

INTRODUCTION

As we have followed the story of the church throughout this book of Acts we have discovered that the gospel has spread from Jerusalem into the area of Samaria. The church as a result is growing and believers are being added to the church from places like Samaria an unthinkable prospect as far as any Jew was concerned.

Now in this section we see the spread of the gospel continuing as it reaches the African continent through this Ethiopian eunuch. Last time we were in Acts we saw the false profession of faith by Simon, however now we see the contrast of genuine faith, which results in genuine salvation. There are three elements in this Ethiopian coming to faith in Jesus Christ and we want to explore each one.

1. THE PREPARATION FOR RECEIVING THE GOSPEL (vs. 25-28)

This Ethiopian man was being prepared to receive and accept the gospel and we see this preparation in four ways.

a) **The Leading of the Holy Spirit (vs. 25-26)** - We know that salvation is God's work it originates in the sovereign will of God and is implemented by the grace of God. There are two insurmountable barriers that keep sinners from grasping God's salvation by their own efforts. First sinners are spiritually dead and therefore they are unable to respond to God.

Secondly Satan and his cohorts are also actively involved in keeping sinners from turning to the Lord for salvation by blinding their minds to the truth (2 Corinthians 4:3-4). Therefore in the light of these two facts it is ludicrous to assume that anyone apart from the work of the Holy Spirit could ever come to saving faith in the Lord Jesus.

The Spirit must do all the work from bringing a sinner into contact with the gospel to enlightening his soul and ultimately in breathing spiritual life into his dead heart.

In these verses the Spirit begins his work in saving this Ethiopian by moving Philip into position. Philip, Peter and John had known wonderful blessing in Samaria and on their way back to Jerusalem Peter and John carried on the work of evangelism that Philip had started by preaching the gospel in many Samaritan villages (v 25). But Philip was told not to go back to Jerusalem for he was being sent south to a desert road that goes from Gaza and Jerusalem. Now Gaza was one of the five main cities of the Philistines, which had been destroyed and a new city Gaza was built nearer the coast. The road however from Jerusalem to Egypt still ran through the ruins of the Old Gaza and this road was primarily a desert road.

The point of this information is that this command given by the Spirit was very strange, for Philip is being sent to a road that was hardly ever used, it was a desert road. But God was in control and He knew exactly what he was doing for there would be a man passing along that road who needed some spiritual help. God had someone he was going to save and so he places Philip in the right place.

Now we can see this in our own conversion, look at the circumstances that surrounded you coming to faith in Christ. My own involved moving home and school; and being befriended by Christian young people. Without moving home I would never have moved school and without doing that I would not have met two Christian young people who told me the gospel and took me to church.

Without that I would not have heard the gospel and would not have been saved. We must always remember that God works by His Spirit, behind the scenes and every circumstance and situation is controlled by Him. Therefore we must accept every situation that we find ourselves in as from God and look for the opportunities that He has ordained for us to share the gospel.

b) The Willingness of Philip to Obey (v 27) - God often accomplishes his purposes through human instruments. He takes normal people and uses them for His own eternal purposes. However according to the bible the people that God uses the most are those who willingly obey His word and in doing so actively follow the leading of His Holy Spirit and that is certainly the case with Philip for we read that Philip "started out" (v 27).

Now remember Philip is being asked to go on what seems an illogical journey. But it seems he did not struggle with the absurdity of the command before obeying it nor did he question God on the matter he simply obeyed and started on his journey in the knowledge that the Lord knows what He is doing. Remember the work in Samaria was thriving and there was still much to do and now Philip is being asked to leave and go to a desert road where meeting anyone would be very unlikely. But Philip knew that His God was in control he had seen what God did in Samaria and he knew that he only went to Samaria to escape the trouble in Jerusalem.

But God wanted Philip in Samaria for His own purposes and so He sent the persecution and now He wants him in the desert road so He sends the angel to instruct him (v 26). But without God's work of the Holy Spirit and without Philip's willing obedience and submissiveness to His God this Ethiopian would not have had the gospel explained to him or have been saved.

My dear Christian friend each one of us must daily obey God's word in the knowledge that God is in control of every situation and every circumstance of life. Even if that means that at times it seems that we are being led in a direction that does not make sense the obedient Christian will continue to obey God's word because we know that our God has a purpose that needs to be fulfilled.

We also must always be prepared to be used by God in every situation that we find ourselves. It might be that God will save someone from the most unpromising situation. But God's ways are not our ways and His purposes are much deeper and much fuller than we could ever imagine. So devote yourself to the daily obedience of the word of God and allow God to lead and guide us through His word and then make the most of every opportunity that He presents to us.

c) The Desire of the Ethiopian to Worship (v 27) - It is clear that God had placed within this Ethiopian eunuch a desire to seek after and worship the one true God. He had travelled all the way to Jerusalem in order to worship.

Now we are not told how he first came into contact with the Jewish faith but we are told that he was a high ranking official in his country for he was in charge of all the treasury of Candace queen of the Ethiopians. Now Ethiopia in that day was a large kingdom located south of Egypt. To the Greeks and Romans it represented the outer limits of the known world.

