

A concerned seeker saved

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[0 : 00] Acts chapter 8, and if you keep your Bibles open, this chapter will consider the verses from verse 26, and this encounter between Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch.

And if we are to single out a verse, as I said, it might be verse 37, then Philip says to the Ethiopian, if you believe with all your heart, you may, that is, be baptized.

And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. Someone has called the gospel God's dynamite.

God's dynamite for breaking down the barriers of sin in people's lives and setting prisoners free.

And I suppose, as we've looked at the first few chapters of Acts of the Apostles, we have some insight into this breaking down of the barriers by the gospel and the freeing of people from the barriers of sin.

You see, the gospel is not just an innocuous sort of idea. It isn't something that people can take or leave at will.

[1 : 23] It merits serious attention because it deals with serious issues. It deals with issues of life and death. It deals with issues of sin.

Now, in this passage from the Acts that we're going to look at tonight, we have, I think, a wonderful example. In the first place, of the presentation of the gospel to a sinner.

And on the other hand, we have a wonderful example of the receiving of the gospel by a sinner. The concern of this chapter is to look into the introduction by Philip of Jesus to this man, this Ethiopian unit, this minister of finance from the country pretty far to the south.

Now, we find this in these verses 26, more or less, to the end of the chapter of Acts 8. But we must notice how much of a change takes place with this martyrdom, with this stoning of stupend.

And we can't minimize the importance of stupend for a change that takes place in the direction of the work of the early church.

[2 : 48] Because we find here in the first few verses that he looks accused for the first real persecution of the church.

In the first three verses here, we'll read about this. Saul was consenting to his death. At that time, a great persecution arose against the church, which was at Jerusalem, and there were people scattered throughout the region.

After Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house and bragging off men and women, committing them to prison. So Stephen's death in a sense lit a fuse for the first real persecution upon the early church.

But he also really, or his death, also triggered off perhaps the first real evangelistic thrust, or missionary thrust, of the church beyond Jerusalem.

Because, as we look at verse 4 here, we see that those who were stappers, what did they do? They went everywhere preaching the word. And that too was a consequence of the death of this man's people.

[3 : 59] But also we can say that his death had an influence, ultimately at least, on the church's first major converse, the apostle Paul, as he became.

Paul, a pastor of whom we read here, that at this point he was consenting to his death. But then, when the Lord did convert him and turn him, what a powerful, true he was in the Lord's hands in the reaching out of the church.

But I think also in Stephen, there is a reaching out of the ideas, of the theology of the church.

Because as he was saying in his speech here, or in his preaching before the council, he made this all a revolutionary statement, that the Lord does not dwell in temples made with arms.

Heaven is my throne. The earth is my scripture. And the Lord does not dwell in the church. See, the church in his ideas is reaching out.

It isn't a preserve of the temple. It isn't a preserve of the Jews. It is a faith for the world. And there would be a going out to the world. And in this context, just around the corner, there is persecution.

[5 : 25] And persecution, friends, is always just around the corner for the church. Indeed, we can go further and say that the New Testament makes it clear that while persecution is not to be sought, nonetheless, it is most certainly to be accepted by those here followers of Jesus and his message.

And you young folks here tonight too will confront this. In your schools or wherever you may be, among your contemporaries, there will be a measure of sensitivity.

If you try to take a stand for the Lord Jesus Christ, and many run away from this, it becomes very difficult to maintain Christian perception in an alien environment.

Is this why so few fellows? But we realize that the path of suffering or persecution in God's hand is to all spiritual truth and to the spiritual truth of the church and its growth.

It is a gateway to blessing. But remember this. When we think of persecution, remember this, that just as a wind shatters seed as it is thrown up into the air, so persecution has this.

[6 : 54] The winds of persecution shatter the seed of the word of God. And then I think we have an illustration of this, even in our own day, in countries where there is actual physical persecution, as we have found in Russia and Romania and China and so on.

And it is what we see here. Therefore, those who were stuttered went everywhere, preaching the word. And immediately, from verse 4, we read about this man Philip, and we read about how he shared his faith in Samaria, preaching or proclaiming that Christ was Lord, preaching Christ to them.

Now, why can we come across this man Philip before? Because he, along with Stephen, was one of the seven who were set apart by the apostles.

