

Philip - The Deacon Who Became A Beacon !

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[0 : 0 0] Now if you were here last week or if you've been following through Acts, you will know that Simon the magician has basically been shown to be a fake, probably a fake Christian as well, because Simon Peter noticed that his heart was full of bitterness and still captive to sin, even though he had been baptized.

And he was obviously a man for whom money meant everything, and he thought that with money he could buy the power that the apostles clearly were able to wield against the darkness in people's hearts.

So he had to learn the hard way that that was not the case. And we're told at the end of that episode, Now when they had testified, and this is verse 25, when they had testified and spoken the word of the Lord, they, that is Peter and John, returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans.

Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, Rise and go toward the south, to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.

This is a desert place. And he rose and went. And there was an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a court official of Candace, the queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure.

[1 : 3 8] He had come to Jerusalem to worship and was returning, seated in his chariot, and he was reading the prophet Isaiah. And the spirit said to Philip, Go over and join this chariot.

So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, Do you understand what you're reading? And he said, How can I?

Unless someone guides me. And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. Now the message of the scripture that he was reading was this.

Like a sheep, he was led to the slaughter and like a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he opens not his mouth. In his humiliation, justice was denied him.

Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth. And the eunuch said to Philip, About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this?

[2 : 4 7] About himself or about someone else? Then Philip opened his mouth and beginning with this scripture, he told him the good news about Jesus.

And as they were going along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, See, here is water. What prevents me from being baptized? And if you're reading the King James Version, you've got an extra verse in here, which says that Philip said to him that if you believe with all your heart that Jesus Christ is Lord, then you may.

And the Ethiopian eunuch made a complete confession of faith at this point. And he commanded the chariot to stop and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him.

And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away. And the eunuch saw him no more, but went on his way rejoicing. But Philip found himself at Azotus.

And as he passed through, he preached the gospel to all the towns until he came to Caesarea. May God be praised for his word.

[4 : 11] It's an amazing account of what the Spirit of God was doing then. What we're really looking at here is this is the outworking of what Jesus commanded the apostles before he was taken up into heaven.

He said to them, you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in Judea and in Samaria and to the end of the earth.

To the end of the earth. So as our brother Bill pointed out last week, we're in the middle of a big transition period here. The gospel has been preached first of all to the Jews because when the angel was sent from heaven to announce the birth of Jesus, he said, he will save his people from their sins.

To you is born this day. To you is born. He was talking to Jewish shepherds. To you is born this day a Savior, which is Christ the Lord.

But of course, Isaiah had predicted 700 years previously that it was too small a thing for the Messiah to simply bring salvation to the Jewish nation.

[5 : 31] He would become a light to the world, a light to the nations. And so God had always had a far bigger picture in mind. He would go first to the Jews.

And Jesus even said this. He said, I was sent first of all to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. So starting at Jerusalem, that was where the gospel was supposed to start.

The offer of salvation was first made to the Jewish people. And you need to bear in mind, and this is something that the church today needs the humility to remember, that the church didn't start off as a Gentile institution like it is today.

The church was 99%, if not 100%, Jewish when it first began. All the believers were Jews. All the disciples were Jews.

The twelve apostles, as they became, were Jews. the foundations of the church were laid by Jewish teachers.

[6 : 37] So the foundation of the apostles and the prophets is the foundation of the church, and it's entirely Jewish to its roots. So we need the humility to realize that God made promises to the Jewish people, covenanted promises that he made to Abraham, promises, by the way, that had absolutely no conditions attached.

God didn't require anything of Abraham when he said these things. I will make you the father of many nations, he said. And through you, all the families of the earth will be blessed.

He promised him a land, he said, that would be for him and for his descendants after him forever. An everlasting possession. we need to come to terms with all these things.

So Jerusalem was the starting point for the gospel. And it would move into Judea, to the places around Jerusalem, to the hill country where the tribes of Israel, the descendants there were mostly people who had descended from King David, the tribe of Judah.

And then Samaria, now that's the sticking point. That was the sticking point in the Jewish mind because the Samaritans, as Bill explained last week, were a hybrid race.

[8 : 04] They were neither Jew nor Gentile. They were a little bit Jewish and they were a little bit Gentile, but they weren't pure in any sense. They were despised by the religious establishment in Jerusalem that would have nothing to do with them.

And the Samaritans felt exactly the same about the Jews. They would avoid each other every which way they could, which is one of the reasons Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan was so offensive to his Jewish hearers because the Samaritan was the good guy in the parable.

