

# “Around the Bases: Κηρυγμα”

Acts 8:26-40 <sup>1</sup>

We’ve had a bit of a break in the sequence, but today we complete our journey “around the bases” of our church ministry structure: WORSHIP; CONNECT; GROW; SERVE; and GO. This time around, we’ve been looking at the Greek words often connected with each of these functions: *Leiturgia* (λειτουργια); *Koinonia* (κοινωνια); *Didache* (διδαχη); *Diakonia* (διακονια); and now, *Kerygma* (κηρυγμα).

While this GO/MISSION/Kerygma part of our congregational life has many purposes, its *central* purpose is creating avenues for communication of the Good News of Jesus with the world. Sometimes we create such channels through meeting human needs in Jesus’ Name, such as at Route One or the Coalition for Compassion. Sometimes we create such channels through outreach activities such as Backyard Bible Clubs or youth camps in Jamaica. But the *central* purpose of our personal and corporate MISSION is to share the Good News of Jesus and lead others toward faith in Him. Such sharing is often called “evangelism,” which comes from the Latin word *evangelium*, which comes from the Greek Word ευαγγελιον, which means “good news.”<sup>2</sup> So now you know!

What’s the first image that comes to your mind when you hear the word “evangelism”? One of the things I remember is an evangelist who approached my table at the Southern Baptist Convention in Dallas thirty years ago. He was wearing a bright blue sport coat, a white shirt, a red tie, and white trousers, and he sported white patent leather shoes on one end and a bodacious toupee on the other. Can’t you just hear him asking, “Brother, do you know *Jaeezus?*”

Now most vocational evangelists aren’t like that fellow, but you’ve seen plenty of guys like him on TV and in other places, have you not? Such stereotypes notwithstanding, “evangelism” is nothing more than the Greek word for “good news”; and “evangelists” are persons who bring good news.

The idea of evangelism is that once I know the Good News—that God loves me and has a purpose and plan for my life—God wants me to tell other people about what I’ve discovered. As it’s sometimes put, “Evangelism is one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread.”

As I’ve noted many times, God’s purpose in each of our lives is to so shape our character that we’re willing, ready, and eager to spend eternity with God. And God’s parallel purpose on earth is to populate this planet with persons who of their own free will choose to join their lives together in a community of relationships that only God can build—the Body of Christ, the Church. This is not “Mission Impossible.” This is “Mission Inevitable.” This has been God’s plan even before Creation began, *and it’s going to happen.*<sup>3</sup>

The amazing thing, the wonderful thing, the truly *exciting* thing about this plan is that God has given us—to you and me!—the task and opportunity of completing it. The Bible tells us that God “*wants everyone to be saved and to understand the truth*” (1 Timothy 2:4), and our mission is to “tell the truth” in all the ways and in all the places where God sends us. Telling the Good News—“evangelism”—is something every one of us is commanded to do.

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<sup>1</sup> A sermon by Dr. David C. Stancil, delivered at the Columbia Baptist Fellowship in Columbia, Maryland on June 2, 2013.

<sup>2</sup> [www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/evangel](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/evangel)

<sup>3</sup> Rick Warren, in his sermon for *40 Days of Purpose*, “You Were Made for a Mission.”

Jesus gave us a “Great Commission,” not a “Great Suggestion” (Matthew 28:18-20), and we will be held accountable for how we carry it out (Ezekiel 33:8). But while we certainly will be accountable for our stewardship of the Good News, this is not an onerous task, but is rather a wonderful opportunity and privilege.

Do you have a hard time talking to other people about your favorite ball team? Your favorite hobby? Your favorite recipe? Your grandchildren? Of course you don't! If your life in Christ *really* is the wonderful, transforming, purpose-giving, fear-eliminating, deeply joyful experience that we say it is on Sunday mornings, then it really shouldn't be hard to talk about.

