

Reaching Out With Power

Acts 1:8, Acts 8:26-40

Good morning! It's so great to see you all this morning. We're finishing up our series called "Reaching Out". The first message was about reaching out and making Jesus known to others through acts of kindness and I highlighted Servant Evangelism as one way of doing that. BTW, we will have a Servant Evangelism event on the 20th of this month. That's a Saturday. Then, the next message, last week, was reaching out with boldness and I talked about what it takes to be confident in sharing Jesus with others. Today, I'd like to talk about reaching out to our non-Christian loved ones and friends with power. So, I've entitled this message, "Reaching Out with Power".

Yes, it's great to be kind and bold but it's greater when you possess the power to reach out. Where do you get this power? How do you get this power?

Jesus said to his disciples before he went to heaven, "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." (Acts 1:8)

So, how does this power look like? Is it the same as the power that transforms the sickly Jane Foster to Mighty Thor, the Goddess of Thunder? And with that power, she smashes and destroys all evil creatures she encounters with Mjolnir, the hammer from which her power comes from. The problem is, this power is temporary. In the end, well, I don't want to spoil the movie for you.

Jesus is clear that this power comes from the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit that gives us the power to witness. It is the Holy Spirit that helps us to be kind and bold as we obey the command of Jesus to share the good news with others. Without this power, we are nothing. We can do all the witnessing we can but without the help of the Holy Spirit, people's minds and hearts won't change.

This power is not temporary because if you're a follower of Jesus, you have the Holy Spirit's power in you forever and ever.

To be sure, you won't become a superhero, like you suddenly can fly and muscles in your body will bulge, but you will be God's hero as you make yourself available to him. He will transform the ordinary you to an extraordinary you, doing great things for God.

Now, I want you to turn to **Acts 8:26-40** in your Bibles. I'm not going to read it but I want you to refer to it as I quote verses as I go through this passage.

As a backgrounder, this event as narrated in this passage occurs in the life of the early church after Jesus went to heaven and there was heavy persecution of the followers of Jesus. The disciples were scattered. It was good in a way because the gospel spread as well. In the midst of this, Philip was busy evangelizing, going here and there. That's why he is called "Philip the Evangelist" Then, his plan was disrupted when an angel directed him to go to a certain place. Philip obeyed and he met an Ethiopian eunuch and the latter became a Christian immediately after Philip shared the gospel with him. So, in this passage I'd like us to see what the Holy Spirit does to give us his power to witness and what we can do to harness this power.

But first, who is the Holy Spirit? If you're a Christian, you know that he is the third person of the Trinity. He is as much God as the Father and the Son. They're three in one. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are one substance and yet, each one has a role to play or a function to perform. The Father creates the plan, the Son, who is Jesus, executes the plan, and the Holy Spirit administers the plan.

Since the beginning of time, God had already created the plan of salvation for mankind. Then, in time, he sent his Son Jesus to execute the plan which happened when he himself was executed on the cross, and then, afterwards, the

Holy Spirit was given the role of administering the plan as we see in the book of Acts. And he continues to do so up to the present time and will continue to do so in the future until Jesus comes back again.

The Holy Spirit is a person. No mistaking about it. He is not a force. He is always awake unlike in Star Wars when the force awakens. He is always active and busy just like the Father and the Son.

This morning, I'd like to share with you **how to reach out with power.**

1. I need to obey and go.

That's obvious. If you're just sitting in your house, reading all the materials on evangelism and watching YouTube videos how to share, but not putting them into practice, then you won't experience God's power. Now, in verse 27, an angel tells Philip to go down to the desert road. As he was walking on the road, in verse 29, we read, ***"The Spirit told Philip, "Go to that chariot and stay near it."*** Now, the Holy Spirit doesn't speak to you in an audible voice anymore to tell you what to do, although that's possible since we cannot put God in a box. But nowadays, there's the gentle tug of the Holy Spirit who tells you to go here or there or speak to this person or that person. As I said, it's the Holy Spirit's job to administer God's plan. So, when we feel that gentle nudge, what do we do? We put it off? We just make a mental note of it?

