

## **“THAT OLD TIME RELIGION”**

# ***“The Soul Winner’s Secret”***

## **Scripture Reading – Acts, 8:26-40**

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*An angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Go south to the road – the desert road – that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza”. So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the book of Isaiah the prophet. The Spirit told Philip, “Go to that chariot and stay near it”.*

*Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. “Do you understand what you are reading?” Philip asked. “How can I”, he said, “unless someone explains it to me?” So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. 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’.*

*The eunuch asked Philip, “Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?” Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.*

*As they travelled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, “Look, here is water. Why shouldn’t I be baptised?” [Phillip said, “If you believe with all your heart, you may”. The eunuch answered, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God”.] And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptised him. When 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. Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and travelled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea.*

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***‘If you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord”, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified; it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.’***

**Romans, 10:9-10, NIV**

**This series, based on THE BOOK OF ACTS, is entitled ‘THAT OLD TIME RELIGION’.**

The reason I want to call this series ‘THAT OLD TIME RELIGION’ is that we need to look back in order that we might really look to the future. The OLD TIME RELIGION needs to become the NEW TIME RELIGION because it is the ALL TIME RELIGION. If we get back to the basics of life in the Christian Church, we might better understand what the Holy Spirit can do through us today.

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**THE BOOK OF ACTS is the story of success; the story of a church triumphant.**

It is the story of a small group of uncultured and generally unlearned people with meagre resources – very little money, no prestige, and no church buildings. This small group of people went out to tell the story of a publicly executed Jew. They went out against three obstacles – the imperial might of the Romans, the intellectual sophistication of the Greeks, and the religious bigotry of the Jews. They turned the world inside out and upside down for Jesus Christ.

*The Acts of the Apostles is the story of a church on fire with evangelism and growth...*

## **“THE SOUL WINNER’S SECRET”**

**One of America’s best-selling Christian magazines is ‘THE WITTENBERG DOOR’.**

Written by Christians for Christians, it is religious satire and does a great job showing the church her glaring inconsistencies in its faith and actions. One of their writers, Doug Peterson, was doing an article on ‘TELEVISION EVANGELISTS’. He wrote to 29 of them for information on how to become a Christian. The good news is that he received a reply from every one of them. The sad news is that 21 of them put Doug Peterson on their mailing lists to receive fundraising letters. Sixteen of them also sent prayer cloths and other items as ‘gifts’ to help with the fundraising incentive. Is there any wonder why people in our culture today have negative feelings towards the Word of God and the whole concept of Christian evangelism? We equate it with money grubbing, hell-fire and damnation preachers who make us nervous to be around or amused at best!

*Today as we continue our series on THE BOOK OF ACTS, we see how Philip, a member of the Early Christian Church, successfully engaged in real evangelism...*

**We were first introduced to Philip when seven were chosen to wait on tables.**

Philip was a man of impeccable qualifications. To serve in the Luncheon Club in the Early Church you had to have a good reputation, be filled with the Holy Spirit, and be filled with wisdom. When persecution struck the church in Jerusalem following the martyrdom of Stephen, Philip made his way to Samaria. He did not go meekly or quietly but went on a four day journey towards the northwest proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Many believed in Samaria, including Simon the magician who later became one of the church’s opponents.

***The soul winner’s secret is plain to see in the actions of the evangelist Philip...***

## **1. PERCEIVE THE CALL OF GOD**

***‘Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Go south to the road – the desert road – that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza”.’***

**Acts, 8:26, NIV**

**As far as I am aware, God has never spoken to me by way of an angel.**

The Bible speaks about entertaining angels unaware, so perhaps I have met an angel without recognising his identity, or knowing that God was speaking directly to me. However, God has

spoken to me through his Word, and He has spoken directly to my heart. God seems to have many ways He can speak to us, and so we must be continually listening out for his voice.

### **Some Christians wonder why it seems that God does not use them.**

Of course, it may be that the person concerned is unusable. Perhaps they are filled with ambition, or pride, or self. But the truth is that God never leaves a surrendered vessel unfilled and unused. When we surrender ourselves to God, the Lord fills us with his Holy Spirit. Then we can be certain that we can and will be used by him.

