

Trinity Baptist Church
Sunday 12th June 2022
Andy Banks; The Spirit-filled Life: The Example Of Philip
Acts 6:1-6; 8:4-40

For those who are visiting today, we've been digging deeper into the teaching in the Christian Life and Witness Course, run by the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. Last week I spoke about how the effective Christian life is a Spirit-filled life: what that looks like; what can block the flow of the Holy Spirit of God into and through us; and how we can remain Spirit-filled. And today, we're exploring what the Spirit's infilling looked like in the life of Philip the deacon / evangelist. So, let's read first from Acts 6:1-6; 8:4-6,12-13,26-40.

[Read Acts 6:1-6; 8:4-6,12-13,26-40]

Acts 6:1*In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenistic [Greek-speaking] Jews among them complained against the Hebraic [biological] Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. 2So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, 'It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. 3Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them 4and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.'*

5This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. 6They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.

8:4*Those who had been scattered [by persecution] preached the word wherever they went. 5Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Messiah there. 6When the crowds heard Philip and saw the signs he performed, they all paid close attention to what he said.*

Then Luke summarises the miracles God performed through Philip, before introducing us to a sorcerer named Simon, who held power over many in the city by his amazing trickery.

12*But when they believed Philip as he proclaimed the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptised, both men and women. 13Simon himself believed and was baptised. And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw.*

But Simon's conversion was shown to be phony; he was really after keeping his power over the people, and Peter, who came to support Philip's mission, rebuked him. And then God called Philip away.

26*Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, 'Go south to the road – the desert road – that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.' 27So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of the Kandake (which means 'queen of the Ethiopians'). This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, 28and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the Book of Isaiah the prophet. 29The Spirit told Philip, 'Go to that chariot and stay near it.'*

30Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. 'Do you understand what you are reading?' Philip asked.

31'How can I,' he said, 'unless someone explains it to me?' So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

32This is the passage of Scripture the eunuch was reading:

*'He was led like a sheep to the slaughter,
and as a lamb before its shearer is silent,*

so he did not open his mouth.

33In his humiliation he was deprived of justice.

Who can speak of his descendants?

For his life was taken from the earth.'

34The eunuch asked Philip, 'Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?'

35Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.

36As they travelled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, 'Look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptised?' 38And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptised him. 39When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing. 40Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and travelled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea.

[Pray]

Have you ever wished you could get inside someone's mind or spirit to help them to grasp an important lesson or believe an important truth? Maybe something relatively small like, when you say to your child: "Instead of getting angry because your homework isn't making sense, walk away, take a break, come back to it." "I can't walk away; I've got to get this done by tomorrow!" And they get themselves even more worked up, so it takes them even longer to calm down, and be able to concentrate. Or it might be something far more significant, like when you wish you could help someone truly believe that they have great *worth* because God made them with their unique personality. But all they can do is hear the negative words that others have said about them. Don't you just wish, sometimes, that you could get inside someone's spirit to help them see the truth?

Interestingly, God had the same problem. He gave his people good laws – laws that would be *life* for them if they followed them – but they didn't believe him and so chose to do things their way. So, once he had dealt with our wrongdoing – our sin – by Jesus dying in our place and rising again, the next stage in God's plan was to put his own Spirit inside us, so that he could stir us to faith and obedience from within. But, even then, he respects our freewill too much to *force* us to obey. Instead, he urges and prompts us, guides and directs us in the way we should go, but allows us to resist the Holy Spirit's influence in our lives – even though it breaks his heart. But he really longs that we should welcome the Holy Spirit continually into our lives and follow his direction – that is the way to the *best* life for us, because it is the life that pleases God. As Paul commanded in Ephesians 5:18: "Be filled and go on being filled with the Spirit."

But what does a Spirit-filled life look like? We can learn a lot from Philip, even though he is a relatively minor character in the Bible.

1) Spirit-filled character

Firstly, we see that he was clearly recognised by all the Church as possessing a *Spirit-filled character*. When the Church faced a problem of racial discrimination in the distribution of finance to help widows in need, the apostles realised that, if they were to solve this problem *themselves*, it would take them away from doing what God had called *them* to do, which was to preach the Word of God, and call people to faith in Jesus. But the widows still needed help. So they selected seven others who could perform this servant or deacon role. And the basis on which that selection was made was their *character*: "choose seven men from among you who are known to be *full of the Spirit and wisdom*." The first would lead to the second. The Spirit's infilling clearly made them not only wise, but trustworthy, fair, honest, compassionate, and able to see past racial barriers to focus only on needs, since those qualities are what this role demanded.

2) Spirit-empowered perseverance

Secondly, we see a *Spirit-empowered perseverance*. Acts 7 tells the story of Stephen, one of the seven, who was stoned to death for preaching about Jesus. And at the beginning of Acts 8 a great persecution broke out against the Church in Jerusalem on the back of his martyrdom. Everyone (except the apostles) was forced to flee for their lives throughout the country – Judea in the South, and even the territory occupied by the hated half-brother Samaritans in the north. But Philip’s reaction to this persecution was simply to carry on telling people about Jesus wherever he found himself – as Jesus had called his Church to do in Acts 1:8! God used the persecution to spread his Church. And, here again, we see how vital it was that the Spirit-filled Philip was not racially prejudiced – Samaritans and Ethiopians needed the Word of God as much as Jews, so he shared it with them.

