

Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch

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[0 : 00] Now if you could turn with me again to that chapter we read in Acts chapter 8, Acts chapter 8, and we shall be looking at the verses marked 26 to 39, Philip and the Ethiopian unit.

One of the wonderful things about being a Christian is that we each have our own story of how God found us. There is no story that is the same.

Each of us have our own personal experience of meeting with the risen Lord Jesus. No two testimonies are the same. There's no set formulas, no set places, no set schedules.

Each of us as Christians have our own specific encounter with the risen Lord Jesus. And the book of Acts is full of testimonies. It's full of accounts of how people came to know the risen Lord Jesus.

And this account of the Ethiopian eunuch is one of the most dramatic conversions that we have. It has everything from angels speaking to high officials, then to angels sweeping people away not to be seen again.

[1 : 12] Now tonight, I would like to use this passage and try and examine a number of various things about conversion that we discover in this account.

And to do this, I have divided this passage into three different parts. And each part reveals a little about the process that occurred in this Ethiopian's life that drew him to his Lord.

So the first thing that I would like to look at is we have a spirit-led believer in verses 26 to 29. Then the second thing I would like to look at is that the spirit-led believer brought a message of hope which we find in verse 30 to 35.

And this message of hope resulted in a transformed life which we read about in verses 36 to 39. So we're going to be looking at three things.

The spirit-led believer, the message of hope, and the transformed life. First of all, a spirit-led believer, verses 26 to 29. The first character we meet in this account is Philip.

[2 : 20] Now Philip is an interesting guy. He is one of the seven deacons that supported the early church. And what characterised Philip, what was special about Philip, was that he was a great evangelist.

He was one who desired and loved to tell the story about Jesus, to tell the story of the cross, to tell people and to share with people the message of good news that Christ brought.

And in this chapter, we have him going throughout Samaria, proclaiming the message of a risen Lord Jesus. And as he was going about preaching, many people are being converted.

Philip is a powerful evangelist. When he speaks, people listen. He is gathering huge crowds to him, and people are falling under the spirit and are coming to know and to love Jesus as their own Lord and Saviour.

The gospel is beginning to spread out from Jerusalem. Philip is in Samaria. Now Samaria is an interesting place. The Jews hated the Samaritans.

[3 : 22] The Samaritans hated the Jews. The last place on earth a Jew would want to be found would be in Samaria. But here we have Philip, an evangelist, going into Samaria, going into an area which was off limits, an area which a Jew would never want to go.

But so full of the spirit is he that he is willing to go wherever God leads him. And God is leading him into Samaria, into the very anti-Jewish place.

And in verse 26 we have what is a really puzzling instruction. We have God speaking to Philip through an angel. And the instruction to Philip is to leave Samaria.

Go. Leave it. But not only leave Samaria, but go to the desert. Philip is being asked to stop a vibrant ministry in Samaria and go to a desert.

Look at what's happening in Samaria. People are crowding. People are hearing. People are coming to know Jesus. Surely this newly established church needs its main leader with it all the time.

[4 : 33] But God has a different plan. God says to Philip, go. Go from Samaria. Go from where you are experiencing this blessing and go to a desert. The most prolific evangelist of his time is being sent to the desert.

He is going from a place which has been ripe for the picking to a place which is naturally dead. What on earth is God doing here? Why does God want Philip to go? What is God's plan?

It seems perplexing. It seems puzzling. Philip had been working in fertile spiritual ground and now he is being sent to the middle of nowhere. Philip is being asked to leave the hustle and the bustle of Samaria.

And he is being asked to go to the edge of the desert. He was being asked to go to a place called Gaza. Now Gaza is kind of like one of these motorway service stations. It is a stop off.

You stop off in Gaza. You fill yourself up with water and then you trek deeper into the desert, deeper into Africa. It wasn't a place where you would want to spend much time.

[5 : 36] But this is God's command. Do we need a complaint from Philip? No. Philip goes. Philip hears the word of the Lord and he goes. He didn't sulkily head off into the desert.

He didn't go complaining. He went willingly and he went in the Lord's strength. Philip knew where he had to go but he wasn't yet sure what he had to do.

What faith Philip has. He leaves everything and he goes to somewhere where he is not sure what is going to happen next.

He doesn't understand it. Many of his colleagues I am sure couldn't understand what God is wanting him to go but he goes and he trusts. Now I am sure most of us would have been a little taken aback if God had asked us to do that.

Imagine if we were in Philip's shoes. What would we have done? What would we have said? Would we have been so willing to follow the Lord's command or would we have been a bit reticent? Would we have come up with a whole host of excuses to God?

