

Let's open our Bibles tonight to chapter 8 of the book of Acts, verse 26, as we continue our study through the history of the early church.

God gives to us, through Luke's pen, about thirty years of history - from the time that Jesus ascended into heaven until Paul was able to say (thirty years later), "The whole earth has heard the gospel" (Colossians 1:23). And I don't think that was hyperbole. They got to it.

In Acts 8, we saw the gospel message move out of Jerusalem for the first time. You might remember (back in chapter 1:8), the Lord said to the people gathered (the 120 or so) that they were to be filled with the Spirit and take the gospel, starting in Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. But no one had moved. I mean, everyone was happy being in town. We read in chapter 5:28 (of the disciples) that, "You have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine." God had used the murder of Stephen, the first martyr of the church, and the persecution that followed - much of it led by Saul of Tarsus - to drive the church out of Jerusalem. And the saints went scurrying, literally, in every direction. And so, according to chapter 1:8, that was the will of God - that the Word would go out into the world. So far, the only people staying in town were the apostles. You might say, "Well, are they lazy?" No. They were bold. Pretty risky to stay in town. You'll find that out in a couple of chapters, with James being arrested and killed and all. But they wanted to have a headquarters that people could still look to and come to. That wouldn't last very long, but it would last for the time being.

So we have joined, in chapter 8, Philip. He's one of the seven deacons that was chosen back in chapter 6 to be, really, the first organizational step in the church. It began to grow so fast that the widows wanted more attention, felt like some of them were neglected, especially the Hellenist widows. They were the ones who had come out of Greek cultures but were now in town. And so the disciples, not having a hard heart towards the widows, but said, "We've got to keep teaching and studying and praying, and we need to assign this to somebody else to care for them so that they don't go without care," and Philip was one of these seven. And, like Stephen before him, he was a faithful guy in the Word, he was a man of God, he loved the Lord. And as the scattering took place, the diaspora - the driving of the

people out of town, Philip went up north to Samaria, and he began to minister there, and he found great success. God's Word was heard. The power of God's Spirit was with him. People were being delivered from the occult, which kind of controlled this town by a fellow that was there in town and had, for years, really grabbed hold, if you will, of the hearts of the people. And people began to get saved and delivered. It was so good that Peter and John, hearing about it, were sent from Jerusalem to the north, and they brought with them that desire to begin to pray for the new believers to be baptized in the Holy Spirit. And they stayed for a while - they ministered to the saints. Simon the Sorcerer, that fellow that had run the town, had feigned a conversion; Philip had even baptized him. But it came out later that this guy was just after it for the money, and he wanted power that he could use for his own benefit, and Peter called him out on it. Well, Peter and John eventually pack up and go back home. They literally preach in every town on the way out (Philip was a good example to them) and left Philip there.

Well tonight we want to start in verse 26 through verse 40, the end of the chapter. It'll be our last week with Philip. I think we've been with him two more; this is our third week. We will join with Philip again (ahead in chapter 21), where we will catch up with him, and he now has four daughters, and he lives in Caesarea, and both he and his daughters have been given by the Lord a prophetic gift, and they continue to find themselves involved. And I think there are certain places in the book of Acts you can almost see Philip's involvement in the lives of the church and of the early church and its growth.

But tonight we catch up with Philip in a great revival in Samaria. I mean, things couldn't have gone better, and yet God comes to speak to Philip, and He says to him, "I want you to go somewhere else." And in light of what is going on in Samaria at this time, I suspect that it was very hard for Philip to recognize that that was the Lord speaking because it ran contrary to everything that would be common sense. If you're serving the Lord, and a town is in revival, and you're the cause of it, and you're there, and God is using you, it is awful hard to walk away. But yet Philip was able to. And we want to talk about, tonight, how do we hear from God when He's directing us to something that's less than obvious?

