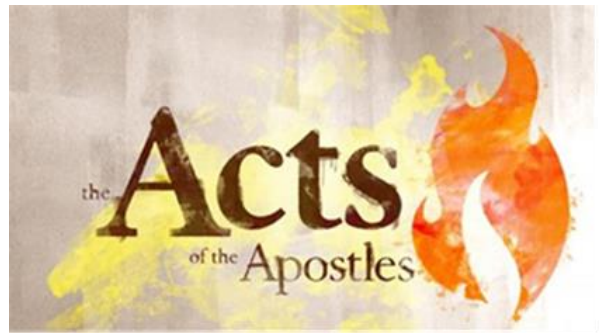


## ACTS: THE STORY OF THE CHURCH – Part 10

### Philip's Second Story

Acts 8:26-40

Philip had transitioned from a server caring for widows and distributing food to a bold and supernaturally gifted proclaimer and evangelist for Christ. He had traveled a distance from the home base and was healing people from all kinds of maladies when he was confronted by a magician named Simon.



That's an interesting encounter and it can be found in 8: 9-25. We pick up Philip's second story in 8:26-40 when he was traveling through Gaza and was told by the Spirit to speak with an African man who was passing by in a chariot. Turns out the man was a eunuch who served the Queen of Ethiopia as finance minister and who was a follower of Judaism. That would not have been a normal combination in those days.

O.K. let's plot out Philip's first "mission" trip. First, he travels quite a distance to proclaim and heal when he meets a magician who fancied Philip's ability to heal (even though it was not Philip's ability in the least) and wanted to follow Jesus to gain the ability to heal people and cast out demons. Imagine how these gifts would improve his magic act. *Vegas Baby!*

After this unusual encounter Philip is traveling back to Jerusalem when he has a Divine encounter with a eunuch from the African continent. Wonder if Philip thought, "I had such a calm life distributing food to widows...what was I thinking heading out on a preaching trip?" Let's pick it up in 8:26:

*Then the Lord's angel said to Philip, "Now go south from Jerusalem on the desert road to Gaza." He left immediately on his assignment. Along the way he encountered an Ethiopian who believed in the God of the Jews, who was the minister of finance for Candace, queen of Ethiopia. He was on his way*

*home from worshipping God in Jerusalem. As he rode along in his chariot, he was reading from the scroll of Isaiah.*

*The Holy Spirit said to Philip, "Go walk alongside the chariot." So, Philip ran to catch up. As he drew closer he overheard the man reading from the scroll of Isaiah the prophet. Philip asked him, "Sir, do you understand what you're reading? The man answered, "How can I possibly make sense of this without someone explaining it to me?" So, he invited Philip up into his chariot to sit with him.*

Let's stop to unpack this encounter a bit.

1. Let's highlight the fact that Philip did what the Spirit instructed him to do. Had he ever run into an Ethiopian Eunuch who was a follower of the Most High God of Israel who happened to be reading, possibly even struggling with the section of Isaiah that foretold the coming of the Messiah? Ha, likely not. Takeaway here is that God does have certain things for us to do and they are Divine appointments. Divine appointments keep the Kingdom moving forward. There is a bigger plan in place that we might have a small part in. "If," we listen and then follow through.
2. The eunuch was traveling home from Jerusalem where he had been worshipping God. It was a pilgrimage for him, despite the limitations placed on him by the religious structure in Jerusalem. As a eunuch he would not have been allowed to fully enter the Temple. It's quite possible he would not have been eligible to listen to the best rabbis. This is key as a skilled rabbi could have explained the Isaiah passages to him, although they would not have centered on the teaching on Jesus. To most in Jerusalem at this point the Messiah/Promised One was still a dream...for Philip, Jesus was the "dream fulfilled."
3. To be part of God's Kingdom's progressive plan we, like Philip, must be tuned into God's leadership. God won't knock us down to get our attention.

If, and this is a big *if*, we daily seek God and his leadership, we will be in position to hear and hopefully follow.

