

**"HOW TO BE SURE
YOU ARE SERVING CHRIST TODAY"
SAINTS IN CIRCULATION
ACTS 6, 8, 21**

During the darkest hours of World War II, Britain faced a critical shortage of silver for the war industries. Informed of the crisis, Winston Churchill asked if there were any possible sources of silver, however remote. The answer came back, Yes, the churches, cathedrals, and abbeys held beautiful sterling silver statues of the saints. From Churchill came the now-famous reply, "Well, it's time to put the saints into circulation!" And so they did.

As we trudge through the blizzard of Christian issues, articles, conferences, and talk shows, what we truly need are glimpses of saints in circulation today. What does such a person look like? An ordinary man from the early church provides a portrait of true discipleship. His name was Philip. His story is told in the sixth and eighth chapters of Acts.

Philip translates discipleship of the First Century into a most imitable way of life. Let's just follow him through Acts, chapter eight and see that life! A saint in circulation is one who:

- 1. Suffers for the cause of Christ vs. 1-4**
- 2. Seeks out the unwanted for Christ v. 5**
- 3. Serves in the power of Christ vs. 6-13**
- 4. Stays sensitive to the Spirit of God v. 26**
- 5. Surrenders all glory to God vs. 26b-28**
- 6. Swiftly obeys God vs. 29-30**
- 7. Speaks only the Word of God vs. 30-35**

IF YOU ARE SERVING CHRIST TODAY YOU WILL BE A DISCIPLE AT ANY COST

The dust had scarcely settled from Stephen's stoning when Saul's crusade began. The persecution of the early church had now reached the ordinary believer. Acts records the scene: "but Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison" (Acts 8:3). It was time to fade into the woodwork or face the high cost of

discipleship. Like sparks from a brush fire, the glowing lives scattered in all directions.

One of those who chose to keep on was Philip. It would have been easy to leave town and start life over as an anonymous believer. But, as a true disciple, PHILIP WAS WILLING TO SUFFER FOR THE CAUSE OF CHRIST. He joined those who, though separated and scattered throughout the land, preached the word wherever they went, at any cost.

IF YOU ARE SERVING CHRIST TODAY YOU WILL BE MINISTERING TO THE UNLOVELY

The next facet of first-century discipleship is implicit in Philip's destination: "Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Christ there" (Acts 8:5). Not only was he a disciple at any cost, he was also WILLING TO MINISTER TO EVEN THE MOST UNWANTED. Samaria was no ordinary town. In 722 BC, seven centuries before Philip's birth, the Assyrians leveled the northern kingdom of Israel. Samaria was the capital city of that kingdom. Shalmaneser V, the conquering Assyrian king, was a wise ruler. To be sure there would be no further trouble, he deported all capable Israelites. Then he resettled captive peoples from other conquered lands among the poor, sick, and crippled who were left in the northern kingdom.

From this infusion of foreigners came a racially mixed people: half Jew, half Gentile. Called Samaritans, they were hated by the "pure" Jews. Seven hundred years had only amplified the abhorrence of these half-breeds. Behind Philip's journey to Samaria is a key to a true discipleship. Philip was no respecter of persons. As James said so forcefully, "...as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, DON'T SHOW FAVORITISM" (Jas. 2:1). Philip didn't; he was willing not only to suffer for the cause of Christ, but also to go to the most unwanted and share the good news.

What did Jesus say was the greatest identifying mark of all in a disciple? Love. "By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples" - if you do what? "If ye have love one to another." One of the greatest illustrations of this was on the television special "James Emory Bond." It was an entire one-hour interview with a black man who was an ex-truck driver. He was in his seventies at the time of the interview. Apparently he lived in Baltimore. One night he watched a panel discussion with some of the city leaders, mayor, chief of police and others on television. They discussed the race and juvenile delinquency problems in Baltimore. As he watched, his heart was really moved.

The next day he went down to the television station. He wanted to talk to somebody because he had been so moved by their discussion. He said he knew the answer, but he didn't know whom to tell. At the station they had the good sense not only to interview him, but also to videotape it. All you saw was this grey-haired gentleman as he answered questions coming from off camera.

He said, among other things, that when he was a young fellow growing up on the edge of Baltimore, the white boys would throw rocks at him as he was on his way to school. He began to hate white people. As a young man he started working as a truck driver. One morning when he saw the milk truck go by, he thought how nice it would be if he could just have a little milk before he went to work in the morning.

He stopped the milkman, who was a white man, one day and asked him if he would leave him a quart of milk. He said, "No, I don't deliver milk to niggers."

"So," Bond said, "I called up the milk company, and I asked the man I talked with if this was true, that they didn't give milk to black people. He said, "No, that's not right. We do deliver milk to black people, and we'll see that he delivers the milk."

"So," he said, "the milk came, a quart each morning. Several weeks went by and I realized that he wasn't leaving me a bill, and I wanted to pay for it. So I stopped him one morning and said, 'I want you to give me a bill so I can pay for this.' And the milkman said, 'I don't take money from niggers.' So I said, 'Well, I've got to pay you, you've just got to let me pay you.'

