

Title: “Quick to Listen. Bold to Move.” January 14, 2018 Pastor Dave Sattler Series: “Missions Month — Understanding Our Neighbourhoods”

Text: Acts 8:4-40, Philip, The Evangelist Sources: NIV Life Application Bible.

Commentaries: F.F. Bruce, I. Howard Marshall, & Grant Osborne. Books: “unChristian” by David Kinnaman, “What Happened to Christian Canada?” by Mark Noll, “Is Jesus Your Personal Saviour? In Search of Canadian Evangelicalism in the 1990s” by G.A. Rawlyk, & “Missionary Messages” by A.B. Simpson. Coffee: Steve Hamer-Jackson, Brazza, 1/11/2018. Lecture: Ray Bakke, Regent, 5/10/2017.

I. Introduction:

- Good morning, everyone. <Slide>
- I’m Dave Sattler, one of the pastors here at NSAC today launching our 5th Annual Missions Month. This year’s focus? — “Understanding our Neighbourhoods.”
- Here’s a vision. In Acts 8:8, Luke writes, “So there was great joy in that city.”
- The Messiah had been “proclaimed” (5). This was the Good News the “crowds” (6) longed to hear. And, people responded and “joy” resounded in Samaria!
- The Bible actually has a lot to say about God’s mission to cities like Vancouver.
- Yet, for Christ-followers, it’s difficult to see our offices, our schools, our recreation spaces, our streets ... as places where God is at work.
- Resistant to any hint of the Christian Story, most Vancouver-ites are not waking up on a Sunday wanting to, or even thinking about going to church.
- People may call themselves “spiritual,” but not “religious.”
- For this next three weeks, we’ll focus on listening our way into the culture, seeking to find the footprints of the Holy Spirit so we might continue to “express the love and hope” of Jesus to family, friends, & neighbours.
- And we trust God will further grow our mission hearts. Together.

- <Slide> So, what’s happened to the Christian Church in Canada in 150 years?
- Not much on the topic. Arcane. Understood by few. One historian calls it a “considerable puzzle.” — Noll, p.57 These next weeks I’ll attempt to give a summary.
- ILL - Today, we’ll take a brief look at the Church during Canada’s first 50 years.
 - In 1867, the year of Confederation, about 4 million people called Canada home. A census taken 4 years later noted ... just over 40% of Canadians were Roman Catholic and just over 50% Protestant.
 - Out of those nearly 2 million Protestants, “virtually all Methodists, Presbyterians, and Baptists, and ... Anglicans, would have ... describe[d] themselves as evangelicals.” — Rawlyk, p.33
- The basic meaning of the term, ‘evangelical?’ — People who hold to the authority of the Bible, believe in the historical Jesus, and trust that salvation comes alone through faith in Christ and His work on the cross.
- By the latter part of the nineteenth century, Darwin’s theory of evolution, higher biblical criticism, comparative religions, and emerging industrial advances called these core beliefs of many self-identified evangelicals into question.
- Consequently, many Canadian evangelicals abandoned the faith of their parents and sought salvation in ‘scientific inquiry.’ Often secretly, while still attending church to ‘keep up appearances.’

- Others turned to the ‘antithesis’ of Christianity: a gospel of consumerism.
- Protestant churches attempted to combat these modern cultural shifts. And, as Canadian Church historian, George Rawlyk puts it,
 - Q: “... evangelical [church] leadership put more stress on ... religion of the head and less on religion of the heart, and [people] easily succumbed ... to the materialistic delights of late Victorian Canada.” – Goldwin French in Rawlyk, p.11/12.
- Clark Pinnock calls this the “modernist impulse.” Effects of which are still being felt today in Canadian church culture and across our nation. – Pinnock in Rawlyk, p.33.
- **<Slide>** Now, let’s turn to our text: Acts 8, pg. 889-90 in the blue Bibles.
- And, our focus for today: Philip, the Evangelist. When I hear the name ‘Philip,’ I can’t help but think of, Q: ‘My husband and I.’ Dear old, Queen Elizabeth II!
- Philip’s ministry resume is noteworthy. First, this is not the Duke of Edinburgh, Philip; or the disciple of Jesus, Philip. This Philip is a Jew, with Greek heritage, who’s first introduced earlier in Acts as a deacon, appointed to administer the ‘Care Fund’ in the Jerusalem Church. A ‘gritty’ role, he had the important job of daily dispersing food fairly among poor widows of different ethnicities – women cast off by society and completely dependent on the church’s benevolence for basic needs.
- Philip, “full of the Spirit and wisdom” (6:3). Interesting the church’s first evangelist and missionary came right from there – a ‘tough’ ministry ‘in the trenches.’
- Let’s pick up the story in Acts 8:4-21/26-40. [READ]
- PRAY: ‘Lord, move me out of the way. Come, speak to us by Your Spirit. Move us as people of Your mission in our city. We’re hungry to hear from You. Amen.’