[6 : 37] God I can't go. I can't go to Gaza. Look here. There are still many people in this region. The work has to go on. Lord I have no desire to live by the desert. I am quite comfortable in Samaria.

The people like me. I am doing a good thing for you. I really enjoy it here. Why do we need to go to the desert? Lord I don't know anyone down there. I don't even know if anyone lives down there. Why on earth do you want me to go there?

But this can often be the way God deals with his people. He may issue us with a command to go but not reveal the full scope of what he wishes us to do. He may slowly reveal his plan for us.

He may slowly unwrap it so that we don't see the big picture straight away. But why does God do this? Why does God simply allow us to see a little bit then a little bit then a little bit?

Why doesn't he show us the whole picture all at once? Well quite simply it's to test our obedience. God is wanting to know are you faithful? Are you going to trust me?

[7 : 38] If I tell you to do something will you do it? Will you obey? God is putting Philip to the test. Does Philip trust God? And the answer is yes.

And God can often do the same with us. He says go and do. He says go and says God what am I meant to do here? He says wait. I will tell you when you go.

So God uses these experiences to help test our faith. The encouragement for us is that if we find ourselves in a situation where we are being commanded to go where God is testing our obedience to him we are reassured by God's word that the Lord blesses those who obey him.

We may be asked to do things which daunt us which cause us to feel uneasy because we aren't assured of what to expect next. But do as Philip did and obey.

Put your confidence in God the creator and sustainer of the earth. There will be those here tonight who are wrestling with obedience to God.

[8 : 45] You know he's calling you to act. You know he's asking you to do something on his behalf. To take a step which seems daunting which seems scary which you're fearful about.

Put your trust in the one who knows the beginning from the end and take that step of obedience. Be like Philip. Go and do and you will be blessed by the Most High.

For some of us tonight we might be hearing God's voice calling us to do some new ministry. Here in church someone might be feeling a burden to set up a Bible study group to do a discipleship explored group.

There might be an outreach project that you might be feeling God is calling you to do but yet you're afraid. But do as Philip did and go. Listen to the spirit of God and put your trust in the spirit of God.

For others God might be calling you into some kind of full time ministry. It might be at home. It might be overseas. Do as Philip did. Go. Go with confidence. Go trusting that God is with us wherever we are whatever situation we find ourselves.

[9 : 50] Go. Take a leaf out of Philip's book and go as the Lord has commanded you. You can just imagine Philip standing on the desert road wondering why on earth has God taken me to this place?

Why does God want me here in the desert? Completely confused but still trusting. And as he waits he begins to hear the faint noise of chariots.

And as the noise of the chariots begins to grow and grow he then realizes that the reason he is here is to evangelize this one traveler. In verse 27 we see it is plain to Philip what he must do.

Philip was going to be used as the catalyst for the gospel to reach down into Africa. Philip had carried it north to Samaria now he is going to take it south down to the heart of Africa.

He is going to take it to Ethiopia and beyond. But who is this traveler he sees on the road? Who is it? Well, he is an Ethiopian eunuch. One of the most important men in Ethiopian society and we should note that Ethiopia here is not the modern day Ethiopia.

[11 : 00] Ethiopia in this passage refers to most the vast swath of country just south of Egypt. So it is a huge area of land. It is fully incorporated in most of central Africa.

And this man is a senior figure in the court of Candace queen of Ethiopia. Now Candace queen of Ethiopia Candace is simply a title like a Caesar or a Herod.

It simply refers to her position. Now the queen in Ethiopia at that time was the one who performed all the secular functions of government because the Ethiopians believed that the king was basically a sun god and he was too important to carry out any kind of secular kind of administration.

So all the stuff all the things of state were carried out by the queen. The king simply sat as one revered as a special son a special kind of deity.

And this eunuch was seeking after the truth. He was a God-fearer. He was desperate to understand what God was who God was.

[12 : 05] He was desperate to have this question answered. He didn't have peace of mind. His answers have remained unanswered. His questions have remained unanswered. Verse 27 We are told that he had gone to Jerusalem to worship but was now returning to Ethiopia.

You can just imagine that he has been somewhat disappointed by Jerusalem. He is coming back with no answers. He has still got many questions. He still isn't clear as to God.

He still isn't clear as to how to find this inner satisfaction. And he's probably coming back disappointed because he was not even allowed into the inner courts. He was excluded as he was a eunuch.

As we read in Deuteronomy 23 verse 1 the eunuch had no privileges within the inner courts. They could simply watch from afar. So he comes back from Jerusalem disappointed at his experience.