You see, each one of us as followers of Jesus has a role to play when it comes to making known God's plan of salvation. I think that's clear to each one of us. Jesus gave us the great commission: ***"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*** (Matt. 28:19-20) He didn't say, "Please go", "Would you go?" "How about you go?". He says, "Go". The angel says to Philip, "Go". That's a command. Not a suggestion. Not a question.

But just like any other commands of Jesus, it's actually hard to put into practice. That is, if you're doing it in your own power. Jesus says that we cannot do anything on our own. *"Apart from me you can do nothing."* (John 15:5) That's why Paul says, and let's say together, *"I can do all things through him (Jesus) who gives me strength"*. (Phil 4:13) Jesus can give us strength because he gave us the Holy Spirit when we became Christians. The Holy Spirit is now in you if you're a follower of Jesus. We have to be aware of that. And it is the Holy Spirit who will empower you to do what you can't do on your own.

So, the power to witness comes from the Holy Spirit. Philip was aware of this. So, did he wait before going? It says in verse 30, *"Then Philip ran up to the chariot."* Notice he felt a sense of urgency. He ran. He didn't want to miss the opportunity. He didn't even know what was going to happen. He just obeyed. He didn't hesitate. He just moved as the Holy Spirit moved him. The Bible doesn't say whether he was nervous. Maybe he was, maybe he was not. But nervousness is a natural reaction to an unfamiliar or perceived scary situation. You'll experience this especially if you don't do it often. So, what's the key to becoming bold and overcoming nervousness? First, be aware that the Holy Spirit is in you who will empower you. Second, do it as often as you can. I mean, if you ask the members of our praise and worship team if they felt nervous the first time they sang in front, they'll say, "I was". If you ask them now, the answer is, "I am". But, I believe the degree of nervousness is much less than before. Right, Liana? Next week, she'll do a special number.

By the way, when God leads you, he doesn't tell you exactly what you're going to do. You see, God doesn't give you the whole picture when he leads you. He leads you step by step, moment by moment. Otherwise, you might run away if you know that there will be troubles ahead. Some actually ran away after being

given instructions like Jonah when it was clear God wanted him to preach to the Ninevites.

Now, I want you to notice that prior to Philip's encounter with the Ethiopian eunuch, the apostles were primarily witnessing only to the Jews and Samaritans. So, this is the first time that the gospel was brought to the "ends of the earth", so to speak, in fulfillment of Jesus' command before he went to heaven. This Ethiopian came all the way from East Africa. A good 2000-something miles from Jerusalem. He is a proselyte Jew. He went to Jerusalem to worship. Then, he came back to his country a changed man. Surely, when he went back to his homeland, he spread the news about Jesus. In fact, tradition says that the eunuch founded a church there.

So, I hope that we'll have the same kind of attitude that when an opportunity arises to witness, we run towards and not run away. But what I want us to notice is how Philip could be so receptive to the Spirit's leading. How he could be so sensitive to the voice of God.

I have always said that God is always speaking to us. He speaks to us through his Word, the Bible. He speaks to us when we pray to him. He impresses upon us his thoughts and his will. He speaks to us in his still, small voice. There are so many ways that God speaks to us. But it seems, sometimes we don't hear him. Why? **What are the reasons we don't hear God?**

One reason is that **we're not listening enough.** We'd rather open our social apps rather than the Word of God. I'm not saying there's anything wrong with those apps but if they're our constant companions instead of the Bible, we better check our priorities. The same thing with the internet, the TV, etc. Whatever we spend most time on is our priority.

Another reason is that **we're not praying enough.** Prayer is communication with God. If we don't pray, or our prayer life is lacking, God is not able to speak to

us as well. There are times when in the middle of prayer, God impresses upon me his answer. Or after praying, the answer just pops up maybe a few moments later.