Verse 26 says this, "Now an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, saying, 'Arise and go toward the south along the road which goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.' This is desert. So he arose and went." The revival in Samaria was unabated, with no end in sight. We aren't told how the angel of the Lord spoke to Philip. If you go by

New Testament standards, the word of the Lord to God's people is more often than not through prayer and through the Word by His Spirit, internal, that still small voice. There are appearances of the Lord to people and angels as well, but they're very small in terms of number when compared even to the Old Testament. So we can only guess at how Philip heard from the Lord, but the advice or the counsel or the direction - the order from the Lord's servant - was pretty clear. "We want you to leave Samaria, go south, get on the road that runs from Jerusalem to Gaza." Now, the Gaza strip today is that land in the south, that desert land along the Mediterranean. It's a very large, enclosed almost, Palestinian refugee camp. It has been run by Hamas since 2007. It is a terror to the people that live near it. Our bus driver in Israel (for years) lived in a town that was constantly being shelled out of Gaza. So we would be traveling, and he'd have to call his wife when the news came of another shelling, and it was a very difficult place for them to live. But in Philip's day, everyone that lived there were Philistines. So that was a Philistine stronghold.

If you read verse 26, and you put yourself in Philip's shoes, it seems like a strange and maybe incomplete message at best. "Take the south road that leads to the desert from Jerusalem, headed for Africa." Had Philip been aware of what God's intentions were, had the Lord said to Philip, "I want you to talk to a fellow who is headed home to Africa; he is a Gentile who has converted to Judaism, he has come to Jerusalem to find satisfaction in his relationship with God, and he hasn't found it; he is going home discouraged, but I want to tell him about Me, and I want you to be the mouthpiece through whom I speak so that he can get saved, and then he can take the gospel home," I think Philip would have said, "That's awesome! I would be more than happy. I would be privileged, honored to go do that." It's not what you read. Not even close. What he knew was there was a revival in town that was underway, that many people were listening to the gospel, that there was, constantly, healing and the deliverance from demon oppression and possession, that multiplication of salvations was taking place around him, that people were being baptized in the Holy Spirit, that the town was upside down for Jesus. Everyone listened. He had nightly services that were overflowing. He had a book deal in the works. (I don't know if he did or not). He had lots of speaking invitations on his desk. Even the big shots, the apostles from Jerusalem, had come here to see what God was doing. I mean, it couldn't have been more marvelous when it came to ministry if that's what your heart was wanting to do. And I'm sure that somewhere in his mind, when this angel of the Lord spoke to him - however he did, was that he probably said, "Why would I go to the desert? There is nothing there for me!" To

go from a place of obvious blessing to a questionable destination and future, I suspect would have caused Philip some confusion, maybe some apprehension. Put yourself in those shoes for a minute. I have to believe Philip struggled a bit, wondering if this was really the Lord. "Are You sure? Answer the secret question so I'll know You're the Lord." I mean, there has to be some kind of hesitancy, I think. But Philip had a gift that I pray that all of us have. He had the ability to distinguish the voice of the Lord amongst all of the noise, all of the reasoning, all of the success, all of the profit that you saw in his ministry. He was able to set all of that aside and say, "I heard from God. God has spoken to my heart." And even above all of the logical arguments to conclude this must not be the Lord at all, he didn't even seem to hesitate. In fact, notice in verse 26, it says, "Go to Gaza. This is the desert. So he arose and went." It is as succinct and terse of a verse that you can read.

How important do you think it is for us to hear the voice of God in our hearts and not just make all of our decisions based on outward perception or common sense? Most of us, "Well, it's the Lord," and then we reason as if somehow we are as smart as God ever was. So often His leading runs contrary, doesn't it, to common sense. We, in fact, support a brother who had a very successful ministry as a doctor in the Tahoe area, who decided to give up his very successful practice and take his expertise to the hills amongst the tribes in Mexico - build a hospital, do surgeries every day, fly people in from very remote places just to serve them. There are people there from Wycliffe, translating the Bible into the local dialect of these Indians. And that's where he's gone, and we're glad to be a part of what he is doing. But don't get me wrong - everyone who knows that thinks that's stupid to do. "How could you leave such a great place of income and affluence to go live in a place that is run-down and is dangerous?" And the cartels come in, and he was telling us about the cartels come in, sometimes they're shot up, and their policy has been, "We'll just treat 'em for free like everybody else. We'll do surgery, we'll pull the bullets out. We'll send 'em on their way." The fallout has been they've been left alone. They can just do their work. But talk to the world about that, and, "That's crazy! What in the world is wrong with you?!" And the world thinks that people like that have lost their minds. But it's because man judges on the outward appearance (1 Samuel 16:7) while he and Philip listened to that small voice. He walks away from revival. If you're a pastor, and the church is full and overflowing, and the town is being changed, where else would you want to go? And Philip's answer is, "Wherever God sends me. Wherever God sends me."

