

Learning from Philip

Acts 8:4-13

Introduction:

How do we grow churches in the twenty-first century?

Simply put, we look back at the first century and learn from the men who started churches all over the Roman world.

Those men put their lives on the line to plant churches throughout the Mediterranean.

A great example that can help any struggling church is the one Bible readers encounter in Acts 8:4-13.

What Philip did in Samaria can be done today.

Let us learn from Philip how church growth happens.

I. Church Growth Starts with Preaching Christ.

When Philip went to Samaria, he “began proclaiming Christ to them.”

Samaria was full of people considered by Jews to be blasphemers and half-breeds.

Samaritans were descendants of the Jews and Assyrians that were mixed after the Assyrian captivity of Israel in 721 B.C.

The purer stock of Hebrew people looked upon the Samaritans with disfavor.

Samaritans were known for keeping part of the Old Testament, but not all of it.

They were looked down on by all “good Jews” and were hated by most Jews.

Philip ignored all the cultural issues that divide people and started with the one thing that can unite people; He preached Christ.

Philip did not start by trying to change the Samaritans into Jews or convince them to give up their half-hearted acceptance of the old law.

Sinners do not become saints by pushing or rushing change.

The unchurched do not become the best behaved, reverent, or obedient just by showing up to worship.

Every saint has a past, and every sinner has a future.

Which one do we want to focus on, the past or the future?

Philip attempted to convert the Samaritans to Christ, so he preached Christ.

We must start with the good news!

We must be telling the community about the Christ—the Messiah—the promised deliverer, leader, and Savior.

We must tell the community about Christ’s life and teaching.

We must tell the people about Christ’s death for the sins of everyone and his resurrection that ensures salvation.

Too often churches get confused; they try to fix the city or change the people.

In this confused state, churches try to make the people be just like what they want.

The cookie-cutter person looked for knows how to come in, sit down, be quiet, dress right, talk right, and live right.

This is the wrong place to start.

The right place to start is to preach as Philip did, proclaim Christ, and let the word of God change lives.

II. Church Growth Starts with Helping People.

We sometimes let the performance of miracles hinder our learning of the real lesson in a Bible narrative.

Yes, Philip was given the power to perform miracles.

We cannot overlook the work of the Holy Spirit in Philip's efforts.

We recognize that this power is no longer given into the hands of selected servants.

The real lesson is this: The Samaritans saw a man whose message compelled him to help people, especially people who were in need.

We can do good works in the name of Christ and in the name of Christ petition God to heal.

People in Samaria saw the good Philip did in the name of Jesus and they liked it, so they responded to it.

Too frequently churches sit in isolation in the community.

They meet, they worship, they study, they have fellowship, they go home.

The community sees little in the way of good being done to help people.

Members of the church often do not even see or know about good being done.

When we help people and share Christ with them, the church should come up.

Philip helped people.

His actions led people to give attention to what he was saying.

Having seen how it starts, let us look at how it works.

III. Philip's Method Works because the Community Benefits Unconditionally.

The people of Samaria saw all the good being done by Philip and appreciated what he **could do** for them.

The good news and good deeds helped Samaria become a better community.

This is the goal for any church that decides to get outside itself, collectively or individually, and help people.

When we as Christians make it our goal to offer services that will help people around us, the whole town can be enriched.

Philip's method can still work, if we will get outside our building, do good works for our community, and help people in need then share Christ with them, growth will come.

What is the church here doing to benefit our neighborhood? What services do we offer that no other group offers?

Good is often done by members of the church in the community but it is done in the name of community groups.

Community groups get more help from church members than the church does.

The church needs to figure out the needs of the community then work to meet them by being the hands of Jesus.

IV. Philip's Method Works because the Community Acknowledges the Church.

The good which Philip did was obviously connected to his love for the Lord he proclaimed.

This is still a good and viable goal for the church.

We should help people whether anyone notices or not (think about the account of the Good Samaritan).

We should praise God when our works of feeding the community, offering free services, or helping those in need are seen.

The community will not only benefit but respond with appreciation and attention.

What is the reputation of the church?

Is she known as a source of help and strength in times of trouble or hardship?

Is she known for helping people not just their situation or circumstances?

Do the people we help know where the real help comes from?

V. Philip's Method Works because the Community Changes.

Philip began "proclaiming Christ" and helping the people.

The community benefited from the good deeds and acknowledged the good news being taught.