I remember the time I was in Russia doing short-term missionary work. I was with a group of missionary trainees and the day came for us to leave Russia and come back to the U.S. The day before we left, I had boasted to my co-trainees that my Russian friend Sasha, an air force lieutenant, would be able to let us all, all 25 of us, into the air force base to distribute Bibles. They marveled at that and looked at me admiringly while I beamed proudly. Suddenly, I felt special. Then, in the afternoon, Sasha came into the hostel but he looked sad. He announced in halting English that his superior denied our request. Everyone looked disappointed while my pride took a beating.

After he left, I immediately went to my room and asked for God's forgiveness. God humbled me. I wept before God and prayed that he would reverse the situation. I pleaded with God for a long time in prayer. Late that evening, Sasha called me. He said that his superior changed his mind. The next morning, four of us were able to go inside the air force base to distribute Bibles.

We need to pray so that the Holy Spirit can use us. If we are full of ourselves, wanting all the glory, thinking that it is because of our speech that move people's hearts, then there's no room for the Holy Spirit to work. Paul even asked for other's prayers, "Pray also for me, that the message may be given to me when I open my mouth to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel." (Eph. 6:19)

The third reason is **we're not clean enough**. What I'm saying is that, perhaps, we've committed a sin or we continue to commit a sin that breaks our fellowship with God. **Isaiah 59:2 (NLT) says, "It's your sins that have cut you off from God. Because of your sins, he has turned away and will not listen anymore."** So, if it seems that God is silent, maybe we need to examine ourselves or better yet ask

God to reveal in us things that grieve his Spirit. The psalmist says, *“Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. Point out anything in me that offends you.”* (Psalm 139:23 NLT)

Let us keep our lives in order and pleasing to God so the Holy Spirit can move in our lives. And when he does, it’ll be easy to go and obey. Then, the second thing I need to do to reach out with power is

2. I need to be ready to share Jesus.

We hear the phrase, “Your life may be the only Bible some people will read”. Or the saying that’s attributed to St. Francis of Assisi, “Preach the gospel. If necessary, use words.” Those are nice and profound and contain some truth in them. But the fact remains that nobody gets saved just by watching you live your life, no matter how good you are or kind you are or loving you are. We must open our mouths or help others to see what the Bible is saying about how to be saved. That is what Philip exactly did upon the prompting of the Holy Spirit.

So, we read in our passage that Philip ran up to the chariot and then the eunuch asked him to explain the passage he was reading from Isaiah 53:7-8. It says,

“He was led like a sheep to the slaughter.

And as a lamb is silent before the shearers,

he did not open his mouth.

He was humiliated and received no justice.

Who can speak of his descendants?

For his life was taken from the earth.”

In verse 35, it says, *“Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.”* He was ready. He was prepared. Philip was the man at that very moment. Was it because he was intelligent? Was it

because he graduated from Bible school? Was it because he underwent all the evangelism trainings there were? No. He just knows his Bible.

What is the good news or the gospel that Philip shared? Please read with me from 1 Corinthians 15:3-4, *“Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.”* That’s the gospel in summary. There are three parts. Death, burial, and resurrection. All three equals the Gospel. All three equals SALVATION. Being saved from sin and death has nothing to do with how good we are, nothing to do with our religion, nothing to do with what we know or who we know. It has everything to do with what Jesus did for us. And the reason Jesus died for us is that we are all sinners condemned to die as Romans 6:23 says, *“For the wages of sin is death”*. Many people don’t know they’re going to hell when they die without Jesus. They know that they’re living a sinful life but they don’t know how to get out of it. They have no sense of direction. But God has given us Jesus so that we can be saved from our sins. God is ready, willing, and able to forgive anyone who asks forgiveness and receives Jesus in their heart. You see, salvation is not based on our good works but on the grace of God. Eph. 2:8-9 says, *“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.”* If you want to receive the gift of salvation today, I’ll give you an opportunity to do that after this message.

Going back to the matter of being ready, in 1 Peter 3:15 we read, *“But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.”* Peter is saying, “If you want to be a good witness for Christ, first be his disciple. Be devoted to him. Make him your Lord and Master. And then, be ready to share Jesus with anyone who asks you about him.”