"Well," the milkman said, "tell you what you do. You put the money on the fence post."

James Emory Bond said, "I thought I'd have a little fun with him, so I said, 'Now I won't feel like I paid you unless I put it in your hand.' 'Nossir,' he said, 'put it on the post.' So I said, 'O.K.' And I put it on the post. When the milkman reached out to take the change, I just laid my hand on top of his. And he jerked it away."

Then he said, "Later on, one of God's servants by the name of Billy Sunday came to our town, and he told how Jesus Christ died on the cross to take away men's sin and his enmity of heart toward his fellowman. As I heard that, I realized that I needed this, and I walked the sawdust trail. And you know, God took the hate out of my heart for the white man. He put love there."

Apparently, a few days later, unknown to him, the milkman went to hear Billy Sunday. He went forward in the meeting, received Christ, and a couple days later pulled up in front of James Emory Bond's little place. With tears streaming down his face, he apologized for the way he had treated him. And this dear old black man said, "I have loved him, and he has loved me ever since."

Now that's what discipleship means. There is a mark of a disciple. Bearing fruit in the work of Christ. "By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another." When we begin to see more disciples sprinkled around America and around the world, what a difference it will make! Real genuine disciples who will turn the world upside down. There are many already, and we ought to be praying for them.

A few years ago the need for this kind of discipleship became very real to me. Our church was canvassing a federal housing project on a 108-degree day. My team was already in the van with the air-conditioner running when I tapped lightly on the door of the last unit in the complex. The door opened and I pushed in a flyer and turned to go. A voice stopped my retreat. One of the

saddest young men I had ever seen invited me into the squalid apartment. The odor was incredible. Three small, filthy children cowered around their indecently-clad mother. In those moments I felt true revulsion that was transformed into God-given compassion. When I emerged twenty minutes later, I left behind two new creatures in Christ. The unwed couple came to church on Sunday, made a public confession of faith, were married that week, and joined our fellowship.

IF YOU ARE SERVING CHRIST TODAY YOU WILL BE SERVING IN CHRIST'S POWER

Acts 8:6-8 records that Philip went on to be a mighty instrument in God's hand. When God puts His saints in circulation He does so to demonstrate His power through them. Philip became a living example to the outcasts in Samaria of the Messiah's transforming power. Persecution didn't stop him. Racial bias didn't deflect him. he SERVED IN THE POWER OF CHRIST, and they received the message gladly. Luke writes, "When the crowds heard Philip and saw the miraculous signs he did, they all paid close attention to what he said.... So there was great joy in that city" (Acts 8:6,8).

Notice what happens next. As do all marvelous works of God, Philip's ministry attracts attention. A citywide revival is hard to keep quiet. The parade begins. Verses 9-13 introduce Simon, a fake who wants to imitate the truth for gain. then the apostles in Jerusalem send Peter and John to check out the situation.

IF YOU ARE SERVING CHRIST TODAY YOU WILL BE LISTENING TO THE STILL SMALL VOICE OF GOD'S SPIRIT.

But in the midst of all the attention he is receiving, Philip exhibits a remarkable quality. He has reached the make-it-or-break-it point for every saint God sends into circulation. It comes so quietly that all whose ears are attuned only to the sound of applause, the whirl of activity, or the hope of fame, never hear it. "Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip..." (Acts 8:26). In the midst of the biggest revival since Pentecost, Philip has not lost an ear for God. The din of accomplishment cannot muffle the voice of God. A true-hearted saint he is, for HE LISTENS.

IF YOU ARE SERVING CHRIST TODAY YOU WILL BE GIVING GOD THE GLORY

The message he hears is shocking. So brief, but so hard. "Go south to the road -- the desert road -- that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza" (Acts 8:26). To get the significance of the order, we need to drop back more than three hundred years. Alexander the Great had found a surefire method to conquer the world: fear. When his armies marched into an area, he led them to the city gates demanding unconditional surrender. When the inhabitants refused, his armies swiftly destroyed the city and the people. To make the message very

clear, Alexander ordered the city scraped from its foundation and dumped as a crumbled pile of rubble next to its former site. Then, he marched to the neighboring city and pointed back. It worked! The conquest moved from west to east with lightning speed.

Gaza faced Alexander in 332 BC. No one survived. to this day, a mound marks the site of that original foundation. Two hundred years after Alexander, the Romans rebuilt Gaza on the coast. So there were two Gazas: one a beautiful coastal town, the other a pile of rubble. To the latter God's man was sent.