We could perhaps call them deacons, but they were set apart. We read this in chapter 6 in verse 5. And like Stephen, this man Philip, has a burden for souls.

He isn't specifically set apart for preaching, but his burden, no more less, is to share Christ.

Because like Stephen, he is a man who is filled with the Holy Spirit of God.

[8 : 15] And we read in verses 5 to 8 here, he is greatly used. Greatly used. And the multitude, multitude, with one of the words, he did the things spoken by Philip, healing and seeing the miracles which he gave.

Isn't that marvelous? Multitudes, with one of the words, heeding the things spoken by Philip, healing the Gospel, listening to it, paying attention to it, and working it out in the line.

I know this is perhaps too. You can see this almost like a mathematical formula. Persecution plus teaching equals joy.

As you read in verse 8, and there was great joy in that city. When people hear the word, and when people heed the word, and when people respond to the word, they are delivered from their sinful lifestyle.

Delivered from, as it were, as we read here, demonic control. And there is joy following. Joy following. There must be.

[9 : 36] When you're delivered from the fraud, and from the grip of sin, and from the power of the evil one. How can there not be joy? And so we find here, and so when it is still true in the experience of the evil.

Well, tonight, I'd just like to link for a little of Philip's encounter with the Ethiopian unit as we go on to read about this, and this is the next passage, which we read of Philip in verse 26, and onwards.

And I think that there are here wonderful lessons for witnessing, and for receiving Christ for yourself. And I'd like us to notice three things arising from this encounter.

And first is, notice the inquiry, or the inquirer met. The inquirer met. And finally, notice the joy that is resulting.

And finally, notice the joy that is resulting. We find that in verse 39. But first of all, the inquirer met.

[10 : 51] Let's picture the scene again. Here's an Ethiopian unit, an unmarried man, a man of some authority, a minister of state in his own country.

He had charge of the treasury. He was minister of finance, if you like. Here is this man, a Ethiopian, at least, perhaps, a couple of hundred miles away from home.

Here, we meet an inquirer, a man who is speaking truth. Now, why do we know that the Ethiopian is speaking the truth?

Well, of course, there are several clear things here that tell us. First of all, we read that he came to Jerusalem to worship. We read this in verse 27.

At the end of that verse, he had come to Jerusalem to worship. Well, he was at least an inquirer if he came to Jerusalem to do that. But more than that, he is reading the scriptures.

[11 : 55] He was returning to Ethiopia and sitting in his chariot, he was reading Isaiah the prophet. He was a man with a concern for his soul.

Perhaps, we could just ask the question, or the question, how many people do we find travelling a couple of hundred miles to worship God?

How many people do you see reading the word of God these days? And he wasn't even brought up with him.

He is a man, you see, from a Stephen land, a land which could not then receive the light of God's revelation. And yet, he is going all these miles to worship and he is reading the Bible.

He has come from a situation of ignorance. He is not even, as we might say loosely, down on his luck. Because he's a man of rank, he's a man of position, he's a man of affluence, he doesn't need anything, he's a man of wealth, he's a man of influence.

[13 : 17] And yet, he had come to Jerusalem to worship and he was sitting, reading the prophet Isaiah. Somehow, this man had come in touch with a true faith.

Somehow, he had broken up to a point with the surrounding heathenism. Somehow, he had a Bible in his hands and he was searching, he was inquiring, he was looking for truth.

But he hasn't found it yet. He hasn't found it yet. But in a way, this Ethiopian represents people today who are religious, who have a religious inquiry.

seeking the truth, but they're not convicted yet. Their hearts haven't been opened yet to understand what the truth is actually saying to them.

They're sincere, but they're still lost. They're in need of someone to show them the way, or perhaps we should say that they are in need of a key to help them to understand what the word is saying to them in their own situation.

[14 : 44] Let me ask you, how concerned are you tonight about your spiritual life? How much of an inspirer are you tonight?

you concerned about where you stand before God, about where you are in relation to God? How concerned are you about what God thinks of you?

To the bathroom. How much is the Bible in your hands? How much is it read? How much is it poured over? Perhaps your experience has been that the Ethiopian.

Oh yes, I am interested. Oh yes, I read the Bible, but I don't understand it. I don't have the keys. It is you.

