

Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch

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Date: 19 May 2019

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[0 : 00] May the words of my lips and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in thy sight. Oh, Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

Well, dear friends, before I seek to open the passage that is before us from Acts 8, if you want to find a Bible and turn to that Acts 8 verses 26 to 40, which have already been read, I would encourage you to do that.

But I have a few things I wanted to say before that. First of all, on behalf of the Diocese of the Anacid Network in Canada, I want to say praise the Lord, hallelujah, and congratulations for this great and glorious day.

I'm thinking specifically of the ordination service that I hope most all will be able to be part of coming this afternoon. This is an extremely significant development for our diocese and I believe for the body of Christ.

For Daniel, for Jonathan, and for Daniel to be ordained to the diaconate is a great joy. And for me as bishop, to have the honor and joy to lay hands on them is a wonderful thing.

[1 : 19] And so I am delighted and I know that you are as well. And I just want to say that on behalf of the diocese. I remember, because I know this is not only big for the diocese and big for the Church of the Messiah, but Ryle College as well.

And you won't be surprised that it was at a Starbucks that George and I were speaking. And he shared with me his heart's desire and longing with a sense of call of God that he would raise up, out of Church of the Messiah, a theological college which would prepare people for ministry.

And so it's so fun to be here on this Sunday where we're marking something which is obvious fruit of that vision, of that promise of God and now of that reality.

And so this is only just a beginning, of course, but it's an exciting and significant beginning. And so I rejoice in that. I also wanted to tell you that George kindly gave me leeway to choose the passage that I wanted to preach on today.

And you might think Acts 8, 26 to 40 is a bit obscure or what does that have to do? Well, I know it's got about evangelism and so on, so maybe it's always a good one. But I wanted to tell you sort of personally, and I hope this is more than nostalgia.

[2 : 46] In 1971, the rector of the church that I attended, the Anakin Church, took me, I think sort of dutifully, he didn't know what to do with me kind of situation, took me to a conference that he thought I'd like.

It was a Faith at Works conference in Hamilton. And Michael, Canon Michael Green was the speaker. Now later he moved, he and his wife Rosemary, to Regent College in Vancouver. But this was his first visit to Canada. The theme was, Good News is Our Business. And the second talk he gave was based on Acts 8, 26 to 40.

I can still remember all seven points of that sermon, even the tone of voice of the way this great man delivered them. And the thing was that it was powerful, not only because of the word of God, because it rang true in terms of the life of the man.

The little I knew about him, and I'd read a number of his books, I knew that he gossiped the gospel in every opportunity. And any opportunity that had to be around him in future years, I found that to be absolutely the case.

[3 : 57] So friends, I want to read you a little bit from your rector's pastor's blog for today. The last paragraph, he says this, friends, please pray that the Lord will use Messiah in evangelism.

Please pray that he will use our people, services, small groups, Sunday school, youth group, church on Wednesday, men's and women's ministries, and much more in telling the good news.

I say amen. I'm praying that for you and for myself. And I'm praying that somehow a little bit of this passage from Acts 8 will spill over to you in a powerful way, whereby the impact will be actual witnessing action.

So an excerpt from what has already been wonderfully read for us, it says this. Now, the passage of the scripture that he was reading was this. This is the Ethiopian eunuch on his chariot.

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

[5 : 11] 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? About himself or about someone else? Here it is. Then Philip opened his mouth and beginning with this scripture, he told him the good news about Jesus.

Jesus, make no mistake. Don't be deceived. I hope that as I make my way through three points I hope to make, that you will get it, what the impact and the prayer of this is.

That in fact, you and I will become Philips, who will be so steep and interacting with the word of God, so available to people that in fact, in all sorts of circumstances, having searched the scriptures daily, we're ready and we don't just aren't just ready, but we open our mouths and speak about Jesus.

Now, I know there's quotes about, you know, preach the scripture, preach the gospel and when necessary use words. I'm not a big fan of that quote.

[6 : 28] But I have to admit, I know that we need our lives have to back up what it is we're saying. But in fact, if you don't open your mouth, friend, nobody will know the actual facts of the gospel.