3) Spirit-maintained unity

Thirdly, we see a *Spirit-maintained unity* within the Church. That would become increasingly necessary as the Church became more diverse, and Philip was at the forefront of bringing different races together. But he also helped maintain the unity of the Church by his willing submission to the apostles’ leadership. *They* commissioned him as a deacon, and he acted under their authority. And when the Samaritans in this city turned to Christ, he (presumably) sent to Jerusalem for Peter and John to come and be the channels through whom these new converts would receive the Holy Spirit – not because Philip couldn’t pass on this gift (all Christians can), but because it was a way of honouring the apostles’ continuing authority over the Church, and thereby maintaining its unity.

4) Spirit-directed obedience

Fourthly, we see a *Spirit-directed obedience*. The Samaritan mission was a great success. Satan’s power and influence over the city through Simon the Sorcerer was broken by the power of God demonstrated in miracles and in convicting people of the truth of God’s Word. Many people came to faith and were filled with the Holy Spirit. Yet, Philip obeyed the angel’s direction to leave that great opportunity and go to a, frankly, not very promising alternative: a *desert* road! Then, Philip obeyed God’s direct instruction to approach an Ethiopian chariot! And what, I wonder, was the full result of his obedience? We don’t know for certain, but we *do* know that by 300AD, Alexandria in Ethiopia had become one of the two most important Christian centres in the world, and there remains to this day a strong Christian presence in Ethiopia, even despite the subsequent Muslim invasion. Could it be that the first catalyst for the spread of Christianity there was this Ethiopian official?

5) Spirit-prepared opportunity

Fifthly, that this was undoubtedly a *Spirit-prepared opportunity*! Like many Ethiopians, the man’s heart was already open to the true God. That’s why he had gone up to Jerusalem to worship and why he was reading from the Jewish Scripture – our Old Testament. And the Spirit brought Philip alongside him just as he was reading one of the Old Testament passages that most clearly prophesies Jesus’ death, and the victory he won for us through it – Isaiah 53. That wasn’t just coincidence! It was all the Holy Spirit’s preparation such that Philip met this man when he was most receptive to the good news about Jesus. It’s exciting following the Spirit’s promptings, because we can find ourselves having conversations where real spiritual progress takes place.

I have a friend who has recently taken the brave step of admitting that he is an alcoholic. Because of this church’s past witness, I was able to share with him that I know people who have been helped to quit drinking by Alcoholics Anonymous, which is founded upon Christian principles and encourages its members to seek the help of a “higher power” in overcoming their addiction. On Thursday, he messaged me to say that he is struggling with the “religious” side of AA. So, I’ve offered him the chance to chat on the phone. I don’t know what will come of it, but it could just be a Spirit-prepared opportunity.

6) Spirit-led conversation

Sixthly, this enabled a *Spirit-led conversation*. Philip started where the Ethiopian was, asking about what he was doing in such a way that, if the man desired, the conversation could go further, “Do you understand what you are reading?” And the man not only invited him to explain the Bible more clearly, he even asked the most important question about this particular passage – “who is the prophet talking about?” What a lead in! So, “Philip began with *that very passage of Scripture* and told him the good news about Jesus.” God not only prepared the opportunity, he also directed the conversation. If we live a Spirit-filled life, we will sometimes experience that joy of feeling like we have said the right thing at the right time – because the *Spirit* has guided our words.

7) Spirit-inspired Scripture

Of course, behind all of that is the truth that the whole Bible is Spirit-inspired Scripture, both in its writing and in its reading. We can have confidence in the power of this Word to speak to people. I find when I visit those who are very sick or suffering from dementia, often I can be getting nowhere in a conversation, but when I read the Bible the look in their eyes changes to one of clarity and peace. The Word of God is powerful to comfort and to convict of the need for Jesus. So one of the best things we can do for someone who is interested in Christianity is to read the Bible with them. Not to bash them over the head with it; but to allow them to discover Jesus for themselves.

8) Spirit-instructed timing

Eighthly, we see a Spirit-instructed timing, both in when to go over and speak to the man, and significantly in recognising that the time was right to baptise him. Baptism is a once in a lifetime act, and so we are called to be spiritually discerning about whether or not a person has a genuine faith and if ready not only for baptism but a life-long journey of disciples afterwards. But this man was ready – and the Spirit in Philip enabled him to see that.

9) Spirit-driven lifestyle

And lastly, and perhaps most importantly of all (except for the first point about his Spirit-filled character), we see in Philip a Spirit-driven lifestyle. This incident of sharing his faith with the Ethiopian was far from a one-off event for him; it was his all-encompassing way of life. At our first Outreach and Evangelism Committee meeting this week, Irene highlighted the vital distinction between *doing* evangelism and *living* evangelism. We can *do* evangelism by, for instance, inviting someone to the God Loves You Tour. But, to *live* evangelism is to live every moment with an eye to how our behaviour, our words, our thoughts even, affect how people perceive Jesus. For instance, I used to race out of our driveway, often somewhat stressed. Until Terry told me that one of our neighbours had mentioned this to him. At that moment, it clicked what a terrible witness that was, and it made me change my behaviour.

So, the infilling of the Holy Spirit leads to:

- a Spirit-filled character that is noticeable to all;
- Spirit-empowered perseverance no matter what obstacles are put in our path;
- Spirit-maintained unity within the Church;
- Spirit-directed obedience to God’s direction – universal and specific;
- Spirit-prepared opportunities to share Jesus;
- Spirit-led conversations when we do;
- With a Spirit-inspired application of the Spirit-inspired Scripture;
- and acting with Spirit-instructed timing for salvation.
- And all this becomes a Spirit-driven lifestyle, living in such a way as to make Jesus known at home, at work, out shopping, in the playground, at the gym, wherever we go.

It's a very high calling, but also a thoroughly rewarding life, as Philip's encounters demonstrate! So what sort of a life do you want?

[Pray

Offer opportunity for prayer ministry]