

Philip, Deacon and Evangelist

(Acts 6:1-8; 8; 21:8)

By

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Today I thought I'd tell you about a man named Philip. Would you like that?

Now, the Bible tells us about two good men named Philip, but I'm only going to be talking about the second one of them. The first one (the one I won't be talking about) was one of Jesus' 12 apostles. This apostle Philip and the other apostles (like Peter and James and John and Thomas) were with Jesus, and we hear about them in the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. But I won't be talking about the apostle Philip today.

No. The Philip we're going to talk about today, is a different man named Philip. And we only hear about this other Philip in the book of Acts in the New Testament part of the Bible after Jesus went back to heaven. But so you can know better about this other Philip, I first need to tell you a few things that the Bible tells us had been happening then.

Okay. Jesus had been on earth and had died for our sins on the cross. Then after 3 days He had been alive again and had talked with lots of people, hundreds of people. You remember that, don't you? But then the Lord Jesus went back to heaven, and the apostles (Peter, James, John, Thomas and the others), Jesus' special men, had begun to tell people in Jerusalem about Jesus, just as He had told them to do. Yes, the apostles began telling the people that the Lord Jesus Christ had died for our sins but was alive again. And the apostles told the people that if they trusted Jesus to forgive their sins, He would, and then someday the Lord Jesus would come back to be King of the whole world, and they would be with Him. This is called the Gospel. "Gospel" means "good news", the good news about Jesus. And when they had turned to Jesus, they were to follow Jesus, that is, to do what He said.

Well, many people there in Jerusalem heard this good news about Jesus and began believing in Jesus. They became what we call Christians, followers of Christ. And these believers were very happy. They would get together every day and praise the Lord and worship Him, and they would also eat meals together, and they shared their things with each other. They shared everything they had with each other. So everyone had enough. Some of them even sold some of their things. Then they would bring the money they got for them and give the money to the apostles. Then the apostles would use this money to take care of those who needed it. That all sounds like such a loving and happy time, doesn't it? And all of this time the apostles were helping pass things out to the others, and they also would tell them more and more about Jesus.

And some of these new believers were widows. That means their husbands had died, so they didn't have husbands to take care of them. So the apostles made sure that the widows had enough, too.

Well, after a while, there were so many people who were believers, that it began to be hard for the apostles to take care of all of this. Also, some people began complaining that one group of widows wasn't getting taken care of as well each day with the food as another group of widows. Goodness!

What were the apostles going to do about all of this!? There was so very much for them to do!

Finally, the apostles called the many believers in Jerusalem together. And the apostles said to them, "Look here, it doesn't make sense that we should have to stop preaching about God in order to wait on tables!" And the apostles said to the believers, "So here is what you need to do. You look around you and choose 7 men from among you, men who are wise and honest and whom everyone talks well about. Men full of the Holy Spirit. Then we'll have them take care of the things like dividing up the food. That way we can spend our time preaching and praying."

Well, that sounds like a wise idea that the apostles came up with, doesn't it? And that's what all the believers thought, too. They liked this idea. So the believers carefully chose 7 godly men from among themselves. One of these men was named Stephen, and another man was named Philip. And that's the Philip we're going to be talking about today.

The believers brought Philip and Stephen and the other 5 men to the apostles. Then the apostles prayed, and they put their hands on the 7 men to ask God to bless and guide them. We call these 7 men "deacons", which just means "servants". Stephen and Philip and the other 5 men were to serve the other believers by dividing up the food and taking care of things. So now there were both apostles and deacons, each with their own jobs to do, weren't there?

Well, the apostles were preaching and teaching more and more about God. And the word of God spread out to more and more people, and more and more people began believing the word of God and trusting the Lord Jesus to save them from their sins, and they were living in a way that pleased God. Soon there were thousands of believers. And the deacon Stephen was full of faith in God, and the Lord gave Stephen the power to do miracles. Isn't all of that wonderful?! It sounds like such a happy time!

But some people didn't want to hear the word of God. (Can you imagine that?!) And these people didn't like it that so many people were trusting in Jesus. And they began trying to argue with Stephen. But Stephen was so wise, and the Holy Spirit was so powerful in Stephen, that these bad men couldn't win any arguments with him. So what do you think those bad men did? Why, they began telling lies about Stephen and trying to make trouble for him! And these bad men got the leaders and other people so upset by their lies, that Stephen was arrested!

But then Stephen was able to talk with all of those leaders and bad people! And Stephen reminded them about all of the good things that the Lord had done for them in the past. And then Stephen told them about Jesus. But the bad people didn't want to hear about Jesus, so finally they just put their hands over their ears so they wouldn't be able to hear all of the wise and true things that Stephen was saying. (Don't they sound foolish and silly?!)

But then a very bad and sad thing happened. The bad people rushed at Stephen, and they killed him! (How awful!) But as he was dying, Stephen looked up at the sky, and he saw Jesus and he saw the glory of God, and Stephen asked God to forgive the men who were going to kill him. Then Stephen died.