And so I'm urging you and praying for you in line with what the rector has invited us to pray for this week. So three points. What I want to say is, well, let me start with verse 26.

Now, an angel of the Lord said to Philip, rise and go south to the road that goes from Jerusalem to Gaza. This is a desert place. Now, that maybe doesn't seem like a fruitful way to start a sermon.

But in fact, what I think it does is it takes the force of everything that has happened in the book of Acts all the way up to this point. What am I talking about? Well, Acts one begins by Luke, who wrote the gospel of Luke, writing a second piece now to the same guy, Theophilus, and saying in his previous work, he spoke about what Jesus began to do and to teach.

It says in verse one until he was taken up. Speaking of the ascension. By that implication, making it clear that when Jesus ascended to heaven, he didn't stop working.

[7 : 48] But in fact, the work goes on. And of course, the promise of the giving of the Holy Spirit is the means through which ordinary people like Philip and you, my friend.

And. That the gospel goes forward and Jesus continues to do his work. The work of salvation is complete. It is finished, as it says in John 19.

But in fact, the application of this glorious salvation is yet to be drawing in more people, a people for his own namesake. So point number one is this, that in fact, what you'll see is that all three points have to do with the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is the one who orchestrates all things. Towards the expansion of the gospel, the expansion of the kingdom.

It's the Holy Spirit is doing this. Make no mistake as significant as the individuals like you and me who open our mouths. It's the Holy Spirit who's working it out.

[8 : 48] And so as you follow the course of of of Luke, as he writes from Acts one eight, where Jesus gave the promise. It's the fifth record of the Great Commission.

This one being the Acts one eight. He said, but you shall receive power after that. The Holy Spirit has come upon you and you shall be witnesses to me in Jerusalem and in Judea and Samaria and to the uttermost parts of the earth.

That's the promise.

The Holy Spirit has come upon you and the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit has come upon you and the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit has come upon you and the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit has come upon you and to May 19th at 4 p.m. And saying this is the direction the Spirit of God is going. He's orchestrating things towards a calling of people for his own namesake.

That's why, for instance, in Acts 18, when when the Lord spoke to Paul in Corinth, he told him to keep on preaching. He said, for I have many in this city are mine.

[10:09] There are many in these parts who are yet to be reached. I don't know who they are, but the Spirit of God knows. And he's orchestrating things so that the likes of you and me can be instruments through which it happens.

The Holy Spirit is at work orchestrating history and your history in Christ towards the expansion of the kingdom. That's point number one. And so as we think about that, we see that, you know, the that Philip was given instructions to go to he's in Samaria.

And in fact, if you follow that, you know, there was a persecution that happened, began at the end of Acts 7, a vicious one. The ringleader of it is a guy by the name of Saul of Tarsus.

And if you know your acts, you'll know in just a few verses after where we end. He who is breathing out violence towards the church is confronted on his way to Damascus with the risen Lord Jesus.

And everything changes for even the enemy of the gospel in Saul of Tarsus, who later is called Paul the Apostle. The Holy Spirit working out his purposes towards the expansion of the kingdom, working in history, working in geography, working in your life, leading you to where you need to be to open your mouth and speak about Jesus.

[11:29] Secondly, the Holy Spirit applies the gospel to otherwise completely lost lives. Over and over again, as you make your way through Acts, there are people who seem to be reasonably disqualified.

Exhibit A, B, C, D of those who could not be reached by this gospel. Not so. And so, I mean, I guess you think of Saul of Tarsus, the enemy, the chief of sinners, the one who has no right to be called an apostle, as he says in 1 Corinthians 15.

But by the grace of God, I am what I am, and his grace toward me did not prove vain. There is no one who's disqualified. And so here it is in this case.

It's a foreigner and a eunuch. Both of whom, as we understand the Old Testament system, would be disqualified from fully being able to participate in the things of God.

There is a promise in Isaiah 56, which speaks about a recovery of these things for the foreigner and for the eunuch. But what's so exciting is that the Holy Spirit leads Philip to an Ethiopian eunuch, who is the minister of finance for the queen of Ethiopia.

[12:49] And there, there is this confrontation. And by the end of the story, you know, he said, as he looks down and discovers some water and says, what's what's stopping me from being baptized?