The Samaritan was the neighbor who cared for the man he didn't know anything about, whereas the priest and the Levite went by on the other side. They didn't want to defile themselves with what might be a dead body in the street or they didn't want to put themselves at risk because the man might be pretending to be injured or dead and it might, while you're attending to him, his mates come out from behind a rock and attack you instead.

So they didn't want to put themselves at risk, but it was a Samaritan of all people, a hated Samaritan, who stopped and gave attention to the man's wounds and did everything that was needed to get him well again.

So Jesus cut right through all these conventions because Jesus always had in mind that the good news that he had come to establish and to pay for with his blood was going to reach not just the Jews but the Samaritans and then the very ends of the earth.

[9 : 40] So we're looking at a gospel that was always intended to sweep right across the world. Jesus actually said one day his disciples said to him, Lord, when is the end going to be?

And Jesus said this gospel must first be preached in all the nations and then the end will come. Now isn't that an exciting thought? Because for the first time in all of history, the technology now exists for the gospel to be preached in every corner of the world.

And it is being preached in every corner of the world. You try and set up a church in Iran and you're going to find yourself in prison before you can lay a brick. But there's an Iranian man, a former Muslim, who's now living in America because he had to flee for his life.

And for the last 20 years he's been beaming radio and television programs into Iran to tell his own people the good news about Jesus. So marvellous, marvellous things are happening.

And God has a way of bypassing all these things. So there's joy in Samaria. We're told at the end of the section that we read that there was joy in Samaria.

[11 : 06] here. Now, I'm thinking about Philip here. Because Philip was a man who started from complete obscurity.

He wasn't an apostle. He wasn't one of, shall we say, the inner circle of Jesus or anything like that. Nobody had heard of him except that he had gained a reputation in the community for kindness, for compassion, for looking after the folks who couldn't look after themselves.

He had also gained a reputation for being a man full of the Spirit, the Holy Spirit. How did he get a reputation like that? Well, you see, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, meekness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

That's the fruit of the Spirit. What you're actually looking at is a description of Philip's life. If he was full of the Spirit, those were the characteristics that people saw in his life.

Isn't it amazing to think that there was a man who was just quietly going about his business and his business was to care for other people. He would see a widow who didn't have what she needed and he would go out of his way to meet that need.

[12 : 34] He would see an orphan running about fatherless and he would do what he could to help that child and bring it to a place of safety. He would see people who just couldn't afford to pay their bills and he would do anything he could to try and get the support that they needed.

This was a man who was self-forgetting. that's what the Holy Spirit does in your life. He makes you self- forgetting. Who is the Holy Spirit?

He's the third person of the Trinity. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. One God, but we know him in three persons. He has revealed himself in three persons.

And the Holy Spirit is often used interchangeably as the Spirit of Jesus in Scripture. Scripture. So if you want to know who the Holy Spirit is, it's Jesus indwelling those who believe in him.

Now, excuse me, but I hear a ripple of excitement passing through the congregation at that prospect. That this, here, we're talking about a man, all right, he was absolutely divine.

[13 : 50] He was a hundred percent God, but he was also a hundred percent human. And he defeated death. He had made a promise.

He said, after three days, I will rise. And he kept that promise. Brothers and sisters, I ask you a simple question.

Would you have problems believing any other promise he made when he kept that one? would you? He said he's coming back.

Do you think he's coming back? I reckon he is. He's coming back. It's not Arnold Schwarzenegger that's coming back, it's Jesus.

Jesus. So here we are. We're looking at something amazing that's happening here with an ordinary humble man.

[14 : 54] You see, when Philip was noticed, he was noticed after he had been serving. It wasn't his service that made him famous.

he was just a quiet man who was just going about helping wherever he could. And he gained a reputation so that when the apostles said to the rest of the community, look, if you want to make sure these Greek speaking widows, these Jewish Greek speaking widows, don't get overlooked in the distribution of food and support, then find seven men from within your own community that you consider to be full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom and we'll lay hands on them and we'll appoint them and these men will do the job of looking after these widows.

And Philip was one of the seven with Stephen that we heard about a few weeks ago. Philip was one of the seven who was appointed. Why was he appointed? Because he was already doing the job.

They had already established a reputation as a man who just quietly went about the thing. He was already doing what they were looking for. And he was full of the Holy Spirit.

He had a Holy Spirit lifestyle. He had a Jesus lifestyle. He had a self-forgetting lifestyle. And because of that, he got noticed for the job of a deacon.