Its kings were believed to be incarnations of the sun god and therefore the everyday affairs of Government were considered to be beneath them. The real power lay with the Queen Mother who was known by the title Candace, which is not a proper name but actually an official title like Pharaoh. This man was in charge of all her treasure in modern times he was the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Despite his power and prestige it seemed he had a vast emptiness in his soul. He was willing to make a very long and difficult journey from his homeland to Jerusalem in order to search for the

truth about God. Unfortunately given the state of Judaism at the time he probably left Jerusalem still searching for God, still empty inside and still with many questions.

But at least it seems that while in Jerusalem he was able to get part of God's word, as we will see in a minute. Now although God is sovereign his sovereignty works in such a way that sinners have a responsibility to seek him. It is clear that God has put restlessness in his heart and pointed him in the right direction but this man still had to go and make that journey to Jerusalem in search of God.

But we are grateful that we are told that those who seek Him will find him. God rewards the seeking heart (Jeremiah 29:13) and this is true of this Ethiopian eunuch.

Perhaps there is someone here today and you are seeking God, you want to know the true God. Perhaps there has been a restlessness placed in your heart, you cannot explain what is wrong with you, but you now have a desire to search for spiritual reality and you long for inward peace.

If that is you today then I can point you to the one who is able to fulfil your needs by saving you from your sin and giving you peace with God that person is Jesus Christ. But you must repent of your sin and trust God for salvation. You must come to church to hear the gospel preached you must obey God by responding to his word.

This man did a great deal to find God you must likewise follow the desires of your heart and seek God with all your strength and I can guarantee you that you will find Him.

Likewise those who are Christians today must always remember that no one comes in to this church without God having a purpose behind it. That purpose might not always be saving purposes but God always brings people into this church for his own purposes. Therefore we should pray that God's purposes for those who come into our building might be saving purposes, perhaps that is His purpose for you.

He wants to save you and give you new life. You may have been coming to this church for a long time, perhaps you do so out of habit or perhaps you have never really thought about why you do come to church. Well I trust and pray that God's purpose will be to bring you to faith in Jesus Christ. I trust that you will begin to search for God and find Him because those who seriously seek Him will find him (1 Chronicles 28:9).

d) The Power of the Word of God (v 28) - While this man was returning to his own country he was sitting in his chariot and was reading from the prophet Isaiah. He obviously still had this desire to know God; whatever happened in Jerusalem has not put him off so he reads God's word to find out more.

He knew that God revealed himself through his word and so it seems that while in Jerusalem he got his hands on the scroll of Isaiah. Perhaps he paid for it? Perhaps he paid a lot for it because it was very difficult for a Gentile to get his hands on such a scroll.

Now once again you can see God at work, making sure that the man got a scroll and of course making sure it was a part of Isaiah from which the gospel could be explained. Although some of God's attributes can be known from creation a saving knowledge of Him comes only through the Scriptures. So God enables this man to get a copy or part of the Scriptures so that Philip is able to explain them to him and so that this man could be saved. If God's only reason for taking this Ethiopian man to Jerusalem was to make sure he had the Scriptures then it was a journey well worth making.

How many times has God provided people with the scriptures so that eventually someone could explain it to them? How often has a Bible and Testament which has been supplied by the Gideons been used by God to open up the heart of sinners.

As a church we must promote the distribution of the Scriptures both here in our own land in throughout the world for it is by the reading of God's word that men and women come to understand the salvation that God offers to sinners through Jesus Christ.

This is why a large part of our services are spent understanding the Scriptures, it is by the understanding of God's word that God reveals Christ to us and through Him we receive salvation. So let's encourage the reading and study of Scripture.

2. THE PRESENTATION OF THE GOSPEL (vs. 29-35)

I would like to spend a lot more time on this point than I am going to because time is going by so quickly. So let me deal with two points about presenting the gospel to sinners.

a) It Must Be Centred On The Bible (vs. 30-34) - When the Spirit told Philip to go up to the Chariot he instantly obeyed and ran up to the Chariot where he heard the Ethiopian reading from the book of Isaiah. It was usually the custom to read aloud so this custom presented Philip with an opportunity to present to him the gospel of the Lord Jesus.

It seems that the Ethiopian was so perplexed by what he read that he did not care who Philip was or why he was in his presence. He simply responded to Philip's question about understanding (v 30) with a firm cry for help (v 31).

Amazingly the Ethiopian then invited Philip to come upon his chariot and help him understand what he was reading. Philip's heart must have rejoiced at such an invitation we all long for that sort of invitation, and it is clear that God has prepared both this Ethiopian and Philip for this moment. The passage that he was reading was Isaiah 53 and the key verses that he was reading at that time were from verses 7-8. The Ethiopian asked Philip whom these verses were talking about? It is clear that he understood that they were talking about someone but whom exactly he did not know. Was Isaiah referring to himself or was he referring to someone else (v 34)?

His confusion was understandable for contemporary Jewish thought was divided on the interpretation of this passage. Some held that the slaughtered sheep represented the nation of Israel others thought that it was referring to Isaiah, while others thought that Isaiah was referring to the coming Messiah. However there was no doubt in Philip's mind who it was referring to.