And add to that the fact that Philip knew nothing about what awaited him or what he was supposed to do there. It was, "Arise and go," and he got up and went. "Just head south, young man. Head towards the middle of nowhere. Go stand in the desert sand." "Aye, aye, captain." And off he went. And it is an amazing verse, verse 27 there, that first sentence. He just got up and went. I don't know if he had internal struggle. I would have. I don't know if it persisted while he walked. But Philip, somehow, was resolved to listen and obey, leaving the glory of the revival in Samaria, without hesitation, for some unknown place of rendezvous. And he had no way of being able to say to you, "This is why I'm going. This is why it makes sense to me." He was not told what he would do. He wasn't told, really, where he was going - just a general area. He wasn't told how long it would take. He was just told to go, and, in faith, he went.

Now, it seems to me that it is biblically normal to expect God to lead you in this progressive sense. And by that I mean if you read through all of the ways that God led His people through the ages, it is almost always that God gives an order, a direction, and then waits for His people to obey. And He really doesn't tell you step two until you take step one. I guess all of us would obey if we had the whole playbook. "And then you're gonna go here, then you're gonna do that, and this is gonna happen." "Oh, that sounds great." Or we'd like to read the whole playbook, "Lord, let me just see if that's what I want to do. No, I don't want to do it." But God just gives you one step. Right? We walk by faith (2 Corinthians 5:7). And Philip got one step. Not another word from the Lord. This is, after all, well beyond sense. And there's no sense telling Philip to go join himself to a chariot when he isn't anywhere near a chariot. So he travels ninety miles south. He goes south. And it is only after taking the first step obediently, without argument, that he could then stop and expect to hear "what is my next step." Now I say all this to say to you - if you are struggling tonight trying to discover what God wants to do in your life, may I at least have you look at the fact that maybe you haven't done what you know to do? If you take the first step, maybe then you can find out what's next. But we haven't done the very thing God has set before us, so there's no sense giving you more direction. "Here's what I want you to do." "Yeah, I haven't done that." "Well, then, why do you want to know what's next?" And you find that so often in the Scriptures - that God will move as you move. It isn't easy to walk by faith, and it's hard to walk with God, listening to His voice, especially when He moves you from the comfortable to the uncomfortable, from the known to the unknown, from safety and security to danger and maybe personal loss. But if it's God speaking, the key is I've got to learn to hear His voice. I think Philip might

have argued how foolish this was to leave, but somehow he knew that it was God that was calling. And I think that's what makes, in many ways, our life as Christians so exciting. Because you really don't know what's coming next. If you really want the Lord to lead you, and you're willing to follow Him, it isn't really that structured kind of everything's-predictable life. Right? It's that moving of God's Spirit. Jesus said to Nicodemus, "You don't know where the wind is going" (John 3:8). So sometimes that's just the way it is with our lives as well. And it may be, if you do what the Lord has shown you to do, then you can wait to hear what comes next. If you follow the Lord, you don't know the end from the beginning. I mean, that's what Abraham did. He said (Genesis 12:1), "Come, and leave here, and go there." "Where am I goin'? I don't know." Had Abraham been stopped all those months of travel and someone said to him, "Where are you going?" "I don't know." "But you're going there in a hurry." "I know. But I don't know where." It's kind of that way with us. You've just got to follow the Lord. So Philip takes the first step of faith. He leans not to his own understanding (Proverbs 3:5). He follows the Lord in what had to outwardly make no common sense, outward sense, and it did seem like he was losing in the process - from huge following and fruit to being in a place that all you wanted was some water because it's in the middle of nowhere.