II. Narrative & Teaching Outline:

1. **<Slide> Out of the Comfort Zone (Acts 8:4-5)**

- Acts 8 begins with reports of “great persecution” against the church (1) ‘flushing’ the apostles out of the friendly confines of their city. And Philip becomes the first recorded to preach the Gospel outside Jerusalem.
- Timeline. Three to five years have passed since the ascension, when Jesus commissioned His disciples ...
 - o Q: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” – cf. Acts 1:8
- It was high time for the mission to get rolling. Persecution brought ‘discomfort.’
- This moved God’s people out and they “scattered” (4). Some, no doubt, unwillingly.
- APP - Counter-intuitive, especially to our western mindset,
 - o But discomfort is not necessarily a bad thing. God can and sometimes does use trouble, pain, weakness ... to shake us. Or, He might urge us out of our comforts into a ‘storm’ ... to shake our complacency or push us into special tasks in which we have no other choice but to trust in Him.
- **<Slide>** ILL - Spring of 1997, I had been Youth Pastor in Surrey for five years.
 - o Great things happening. Kids getting saved. Lives transformed.

- o And God came calling: ‘Go to the North Shore. Move your family. Leave this behind.’
- o And I resisted, ‘God, things are good. We own a house. We love it here.’
- o But God kept on it. He’s kind of like that. Gently. Firmly. Calling us out of our comfort zone.
- o And we went. Definitely not easy. But right — God-ordained. Beautiful.
- This is often God’s way. Here’s the point: **the discomfort of our obedience is far more satisfying than the comfort of our disobedience.**
- I wonder, AQ: How open are we to God’s calling us out of our comfortable situations? Into new places where He wants to use us to reach others?
- <Slide> And, look where Philip went! “To a city in Samaria” (5). Of all places!
- Samaritans were ‘half-breeds’ — pious Jews, yes, but at the bottom of the socio-economic chain. Having survived as POWs during one of the wars with Assyria, they’d inter-married with foreigners, enemies of Israel, to form a mixed race.
- Intense hatred existed between pure Jews in Jerusalem and Samaritans.
- ILL - Sadly prejudice has plagued the church since its inception.
 - o In his c.2010 book, unChristian, David Kinnaman says, Christians in North America are viewed by ‘outsiders’ as, Q: “judgmental, bigoted, & homophobic.” Quite a sober assessment.
- APP - Why would God send Philip there first?! — Well, if He wants to show arrogant Jewish Christians that He’s come for all people, Samaritans are a good place to start. Begg the question, AQ: Where is your ‘Samaria?’ The place that puts rage or fear in your heart? The people around whom you feel most uncomfortable?
- The Christian Story always calls us next to people different from us — some we might not even like, or ever choose to be friends with. Here, when we open our hearts, God longs to love even those people through us. And, it’s wonderful!
- This is the Good News of Jesus in action.

2. <Slide> Breakthroughs & Opposition (Acts 8:6-21)

- ILL - When I was 19, I was on an unforgettable Missions Team ...
 - o To the 1988 Winter Olympics in Calgary.
 - o The leader of our team was Ray Matheson, Dean of Students at our school. And gifted evangelist. Secretly, we called him, ‘One-A-Day Ray.’
 - o You’ll soon see why. For ten days we had front-row seats to watch this godly man in action and I’ve been impacted ever since.
 - o Seemed wherever Ray went — on transit, in the shopping mall, at the Olympic Plaza, he could strike up a conversation with anyone.
 - o And essentially 3 things would happen: Ray would connect deeply with people at a heart level. He always pointed them to Jesus. And lots got saved! Ray now lives in Calgary and I’m told he’s still doing this.
- The “crowds ... all paid close attention” to [Philip] (6).
- Some were delivered from “evil spirits” and “many ... were healed” (7).