Then, the community changed.

People were saved and added to the body of Christ.

The Samaritans had to give up their old ways and live in the light of God through Jesus Christ.

"When they believed Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike."

Simon, formerly a sorcerer, changed his ways.

His conversion probably did more good for Samaria than anything other than the preaching of Christ.

The Samaritans "were giving him attention because he had for a long time astonished them with his magic arts."

He misled the people, claiming to be some great one.

When "Simon himself believed," he was baptized and "continued on with Philip."

Too often we try to change the community by teaching it what it ought to do.

Philip did that, but only after he had proclaimed Christ and began meeting the needs of the people in the community.

The people responded appreciatively and positively, then the community began to change.

We are at the incipiency (in-sip-e-ency) of a restart. Next Sunday afternoon, we will meet in-person. The following Wednesday night we will meet in-person.

What we do with the initial restart will determine our growth from it.

Churches today can improve their community and society by restarting the process of conversion and growth.

Church growth starts with preaching Christ and helping people.

Philip's method of doing so works because the community benefits unconditionally, acknowledges the church, and begins to change.

How does the change come about and what results or fruit does it bear?

VI. Change Happens because the People See Good News.

Samaria saw that Philip's message and ministry were positive things.

They saw good news in action, they did not just hear it.

The people of Samaria saw good deeds, which is why they were willing to listen to the good news.

We do have good news to share, Jesus died for everyone, but our town might need to see more good news.

Then, the community might be more open to listening to the good news.

VII. Change Happens because the People Believe Good News.

Sometimes the good news we share is not heard very well because it is not accompanied by obvious good deeds.

People see us preaching about being the hands of Jesus or bearing fruit, but they do not see us trying to help by being the hands of Jesus and bearing fruit.

When the good news of the Christ is accompanied by our good deeds on His behalf, we will see more results as Philip did.

Philip was in a tough situation, trying to convert people who did not believe in the Old Testament as he did.

He preached “the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ.”

Surely, Philip taught them that the kingdom of God is the church of the Lord Jesus Christ (Matthew 16:18 and 19), the body of Christ (Colossians 1:13-18 and 3:15).

There is no doubt that Philip told the Samaritans that Jesus Christ is the king of his kingdom or head of his church (Colossians 1:18). Jesus is the authority (Matthew 28:18), God speaks through Him (Hebrews 1:1-4), and anyone who rejects the New Testament which is his covenant with believers also rejects Christ (John 12:48).

Philip’s good news and good deeds convinced people that he was the real deal, and they gave attention to him and believed his message.

The Samaritans believed the good news—they believed the word of God.

VIII. Change Happens because the People Experience Good News.

The Samaritans who believed the gospel were baptized—immersed—in the name of Christ.

Philip must have told the Samaritans how they could get into the kingdom, for right after Luke, the author of Acts, says Philip preached things about “the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ,” he wrote that those who believed the things he preached were baptized.

They became part of Jesus Christ and part of the community of believers—the kingdom of God.

Paul announced this experience in Galatians 3:26 and 27, “For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.”

When men and women are baptized, they experience the good news firsthand—the death of Christ for their sins, the burial of the old man, and the resurrection of the new man in the light of God through Jesus.

The people experienced the good news—they were baptized!

Application:

Learning from Philip, we must proclaim the good news of Christ.

We must also get outside our building and comfort zone to do good things in our community that helps people.

The church must do good unconditionally, then, people will see that our faith is genuine.

When people respond to the good deeds, the church is to point people to Christ and His body and continue doing good.

The people will see good news (the good being done), believe the good news (the good being taught), and experience good news.

People want to be part of good things so they will obey the good news of Jesus Christ.

Conclusion:

Anyone who believes Jesus is the Christ can be baptized.

Christ is the king of his kingdom!

Anyone who submits to his authority will be saved.

Submitting to his authority involves us in obedience to him.

Jesus has instructed entrance into his kingdom has been given to those who hear (Matthew 11:15), believe (Mark 16:16), repent (Luke 13:3), confess (Matthew 10:32-33), and are baptized (John 3:5), then live faithful to Christ the rest of their life (Revelation 2:10).

A Christian who has become disobedient can be restored by repenting (Acts 17:30), confessing faults (1 John 1:9) and praying for forgiveness (Acts 8:22).

Jesus is the author of eternal salvation to all who obey him, says Hebrews 5:8 and 9.

Come, be part of the good news of Christ!