Our text in Acts 8 gives us some help in understanding how God intends for us to be evangelists. Let's look at it again: *“Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, ‘Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.’ So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of the Kandake (which means ‘queen of the Ethiopians’). This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the book of Isaiah the prophet. The Spirit told Philip, ‘Go to that chariot and stay near it.’ Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. ‘Do you understand what you are reading?’ Philip asked”* (Acts 8:26-30).

We don't know how the angel and the Spirit spoke to Philip. Philip may have seen and heard the angel as we normally see and hear things, and as happened many times in the biblical record. But it may also be that what Philip experienced was what I call a “spiritual prompting.”

A “spiritual prompting” is a sense that we're supposed to say or do something that we hadn't been intending to say or do. Such a prompting is the “still, small voice” or the “gentle whisper” of God's Spirit (1 Kings 19:12) that alerts us to the approach of a “divine appointment.”

As just one example of such a prompting, as I was making my way back to church from the hospital in Bristol one afternoon, I had the sense that I should stop at a particular store. I did in fact have business in that store, but the significance of the prompting was that I needed to conduct that business now—so I did. And when I entered the store, I “just happened” to meet someone with whom I had a divine appointment. Both of us recognized it as such, though neither of us intended or expected it.

I had another such experience just this week. As I was working with a family member on last Tuesday's funeral service, I asked about the spiritual situation of the deceased. And as that conversation continued, I had the distinct impression that I should ask the woman's sister, with whom I was talking, about her own spiritual journey. She was open to such conversation, and before the afternoon had ended, she and I were on our knees as she asked Jesus to become her Savior. It's really quite exciting to live in such a way, by the promptings of the Spirit, and I heartily commend it to you!

And so it was, however it came to him, that Philip received a spiritual prompting to head to the Gaza Highway. One important thing to notice about Philip, as well as about Paul, and about Jesus himself, is that they didn't set up shop in church somewhere and expect people to come to them. The New Testament model is that we take the Good News to people where they already are.

When he got to the highway, Philip came upon a diplomat who was reading the Hebrew Scripture while being driven along in his government limo (so to speak). Philip boldly came alongside—as in the *Grey Poupon* commercials, perhaps—and asked the official whether he understood what he was reading. In fact, if you come upon someone reading something with religious significance, you can generally count on the fact that you've begun a divine appointment; and it's always fascinating to watch what happens after we make the first move . . .

*“How can I” he said, ‘unless someone explains it to me?’ So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. This is the passage of Scripture the eunuch was reading: ‘He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before the shearer is silent, so he did not open his mouth. In his humiliation he was deprived of justice. Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth.’*

*“The eunuch asked Philip, ‘Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?’ Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus. As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, ‘Look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptized?’ And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him” (Acts 8:31-38).*

The official was reading one of Isaiah’s prophecies about the Messiah, though he didn’t know that’s what it was. His question, “Who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?” is a poignant one, because the man was thinking that these verses might possibly have been written about him.

This official was a eunuch, or a man who had been castrated. This was frequently the case in those days for men who were assigned to care for the women in the King’s harem. When the text talked about “being led as a sheep to the slaughter,” about humiliation, about having no descendants, the words struck a painful nerve and awakened a deep longing.

Philip listened carefully to the question, and began with that very passage to tell the official the Good News about Jesus—he began to “do evangelism.” Someone once criticized Charles Spurgeon, the great British preacher, saying “All of your sermons sound alike.” Spurgeon replied, “That’s because I take a text anywhere in the Bible and make a bee-line to the Cross.” That’s what Philip did, too.

When God takes you to your next divine appointment, will you be able to “make a bee-line to the Cross”—to tell that person how to become a Christian? If you’re prepared, God can use you, too, as a “midwife of eternity,” and that’s the greatest privilege that you can ever experience. **But if you’re not prepared to tell someone how to become a Christian, then you’re consciously or unconsciously steering every conversation away from Jesus rather than toward Him, because you don’t want anybody to ask you that question.**

Is that really how you want to go about life? If you don’t know how to tell someone how to become a Christian, you may even find yourself hiding or compromising your faith so that no one will ask you about it. That’s no fun. That’s not abundant life. That’s a drag.