- Many “believed” in Jesus and were “baptized” (12).
- These spiritual breakthroughs ... caused “great joy” in Samaria (8).
- Evidently, the people had previously fallen under the spell of a charlatan called Simon, who’d “amazed them ... with his sorcery” (9-12).
- Simon himself even “believed and was baptized” (13). Though this may have been short-lived. Wanting a piece of the action, Simon offers to “buy” the “ability” to confer the Holy Spirit on people. Of course, his request is flatly denied, Q: ‘Impossible! You can’t “buy the gift of God with money!’” (20) Peter replies.
- As is often the case when God breaks through, confusion or opposition pops up.
- **<Slide>** ILL - It’s always exciting when God breaks through among the youth ...
 - Of our church and city. Cool things are happening right now that Pastor Brendan will highlight next Sunday.
 - Back in my Youth Pastor days, in the late 90s, many of our youth were active reaching their friends for Jesus. In respectful, impactful ways.
 - At one school, however, our students fell under the wrath of the administration who banned the wearing of their ‘NSA Youth, Jesus Can-Opener T-Shirts.’
 - Crazy when you consider what other youth were wearing to school!
 - Undeterred, our students stuck to their mission.
 - The principal showed up for work one morning, and there in front of the school, a group of students, who’d woken up very early, had gathered to pray. When questioned, the students said, “We were praying for you and for the school.” This seemed to melt the principal’s heart a little.
- Reality is: the Good News of Jesus Christ threatens our world’s power-structures.
- It challenges strongholds, systems, and people — particularly those of influence.
- **<Slide>** ILL - Talking with a friend this week about opposition to sharing Christ.
 - He said, Q: “Early in my journey, I feared the same rejection and judgment I put on Christians prior to becoming a Christian myself. What has allowed me to move past this fear is that I now understand God may use me in His plan, but He alone can change someone’s heart. I’m 100% certain He can’t use me if I don’t live and speak the truth when I get the chance. Trust, patience, and faith in His will is what is required of me, not establishing my own agenda for people I wish to see come to Christ. This understanding has allowed me to share my belief without fearing the rejection that often follows.” — Steve Hamer-Jackson, 1/11/2018.
- Good stuff! Opposition mustn’t stop us.

3. **<Slide> Quick to Listen (Acts 8:26-27a)**

- Again, God has a plan to re-locate Philip.
- At the apex of his success in Samaria, “the angel of the Lord says, “Philip, [leave town] ‘Go south to the desert road ... to Gaza.’” (26) My response: What?! After all I’ve done for you here, God. Sounds like a demotion.’

- ILL - Reminds me of my childhood pastor.
 - Fred Taubensee, at good old Mary Hill Baptist Church in Port Coquitlam.
 - And the story he'd tell of how, in his late 20s, he'd received a call from God to be a pastor. Fearing the ministry, like Jonah, Fred ran the other way! Until a few years later, he was in a bad car accident and seriously hurt. Lost an eye. He felt God stop him right there and change his heart.
 - And I remember Pastor Fred reminding us, Q: 'Always listen to God.'
- Beginning of v.27, Philip "started out." Simple obedience. He's quick to listen.
- <Slide> APP - Notice throughout, God's progressive instruction.
- There's this sweet, ongoing 'dance' between Philip and the Holy Spirit.
- God doesn't reveal the entire mission all at once. It comes step-by-step.
- And this is good. For knowing the whole thing can sometimes 'paralyze' us — or cause us to 'toss in the towel' early and justify our lack of action because we think we 'don't have what it takes.'
- Most of the time God just wants us to 'get our feet moving.' Be willing to take that first step. Off the couch. Across the cubicle. Over the driveway. Into the coffee shop. Knock on the door. Strike up a conversation.
- ILL - Years ago, I was laying on the couch at home. I'm good at that!
 - And I looked outside and saw my next-door neighbour in his backyard.
 - In that moment, I knew God wanted me to go talk to him. I resisted, 'It's my day off! I talked to tons of people at church yesterday!' But God's call stuck there. And eventually I gave in, got up, & went over. Turns out my neighbour's father had just died. He was hurting. And open.
 - A few days later I conducted the funeral for his dad and got to share the gospel with the family. I'd like to say they all got saved.
 - Not yet, but it did help take our relationship to another level.
 - That was 17 years ago. We've moved twice since.
 - And just 3 months ago, I had the privilege of doing their son's wedding.
 - Now, I've officiated many weddings, but this one was full of non-Christians (you could see faces look down or glaze over when I mentioned 'Jesus'), but I sensed the Spirit moving that afternoon as I shared the Good News of Jesus with 100 wedding guests.
- I find it so difficult, but I want to be quick to listen to God.
- I have never felt regret when I've taken that first step I know God is asking me to take. I have only felt regret when I haven't.

