

Let us Run Together

June 11th, 2013, Kichijouji Bible Study
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Acts

8:26 Now an angel of the Lord told Philip, "Get up and go south on the road that leads from Jerusalem to Gaza. This is a deserted road."

8:27 So he got up and went. Now there was an Ethiopian eunuch, who was a member of the court of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. He was in charge of all her treasures and had come up to Jerusalem to worship.

8:28 Now he was returning home, seated in his chariot, and reading from the prophet Isaiah.

8:29 The Spirit told Philip, "Approach that chariot and stay near it."

8:30 So Philip ran up to it and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah out loud. Philip asked, "Do you understand what you're reading?"

8:31 The man replied, "How can I unless someone guides me?" So he invited Philip to get in and sit with him.

8:32 This was the passage of Scripture he was reading: "Like a sheep he was led away to be slaughtered, and like a lamb is silent before its shearer, so he does not open his mouth."

8:33 In his humiliation, justice was denied him. Who can describe his descendants? For his life is taken away from the earth."

8:34 The eunuch asked Philip, "I ask you, who is the prophet talking about? Himself? Or someone else?"

8:35 Then Philip began to speak, and, starting from this Scripture, he told him the good news about Jesus.

8:36 As they were going along the road, they came to some water. The eunuch said, "Look, there's some water. What keeps me from being baptized?"

8:38 So he ordered the chariot to stop, and Philip and the eunuch both went down into the water, and Philip baptized him.

8:39 When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away. The eunuch went on his way rejoicing and did not see Philip again.

8:40 But Philip found himself at Azotus. As he was passing through that region, he kept proclaiming the good news in all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

[International Standard Version]

The hymn 107 that we just sang together is actually a prayer rather than merely a song.

1 共に走りましょう、2013年6月11日、吉祥寺学び会、ゴットホルド・ベック

Songs of Days 107.

1. To those who perish without experiencing their Savior,
Pour forth the love of the Lord.
2. For those who don't know salvation,
I offer my prayers now.
3. The depth of His love and His death of sacrifice,
this is the time to let people know.
4. To those who are sinking in despair,
let me show the love of the Lord.
5. Let's proclaim to all lost people,
the peace of being with the Lord.
6. The time of grace will soon be over.
Hurry and proclaim His words.

As in the last verse, "The time of grace will soon be over. Hurry and proclaim His words." It is a wonderful blessing for us to pray and sing with these words, isn't it?

As we can see from the verses we just read at the beginning, the brother called Philip spread the gospel far and wide amongst the audience in the land of Samaria. He preached about Jesus. The multitude of people present were not only gifted the ears to hear the message but were actually led to salvation.

Their lives changed fundamentally and many sick people were healed there on that day. However, what happened afterward deserves more attention. Philip began to serve as the apostle of Jesus, as a vessel in His hands. Great joy was spread all over the land of Samaria because of the great work of the Lord. But before this greatly blessed task was completed, Philip received a new command.

Philip was commanded to walk away from this great multitude and deliver the gospel to just one more person. Let's look at the verse 30; "So Philip ran up to it". He did not stride but he ran up. Led by the spirit of the Lord, He made haste. He obeyed the Lord's command to travel more than 160 km.

It must have been similar to perhaps the distance from here (Tokyo) to Miyota. There was no bullet train. He did not even have a bicycle and he had to walk 160 km. He was given a clandestine mission of some sort – he was given no opportunity at all to surmise the intention of the Lord. With no idea what was going to happen, he was forced to go away from many people who owed their newly awakened minds, hearts and horizons to him.

From a human being's perspective, it seems unreasonable to draw him away from these people. However, the intention of Jesus is fundamentally

different from our view. I suppose that Philip's experience was very similar to Abraham's. Chapter 11, Verse 8 of the Epistle to the Hebrews explains what happened to Abraham;

Hebrews

11:8 By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going.

However, he gradually began to understand the intention of Jesus, a step at a time. Suddenly, he saw the chariot from Ethiopia, Africa right in front of him. At the same time, he received this command from the Holy Spirit; "Approach that chariot and stay near it."

