

Sermon Title: The Gospel Goes To A Gentile
Scripture Text: Acts 8:25-40 (Acts #20)

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 7-9-23

I'd like you to meet me in Acts Chapter 8, where we are going to look at the last 16 verses of this chapter today. We are going to see the Gospel go to a Gentile for the first time. What is a Gentile? A person that is not a Jew. You're in a room *full* of them—Gentiles, that is. Oh, I'm so glad the Gospel got to our part of the world!

And today, as we look at this incident, we are going to make three passes through our text. It's a very straightforward narrative, actually. It's another very important day in the early church. The Gospel has already been launched in Jerusalem. It has spread to the surrounding area of Judea. Thousands have believed in Jerusalem and Judea.

And then, God raised up this man, Stephen; he was one of the first seven deacons chosen in Acts Chapter 6. He began to preach, and the Gospel spread even more, and he was *murdered* for his faith. He gave that glorious testimony that we have in Acts Chapter 7. Immediately upon his death, a major round of persecution [was] led by the man named Saul from Tarsus. That began to drive Christians out of Jerusalem.

And in the first 24 verses of this chapter—Chapter 8—we saw one of Stephen's cohorts, Philip the Deacon, take the Gospel to Samaria. Now, that was a *massive* breakthrough, because of the long history of antipathy and hatred and disdain between Jews and Samaritans, and they had no contact with each other (Jn. 4:9; cf. Lk. 9:52-53). But Philip went there, preached the Gospel, and many were saved. And we also learned some lessons from a pseudo-believer named Simon; we dealt with that last time.

The next huge step now is for the Gospel to go to what Jesus described in Acts Chapter 1, Verse 8, as "the remotest part of the earth." Now, we have a foretaste today of that in our passage. Philip does not *go* to "the remotest part of the earth," but after he preached the Gospel in Samaria, God used him to reach a man from Ethiopia.

Now, as I said, we are going to make three passes through the chapter. Your outline is based upon the sequence of events, and then I want us to draw what to learn from Philip, and what to learn from the Ethiopian.

The sequence of events is this:

1. God Arranged The Meeting (vss. 25-29)
2. God Prepared The Ethiopian (vss. 30-34)
3. God Saved The Ethiopian (vss. 35-38)
4. God Added Another Miracle (vss. 39-40)

First: God Arranged This Meeting.

Philip started in Jerusalem. He was not called to be an evangelist. He was not called to be a missionary. He was asked, "Would you please help make sure that the Greek-speaking widows don't get overlooked in the daily widow's food ministry in Jerusalem?" God had raised up Stephen before him, and now Philip; and when they began to be scattered, Philip chose to go to the city of Samaria—about 45 miles north from Jerusalem. We read about that in Chapter 8:1-24.

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Many in Samaria had believed. Peter and John had come from Jerusalem to witness what happened, and to pray for the new Samaritan believers to receive the Holy Spirit; and they obviously helped Philip with ministering to the people there. And to be honest, we are not told how long that took; we are not told how many weeks or months it may have been. Lord willing, next week when we get to the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, I will try to give you a little bit of what we know about the timeline of these things, and you will get a sense of how quickly history was moving. But I don't want you to get the idea that Acts Chapter 1 is one day, Chapter 2 is the next day, Chapter 3 is the next day; we had a few years go by here.

So, we are not told how many weeks or months are included in those 24 verses, but we come to Verse 25—"So, when they had solemnly testified and spoken the word of the Lord, they started back to Jerusalem, and were preaching the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans." (NASB-1995—and throughout, unless otherwise noted)

Now, we know who he is talking about: The antecedent of the word "they" is at least Philip, Peter, and John. There were likely more with them, but we know that they were the main actors. And as I said, we don't know how long it took; but they spent however much time it took to get to "many villages of the Samaritans." We are not told exactly what *their* strategy was, but we know, when we start to see the systematic evangelization, Paul always went to the Jews first—and where did he go? To the synagogue. Well, what's the big day for the synagogue? It's the Sabbath. They went to "many villages"—probably *many weeks* involved in them doing this; and they took the Gospel every place that they went.