4. <Slide> **Bold to Move (Acts 8:27b-40)**

- Next we're introduced to a "sexually-altered Ethiopian Finance Minister," a Gentile, returning from a spiritual pilgrimage to Jerusalem and "reading" aloud from "the book of Isaiah" (28). — Ray Bakke, 5/10/2017.
- God was clearly preparing the Ethiopian Eunuch for this encounter with Philip.
- APP - And it's important to realize: people aren't as far away from God as they may appear. On first glance it's easy to see all the barriers. To look at family, friends,

and neighbours, listen to their talk, hear their ideologies, or watch their lifestyle, and simply give up. Thinking, Q: ‘They’re so far off from the gospel; they’ll never want to hear what I believe.’

- Sure, there’s some truth to that, but ... the greater truth is: God is so much bigger and up to way more than we are ever able to see in the natural.
 - Refusing to focus on all the walls between them — vocation, religion, ethnic background, net worth, and the sheer fact he was likely very sweaty, on foot in the desert, Philip, instead of bolting, “ran up to the chariot” (30).
 - <Slide> APP - So, what’s your ‘passing chariot?’ And, who’s in it?
 - Your work colleague who’s said at lunch, Q: ‘I’m worried about my job.’ ‘I think my wife might leave me.’ ‘I’ve been drinking a lot lately?’
 - Or, is it that friend at school who messaged, Q: ‘I’m confused about my sexuality.’ ‘I’m super-stressed about my future.’ ‘I just feel really alone right now?’
 - Or, is it that person at your gym new to Canada who said, Q: ‘I’m need a job.’ ‘I really like tennis.’ ‘English is very hard?’
 - Or, is it your neighbour who mentioned recently, Q: ‘My basement flooded last week.’ ‘My husband’s very sick.’ ‘Now that I’m retired I’m not sure what to do?’
 - <Slide> Moments later, Philip was “invited to sit.” A ‘door’ was open (31).
 - APP - I love how many of you are already doing this: making time to sit with people. Amidst all sorts of circumstances. And simply engaging in conversation.
 - This demands willingness to sacrifice busy-ness for the ‘inconvenience’ of stopping everything else you’re doing and giving the precious gift of your time to people.
 - Not to mention the risk. In post-Christian, keep-your-faith-private, West Coast urban culture, you are exposing yourself to the possibility of hard rejection.
 - But, like Philip, boldly following the Spirit’s lead, you are listening to where people are at. And, you are pointing people to Jesus. Steadily. Lovingly. Beautifully.
 - Many of you have even invited friends to church recently.
 - Way to go! God is using you. Mightily.
 - Ethiopia was far away. On the Nile. Below Egypt.
 - ILL - The famous Greek poet, Homer, in his work, *Odyssey*, refers to Ethiopians as,
 - Q: “the last of men” — people ‘living on the edge of the ancient world.’
 - Homer in Bruce, p.170
 - As a result of this man’s conversion, just as Jesus had told His disciples in Acts 1:8, the Gospel would find its way to “the [very] ends of the earth.”
 - APP - And God wants to do the same with us. Reaching out to all sorts of people in this city, who will take the Good News of Jesus to the ends of the earth. Amen.
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- We turn now to the Lord’s Supper. Jesus called His disciples together the night before He went to the cross. To share a sacred meal that illustrated all that He would do for them. And us. The bread, His body sacrificed for us. The cup, a symbol of His blood poured out for the forgiveness of our sins. To make relationship with God possible.
 - <Silence> Come by yourself, with friend or family member. Row by row. Rip & dip.