### **GOD'S WAYS ARE OFTEN UNKNOWN**

#### **Philip was an ordinary man who was used in an extraordinary way.**

Philip had no idea of God's plan when the angel spoke to him. He was completely unaware that he was about to witness to a very important person. In fact, God's plan was for Philip to testify to one of the most influential men in the whole of North Africa. The conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch would open up a continent to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, but Philip was not told what was at stake. All Philip knew was that God had spoken to him through an angel. He was convinced and obeyed God's call at once.

#### **We have mentioned before the name of Dwight L Moody.**

Moody was basically an uncultured and uneducated man, but he was a mighty preacher of the Word of God. He was used by God in both America and Europe to bring many people to Christ. Once when he preached at Cambridge, a young cricketer, Charles T Studd, listened attentively to the Gospel Moody proclaimed. Unlike Moody, Studd seemed to have it all. His father was a personal friend to the monarch and he was very rich. Studd was well educated and well off, but something Moody said touched his heart. Immediately he resigned his place in the cricket and rugby teams and went to China to begin a hugely successful mission.

When they later asked Charles T Studd what had motivated him to leave behind prestige and wealth and set out for a distant land, he replied: "IF CHRIST BE GOD AND HE DIED FOR ME, THERE IS NO SACRIFICE I CAN MAKE WHICH IS TOO GREAT FOR HIM". God's ways are often unknown. Moody did not know what God would do through his preaching. The man who led Moody to Christ had no idea of what would happen later.

### **GOD'S WAYS ARE OFTEN UNEXPLAINED**

#### **God did not have to give Philip any reason for going.**

The call of God came very clearly to Philip when he was simply told to "GO". God gave him a direction to follow, a where but he did not tell him why. Perfect obedience does not demand to know why. In a very real sense, Philip travelled under sealed orders. He did not know why, but nonetheless Philip obeyed.

#### **We must be prepared to follow God's leading, even if it seems like a demotion.**

At first we may not understand God's plans, but the results will prove that his way is always the right way. The problem is that sometimes we do not trust him like we should.

***'So Philip started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the book of Isaiah the prophet. The Spirit told Philip, "Go to that chariot and stay near it". Then Philip ran up to the chariot.'***  
***Acts, 8:27-30a, NIV***

#### **Philip did not wait; neither did he argue with the Lord.**

Philip had to run to the chariot to catch up to it and he had to keep on running to stay near to it. A few moments of indecision and it would have been too late. Philip could have reasoned within himself that he was Jewish and this man was an Ethiopian, so there would be a problem with race and culture. Philip could have thought he was poor whilst the Ethiopian was a rich man, or he could have decided that it would have been impolite to disturb someone when he was reading. Philip did not allow race or riches or reading or anything else come between him and God's calling upon his life.

#### **Are you that sensitive to the voice of the Lord?**

The Ethiopian was an important official in the treasury of a powerful government. He had authority, he had prestige, and he had power. He was in economics, he was in government. He had his fingertips on the economic pulse of a kingdom, but he travelled to Jerusalem in order to worship. A journey undertaken not by private jet and official car but by chariot. It would have been uncomfortable and unpleasant ride.

#### **This man had an emptiness in his heart.**

An emptiness that his authority, position, power, prestige, and wealth could not fill. He travelled to Jerusalem to worship and the wells of religion were dry to him. He was returning home, reading the prophet Isaiah, trying to have the longing in his heart fulfilled. He had a hunger and a thirst that only Jesus Christ could fill, and he was reading the Gospel in the Old Testament. The timing was absolutely perfect; that is why we should immediately obey the call of God!

#### **No one Christian is excluded from the task of soul-winning.**

A Christian who refuses to testify about Jesus is like a bus driver who refuses to drive a bus or a barber who refuses to cut hair. A Christian who refuses to "GO" is not just missing out on a blessing; he is guilty of high treason against heaven's King. You might ask where you are to go and the simple answer is wherever God will tell you. When the Spirit says "GO" then you "GO".

#### **One of the abilities that you need to help someone to Jesus is availability.**

Phillip was enjoying a revival meeting in Samaria when he heard the call to go to the Gaza Strip. We read that he ran all the way from Samaria to Gaza. Running a long distance may be out of the question for some of us, but the big question is are we available? If God calls us to go and do, how would we reply? We live in a busy world that places demands upon our time and resources. Phillip was commanded to leave behind a revival where the masses were being saved in order to minister to one man. Would you do that?

