PHILIP'S MINISTRY

Acts 8:2-40
Key Verse 8:12

“But when they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.”

In Chapter 7, we studied the martyrdom of Stephen, one of the seven chosen as stewards for the church of Jerusalem. Stephen taught the religious leaders the history of God’s chosen people, so that they might repent of their selfishness. But the religious leaders could not see themselves or their nation from God’s point of view. They judged everything according to the situation. Finally, they rejected Stephen’s message, and had him stoned to death. Saul emerged as a leader of the opposition against the early church, and most except the apostles had to scatter, leaving Jerusalem behind. But the early Christians were not defeated. Even as Stephen lay bleeding to death outside the temple, he saw the vision of Jesus sitting at the right hand of the side of God. He prayed for his attackers, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” Stephen’s prayer shook the kingdom of Satan. Stephen’s prayer opened the door for Saul’s conversion. Most of all, Stephen’s prayer helped the scattered early Christians to preach the gospel of Jesus with a spirit of martyrdom wherever they went. The world situation was dark. But God used the scattered early Christians as a source of light and new hope for his lost sheep. In today’s passage, we learn that evangelical work is first of all the work of the Holy Spirit. Let’s learn the ready-go spirit of Philip in serving God’s world salvation purpose.

I. Philip’s ministry in Samaria (4-25)

First, Philip’s healing ministry. Philip was chosen as one of the seven stewards for the church at Jerusalem, along with Stephen. After Stephen’s martyrdom, Philip could not remain in Jerusalem, but went down to a city in Samaria. We remember Jesus’ visit to a well in Samaria, and the beautiful romance at the well between Jesus and a lonely Samaritan woman. Still, there were racial barriers between Jews and Samaritans. Nevertheless, Philip went down to the Samaritan city,
and preached the Christ there. It was an act of Christian love for God's lost sheep. Ever since Samaria had been defeated by Assyria in 722 B.C., and its people forced to intermarry with foreigners, the Jews regarded the Samaritans as half-breeds and inferior. They were living in darkness and under Satan's torment. But God had mercy on them. God sent Philip to them with the good news of Jesus Christ, in order to set them free from their sins, and restore them as his chosen people.

When Philip arrived in the city, he immediately proclaimed the Christ there. But the people did not respond at once to his message. They were suspicious of a Jew preaching to them and could not open their closed hearts. Did Philip give up or conclude that the Samaritans could not be helped? No! Look at verse 7. "With shrieks, evil spirits came out of many, and many paralytics and cripples were healed." By the power of the Holy Spirit, Philip began a healing ministry among the Samaritan people. Many were under the power of evil spirits. But with the name of Jesus Christ, Philip drove out the evil spirits and sent them back into hell. The people felt as if a huge weight were lifted from their shoulders, and they shrieked with delight. Many were wounded, paralyzed and crippled due to their hard labor in the world, or the poor conditions of their birth. But by the power of the Holy Spirit, Philip strengthened their feeble legs and feet, and they could walk again! For the first time, they were not a burden to others. They could be a blessing to others, work hard in the world, and marry precious daughters of God. Philip's healing ministry brought great rejoicing to the Samaritans living in that city. They could acknowledge that God loved them, and that God wanted to bless them and help them live as his chosen people, in spite of their history of sin and rebellion against him. What was the result of Philip's healing ministry? Look at verse 6. "When the crowds heard Philip and saw the miraculous signs he did, they all paid close attention to what he said." Philip's healing ministry was the precursor to Philip's teaching ministry. Through Philip's healing ministry, all the barriers between Philip and the Samaritans were broken down, and Philip could begin to plant the seeds of the kingdom of God in their hearts. Here we learn that gospel work is first of all healing work. Young people of this generation enjoy unprecedented wealth, and their prospects for finding a job have never been better. Still, they are living in darkness, and have innumerable wounds and sorrows due to their sins and the sins of others. They are so worldly, and think they know it all.
But they don't know how to get out from the power of sin, or to solve their broken relationship problems. We must know that God has given us authority in the name of Jesus to help broken and wounded people to be healed. We must use this authority by faith, and suffer much in order to help them escape the suffering in the world caused by sin.