He obeyed this command. The Bible says that "he ran up to it". He made a final sprint after running for nearly 160 km. Why was he in such a hurry? Someone uses his imagination to explain the reason; "Philip wanted to reach him before the Ethiopian finished reading the chapter 53 of Isaiah and moved forward to the next chapter. If Philip had walked slowly, this eunuch would have already started reading the chapter 54. The intent of the gospel is explained in the Isaiah chapter 53 more fully and in more detail than in chapter 54 and he was desperate to get this across to the eunuch." Anyway, Philip ran. And so should we. If we desire to lead as many souls as possible to the Lord, we all have to run.

There was a man called Friedrich von Bodelschwingh, who was internationally known for his devotion toward the aid of orphans. I undertook some quick research on his life this morning. He was born in 1831 and called to heaven in 1910. He was a man who received a wonderful blessing.

He had to look after thousands of orphans. He had no money and the only means by which he could help them was prayer. Still, he never felt ashamed of himself or inferior in any way. Instead, he knew from his decades of experience that when he prayed, the Lord would never fail to answer. Once he shouted, "Please hurry up! Otherwise, all the people around us will have to die."

Let's get back to the earlier question. Why did Philip have to hurry so much? Needless to say, it was not to win a medal. He had an important purpose.

As the first answer, he ran because he was given a mission from Jesus. Philip was determined to carry out the wishes of the Lord. He ran because he had a mission commanded by Jesus. Philip was determined to fulfill the orders the Lord gave him.

Acts

8:26 Now an angel of the Lord told Philip, "Get up and go south on the road that leads from Jerusalem to Gaza. This is a deserted road."

8:27 So he got up and went.

In verses 29 and 30, we can see his determination to follow the Lord obediently;

Acts

8:29 The Spirit told Philip, "Approach that chariot and stay near it."

8:30 So Philip ran up to it and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah out loud. Philip asked, "Do you understand what you're reading?"

He did neither hesitate nor ask a question, instead he just obeyed. The most notable characteristic of Philip was his instant obedience to any commands from the Lord. Why was he chosen to serve Jesus? He always had his ears bent toward the Word of the Lord and followed all commands immediately.

When Jesus commanded Philip to leave the land of Samaria where he had received blessings for his great work, he instantly obeyed. He had no idea what was going to happen to him, but that made no difference whatsoever. And now, he showed the same unswerving faith in the midst of this wilderness. Philip obeyed. Philip must have shared the feeling of the author of this Psalm;

Psalms

119:32 I eagerly race along the way of your commands, for you enable me to do so.

Philip's heart was fully determined; "I am prepared to live for the Lord and I am willing to obey the Lord without any condition". I guess people like Philip are still required today. Jesus needs someone to serve Him unquestioningly.

What Jesus needs today are brothers and sisters who stand by the Lord. What He needs are those who obey the Lord without asking any questions. He needs faithful followers who listen to His voice and desire the Lord to lead them. What the Lord needs are those who have firm convictions.

It is a conviction that Jesus understands all actions He carries out. It is also a conviction that Jesus knows everything about us and still forgives us.

We need to have the conviction that Jesus understands his own intentions and demands. Jesus desires the use of us for His mission. We are actually

being used by the Lord when we spread the gospel to many people, when we explain the gospel to one person, teach in Sunday schools or visit the sick and ailing. The most important prerequisite to serve Jesus is a willingness to obey the Lord. Philip was determined and willing to obey the voice of the Lord. It was the reason why he stood up and ran up. He desperately wanted to obey the Lord and it was the first reason because of which he hurried.

The second reason he hurried was because he was entrusted with the gospel. Philip was determined to spread the message of the gospel. 20 years after this incident, in the Acts of the Apostles, Chapter 21, Philip was described as an evangelist;

Acts

21:8 The next day we left and came to Caesarea. We went to the home of Philip the evangelist, one of the Seven, and stayed with him.

21:9 He had four unmarried daughters who could prophesy.

The term 'evangelist' refers to those who were appointed to proclaim Jesus to others. Philip had this conviction: "The gospel was proclaimed to me through which I was led to faith. However, it is even more important than my own salvation that I proclaim the gospel to others. It was the reason that the gospel was delivered to me."

Moreover, Philip did not merely imbibe this knowledge but also put it to action. Philip proclaimed the joy of experiencing Jesus far and wide. We should not forget that, just like Philip, we too were called to spread to others the wonderful news about the Savior Jesus.