And that's the importance of getting into the Word. When you get into the Word, the Word will get into you. And you'll be ready.

So, to reach out with power, I need to obey and go, I need to be ready to share Jesus, and thirdly,

3. I need to understand that it's all the work of the Holy Spirit.

In verses 36-38, we read, *"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."*

The fact that the eunuch was baptized tells us that he accepted Jesus when Philip shared with him the gospel. After receiving Jesus, he immediately asked for baptism. So, he was saved first, then he was baptized not the other way around.

In the matter of salvation, God uses us as conduits of his grace but we can never claim that it is through our efforts that someone was saved. From beginning to end, it is the work of the Holy Spirit. The Bible says that he is the one who convicts, cleanses, and sanctifies. And all of this is to bring glory to the name of Jesus.

You see, understanding that it is the work of the Holy Spirit from start to finish takes away the burden of feeling disappointed when someone rejects my presentation of the gospel. Because the truth is, they don't reject me but Jesus. It helps me to put everything in the proper perspective. Therefore, I just do what is expected of me, which is to just tell others what Jesus has done for me.

I don't need to sweat it. I just need to leave everything to God. It is his business anyway to save souls.

Bill Bright, the founder of Campus Crusade for Christ said, *"Successful witnessing is taking the initiative to share Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit and leaving the results to God."*

Doesn't that make you relax a bit?

I need to obey and go, I need to be ready to share the gospel, I need to understand that it's the work of the Holy Spirit and fourthly,

4. I need to keep going.

Verses 39-40 says, *"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."*

The Spirit is really active and busy! After saving the eunuch, he led Philip to someplace else to continue the work of saving people's souls. Folks, that is God's intention since he created Adam and Eve. The Bible says, *"He does not want anyone to be destroyed, but wants everyone to repent."* (2 Peter 3:9 NLT)

Witnessing for Jesus is not a one-off deal. Like, "Hey, I led someone to Christ today. Guess I can relax and take time off. Maybe I'll witness again next year." It is a lifestyle. Whenever an opportunity arises, we witness. In fact, we should look for opportunities or create opportunities. Remember, Jesus empowers us with his Holy Spirit as we do so.

Let me share with you a story on why it is important to seize the moment and just rely on the power of the Holy Spirit.

There was a soldier in the U.S. army who just finished his tour of duty and was now discharged from the service. He was in the highway and decided to hitchhike. After a few minutes, a car stopped in front of him and the driver, who was smiling, signaled him to hop in. He went inside the car and then immediately introduced himself to the driver. "Private First Class Robert Thompson, Sir."

"Nice to meet you, soldier. My name is Bill."

Robert learned that Bill has just attended a business conference in New York. He was driving back to Chicago where he lived. He also learned that he has

a wife and two children. Being a Christian, Robert suddenly felt that he needed to share Jesus with Bill. After being in the army too long, however, he really did not know anymore how to communicate the gospel. He tried to put off the thought but it persisted. When he was close to his destination somewhere in Pennsylvania, he decided to share Jesus in the best way he can. All the while, Bill was listening and nodding his head. Then, he started to cry and stopped on the roadside. On the roadside, he accepted Jesus. Then, as they parted ways, Bill handed Robert his business card.

Five years passed and Robert was in Chicago to attend a business conference himself. Remembering Bill, he called the number on the business card. Someone said that he no longer worked there and so he decided to find his address.

A woman opened the door. He briefly introduced himself. “Hi, my name is Robert. I met your husband five years ago on the road. He gave me a ride as he was coming back from New York.”

The woman gave him a sad look. “Do you know that my husband never made it back?”

“What do you mean?”

“He met an accident on the road.”

“I’m sorry. I don’t know whether you’re a Christian. But you know I believe he is in heaven because he accepted Jesus after I shared with him the gospel.”

Suddenly, the woman cried.

“Did I say something wrong?” Robert asked.

Softly, the woman said, “No, these are tears of joy. Robert, I am a Christian, too. For years, I’ve been praying for the salvation of my husband. God led you to my husband. He knew what was going to happen to him and he answered my prayer.”