He has learnt nothing of God. He is completely confused. He is completely puzzled. It is to this outsider that Philip is sent. It is to this eunuch that Philip must share the gospel with.

[13 : 14] God is going to push the Boers of the church even further. God has been pushing it north into Samaria and now God is beginning to take the gospel to Africa. He is going to take it into the heart of Africa.

Philip trusted God. He was a man led by the Spirit. And the result of this was the spread of the gospel into inner Africa. Second, we have a message of hope.

Verse 30 to 35. The next scene begins with poor Philip trying to keep up with the horses as he runs alongside these chariots. And as he runs alongside the chariot he hears the eunuch reading aloud the prophecy of Isaiah.

Now it was very common to read aloud the Hebrew scriptures because they are very difficult to read silently. And as a good teacher Philip checks for understanding and asks do you understand what you are reading?

And Philip finds that there is very little understanding. The Ethiopian has no hesitation in saying to Philip that he is absolutely confused about what he reads here.

[14 : 22] He is not sure about who this passage refers to. Is it the prophet in verse 34 or is it somebody else? Is the question which he is asking. He is completely baffled by it. And as we read this account we are drawn to the fact that God is at work here.

God is at work in every detail in this Ethiopian's life. Philip reaches the point exactly where the eunuch is reading about the suffering servant.

The clearest passage in the Old Testament which refers to the work of the Messiah who had come to save his people. God is at work. He is directing and guiding this Ethiopian's life so that he will encounter Philip and more importantly that he will encounter the risen Lord Jesus.

God is involved in every little detail so as to ensure that God's message of hope would be heard and would be understood and believed by this Ethiopian.

This Ethiopian was reading a chapter about the suffering servant who came to be the one who would save us. The previous verses leading up to this point in Isaiah in Isaiah 53 had described how the servant had taken upon himself our infirmities and sorrows in Isaiah 53 verse 4.

- [15 : 41] How the servant had been pierced for our transgressions. How we all like sheep have gone astray but that the Lord had laid on him the iniquity of us all. Then he comes to these words in Isaiah which are quoted in verse 32 to 33.

Let me read them. Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter and like a lamb before it 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. What these two verses in Acts highlight is that this suffering servant predicted in Isaiah hundreds of years before was speaking of Jesus and his work on the cross.

Jesus is the one who was pierced for our transgressions. Jesus was the one who would bear the burden of our iniquities.

Jesus is the suffering servant. He is the one who fulfilled this prophecy. He was the one that fulfilled this prophecy only very shortly before the meeting of the eunuch and the evangelist.

- [17 : 03] Jesus is the one who suffered much whilst paying the price of our rebellion. And the emphasis in these verses is that he does it voluntarily.

from these two verses quoted in Acts we are presented again with the fact that Jesus dies on the cross willingly.

He is not forced. Jesus does not go to the cross kicking and screaming angry. he did not offer any defense.

Rather he was willing to endure the humiliation of that course and the humiliation of being crucified so that we would not have to experience separation from God.

The Ethiopian knew the awful experience of separation in his own life. In Jerusalem he was kept apart from religious life.

- [18 : 08] He was not allowed into the inner temple because of his physical condition. And I am sure that as he heard of Jesus' willingness to endure the separation from the Father he was able to relate to the dreadfulness that separation is and how terrible it leaves you feeling.

and as he begins to appreciate the cost of that separation I can just imagine him being overwhelmed by the love and the strength of Christ's love for him.

How Jesus was willing to endure the extremes of human suffering and more painfully the separation between him and his Father so that a sinner like that Ethiopian so that a sinner like us here could be brought close to God so that we might have a new relationship with God a relationship which brings peace which brings to which we're far apart together once more if we feel that distance tonight from God if we feel like strangers all that we must do is humbly accept Christ and his sacrifice by humbly acknowledging that we have wronged God and declare that we now wish to have God at the centre of our life we can then be friends with God the separation will be bridged by our Lord and Father

Jesus Christ God in the book of Acts this message is given to all people everywhere nobody is excluded rather all are included it is the same message that we Christians seek to proclaim that no matter who you are no matter what you have done no matter where you come from Christ died for you this is the transforming message of the Bible if you are here tonight and you feel that gulf of separation from God that gulf must be bridged and it can only be bridged by Christ through Christ today is the day of salvation as the Bible urges us that if you hear his call do not harden your heart but let his call melt your heart and accept the invitation to come into his fold for you will find rest and satisfaction as Christians are we like Philip able to simply explain the gospel to those who seek after truth are we able to communicate this message clearly and effectively are we able to strip away all the jargon which we may put into it and are we able to deal with people where they are are we able to share the hope that we have with the man on the street are we able to have a clear explanation of the gospel ready so that when people come we can answer clearly and appropriately