And now comes a spectacular new development. They are heading back to Jerusalem, stopping off village by village, and Verse 26—"But an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip saying, 'Get up and go south to the road that descends from Jerusalem to Gaza.' (This is a desert road.)"

Now, he and gone to the city of Samaria, about 45 miles north of Jerusalem, and they are heading back south now, and the angel tells Philip, "Leave the group. Head on down south. Go right past Jerusalem and take a right. That's what I want you to do. I want you to head toward Gaza."

"Gaza" had been one of the five chief Philistine cities. You know, the Philistines in the Old Testament—constant enemies of Israel. Now you frequently hear of the "Gaza Strip": a thin strip of land along the Mediterranean Sea, and that's pretty much where the enemies of Israel launch their missiles most often toward Israel; it is "Palestinian" territory now. The city "Gaza" had been destroyed in the first century B.C, and a new city was built closer to the coast, and there were two roads that went down there. There was still the road to Egypt that ran through the ruins of old Gaza. There was another road that went along the seacoast. Now, if you and I were taking a trip through there, and we said, "Okay, shall we take the road that goes along the sea, with the cool ocean breezes and the beautiful views, or should we take the road that goes through the desert? Especially on a hundred-degree day like today, let's go out where all those light colored rocks are, and walk for ten hours or so."

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Well, you would not choose the desert road, unless you were in a hurry. It was a little shorter; it was a little faster. But God did not tell him to take the scenic one; the sovereign hand of God said, "Take the desert road."

Verses 27 and 28—"So he got up and went"—apparently he left Peter and John, and moved on—"and there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure; and he had come to Jerusalem to worship, and he was returning and sitting in his chariot, and was reading the prophet Isaiah."

Do you remember how much God told Philip in example, *why* to go there? He *didn't*.

In those days, "Ethiopia" referred to a large kingdom south of Egypt. Truthfully, we don't know its exact boundaries in the first century. Now, you can find Ethiopia on a map—a defined country, one of the many countries of Africa—but it was much bigger, then.

A "eunuch" was an emasculated man who was groomed as such to be a servant to a high-ranking government official. Now, if that sounds like an *awful* practice, it *was*. It was designed to safeguard a king's harem, and/or to limit—shall we say, "mischief"—by government servants. This particular servant had risen through the ranks; he was a *very* important guy. He was basically the secretary of the treasury; he "was in charge of all her treasure"—that is, the Queen Mother.

The word "Candace"—we know of it as a woman's name, but "Candace" is not, in this instance, believed to be a specific person; "Candace" was the *title* that was given to whoever was in the role of Queen Mother of the land of Ethiopia. It's like "Pharaoh" is not the name of a guy; "Pharaoh" is the name of an office. The belief among the Ethiopians was that the king was too holy to do any kind of work; he was just a figurehead, and one to be revered. It was his wife—it was the Queen Mother—who was the head of state. So [the eunuch] was a servant to the Queen Mother.

Now, this Ethiopian "had come to Jerusalem to worship." That means: We don't know *why*, but somehow he had eschewed all of the paganism of his native land; he and learned about the true God, Yahweh. We are not told, but *probably* that had happened through Jews who had been scattered even beyond Egypt to Ethiopia. Remember, once the Captivity came, Jews were scattered around, and not all of them came back, but a small percentage came back to Jerusalem.

So he wanted to come to Jerusalem. He had. And as a eunuch—we don't know if he knew this before he got there, but he would have been prohibited from entering the actual Temple; he would have been prohibited, as well, from becoming a full proselyte to Judaism. That's a regulation specified in Deuteronomy 23 (cf. Is. 56:3-8). Nevertheless, God put it in his heart to go to Jerusalem; he had been there. Now, he could not *get into* the Temple, but he could get to the outer court of the Temple—"The Court of the Gentiles." Who do we know that has been hanging out around there? He may have seen some things; we don't know. Now he is on his way home. He is "sitting in his chariot and...reading the prophet Isaiah."

