

Seven New Testament Soul-Winners

by

W. B. RILEY, A.M., D.D., L.L.D.,
Pastor, First Baptist Church, Minneapolis, Minn.

Copyright © 1939

~ out-of-print and in the public domain ~

CHAPTER THREE

PHILIP - THE FAITHFUL SOUL-WINNER ACTS 8:1-40

THE four Gospels and the Book of The Acts constitute the New Testament Pentateuch.

They are historical in character and romantic in interest. History appeals to the student in proportion as it links itself to the lives of individuals. In fact, human history is only a record of the doings of men, and the personnel of the same is ever the source and center of interest. The Gospels are a history of the CHRIST, and The Acts a history of His disciples or churchmen.

The present study brings us the very heart of heroism as that is exhibited in this Book.

When Stephen stood in the midst of his enemies, they hurled at him their anathemas, gnashing their teeth for very anger.

His face lighted with a light from Heaven, and his eyes opened as they had never opened before, and the vision vouchsafed him was one seldom enjoyed by man; and the martyr Stephen stood ready for the stoning that sent him into the presence of GOD.

The greatness of his soul was as surely proven in his death as it had been demonstrated in his life, and the prayer upon which he expended his last breath - "**Lay not this sin to their charge**" - was as gracious an evidence of his spirit, as was the sleep that followed a sign of GOD's personal interest in His own. "**And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him**" (Acts 8: 2). [34]

When one Prophet of GOD is taken, the Spirit has another who will stand in his stead.

Strange to say that the Saul introduced into the fifty-eighth verse of the seventh chapter and shown in his raging enmity against CHRIST and the Church in the opening verse of this eighth chapter is unconsciously on his way to succeed Stephen; but GOD already has co-laborers of the martyred saints who will carry on, and Philip is chief among them.

It will be interesting then to follow the history of Philip, and we have elected to do this under three heads:

- Philip's Personal Progress,
- Philip's Prominent Proselytes, and
- Philip's Passing Popularity.

Philip's Personal Progress

He was a faithful layman.

We rest this statement upon the reputation that he sustained in the church at Jerusalem.

Character is essential to competence; consecration is competence in activity.

We are always glad when a genius is devoted to GOD and I am sure that most people of literary taste would admit that Edgar A. Guest, the American poet, belongs in that class, and Guest's devotion to CHRIST and interest in church work is widely known. Among the poems of recent years he has written one intended to stimulate laymen in particular. It runs after this manner:-

The Laymen

Leave it to the ministers and soon the church will die,
 Leave it to the women folk, the young will pass it by,
 For the church is all that lifts us from the coarse and selfish mob,
 And the church that is to prosper needs the laymen on the job.

It's the church's special function to uphold the finer things,
 To teach that way of living from which all that is noble springs,
 But the minister can't do it, single-handed and alone, [35]
 For the laymen of the country are the church's cornerstone.

When you see a church that's empty though its doors are opened wide,
 It is not the church that's dying, it's the LAYMEN who have DIED,
 For it's not by song or sermon that the church's work is done;
 It's the laymen of the country who for GOD must carry on!

The Church at Jerusalem was to be congratulated in having Philip in its membership. If the mantle of Philip could descend upon the laymen of the present hour, no statistics could mark the progress of Christianity, for every passing hour would change the figure and always for the better, bigger.

Philip was shortly made a deacon.

The record of this experience is in Acts 6:5.

"And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte at Antioch."

This is the original deaconate, the first Board of Deacons the world ever saw in the first Church the world ever knew. Note that Philip is the second man named in the list. There was but one who received a larger vote and that was Stephen, the courageous saint who became the first martyr of the church of GOD.

We have not the least doubt that this order of Scripture is another evidence of the verbal inspiration of the Book.

These men are put in the order of their value - Stephen first and Philip second. What else could the Church do but elect Stephen and Philip? A church that would have failed to exalt such laymen to office would have proven itself derelict, despiritualized, dumb.

There are some men who are forever trying to get into office. They love power and crave prominence and covet honors. They are seldom fit for membership even, much less for office administration.

There are other men who cannot keep out of office. [36]

Their course and conduct in life is such that their brethren demand it of them, and whether they will or not, select them and set them aside for the same. Philip belonged to that company.