It is helpful to be an inquirer. You have access to the word, but you need someone or you need something to show the way.

[15 : 52] And you see, this is where God steps in. He has his man for this situation. And he takes Philip, you see how God is at work here.

He takes Philip, he takes Philip from that successful situation, from a successful mission that he's involved in there in Samaria. There you see where multitudes have been touched by the power of the word through what Philip has been preaching to them of the message of Jesus Christ.

And he takes him away from there from a promising, developing situation. And he takes him right down to the desert. Philip must have been wondering, what's going on here that I'm being taken down to this desert place in the south, hundreds of miles away from Samaria.

What's happening here? And God takes him for one man, for one man, down there on the way going down to gather.

Didn't this tell us something about the Lord and about the way the Lord works? He isn't just concerned about multitudes. He isn't just concerned about great missions.

[17 : 03] He is concerned about individuals. He is concerned about their needs. He is concerned about you tonight and your needs, personally and individually.

You are not just part of a multitude or a group or a gathering. God is concerned about your soul. You see how it works out in this story here.

He is concerned about your personal standing before him. He knows your needs and he is able to meet your needs whatever your state may be, whatever your condition.

So this tells us something wonderful about God and his concerns about a seeking soul. But it tells us something wonderful to you about Philip, doesn't it?

Because here is a witnessing Christian. Here is a man, you see, who was involved after all in this wonderfully successful work in Sumeria, prayer, and yet he is responsive to the plantings of the Lord, and he is obedient to the Lord's command.

[18:16] He is alive to the opportunities provided in the Lord's providence. He is eager to spread and to share the word whatever the inconvenience to him might be however unpromising the situation may be.

and he is prepared by the Lord, prepared in his own understanding of the word, and he is filled with the Holy Spirit of God.

And that is how he is going forward. Now, how like are we to Philip? Believing friends, let me just ask you tonight, do you ever ask yourself, oh, I ask myself this day by day, what opportunity will I have today?

Do you ever ask, to whom will I bring the word today? Do you ever ask yourself, to whom shall I be sent today to speak the word of God to a needy soul?

you see, if you have no aim along these lines, is it likely that opportunity will develop? Will develop?

[19:41] God the spirit tells him to go as he goes and he's ready. You see how Philip here identifies an opportunity, but he also makes an opening, he also makes, you notice how Philip here takes the initiative, he goes up to the chariot and he says, seeing the man reading, he says, do you understand what you're reading there, my man?

Do you understand that he takes the initiative? And not only does he take the initiative, but he exploits this subsequent inquiry, he goes and he sits with the Ethiopian and he explains the scripture.

Now, perhaps we don't have angels guiding us as Philip was guided here by an angel, but we have the same indwelling Holy Spirit, every believer has the indwelling Holy Spirit of God, and we have the same charge to share the gospel with those who need it, without fear and without apology.

And I would suggest that you and I feel friends need to be more alive than we are, to make opportunities to take opportunities, to exploit opportunities on opening for the gospel.

And as we find here, if you do this, if you rely to this, and if we obey the leading of God and the prompting of God, you can be sure that God goes before, that he has gone before, that he has been preparing a heart, that he's been speaking to some soul who needs your counsel and your witness, God, as we used to be told in examination, my God, there are no marks for not trying.

[21:47] And so it is here too, no marks for not trying. And so we have an inquirer, ignorant at this point of salvation's plan, God's God's witness, ready to show the way by which a soul can be united to God.

But notice in the second place then, the change that is raw, I mean by that the change that is raw in this Ethiopian. Because what we have here is a wonderful example of illustration of conversion, of how the Holy Spirit of God comes into a person's life and changes that life for us.

Now the Ethiopian is awakened, no doubt, is awakened by the claims of the true faith. He'd come in touch with it somehow.

Often you know it's strange how the Lord works. Think of it here, the Ethiopian had gone up to Jerusalem to worship, but he hadn't gone through a saving change there in Jerusalem.

He might have expected that perhaps, but he hadn't. Maybe he had just come in touch with the Jews, I don't know. But clearly the man didn't get what he'd been looking for in Jerusalem.

[23:17] And now even he's way back home and he's reading this word and he doesn't understand it fully. He's still unsaved, he's still seeking. And he's struggling with this glorious passage from Isaiah chapter 53.