Philip knew the Scriptures well enough to begin with that very passage and he presented the good news of Jesus to the Ethiopian (v 35). You see he was not just telling the man the good news but he was able to show him from the Scriptures so that he spoke with the authority of the Scriptures rather than with his own authority.

It is important that we all seek to know God's word so that we are able to explain the good news of Jesus from them. Would you or I have been able to take that Old Testament passage and explain the good news of Jesus to the man? If not then we then to learn how to do so, we need to know the Scriptures and we need to memorise them. It is important that any presentation of the gospel is based solidly on Scripture.

Of course the use of personal testimonies or the giving of Christian literature is important in presenting the truth but they are no substitute for explaining to people the gospel from the Scriptures. If someone asked you today to explain the gospel to them would you be able to turn to

appropriate passages of Scripture and explain it to them so that they would have a clear presentation of the gospel.

If you are unable to do that and I would be surprised if everyone could, then you need to practise and do some homework on it. Try this afternoon to have an imaginary conversation with someone and see if you could turn to four or five verses or passages that enable you to explain the gospel clearly.

If we practise then when God presents us with an opportunity to present the gospel we will be able to do it, demonstrating from the Scriptures that Jesus is God in human flesh who lived and died and rose again on behalf of sinners. We will be able to explain what Jesus work on the cross means for sinners who turn to him in repentance and faith. It is not just the task of the Pastor or Elders to present the gospel, it is all our jobs. Some of us will do it better than others but what is important is that we are able to do it.

b) It Must Be Centred On Jesus Christ (v 35) - Notice what Philip did he presented Jesus to them. That is the gospel, the gospel is about Jesus and when we are presenting the gospel we must present Jesus as the lamb that was slaughtered, the one who gave his life for sinners. Any gospel presentation to be effective must clearly and comprehensively present to sinful men and women, Jesus Christ.

We must show people who he is and what he did on behalf of sinners. Yes we can deal with the issue of creation and evolution if that is important for clearing the path, in order that we are able to present Jesus but debating creation and evolution issues although important is not presenting the gospel.

If we can move on from those issues to Jesus Christ then that is fine but it is very important that we understand that a clear gospel presentation is a presentation about the person and work of Jesus Christ.

3. THE RESPONSE TO THE GOSPEL (vs. 36-40)

The Spirit's preparation and Philip's presentation combine to produce a positive response from the Ethiopian. Of course what we have here is a shorten version of events but as Philip was on board the chariot it seems that the Ethiopian was taught about believing in Jesus and about baptism. For as they went along the road the Ethiopian saw some water and asked what prevented him from being baptised? (v 36).

It seems that the Ethiopian has already been granted saving faith in Jesus Christ and wants to outwardly demonstrate that by obedience in going through the waters of baptism. The oldest and most reliable manuscripts do not contain verse 37, which is why the NIV puts it in the footnote at the bottom of the page.

It was probably put in as a latter addition to make it clear that no one can be baptised without clearly believing who Jesus is and what he has done. But it is implied in the fact that the man gets baptised and Philip would not have permitted such a thing without a clear confession of Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. So both Philip and the Ethiopian go into the water where Philip baptises him. Remember baptism is a public confession of faith and every believer should be baptised. To fail to be baptised is to be disobedient and this Ethiopian wanted to obey His new Lord and Master.

So in front of his entourage the Ethiopian demonstrates to everyone through baptism that he has confessed faith in Jesus Christ and is a changed man. After the Ethiopian was baptised the Spirit

took Philip away (v 38) perhaps to demonstrate to the Ethiopian and to his entire entourage that Philip was indeed from God and therefore what has happened to the Ethiopian is truly from God.

As for the Ethiopian he went away rejoicing while Philip finds himself in Azotus which was 20 miles north of Gaza but it did not matter where Philip went or was sent he continued to preach the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea (v 40).

Now as I finish let me make it clear that the only proper response to the gospel is to turn to the Saviour in faith and be baptised as a declaration that you are saved and belong to God. You must not separate profession of faith and baptism for they go together.

Anyone who professes faith but is not baptised is either a true believer who has been poorly taught on the issue of baptism or else they are disobedient believers or the third possibility is that they are not believers at all. Sadly there are far too many professing believers who are not baptised and who do not belong to a gospel church.

I cannot understand that, this Ethiopian wasted no time in obeying the Lord and was baptised on the same day he professed faith. If you are a real Christian then can I urge you to be baptised, speak to me afterwards and I will gladly help you to understand these things.

Notice finally the effect that the Ethiopian's conversion had on him, he went away rejoicing (v 39). There is nothing quite like knowing that your sins are forgiven and that God through Jesus Christ accepts you for making a person rejoice.

Christian every day we should rejoice in this wonderful truth that Christ died for our sins, was buried and was raised from the dead according to the Scriptures.

As a result our sins are forgiven and we are justified and in the process of being sanctified and one day we will be glorified. Let us rejoice in these facts and then let us go out and speak to others about our wonderful Saviour.

Amen