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Now, not just everyone could get ahold of a scroll of a part of the Bible. That tells us that this guy had significant means, certainly because of his position: he was, in essence, a close servant to royalty who had gone to Jerusalem. But he had *no idea* what God had in store for him on this trip!

Verse 29—"Then the Spirit said to Philip, 'Go up and join this chariot.' " Therefore: God Arranged This Meeting.

Secondly, we find out that God Prepared The Ethiopian.

Acts Chapter 8, Verses 30 and 31—"Philip ran up and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet, and said, 'Do you understand what you are reading?' And he said, 'Well, how could I, unless someone guides me?' And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him."

Notice, it's interesting: It said, "Philip *heard* him reading..." That means he was reading out loud. That might have just been his custom. I've been told some people *do* that whenever they read from a scroll. Maybe somebody else was there. Certainly, a man of *his* stature would have had others who were part of the entourage—chariot drivers and whatever else he may have had among those who traveled with him. But Philip's question was a *welcome* question: "Do you understand what you are reading?"

Now look at Verses 32 and 33—"Now the passage of Scripture which he was reading was this: 'He was led as a sheep to slaughter; and as a lamb before its shearer is silent, so He does not open His mouth. In humiliation His judgment was taken away; who will relate His generation? For His life is removed from the earth.' "

So, Philip "happens" to go past Jerusalem, "happens" to get on this road, "happens" to choose the right road, "happens" to see this entourage going on with this guy in the chariot; and he is reading out loud from Isaiah. I think God arranged that (cf. Prov. 16:9; 20:24; Jer. 10:23). *Not only* is he reading Isaiah, he's reading from Isaiah 53, Verses 7 and 8, about the "Servant" of the Lord (Is. 42:1; 49:5-6), who was the substitutionary sacrifice for sin (53:5, 8, 11; cf. Matt. 20:28; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Pet. 1:18-19; 2:24; 3:18). It is one of the most *specific* Old Testament passages about Jesus.

So, Verse 34—"The eunuch answered Philip and said, 'Please tell me, of whom does the prophet say this? Of himself or of someone else?' "

Now, there is a background to that question, and it tells us that *this guy had done some research*. Maybe he had been asking about this while he was in Jerusalem. There was disagreement among Jewish rabbis about whether this "sheep" that was led to "slaughter" was Israel—some of them said that; they spiritualized it to be the whole nation—or, maybe they said, "Isaiah was referring to himself," like a self-prophecy of his demise; or, it looked forward to the Messiah. It is obvious which answer is correct.

But his question was legitimate, and it was honest. "Is Isaiah talking about himself, or somebody else?" This was God beginning to open the door for the Gospel to go, for the first time in the Book of Acts, to a Gentile (cf. Acts 11:18; 14:27).

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Now, other Gentiles had been saved during the ministry of Jesus, but this is a big deal in Acts. And even though no one had yet targeted the Gentiles by design, God brought a mission field to Philip. He is still in *Israel territory*, and he meets this guy from Ethiopia.

I know people who do missions in the United States by going to American college campuses and focusing on foreign students. You know, you can go spend a few years learning a language, and try to share the Gospel somewhere; or wait until somebody comes here, learns *your* language, introduce them to Christ, and send them back home, and you have spread the fire! That's a good thing to do, and that is kind of what was going on here—although the guy wasn't going to college.

But we know: God Arranged The Meeting. God Prepared The Ethiopian.

And now: God Saved The Ethiopian.

Look at Verse 35; you can't say it more simply than this: "Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him."

Now, that tells you more than *just* what those words say: Philip was obviously *ready* for this. His heart was *full* of God's Word (cf. Prov. 22:18). It sounds a lot like Jesus after His resurrection. Remember, He encountered those two questioning disciples on the road to Emmaus; and remember in Luke 24:27—"Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures." (cf. vs. 44; Jn. 5:39; Acts 3:34). So Philip could say, "Yes, I know who that is talking about. It is talking about Jesus of Nazareth. Let me tell you about Him."