[16 : 27] The deacon, what a word, what a word to choose for servants in the church of God. A deacon in those days, the diaconos, the diaconos was the lowest of the lowest of the lowest of the slaves.

He was the guy who got to wash everybody's feet and clean out the latrine. And that's the word they chose for a servant in the church of God.

the person who didn't need any status, didn't need any reputation, didn't need any courtesy titles, he didn't need to be a reverend or a most reverend or a holiness or any of those things.

He wasn't looking for status. He was just a servant, just someone who would do whatever was required and he would be there to do it. And so Philip came out of obscurity, became a deacon, became recognized as one of the leading servants, a leading servant, it's a lovely concept, isn't it?

A servant who leads. There shouldn't be any such thing in the church as a servant, as a leader who doesn't serve. There really shouldn't be such a thing. There should be a sign up in church leadership that says status seekers, keep out.

[17 : 56] It's not for folks who want to make something of themselves. So here he is and he's been preaching the gospel in Samaria.

How did it happen? It happened because God led him by means of events. Events, dear chap, events.

God led him by means of events and the event that led him was persecution. persecution. He couldn't stay in Jerusalem anymore. He had to flee for his life.

I don't know if you remember but Jesus once said a very strange thing. He said if they persecute you in one place flee to another. Now don't we tend to assume that a person who's undergoing persecution needs to be firm and strong and courageous and stand firm just where they are and refuse to be pushed around, pushed about.

And Jesus says if they persecute you in one place flee to another. And that's exactly what Philip did. When the persecution broke out in Jerusalem it broke out primarily against the Greek speaking Jews and he was scattered with everybody else.

[19 : 10] And he found himself in Samaria of all places. Samaria. My goodness the one place no Jew would willingly be seen. And there he is in Samaria and what does he do?

He does what he always does. He goes around being like Jesus and speaking of Jesus at every turn. And the next thing you know he's in the middle of a rip-roaring revival.

Samaria is on fire with the news about Jesus. It's a moment of great thrill and great excitement. There's tremendous passion. There are people who are discovering that probably some of them had heard from the Samaritan woman that Jesus had talked to at the well.

That Jesus was the true Messiah. And so there would be Samaritans around who had already heard this and were already convinced by that woman's testimony.

Some of them had perhaps even met Jesus himself. But when Philip started to share the gospel the power of the spirit just swept through Samaria and the whole place lit up.

[20 : 21] And in the midst of this right in the midst of this thrilling expansion of ministry where you think it can't get better than this. Suddenly the spirit the angel of the Lord comes to Philip.

an angel comes to him and says I want you to go down onto the desert road towards Gaza. You can almost you know if that was you or me in the middle of a rip-roaring ministry that's going so well you say Lord what the Gaza the desert what Lord that doesn't make any sense.

I've just come from nowhere and you've suddenly put me somewhere I was no one and you've suddenly made me someone and now you want to bury me in a desert place again. What is this about Lord?

But that wasn't Philip. You know there's one little phrase here in the scripture that is absolutely amazing in its implications. It's verse 27.

one, two, three, four, five little words. This is the angel said to him rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.

[21 : 46] This is a desert place and here's the five words and he rose and went. No protest. No, but Lord nothing, nothing like that.

He just rose and he went and he walks away from this revival. He walks away from this excitement. He walks away from the buzz and all that's happening that nobody would want to give up.

And in complete and simple obedience he just rises and goes. that's what it means to be a man full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom.

That's what it means to be full of the Holy Spirit because to be full of the Holy Spirit means that the Holy Spirit is able to direct everything you do.

And so instead of questioning the Lord and asking the Lord, Lord how could you want me to go down to this deserted place? What on earth is out there? There's nothing there.

[22 : 57] Why would I do that? In fact you can even translate this a slightly different way. It says go down from Jerusalem to go toward the south.

You can actually translate it as go down go out at noon. Go out at noon. It would mean the same thing in the original there.

And that could be significant because you think to go towards the desert at noon you're not expecting to meet anybody because nobody in their right mind in the Middle East is going to be traveling in the heat of the day.

You don't expect to meet many people in the desert anyway but even less so at noon. So what could God's purpose possibly be to send his servant out down to there at noon?

But he arose and went. My brothers and sisters that's supposed to be you and me. God is supposed to have such easy access to your heart and mine that he can just place something in front of us and we'll just do it.