If you want your spiritual life to take on new luster, new adventure, new power, take the time to learn how to “answer the Question.” While there’s no one right way to explain the Good News, I’ve enclosed in your worship order a handout that explains how I usually go about it. The handout begins with some preparatory thoughts about sharing the Good News, explains how to become a Christian, and then suggests some things to talk about after a person chooses to receive Christ.

The handout uses the four-fold outline, **God’s Purpose, Our Problem, God’s Provision, and Our Decision**, which is the basic process I used last Sunday afternoon. We even have some New Testaments designed for such sharing in the office, and there are some on Peggy’s desk right now. All you have to do is have one of those with you, read it to the person with whom you have a divine appointment, and then give it to him or her. The process of sharing isn’t hard. The key is to have a vital relationship with Jesus yourself, because without that, you can’t introduce others to Him.

“When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing. Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and traveled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea” (Acts 8:39-40). All of a sudden, when the appointment was ended, Philip found himself transported twenty miles away to another appointment. And you thought “Beam me up, Scotty” began with *Star Trek!*

One of our members in Bristol came to the very door of death, but returned. As she waited at that door, she learned that fifty-seven people were already in heaven because of the influence of her life. Fifty-seven! Is anybody going to be in heaven because of you? **All you’re going to take with you to heaven is your character and other people.** That’s it . . . but that’s *plenty!*

Jesus told us to carry the Good News to Oakland Mills, to Columbia, to Maryland, to the farthest reaches of these United States, and to the very ends of the Earth (Acts 1:8). Let me quickly suggest a few more ways to do this.

Remembering the fellow in the white shoes and toupee, most of us want to get as far away from evangelism as we can. But evangelist Jose Zayas makes this enterprise more attractive when he asks, “What do you already love to do? What are you already involved in? What excites you? What are you passionate about? Do those things for the glory of God by finding people who like to do those things and loving them.”

“Pray something like, ‘God, give me the time and the resources to get engaged in this activity, and I will find people who don’t know you and establish **common ground**.’ Pray bold prayers.

“**Common ground** leads to conversation, and conversation leads to connection. If people don’t know I care about them, they’re not going to talk with me, and they’re not going to connect with the [Good News] so that ultimately they might [meet Jesus]. Faith often comes in stages; it doesn’t always happen overnight. Stick with your friends through those stages.”<sup>4</sup>

Did you get that? Being an evangelist doesn’t involve more meetings at church. Evangelism has to do with Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, quilting clubs, bridge clubs, shooting clubs, bowling leagues, soccer teams, bicycles and kayaks—all kinds of fun stuff. The important thing is to spend time with people who aren’t already Christians . . . on purpose.

“Truly I tell you,” Jesus said, “no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive **a hundred times as much** in this present age: homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—along with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life (Mark 10:29-30).”

Do you know how much “a hundred times over” is? That’s 10,000 percent. Ten thousand percent!!! Where else are you going to get such a return on your investment? I can tell you: *nowhere*. This is the best deal in the Cosmos!

Jesus told us that “Whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it” (Mark 8:35). Don’t trade your life for temporary things. Tell the Good News, my friend. Tell the Good News!

<sup>4</sup> Jose Zayas, “The Evangelism Habit,” in *Decision*, November 2004, 30.

# Can You Tell Me How I Can Become A Christian?

There is no one "right way" to lead someone to Christ. Each of us will find a way that fits our own personalities, and even then each presentation will be tailored to fit the person with whom we are speaking. We speak from within our own journey and our own testimony.