We were appointed to let all the distressed, worried and lost people know that salvation, hope and refuge are waiting for them. Paul wrote to the brothers and sisters in Thessaloniki:

1Thessalonians

2:4 we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel.

The true living God blessed us with this wonderful gift that is Jesus. The gospel does not refer to any specific teachings, but it is Jesus himself who is its gift and messenger. Paul wrote to the brothers and sisters who were still in Rome;

Romans

8:32 The one who did not spare his own Son, but offered him as a sacrifice for all of us, surely will give us all things, along with his Son, won't he?

It is the Lord Jesus Himself who is entrusted to us rather than any specific doctrine or teachings. We are clearly commanded to follow these instructions from Him: Do your utmost for others so that they benefit from the richness of the Lord. Do all you can to help others to find their true satisfaction in Jesus. Use all your strength to release others from slavery to sin and the bondage of ego.

Mark

16:15 Then he told them, "As you go into all the world, proclaim the gospel to everyone.

This verse urges us to spread knowledge to others about Jesus. The gospel does not refer to any specific teaching, but to Jesus himself. Proclaim Jesus. Let all people know who Jesus is. Jesus is the solution to all our problems.

Are we carrying out this task faithfully? Are we proclaiming the gospel or are we satisfied merely because we ourselves are saved? If we are reluctant to proclaim the gospel of Jesus to others for their salvation from sins, we would never be blessed. Philip hurried so much to complete this very task. Why was that?

Philip hurried because he wanted to broadcast the coming of joy. He could not contain it within his heart and longed to share this happiness with many others. He understood correctly what was most valuable in his life. But, still why did he really have to hurry so much?

There is a third answer to this question. He ran because it was a matter of urgency, a matter of life and death. Moreover, it was an amazing incident that Jesus brought Philip into contact with the eunuch who was responsible for the administration of all the queen's property.

Indeed, these two were brought into contact with each other at the very moment when one of them needed the help of the other one. Had Philip failed to obey the command immediately, this encounter could never have occurred. Jesus, knowing that the heart of this treasurer was prepared for it, wanted him to know the gospel [and Philip to convey it without delay].

Philip was filled with the same desire and so he hurried. We should always keep in mind that for us, nothing is more urgent than proclaiming the gospel of the Lord. No time must be wasted in leading lost souls to Jesus.

There are so many people who don't have Jesus yet and thus are separated from salvation, peace, hope and forgiveness for their sins. Their existence deprives

us of all comfort and makes us dismayed. Let us never forget the attitude of Jesus toward such people. The attitude Jesus took should be ours as well.

John

9:4 I must do the work of the one who sent me while it is day. Night is approaching, when no one can work.

Likewise, Paul's testimony should be our testimony too.

1Corinthians

9:16 For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast about, for this obligation has been entrusted to me. How terrible it would be for me if I didn't preach the gospel!

At this present moment, we are living in the time of grace. During this period, the salvation accomplished has to be broadcast all over the world. However, this time of grace is heading toward the end at furious speed. The Last Judgment will eventually begin. So, we must hurry. The desire of Paul's heart was to capture as many souls as possible and bring them to the lamb, Jesus. Once the soul is redeemed by His blood, it has to come and face Jesus. Paul sent this confession to the elders in Ephesos;

Acts

20:20 I never shrank from telling you anything that would help you nor from teaching you publicly and from house to house.

20:21 I testified to both Jews and Greeks about repentance to God and faith in our Lord Jesus.

Just like Paul, Philip also proclaimed the coming of joy in a hurry. He raced to carry out his responsibility. He could not remain silent. He felt compelled to proclaim the grace and love of Jesus as had been planned by the Lord. Philip hurried. Because the critical issue of whether this man's soul will be saved forever or perish depended entirely on him.

Once I read about this evangelist who helped lead many people to the Lord Jesus. On night, he preached to thousands of audience members. Many of them felt the eagerness to know more about Jesus and decided to obey him henceforth.

Later that night, the evangelist came home by cab. Even before he reached his house, the cab driver had been led to the faith and come to believe in Jesus. The most important characteristic of this evangelist was that he understood the urgent nature of his mission and he never missed any opportunity to proclaim Jesus. Philip hurried. Again, why?