In other words, when the conditions of becoming a deacon were determined - "**the man of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom**" - Philip measured up, and the membership of the whole First Church in Jerusalem said with unanimity of speech, "That is the man! Make a deacon of him."

If the organization of the early church had been as redundant as that of the present-day ecclesiasticism, they would have elected Philip to a half a dozen offices, but in the simplicity and efficiency of that body, few offices existed; in fact, at that time not more than two were at all recognized, and Philip is destined to fill both of them.

The deaconate has been a power in the Church of GOD, but what it would have accomplished had the original condition of membership in it been retained, who can tell?

He developed into a lay evangelist.

That record you will find in verse five. "**Then Philip went down to Samaria and preached Christ unto them.**" It looks very much like a voluntary service. The text doesn't say that he was sent down to the city of Samaria. There was no State Convention secretary to send him; there was no bishop in existence to appoint him; there was no superintendent of religion to suggest it. At that time, in the history of the Church of GOD, the HOLY SPIRIT was the Bishop and suggestions came through Him, and the men of the Philip sort responded with willing hearts. "**Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ unto them.**" The average deacon, if he goes to another city, goes to attend a convention and vote, or to sit in council and give advice. How seldom is a deacon heard of going to another city in search of souls and for the purpose of preaching the Gospel! Alas, how far we have departed from our New Testament model!

The promise of the evangelist had been with Philip from the first.

A new convert who spends the day after his personal salvation, appealing to other men to come to CHRIST, is on the way to preaching the Gospel. [37]

The man who voluntarily wins one will almost invariably go on and win many. Once the taste of soul-winning is experienced, men will continue in the joy of the same, and to what measure of success GOD may bring the personal worker, who can prophesy? And yet no man ever did the big thing first and few men ever do the smaller thing without being privileged the larger a little later.

We have records of great meetings in which cities have been turned upside down; the sick have been healed, the demonized men have been dispossessed, and saints set to singing, but let it be understood that the original revival of that sort was led by one who began as a layman, was exalted by his brethren to the office of deacon, and directed by the HOLY SPIRIT to the office of an evangelist.

It is with difficulty that one passes from the report of this revival without commenting upon it.

- We would like to call attention to the circumstance that wherever the Gospel is faithfully preached, miracles occur.
- We would like to affirm the historical fact that wherever the Gospel is faithfully preached, unclean spirits are cast out.
- We would like to remind our readers of how a revival of religion is the best basis of rejoicing ever known to the mind of man;

but we pass these subjects, worthy of sermons everyone, to call your attention to

Philip's Prominent Proselytes

We employ the word "*proselyte*" with good reason. It means one "*brought over to any opinion, belief, sect, or party; and especially one who has been won over from one religious belief to another.*"

Philip did not face men without religion. The world has seldom been without a religion and seldom had as much as now. If religion could save the world, it would have long since been redeemed; in fact, CHRIST never would have come.

From time immemorial, false religions have flourished and the work of the prophet of GOD is and has been the winning of men from these to the religion that is true and divine. At this Philip was a success. [38]

He swayed the populace with his words.

"And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did" (Acts 8:6).

How marvelous is GOD's method of making orators! Overnight he took a plain fisherman in Peter and exceeded a Demosthenes and Cicero; and, here, in a few short weeks, a man who had probably never spoken before sways a multitude. His homiletics had been learned in no theological seminary, and yet when did man-made elocution excel in desirable results the product of Philip's preaching?

We have referred many times to the modern effort to standardize the ministry. We suggest to our brethren, who are advocates of this endeavor to run all occupants of pulpits through the same mill, that there was a standardized ministry two thousand years before they were born, and that was the standard of the Spirit's indwelling which will never be surpassed; and that all the universities and theological seminaries of the land cannot equal in minister-making the work of the HOLY GHOST. Witness Philip!

He turned the cult-leader to Christianity.

In his day, as in ours, there were cults.

Simon, the sorcerer in that same city, had given out that he himself was a great one, and it is amazing how many people will follow such an announcement. Self-advertisement is successful with the superficial; and, mark you, the superficial are in every section of society, for the text says, "**They all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God**" (Acts 8: 10).