And this passage is speaking to him about the suffering saviour of Jehovah. It speaks of his birth, it speaks of his life, it speaks of his death, it speaks also of his resurrection as well.

But the Ethiopian doesn't understand it, he's still lost, he's still spiritually ignorant. But Philip is there, not desert region.

They went again, and the Holy Spirit is there. And Philip opened his mouth, and beginning of this scripture, Isaiah 53, he teaches Jesus to him.

This is the message for the lost soul. And if you're not saved tonight, this is a message for you tonight.

[24 : 27] Jesus is the one who was led as a lamb to the slaughter. He is the one who was silent before his aggressor.

He is the one who was humiliated by an awful death. He is the one who endured bad for sinners like me and like you.

But you see, we learn that it isn't enough to desire salvation. The lost sinner must understand God's plan of salvation in his or her heart.

What does Philip say, he says, believe with all your heart, believe with all your heart. Our Nephian opium unit praise the Lord.

He is prepared to make confession. I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. As Paul featured elsewhere, if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

[25 : 42] Simple as that. You will be saved, for with the heart one believes unto righteousness and with the mouth confession is made to salvation.

It is the same for you and for me today, for any man today, as it was for the Ethiopian unit or for the Roman church to which Paul would write.

the same message man, the same urgency over the message, the same confession of Jesus Christ, the same Holy Spirit who opens your heart and your understanding, the same Jesus that saves, saves through his word and through his spirit.

And we know that there is a change in this man's life, in his heart because he wants to be baptized. You understand, he came from a completely heathen background, from a non-covenantal background, and he wants to be baptized, he wants to make another word, public profession, and he is prepared to confess that Jesus Christ is his Lord.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Now in this story here in Acts 8 we only read about the Ethiopian eunuch himself, but we can certainly gather that he would have been part of a large caravan.

[27 : 15] It wasn't just the Ethiopian eunuch and Philip here. And we must understand therefore that this was very much a public profession of faith, that this Ethiopian was making no doubt in front of many of his fellow countrymen who were travelling with him there going down on that desert way.

And we can understand from this that the Ethiopian eunuch was no closet Christian. He is converted. He is saved. And he doesn't mind who knows it.

He doesn't mind who knows what the Lord has done for him. He realized, you see, the significance of baptism. Perhaps the Philip had been instructing him as it points to the washing away of sin.

And he understood then that his sins had been washed away by the blood of Jesus, by the suffering servant of Jehovah.

Have your sins been washed away yet? Have you come to confess yet? Have you yet seen in Jesus the one who has paid the penalty due for your sins?

[28 : 29] Have you yet come to confess that Jesus is Lord in your life? You see, becoming a Christian is not simply accepting some principles.

Nor is it simply taking on a new religion. It is receiving a person. A person whose suffering has made you whole.

And so, we see here, not only an inquirer, but we also see here a great change brought in this man. So notice in the third place, and quite briefly, and I'm looking here at verse 39, the joy which results. Oh, dear friends, the wonderful, gracious God.

That day, the Ethiopian became a Christian soul. He became a Christian in his heart. He became committed to the Lord. He understood at once his lostness, and he understood his own sin, which that suffering servant of Jehovah came to deal with on the cross.

[29 : 48] That servant of Jehovah, which he read in Isaiah chapter 53. He knew there was cleansing there in that man, cleansing from all sins in the blood of Jesus Christ, the Lord outfield of his death.

In these past days, this Jesus had been put to death and is alive again. I saw this. I know as we look at the experience of the Ethiopian, don't these words of Wesley perhaps come to mind, if you know them?

Long my imprisoned spirit lay, fast bound in sin and nature's night, thine eyes diffused a quickening ray. I woke, the dungeon flamed with light.

My chains fell off, my heart was free. My robe went forth and followed thee. There was the experience of the Ethiopian.

This is the experience of the man and the woman and the young person and the child who comes to know the Lord Jesus Christ, the Savior. It was his experience.

[31 : 02] Has it been yours yet? But you see the result. Verse 39, The Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away so that the eunuch saw him no more.

And look at these words. And he went on his way, rejoicing. He went on his way, rejoicing. And dear friends, there is only one way that real joy can fill your soul, can flood your soul.

