who said of his Jewish friends Romans 10:1 *my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation.* Are you concerned for unbelievers? Would you let that concern translate into caring involvement in their lives?

We've noted God's concern for the eunuch, God's employment of a believer, Philip's concern for the eunuch. Note fourthly God's preparation of the eunuch ®. This man had been given already, by God, an interest in spiritual things. He was a seeker of truth, a reader of the Scriptures. When Philip initiated a religious conversation he welcomed it. 31 *And he said, "Well, how could I, unless*

*someone guides me?” And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. Some people pick up hitchhikers in order to witness to them. This man picks up a hitchhiker in order to learn from him. After reading the Scripture **34** *The eunuch answered Philip and said, “Please tell me, of whom does the prophet say this? Of himself or of someone else?”* The man is ready, eager to learn. He has been prepared by God for this encounter with Philip. Now, there are some out there who are just waiting for someone to tell them of Christ. There are some - but not that many. Others are completely closed minded to Christ. And still others aren’t close-minded but they aren’t ready to embrace Jesus yet either. These need more time to think and weigh the costs and evidence. Acts 17:**1-4a** *Now when they had traveled through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. 2 And according to Paul’s custom, he went to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, 3 explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, “This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ.” 4 And some of them were persuaded.* But it took more than a short sermon. For some it takes weeks or months. Acts 17: **10-11** *The brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. 11 Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so.* They weren’t ready right at first. But after careful thought **12a** *Therefore many of them believed.* Then Paul preached in philosophical Athens. He told of God’s man, Jesus, who had risen from the dead. **32a** *Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some began to sneer.* Some were closed-minded. It speaks of no one who immediately believed but **32b** *but others said, “We shall hear you again concerning this.* They wanted to know more and evaluate. Some then are like the eunuch, ripe fruit ready to be picked, others need more time. You know some like this? Then bring them to church. Invite them to the Festival of Hope. They don’t have to pretend to be Christians to come around. And you don’t have to be a great evangelist to invite them. Bring them along and they’ll hear the word of Christ. We will be offering a class just for inquirers in the Fall -- Christianity Explored. You’ll offend very few by inviting them to something like that, or to a special event at the Consol or inviting them to church on Easter or to a Chili Cook-off. You never know who is ready, who has been prepared by God to hear and receive the word of Christ. We have an awesome opportunity coming up this month with our 1 for 1 focus and the Festival of Hope.*

Don't waste this. Pray about one person, maybe five persons to invite, and then pray for God to make them ready and make you ready and contagious.

Finally, my brethren, point 5 - note Philip's boldness. Are you scared by a challenge like we are setting before you? I get that. But let's look at our Spirit-filled brother Phil. **35** *Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him.* And you know this isn't an easy thing to do. But Philip had an open door and knew he must walk thru it and what an open door it was! This guy was just asking to hear the gospel and Philip recognized a God-given opportunity when he saw it. I'm afraid some of us wouldn't recognize an open door to witness if it hit us in the face. Someone runs up to you at work tomorrow and says, "Tell me, what must I do to be saved!" And you think, "Hmm, I wonder if this is a good time to share my faith?" I confess, that is the way I tend to be. I tend to want to play it safe. I tend to assume someone is disinterested in spiritual things. That is something I don't like about me. I want God to change that. Friend, we need to be ready! We are called to be bold! Philip was. He understood that he was to be a witness for Christ. The angel never told him to witness to the eunuch. It doesn't say the Spirit told him either. They never told Philip what to do, they just showed him where to do it. What to do was clear enough for Christ said in Acts 1:**8b** *you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses.* So, Philip preached Jesus to him from Isaiah 53. He must have explained to this man the glorious atoning death of Christ. He must have proclaimed to him the glorious resurrection of Christ. He must have called him to repent and believe the gospel and be baptized. Philip preached. He had no pulpit but he preached. And when he was finished with the eunuch God beamed him elsewhere and he kept on preaching wherever he went.

There are four words in verse 35 I would especially point you to. They are there in the Greek. My NAS has it as it is written, "Philip opened his mouth."[®] Isn't that marvelous?! It seems so many Christians have lockjaw. We just can't talk of Christ! That's the way the devil would have it. But people, good news is for sharing! Some years ago in a wealthy residential section of Richmond, Virginia some residents complained of the singing of a small church, saying that it disturbed them. A petition for their city council was circulated. It was brought to a Jewish resident for his signature. He read it and said, *I cannot sign it. If I believed as do these Christians that my Messiah had come, I would shout it from the housetops and on every street in Richmond, and nobody could stop me."*

That's right! With a message like that we must open our mouths. Peter and John, when arrested for preaching said, Acts 4:20 *We cannot stop speaking what we have seen and heard.* Philip, said verse 35, opened his mouth. Why? Well, just look at the Scripture which he read with the eunuch 32 *Now the passage of Scripture which he was reading was this: "He was led as a sheep to slaughter; And as a lamb before its shearer is silent, So He does not open His mouth.* Hmm! Jesus our Lord went to his trial, His mocking, His scourging and His crucifixion as a silent Lamb. Had He said the word a thousand angels would have come to his side but He did not open His mouth. For you, for me, He kept silent. To Philip, to me, the logic is simple. If Jesus is willing to be that Lamb who opened not his mouth for me. I must be willing to open my mouth for Him.

Isaac Watts wrote, "Am I a soldier of the cross, a follower of the Lamb, and shall I fear to own His cause or blush to speak His name?" Oh may it not be so! It is our privilege to be infected carriers of new life in Jesus! (solicit stories how individuals were infected by a "carrier")