Well, that was terrible, wasn't it?! But the trouble didn't stop there. No. Instead, all of this uproar caused a lot of trouble for the other believers in Jerusalem as well. Well, the apostles stayed there in Jerusalem, but many, many of the other believers left Jerusalem and went all over the rest of the country so as not to get in trouble. Why, they might have been thrown in jail or even killed if they'd stayed there. And one of the many believers who left Jerusalem was the deacon Philip, the man I said we'd be talking about today.

Now that was awful, wasn't it? All of those Christians having to move to so many different places? But wait a minute! What do you think all of these Christians did when they got to their new homes? Why, they began telling the people in those new cities about Jesus and how to be saved from their sins, of course! So now many more people in lots of different places were being saved from their sins and would be able to go to heaven someday! Yes, the Lord can even use bad things to bring good. And the Lord was using this trouble back in Jerusalem to spread the word of God all over the country! These people who had left Jerusalem were like little missionaries, weren't they?! After all, if you knew how to be able to have your sins forgiven and be able to be happy someday in heaven with Jesus, you'd want to tell other people this wonderful news, too, wouldn't you?! I know, I do! But let's see what else the Bible says about Philip, all right?

Well, as I just said, the deacon Philip was one of the many people who left Jerusalem because of all the terrible trouble there. And he went many miles away to a city called Sa-ma-ri-a. And in Samaria Philip preached about Jesus Christ to the people there. Lots of the people believed what Philip was saying, and they were saved from their sins, became Christians. And the Lord let Philip do miracles, too. Yes, the Lord let Philip be able to heal many sick people and cure many people who hadn't been able to walk. And these miracles made the people believe even more that Philip was telling them the truth. And there was great happiness in the city of Samaria.

But just think, there wouldn't have been this great happiness in Samaria and all of these people being saved from their sins by trusting in Jesus if there hadn't been such terrible trouble back in Jerusalem, would there?! No, Philip would have stayed in Jerusalem. But now, because of that big trouble, Philip was there in Samaria. Yes, as I said earlier, the Lord can turn even bad things into good, can't He? We don't always understand this at the time, but sometimes we can think back and see, "Oh, this good thing is happening now because of that bad thing that happened then!" Isn't the Lord good and powerful?! But let's get back to what was happening in the city of Samaria.

Now, there was a man in the city of Samaria named Simon. And before Philip had come to Samaria, for a long time this Simon used to do what were probably magic tricks. He didn't do this just for fun or to entertain people, but to make the people there think he was wonderful, that he was someone very special. And everyone used to say, "Oh, Simon has great power from God." Simon was a very important man there, and he liked being so important.

But when the people in Samaria heard Philip teaching about Jesus, they believed what Philip was saying. They began trusting in the Lord Jesus to save them from their sins and were baptized. Well, Simon also heard Philip teaching about Jesus, and the Bible says that Simon then believed in Jesus and was baptized. Then Simon went with Philip and was amazed at the real miracles (not magic tricks!) that God let Philip do.

Now, remember, the apostles (Peter, James, John, and the others) had stayed in Jerusalem, even when all the trouble had been going on. And some way the apostles heard that the word of God was being preached and listened to many miles away in Samaria. So the other apostles sent Peter and John to the city of Samaria to see just what was going on there.

When Peter and John got to Samaria, they saw the many believers there. And Peter and John prayed for these believers that the Holy Spirit might come on them. And Peter and John laid their hands on the believers, and what do you think happened? Why the Lord had the Holy Spirit come on the believers in Samaria. We aren't told just what happened then, but it was something special.

But remember Simon? Well, Simon saw this, that Peter and John had prayed and laid their hands on the people, and the Holy Spirit had come on them. So Simon said to Peter and John, "Oh, I want to be able to lay my hands on people and have the Holy Spirit come on them, too." And Simon said, "I'll give you money if you'll give me this power." You see, Simon didn't understand that only the Lord God could have the Holy Spirit come on people in a special way. It is a gift that the Lord gives; it can't be bought with money. But, remember, Simon used to trick people into thinking he had power from God, so maybe he thought it was some sort of trick that he could buy and be able to do, too. The Bible doesn't really say just what Simon was thinking.

Well, Peter and John didn't like this at all! And Peter said to Simon, "May your money die with you, because you thought that God's gift of the Holy Spirit could be bought with money!!"

And Peter said to Simon, "You don't have any share in this, because your heart isn't right with God! Repent of this wickedness! Pray to God to forgive your wicked thoughts! I see that you are bitter and sinning greatly!"

It sounds to me as if Simon had liked it that the people there used to think that he was important and had power from God, but that they didn't think that anymore. So perhaps Simon wanted to have the people there to think he was important again. But, again, the Bible doesn't say just exactly what Simon was thinking.

Anyway, after Peter had scolded him, Simon seems to have been scared, because he then said to Peter, "Oh, you pray to the Lord for me, that these bad things won't happen to me!"

And that's all we hear in the Bible about this man named Simon. But we know that the miracles in the Bible that the Lord God had happen weren't magic tricks, were they? No, they were real and special things that God let some men do. Often the miracles happened so that people would see that a man was really from God, since God gave him the power to do these miracles. Then the people seeing the miracles would know that what the man was telling them was true, a message from God, given so that they would believe what the man of God was saying. But let's go on.

