

Come Follow Me  
Elo Viz Production  
Week 29  
Acts 6-9

There are three amazing characters in these chapters this week. We will be spending some time on Paul in the coming weeks so I'd like to briefly mention a few things about Philip then I hope to spend most of the time we have on Stephen. Who is one of my most favorite characters in the book of Acts.

Both Philip and Stephen are called by the apostles as deacons. The Greek word is "Diakonos". Which means "one who executes the command of another, similar to a servant or a more correct term would be a minister. These men were similar to the role deacons play in the latter day church today. Their duties are to serve and to administer. But, could you imagine what it would look like if the deacons today were as faithful and these two men.

Philip for example goes down to the city of Samaria, (remember that Jews and the Samaritan did not like each other. We talked about this back when Jesus gave the parable of the good samaritan). But Philip didn't care. We goes there and it says:  
"[He] preached Christ unto them. And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip **spake**, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did.  
7 For **unclean spirits**, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed *with them*: and many **taken** with palsies, and that were lame, were **healed**. And there was great joy in that city." (Acts 8:5-8)

I can't help but think of my son on his mission in Brazil. We get the opportunity to video chat to him every week which is something I never had on my mission. I just am so amazed every time I see him to see the change not only in him but also the stories I hear about the people in Brazil. They are so open to hearing the word of God that they literally have baptisms almost every week. Like Philip our son has seen and been a part of many marvelous miracles and every week without fail he recognizes that God is very active in His work. In bringing His children into His fold. This last week my son told me about this missionary in his area. He left to go on his mission while his parents were mission presidents serving in another mission in Brazil. He said that this young man is so much like the missionaries that we read about in the scriptures, Alma the younger, Ammon, Nephi, Philip and Stephen. He has performed miracles in the name of Christ, he baptized over 20 people his first month in the mission, and he has taught my son so much about faith. But his testimony, my son said...Dad, you should hear his testimony of Christ! It is so powerful that you know for certainty that this young man knows Christ. I am so grateful to this young man for the work he is doing and the influence he has had on my son.

In chapter eight an angel of the Lord speaks to Philip and said:  
"Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert.

And I love this next line. This is how we should respond angel or not when we receive instructions from heaven:

“And he arose and went” (Acts 8:26-27)

These five words are very powerful. A whole sermon could be taught on this short phase. We don't have time to go into this story too much. I hope you will dig a little deep this week into the significance of this man from Ethiopia. There is a lot there that we don't have time to unpack. What I will point out though is how open this man is to receiving instruction. We read very plainly about these two men and their exchange. However it is important not to forget the third man that had to have been present in order for this exchange to even take place. That is the Holy Ghost who guided Philip and who touched the heart of this eunuch from Ethiopia.

“37 And Philip said, If thou **believest** with all thine heart, thou mayest [be baptized].

And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

38 And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he **baptized** him.

39 And when they were come up out of the water, the **Spirit** of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing.

(Acts 8:37-39)

Philip just disappears and leaves the eunuch standing there in the water. What a marvelous conversion.

I hear people say all the time: Why doesn't stuff like that happen today? Why don't we see more miracles, signs and wonders like they did back then? I think that is an important question to address. And I'm sure lots of answers would satisfy you. However, here is the truth: The greater the signs and wonders, the more visible the angels, and miracles; means there has to be a balance of equal persecution and hardship. We may say that we want to see these wonderful things but are we truly ready to endure what they went through? With our lives of comfort and convenience, do we really want to trade all of that for the torchur, dismemberment, gruesome horrors that these early saints endured? Because that is what it takes in order to balance the scales of the universe with heavenly signs and wonders.

Stephen was a perfect example of this. A young man chosen because he was “a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost” (Acts 8:6)

”8 And Stephen, full of faith and **power**, did great wonders and **miracles** among the people.” (Acts 6:8)

Well, the leaders of that day did not like all this attention that Stephen or any of the church leaders were getting. And as we will see they will do just about anything to get rid of these God fearing men. They even set up false witnesses in order to guarantee a conviction.

”15 And all that sat in the council, looking steadfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the **face** of an **angel**.” (Acts 6:15)

You would think that would be enough to convince them that this man is a man of God and that they should probably not mess with him. But as we will see a hard heart is not reachable by any force.