Here is the fourth answer to this question. He ran because he had found the soul that had to be saved. And Philip dearly wished to lead that soul to the Lord. Jesus granted this treasurer with the blessing of salvation [and Philip's mission was thus complete]. How could he be led to salvation? He contemplated quickly, got the courage and reacted decisively.

Why could Philip lead this treasurer, who was the seeker of the truth, to Jesus? It was because Philip himself had experienced Jesus. He had the conviction that the words of the Lord could save people. Philip's realization was not just that this eunuch needed Jesus and was seeking the savior, but that Jesus too was seeking this eunuch.

Needless to say, it was not so easy to reach close to the eunuch through the wilderness. He had to call for courage knowing that the eunuch would never be alone in the chariot. Undoubtedly, such an important person must have been guarded by a number of subordinates. As Philip was running as fast as he could, he thought of Jesus who died to save all souls, and he desperately wanted to save this man.

Isn't it our primary concern to lead as many people as possible to Jesus through our lives so that they find their redemption in Him? When we get a telephone call, we respond to it in various ways. You may complain, "Oh not again! I am getting yet another phone call. I am interrupted all the time and I can't continue my job!"

There is another way to react to it. "This might be from the soul of another person who is urgently waiting for me to talk about Jesus." While he was running after the chariot in the wilderness, Philip could have said "This disgusting chariot is raising such awful dust. I can't keep my eyes open. All the sand is blowing into my eyes, my mouth and my nose. It is so awful! How can I get away from this dust?"

Philip did not care about dust flying into his face at all. "This man in the chariot is a very important person," he must have reminded himself. "At any cost, I need to proclaim the savior who came down to this earth to him. All people we encounter and all people we know now are the souls brought to us for salvation because we are aware of the life and blood Jesus sacrificed.

The true living God desires the use of each one of us for his service. The Gospel is delivered to us as the only joyous gift that can ease our deepest anguish. Why did Philip hurry? Because he was controlled by the love of Jesus.

2Corinthians

5:14 The love of the Messiah controls us.

Philip worked desperately to save just one soul. How was his effort rewarded? For our Lord, every single soul is more valuable than all the wealth of this world.

The Lord God will never overlook, or be indifferent to any soul. The Ethiopian treasurer told this stranger called Philip to have a seat in his chariot. It was a manifestation of his spiritual hunger and thirst, his unfulfilled heart as well as his desire for salvation.

The treasurer was reading the Book of Isaiah, Chapter 53. In this well-known chapter, the arrival of the promised savior was predicted. This was the chapter which described precisely how the savior would negate Himself, go through the pain of sacrifice and give up his life as the price for our salvation. These verses are wonderful treasures.

Acts

8:32 This was the passage of Scripture he was reading: "Like a sheep he was led away to be slaughtered, and like a lamb is silent before its shearer, so he does not open his mouth.

8:33 In his humiliation, justice was denied him. Who can describe his descendants? For his life is taken away from the earth."

8:34 The eunuch asked Philip, "I ask you, who is the prophet talking about? Himself? Or someone else?"

8:35 Then Philip began to speak, and, starting from this Scripture, he told him the good news about Jesus.

Philip was apparently not interested in teaching Judaism, or talking about early churches and other believers. He only proclaimed the gospel of Jesus to the treasurer. He talked about Jesus Himself as the gospel. We should not forget that Jesus alone is everything to us and our greatest symbol of light.

Those who place their highest value on Jesus will be used by the Lord. It is because such people do not pursue their personal glory at all. Undoubtedly, when Philip led the treasurer to the Lord Jesus, he must have pointed out the importance of testifying to the Lord. Because for all believers, it is not their own salvation that is of prime importance, but true and faithful service to the Lord in this world.

Those who have found salvation in Jesus are privileged to testify to it through the baptism of water. The treasurer found some water and asked what was keeping him from being baptized.

Acts

8:36 As they were going along the road, they came to some water. The eunuch said, "Look, there's some water. What keeps me from being baptized?"

8:38 So he ordered the chariot to stop, and Philip and the eunuch both went down into the water, and Philip baptized him.

8:39 When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away. The eunuch went on his way rejoicing and did not see Philip again.

They both went down into the water where his whole body was immersed as part of the baptism. There is no doubt that Philip explained to all subordinates of the treasurer what he was doing in front of them, the meaning of the baptism and the reason why it had to be carried out. This way, all the people heard about the gospel and the salvation that Jesus had accomplished.

