

Title: THE BEST WITNESS, ACTS 8:26 – 40  
(Chatham, NJ; 05/03/15, AM) [Pd – Topical]

Theme: Although it is not a paradigm for all evangelistic effort, the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch illustrates the best elements of effective witness.

Purpose: To persuade the congregation that one-to-one evangelism and reliance on the Holy Spirit to convict a person's heart are the most effective means of witnessing.

Introduction:

1. In our recent study on the Lord's Supper, the author expressed how 19<sup>th</sup> century revivalism and its institutional structures die hard.
2. Looking to the early church we can see that evangelism began at a Jewish festival in the area of the Jerusalem Temple.
3. The apostles' witness also took them from house to house, Acts 5:42 (not a command to go door knocking).
4. None of these are the singular, perfect paradigm for witnessing (I prefer this word over evangelism which sounds stilted, formal, and intimidating).
5. The conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch is also not the perfect paradigm, but it provides some helpful insights.

## I. One-to-One Teaching

### A. Conversation and clarification

1. Philip and the Ethiopian talk, Acts 8:30-31
2. Colossians 4:5-6 recommend appropriate talk
3. Acts 8 also involved questions and answers: this is how people learn
4. 1 Peter 3:15 reflects this normal course of human interaction
5. Being exposed to a lecture, sermon, or some other mass presentation may help raise awareness of Christianity, but we have become overly dependent on them

### B. Other NT clues

1. From the synagogue to the hall of Tyrannus, Acts 19:8-10, in Ephesus
2. Paul taught there for two years
3. Was this a daily Gospel meeting or a class allowing for discussion, questions, and clarification?
4. However, consider how the Gospel spread to another city of the region about 100 miles east of Ephesus, the city of Colossae
5. Focus on a man named Epaphras, "one of their own" (Col. 4:12) shared the Gospel with them (Col. 1:7) "you learned it from E."
6. Epaphras went back and witnessed to his friends and neighbors
7. This was one-on-one evangelism; I suspect he allowed for discussion, etc.
8. Witnessing is not most effective in an auditorium or a big group; this is particularly true if we leave out the personal encounters.
9. My concern is not necessarily a matter of effectiveness but more a matter of us being dependent on such communal preaching.

## II. Don't Confuse Witnessing with Harvesting

### A. The failure of a vision

1. Every evangelist's dream: 3,000 responses in one day
2. I doubt that even the Apostles replicated that again in their lifetime
3. We have other failed visions:
4. I've heard preachers exhort, "You can't get to heaven unless you take somebody with you." Oh, really?

5. I've also heard the mathematics of evangelism: one teaches one who teaches one who teaches one, and by an exponential calculation the whole world has become Christian in our lifetime. Where did Christ ever promise that?
6. These visions may spur us on but they are unrealistic and therefore hold out false hopes

B. Every soul ripe? (John 4:35-38)

1. Jesus made that statement on the verge of the Kingdom breaking into history.
2. Perhaps, like them, we don't see the possibilities
3. At the same time, once the Gospel went forth, not every person responded
4. Similarly, our witness will experience sowing, harvesting, and rejection
5. Our witness still stands, 1 Peter 2:12; Titus 2:9-10 (making the message attractive)

### III. The Role of the Holy Spirit

A. His role with Philip and the eunuch

1. Philip was led to the road, Acts 8:26
2. The eunuch was a worshipper (Gentile convert to Israel?), 27
3. He was reading the Bible, 28
4. He had years of preparation for this moment.
5. Years of preparation had also gone into the Pentecost moment, Acts 2
6. Furthermore the Holy Spirit had prepared Cornelius in Acts 10 and had conspired to bring Peter and him together.
7. I don't suggest that the Holy Spirit will always work that way for us: these were exceptional and momentous occasions in salvation history.

B. Giving the Spirit room to work today

1. We plant and water, but God causes it to grow, 1 Corinthians 3:6-7
2. Do we believe this?
3. Planting and watering may demand more than just announcing the message, but it may also be less than confrontational persuasion.
4. Conversation must be gracious (Col. 4:6) and respectful (1 Peter 3:16).
5. Plant seeds, water them, and let the Spirit do the persuading.

#### Conclusions:

1. Your day to day witness to family, friends, neighbors, and co-workers is how the Gospel spreads (people are infected by casual contact).
2. Worry less about harvesting and more about witnessing.
3. Believe that the Holy Spirit is alive and well in the message of salvation despite the resistance of many people.
4. Your witness still counts.
5. Keep it shining brightly.