

The Ethiopian Eunuch

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[0 : 00] Let us now turn back to the portion of scripture we read in the Acts of the Apostles and chapter 8.

And again reading at verse 26, the encounter that Philip had with the Ethiopian Enoch. Now the angel of the Lord said to Philip, rise and go towards 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 Enoch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure.

He had come to Jerusalem to worship and was returning and so on. Now Luke, who is the author of the Gospel of Luke, is also the author of the Acts of the Apostles.

[1 : 14] And while the Gospel of Luke focuses primarily on the life of Christ, the Acts of the Apostles covers a period of about 30 years from the Lord's ascension to Paul's first imprisonment in Rome in the year AD 63.

And the Acts of the Apostles covers the expansion of the Gospel from Jerusalem outwards throughout the land of Israel or Palestine into Asia Minor and into Greece and ultimately to Rome.

And in this chapter we read that the Samaritans, who had been so opposed to the Jews down through the centuries, that they themselves also embraced the Gospel.

It says in verse 8 of this chapter that there was much joy in that city because the Gospel was being blessed and the Lord was being glorified through the work of the Gospel in the hearts of many.

Now, I'd like to focus on just one man this evening. The one man mentioned as the eunuch from Ethiopia.

[2 : 43] In the midst of this marvellous expansion of the Gospel throughout the land of Israel and much further beyond, it's as if we focus in on one individual and the circumstances concerning his conversion and his going on to witness, we believe, in his own land after his conversion.

So under three headings I'd like to highlight, first of all, this man's religious commitment. Because it says from verse 27 that he was come to Jerusalem to worship and he was returning.

That's the first thing, his religious commitment. Secondly, the heavenly intervention. The Lord sent Philip to him.

And the Lord saw fit that at the time that Philip came to him, this man was reading the Scriptures and puzzling over a particular part of the prophecy of Isaiah that he just didn't, wasn't able to understand.

And Philip appeared and he explained the Gospel to him from that particular section of Scripture. That was a heavenly intervention.

[4 : 12] And that is always the case. When the Lord is to bless his elect people in the world, he will bring his providence around in such a way that circumstances meet together and the Lord will answer our questions, enlighten our minds, bring his salvation into our souls and thus receive his blessing.

A heavenly intervention. And thirdly and finally, this man's joyful profession of faith. He went on his way rejoicing after having been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Well, these three points. Firstly, this man's religious commitment. Now, it says here that he was an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a court official of the queen of the Ethiopians who was in charge of all her treasure.

And that he had come to Jerusalem to worship. Now, I had a little look at the map of Ethiopia. Not quite sure exactly what particular area this man came from. Let's say he came from the northern part of Ethiopia.

[5 : 39] A journey from there to Jerusalem would be well over a thousand miles. Well over a thousand miles. There and back.

And you think, well, this man must have been really dedicated. And certainly he must have been. He must have been listening and paying attention to the commandments that God had laid down for his people Israel to observe the feasts at Jerusalem.

And this man obviously had been up to one of the feasts. We don't know which one. Maybe it's a feast of Passover or Pentecost. A feast of tabernacles. But in Deuteronomy 12, it says, The Lord says, You shall seek the place that the Lord your God will choose out of all your tribes to put his name there and make his habitation there.

And there you shall go. And there you shall bring your burnt offerings and your sacrifices, your tithes and the contributions that you present.

This man left Ethiopia. And he was intent upon offering to the Lord what the Lord required of him up at Jerusalem.

[6 : 58] Now, he would obviously have not carried his sacrificial animal with him all the way. There was provision at the temple where people were able to buy an animal that they were then able to sacrifice.

And this man had gone all the way there. And he was dedicated and fully committed to the religion and the religious practices of the Jews.

If he was looking for salvation in that particular way, obviously he hadn't found it there. Because it says here that he just was coming back and still reading the word of God and it doesn't make any sense to him at all.

To me, he looks like a disappointed seeker. Somebody who had gone maybe full of hope and desire to have God's blessing poured out upon him at Jerusalem.