*You will be surprised by what happens when you immediately obey God's call and voice...*

## 2. PREACH THE CHRIST OF GOD

*‘Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. “Do you understand what you are reading?” Philip asked. “How can I”, he said, “unless someone explains it to me?” He invited Philip to come up and sit with him.’*  
**Acts, 8:30-31, NIV**

**Philip listened to the man before he opened his mouth.**

He did not run up to the chariot and correct the man's Hebrew. He did not tell him that he was a pagan who was going to hell if he did not believe in Jesus Christ. He did not ask: "IF YOU WERE TO DIE TODAY, WHERE WOULD BE SPEND ETERNITY?". No, Philip made himself available where the man was. Philip's only question was: **"DO YOU UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU ARE READING?"**. There was no judgement; Philip was simply asking an exploratory question. Philip listened to where this man was coming from. Philip let the Ethiopian to set the agenda.

**Philip was patient and waited for an invitation to go deeper.**

Once Philip got to the chariot, listened and assessed what was going on, he did not hop over the side of the chariot and take control. No! He waited for an invitation to take the conversation deeper. Philip did not have to rush the conversation because the Holy Spirit was in charge. It would open up and flow naturally because God was in it. He waited for an invitation to continue the conversation deeper. Once the eunuch invited him to take it further, then and only then, did Philip begin to speak.

**The eunuch was reading from Isaiah, 53:7-8.**

*‘The eunuch asked Philip, “Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?” Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.’*

**Acts, 8:34-35, NIV**

**Philip allowed the Ethiopian to ask the question he wanted answered.**

Most studies show that although only a small proportion of people attend church in the UK, many, many, more consider themselves to be spiritual. It seems that many more people we meet are interested in spiritual things, whilst they are not interested in the Army or the church. It is important for us to answer the questions that people are asking. Of course we must point people to Jesus, who we believe is the answer to all of life's problems and questions, but we, like Philip must take our 'Ethiopian eunuch' from where he is, towards Jesus Christ.

**Philip preached about the Lord Jesus Christ.**

He did not engage in a conversation about race. He did not talk about economics. He did not discuss the political situation in Ethiopia. He preached about Jesus Christ. After all, it was what the Ethiopian was asking about anyway!

*There are two basic Gospel truths that we must be familiar with...*

 **ALL MEN ARE SINNERS**

**Philip showed the Ethiopian eunuch that Christ had died for his sins.**

Nobody has ever been saved who has not first admitted that he or she is a sinner. There is no one so good that he need not be saved, and no one so bad they cannot be saved.

**The world seems to fall into two broad categories.**

*The first group are those who think that they are too good to be saved. They think that the Gospel is for the criminal, the thief, the murdered, the dope addict. They do not think that the Gospel is for them because they are nice, cultured people.*

*The second group are those who think they are so horrible, so terrible that God will not have anything at all to do with them. They wish they were like those nice and cultured people who go to church.*

*‘There is an old story about a king who was visiting a slave galley ship where they chained the slaves to the oars. They were prisoners of the state, people who had done horrible things, committed terrible crimes, and their sentence was to pull at the oars beneath the decks, to be the engines of those ancient ships. The king visited one of those ships and he asked a man, “Why are you here?” The prisoner replied, “Sire, the reason I am here is because I was framed. I wasn't guilty”. The king said, “Oh, that's tragic, that's such a shame”. He went to the next man and asked, “Why are you here?” “Your honour”, he replied “I am like the other man. I am innocent. I was simply in a crowd when a crime was committed and so I was arrested with the others. Have mercy on me”. The king said, “Oh, that's tragic, that you should be in such a situation”. The king went to one man after another and they all had some tale of innocence except for one man. He said, “Your majesty, I'm here because I'm a criminal. I have sinned against my God. I have sinned against my king. I've sinned against my fellow men. And now I'm suffering the just punishment for my crime”. When the king heard that he said, “You rascal. What are you doing here among so many honest men? Guards, release him and get him out of here”.’*

When we proclaim our innocence, we condemn ourselves; but when we say, **“LORD, HAVE MERCY ON ME, A SINNER”**, we will experience the forgiveness of the King of kings...



### **CHRIST DIED FOR SINS**

**The Ethiopian was immersed in the prophecy of the suffering servant.**

*‘Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.’*

**Isaiah, 53:4-6, NIV**

**To be a soul winner, you must preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ.**

No matter what we say or preach, if we do not tell people that Jesus died for sins, was buried, and was raised again, we are not preaching the Gospel of Christ. Jesus took my

sin and went to Calvary. I take his righteousness and go to heaven. In other words, I'm standing in Jesus' shoes, and He is standing in mine. That is what the Gospel means. It is so simple that sometimes a little child can see the truth whilst a university professor stumbles over it.