In a Western city, a so-called religious movement has reached great proportions, and at present the exposition of the leader has made the movement itself a laughing stock; and yet, strange to say, in it are the representatives of all classes - not the poor and the ragged and the hungry only, but the dwellers from the boulevard residences, a high city official, the judge from the court - they have all given "**heed, from the least to the greatest**" saying, "This woman is the great power of God!" [39]

Apparently it is easier to create and bring to success a cult than it is to get people to follow the CHRIST. The work of Simon, therefore, had been far less important and far more easy than is the work of Philip in showing Simon his error and turning him to believe. When a convert from such station is made, it is an accession of one who has the spirit of leadership, and second, it is commonly the end of the foolish following and the unprofitable organization that is round about him.

It is interesting to follow this case to the end. Simon will prove himself a sorcerer again when he sees the power of the HOLY GHOST. He will think to purchase it.

Let us not be too hard on Simon; he only illustrates a universal principle. Any long-established custom is hard to break up.

The man who has once been addicted to drink will find sobriety difficult even though he believe and profess; men and women who have once yielded to lust will find it hard to recover cleanness of thought and action, and the individual who has once given himself over to money-grafting in

the name of God - will find it hard to break from that sacrilegious habit. I say without hesitation that the greatest peril to the present-day ministry is at this point.

The riches of the world tempt the Apostles of the church.

Money is truly "**the root of all evil**," but its mischievous influence is never more frightfully felt than when a preacher commercializes the Gospel as Simon sought to do. GOD knows, there are many of them.

There are men in America by the score who have given themselves to evangelism because they saw Billy Sunday making his thousands out of the same. They go into a church and for a week they expect as big a return as the average pastor receives for twelve months' service, and if it isn't forthcoming they browbeat the pastor, criticize the officers, and leave the church in disgust, having also disgusted all behind them.

There are others who are forever in promotion schemes, employing the preacher's standing to seduce the gullible, who have an idea that GOD's prophets can do no wrong. They sell stocks that advocate promotion enterprises, and uniformly take a big "rake-off". Such is Simony, and when once one is in the power of it, it is easier to break from liquor or lust than from godless greed. [40]

He saw a state treasurer saved.

"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, a 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.

"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 shearers, 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.

"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?"

"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" (Acts 8:26-37). [41]

Evidently there was a dual bigotry to be met here.

The first existed in the fact that this man was apparently a believer in the Old Testament Scripture, either a Jew or a proselyte of the gate. He had his religion, then, fixed and satisfactory. Such men are seldom moved in the interest of another faith.

Again, he held high office of state; he was the treasurer of Ethiopia, the financial counselor of Candace. It is a natural but none the less sad fact that men of exalted station are difficult to reach with the Gospel.

JESUS CHRIST demands humility versus pride, and repentance versus self-assertion, and obedience to another rather than self-government of one's life.

These steps are not difficult for the humble, the lowly, the poor, but they are so hard for the high that CHRIST Himself once said, **"It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God"** (Matthew 19:24). We should be hopeless concerning the rich had He not followed that with the statement, **"With God all things are possible."**

GOD was with Philip and GOD was in the Word that Candace's treasurer was reading, and the angel of the Lord who said unto Philip, **"Arise, and go toward the south"** had Himself gone the same way and set the treasurer to the study of the sacred Scripture.

Whenever any man, no matter who he is, how high and haughty, how unholy and wicked, how arrogant and even atheistic, begins to study the Book, he is on the way. Work with him then becomes possible, easy, and the issue fairly certain.

I recall an experience in my own ministry of a foreman in Bloomington, Illinois, who commanded his wife to cease church attendance.

When first I went to talk with him about the domestic difficulty that arose in consequence, he was insolent, insulting. When I went back the second time, he was morose and silent. When I approached his house on the third visit, he sat on the porch with the Bible in his hand. On the former occasions I had actually knelt in his presence to pray, afraid for my physical safety, for he sat bolt upright in his chair, his face clouded with a frown, but when I approached his house on this third occasion and saw the Bible in his hand, all fear, yea, even anxiety, fled my heart at once. I knew that my man was on the way and that the Spirit of GOD was winning. [42]

Practically the only hope of turning men from false faiths to the true one is in the Word.

There are many sincere men who accept and advocate false faiths. There are many men who believe the Bible that have had the same falsely interpreted to them and have taken their spiritual attitude in consequence of such instruction. If, however, those same men would do as the Ethiopian treasurer did, continue to study, the Bible itself would lead them forth and reveal to them the CHRIST.