And Philip said nothing. Because, in fact, the gospel had taken root and had saved him, as it says in Hebrews 7, to the uttermost.

This is the message of Isaiah 53 that this dear man is reading as Philip comes along. And so it is that, in fact, Philip speaks from Isaiah 53, surely, about the reality of the fact that Jesus, the son of whom this passage is speaking, the question was, of whom is he speaking?

It's Jesus. Jesus. And why Jesus? Why did he have to go through that? It was for the likes of you and me. He was put in our place. Substituted.

Placed in our place. And when he stretched out his arms on the cross, he who knew no sin became sin on our behalf, as it says in 2 Corinthians 5, that we might become the righteousness of God.

[14:13] That's what Isaiah 53 is talking about. And so the father who is pleased to crush him, it says in this great passage, is then satisfied with the offering which he makes so that many find righteousness through this one.

This is the message which Philip brought to the Ethiopian eunuch. And this is the message which made this dear man be able to be baptized on that day.

Remember, Paul says that you were at that time. This is from Ephesians 2. Remember, you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise.

Having no hope and without God in the world. Surely that was this dear man. But now in Christ Jesus, you who are once far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

Dear friends, I made a promise to the Lord early on in my days that whenever possible, whether I knew everybody or not, and I don't know everybody here, I see your sunshiny faces, I know that most obviously know everything about what I'm saying.

[15:27] Nothing that is being said is at all new to you. And I rejoice in that. But perhaps there's someone who has a sense of being on the outside of these things. Where in fact, this news of a savior who stepped in your place because the Holy Spirit delivers a gospel which takes you from

being far off to being part of the beloved.

You who are far off are brought near. Consequently, the writer of Hebrews says he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him.

This is Jesus since he always lives to make intercession for us. And thirdly, the Holy Spirit uses ordinary people as the vehicle through which he brings this astounding message, which he has orchestrated by his working to bring this person to be ready to receive what you have to say about the Lord Jesus.

It was actually this point, which is what Ken and Michael Green primarily spoke about that day 48 years ago, which had such an impact.

And here are some of the things that I want you to think about in that regard. First of all, just for you to know a little bit about Philip. Philip was a deacon. The actual word deacon is never used in Acts 6, but he's one of the seven which was chosen by the apostles in that sort of internal difficulty that there was.

[17:01] There was Stephen and Philip and five others. Stephen is the one who is the first martyr. And out of his martyrdom was unleashed this incredible persecution.

And so the Spirit of God used a fleeing for their lives, which is what Philip and his family were doing, going north. And they find themselves in Samaria.

And so rather than keeping his head down and hoping that nobody knows who he is and what's going on, instead of that, he gossips the gospel. And in fact, there's this glorious turning, just as there was with the woman at the well in John 4.

There's this turning in Samaria of people to Christ, so much so that the apostles dispatch Peter and John to go up there to Samaria to see what's going on and to pray for these folks, lay hands on them for the filling of the Holy Spirit.

And then, so there's Philip in the midst of this revival. It says in Acts 8, verse 9, so there was joy in the city. Incidentally, just as an aside, one of our churches in Anik named themselves Celebration in Barry based on Acts 8, verse 9.

[18:11] Because that's what they're praying for Barry area, that the gospel will take root and there's going to be joy in the city as a result of this happening. Celebration, church, pray for them.

Well, so it is that this Philip, in the midst of this revival, perhaps surprisingly, finds himself confronted by an angel and the Spirit of God and being asked to leave all of this revival behind and go south miles into the desert.

Sounds crazy, unless God tells you. Point number one about the character of the witness is he's led by the Holy Spirit. But I want to ask you, are you cultivating a relationship with the Lord Jesus such that the Spirit of God has the right to whisper in your ear, as it says in Isaiah 30, this is the way, walk in it, whether to turn to the right or to the left.

Does he have access to you such that he can tell you what to do and say, leave all this behind and go there, crazy as it may seem? See, the Holy Spirit does that.

It's not that everything is crazy. It's just that we don't always have the sense of what he's about. But does he have the right? See, Philip, as a witness, was led by the Holy Spirit and he obeyed.