Second, Philip's ministry of the word. Prior to Philip's arrival in Samaria, the people of Samaria were so hungry and thirsty because of their many wounds and sorrows. They were looking for someone who could ease the burden of their lives in the world. One man named Simon was very clever. He saw that in their desperation, the people would pay a lot of money if someone could give them some kind of hope to escape the burdens of their everyday life. So Simon practiced a kind of sorcery or witchcraft that amazed all the people of Samaria, both high and low, and he himself boasted that he was someone great. For a long time, Simon was recognized as someone divine by the people, and they followed him and gave him money. However, Simon's magic was mostly for show. He could not help those who were suffering from demon-possession, or give strength to those who were crippled or lame. To the suffering people of Samaria, Simon's magic made him seem like a light in their darkness. But Simon had no power to overcome the darkness in their souls. He was not the true light.

Philip's coming, however, announced the arrival of the true light for the Samaritan people. Through his healing ministry, he revealed the power of Jesus' name to overcome the power of Satan and the darkness of the world. When the Samaritans listened closely to his message, they realized that Philip was teaching them the way of salvation. They believed that Jesus was the Christ who died on the cross for their sins. They believed the promise of God that through faith they would inherit the kingdom of God and eternal life. They were so happy, knowing that God had sent his Son into the world so that they might not live anymore in the darkness, but have the light of life through the name of God's one and only Son, Jesus Christ. They saw that there was a fundamental difference between worldly magic, and the spiritual power and life that the name of Jesus gives. So they turned away from Simon and his magic, and they came to Philip, both men and women, in order to be baptized. It was their commitment to follow Jesus only, while living in this world. It was their confession to God that they were sinners, but
they believed the power of Jesus' blood to cleanse them of their sins and make them children of God forever and ever. Look at verse 12. “But when they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.” Look at verse 13. “Simon himself believed and was baptized. And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw.” Simon was a sorcerer. But he was a businessman first. What he offered for a price could not compete with what Philip offered to everyone for free. He surrendered, and followed Philip around to learn his secrets. Here we learn that truth is better than magic power. Truth has the greatest power of all, for it can set our souls free. But to know the truth of Jesus, we must make the commitment to Christ through baptism.

Third, Peter and John's ministry of the Holy Spirit. Word came to the apostles in Jerusalem that Samaria had accepted the word of God. In spite of Jewish prejudice, the apostles rejoiced at God's work in Samaria through Philip, and they sent their top leaders, Peter and John, to pray for their new Samaritan sheep. When they arrived, they observed carefully and found the clear prayer topic for the Samaritans, that they should receive the Holy Spirit. They laid their hands on the Samaritan believers, and the Holy Spirit came to them, one by one.

Here, we must understand why the Samaritan believers needed the coming of the Holy Spirit. When man and woman were created in the Garden of Eden, they were made in the image of God. They had the authority of God to be rulers and stewards of the world God had made. They were made from the dust of the ground, but they received their life from the breath of God. In short, God created man and woman to be both body and spirit. However, when man sinned against God in the Garden, mankind lost the image of God. He became flesh, and groaned along with all creation because of the curse to eat three meals a day just to grow old and die. But the worst part of the curse was that man was cut off from spiritual life together with God in the garden of the Lord. Instead, man had to live among other cursed men. He had to live in the company of the devil, and evil spirits, the devil's foot soldiers. Because of evil spirits, he could not do the good he was created to do. Instead, he did only evil all the time according to his conscience. When Jesus came into this world, he made an invitation to all those who were
only suffering to live in this cursed world. John 7:38-9 says, “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.’ By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive.” Whoever receives the Holy Spirit is born again; he is no longer a slave of sin and the power of evil spirits, he is a child of God and a servant of righteousness. Whoever is born again of the Holy Spirit is no longer a political man or a nationalistic man; he is a child of God and a citizen of the kingdom of God. The promise of eternal life and the kingdom of God is welling up in his soul, and he can freely serve God and serve others all his lifetime until he passes through this world and enters his eternal rest in the kingdom of God. This is the reason the apostles prayed for the Samaritans to receive the Holy Spirit. The Spirit came at the laying on the apostles’ hands. But it was merely to uphold the apostles’ authority in giving God’s flock the word of God. The Spirit comes to all those who love God and Jesus and obey God’s word (Jn 14:15).