Philip was ready he was prepared to share the gospel are we are we really passionate about letting this message out for if we are we will be ready we will be ready to take it to those who we come across and my prayer this night is that each one of us as Christians would be ready to share the good news about our saints the message of Acts is that the gospel is for all people not just the likeable the sociable the rich and the kind the conversion of the Ethiopian highlights the diversity of the early church how the church under the guidance of the spirit was reaching out to those who had before been unreachable how the church was willing to accept members from every sphere of society no matter who you are no matter what you did you were welcome into that church of Christ throughout the book of Acts we are constantly being surprised by the people who enter into the kingdom into the church chapter 8 chapter 9 we have three astonishing people all coming to the church we have Simon the Magician the first one in Acts 8 then we have the Ethiopian eunuch and then finally we have Saul of Tarsus all welcomed all welcomed with open arms into that church all with this common bond that they had a love for God and God loved them it is a message of hope for all people everywhere the message that Philip delivered to the Ethiopian is a message of hope and it is a message of hope for us today thirdly it led to a transformed life this message which Philip gave led to a transformed life in verses 36 to 40 we have noticed that the message was shared by a man led by the spirit then we noticed that the message was full of hope but the message then leads to a transformed life the Ethiopian eunuch had received the most incredible news in the world and he had to make it known to the world he had to make a public profession of where he stood he could not keep it within himself he was bursting with joy he was eager to let the world know

[23 : 23] I am a follower of Jesus you can just imagine the scene in the chariot Philip had been explaining the gospel to him and his eyes grow wider and wider of what God has done for him because he had never heard such truth before you can just imagine Philip coming to the great commission explaining about baptism and you can just imagine the eunuchs looking around for a piece of water so that he could be baptised so keen is he to be baptised to make this profession he is scouring the landscape trying to find a body of water so that he may be able to publicly profess that Christ is his then all of a sudden he sees it in the distance there he says see here is water what prevents me from being baptised here is a man probably only hours old in his faith and he recognises that he must publicly display his faith and it's possible and it's very possible that we could come up with a whole number of reasons why this man should not be baptised we could say well you need to get involved in the church first you need to show that you understand fully all things or you need to attend a preparation course then we'll consider baptising you from this passage however we know that all Philip looked for was repentance and faith he didn't demand the Ethiopian clean up his life a bit before he was baptised he didn't ask for anything else but repentance and faith and these two were visible to Philip

Philip then proceeded to baptise this human are there some of us tonight who are Christians but who have yet to publicly profess their faith are there those who are waiting a little bit longer to profess their faith let me urge you today to identify yourself with Jesus Christ and his people let me urge you today to take that step and to say publicly I belong to Jesus often we may feel as if we have to wait a bit that we must delay in making our profession public because we don't think we're quite good enough yet we think that we need to sort ourselves out a bit more before we take a stand for Christ and if we think like that I'm afraid we've got it all mixed up the fact is we can't sort out our lives that is why

Christ died we need God to sort it out and he will sort it out what we must do is obey his command and he states that we must identify ourselves with him and with his people we must openly declare that we are Christ followers as Paul urges us in Romans we are to profess with our mouths that Jesus is Lord do exactly what Philip did share abroad the good news of the risen Lord Jesus however we must realize we don't do this on our own we have a helper with us one who will guide and direct us one who will strengthen us and that is God's spirit he will dwell with us and he will enable us to confess that Jesus is Lord just as he enabled that evangelist Philip to declare to the Ethiopian that Jesus is Lord and for the Ethiopian to declare that I am Jesus that spirit will also enable us to declare that Jesus is Lord publicly remember

Christ is the rock that we stand upon and we will not falter no matter what others try to do to us if our foundation is built upon Christ we are secure and safe here and into eternity in conclusion let us ensure that we as believers are men women boys and girls who are led by the spirit that we are the ones who are delivering a message of hope to our world outside finally we will see the transforming message go out and we will see transformed lives and we will see God's kingdom here on earth expand and the glory of God will flood into all spheres of life amen let us pray heavenly father we come to you this evening thanking you for your grace thanking you that you saw the condition that we were in and that you did something about it father thank you that we no longer need to be separated from you but that we can be brought close to you through Christ our lord father I pray that as we go out of this place that each one of us would know the risen lord Jesus in a personal way and those who know it would be able to profess it publicly to share the gospel message to those men and women boys and girls who we will meet this week father we pray that you continue with us as we sing your praises for we ask this in

Christ's name amen