Well, Peter and John preached the word of God there in the city of Samaria, then they went back to Jerusalem. As they walked back to Jerusalem, they went through many towns there in the land of Samaria, and they preached in those towns as they went through them.

But what do you think happened to Philip? Why, the angel of the Lord spoke to Philip! And the angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Get up and go to the road that goes from Jerusalem into Gaza." It was a desert there.

Now, remember, there weren't cars then. Philip probably just walked. It would probably take him several days to walk there. But Philip got right up and went, just as he'd been told. And when he got to that road, why, he saw a chariot on the road. And a very important man was riding in the chariot. We aren't told, but there were probably soldiers with the man, too, because usually a chariot wouldn't be just going along all by itself. But, again, the Bible doesn't say. Anyway, this man worked for the queen of Ethiopia. The Bible doesn't tell us this man's name. The Bible just says that he was the queen of Ethiopia's treasurer, that is, the one who took care of all of her money.

But why was this very important man riding in a chariot on a road in the desert? Why was he so far from where he worked in Ethiopia? Why, this man was a worshipper of the Lord God, and he had been to Jerusalem to worship the Lord at the temple! And now he was going way back home to Ethiopia, probably a trip of about 100 miles.

But what do you think this very important man was doing as he rode along in his chariot in the desert? Do you think he was taking a nap? No. The man was reading from the Bible. He was reading verses written hundreds of years before by one of the Jewish prophets, a prophet named Isaiah. (We have those same verses from Isaiah in our Bibles today.)

Well, Philip saw this chariot with the man sitting in it reading, and God the Holy Spirit said to Philip, "Go near him and join yourself to the chariot." So Philip did. He got up and ran until he was near the chariot. Now, the man was reading outloud to himself, so as Philip got near the chariot, Philip heard what the man was reading that the prophet Isaiah had written.

And Philip spoke to the important man from Ethiopia. He said, "Do you understand what you're reading?"

The man said, "No. How can I understand it unless someone helps me?" And then what do you think the man said? Why, he said to Philip, "Come up into the chariot with me." So Philip got up into the chariot and sat with this important man from Ethiopia.

Now, the verses that the man had been reading in Isaiah are ones the we often read today. They are verses that were a prophesy about Jesus. Yes, they'd been written hundreds of years before Jesus came to earth, but in those verses the prophet Isaiah was describing how someday a humble person would come and die. The verses in Isaiah don't give the name of who that would be, but we know that Isaiah was talking about Jesus. The verses were describing Jesus and what He would do.

The important man was confused by the verses. He asked Philip, "Please, who was the prophet talking about? Was he talking about himself or about someone else?"

Well, Philip knew who the prophet was talking about, didn't he?! So Philip explained the

verses to the man, that it was a prophecy about Jesus, and Philip told him about Jesus. He told him that Jesus was the Son of God, and that Jesus had come to earth as a human, so He was both God and a man. And Philip told him how Jesus had died for our sins on the cross and then was alive again, and how if we trust in Jesus, He will forgive our sins, and then He will be our King, and we can someday be with Him. And the man listened carefully to what Philip told him.

Well, the chariot was going along all the time that Philip was talking to this man. And as the chariot went along, it came to a place where there was water. And the important man said to Philip, "Look! There is water! Why can't I be baptized?"

Philip said to him, "If you believe with all your heart, you may be baptized."

And the man said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."

The man wasn't driving the chariot himself, so he ordered the man who was driving it to stop. The chariot stopped, and Philip and the important man from Ethiopia got out of the chariot. Then they both went down into the water, and Philip baptized the important man there.

The Bible then tells us that when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away so that the important man from Ethiopia didn't see Philip anymore. The Bible doesn't say just exactly what happened, but Philip just wasn't there anymore. Anyway, the important man got back up into his chariot and started back to Ethiopia. And he was very, very happy. He had worshipped God before, but now he knew more about God. He knew about and trusted in Jesus, and his sins were forgiven!

The Bible then says that Philip was at a city along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. And Philip went along the sea coast from city to city. And everywhere he went, Philip preached about the Lord Jesus. After all, he knew the good news about Jesus and how to have our sins forgiven, and he wanted to share that good news with other people.

Finally after many miles, Philip came to the big city of Cae-sa-ri-a. And it seems that he stayed there in Caesaria. At some time Philip got married, and he had four daughters who became prophetesses. The Bible tells us that many years later when the apostle Paul and Luke and others were going to Jerusalem, that they stopped in Caesaria, staying at Philip's home for many days before continuing their journey.

And that is the last that the Bible tells us about Philip, the man who had been a deacon, had left Jerusalem during the great trouble there, and had then become a preacher of the Gospel -- a preacher of the wonderful good news (the Gospel) about the Lord Jesus Christ. And because of his preaching, many people became Christians. Sometimes people call Philip an e-van-ge-list because "e-van-gel" comes from the Greek word for "Gospel" or "good news". Have you trusted in this good news that Philip preached and we read about in the Bible? I have.

I hope you enjoyed hearing about Philip, the deacon and evangelist. I enjoyed telling you about him.