We read, in the middle of verse 27, "And behold." It's a great word, and you find it often in the gospels as well. The word "behold" doesn't mean just look; it means check this out, or look how interesting this is, or look how unexpected what you're about to see is. The Lord uses this word a lot in the gospels. "Behold." He shows up in the middle of nowhere, and, "Look at that!" "And behold, a man of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under Candace the queen of the Ethiopians, who had charge of all her treasury, and had come to Jerusalem to worship, was returning. And sitting in his chariot, he was reading Isaiah the prophet." Ninety miles of travel in silence. I don't know how excruciating it was for Philip along the way. I wonder how many times he went, "Ah, I just should go back. They're a bunch of young Christians. We don't have anybody leading this town. We just know there's Simon the Sorcerer who's kind of a jerk, and he's taking advantage of the people, and God has moved him out, and now there's no one to deal with him. What are we going to do now?" And Philip, I'm sure, must have struggled. But take note. The word "behold." Take note. "Here's God's purpose, Philip. Here's why you're here." On this desert road from Jerusalem, traveling south, comes this official entourage and a chariot carrying a man of great authority. He's an Ethiopian, he's a eunuch, he's second in charge to the queen, he's the secretary of the treasury. The name Candace is not a name. It's a title, much like Pharaoh. And so it signified his place.

It was a title given to him by the queen of Ethiopia, and it said he had come to Jerusalem to worship. Now, Jerusalem from Ethiopia's capital is 1200 miles. Imagine you going 1200 miles in a chariot - like from here to the Canadian border, in a chariot. Not on great roads. The old Roman roads. Okay, they're paved to some extent, but they're not going to be really good for you. I mean, this guy had come 1200 miles to do one thing - worship God. Here's a pretty devout guy, isn't he? I mean, he is hungry. He is hungry for the Lord. Back in Ethiopia, the nation and the people worshipped many different gods. But he had become sure of one thing - there is only one God, and He is the God of the Jews. And he invests time and money and great expense to find out if he might know this God of the Jews. The Jewish faith for the Ethiopians could be traced back to the visit of the queen of Sheba, years earlier, to Solomon (in fact, back in 1 Kings 10). When the queen of Sheba left Solomon, she took his religion with her, and it was the first introduction, if you will, to the monotheism of Judaism, the one God.

Years ago, Haile Selassie, who was the king of Ethiopia (he was coronated in 1930; he died when he was in his 80's), claimed that he was a direct descendant of Solomon and the queen of Sheba through a son called Menelik I. I bring that up to you because if you ever wanted to know where the Rastafarians came from, that's where they were born. When he was coronated (he was coronated back in 1930 or so), they turned to him as their messiah, a group of folks, and they believe to this day (the Rastafarians) that Haile Selassie is their savior, and he is going to return from the dead to gather them together.

So, Ethiopia had a long history, if you will, of exposure to Judaism. But this eunuch had really attained great heights in a foreign power. He had risen to the top of his class. Aside from the queen, no one more powerful than he. He got to the top and realized there wasn't a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. You usually don't see it climbing up, but you're usually disappointed when you get up there. And there wasn't one. And so he invests time and money to go to pursue what he believes to be so - that there's only one God - and he heads for Jerusalem, its capital, and he wants to know. His position wasn't enough. It hadn't filled his heart. He still longed for peace. And so he had converted to Judaism. Now there were a couple of options if you were going to convert to Judaism - that were available to Gentiles regarding their worship. He could become a full proselyte, which would mean he'd have to become circumcised, and since he had already been made a eunuch, that probably was difficult. But that would have allowed him access to the outer Temple courts. So that probably wasn't available to him. He could also become