[24 : 07] A few years ago I remember an elderly couple they went out to Brazil and when they were in Brasilia going around in the city they came to discover that there were literally thousands upon thousands of orphaned children, street kids who were living rough on the streets and it wasn't widely known but they discovered from some very insider contacts that many of these kids were just being shot.

There were hit squads going out at night that just killed these children because they were like vermin running about the place. They just shot them. And this elderly couple came home from their holidays and they were shocked to their foundations at what they had discovered.

And you know what they did? They packed their bags and went back to Brazil and started an orphanage. they were in their seventies. You see this man just arose and went.

He saw the need and because of the selfless love of Jesus in him he just rose up and he went to do something about it. He thought he didn't think to question what the angel had said.

There are plenty of examples in scripture of people who got visits from angels and they questioned what the angel was saying. Zechariah was struck dumb because he didn't believe that his wife was going to have a baby in their old age.

[25 : 42] But not this man. This is a man who's walking with God. This is a man who's taking baby steps and he's quite happy to let God direct his paths.

Proverbs 3, 5 and 6. Trust in the Lord with all your heart. Lean not upon your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him and he will direct your paths.

This is exactly who Philip is. That's the man he is. He arose and went. And there was an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians.

And this eunuch, now he might have been a eunuch in literal terms because very often, this was a man who was a servant to a queen, he would be moving about in that close quarters to the queen, and very often in those days, male servants were literally rendered incapable of sexual contact with the women round about.

And that may literally be true of him. And I think it was actually, and I'll tell you why in a moment or two. But it was also generally a word that quite often applied to somebody who was a high official and not necessarily physically maimed in any way.

[27 : 18] But he was certainly a trusted man. This was the man who was effectively the treasurer of Ethiopia. And this is the man that Philip had been sent to the desert to meet with.

This was a divine encounter. I wonder how obedient we are, really. Do we expect God to direct our paths in this intimate moment-by-moment way, do we?

Because I think we should. I really think we should. I confess I'm not as good at it now as I was years ago when I was a younger man and I regret that.

But I remember on one occasion I had been at a prayer meeting and the man who was leading the prayer meeting in my mind was a spiritual giant. I couldn't reach up to this guy.

And I was so impressed by this man. And all through the meeting I had a psalm, a word from the psalms going through my head. And I had a growing conviction that I had to tell this man this word from the psalms.

[28 : 29] I had to say it to him. And it wouldn't leave me alone. And I didn't have the courage to say anything to him because he was off my scale as far as I could see.

So I came home and I was getting ready for bed and I said to Agnes I can't get any peace about this thing. I think I was supposed to tell this man this word tonight.

And I didn't have the courage to do it. And so I said look I'm going out for a walk in the rain. It was pouring rain. That will maybe just cool my silly head down and I'll get a bit of perspective on this.

So I got as far as my car and I knew that I was going to be disobedient to God if I didn't get in my car and go. And it was after midnight. So I got in my car and my car had a bad exhaust system and it was making a right old racket.

And there I had to drive into his street and all the lights were off. And here was this noisy car driving in and I thought oh lord I really don't want to be here. And then I remembered he had a big dog and I thought I don't want to be here at all.

[29 : 37] But anyway I somehow or other I found a modicum of courage and I went up to his door I rang the bell and the light went straight on. And he came to the door in his dressing gown and he said I expected you hours ago.

And I was completely flabbergasted. He invited me in. We went into it. It turned out he and his wife had a little chapel in their house.

Just a wee prayer room that they had set aside. And he took me into this and he said you've got a message for me haven't you? I said yes. He said what is it? And I told him straight out.

And this big guy, this was a guy who had major, major jobs that in political circles he was an impressive, powerful person and had been very close to senior government officials in other countries and I gave him this word from the Psalms and he started to cry.

He says my wife and I have been asking the Lord to give us a word from the scriptures for years. We've been crying out to God and this is the word.

[30 : 59] I know tonight this is the word. So you see, folks, God is no respecter of persons. I said to you a few weeks ago when I was standing here, if God always chose the right people I wouldn't be preaching.

And the reality is if God always chose the right people none of us would do anything as Christians because we're not fit for task. None of us. It's only by the grace of God that we're fit for task.

God takes the wrong people and makes them right. God takes the weak and he shames the strong. And this is it. That's what he said to the Corinthians.

Let me read this to you. Consider your calling, brothers.

Not many of you were wise according to worldly standards. Not many were powerful. Not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise.