But he's coming back seemingly totally deflated. And there he is sitting in his chariot, puzzling over this text from the prophecy of Isaiah.

[8 : 21] Certainly the situation with the Jewish hierarchy at that time in Jerusalem wasn't at all conducive to bringing peace and harmony into the hearts and minds and souls of people.

Evidently, there was a lot of division among the ruling class, among the Pharisees. There was much deadness, spiritually speaking.

There was much sectarianism, divisions and squabbles and much hypocrisy regarding the religion of the Pharisees. And to go into that kind of situation with a desire for the Lord's blessing to come to you, well, it didn't seem to be a situation conducive to bringing a blessing to anyone.

But the Lord had his eye on this man. This man had come a long way seeking a blessing.

He was fully committed. But he wasn't going to get a blessing along the path that he had been hitherto following. There may be some people in our communities, something like this, that you think coming to church is the be-all and end-all of things.

[9 : 55] But coming to church, although it is good in itself, you must come to the Lord of the church to secure eternal salvation for your soul. Associating with Christians in the community is a good thing in itself.

But you come to the Christ of the Christian to secure salvation for yourself. Many are the things that people involve themselves with, and they're all good practices in themselves, but very often people fall so far short of coming to the Lord Jesus Christ himself because salvation is in him alone.

And eternal life is to be found in him alone, not in merely associating with people who know the Lord, although that is in itself commendable.

Nevertheless, you must take the step of faith and place your trust in Jesus for yourself. So this man, he was religiously committed, but maybe religiously off-center.

He was coming from Jerusalem, and he was sitting in his chariot and reading the prophet Isaiah.

[11 : 23] And then we see the Lord having moved Philip. In verse 26, Philip having been preaching in Samaria, a city that was full of religious activity, blessings from heaven being enjoyed by many people there, and it was like a revival situation in Samaria.

Nevertheless, the Lord and his angel sent to Philip arise, leave this most enjoyable situation, and I'm going to send you to one man who's puzzling over the way of salvation for himself.

He just can't get peace, and I'm sending you to him. Isn't it amazing that the Lord knew the needs of the Ethiopian, where he was, in the middle of the Gaza, which is a desert area, in his dejection, having left Jerusalem, now on his way back to Ethiopia, the Lord is mindful of this man's situation.

And he calls Philip to go down there. So that's the second point, the heavenly intervention. And we see that at verse 29, 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 are reading? And so on. Once the Lord made known to Philip who he was going to address, Philip ran there.

[13:12] He's keen to obey what the Lord is asking him to fulfill. And he heard this man reading. Do you understand what you're reading?

How can I? Except someone guides me. And he immediately invites Philip into the chariot with him. What an amazing thing. Philip appears seemingly from nowhere and he invites him to sit in with him in his chariot. Now the passage of the scripture that he was reading was this, like a sheep he was led to the slaughter, like a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he opens not his mouth, and so on. It's as if there are words of a text there that are full of Christ and Christ's work of atonement, Christ's work of salvation upon the cross.

And Philip, having heard what he was reading, he said, I'm going to preach to you about Jesus.

[14:29] And there are four things in these verses from Isaiah that I'd like to highlight in particular. He's talking, first of all, at the middle of verse 32, like a sheep, he was led to the slaughter.

Jesus was. Talking about his obedience, and humility, and submission. Secondly, he's talking about his silence, like a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he opens not his mouth.

Thirdly, he talks about his humiliation. In his humiliation, justice was denied him. And fourthly, he talks about his generation.

Who can describe his generation, for his life is taken away from the earth. One or two words on each of these. As Philip addresses the eunuch in his chariot, in the middle of the Gaza desert, on his way home to Ethiopia, having been in Jerusalem.

first thing is, he preaches Jesus to him. And it says, like a sheep, he was led to the slaughter.

[15:56] He's talking about the eternal son of God. He's talking about how submissive he was in his sufferings.