When Simon saw how the Holy Spirit came to all those on whom the apostles laid their hands, the evil spirits in him were stirred up, especially the money-making demon. So he offered the apostles money if they would show him how he also could give the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands. It seemed that he could make a lot of money if only he could give others the Holy Spirit on demand. Read vs.20-23. “Peter answered: ‘May you money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money! You have no part of share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God. Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps he will forgive you for having such a thought in your heart. For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin.’” Simon was very sorry about his money-making desire. Here we learn the problem of money-making is a very deep rooted problem. Human beings want a lot of money. Why? It is for the sake of buying and selling things in the world. Those who buy what they want think that they can control themselves and their situations. But the spiritual world is different. The Holy Spirit is the gift of God. The Holy Spirit comes and goes as it pleases. Human beings can only receive the gift of God. They cannot buy the gift of God, or use it as they see fit. Money therefore has a great limitation. Spiritual life and rebirth comes to men only when they humble themselves and recognize that God is the
true owner and the giver of life. American students are suffering too much because of money-making desires that only make them bitter and slaves to sin. May God help us to pray for them sincerely to receive the Holy Spirit, and experience spiritual rebirth and a living hope in the kingdom of God.

II. Philip's one to one Bible study

First, the Ethiopian eunuch. God used Philip greatly in Samaria through his healing and preaching ministry. Philip could have wanted to enjoy precious fellowship with his many Samaritan sheep. But God called him through the Holy Spirit to leave his sheep behind and go southward to the road leading from Jerusalem to Africa. Philip humbly obeyed and set out. On the way, he came across the richly appointed chariot of an important Ethiopian official. This man was the treasurer for Candace, the queen of the Ethiopians. Philip was a poor country evangelist. But the Holy Spirit instructed Philip to go near his chariot and be ready to help him.

The Ethiopian was a eunuch. From boyhood, he had been set apart for service to the queen. He gave his heart to carry out his duties well, and he quickly rose to an important position given only to those who were faithful and trustworthy. However, the Ethiopian official had a fatalistic element of life, because he was a eunuch. He could not have his own family. He could not marry and enjoy his cute and lovely kids. He worked hard, but he felt doomed to be a worker bee in service to the queen bee all his lifetime. Perhaps through the influence of Jewish exiles, the Ethiopian had become familiar with the God of the Jews. He found God's truth and God's hope in the law of God, and he began to worship God in order to reconcile himself to God's sovereignty over his life. When Philip met him, he was reading from the book of Isaiah. He was a truth-seeker. But he needed help to find in God's word the way to eternal life in the kingdom of God.

Second, Philip's one to one Bible study. Philip asked the Ethiopian, "Do you understand what you are reading?" The Ethiopian was an important official. But his spiritual thirst made him humble. He invited Philip to come up and teach him the meaning of the word of God. What was the Ethiopian reading? Look at verses 32 and 33. "The eunuch was reading
this passage of Scripture: ‘He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before the shearer is silent, so he did not open his mouth. In his humiliation he was deprived of justice. Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth.’” This passage comes from Isaiah 53:7-8, and speaks of the suffering servant Jesus, who faced suffering after suffering on earth in order to bear our sins and heal us by his wounds. It was amazing to the Ethiopian that it might be God’s will for his servant to suffer like this. The eunuch also felt a sense of injustice and loss, living in this hard world. But the eunuch did not know who it was that God had asked to suffer in this way. Look at verse 34. “The eunuch asked Philip, ‘Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?’” It was God’s own Son whom God had caused to suffer in this way. It was not to punish his Son, but to condemn sin in sinful mankind, so that through his Son, all men might be free from sin, and find God’s absolute purpose and meaning for his life. Jesus was born as a man into the world. But he became like a eunuch in order to obey God’s will for him to die on the cross for the sin of the world. It was so that all sorrowful men could die to their sins and sorrows, and freely live as fruitful children of God. The eunuch found that when he believed that Jesus is the Son of God and the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, he was no more sorrowful. He was rejoicing night and day to know that he could bear abundant fruit as a servant of God through Jesus Christ. He gave orders to stop the chariot and was baptized by Philip. Philip was taken away by the Holy Spirit. But the eunuch went back home, rejoicing, and established the church of God in Africa. He could have many spiritual descendants when he believed the word of God through one to one Bible study with Philip.

In this passage we learn that the gospel of Jesus Christ is the light of the world for men living in the darkness of sin. We must learn from Philip to be ready to follow the Spirit’s leading, so that we might shine God’s light wherever and whenever we are. May God richly bless you to be filled with the Holy Spirit when you believe that Jesus is the Son of God who died for our sins and rose again to give us a living hope in the kingdom of God.