Philip SURRENDERED ALL THE GLORY TO GOD. Without a stir, without evidence of a second thought, he set out for Gaza (Acts 8:27). Behind him lay a dream ministry. With God's power working through him, he had seen evil spirits cast out and paralytics walk. As he preached the good news, people responded with great joy. He began the work in that Samaritan city, and it was his -- or was it? No, as with all who find their lives in Christ, his perspective was, not I but Christ, not mine but His (Gal. 2:20). Not my ministry, church, idea, or plan, but unreservedly His. So Philip led the way down an ancient path God's true disciples have often trod. The sandals of Enoch, Noah, Moses, David, Daniel, and many an unnamed hero of the faith have kicked up the dust of self-denial and followed this path of surrendering all glory to God.

Once the question of who gets the glory is settled, the pace quickens. "So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch.... The Spirit told Philip, 'Go to that chariot and stay near it'. Then Philip RAN up to the chariot" (Acts 8:27, 29-30). When a person listens to God and gives Him the glory, SWIFT OBEDIENCE is always next.

God doesn't have any part-timers. He calls men to complete self-denial and obedience. That's discipleship. When that quality of life translates into the everyday world, a saint enters circulation. God had an appointment so important that only an attuned, humble and obedient servant could keep it. That rendezvous was with an open, hungry heart.

IF YOU ARE SERVING CHRIST TODAY YOU WILL BE SPEAKING THE WORD OF GOD

In that day hundreds of thousands of the faithful ascended to the Holy City at Passover. Among them was this Ethiopian official. Having traveled five hundred miles from ancient Nubia, he was a genuine seeker of God. After his visit to Jerusalem, where he may have obtained a copy of the Isaiah scroll, a searching heart headed home. For this moment God had prepared just the right servant. With an overflowing zeal that comes from a God-filled life, Philip asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" (Acts 8:30).

In our modern world we busily read the paper, billboards, the package our lunch came in, and a myriad of other printed media. Their messages barely penetrate our conscious mental processes. But when the ancients read, they did so for only one purpose. In ancient schools students were taught to take the words of one worthy to be read and to "know again what they knew as they wrote." In fact, that is the literal meaning of the word "reading" used in verse 28. In his heart and mind, the Ethiopian was seeking to know again what Isaiah knew as he wrote those words seven hundred years before.

"How can I," he responded to Philip's query, "unless someone explains it to me?" So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him" (Acts 8:31). What next? how will this disciple who is unafraid of persecution, unhindered by favoritism, unstoppable in God's power, who displays undeflectable loyalty to God's glory, sensitivity to God's direction, and swift obedience to His command--how will such a servant respond? With the next mark of a circulating saint's life: he **SPOKE THE WORD OF GOD** to him. Verse 35 doesn't say he recited the gospel presentation he learned at the First Church of Jerusalem. No, he began right where the seeker was. "Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus" (Acts 8:35). That is where true evangelism starts and finishes -- with the good news about Jesus, the One who bore our punishment.

The man believed, was baptized and went on his way. Note the last word of verse 39: the Ethiopian went on his way "rejoicing." No clinging to Philip and begging him to go on with him. No tearful wrenching apart of messenger and receiver. when people take their eyes off the messenger and see the Master, they don't look back. Philip's life **POINTED MEN TO CHRIST**.

IF YOU ARE SERVING CHRIST TODAY YOU WILL BE SERVING UNTIL THE END

What does Philip do next? He just **GOES ON SERVING CHRIST**, wherever he is. Scripture says he "traveled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea" (Acts 8:40). We find him again in Acts 21:8, faithfully serving the Lord as host to the man who drove him out of his home in Jerusalem. Paul, formerly Saul, the persecutor, came to enjoy this dear saint's fellowship. They must have had some long talks about those early days and how faithfully God had led in each of their lives.

How does the life of this faithful first-century disciple speak to us today? Saints in circulation in any age, if they are minted by God, are characterized by the same qualities. They are willing to pay any price to serve God. They are willing to seek out even the undesirable and share Christ with them. they serve in the power of Christ. They are ever aware of the still, small voice of God in His Word. They give up any claim to personal commendation and reflect the glory back to the only One who deserves it. They are marked by swift obedience to God's commands. When given the opportunity to confront a seeking heart

they speak God's Word. In ministry, they point each one to Christ. Finally, they keep on serving God anywhere and anytime, as long as their lives endure.

Quite a portrait. Quite a challenge. But, first-century-style discipleship is not unattainable. We serve the One who prayed to Our Father, "I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I MYSELF MAY BE IN THEM" (Jn. 17:26). What is a saint in circulation? Nothing less than a living representation of Christ in the world. Are you?

1. If You Are Serving Christ Today You Will Be A Disciple At Any Cost
2. If You Are Serving Christ Today You Will Be Ministering To The Unlovely
3. If You Are Serving Christ Today You Will Be Serving In Christ's Power
4. If You Are Serving Christ Today You Will Be Listening To The Still Small Voice Of God's Spirit.
5. If You Are Serving Christ Today You Will Be Giving God The Glory
6. If You Are Serving Christ Today You Will Be Speaking The Word Of God
7. If You Are Serving Christ Today You Will Be Serving Until The End