

**“Proclaiming God’s Love”  
Acts 8:26-40**

**INTRODUCTION:**

**We begin this morning,  
with an example of how Christianity grew  
and moved from the confines of Judaism to the Gentiles.**

**It also serves as a good example  
of how the Gospel is spread even today.**

**Luke does not provide details of where Philip was  
or what he was doing prior to being directed by God,  
we can assume that Luke’s emphasis is on the action  
– not the geography.  
- not the method of baptism**

**For Luke, all of those details pale  
in comparison to the central event:  
a seeker looking for someone with an answer.**

**And, so, it is an angel of the Lord – a divine messenger –  
that delivers the directive to Philip.**

**Notice that it is not Philip who seeks the Ethiopian;  
it is God who causes them to cross paths.**

**That’s a key element in understanding evangelism.  
How many seekers in our area are being drawn by God,  
spiritually hungry people,  
who are searching for answers?**

**Has God drawn us to those  
and we did not realize that?  
Or maybe we didn’t feel we the necessary tools**

to deal with these seekers?

Let's take a closer look.

**ETHIOPIAN:**

I prefer to refer to the person in our scripture as an "Ethiopian."

I don't want to make anything out of the term "eunuch."

It could be a physical condition  
or an Eastern title for a government official.

Our focus is he is a spiritual pilgrim from a distant land,  
earnestly trying to understand what scripture has to say  
about God's salvation.

This Ethiopian had a spiritual need that was not being met.  
Whether that was because he was "not from here"  
- a foreigner according to the Jews of Judah -  
or because he was a "eunuch", we do not know.

What we do know is that he was a high ranking official,  
in charge of the queen's treasury,  
obviously learned and fluent in Hebrew.

He was interested in knowing more about Judaism,  
he was returning home from Jerusalem  
where he had worshipped  
and was studying the book of Isaiah.  
and was interested in learning more.

Scripture tells us that he was studying  
the "suffering servant" passage, Isaiah 53:7-8.  
It had caught his interest and he had questions.

Bear with me for a moment, while I read Isaiah 53  
as translated by Eugene Peterson in *The Message*.

**Who believes what we've heard and seen?**

**Who would have thought GOD's saving power would look like this?**

**<sup>2-6</sup> The servant grew up before God—a scrawny seedling, a scrubby plant in a parched field.**

**There was nothing attractive about him, nothing to cause us to take a second look. He was looked down on and passed over, a man who suffered, who knew pain firsthand. One look at him and people turned away.**

**We looked down on him, thought he was scum.**

**But the fact is, it was *our* pains he carried—*our* disfigurements, all the things wrong with *us*.**

**We thought he brought it on himself, that God was punishing him for his own failures. But it was our sins that did that to him, that ripped and tore and crushed him—*our sins!* He took the punishment, and that made us whole. Through his bruises we get healed.**

**We're all like sheep who've wandered off and gotten lost. We've all done our own thing, gone our own way. And GOD has piled all our sins, everything we've done wrong, on him, on him.**

**<sup>7-9</sup> He was beaten, he was tortured, but he didn't say a word. Like a lamb taken to be slaughtered and like a sheep being sheared, he took it all in silence.**

**Justice miscarried, and he was led off—and did anyone really know what was happening?**

**He died without a thought for his own welfare, beaten bloody for the sins of my people. They buried him with the wicked, threw him in a grave with a rich man, even though he'd never hurt a soul or said one word that wasn't true.**

**<sup>10</sup> Still, it's what GOD had in mind all along, to crush him with pain.**

**The plan was [for him to] give himself as an offering for sin so that he'd see life come from it—life, life, and more life. And GOD's plan will deeply prosper through him.**

**<sup>11-12</sup> Out of that terrible travail of soul, he'll see that it's worth it and be glad he did it. Through what he experienced, my righteous one, my servant, will make many "righteous ones," as he himself carries the burden of their sins.**

**Therefore I'll reward him extravagantly—the best of everything, the highest honors—because he looked death in the face and didn't flinch, because he embraced the company of the lowest.**

**He took on his own shoulders the sin of the many, he took up the cause of all the black sheep.**

**The first two verses of Isaiah 53 are very important to understanding what is going on with the Ethiopian:  
Who believes what we've heard and seen?  
Who would have thought GOD's saving power would look like this?**

**The Ethiopian was struggling to understand and God brought two things together that only God could orchestrate:  
- a seeker reading Isaiah 53,  
the very starting point for understanding the ministry of Jesus  
- and Philip, equipped to answer the questions**

**Philip's asked: "Do you understand what you are reading?"  
The Ethiopian responded: "How can I unless someone guides me?"**