We can see in here that this treasurer went down into water filled with joy. We of course know why he was so joyous. He encountered the savior. He understood that the debt of his sins was canceled. Then, by being baptized, he testified publicly that he had obtained salvation. But, how did all this happen? It happened solely because Philip wasted no time bringing him to the Lord.

Now, let's look at the fifth and final answer to the question; Philip hurried because he understood that, for the Lord's plan to be accomplished, all saved souls need to be connected with each other and work just like one long chain.

We see in these verses how one soul came to the Lord and was saved. Moreover, this was the soul of a very special person. If this incident occurred today, it would have been broadcast all over the country on the same day on TV, radio and newspapers with a big headline such as, "Our Treasurer is now Christian!"

In fact, the gospel began to be spread all over Africa through this man. Here again, we see another instance that salvation of a particular person was not all Jesus desired. Rather, it was more important for Him to see the message passed on to many other people and eventually expose all of them to the gospel.

The treasurer was one of the precious rings which comprised a long chain. He was given the privilege to be a vessel of the savior through which the gospel of the Lord Jesus was spread throughout Africa. We too have to be obedient to the Lord.

The gospel has to be proclaimed with extreme urgency. In addition, we are not allowed to know how Jesus plans to use those have been saved through us.

Someday, boys attending Sunday school, someone we met on the commuter train or even an old classmate who has been absent for years might be saved and filled with the Holy Spirit. However, we have no chance to know how the Lord wants to use them or how He will bless them. We have nothing to do with it. It deserves our attention that Philip was still in a hurry even after this incident was over. He made great haste and suddenly disappeared.

Acts

8:39 When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away. The eunuch went on his way rejoicing and did not see Philip again.

Philip was always rushing around to proclaim the gospel. He was indeed a busy evangelist. He became a man the Lord could use handily.

According to the Acts of the Apostles, Chapter 6, Verse 3, Philip was full of the Spirit. He was always filled with the Holy Spirit. Those who are filled with Holy Spirit are compelled to proclaim the gospel in all haste. For such followers, only Jesus is important.

That was why the Holy Spirit snatched Philip away. Those who are filled with the Holy Spirit have a sincere desire to disappear from the sight of others so as to avoid drawing the attention of people. Philip sincerely hoped that all honor and glory would be given to Jesus alone. "Only Jesus has to increase while I have to decrease." Philip was truly blessed when he spoke these words straight from the heart.

I would like to conclude this sermon with this poem. It was composed by the principal of a divinity school in Switzerland. The title of the poem was taken from Chapter 8, Verse 20 of Jeremiah, "The harvest is past, the summer has ended, and we haven't been delivered." He made this song with this verse in mind.

The time of grace is nearing its end.
In this huge wide world, the last day draws near
From the far reaches of the distant desert, we hear
the screams of anxiety.
Our night is pitch black with no ray of light
Without the grace of God, which illuminates us,
In pain and gloom, we have to walk the dark road.
Forever and forever.

You sing songs filled with joy and call yourself
children of God.
On the other hand, we are the sacrifices of death,
we are filled with terror and suffering from awful
pain.

Why do you stand still and keep your hands away
while the night descends?
Why don't you tell us that the Lord God sent His
only begotten son and He still loves us?

Without you, we have no chance to know His love,
and we are going to perish without any hope.
Were we just born to die?
Is death our eternal destiny?

The stars don't shine on us.
We do not see the light of promise.
We hear the distant thunder of the judgment.
Why are you waiting so patiently,
When God is urging you, "Go and proclaim
throughout the world His victory on the cross?"

I know that you have good news for our miserable
souls.
When you hold the medicine to heal all wounds
forever,
why do you remain silent for such a long time?

Please let us hear your words and show us the way
which leads to the rock of faith.
Please wipe away our tears.
It is because of you that we have to move toward
our death.
Our sins make us suffer, and the dark night is
coming.
We have to surrender our souls to the power of
Satan.
Forever and forever.
Millions of people are calling from distant countries,
"The Lord of harvest, please listen".

To us believers, please give new blessings.
Please forgive our sins.
To the souls that are desperately waiting, make us
deliver the words of the cross.
To save them from eternal destruction.

End