

Bible Study 28 – Acts 8:26-40 – Philip and the conversion of a prominent Ethiopian

Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” This is a desert place. 27 And he rose and went. And there was an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure. He had come to Jerusalem to worship 28 and was returning, seated in his chariot, and he was reading the prophet Isaiah. 29 And the Spirit said to Philip, “Go over and join this chariot.” 30 So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, “Do you understand what you are reading?” 31 And he said, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. 32 Now the passage of the Scripture that he was reading was this:

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

33 In his humiliation justice was denied him.

Who can describe his generation?

For his life is taken away from the earth.”

34 And the eunuch said to Philip, “About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?” 35 Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus. 36 And as they were going along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, “See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?”^[e] 38 And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. 39 And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing. 40 But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through he preached the gospel to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

1. Philip is instructed by the Lord: Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” This is a desert place. 27 And he rose and went.

a) Philip received a message from the Lord. Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip... Angel literally means messenger. Angels are spiritual beings that serve the Lord God. And hence Philip receives a word from God...

b) Philip is to rise and take the road that runs south from Jerusalem to Gaza. This is surely counter intuitive as he was instructed to go out into a desert place rather than a busy city or town where crowds gather. It was not simply a literal desert but also provided a useful metaphor for the spiritual desert that would soon be transformed by grace... I'm reminded again of how often God's ways are not our ways. And yet he unlike us is never wrong...

c) Philip responds positively in faith. He rose and went... And we recognise the hand of God at work who is not only guiding Philip but will grace his faithfulness...

2. Philip there encounters a court official of Queen Candace of Ethiopia: And there was an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure. He had come to Jerusalem to worship 28 and was returning, seated in his chariot, and he was reading the prophet Isaiah.

a) The Ethiopian eunuch was a renowned and powerful political figure. He was trusted as the Queen's treasurer. He therefore enjoyed a position of privilege which would have carried patronage and prosperity in its wake. Such court officials were castrated to ensure that no one could impregnate the Queen and hence supplant the royal bloodline...

b) The Ethiopian eunuch was returning from Jerusalem where he had gone to worship God. He was likely a God-fearer, that is a Gentile who worshipped the God of Israel. Although, he may have been a diaspora Jew by descent – born and brought up in Ethiopia.

c) The Ethiopian eunuch was reading the Old Testament Book of Isaiah. He was evidently a man who sought after God, who desired to know God and know God's will for his life. And God was about to act through the instrumentality of his servant, Philip who was given the opportunity to enlighten the Ethiopian official regarding the Word Incarnate who is revealed in the word of scripture.

3. Philip therefore reaches out to instruct the Ethiopian: And the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over and join this chariot." 30 So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" 31 And he said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. Let us note how:

a) Philip was alert to opportunity... when God opens a door for us, he expects us to walk through it...

b) Philip was attuned to the prompting of the Holy Spirit... in accord with the word of God...

c) Philip was affable and assiduous in approaching the Ethiopian official... he was courteous and respectful, and therefore he was invited to join the official and share the Good News with him...

4. Philip reveals the gospel of Jesus: Now the passage of the Scripture that he was reading was this: "Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter and like a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he opens not his mouth. 33 In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth." 34 And the eunuch said to Philip, "About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?" 35 Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus.

a) Philip makes clear that the passage he was reading from Isaiah 53 prefigures and points to Jesus Christ who was the substitutionary and sacrificial Lamb of God, who was sacrificed for the sin of the world...

b) Philip preaches Jesus, the Christ, the Son of the living God, beginning at this passage...

The Old Testament scriptures anticipate and articulate the person and work of Christ... Jesus was and is prophesied and promised therein. He is revealed in word, promise, symbol, and type throughout the Old Testament scriptures... He is the main theme of our complete Bible...

c) Philip proclaims Good News in and through the Lord Jesus Christ... reconciliation, redemption, restoration, renewal... All God's promises to us are yes and amen in Jesus... who is our wisdom from God, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.

5. Philip reacts in response to the Ethiopian's request to be baptised: And as they were going along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, "See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?" 38 And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him.

a) On coming to water, the Ethiopian asked to be baptised...

b) The Ethiopian therefore commanded his chariot and retinue to stop...

c) The Ethiopian was baptised by Philip no doubt on confession of sin and profession of faith as a sign and seal of God's Covenant of Grace in Jesus Christ... And Philip thereby was fulfilling the Great Commission to go make disciples, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit...

6. Philip resumes his missionary journey, while the Ethiopian went on his way rejoicing: And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing. 40 But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through he preached the gospel to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

a) The Ethiopian resumes his journey home in the joy of the Lord... A seed to planted in Ethiopia...

b) While Philip is again receptive to the guidance of God's Spirit... The Great Commission must continue...

c) Philip therefore refocuses his attention on sharing the good news about what God has done for fallen humanity in Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour in all the towns and village enroute to Caesarea.... And this commission continues in his church until the consummation...

Questions

1. How and where do we seek God and his will for our lives?
2. In what ways was the Old Testament period anticipatory of the New Testament era?
3. Why is Jesus Christ central to the Christian faith?
4. In what ways does the Holy Spirit work in the furtherance of the Christ's Great Commission to his church?