### **SPIRITUAL NEEDS OF THOSE AROUND US:**

**Let me ask you this:**

**How many people did God bring you into contact with this last week**

**Who were seeking spiritual guidance?**

**OK. That made us uncomfortable.**

**So, let me ask another question:**

**In this area, how many people  
do you think have had a bad experience with  
“church” and are on “sabbatical?”**

**Unless we are *aware* of what is going on around us *spiritually*,  
we may be missing some prime opportunities  
to *proclaim* the love of God  
to the people of the Ozarks.**

**It’s right there in our mission statement:**

**We will *proclaim* and demonstrate the inclusiveness of God’s  
love.**

**Truthfully, we do a good job of demonstrating that love;  
we just aren’t so good at *proclaiming* that love.**

**In 1 Peter 3:15 we read:**

**<sup>15</sup> But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be  
prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give  
the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with  
gentleness and respect . . .**

**We need to concentrate on being *equipped*  
to deal with the Ethiopians God brings across our paths.**

**Luke does not go into the details of this encounter;  
where this happened, the method of baptism used,  
the amount of water available and used . . .**

**All those details pale in comparison to the central event:  
a seeker thirsting for God and someone with an answer.**

**My beloved friends,**

**YOU could be that someone!**

**EQUIPPED FOR SUCCESS:**

**Often success comes from being in the right place, at the right time,  
with the right skills and tools for the situation.**

**Most seekers and non-believers have questions.**

**We need to be prepared to answer those questions.**

**I know, evangelism – sharing the gospel with a stranger –  
is scary but as simple as walking across the room,  
according to Bill Hybels,**

**senior pastor of Willow Creek Community Church  
in South Barrington, Ill.**

**And the most important element of evangelism is STORY.**

**First of all,  
what is the seeker's story?**

**You won't know what to offer them  
if you don't listen to their story first.**

**A 7-year old girl asked her mother one day:  
"Where did I come from."**

**Her mother took a deep breath, sat the girl down  
and began a long, detailed lesson on biology.**

**When she had finished,  
the little girls said:  
"Wow! Debbie said she was from Dallas!"**

**Before we launch into the gospel story  
or a long description of how good our church is**

**or all the wonderful things we do,  
we need to *listen* to the seeker's story.**

**What is the seeker *seeking*???**

**The meeting between the Ethiopian and Philip  
would have turned out very different  
if Philip had started with the 10 commandments!**

**You don't know what to offer seekers until you know their story!  
And that story begins with: Do you have a church home?**

**Next, we need to learn to tell the "story" of the Gospel  
in simple, concise, non-judgmental, inclusive ways.  
We'll be working on that in the future.**

**Along with this ability to tell the "story" of the Gospel,  
we need to learn to tell our own spiritual stories  
concisely and effectively.**

**There are people all around us –  
people God loves deeply and longs for a relationship with –  
who are seeking to be included.**

**There are those who feel like social outcasts;  
those who have been mistreated by a Church.**

**People who have been moved to the outer edges of Christianity  
because of unloving and uncaring attitudes of Christians.**

**People who have chosen to "castrate" themselves from religious life.**

**Those folks need someone to "guide" them.**

**God sends them across our paths daily.**

**We just aren't sensitive enough to realize it –  
- or we are too afraid to start a spiritual discussion.**

**With the help of the Holy Spirit,  
begin a conversation with them,  
listen to their responses  
and discern whatever need they may have.**

**When you offer a solution to their needs,  
make sure it is a solution to their needs,  
not something you think they may be interested in.**

**The chances are they don't care about the attributes of our church –  
- not yet, anyway.**

**They won't care whether or not we are a good church,  
filled with friendly folk, who like to eat a lot.**

**The seeker will have a spiritual need  
and will be more interested in having that need met.**

### **CONCLUSION:**

**The climax to which Luke is building is the baptism of this official.  
Baptism is the outward symbol for an internal conversion.**

**Conversion – the acceptance of Jesus as Christ and Savior  
is the single most important decision a person can make.**

**As an outward symbol of that inner conversion,  
a Christian is baptized into the family of faith.**

**But it does not end there.**



**What lies beyond conversion and baptism  
is participation in a body of believers.**

**If you've ever used a charcoal fire,  
you know that when the briquets are gathered together  
they burn the hottest.**

**If you pull one of the briquets off to itself,  
it will slowly go out.**

**It is the same for those who have accepted Christ and been baptized.  
Without the fellowship of like-minded Christians,  
they begin to cool and to drift away from God's purpose –  
from what they were created to be.**

**The passage ends as it began; Philip is "snatched away."  
His mission was complete, his work was done.**

**Our work has just begun.**

**Here's the challenge I want to leave you with:  
Find one person you do not know well,  
and ask him/her  
"Do you have a church home?"**

**If the answer is "yes" then ask them what they like best  
about their church.**

**If the answer is "no" – don't ask them "why not?"  
Instead, ask them what they would expect from a church.**

**Then . . . listen . . .**