And obviously he did, because look at Verse 36—"As they went along the road they came to some water; and the eunuch said, 'Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?' "

Now, that *also* tells you more than just those words: That tells you that when Philip "preached Jesus to him," he *included* the call to repentance and to baptism, just like Peter had said: "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins" (Acts 2:38, NKJV). The message was the same to this Ethiopian, as it had been to the Samaritans, as it had been to the Jews in Jerusalem and Judea (cf. Acts 15:6-11; cf. Eph. 4:5).

Now, I think it is quite reasonable to surmise that while he was in Jerusalem to worship, this Ethiopian guy quite possibly—I would even say, *probably*—heard testimonies about people turning to Christ. Since he could not go *inside* the Temple, he may well have been outside the Temple, maybe below those steps leading up to the Temple; maybe he saw, among all the *mikvahs* there, the ceremonial washing pools—maybe he saw people being baptized.

But we know for sure that he knew that when he came to Christ, that's what he wanted to do: to be baptized and to declare his faith. We are going to see the same thing when the Gospel goes specifically to a group of Gentiles in Acts Chapter 10.

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Now, that brings us to Acts Chapter 8, Verse 37—" [And Philip said, 'If you believe with all your heart, you may.' And he answered and said, 'I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.']"

Now, notice the brackets around that verse, as rendered in the New American Standard. The reason it is in brackets is because that verse is *not* in the oldest manuscripts of the Book of Acts. There is *no* manuscript evidence for it until the seventh century—the 600s, A.D. It wasn't included in Jerome's translation into Latin—called the Vulgate—in the fourth century. So it was not in the original.

Now, is there any *error* in that verse? No—only that it should not *be* there. As a matter of fact, it is like many records that we *do* have of what people said or what people were asked to repeat at the time of baptism. It does show up in some manuscripts after a few centuries as a marginal note, and then it eventually got included into the more conflated manuscripts.

If you meet one of our brothers or sisters in Christ who come from the tradition of believing that the King James Version is the *only* one that should be used, they will say, "See, there's an example! You and your *modern* translations—you *take things out of the Bible!*" And there is a certain element of truth there, but it is *backward*. The point is: No, it is not that anybody decided to take something *out* of the Bible. You are assuming that the King James in English—from the 17th century—is *the* definitive translation. The fact is: No, something was *added* to the *original* manuscripts that came to be included in some of the later ones, and that is where the King James came from. And that side-trip is for free.

Even though the words may not have been in what Philip said—and maybe *they were*—what happened was clear, and it shows the commitment and the character of both Philip and the Ethiopian.

So look at Verse 38—"And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he baptized him."

That *also* tells you some things beyond what the exact words say: It tells you that Philip was not Presbyterian, Philip was not Lutheran, Philip was not Catholic. *This was not a sprinkling!* They "*went down* into the water" and "*they came up* out of the water" (vs. 39; cf. Matt. 3:16; Jn. 3:23). The word "baptize" means "to immerse"! He was baptized by immersion.

I would not go so far as to say that proves Philip was a *Baptist*, but he would be a lot more happy in a Baptist church than he would somewhere else. Believer's Baptism by Immersion (cf. Acts 8:12; 16:33-34; 18:8)—coming soon to a church gathering near you, the last weekend in August. See Scott Basolo if you need more information.

God Arranged This Meeting. God Prepared The Ethiopian. God Saved The Ethiopian.

Then, God Added Another Miracle.

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This chapter is amazing! It begins with vicious persecution that breaks out on the day Stephen is murdered. God used the persecution to spread out the people, who took the glorious Gospel of Christ with them. Philip took it to heart; he chose to go to Samaria, where he preached the Gospel. God did miracles there: People were delivered from demons there; many who were paralyzed and crippled were healed. There was that pseudo-believer Simon; we learned an important lesson from him against the backdrop of the many *true* conversions. And then, after Peter and John came from Jerusalem, there were *more* miracles accompanying the arrival of the Holy Spirit, to the point that Simon was jealous, and he wanted to buy that power for himself.