When you think back to the gospel, and you realize when he and his disciples were in the garden of Gethsemane, these people came from the high priests and the officials, and they had torches, and they had sticks to arrest him.

And Jesus says, I could call on all of these angels to destroy you all in a second. But how then would the word of God be fulfilled? They fell backwards when he said, who are you seeking?

We are seeking Jesus of Nazareth. They fell backwards because his power was demonstrated that he was the eternal God.

Nevertheless, he said, if you are seeking me, let these disciples go their way. And he submitted to them, and they bound him, and they brought him before the authorities, before Annas and Caiaphas, brought him before the Roman authorities, Pilate, brought him before Herod, back again to Pilate.

[17:17] It's as if he shows the marvelous submission of the Son of God fulfilling every detail of what God the Father required of him.

Just as a sacrificial animal would be led to the slaughter, so Jesus Christ was led to the cross, not complaining, not objecting, but desirous to fulfill what God the Father required of him.

And then the next thing is silence, like a lamb before its shearer is silent. You see, these people, it's as if they were shearing Jesus Christ of his dignity, and shearing him and accusing him of various things of which he was not guilty.

It's as if they were taking away his credibility by what they were saying about him and doing to him. It's as if they were making him nothing.

And the people of Israel were saying, we don't want this man but Barabbas. Barabbas was a robber, and they had rather receive a robber into their community than the eternal Son of God who never sinned in thought, word, or action.

[18:49] Nevertheless, he remained silent in the face of it all. He opened not his mouth.

With one word of his mouth he could have destroyed them. With one word of his mouth he could have rendered them non-existent.

But he was submissive to the will of the Father. And you see also if he had started to speak about his knowledge of my sins and his knowledge of your sins, what a catalogue of sin he could have exhibited to the world.

The reporters in Jerusalem would have been there with their books and their pencils taking down the sins of people whom they knew.

Jesus Christ didn't say a word about my sin or about your sin. Like a lamb before its shearer is silent so he opened not his mouth.

[20 : 12] sin and then it says in his humiliation justice was denied him. He was dealt with in such an unjust and unfair way.

Nothing concerning his trial was regular. He was called all kinds of names but he didn't object to this.

He was denied justice at that level. Why was all this happening to him? Because he was taking the place of his people and he was suffering in the room and place of his people.

He was suffering because he had taken their sins upon himself. And these are the things that should have happened to us. This slaughtering and this shearing and this awful humiliation and this awful suffering.

These are the things that he took on himself in our room and in our place if we indeed are his people. And the eunuch listens and listens.

[21 : 44] And then it says at the middle of verse 33 who can describe his generation? There are a number of suggestions as to what these words mean.

Who can describe his generation? Some people say it's a reflection on the kind of violence that prevailed in his generation that this is referring to.

I mean they crucified a man who was completely innocent. What does that say about that generation of people? But there's another way of looking at it and that is he's talking about despite the fact that Jesus Christ died in this way that there is going to be a wonderful fruit from the sufferings and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Who shall declare his generation? Who can tell the number of those for whom he died and who will come to a saving knowledge of him and who will die in the arms of Jesus and at last surround the great white throne and sing his glory and his praise throughout the endless ages of eternity?

Who can declare that number despite the fact that there has been this awful happening in Jerusalem in connection with him or the Lord will be victorious at the last.

[23 : 08] his life is taken away from the earth. He died the just in the room of the unjust that he may bring us to God.

He died that we might not die. He suffered in himself the punishment due for the sins of his people. An Ethiopian you know can hardly believe his ears. He had just been to Jerusalem. He had fulfilled his obligation to the law by sacrificing an animal but no real peace came into his heart through the sacrifice of an animal.

But now he realizes this is the sacrifice to satisfy divine justice. This is the sacrifice to bring peace between me and my God.

This is the one to whom I must look. This is the one through whom life comes to me. Life everlasting. Philip opened his mouth and beginning with this scripture he told him the good news about Jesus.