[32 : 04] God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong. God chose what is low and despised in the world even things that are not to bring to nothing things that are so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

This is what it's all about. It's about the glory of God. That's what Philip was doing. He was bringing glory to God because he himself was nothing but he was just obedient in a very simple and straightforward fashion.

So when he gets a mission, he gets a commission to do something that makes no sense, he doesn't question it. He just goes. He just arises and goes.

Dwight Moody pointed out that Moses had lived 120 years. And he says Moses spent 40 of those years thinking he was a somebody.

and he spent another 40 years in the desert learning that he was a nobody. And then he spent a further 40 years discovering what God can do with somebody who knows he's a nobody.

[33 : 09] You see, our God is extraordinary. And Philip did extraordinary things because of his extraordinary God. My brothers and sisters, look at the state of our country today.

do you think our country needs to know our extraordinary God? I had this, this church was filled the other day for a funeral and I don't think there was more than two people in the whole place that I could have said were born again.

They were just people who had no idea they were without hope and without God in the world. At a funeral, what a terrible place to be at a funeral without hope and without God.

That's helpful. So Philip ran up.

The spirit said to Philip, run up and join this chariot. And so here we are, we've got an angel speaking to Philip and now we're told that the spirit spoke to Philip.

[34 : 16] This man is getting directions from God one way or another. He's getting directions from God. God. I don't think most of us expect God to direct us. I don't think we do.

I think it's a hit or miss thing for us. I think we think that the people of Bible times were in a special place and that today these things don't happen.

I want to tell you, Richard Wurmbrand said that the supernatural is natural in the underground church because they've got no one but God to depend on.

You see, we're told here towards the end of this reading today that Philip preached the gospel in all the towns between Samaria and Caesarea, which was his hometown.

And that was probably about 25 towns along the route. And he preached the gospel in all of those. Now, let me ask you something. This was the first century. So how much money did he spend on buying a big tent that he could put up in the center of the town?

[35 : 29] And how much money did he spend on buying the services of a lighting crew and sound engineers and all that?

And how much money did he raise for an evangelistic crusade in each of these towns? things. I'll guarantee you, my brothers and sisters, that all Philip did was to stand in the town square and say to folks, I want to tell you the best news you've ever heard.

And the Holy Spirit did the rest. He was just faithful in little things. We are so clever today. We've got so much technology.

We've got so great resources. Do you know that the Christian church in the West has an enormous footprint on the internet? We've got a massive presence on the internet.

And the underground church, do you know where that is? It's underground. It's not out there to be seen. It's invisible most of the time.

[36 : 32] And when they do make themselves visible, they know they're taking a risk and it's to share the gospel with someone who needs to know the Lord. And here's Philip. He's been plucked out of this great revival just for the sake of one man, this one Ethiopian man who matters as much to God as all the folk in Samaria that are rejoicing in the new saviour that they've discovered.

This man matters just as much to God. God sent Philip to just meet with this one man. man. There are some parts of the church around the world that believe that this one man was the man who founded the Ethiopian church.

And just a few years ago, my wife and I were in Israel. Agnes had a really, really sore knee. It was severely disabling. And there were some Ethiopian Christian folks in our group.

And when they saw Agnes hobbling about, one of them said, let me pray for you. And he just very simply prayed for Agnes there and then. And her knee was healed instantly.

And she had no trouble with it again after that. So they were probably the direct descendants of this man that God sent his evangelist to meet this just one man.

[38 : 11] And we could turn around to the Lord and say, Lord, that's a waste of my time. There's all this going on here in Samaria. It's buzzing, Lord. Do you not see it? How can I walk away from this?

And the Lord is saying, there is one man who needs to hear the gospel. And by the way, this man was reading from the scroll of Isaiah. So that means he was very probably, we know he had been up at Jerusalem to worship, but he was a Gentile, he was a black man.

He wasn't a Jew. He was probably a proselyte, as they would call him, a convert to Judaism. And he had a copy of the scroll of Isaiah, so he must have been serious in his faith.

faith. And, but look at what's going on here with this man. Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and said, do you understand what you're reading?

And the man said, no, how am I supposed to understand? There's no one to help me. And he must have recognized that Philip was a Jew. And he thought, well, I'm reading the Jewish scriptures.

[39 : 21] Why don't you come up into the chariot and help me? Help me understand. And of course, what a passage for this man to be reading. I don't know if you're aware of it or not, but Isaiah actually prophesied that God would give a eunuch who couldn't have a family, remember, he would give him a heritage better than children.

