*DEVOTIONAL*

January 8 - 13

*Philip’s Witness*

**Monday, January 8 Acts 8:4-17**

*“Philip went to a city in Samaria”*

Among the witnesses who went out from Jerusalem was Philip. He went to Samaria and preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ. Great joy resulted from Philip’s ministry, though we are not told the exact reason for the joy. Was it the result of conversion or of so many people being healed? Luke introduces Simon the sorcerer, a man who performed great works through his magic and had a big following. He was amazed by what he saw in Philip’s ministry, and he too believed and was baptized.

Peter and John are sent from the church in Jerusalem to check out what is happening in Samaria. When the apostles arrive, they pray for the Samaritan believers that they might receive the Holy Spirit. Apparently Philip had baptized them in the name of the Lord Jesus, but not in the name of the Holy Spirit. Why this was so we are not told but, regardless of the reason for the Spirit’s omission by Philip, the actions of the apostles makes it clear that the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit is essential to living the Christian life.

*By faith you have saved me, Lord, and your Spirit lives in me. Amen.*

**Tuesday, January 9 John 4:1-26**

*“Jesus came to the Samaritan village of Sychar”*

On his way north from Judea to Galilee, Jesus goes through the region of Samaria where he meets a Samaritan woman who is of questionable moral character. In this culture it was highly irregular for a man with Jesus’ profile to speak with anyone possessing such features. He is male, single, religious, and Jewish, and clearly defined social boundaries ought to keep him from speaking with this woman. Jesus, however, is guided not by social norms but by the ministry that his heavenly Father has given him.

Jesus arrives at the well, sits on the wall at its edge to relieve his fatigue, and presents an unavoidable obstacle to a woman who has come to get water. The conversation between Jesus and the woman brings her from earthly thoughts (well water) to heavenly realities (living water). In verses 7-15 Jesus explores the meaning of living water; in verses 16-26 he discusses the sinful life of the woman and talks about true worship. Will she understand the gift of God and its giver? Will she ask for living water?

*May our social boundaries, Lord, not be an obstacle to sharing the Gospel. Amen.*

**Wednesday, January 10 Acts 8:18-25**

*“Simon offered money to buy this power”*

Simon is attracted by what happened through laying on of hands by the apostles. He is not interested in his own receiving the Spirit; what he wants is the ability to lay hands on people with similar results. His offer of money for this ability evokes a strong response from Peter. His point is that this is a gift that God gives as he chooses according to his good purposes; we human beings cannot manipulate God into giving us what we desire. That is what happens in Simon’s magic kingdom, not in God’s righteous kingdom.

Simon is an example of misplaced religion. He believed and was baptized, but it was obviously an inadequate belief. He sought God’s power without any apparent interest in developing a relationship with God. In verse 24 he gives Peter an inadequate reason to pray for him. He does not express a desire to be right with God; he does not humble himself before God, confess his sin, and ask for forgiveness. Rather, he hopes that Peter can use his influence to shield him from punishment.

*May I never desire your power, Lord, for my own selfish reasons. Amen.*

*DEVOTIONAL*

January 8 - 13

*Philip’s Witness*

**Thursday, January 11 2 Kings 5:1-27**

*“I will run after him and get something from him”*

The story of Naaman has three distinct divisions. The first division deals with the healing of Naaman (vv. 1-14); it describes how the words of a young maiden come to restore the skin of the leprous general. The second division (vv. 15-19) shows how someone whose skin has returned to health then returns to thank and attempt to reward his healer. In the process he is both physically and spiritually transformed.

In the final section (vv. 20-27), the humility and generosity of Naaman is starkly contrasted with the presumptuousness and greed of Gehazi. While the foreigner submits to the prophet and follows the prophet’s instruction, Gehazi the servant of the prophet takes matters into his own hands in doing what seems right to him. While Naaman the foreigner has sought God’s favor and turned to him, Gehazi the Israelite has given in to his greed and rejected the decision of God’s prophet to refrain from accepting a reward for God’s healing. The humble foreigner is healed, but the greedy Israelite is afflicted with disease.

*We are not to profit, Lord, from the work of our heavenly Father. Amen.*

**Friday, January 12 Acts 8:26-40**

*“Then Philip . . . preached Jesus to him”*

The key to Philip’s witness was his obedience. When God asked him to go to the desert road, he went even though the command seemed an odd one. When he was asked to go to the chariot and stay near it, he obeyed again. Through his obedience the Lord opened a door for Philip to be a witness. Philip discovered that the Ethiopian had been prepared by God before he even spoke to him. We too can expect this as we share Christ with others. This doesn’t always happen, of course, but it happens often enough for us to realize that God can lead us to people whom he has already prepared to listen to what we have to say.

Philip started his gospel presentation from where the Ethiopian was, that is, with the question whether the eunuch understood what he was reading. Then Philip gave the eunuch an opportunity to ask more questions. From that point, Philip took him to where he needed to be in terms of knowing the facts of the gospel. Often people are not interested in the questions we think that the gospel answers. Thus, we need to start with what they recognize as their questions.

*Your Spirit, Lord, leads me to people who need to hear your gospel. Amen.*

**Saturday, January 13 Isaiah 53:1-12**

*“He was oppressed and afflicted”*

As early as Philip’s encounter with the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26-40; see above), Christians have understood that Jesus Christ is the one about whom Isaiah is speaking in this chapter. The congruence with Jesus’ life is remarkable for a text written some 600 years before he walked the earth. Jesus did indeed appear on the earth without any kind of fanfare or dominating presence. He was horribly disfigured, as all descriptions of the facts of crucifixion make plain. He did go to his death without any protest about its manifest injustice and without any attempt to defend himself, going so far as to ask Peter if he would have him disobey his Father’s will (John 18:11).

The prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane makes it clear that his death was indeed the Father’s will. And his own words, uttered at the Last Supper, demonstrate that he understood his death to be an offering for the forgiveness of sins: “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” (Matthew 26:28). Further, his death will not be the end of him for “he will see the light of life and be satisfied.”

*We give witness, Lord, to your death and resurrection. Amen.*