We have learned all of that, and then after the Ethiopian is baptized—and now, bear in mind: God sent an angel to tell Philip to skip ahead and go south from Jerusalem; he spoke to him and told him to go up and join the chariot; God is clearly at work here—well, God Adds Another Miracle, *again* showing His hand upon Philip to spread the Gospel yet further.

So look at our last two verses: 39 and 40—"When they came up out of the water"—again, that's immersion—"the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; and the eunuch no longer saw him, but went on his way rejoicing. But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through he kept preaching the gospel to all the cities until he came to Caesarea."

Now, *every* miracle of God has a purpose. All of them validate the message and the messengers that God sends (Acts 14:3). But I have to say—maybe there is more to this that I'm not quite seeing, but I have to say that of all the miracles recorded in the New Testament, *this one* strikes me as *almost* serendipitous. The Ethiopian *already* believed the message; he already believed Philip; he already put his faith in Christ; he is already baptized. Maybe God was just saying to Philip, "You know, I know I made you hurry from way up there in Samaria down to this crummy desert road here. Here's a first-class ticket to your next stop!"—whatever it is.

Philip and the Ethiopian come up out of the water...By the way: I would like to add that sometime to one of our baptisms. I would *love* to pull somebody up out of the water and then find myself in—I don't know, *McCall*, Bali, something like that.

He finds himself in "Azotus." That's the first-century name of an Old Testament Philistine city—another Philistine city—called "Ashdod." Go look that up; interesting things happened there (e.g., 1 Sam. 5:1-12).

Philip continues going along and preaching on his way. Now, he is in *thoroughly* Gentile territory. Remember, Philip is a Greek-speaking Jew. He has a unique slot that he fulfills here. And it says that he went city by city, and preached his way to "Caesarea."

"Caesarea" is another city along the Mediterranean coast; it will be significant in several more places in the Book of Acts. It is now one of the most well-preserved sites that you can visit in Israel. Those who were there with me last month will remember Caesarea Maritima—amazing place.

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Many believe—and I have no reason to disagree with them—that Caesarea may have been Philip's hometown. He was a Greek-speaking Jew, he had been in Jerusalem for Pentecost, he was chosen as one of those first deacons, and he may have just preached his way back to his hometown. We don't know for sure, but it is told that that is where he went, so, hence, probably his hometown.

Now, that's the sequence of events. We have a few minutes left, and I want us to skim back over the passage two more times. I want to say, like the King James says in 8:30: "Understandest thou what thou readest?" I mean, we know the *words*, we know what happened, but how do we connect *this* historical narrative to us? (cf. Rom. 15:4) I hate to break the news to you: We are not Apostles. We do not have miraculous power. This is not the first century. The barriers have *long since* been knocked down, to take the Gospel to Samaritans and Gentiles. God *does not* speak audibly, these days. God *does not* send angels to deliver select personal instructions. Our situation is *far different*. But there is *a lot* that we can learn by observing the two main character in our passage. I am *assuming* you want to be a better and better instrument of God for spreading the Gospel (cf. Acts 26:29; Rom. 10:1; Gal. 6:10; Phil. 2:15; 1 Thess. 3:12). I know *I* do. So, let's learn from Philip six things we can do.

Number 1: Be Faithful In Ministry

Remember how this started? "So, when they had solemnly testified and spoken the word of the Lord, they started back to Jerusalem, and were preaching the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans" (vs. 25). At least Peter, John, and Philip—maybe others—they "solemnly testified"; that means that they faithfully bore witness to the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. They "spoke the word of the Lord"; that means they explained the Old Testament Scriptures—like Philip explained Isaiah, like Stephen had explained a number of passages, like Peter had explained a number of passages (cf. Neh. 8:8; 1 Tim. 4:13; 2 Tim. 4:2)—and surely, they also passed along "the apostles' doctrine" (Acts 2:42, NKJV), which they studied all the time in Jerusalem. Well, *those* are things *you and I* can do! Let's just be faithful in ministry. Where God takes you—that's *the very best place* for you to share the Gospel, whatever day you are there, with *whomever* you encounter (Matt. 28:19; Mk. 13:10; Acts 26:22; Rom. 15:19; 2 Cor. 2:14-16).