Only one way. And that is when you come as a sinner to Jesus Christ. Not this world's passing joy, but lasting joy, an abundant joy.

There's nothing like the joy of a saved sinner. Nothing like it at all. Oh, I have to confess myself that there is not enough joy in my life.

And I would believe and suggest that there is not enough joy in the lives of Christian men and women in this day. Oh, there is much for us to grieve over.

[32 : 08] There is much for us to mourn over in the spiritual condition of our country and even our own spiritual state. But if we are born again by God's Spirit, if we have a love for Jesus Christ, and a love for his truth, then there will be there, surely, rejoicing in our hearts.

There isn't enough rejoicing over what God has done after all. Our salvation is about what God has done. And it is a wonderful thing to be saved.

And if you're saved tonight, that is a wonderful thing. Let us make no bones about it. And part of this is real joy. And let us not rob ourselves, let us not rob ourselves of this real joy that we can know in Jesus Christ when he is our Savior.

We must minimize when we know Jesus. Joy must flood our souls. Of course, you cannot possibly have this joy.

Otherwise, it is true. For the unsaved, there is not this joy. Ultimately, for the unsaved, there is misery.

[33 : 25] But when Christ comes into your life, surely there must be joy, an abundant joy. If I can quote the words of another poem. Oh, happy day, Dudridge writes.

Oh, happy day, that fixed my choice on thee, my Savior, and my God. Well, may this glowing heart rejoice until its raptures all abroad.

These words. Well, may this glowing heart rejoice. Do you have a glowing heart tonight if you have the Lord in your heart?

Surely, your heart must be glowing. And if it is, won't you tell its raptures abroad? And if you tell its raptures abroad, won't people see it and won't they say, look at these Christians in there, the freak. It isn't a mournful church, that one. It's a church where there are Christians who are full of joy because they know one who can give them real and lasting joy.

[34 : 30] And it's a wonderful thing. Doesn't this find an echo in your soul? Is your faith so clear and so vital and so personal?

Oh, joy, we mustn't minimize it in the New Testament. This is such a strong theme of the saved sinner. And this is what we read here. He went on his way rejoicing.

And he had good grounds to rejoice at every saved sinner. He had found the Savior. He had come to know him. He had come to know Jesus. His sin being. Now he knew.

Now he understood. Now he was a changed man. And the Lord's joy was with him. Even when he was going down into that distant land which at that point hadn't received the word of the Lord.

let me just say a word in conclusion. Why become a Christian?

[35 : 38] Do you become a Christian to escape hell? Well, when you become a Christian that's true. Do you become a Christian because of the wonderful friends you will know who profess the same faith?

Well, that is true when you become a Christian. You become a Christian because of the sense of purpose and because of the feeling and knowledge of forgiveness that you enjoy.

Well, that is true also. And feelings of peace and of joy, yes. And yet, and yet there is more. In the final analysis you become a Christian as a result of what God has done for you.

Not only in the death of his son but also in the work of his spirit in your heart. And in his control over this whole situation in sending a messenger perhaps for you.

You become a Christian a follower of Christ because Christianity is true as we said this morning. And really and truly it is this discovery it is this discovery under the spirit of God it is true that gives the Ethiopian seeker and any seeking sinner joy as you go on in your life.

[37 : 02] And my dear friend if you are a seeker just tonight you'll find with prayer and with the seeking and reading of the scriptures that sooner or later you will be crowned with blessing.

It must be so. You will find that the gospel is good news for you so that the sinner so the saved sinner can go on his or her way rejoicing.

Philippa do you understand what you are reading? The Ethiopian says how can I understand?

Philip explains and the Ethiopian says I believe that Jesus Christ is the son of God and he went on his way rejoicing.

may the Lord give us that rejoicing in our own lives in our own hearts and may he bless these thoughts upon his word. Let us pray.

gracious Lord our God and Father we thank thee and bless thee for thy word and we pray that it may be written in our hearts and in our minds.

[38 : 21] O grant thy spirit's help O Lord that we would heed and listen to thy word to thyself as thou didst speak to us and give us in our hearts that real and abiding and lasting joy which only thy gospel gives.

Hear us Lord we pray thee guide us in this week upon which we have entered and forgive all our sins and shortcomings in Jesus' precious name. Amen.