*'For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.'*

**1 Corinthians, 15:3, NIV**

### 3. PURSUE A COMMITMENT TO GOD

Three commitments reflected in Philip's life are my challenge to you this week.

When you hear them say: "BY THE GRACE OF GOD, I AM GOING TO DO THAT THIS WEEK"...

#### **BE INCLINED TO THE CALL OF THE SPIRIT**

**Philip had ears to hear the word of the Lord.**

Philip was in the middle of a revival in Samaria and God called him because his heart was tender enough to hear God.

*'Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Go south to the road – the desert road – that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza".'*

**Acts, 8:26, NIV**

*'The Spirit told Philip, "Go to that chariot and stay near it".'*

**Acts, 8:29, NIV**

**Philip did not know anything about God's plan.**

God's ways are often unknown, but when God just said, "GO", Philip got up and went. Will you do that? Christians do not need an explanation from God when he calls. Instead, we need to say, "GOD, I WILL DO IT. WHEREVER YOU WANT ME TO GO. WHATEVER YOU WANT ME TO DO. IF YOU EXPLAIN IT, FINE. IF YOU DO NOT, THAT IS FINE, TOO. BUT GOD I AM GOING TO DO IT".

#### **BE INSISTENT FOR THE CAUSE OF THE SPIRIT**

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

**Acts, 8:35, NIV**

**Did you know that the Holy Spirit is very single-minded?**

*He has but one cause...*

*'Jesus said, "When the Counsellor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me."*

**John, 15:26, NIV**

**It is time we got excited about what excites God.**

*What excites God most is bringing people to Jesus Christ...*



#### **BE INSTANT TO THE COMMANDS OF THE SPIRIT**

*'The Spirit told Philip, "Go to that chariot and stay near it". Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. "Do you understand what you are reading?" Philip asked.'*

**Acts, 8:29-30, NIV**

**Philip did not take a leisurely stroll... he ran.**

Why? Because that chariot was moving on. There was a split second and God wanted instant obedience. When the Spirit said 'GO', he went.

I have a feeling that had Philip been the kind of Christian that some are, he may have said, *"I can't go. He is a rich man. I am a poor preacher man. He is in a gold chariot. I can't go up there"...* BUT RICHES DID NOT KEEP PHILIP FROM GOING.

Or he might have said, *"He's a different race than I am. And I don't feel comfortable talking to someone of a different race"...* BUT RACE DID NOT KEEP PHILIP FROM GOING.

Or he might have said, *"I don't want to disturb him. He is reading and he looks so busy".*

**How many golden opportunities have we passed by?**

**John Dillinger was a gangster, a feared man on the streets of Chicago.**

But it did not have to be that way. You see, when John Dillinger was a young kid, he was labelled as a 'problem child'. He had a bad reputation and people were afraid of him early on in his years. The story is told how a young Dillinger attended a revival service. After the service was over, John Dillinger walked up to the altar rail and waited for someone to come to speak and pray with him. No one did. No one spoke with him. Not one person showed an interest. Not one. He walked out of the revival and said, "I'm never going to church again". It wasn't until he was shot dead on Lincoln Avenue in Chicago that he finally re-entered a church again. By then, though, it was too late. You might say an opportunity was missed at that altar rail...

*'A hundred thousand souls a day are passing one by one away, in Christless guilt and gloom without one ray of hope or light with future dark as endless night, their passing to their doom. Who is the answer? The world needs Jesus Christ. There is no other need like the need for Jesus.'*

**Albert B Simpson**

*'Give me one hundred preachers who fear nothing but sin, and desire nothing but God, and I care not whether they be clergymen or laymen, they alone will shake the gates of Hell and set up the Kingdom of Heaven here upon the Earth.'*

**John Wesley**

Three things I want you to do this week: 'BE INCLINED TO THE CALL OF THE SPIRIT' ... 'BE INSISTENT TO THE CAUSE OF THE SPIRIT' ... 'BE INSTANT TO THE COMMANDS OF THE SPIRIT'.

**"DON'T GO TO HEAVEN ALONE ... TAKE SOMEONE WITH YOU!"**