Number 2: Be Responsive To God

Okay, I get it: You are not going to have an "angel of the Lord" come and tell you to leave behind your traveling party and head to the "desert road" toward his own town. But when that happened to Philip, what does it say, simply? "So he got up and went" (vs. 27). No delay. His attitude was: "God has given me an opportunity; I will seize it!" *That* is something we can do! It may not be as divine revelation via an angel, but we can be responsive to the Lord.

Number 3: Be Willing And Eager

Not only did Philip *go*, but the wording gives you a sense of his *eagerness* and *energy* as he did it: Verse 30—"Philip *ran up* and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet, and said,

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'Do you understand what you are reading?' " As far as we know, God had not told him *why* He sent him down that road. And then he sees this big deal going on, and he says, "Okay, I have a pretty good idea why God sent me here." He *runs up* and gets closer, and hears a guy reading out loud from Isaiah, and he ran up and asked him, "Do you understand?" It was his *joy*, it was his *desire* to speak on behalf of Christ! *That* is something we can do. We can learn that from Philip.

Number 4: Be Prepared With Scripture

Remember back when we were looking at Stephen's *astounding* speech—his "Best Last Words, Ever" as I called it, in Chapter 7—I urged us all to be relentless in increasing our understanding of God's Word so that we can do likewise (1 Pet. 2:2; 3:15; 2 Pet. 3:18). Well, Stephen was not the only one of the first deacons to do that. We saw this from Philip: He "opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him." (vs. 35). This was *out of the blue* for him! But he *knew* the Scriptures well enough to start there, and preach Christ from there.

Now, if you are not comfortable yet with doing something like that, I want to emphasize that word "yet." You only know what you know, but you are not *stuck* with knowing only what you know! (cf. Col. 1:10) This is the *perfect day* to begin learning, say, one tidbit at a time, maybe one memory verse at a time. And if you were to add one gem to your spiritual treasure per week, a year from now that would give you 52 things that you could use to share the Gospel by a year from now. If you say, "Well, hey, Jim, I'm almost as old as you. My mind is fossilizing. I can't do that every week!" Okay, if you miss every other week, or it takes you *two weeks* to memorize a verse of Scripture, then a year from now you will have 26 verses!

In other words: Be *relentless* in preparing your heart to know the Scriptures (Jos. 1:8; Ps. 1:2; Rom. 12:2; Col. 3:16; 1 Tim. 4:6; 2 Pet. 3:2). It is *important* to know the whole big story, it's *important* to know the big picture, it's *important* to know all the different books of the Bible; but learn things that you can use as a starting point. If you think God might be putting you into the presence of somebody that is *really* struggling, *really* hurting; who has maybe been maligned, gossiped about, crushed by a physical problem of some kind or the illness or death of a loved one—maybe you'll want to start by memorizing First Peter Chapter 5, Verse 7—"casting all your care on Him, for He cares for you" (NKJV). There's an open door! "You have a lot of care? I know someplace you can go with that! Take it to Jesus, because He cares for you." "What do you mean, *Jesus*? I don't believe in Jesus!" "Well, let me tell you about Jesus. Have you ever heard of Isaiah 53?"—if that's one of the gems that you have memorized. That is something you and I can do: Be Prepared With Scripture.