It was Isaiah who prophesied that just three chapters after the one that he was reading. Isaiah said that I'll give to the eunuch who trusts me a heritage better than children.

And so here he is reading in Isaiah the prophet, and he's reading of all passages that he could have been reading, he's reading Isaiah 53, the one chapter in Isaiah that more clearly than anywhere else in scripture speaks about the suffering, sorrowing servant of God, the Messiah, the Messiah who bears the sin of his people.

And that happens to be the one chapter he's reading at that point. Now, is that an accident? Or does God time this perfectly to send Philip to meet up with this man in his chariot just at the very point where he's reading Isaiah 53?

And just at the very point where they've stopped the teaching and the man's convinced that Jesus is the Messiah, lo and behold, there's a body of water.

[41 : 03] And the man says, hey, look, there's water, what's to stop me being baptized? You see the hand of God in this, don't you, at every point?

you feel the hair standing up on the back of your neck. You know, this is God at work here. All these coincidences taking place.

It reminded me when I was reading it of the time in Queen Esther's time in Old Testament times when the king couldn't sleep.

And because of his insomnia, he was looking for some distraction and he said, go and get the chronicles of the kingdom and start reading them to me. I want somebody to read something to me.

And of course, they started reading through the chronicles of all that had been going on in the kingdom and they got to the story about Mordecai, who was Esther's uncle. And Mordecai had actually protected the king.

[42 : 07] He had actually warned the king about a plot to assassinate him. And the king said, that's amazing. was anything done to honour this man who has done so much for me?

And they said, no, no, nothing was done. And they said, well, let's change that right now. And he's just about, he's just announcing that he wants to honour the man who has done so much for him.

When Haman, who hates the Jews, and hates Queen Esther, of course, but doesn't know she's a Jew, and he walks in at that very moment to ask a favour of the king. And the king pops a question, Haman, who do you think, what should be done for the man that the king wishes to honour?

And Haman thinks to himself, well, who would the king wish to honour if it wasn't me? Haman. And so Haman comes up with this plan, put him on a special horse that the king has ridden, and the king's livery on the horse, and lets somebody lead the horse through the town, saying this is what happens to the man the king wants to honour, and the king says to Haman, that's a great idea, go and do this for Mordecai.

Whoa! Coincidence, coincidence, coincidence, but it's the hand of God all the way through, and that's what's happening here, and this is why it's so important for us to dare to believe that God can be in the little incidences in our lives, and not think that anything is just random.

[43 : 43] Nothing is random when you're trusting the Lord. You trust the Lord with all your heart, and you lean not upon your own understanding, and acknowledge him in all your ways, then he does direct your paths.

He does direct, and you can hear the inner voice of the Spirit speaking to you, saying, you know, there's a man called Lee Strobel, who's a well-known apologist for the gospel, and his wife was converted because their child was saved, through a nurse who went to the restaurant that they happened to be in, and when their child took a choking fit on a piece of food, the nurse knew exactly what to do, and she stepped in and rescued the child, and the woman said, my goodness, she says, I'm just so thankful that you happened to be in the restaurant tonight, and the woman said, oh, it was no accident, she said, God told me not to go to the restaurant I was planning to go to, he said, I needed to be here tonight, I didn't know why, I just came, that's the 20th century folks, and this is the 21st century,

God hasn't changed, it's our faith level that has changed, it's our expectation of God that has changed, but he hasn't changed, Christ, and so Philip is able to lead this man to read the prophet Isaiah with new eyes, and to see, yes, this actually is a perfect description, because this man had just been up at Jerusalem for the feast, and he had been up there as a worshipper, and what had he learned, he must have, the whole of Jerusalem was buzzing about Jesus of Nazareth, and the crucifixion, and then the resurrection, and then the Holy Spirit coming at Pentecost, the whole place was buzzing, he couldn't have missed what was going on, so he knew all this, and when he's reading this, he asks a very reasonable question, he's saying, is this prophet here, is he talking about himself or someone else?

Who is this lamb that's led to the slaughter? Who is this one who's denied justice? Is that the prophet? it's a reasonable question to ask, because Jeremiah had said exactly that about himself, Jeremiah had said, Lord, I'm just like a lamb to the slaughter, and so if this man knew the Old Testament, knew the Hebrew scriptures, then it was a reasonable question to ask, maybe Isaiah was speaking about himself, and Philip says, no, he's not talking about himself, think about what you've heard and read about Jesus of Nazareth in recent times, this is the man who was denied justice, this is the man that nobody cared if he lived or died, and so he was able to bring him to faith in Jesus, through the scriptures, starting with that passage from Isaiah,

Philip opened his mouth, beginning with this scripture, it sounds a wee bit like the road to Emmaus event, doesn't it? Beginning with Moses and all the prophets, the Lord showed them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.