The Jews of the world dare not carefully, and with a prayer on their lips, read their own Scriptures.

If they did, their pride would be crushed and penitence would come. Their haughtiness of spirit would give place to humility, and their rejection of the CHRIST would become their conviction through the study of their own Scriptures, as occurred with Candace's treasurer.

The best way in the world to reach any man is by an appeal to the Book.

One sentence from sacred Scripture is worth more to the soul of the sinner than hours of scholarly argument. It is the truth that makes men free, and GOD's Word is truth.

But we pass on with our studies to

Philip's Passing Popularity

When in all the New Testament did any man ever rise more rapidly in office and honor and successful ministry than did Philip? And yet how strange that with the completion of this incident, Philip drops out of sight and is only seldom heard of again! How like life is that!

His rise, we have said, was exceedingly rapid.

Not a day intervenes between his conversion and his success as a soulwinner. Only a few days intervene between his salvation and his selection to the deaconate. Not a month has passed when lo, this new convert is the outstanding preacher, Peter excepted, of the entire company of disciples. [43]

Stephen's bravery and loyalty indicated the largeness of his soul, but his martyrdom cut his ministry so short that we have no experiences by which to measure what might have been his success. Somehow Philip has escaped a kindred consequence.

We doubt very much if Philip was a warrior.

There is a big difference between the sermon Peter preached at Pentecost and the speech that Stephen made in the seventh chapter and Philip's utterances. Both of those charged Israel with the resistance of the Spirit, crucifixion of the Son. even with an affront to GOD. We do not find anything akin to that in Philip's preaching. He emphasized "**the Kingdom of God**" and exalted "**the Name of Jesus**," but he seems to have been careful in his speech.

Such men often rise rapidly. They go easily to their zenith. They escape the certain oppositions that greater courage always excites and in consequence, they are not retarded by criticism and

enmity and persecution.

There are evangelists in America today who get on with seldom a jar, whose ministry is an enormous commercial asset. They preach CHRIST; they declare the things concerning the Kingdom; they witness a good many souls converted; they take issue with no one. Some of them have even said that they wouldn't sign a Confession of Faith that they themselves had written. That could not be because they did not believe it, for if they wrote it themselves they would certainly believe it; but it is because it would commit them in the open and require from them a defense and excite for them opposition; and it is more popular and financially profitable not to have anything in the way, but to get the track open and the rails greased and the wheels in action and make every station on time.

We would not charge Philip with any false teaching; he was not guilty of that. We do rejoice that **"he preached Christ."** We are glad that GOD gave him many souls. We are happy that his rise was so rapid, but we are not surprised that this incident is the prominent one of his entire preaching experience. The way of ease is the quick way, but it is seldom the finally effective and most successful way. [44]

His prominence was short-lived.

It is always amazing to trace the history of boy-preachers and baby-evangelists.

Where, in all the annals of the church, has one of them ever proven to be a man of power or a woman of permanent spiritual influence? They get the crowds, these infants! They commonly speak those platitudes of the Christian faith that produce no opposition whatever. They combine baby faces with infant messages. As a rule, they lay their emphasis upon "miracles," and sometimes they witness "the departure of unclean spirits," for the most stained man would dare to enter the sanctuary where a baby speaks. Almost uniformly they spread the spirit of good cheer.

Meetings led by infants are soulful and songful, but in a few years their charms have failed.

Maturity has spoiled the baby look and it has also rendered impotent the baby appeal. **"When 1 was a child, 1 spake as a child, 1 understood as a child, 1 thought as a child, but when 1 became a man, 1 put away childish things"** (I Corinthians 13:11).

This declaration of the Apostle is demanded by the public. They expect a man to be manly; they look for courage; they listen for convictions, and if they do not find them, they depart.

To be sure, there are other things that cut short ministerial prominence - laxity in morals, greed of gain, dishonesty of profession, excessive self-admiration and self-advertisement - but we can scarcely think that Philip was guilty of any of these.

We believe the weakness of Philip's ministry to have been that he sought the way of ease; that he was one of those sweet souls that hated a conflict and remained forever a spiritual man, but in consequence of lack of courage, an ineffective one; and Philip has had more successors than Peter, claims of the papacy to the contrary notwithstanding.

