

ACTS: I WILL BUILD MY CHURCH (PART 11)

The emphasis in Stephen's life is on FULLNESS: he was full of the Holy Spirit, full of wisdom, full of faith, and full of power. In Scripture, to be "full of" means "to be controlled by." Stephen was a God-controlled man who had a huge impact on his church – and he was NOT one of the leaders!

Acts 7:51-53 Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers: Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it.

At this point, their hatred for the name of Jesus explodes at Stephen:

Acts 7:54-56 When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth. But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.

The RIGHT HAND is a Hebrew idiom meaning "the place of power." This isn't saying that Jesus is "beside" God; this is saying that Jesus IS God!

Exodus 15:6 Thy right hand, O LORD, is become glorious in power: thy right hand, O LORD, hath dashed in pieces the enemy.

Matthew 28:18 And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.

Hebrews 10:11-12 And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God;

JESUS STOOD UP FOR STEPHEN!

Acts 7:57-60 Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, And cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul. And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

Luke 23:34a Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.

Luke 23:46 And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost.

"WHOSE NAME WAS SAUL" // Paul never forgot this event ...

Acts 22:20 And when the blood of thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him.

"HE FELL ASLEEP" // When Christians die, they "fall asleep." Jesus didn't call death, "death" – so the early church didn't either!

John 11:11 These things said he: and after that he saith unto them, Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep.

Matthew 9:24 He said unto them, Give place: for the maid is not dead, but sleepeth. And they laughed him to scorn.

1 Thessalonians 4:13 But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.

Acts 8:1-4 And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles. And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison. Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word.

Acts 22:4 And I persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women.

Jesus had made His prophetic statement in Acts 1:8, but the disciples never dreamed that it would be accomplished through circumstances that put them in uncomfortable places!

Acts 1:8 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.

Romans 8:28 And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose.

One of the Christians who was “scattered” abroad was Philip, who like Stephen had been one of the seven deacons appointed in Acts 6. He ended up among the hated Samaritans and began preaching.

Acts 8:5-8 Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them. And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed. And there was great joy in that city.

Philip is called an “evangelist” in Acts, not because he ministered to saints, but because he won sinners to the Lord! AND REMEMBER, PHILIP IS NOT EVEN ONE OF THE LEADERS! Give us evangelists!

Acts 21:8 And the next day we that were of Paul's company departed, and came unto Caesarea: and we entered into the house of Philip the evangelist, which was one of the seven; and abode with him.

Acts 8:9-13 But there was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one: To whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God. And to him they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries. But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done.

“BUT WHEN THEY BELIEVED ... THEY WERE BAPTIZED ...”

Mark 16:16 He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.

Acts 8:14-17 Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John: Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost: (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.) Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost.

Note that the first century church DIDN'T believe that anyone had “received the Holy Spirit” just because they had believed – these Samaritans had all believed and been baptized, but the Bible is clear that they have not received the Holy Ghost.

Note that the first century church DID believe that the baptism of the Holy Ghost was absolutely essential to salvation – that's why the Apostles made the trip from Jerusalem (when they should have been in hiding!) to lay hands on them that they might receive.

Acts 8:18-25 And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost. But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity. Then answered Simon, and said, Pray ye to the Lord for me, that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me. And they, when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, returned to Jerusalem, and preached the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans.

This is where it turns with Simon, and he goes back to his old “sorcerer ways,” wanting to have power over the people once again. Note that he didn't ask for power to do any of the miracles or signs he had seen – because he realized that being filled with the Holy Ghost was a greater power! What did he observe that made him want this power so much? Speaking in tongues! This is the New Testament pattern.

Acts 10:45-46a And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost. For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God.

Simon the Sorcerer asked other people to pray for him, but we don't know if he ever prayed, or received the baptism of the Holy Ghost!

It is at this point Philip is directed by the Lord to leave the crowd at his “revival meetings” and go out into the desert to meet with one person. We are often willing to do the “big things” for God, but reluctant to do the “small things” – but this is not the spirit of the New Testament church. Every soul is important! AND REMEMBER, PHILIP IS NOT EVEN ONE OF THE LEADERS! “And these signs shall follow them that believe!”

Acts 8:26-29 And 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. And he arose and went: 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. Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot.

You never know who you are witnessing to, or what God will eventually accomplish through the ONE person your testimony impacts:

- In Acts 8 it was one anonymous Ethiopian Treasurer
- In Acts 9 it was one Pharisee named Saul
- In Acts 9 it was one coat-maker named Dorcas
- In Acts 10 it was one Roman Centurion named Cornelius
- In Acts 14 it was one anonymous crippled man
- In Acts 16 it was one seller of cloth named Lydia
- In Acts 16 it was one anonymous Philippian jailer
- In Acts 18 it was one ruler of the synagogue named Crispus
- In Acts 18 it was one eloquent preacher named Apollos

Acts 8:30-35 And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest? And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him. The place of the scripture which he read was this, He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth: In his humiliation his judgment was taken away: and who shall declare his generation? for his life is taken from the earth. And the eunuch answered Philip, and said, I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man? Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus.

Isaiah 53:7-8 He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken.

BEGIN WHERE THEY ARE – AND PREACH JESUS! That’s all Philip did, that’s all the church in Acts did, and that’s all you need to do!

Acts 8:36 And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?

Isaiah 53 doesn’t say anything about being baptized, or even about water (!), but please note that when they preached JESUS in the New Testament, that involved being BAPTIZED in Jesus’ name!

Acts 8:37-40 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. And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing. But Philip was found at Azotus: and passing through he preached in all the cities, till he came to Caesarea.

“THEY WENT DOWN BOTH INTO THE WATER” = IMMERSION!

The Ethiopian eunuch would always have been treated as a second-class citizen in the Jewish religion (Deuteronomy 23:1 says he was not allowed to enter into the congregation of the Lord) – and yet he was so hungry for God that he travelled many miles to the temple in Jerusalem. Thank God he found the New Testament church!

Galatians 3:27-29 For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Philip experiences “supernatural transport,” like the prophet Elijah. Have you ever noticed that MIRACLES, even outstanding ones, are not a “big deal” in the book of Acts? The MESSAGE they preach is the “big deal!” How often do we get that backwards in the 21st century?

Philip was the right man in the right place at the right time saying the right thing to the right person. AND REMEMBER, PHILIP IS NOT EVEN ONE OF THE LEADERS! You can be powerfully used by God!