what was called, in the Bible, a "God fearer," a believer in Judaism, if you will, but he didn't have access to the Temple proper at all; he was just one who had come along. I don't know who he was, don't know how far he'd gone with that. But I don't doubt that this was his first trip, and maybe his only trip, to Jerusalem. It was that arduous, if you will. I'm sure that he brought great anticipation and high hopes. It was a serious pursuit. Who else is traveling that far under those conditions just to worship? He went on a Feast Day, I'm sure. He looked forward to learning the truth that would satisfy or settle his dissatisfied heart, and now he's riding away from that experience with his Bible open but moving away from Jerusalem itself. He had gone there to the Temple, I'm sure. I'm sure that he talked to the priests and to the rabbis. I'm sure he asked them the meaning of life or the secrets of life or the relationship with God. With his status, he might very well have gotten an audience with one of the Sanhedrin members so that he could ask more questions. He would have traveled along the Nile and came over the dunes and the Sinai and the hills of Judea. And he showed up! He made it. But from what he says and what we read, he didn't get what he was looking for. He was still hungry. He hadn't found Judaism to be the answer. In fact, if his experience is what we know about Jerusalem in the 1st century, he would have been met by a bunch of materialists at the Temple, a bunch of Sadducees who even shunned an afterlife. In fact, his hunger for God would have far exceeded theirs. He would have come hungry, and they would have just been in business because that's what they had made their religion to be. So no answers. He finds hypocrisy. He finds intolerance. He finds legality and bondage and special interest groups. He finds squabbling and infighting and sex and deadness. He sees the programs and the rules. There's no joy, there's no faith, there's no fulfillment of any peace. Where is God in all of this? And so I don't know how long that he stayed. We don't know if he met any Christians who happened to be there outside the Temple area where they were meeting, if he'd heard of Saul, or if he had heard about what had happened to Stephen. But we do know he left town without having any answers, and he was settling in to take this long 1200 (further) miles now home, and he had to do so - not with anticipation. I don't know if you ever go on vacation, and you have to have a long flight. People that go to Israel with us say, "Oh, that's 16 hours. It's gonna be forever." But they're excited to go, so you can make anything because you're excited. But coming home, it's like 75 hours - it feels like - (Laughing) because you're just goin' home, "I'm goin' back to work." And I suspect that this ride home for him was going to be a whole lot harder than going out. But, look, his hunger for God is still intact. He's still hungry - hungry to hear from God, hungry for answers. And so here's a great picture of religion and what it offers to man.

It has a promise it can't keep. But here's a true seeker of God, and he's dissatisfied, but he's not quitting, not giving up. You might have thought he's riding out of town, goin', "I'll throw this Bible out the next place I stop, the next rest stop." But that wasn't his heart. He wanted to know what God had to say. He's determined, and so he gets the Bible out, and he's reading the scroll of Isaiah, and it's on his lap, and he's poring over it - hungry, desperate heart. And Isaiah was the most popular book in Israel. It talked about the Messiah's rule and His reign. And this powerful eunuch was going home with the power that he held, and he ached to know the truth, and he didn't have it. So he's riding in the middle of absolutely nowhere, and yet there's this promise in Jeremiah 29:13 that if you seek the Lord with all your heart, you're going to find Him. And so he's seeking the Lord with all of his heart. And God, if He says something, you can count on it. The eunuch was looking in the right place - to God and to His Word. He wouldn't be disappointed. The Lord would see to that. And so on Highway 1, through the desert, stands Philip - cued up, ready to move. "Lord, what do You want me to do now?" And here comes this cloud in the desert, surrounded by, I'm sure, dignitaries and army people, like a procession through the desert.

"Then the Spirit," verse 29, "said to Philip, 'Go near and overtake this chariot.' So Philip ran to him, and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, 'Do you understand what you are reading?' And he said, 'How can I, unless someone guides me?' And he asked Philip to come up and sit with him." God knew the heart of this man. He knows yours. He knows mine. And I love how He sets in motion lots of things so that this man's cry could be answered. So important is this eunuch to the Lord that God would bring Philip all the way from the glory of the Samaritans' revival to stand in the midst of nowhere so that He could get him the Word of God. And He picked a faithful guy who was able to hear God's voice. God's always speaking, but we've got to be listening, and Philip was willing to listen. But here's a sheep that the Lord loved - that Luke 15 passage about having a hundred sheep and losing one, and going out to find the one that was lost and rejoicing - that's what the Lord did with this guy. He's a hungry man, and he's going home. So God makes provision for him. I say this to you - God makes provision for every hungry heart. And we're talking about inviting people to Easter and praying for them and getting the Word out - I think God will move mountains to get His Word out, and God will move in people's hearts. All the time people ask, "Well, what about the tribal groups who haven't heard?" and I don't have any answers for that other than I know that if you have a hungry heart, God'll get to you. His primary method in the Bible is to send someone to declare His Word, but He doesn't need our help. I

know this for sure. On the day of judgment, no one is going to be able to say, "Lord, I wanted to know You, but I didn't know how to go about it." That, God won't do.