One of the pitiful features of church history is the ministerial failures to be found by the way - men who started well but did not increase. Of the greatest of all ministers, our ensample in our Saviour, CHRIST, it was said, "**Of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever**" (Isaiah 9: 7). [45]

However, Philip's ministry had its point of permanence. He did not end his evangelistic career in disaster, nor does it seem probable that he ceased from evangelism and turned to the sale of life insurance or oil stocks. For over in the Book of the Acts (21:8), Paul, the then peerless Apostle, with his companions came to Caesarea and "**entered into the house of Philip the evangelist, which was one of the seven; and abode with him. And the same man had four daughters, virgins, which did prophesy.**"

There is, therefore, a twofold testimony to the permanence of Philip's ministry.

He continued in evangelism and was now known in that office rather than as a deacon. It makes no difference to what office the church may elect one, his true office will be the one to which the Spirit exalts him, and in which GOD's blessing has been upon him. With Philip this was not in handling the money of the church - the office of a deacon - but in evangelism - the office of a soul-winner. There is every evidence that he had a quiet, modest, but continuous ministry of evangelism.

We need men after this manner. It is not best that all evangelists should be impetuous Peters nor polemical Pauls. There are churches that will not touch either, and there are communities that can not be reached, though both come in succession. They will turn from them; but Philip's ministry to such places is both pleasing and profitable. They want a quiet man, a man with no spirit of criticism in him. They don't like a fiery speaker; they want a smooth and polished one. They are willing to have souls saved if it is done in a very quiet and correct way, and they call only for the kind of a man who will fit their policy.

If Philips did not exist, such people might never hear the Gospel, or, if they heard it at all, might never engage in an evangelistic campaign. [46]

Dr. J. Wilbur Chapman, himself a model evangelist in many ways, recognized this fact.

When he assembled his great company for his famed simultaneous campaign, he had in it the stormy and the scholarly; the polemic and the peacemaker; the man whose voice was adapted to the outdoors and the quiet "parlor" and "ladies' meeting" kind. He also revealed much genius in appointing them, suiting the man to the section: and we are inclined to think that during our ministry of forty-five years, J. Wilbur Chapman, in a comparatively brief period of time, accomplished more for the true upbuilding of the churches of America than any other evangelist we have known.

Furthermore, Philip's ministry was made permanent through its adoption by his daughters.

They were four, and were prophetesses everyone. This also is doubly suggestive. It seems

strange to the average individual that the most successful minister seldom has a child make choice of his profession.

Peter left no junior to carry on his work; John, no children to complete what he had commenced; James, no ministerial descendants as far as the record goes. The same remark may be made of the prominent church fathers, and even with modern ministers it is a rare thing that the prominent preacher has a prominent son. Charles Spurgeon's two boys illustrated the exception. People wonder why this fact is true.

The reason is not unreasonable. The explanation is not far to seek. The successful leaders in other professions are seldom followed by successful sons. Pitt the younger was one in ten thousand. Success on the father's part is a serious handicap for the children. No greater calamity ever befalls youth than that it be cast into the lap of luxury, into the house of honor, into the circle of social prestige.

Poverty is youth's hard master, but best teacher.

Want and hardship combine to conduct the world's best college. A diploma from "the university of hard knocks" is often promise of unusual success. Doubtless, Philip's daughters were the children of economy, adepts at daily duties. Sunday was sweet to them because it was the only holiday of the week; the church service was attractive because it was the social event of the same. There they met their friends. They were treated with favor because they were the children of the preacher himself. They occupied front seats in the assembly because all people paid respect to them, and the ministry became in their eyes an honored office. [47]

Then again, GOD was evidently with Philip, and when GOD is in the house, the children feel it and their decisions for life are affected by it.

When the day opens with family prayers, the curtains of night will very likely shut the petitioners into some quiet room where He can talk back in a still, small voice, showing them the way.

We almost envy Philip.

We think that the man whose son or daughter follows him in the ministry is favored of GOD. In our youthful lives and fleshly ambitions, we may desire sons who shall be prominent in one of the professions, statesmen, or great financiers, and daughters who shall be the belles of society, but the more sober thought of age and the more sure result of observation reverses all of this and convinces us that of all the possible vocations of life, the highest is that which the Son of Man Himself selected, namely to seek and to save the lost - the ministry of the evangel! [48]

~ end of chapter 3 ~