[24 : 37] You know that the word Jesus means saviour. You shall call his name Jesus the angel said to Mary because he will save his people from their sins.

And that was enough for the eunuch. He said what prevents me from being baptized? And there's a section in verse 37 and you don't see verse 37 in ESV but the reason is that they believe that it's a later inclusion into the text.

Verse 37 at the very bottom of your Bible says Philip said if you believe with all your heart you may and he replied I believe that Jesus Christ is the son of God.

That is the profession that he was willing to make just as Paul says in Romans chapter 10 and verse 9 if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead you will be saved.

And obviously the Lord's intervention into this man's life brought this assurance into his soul and this appreciation of who Christ was.

[26 : 00] And he said Christ is enough for me. He is enough. What he has done for sinners like me is enough. I am willing to commit myself to him and to him alone for salvation.

And I look to him alone that I might be saved. And he says what hinders me from being baptized? and Philip said if you believe with all your heart you may I believe that Jesus Christ is the son of

God and hearing that profession and confession of his faith Peter Philip commanded the chariot to stop and they both went down into the water Philip and you know and he baptized him.

What an amazing trip this man took all the way from Ethiopia to Jerusalem and halfway back again and there the Lord met him and he got assurance of his salvation and he wanted to tell everyone because that is the way that they did it at that particular time in the church's experience they were baptized because they were coming from a background that wasn't steeped in Christian teaching and they came and they made a public profession of their faith in Jesus the saviour of sinners and it says here they came up out of the water and the spirit of the Lord carried away Philip and the eunuch saw him no more but interestingly the eunuch went on his way rejoicing he had found the pearl of great price he had found the

Lord Jesus Christ as saviour he had found the one who will say I will never leave you nor forsake you whose blood cleanses from all sin he has found him and he rejoices in him where does this leave us this evening are we something like the Ethiopian man who had come to Jerusalem focusing particularly on the Jewish system of worship are we fulfilling our religious commitments and happy merely to do that but are we looking for something more it seems to me that this man although he had come to Jerusalem and fulfilled an aspect of his commitments to the Jewish law it didn't really satisfy him at all he didn't find heart satisfaction and peace but the

Lord knew where he was and the Lord sent his servant and the Lord opened the scriptures at exactly the right place for the servant to come and expound the word of God to this man do you ever think how amazing it is when you're going through maybe a bad patch in your life and if you follow your usual pattern of reading at your private worship how often there is something there maybe day after day after day psalm after psalm chapter after chapter after chapter and there's something that speaks to you and speaks into your situation and answers your questions and assures you that all things are going to be alright although they seem dark at the moment nevertheless you are enabled to trust in what the Lord is saying through his word and you hold on to it until such time as the Lord actually makes clear that all things are alright the Lord's intervention comes with needle point accuracy into the experience of his people maybe a word from the scripture dealing with a particular issue in your life that you haven't disclosed to anybody nevertheless a word from heaven comes and in that word is peace and assurance that all is well between you and your

[31 : 02] Lord and that's what happened to this man he found in the exposition of this part of scripture that the Lord Jesus Christ was the answer to his need as a sinner and then he goes on his way rejoicing some people believe that when he went back to Ethiopia that he was a bright witness there so that many Christians appeared in Ethiopia as a result of this man's continuing witness well if we are witnesses for Christ may God give us grace to witness faithfully and who knows maybe the Lord will raise up many who will hear the gospel from us maybe in a very informal way or maybe formally as well that the

Lord will answer the longings of many through what we say to them from the scriptures a religious commitment a heavenly intervention and a joyful profession oh how different he went on his way down to Ethiopia from the way he had been in the desert of Gaza the Lord came into his life filled him with the joy of salvation and may that be true with every one of ourselves whatever our circumstances this evening may we know something of the power of the word of God for ourselves and the love of Christ for ourselves and may we get to know him more and more as individuals and as communities may the power of the gospel continue to prevail upon us and among us amen may God bless these thoughts to us yeah please sayorn love of me as to know how we'll those