[47 : 18] Do you know that if you're a Jew today and you go along to synagogue, you'll have a lectionary, you'll have a sort of order of readings for the year that go through, and it's all set out for each time that you meet in the synagogue, and one of the readings that you will not come across in that list of readings is Isaiah 53.

You'll not come across Isaiah 53. The rabbis years ago decided to take Isaiah 53 out of the frame because there is no way to explain Isaiah 53 except in terms of Jesus of Nazareth.

Isaiah 53 was written about 7000 years ago. The rabbis are beginning to admit that. The same is true of Psalm 22, which is one of the most perfect descriptions of the crucifixion.

They cast lots for my garments. They wag their heads at me. Psalm 22 just about describes the crucifixion, and it was written a thousand years before the event.

Isaiah 53 was written about 700 years before the event. So this man was led to faith in Jesus by the writing of a 700-year-old prophecy.

[48 : 41] And as they were going along the road, they came to some water, and the eunuch said, look, here's some water. What prevents me from being baptized? And it's a good question. There was nothing to prevent him from being baptized.

He wanted to signal by his baptism that he had become a part of the community of faith, that he was now a disciple of Jesus.

And you know what's amazing about that? Jesus said to the Pharisees, you travel land and sea to make a single proselyte, a single convert to your faith, and when you do, he's twice as much a child of hell as you yourselves are.

That was a terrible thing for Jesus to say, was it not? It doesn't sound kind at all. It doesn't sound like the king of love would say such a thing. But that's what he said. Let me tell you again.

You traverse land and sea to make a single convert to your faith, and when you convert him, he's twice as much a son of hell as you are.

[49 : 49] That's a dreadful indictment. And so effectively, this proselyte here, this man who was now trying to learn how to live the Jewish faith to be part of Judaism, is literally rescued.

God plucked Philip out of Samaria in the midst of this great revival and sent him down the desert road to meet this one man to rescue this man who was in danger of being made twice as much a child of hell as the folks who had converted him in the first place.

And why was he going to be a child of hell? Because Judaism in those days was nothing short of just a legalistic framework. It was a religion that actually believed that God should be impressed with what we do for him.

That explains the parable that Jesus told of the Pharisee and the publican. The Pharisee stood way down the front in a prominent place in the synagogue and said, Lord, I thank you that I'm not like this publican here and I fast twice a week and I tithe everything I have and I just thank you that I'm such a righteous person.

And the publican stood at the back of the synagogue and tried to keep himself in an obscure place and he beat his chest and cried and wouldn't even lift his head. Oh God be merciful to me a sinner.

[51 : 17] And Jesus said, I tell you, that man went home justified. Not the Pharisee. Why?

Because that was a man who needed God to be his righteousness. He could not establish his own righteousness through his good deeds. He knew that if he had any righteousness, any hope at all, it was going to be by the mercy of God.

Brothers and sisters, if you're a Christian today, you're a Christian by the mercy of God. It's because of God's goodness to you. God is not impressed by anything we do for him.

He's impressed by what his son did for us. God is impressed by the mercy of God. That's it. That's it. We can't impress God. Let's give up all hope of impressing God.

If I could impress God and get to heaven by my good deeds and my performance, then Jesus was a fool to die on the cross because I didn't need that sacrifice.

[52 : 20] But if the only way I can get to heaven is through the sacrifice of Jesus, then I'm not trying to impress God.

I'm impressed by God and what he has done for me at Calvary. God is the one who's impressive. Not the sinner, but the Savior.

He's impressive. So he commanded the chariot to stop. They both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him.

And there was a man who was not in any danger now of becoming twice as much a child of hell as the Pharisees. This is a man who had been literally plucked off a path of danger and brought into the kingdom.

And this is what Paul said to the Colossian church. He said, He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son He loves in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

[53 : 34] Brothers and sisters, we have been rescued. This eunuch was rescued. If he had continued on that Judaistic path, he would have been lost.

But he was rescued. And we praise God that he was rescued and that we've been rescued. And then the Lord, the Spirit of the Lord just carried Philip away.

And what did that do? That endorsed for the Ethiopian that what had happened was a genuine work of God. He couldn't possibly doubt that God had met with him in a remarkable way.