So, God sent Philip. Maybe you can be Philip in somebody's life. Who knows? You've got to be able to hear and follow. So here's Philip. Now, up to this point, he only had step one. "I want you to go down the road that goes south." "And I rose up and went." Ninety miles later and who knows? A week later? Now he stands at the crossroads of nowhere to nowhere, and the Lord said, "Hey, talk to that guy. Here comes a guy, an official guy. You're going to run up to his chariot in the midst of all of the pomp and circumstance. I want you to go join yourself to him." Now, I can just see Philip standing in the desert and wondering out loud what he was doing there. Or maybe Philip hesitating to approach this royal entourage. But he's bold because he's sensitive to the Spirit. Right? I'm convinced that God doesn't want you to share with everyone. Oh, He wants to reach everyone, but that doesn't mean you have to be involved in everything. But you want to be open to when God does want you to speak, and listen to when He prompts you to reach out. And it takes practice to hear His voice. Sometimes you're going to make a mistake. But I would rather make a mistake trying to hear His voice than to just decide I'll never make a mistake by doing nothing, which is just the biggest mistake of all.

So notice that the Lord said to Philip by His Spirit, "Go and join the chariot and catch him" (he was apparently already by him). And I love verse 30. It says, "Philip ran." Don't you love that? I mean, he could have said, "Okay, I'm gonna go, but I don't like that I'm out here. I don't like the heat, I don't like the sand, I left all this cool stuff behind. I hate it here." No. He's an enthusiastic, great, "Hallelujah, I have a direction," he's an excited saint to serve the Lord in this place. And he runs to catch up with him, and he arrives next to the chariot just as this eunuch is reading out loud out of Isaiah 53. Now, if you don't understand something, like you're reading directions for something, we'll oftentimes read it out loud so we can hear it, won't we? That's just what you do when you don't quite get something. So, he's reading. There are times when God's business requires haste. God's timing is involved. He orchestrates this appointment. But it's going to require Philip to run, and Philip catches up, and there's this perfect timing. And we read, there at the end of verse 30, " 'Do you understand what you are reading?' " And, thankfully, this powerful man is honest. He said, "I don't get it." Most powerful men don't admit that they don't get it. But he was hungry. He admitted his own ignorance, which showed how deep his hunger was. He's an approachable

guy. And the Bible's not like any other book. It has to be spiritually understood. So Philip just asks him, "Do you get what you're reading?" and he said, "I need some help." And he said to Philip, "Would you like to get in the chariot with me, and we can talk?" And he gets in with him, and he's ready now to share with him. How he got there - amazing.

Verse 32, "The place in the Scripture which he read was this: 'He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and as a lamb before its shearer is silent, so He opened not His mouth. In His humiliation His justice was taken away, and who will declare His generation? For His life is taken from the earth.' " Now, let's read verse 34. "So the eunuch answered Philip and said, 'I ask you, of whom does the prophet say this, of himself or of some other man?' " Now, look, he couldn't have picked a better text. Right? I mean, talk about God's timing. The eunuch understood, as he was reading Isaiah 53, that it was written of somebody who had met a violent death without a just hearing. He just didn't know who it was and how it applied to him. But he understood what was written there. So Philip, by now I think, must have realized that God had been preparing this man's heart, and he would now have the privilege of sharing the good news with him. "Now I know why I'm here. God has brought me to bring Jesus to an Ethiopian who's going to bring Jesus to his people. So glad, Lord, that You called me. So glad that I came. I'm so glad I didn't complain along the way" (if he didn't).

Isaiah 53 - the most graphic description in the Old Testament of the suffering Messiah and the reasons for His suffering. The rabbis didn't teach it. They literally took it and spiritualized the entire chapter. They do it till this day, and they say, "This is written collectively of us, the children of Israel, and how much we've had to suffer over the centuries by the hands of the others." That's the teaching even to this day. Jesus, by the way, had taken this very passage, had applied it to His coming the first time to die for the sins of the world, had quoted very clearly in Mark 10, Luke 22, about these verses applying to Him. So if you want to know what Jesus intended with them, go read His own words. He applied them to His suffering and to His death.

Well we just read, here, Isaiah 53:7-8. Let me read to you the first six verses before this because this is what the man read before Philip interrupted him, if you will. "Who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, and as a root out of dry ground. He has no form or comeliness; and when we see Him, there is no

beauty that we should desire Him. He is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all." And then he reads these verses that are written here in our text. So, he had just read, man, the gospel in all of its fullness; and then he reads verse 7 and verse 8.

