

PHILIP, THE EVANGELIST

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KEY TEXTS:

Psalm 68:11 – “The Lord gave the word; great was the company of those who proclaimed it...”
Isaiah 52:7 – “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who proclaims peace, who brings glad tidings of good things, who proclaims salvation, who says to Zion, “Your God reigns!”

The word “evangelist” simply means “one who proclaims good news”. This role is different from the role of a prophet, a priest, a pastor or an apostle. A prophet is an inspired messenger with a particular message for a particular occasion. A priest is a go-between between God and the congregation. A priest performs routines of worship in the temple (or Church, in today’s context) and seeks to lead a life of quiet dignity and pious nobility in the community. A pastor is a shepherd, a person called by God to nurture, succour and lead a particular flock directed to him/her by God and kept together by God. An apostle is someone who is divinely commissioned to represent Christ. An evangelist is a person with a distinctive gift and passion for proclaiming the good news of salvation as found only in Jesus Christ. Philip was given the title of an evangelist after several years of this proof of his ministry. (Acts 21:8) The titles “evangelist” and “apostle” are not titles that anyone can grab overnight, the titles apply after a consistent trail of proofs!

Although the role of an evangelist is a distinct ministry (Ephesians 4:11), anyone who genuinely follows the Lord Jesus Christ will have some part to play in evangelism. Christ was God’s evangelist to a sinful world – a world that is filled with bad news. Jesus Christ was God’s Good News, and He still remains till today the only Good News of God. (Acts 4:12)

Evangelism Generally

An evangelist often does not have any other gift except the ability to lead people to faith in Jesus Christ. There is no hard terrain for an evangelist, the Spirit of God works through him/her to convince, convict and convert unbelievers and to make them accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour. The Spirit of God often leads evangelists to places and people that God had prepared beforehand for their audience. Usually, evangelism is not attended by signs and wonders, except when combined with the mission of an apostle. Similarly, the role of prophets, priests and pastors often does not come with a gift for performing miracles. However, God honours the word of His servants in several ways.

Evangelism in the New Testament – the Time of Jesus

The twelve apostles (and also later the seventy) sent by Christ – Matthew 10, Mark 6:7-13; Luke 9:1-6; Luke 10:1-16 were instructed to carry out certain tasks and to act in certain ways:

- They are to go to the lost sheep – Matthew 10:6
- They are to preach the kingdom of heaven – Matthew 10:7
- They are to perform miracles – Matthew 10:8; Luke 10:17-24
- They are to forgo material success, depend on others for their livelihood – Matthew 10:9-14

- Not everybody will accept them, they will even be persecuted – Matthew 10:14-18; 21-23
- The Spirit will grant them ability to evangelise, to preach – Matthew 10:19, 25-27
- They are not to fear death – Matthew 10:28-31; Luke 12:1-10

Evangelism in the New Testament – the Universal Commission

After His death, the Lord appeared several times to His apostles, and when the time came for these appearances to cease, He called them to Mount Olive somewhere around Bethany, just outside Galilee, and instructed them to “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...” (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-18; Luke 24:44-53) The disciples/apostles were instructed to carry out certain tasks and to act in certain ways:

- To go into all the world and preach the gospel – Mark 16:15
- To baptise in the name of the Father and the Son, and the Holy Spirit – Matthew 28:19
- To perform miracles – Mark 16:17-18

The universal commission is now the basis of evangelism for all who believe in the Lord. However, it still has to be said that evangelism is a distinct ministry, and that evangelists know themselves. All believers are to talk about Christ and seek to convert unbelievers by mentioning what Jesus achieved on the cross.

Evangelism in the New Testament – The Acts of the Apostles

Most of the apostles of the Lord and even newly appointed deacons performed the mission of evangelists. Even Timothy was encouraged to fulfil the role of an evangelist. (Acts 2:14; Acts 3:12; Acts 4:32-33; Acts 5:12-16; Acts 5:29-32; Acts 6:1-8; Acts 8:1-4; 2Timothy 4:5)

Philip, the Evangelist

The title “evangelist” was used for Philip. (Acts 21:8) Philip was one of the seven deacons appointed by the apostles early on in the Jerusalem Church. (Acts 6:1-6) Philip offered himself to act as a distributor of welfare provisions in the Church, but such was his faithfulness in this role that God appointed him to a “higher” role. He was the first person to witness to non-Jews. He actually went to Samaritans and preached Christ to them. (Acts 8:5-8). Christ actually sent him to the Samaritans! (Matthew 10:5; John 4:1-10)

Next, Philip was directed to the Ethiopian high official. (Acts 8:26-40) Philip’s marriage was blessed with four daughters who were prophetesses. (Acts 21:8-9)

What are the distinctive aspects of Philip’s life as an evangelist?

Timothy was encouraged to function in this capacity (2Timothy 4:5)