Number 5: Be Thorough

We read that. Remember, after Philip preached Christ to him, the Ethiopian said, "Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?" (vs. 36) The observation here is simply that Philip's presentation of the Gospel was *more* than just, "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures...He was buried, and...He was raised on the third day

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according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:3-4)—"Do you want to believe that, or not? I've gotta go!" No, he preached Christ and *explained* it to him; he helped him *understand* what he was reading; and he called the eunuch to commit to Christ, and he showed him that following Christ *includes* that it changes your life, and you want it to show—you want to be baptized. He was thorough.

That is something that we can do. Do you know somebody who does not yet believe in Christ? Well, you could help them. Do you know somebody who has just believed in Christ? Well, you can invite them to be baptized next month. See Scott Basolo; we can handle that.

Number 6: Be Relentless.

Do you realize that, as I said, he got started when they asked, "Will you help us serving the widows?" "Sure, I'll do that." A few months later, here he is in Samaria—God is doing miracles; Philip is preaching. Understand: That wasn't a one-off; nor was his encounter with the Ethiopian. He "found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through *he kept preaching the gospel to all the cities* until he came to Caesarea" (vs. 40). And if he happened to be going synagogue by synagogue, that's week after week after week, on his way to get there. He "kept preaching the gospel" wherever he went. That's something you and I can do!

So, this passage is not just here to tell you about a witness encounter that Philip had on a hot road on the way to Gaza. This is here *for us*.

Now, look for what we can learn from this Ethiopian. We see things in him that are characteristics we, too, can emulate; *and* we see in him things that we should look for in other people. You know, if you have an opportunity to talk to somebody about Christ, and you maybe offer a Gospel tract, and they slap it out of your hand, all you a name, stomp on it, and spit on it—you may not want to spend the afternoon talking about spiritual things with that person (cf. Prov. 23:9; Matt. 7:6; Acts 13:46; 18:6). But when you start seeing a *response*, when you start seeing a glimmer of interest—oh, boy, *that's* what you want to see!

So, learn from the Ethiopian four things to look for—and look for them in your own heart, but look for them in people that you have a chance to share with.

Number 1: He Was Seeking True Worship

Acts 8:27—"he had come to Jerusalem to worship." Alright, this is not telling you that *you have to go to Jerusalem* to worship, but it shows the example of somebody making worship a *very* high priority. This guy was willing to travel across half a continent—*surely* it is not unreasonable to ask somebody to maybe come to church with you! And if you begin to see someone with that kind of a desire to worship, you realize: God is at work in that person's heart, because what does Romans 3 say? "There is none righteous, not even one"—so, how many need the Gospel? Everybody. "There is none who seeks for God" (3:10-11). So if you have somebody *even willing* to ask a question about God,

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assume that that is the Spirit at work in that person's life (e.g., Acts 16:14, 29-30; cf. Jer. 24:7; Jn. 3:3, 5; 1 Cor. 12:3b; Titus 3:5). This is a chance for you to plant a seed. This is a chance for you to maybe even be used by God to "harvest" a soul (Jn. 4:35; cf. Matt. 9:36-38; 1 Cor. 3:6).

This guy went to Jerusalem. He did not have a car, he did not have a train, he did not have an airplane—it was a caravan on a really hot, dusty road in the Middle East. That's something you and I can do. We can seek true worship. I mean, here at Heritage Bible Church, we have the audacity to say: "We would like you to set aside three yours on Sunday morning for worship and fellowship and encouragement." That's a whopping *1.9 percent* of the hours in your week! Set that example, and somebody may ask, "Well, how come you never mow your lawn on Sunday morning?" I don't know if they would ask that or not. "Well, I have a much more important commitment." We can observe that, and we can set that pattern.

Number 2: He Was Searching Scripture

Verse 28—"he was returning and sitting in his chariot, and was reading the prophet Isaiah." In addition to whatever the public worship was that that guy got involved with in Jerusalem, he desired to "search the Scriptures" for himself (Jn. 5:39; cf. Acts 17:11). If you hear somebody mention a Bible verse, maybe even mention a Bible verse completely out of context—well, then, you know that you have an open door there. He was willing to open the Scriptures; he was willing to look for what God had for him in that particular time, in that particular place.