4. No two people could have been as different as Philip and the eunuch from Ethiopia. It's quite possible that we will be put into a position to minister/attend to a person unlike us, possibly quite unlike us. Note that this encounter allowed for the still recent reality of Jesus as Messiah to reach Ethiopia. God's plan to reach the world can't come together without a seeker like the eunuch and a person willing to teach him, like Philip. The Gospel is spread by people like us, at times to people greatly unlike us.

Let's pick back up with this unusual narrative:

The portion from Isaiah he was reading was this:

*He was led away to the slaughter like a lamb to be offered. He was like a lamb that is silent before those who sheared him—he never even opened his mouth. In his lowliness justice was stripped away from him. And who could fully express his struggles? For his life was taken from the earth.*

The Ethiopian asked Philip, "Please, can you tell me who the prophet is speaking of? Is it himself or another man? Philip started with this passage and shared with him the wonderful message of Jesus. As they were traveling down the road, the man said, "Look, here is a pool of water. Why don't I get baptized right now?" Philip replied, "If you believe with all your heart, I'll baptize you." The man answered, "I believe that Jesus is the Anointed One, the Son of God.

The Ethiopian stopped his chariot, and they went down into the water and Philip baptized him. When they came up out of the water, Philip was suddenly snatched up by the Spirit of the Lord and instantly carried away to the city of Ashdod, where he reappeared, preaching the gospel in that city. The man never saw Philip again. He returned to Ethiopia full of great joy.

The key question asked by the eunuch was “Who is the prophet speaking of? Is it himself or another man?” Oh my, is it ever another man. The door swung wide open for a conversation about Jesus.

It’s also of note to know in that culture it was frowned upon to ask a person of position and means if they understood what they were reading. Learned and positioned people were above that kind of inquiry, but this was not a normal encounter or conversation. This was a God moment, a divinely inspired and engineered encounter. And, let’s face it, Isaiah is not easy to grasp, especially the prophetic portions focused on a Messiah who would eventually come.

The eunuch had the proverbial horse in front of the cart on the baptism. He saw water and went straight to “baptize me.” Philip knew baptism was the final piece, not the first. First comes belief and acceptance, then comes baptism. “If you believe with all your heart, I’ll baptize you.” Again, baptism before full acceptance, repentance and belief is just, well, getting wet.

The eunuch says, “*Yes, you betcha by golly wow, I believe,*” or more biblically put, “I believe Jesus is the Anointed One, the Son of God.” He believed and accepted so he had made his profession of faith in Jesus as the Hebrew Messiah. Then it was baptism time.

His was a most unusual baptism as the moment Philip brought him up from the water he disappeared, Philip that is. Philip was supernaturally dispatched to another city to preach. While this would have scared about three years off my life expectancy, it did not seem to faze the Ethiopian Royal Financial Director who had just become a complete Jew.

From there he returned to his home country to spread the Jesus story.

### **Takeaways:**

1. God’s plan for salvation was so inclusive that it included traditional Hebrew Jews, Hellenistic Jews, diaspora Jews from here and yon, converted Jews, African converted Jews with royal standing who also happened to be eunuchs (now this was true progress), Samaritans and Gentiles. The Gospel

story is for all people. It has always been an inclusive plan, never exclusive. This reality should/must inform our theology and practice today.

2. God told Philip to go, so he went. That's an easy one to understand and to do likewise.
3. The Gospel story is one to be shared, verbally and demonstrably in how we live. This should be our life's message. The world needs to hear and see it.
4. Finding Jesus should never be cumbersome or difficult, and we at times make it both cumbersome and difficult. Quiz the church and you will discover people who believe that professions of faith must be made in the church, preferably in front of a crowd at the conclusion of a worship service, or if made in another location it must be shared and acknowledged in the church. Honestly, a profession of faith can be made anywhere and still be valid if the person chooses to not be part of a church. The church is for learning, preparing, growing in knowledge and in community and as a launching site. The church should be the weekly "filling" station, but the church is not salvation. Salvation is salvation. While it is obviously best to be part of a local church it isn't necessary for salvation.
5. We must be available and pliable and excited to be part of God's plans. Philip was told to go, and he went. Therein lies a lesson for us.

Amen and Amen.

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