## ❖ SIX PRINCIPLES FOR SHARING YOUR FAITH

1. **The Principle of Responsibility**: The work of salvation is the work of the Holy Spirit. We give witness to what we ourselves have experienced, but it is the Holy Spirit who causes persons to open their hearts to Jesus (John 16:8).
2. **The Principle of Respect**: Because every person is created in God's image, whenever we speak of Jesus to others, we speak with respect, with clarity, and with love (Genesis 1:26-27).
3. **The Principle of "Loading the Heart Drive"**: The Bible tells us to "hide God's Word in our hearts" so that we will understand God's purposes (Psalm 119:11; Deuteronomy 6:4-7; Psalm 19:7-14).
4. **The Principle of a Clear Spirit**: By God's grace, we live our lives in ways consistent with the Gospel, so that we are not ashamed of our testimony. We "walk the walk" (Colossians 1:10).
5. **The Principle of Current Experience**: "You must worship Christ as Lord of your life. And if you are asked about your Christian hope, always be ready to explain it" (1 Peter 3:15).
6. **The Principle of Spiritual Breathing** (from Bill Bright):

**"Exhale"**: "But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us and to cleanse us from every wrong" (1 John 1:9)

**"Inhale"**: "let the Holy Spirit fill and control you" (Ephesians 5:18)

**Trust God**: If we are faithful students of the Word, "the Holy Spirit will teach you what needs to be said even as you are standing there" (Luke 12:12).

## One Way to Answer the Question . . .

- ❖ The verses in bold print are often called "The Roman Road to Salvation."
- ❖ If possible, use a New Testament and let the person read with you.
- ❖ You may find it helpful to underline these verses in your Bible or Testament, writing the page number of the next verse at the bottom of each page. You need only remember the first verse! Apart from Jeremiah 29:11, all verses are in the New Testament.

## 1. GOD'S PURPOSE

Jeremiah 29:11 *"For I know the plans I have for you," says the Lord. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope."*

John 3:16 *"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life."*

## 2. OUR PROBLEM

Romans 3:23     ***“For all have sinned; all fall short of God’s glorious standard.”***

Romans 6:23     ***“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord.”***

## 3. GOD’S PROVISION

Romans 5:8        ***“But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners.”***

John 14:6         Jesus told him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life.  
No one can come to the Father except through me.”

## 4. OUR DECISION

Romans 10:9-10 ***“For if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by confessing with your mouth that you are saved.”***

Romans 10:13     For ***“Anyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”***

- Don’t pressure, but do give a clear opportunity to respond. Conversion is God’s work.

### Prayer of Invitation, “The Sinner’s Prayer”

(There is really no one version of this prayer—these are not “magic words.” Use words that fit what you have talked about together. Even better, prompt them as they use their own words.)

Dear God, thank you that you love me, and that you have paid the debt for my sin. I agree with you that I have sinned and am in need of your forgiveness. I ask you to forgive me of my sin, to cleanse my heart, to make me your child, and to begin to remake my life so that I will become more like Jesus. Guide me through your Holy Spirit as I discover the purpose you have for my life. Thank you for saving me! In Jesus’ Name, Amen.

- ❖ After the prayer: Sometimes people feel significant emotion after a prayer of repentance; sometimes they don’t. Emphasize that faith is anchored in God’s promises, not in our feelings.
  1. Point out that when a person asks for God’s forgiveness, (1) our sins are forgiven; (2) we become children of God; (3) we receive eternal life; (4) the Holy Spirit takes up residence in our lives; and (5) we begin the Great Adventure for which God created us (Ephesians 2:8-10)!
  2. Emphasize Jesus’ promise to the new believer: “I assure you, those who listen to my message and believe in God who sent me have eternal life [PRESENT TENSE]. They will never be condemned for their sins [FUTURE TENSE], but they have already passed from death into life” [PAST TENSE] (John 5:24).
  3. Talk about the importance of baptism (Matthew 28:19-20) & church membership (Acts 2:47; Hebrews 10:23-25) for growing faith.
  4. Encourage immediate witness: Who can you tell about your decision who will rejoice with you? Who do you know who needs to find what you have found?