So, that's something else that we can do. We can be searching Scripture. We can be responding when we have the opportunity. It was such a rare thing for this guy to have a scroll of Isaiah! *We have Bibles galore!* Do you know somebody who doesn't have a Bible? Stop by our front door, take one, and give it away! What better thing could you *possibly do*? Help people search the Scriptures.

Number 3: He Was Humble And Teachable

Remember, we read about what he said he desired to learn? "Well, how could I [understand this], unless someone guides me?" (vs. 31). Well, be willing to guide somebody. As Jesus put it in the Beatitudes: "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied" (Matt. 5:6)—and the implication is that "they *and they alone* will be satisfied."

So if you hear somebody mention something about the Bible, and you think, "Well, I don't know if I want to start that; I'm not sure I can handle that." One of the *wonderful* things is that if you hear somebody say that they don't believe the Bible because of the contradictions in it—*oh, man*, the door just flung open! Walk through it! The right thing to do, in that situation, is not to say, "Well, yeah, there are some hard things in the Bible..." Say, "Oh, which contradiction are you talking about? I'm curious. As you have been studying the Bible, where do you see a contradiction? I don't think there *are* any."—and then they bring up something that you've *never heard of*. That means that not only

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do you get to witness *that day*, you get to say to them something like, "I don't have the answer to that question right now, but I would like to *get* the answer to the question. So I'll buy the coffee next week. Let's come and talk about that. Bring your Bible." And then they show you another contradiction, so you say, "You know, I don't have the answer to that, but if I get the answer to that question, will you give your life to Jesus Christ? Is *that* what is in your way?" You see, *we can do that!* We can be humble and teachable, and we can look for people who are humble and teachable.

Number 4: He Was Eager To Obey

Look how *eager* this guy was to obey! "Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?" (vs. 36) When he heard of Christ, he believed. When he heard that the way to declare your faith is to be baptized (Matt. 28:19-20), he wanted to do it *immediately* (Ps. 119:60). That is something you and I can do, and we can model for people (Phil. 2:15; Titus 2:7). "I understand from the Word what God wants me to do. I am going to go do it." And we can certainly be encouraging each other to do these kinds of things, like we see in the Ethiopian, like we see in Philip (1 Thess. 5:11, 14; Heb. 3:13; 10:25).

So, I want to ask you: Is there *anything* that God has convicted you to do, and you are resisting it? (cf. Jas. 4:17) Now, He is not going to send you an angel, He's not even going to send you a postcard. He won't speak to you audibly. He has given you "everything" you need "for life and godliness" in the "knowledge" of His Son (2 Pet. 1:3), which is in the Scriptures (2 Tim. 3:15-17). He has given you His Holy Spirit to help you understand and apply those things (1 Cor. 2:12; Gal. 5:16; Eph. 3:16).

So, are you going to be like Philip? God is probably not going to ask you to go hike a dusty trail in the Middle East, but He might send you to work this week. You might have a neighbor that has a death in the family. You might know something else that happens that opens a door in somebody's heart.

And of course, above all: Have you put *your* faith in Jesus Christ? Romans 6:23 is simple and clear: "For the wages of sin is death"—and earlier in the same book, he said, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (3:23)—"the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Have you received the "free gift" of "eternal life"? If you have not, you are probably sitting next to somebody who would *love* to tell you how you can, or Pastor Scott or Pastor Scott or me or Pastor Dirk or Deacon Bob, Betty who brought you—we would *love* to talk to you about how you can know this wonderful Savior!

Let's pray:

Father, how glorious, how marvelous this Gospel! Thank You for Your sovereign hand on Philip, and his joyous and instant obedience. Thank You for the faith of this man from ancient Ethiopia, and that that was just the beginning of the outpouring of the flood of the era of Your Gospel of grace going to the Gentiles. Here we sit, 21 centuries later, reaping the benefits. Thank You! Thank You so much. Do Your work in our hearts, for Your glory, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.