

Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God Acts 8:26-40

In his book, “Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God” J. I. Packer says evangelism is “to present Christ Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit, that men shall come to put their trust in God through Him, to accept Him as their Savior, and serve Him as their King in the fellowship of his Church.” The book by Packer is essentially about the relationship between the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man in salvation. Packer says “C. H. Spurgeon was once asked if he could reconcile these two truths to each other. ‘I wouldn’t try’ he replied; ‘I never reconcile friends.’ Friends?—yes, friends. This is the point we have to grasp. In the Bible, divine sovereignty and human responsibility are not enemies... They are friends, and they work together.” In our passage we see these two working together.

Our story today is an example of effective evangelism. The gospel is proclaimed, and the hearer believes. Notice first the essential circumstances for effective evangelism. The first essential for effective evangelism is God’s providence. God sovereignly works in all the circumstances resulting in conversion. We see this in God directing the Evangelist, preparing the Ethiopian and coordinating the encounter. First, God directs Phillip by an angel to go to a certain road, in the desert. Then by the Spirit, God directs him to join a chariot and man he finds there. In this case God directs in this way, but he may also direct through events that bring a believer into contact with an unbeliever to share Christ with him or her. Also, we see that God has been at work in the Ethiopian. The man in the chariot has been to Jerusalem to worship and is reading from Isaiah. Both indicate he was a seeker of the one, true God. He was seeking God because God was seeking him. He had a God-given interest. God had created a curiosity and a receptivity to the gospel. Another interesting thing is to think of what he did and where he lived. He was the treasurer for a queen. God not only prepared him to receive the gospel, but afterwards he would have a God-given opportunity to share it with those who were in his circles of significant influence. Also, God had put him in North Africa. This was considered to edge of civilization in that day. He would have a significant influence and a distant influence for Christ after this encounter with the gospel. Finally, God was coordinating the encounter. The timing was perfect. Phillip didn’t arrive at this road before the chariot arrived or after the Ethiopian had already passed. He also joined the chariot at the exact time the Eunuch was reading two verse in Isaiah 53. In all the Old Testament there are not any verses more directly relevant to the death of Christ, the heart of the gospel. It was a perfect place to begin to share the message of Christ with this traveler.

This story also demonstrates the necessity of gospel proclamation for effective evangelism. We are told Phillip opened his mouth... and proclaimed Christ. God’s providence is essential for effective evangelism, but gospel proclamation is also necessary. Phillip proclaims the death of Christ as a sacrifice for sinners, based on the text being read by the Eunuch, as well as the other essential elements of the gospel. Effective evangelism requires that we open our mouths and proclaim the good news of what God has done for us in Christ. God works before and through the proclamation of the gospel to save sinners.

Finally, we also see here two of the initial consequences of effective evangelism. First, the Ethiopian is baptized. This is to be the first act of obedience for a new believer. Scripture speaks often of “the obedience of faith”. This refers to the fact that obedience flows from true faith. Baptism is to be the first of many acts of obedience to Christ motivated by genuine faith. The second initial consequence is rejoicing. The Ethiopian goes on his way rejoicing after Phillip is taken away. He is rejoicing because he has found the only thing that satisfies our soul, a restored relationship with God through Jesus Christ.