Philip was just carried away by the Spirit. We're told that that happened to Ezekiel on one occasion. It happened to Elijah. And here it is happening to Philip. The Lord just, the Lord has his ways of doing things.

And we can't second guess how he's going to do it. Philip was carried away by the Spirit. The eunuch saw him no more, but he went on his way rejoicing.

[54 : 37] And folks, you know, please, please pray for so many folks in the churches who are in the church but not in the kingdom.

They've never known what it is to experience the joy of salvation, the joy of forgiveness, the joy of God's smile upon their lives and God's favor.

You know, Isaiah said in the very next chapter to the one that the eunuch was reading, no weapon formed against you will prevail. And every tongue that rises in accusation against you, you will condemn.

This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord and their righteousness is from God. You see, the Lord is our righteousness.

Satan cannot pick holes in my righteousness or yours if you're a believer in Jesus Christ because our righteousness is not ours, it's God-given.

[55 : 46] If you were to ask for a phrase that just sums up the whole of the epistle to the Romans, it would be a righteousness from heaven. The whole of the epistle to the Romans is about God giving righteousness to people who could never earn it, never achieve it.

And that's what's been given to this eunuch. That's why he can go on his way rejoicing. He's got nothing to prove anymore. He's been rescued from the way of legalism.

He doesn't have to impress God anymore. He's impressed by God and what God has done for him at Calvary. Isn't that astonishing? Isn't that good news?

But Philip found himself at Azotus. So, I don't know what the spirit did, but the spirit plucked him up, took him away, and he found himself at Azotus.

Now, that's just the first century name for Ashdod, which is the old Philistine city on the coast. And Philip found himself at Ashdod. And as he passed through that area, he just preached in all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

[57 : 01] So, there he is. He's not resting on his laurels. He's not saying, well, we had a great time in Samaria, and now here's this Ethiopian. My goodness, that's the gospel gone to the horn of Africa.

It's gone, are we over there now? My goodness, that's astonishing. But he's not resting on his laurels. He's not relaxing in any sense. He just, everywhere he goes, he talks about Jesus. It reminds me of John Harper that the church in Glasgow was named after.

John Harper was the man who went around the deck of the Titanic saying to people, do you know Jesus? Do you know Jesus? Even as the ship was going down, and when he finally found himself in the water, he's got his life jacket on and he's bobbing about in this icy, freezing water.

He knows he hasn't long to live unless somebody plucks him out of the water. And suddenly, there's another man beside him who's completely panic-stricken and he doesn't have a life jacket. And John Harper took his off and gave it to the man.

He says, if you don't know Jesus, you need that life jacket more than I do. And the man survived. And after the ordeal of the Titanic, this man met with the survivors of the Titanic every year for years after that.

[58 : 23] And all the talk was about John Harper, the man who had plucked him out, enabled him to be plucked out of the water and gave his life for him. And that's what this eunuch would be doing when he got back to Ethiopia.

You can guarantee that the queen of Ethiopia heard the story about Jesus. Philip found himself preaching everywhere he went.

He just couldn't stay silent. He had to talk about the one who had saved him. And years later, in fact, if we go to Acts 21, you'll see a reference to Philip as Philip the evangelist.

And we're told that he had four daughters who prophesied. He lived in Caesarea on the coast. He had four daughters who prophesied. So there we are, even years later, when he's a much, much older man, he's still called Philip the evangelist.

And he's got daughters who are now going on in the Lord and working in the kingdom of God. What a story of God who just takes nobodies and does wonderful things through nobodies.

[59 : 36] Let's pray. Living God, our Father, we bless you for all that you have done in our lives. And we know, living God, that we haven't guessed and never could guess the half of what you're able to do.

Forgive us that we limit you in our expectations. Forgive us that our faith is small. And we ask you, Lord, to increase our faith.

We realize that the scripture is very clear that faith itself is a gift from you. We can't magically do something to increase our faith but we can acknowledge when our faith is weak and we can ask you to increase our faith and to make good the deficit in us so that you receive the glory.

Father, hear our cry and enable us to be the Phillips of today that each of us would have that moment-by-moment sense of your leading.

And whether you send us an angel to direct us or whether the Spirit prompts us from within or whether it's even something like persecution or life difficulties that put us in the place that we wouldn't have wanted to be, help us to understand as our brother Bill said last week that we can blossom wherever we're planted.

[61 : 16] Thank you for Philip's life. Thank you for your life in him. Make us the Phillips of today in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.