[19:38] That's the first point about the character of the one who would be a harvest. Secondly, he was equipped as a servant. Verses 30 and 31. So Philip ran to him and heard him.

So he's specifically told where to go. All of a sudden, there's a chariot up there and he figures that must be it, Lord. And so, you know, I can imagine sort of grudgingly sort of crawling up, sort of, yo, sort of, poor me, what am I doing?

But instead of that, he runs up, which is a mark of the servant spirit of this man. If God has put me here, if this is the situation, then I'm going to be there, hook, line and sinker, 100%.

Servant. For even the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve. And he goes on and says, and he said to him, ran up and said, do you understand what you're reading?

The witness does not come dropping gems on people and take it or leave it. I couldn't care less. Second Corinthians five says, I beseech you, be reconciled to God.

[20:41] There is a sense of taking the lower place, coming alongside, being a servant, saying, how can I help? Do you understand what you're reading? That's the posture of Philip. Thirdly, Philip is a man of the word.

It would have been impossible for him to be used in that significant situation. And make no mistake, the outcome was a man bringing the gospel to Africa.

Just as an aside, I have part of a group which relates to the North American Lutheran Church, which has a very similar history to the American Church in North America.

But I found from my friends in the North American Lutheran Church that the center of Lutheranism, where the gospel is working in such power, where there are more people than anywhere else in the world, is Ethiopia.

Did you know that? That's where the action is for Lutherans. I thought that was so fun and so wonderful. And of course, as Anglicans, we're very familiar with the global south being where the action is.

[21 : 45] Well, it's the same with them. And so it is that the gospel came with this Ethiopian eunuch to Ethiopia. Very good place to come. Because Philip was a man of the word.

He understood when this man read from Isaiah 53, 7 and 8. That was Isaiah 53. He was equipped and ready.

And what a joy it was for him to bring to say, yes, it was the will of the Lord to crush him. He has to be put to grief. When his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring.

He shall prolong his days. The will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. Out of the anguish of his soul, he shall see and be satisfied by the knowledge shall one. The righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous.

Many. There's a whole lot more to be found. A whole lot more fish to be. I'll make you fishers of men. And this Jesus satisfied the righteous requirements of a holy God.

[22 : 49] So that there's a way. Philip was a man of the word. Are you engaged in the word of God? Philip was also someone who took the facts of the gospel and made them known.

Philip opened his mouth. I really have a sense, dear friends. And if you've ever watched any of the videos, which I do week by week, I always end with search the scriptures daily and every opportunity, open your mouth and speak about Jesus.

It's because it's so clear the Holy Spirit is just waiting for folks to get off dead center and get it out there. Anything. Anything.

I had a friend who used to say, you know, if you could just grunt, God would use it. Well, you know, I think there's more content than that that's required. But in fact, the getting it out, saying the name Jesus is a powerful thing.

Dear friends, today is a day of great rejoicing. We pray the Lord of the harvest to send forth laborers into his harvest. And in Daniel, Jonathan and Daniel, we see exactly gospel men being launched in ordained ministry as deacons.

[24 : 06] And we rejoice. But in fact, Philip was an ordinary guy. And in fact, the impact of this account is not just for the ordained.

It is for them. But it is for the likes of you, my friend, who are in Christ. I urge you, people of Church of the Messiah, as your rector has prayed for you and exhorts you to pray.

I'm saying as an application of that prayer, open your mouth and speak about Jesus. Would you stand with me as we as we pray? Lord Jesus Christ, you're amazing.

You who made all things and all things were made for you. We are bought with a price, the price of your own blood. We rejoice. We thank you for the gospel and the power of God.

It is for salvation to anyone and everyone who believes. We have a sense of something precious and powerful, which is within our grasp, which is ours to share. And so we ask you, Lord, to help us to be led by the Holy Spirit, to be moved by the Holy Spirit, to be equipped by the Holy Spirit, to open our mouths.

[25 : 30] And then would you take what we share of your word and of Jesus and apply it to people's lives, that there will be men and women, boys and girls in the kingdom as a result of even our witness.

Hallelujah. Amen.