He says, in verse 34, " 'I ask you, of whom does the prophet say this, of himself or of some other man?' " What's the question? Those seven or eight verses, now, that we've read. He asks a great question. Nicodemus said to Jesus (John 3:4), "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he go back into his mother's womb a second time?" He was trying to understand. The Philippian jailer said (Acts 16:30), "What must I do to be saved?" The key is - when you begin to start hearing people ask really important questions, you know that the Lord is at work. Right? I mean, these are sincere questions.

And we read, in verse 35, "Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture," (right there where he was reading) "preached Jesus to him." I love it. Don't you love it? It doesn't matter where he stops. He goes, "All right. Let's talk about Jesus. Isaiah wrote of somebody else." "Who was it?" "The Son of God who came. God so loved the world He sent Jesus." He might have turned to Isaiah 9 and talked to him about the Son that was born. Or Isaiah 1, "Let us reason together." But he just began to preach Jesus. And we don't know how long he talked because (in verse 35) we are told he began to preach, and then it isn't until verse 36, as they went down the road, and there was some water along the roadway, that it's the eunuch who said, " 'See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?' " And all we can do is we can presume that Philip told him all about salvation, of man's need to be born again. He could very well have shared with him the history of the early church (he was a part of it), the revival that had been happening in Samaria, how God had led him to this desert road. "Man, I've been wondering for a week why I needed to be here, and I believe God wanted me to come talk to you." And I don't know what he said, but he got around to baptism eventually. Talked to him about faith and outward declaration. I'll bet Philip was thrilled. I'm sure the eunuch was thrilled because he listened, and he drank it all

in. And here's one conclusion - he believed that Philip knew the God he was looking for. And, as he heard him speak and he wanted to know more, "Can I be saved? Can I know God?" And then he says to him, "What would keep me from publicly confessing Jesus? Could I have Him to be my Lord?" Perhaps Philip was a little bit more cautious about this than the last time he baptized somebody, which happened to be that Simon the Sorcerer guy. I'm sure he got kind of taken in and went, "Ah, I'd better ask him where he's at and ask him some more questions."

And so we read, in verse 37, "Then Philip said, 'If you believe with all your heart, you may.' And he answered and said, 'I believe' " - and here's what he believed - " 'that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.' So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him." He finally found what he was looking for - peace with God, forgiveness of God, assurance of life. He had a personal relationship, for the first time, with God; not like that religion back in Jerusalem that had left him so empty. He was now going to go home full. And he acts upon his newly-found faith. He asks to be baptized, he confesses Jesus as his Lord, and he hangs on to Jesus. Now this guy goes home to Ethiopia to preach Christ. He's the first missionary of the church, and he goes to Africa, where God had sent him.

We read, in verse 39, "Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away so that the eunuch saw him no more;" (but it didn't seem to matter to him now) "and he went on his way rejoicing. But Philip was found at Azotus. And passing through, he preached in all the cities till he came to Caesarea." I love verse 39. The fellow gets saved, he's going to go home, it's all he wants. Right? He is so thrilled to go, and he is satisfied, and he goes home. Doesn't even notice Philip's gone. Doesn't seem like that parting was very formal at all. In fact, the words "the Lord caught Philip away" is language that suggests that there was this miraculous kind of disappearance on Philip's part. We don't know, but that's kind of the way things are written when God does this.

May I say to you, as a sidelight, foreign efforts in the mission fields have not been effective for very long unless there is a teaching of the Bible and a translation of the Bible into the common language of the people....if you try to get by without it, and the people don't have it for themselves. The folks that we're working with in the hills of Mexico, with the tribal people - the Indians, the first people that went up to do translation made a comic book out of the Bible so that people could see it and very simply begin to understand concepts. And now they're working word for

word to translate it into their vocabulary, and it's going to take ten or fifteen years. It doesn't happen overnight. But the Word of God brings life. The best missionary method for us, and we're involved in several of them, is to just plant churches. I mean, the best way to do missions is not to just show up in a foreign country where you don't know the language, and you're going to get involved. Not for very long, you're not. But if you can move there and start a church, and then begin to raise up indigenous people - whoever they are.....in the Philippines, a couple of times we've been involved with church planting, but we've never stayed more than seven years. We've had pastors there who taught and disciplined young men that love the Lord and took them in and put them through Bible school, and they know the Bible now. They already know the language. They live in the culture. They love the people. And then you just hand the church to them, and you get out. In fact for us, in the Philippines, there have been a couple of times when the political scene begins to happen, and you're not really welcome to stay or aren't allowed to work anymore, you can't afford to be there, and so it's good just to hand things off. And you find, in the early church, that's exactly the methods that God began to do. And so we're doing that in Mexico again. We have people there that are training locals, and they're starting churches. That's the best way to go.