After they lay the false charges forth to Stephen saying that he spoke against Moses, the law and temple, Stephen does something that most of us would probably not even think of; Instead of saying: Nope, this is all wrong. I never did any of those things. I am an innocent man. Instead of defending himself he teaches them. Now, some say that he was criticizing them because he recounts the history of their people which they obviously already knew. He was patronizing to them. But let me show you something very important in his response.

“Men, brethren, and fathers, [he said] hearken; The God of glory appeared unto our father **Abraham**, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in **Charran**,” (Acts 7:2)

The History he is referring to is in Genesis 12. Which says in summary:

“1 Now the LORD had **said** unto **Abram**, **Get** thee out of thy **country**, and from thy **kindred**, and from thy **father’s** house, unto a **land** that I will shew thee:

4 So Abram departed, as the LORD had spoken unto him; and Abram *was* **seventy** and five years old when he departed out of Haran.

5 And Abram took **Sarai** his wife, and **Lot** his **brother’s** son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had **gotten** in **Haran**; and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came.

6 ¶ And Abram passed through the land unto the place of Sichem, unto the plain of Moreh. And the **Canaanite** *was* then in the land.

7 And the LORD appeared unto Abram, and said, **Unto** thy **seed** will I give this **land**: and there builded he an **altar** unto the LORD, who appeared unto him.” (Gen 12:1-7)

Now, Do you notice a difference here? In Genesis it says that God appeared to Abraham after he was in Moreh. But Stephen says that God also appeared to Abraham before he left Mesopotamia. How would he know that?

There are two theories: the first is that when the bible was translated, that some things were removed or changed in order not to be so potent. Meaning it was watered down. And this could very well be the case. But here is what I think. And this is just my thoughts, I do not claim that this is doctrine or gospel. When prophets of old recorded their encounters with God, visions, visitations, it is very common for these great men to see more than just Jesus. Moses for example talked with God face to face and God showed him everything from the beginning to the end.

”And it came to pass that Moses looked, and beheld the **world** upon which he was created; and Moses **beheld** the world and the ends thereof, and all the children of men

which are, and which were created; of the same he greatly [marveled](#) and wondered.”  
(Moses 1:8)

I think it is very possible that Stephen before this event saw Jesus and knew much more than what is written about him. So, without any hesitation he speaks boldly to those that were accusing him. And he has 3 main points, it just so happens to be that they are the same three points that they were accusing him of. And this is the point to his whole message: We had many great men in our history, great prophets that taught great things, We had the law of Moses that was a guide to us, and the temple, that place that we would use to worship God. These three things they were accusing him of speaking against he acknowledges them and important parts of their history and then he makes his point: none of these things will get us to heaven! There is only one way which each of us have any hope of returning to the Father. And that is Jesus Christ, the very man you crucified and hung on a cross. He is the way, the truth, and the life! And no man cometh to the Father, but by Him.

His words cut them to the very core. It stung so much that they became angry and carried him out and stoned him to death. But, just before he dies he looks up and sees the heavens open. And he sees Jesus standing on the right hand of God. (Acts 7:56) And following the example of Jesus he forgives them just before he dies. The first martyr of the early Christian church.

What are we to learn from all this? First of all please notice something very very important. When Jesus was taken to heaven Mark records that:

“He was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God.” (Mark 16:19)

But here when Stephen sees Jesus, He is standing on the right hand of God. Why was He standing? He was standing to applaud or to give respect to Stephen who is about to do one of the greatest things anyone could ever do. To willingly lay down your life in defense of Jesus Christ. Martyrdom is one great evidence for the resurrection of Jesus. It proves that it's true because no one would die for a lie. If you consider what the church went through and all the things they suffered it was all worth it because Jesus is worth dying for. If it was all a ruse to perpetuate a hoax don't you think at the last minute that they would go; oh just kidding, we really didn't see Him after He rose from the dead. No, they were literally ripped apart, crucified, dis-members, they were burned alive. This is what they endured, and no one would endure that to defend a lie. Proof that it was all true. That Jesus is worth dying for. And if He is worth dying for, wouldn't He also be worth living for? You will never be able to courageously die for your faith until you are first courageously living for faith. The truth is If you are not faithful to Jesus in life how will you ever be faithful to Jesus in death?

True, we may never be asked to die for Jesus, as He willingly died for us. But He does ask us to Live for Him. To give our lives as an example of Him. We could at least do that. For Him, we can be kind, merciful, we can be faithful and bold. I pray that we will be.

In the name of Him who is all those things, even Jesus Christ, Amen.