Well, this is now what the Lord was doing. He's sending a guy back to his hometown with the gospel, who's going to be able to do ministry there. So it interests me that Philip has no follow-up contact with this guy. Philip is not sent back by the Lord to Samaria to finish what he started. That's done for Philip. Philip, instead, goes to Azotus which is twenty miles north of Gaza. It's the ancient city of Ashdod, if you find it in the Old Testament. But he began to preach down the coast, which meant he went to Lydda and to Joppa. Those are towns you want to remember because Peter will show up there in the next chapter. And he finally ends up in the Gentile town of Caesarea, where Herod has his administrative offices. He settles down, raises a family, has four prophetic daughters who followed in their dad's footsteps. It'll be here in Caesarea that Peter will come to bring the gospel to Cornelius' house. So we suspect that Philip was probably involved with this population at large, which was almost all Gentile, and he could very well have been involved in that work. In fact, if you go to the next chapter - verses 32 and 38 - there's mention of those two cities, Joppa and Lydda. But quite a work for this man.

And I guess this is my prayer for you. I pray that the Lord would speak to you, and you'd hear Him, that you'd find the work that God wants you to do, open your mouth

when you should, be available to speak up even if you're at a restaurant or pumping gas or at the beach or wherever you are - that God would be able to say to you, "Hey, why don't you speak to this person?" and you'll be willing to do so. And just let the Lord lead you and guide you. He's got a lot of work to do, and He's looking for folks that are available.

So, Philip was a man obedient to the Lord. He was faithful in the little. He went from table setter to evangelist to godly husband and father. He lives a fruitful life. He pops up, like I said, over a thirty-year span to show us the kind of people that God uses. And if you look at Philip's life, there're a couple of things that you might want to just file away. He was sent to the Samaritans who were half-breeds. They had half Judaism, half a hundred different things from a hundred different nations that were moved in there when they were overthrown. But he reached the Samaritans the same way he reached an Ethiopian eunuch, and that was he brought the Scriptures to bear. One of the things that is oftentimes lost in looking at missions is that God's Word works everywhere. It's not restrained by culture, it's not weakened by people's practices. Whether the Samaritans were all over the place with doctrine, or this guy who had studied real hard to know the Bible the best he could, the Word of God saved, if you will, both of them. The Samaritans were ordinary, and they were very poor. The eunuch was influential and extremely rich. The Samaritans did not believe the Bible; they only believed the first five books of Moses. The Pentateuch is all they believed in. The eunuch believed in all of the Old Testament as he had it. The Samaritans got saved through mass evangelism, the town gathered together. And the eunuch got saved one-on-one. So, the methods change, but the message does not. And I guess I would want you to know this - it doesn't matter what culture you look to reach, what tribe, what nation, what people, what color they are, what language they speak. The Word of God will work for everyone because Jesus came to give His life for everyone. So, Philip leaves.

Next week, we're going to start with Saul. He's going to be a problem for a while. It's interesting (and you can put in your Bible) Acts 8, 9 and 10 you find three remarkable salvations. You find an Ethiopian eunuch. He's a black man, he was a descendant of Ham, one of the three sons of Noah. Then you find the conversion of Saul. Saul was a Hebrew from the tribe of Shem, another descendant of Noah. And finally, in chapter 10, we'll find Cornelius, who was a descendant of Japheth. So in the days of the tower of Babel, when God confuses the language because of

the sinful rebellion of man, He puts language barriers to slow down sin. When Jesus comes, He brings them all back together again. In Christ, we become all one in Him. Pretty exciting to live the Christian life. I don't know what God has in store for you, but I would just say to you - you don't want to miss it. Do you? I don't know what God's going to do with you, but I can't wait for you to stand in Ralphs, and the Lord goes, "Speak to this person" and see what you do. But just go do it. Would you? Let's see what God will do with us. That's how revival begins - with all of us. Well, Philip was a wonderful example of that.

Submitted by Maureen Dickson
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