

ERASING THE BOUNDARY LINES / Sunday School- October 28, 2012

Unifying Topic: PHILIP AND THE ETHIOPIAN EUNUCH

Lesson Text

I. The Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8:26-28)

II. Philip Encounters The Eunuch (Acts 8:29-34)

III. Philip Baptizes The Eunuch (Acts 8:35-39)

The Main Thought: And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? (Acts 8:36, KJV).

Unifying Principle: Some people want to prescribe who is in and who is out when it comes to membership in certain groups. Why are the boundaries of membership sometimes limited to specific people? Philip's sharing of the Good News about Jesus and the baptism of the Ethiopian demonstrate the universal availability of the Gospel message.

Lesson Aim: To help learners make a connection between Philip's baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch and the universal availability of the Gospel message.

Life Aim: To help participants examine their feelings of being excluded and their motivations for excluding others.

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- 8:26 And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert.
- 8:27 And he arose and went: and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship,
- 8:28 Was returning, and sitting in his chariot read Esaias the prophet.
- 8:29 Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot.
- 8:30 And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readeest?
- 8:31 And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him.
- 8:32 The place of the scripture which he read was this, He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth:
- 8:33 In his humiliation his judgment was taken away: and who shall declare his generation? for his life is taken from the earth.
- 8:34 And the eunuch answered Philip, and said, I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man?
- 8:35 Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus.
- 8:36 And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?
- 8:37 And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.
- 8:38 And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him.
- 8:39 And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing.

HISTORY:

Peter, and John had finished their task in Samaria, Philip may have accompanied them and they depart for Jerusalem, preaching the Gospel in the Samaritan villages as they journeyed home (v.25). The apostles are laying their hands on the Samaritans, and they are becoming one with them in the body of Christ. The Samaritan's salvation was a fulfillment of prophecy. Jews from Jerusalem and Samaritans from Samaria were seen as having fellowship as one. God's promises to Israel were being fulfilled. This next passage stresses the importance of an individual to God. A miraculous act was needed God is seen using an angel to lead Philip to a single person who needed to know Christ which will lead to another group of people that will accept Him through Jesus.

LESSON:

Acts 8:26-28 The Ethiopian Eunuch

8:26 And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert. Now we see an angel of the Lord speaking to Philip. "Angels" are ministering spirits, sent forth to minister to them who shall be heirs of salvation (Heb.1:14). There was a particular individual that God want to reach with the gospel and save, so God sent an angel to instruct Philip where to go. God's instruction for Philip was in such a way that Philip knew was being led by faith. The angel instructed Philip to arise and go toward the south to a certain road that runs from Jerusalem to Gaza. This certain road was a desert road. Gaza

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was situated where the desert began. Gaza was about 6 miles southwest of Jerusalem. Note that God did not tell Philip why he was to travel the main road to the South, only to arise and go. Just as Abraham of old, Philip had to walk by faith, and this he did. Don't let this go pass you, Philip was engaged in a very successful evangelistic work in Samaria and in Jerusalem, but now he is sent to the desert, but he was obedient to the Spirit of the Lord.

8:27 And he arose and went: and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship,— Philip got up and went, not knowing why, but trusting God to show him. He encountered a man of Ethiopia.

- Ethiopia was located in Africa south of Egypt.
- Name means "burnt face."
- Sometimes called Nubia or Cush.

This man was a eunuch of great authority; a rich man of power, but under the authority of Candace queen of the Ethiopians.

"Eunuch"—Castration was typically carried out on the soon-to-be eunuch without his consent in order that he might perform a specific social function; this was common in many societies. Eunuchs would probably be servants or slaves who, because of their function, usually in order to make them reliable servants of a royal court where physical access to the ruler could wield great influence. It can also refer to a man who is not castrated but who is impotent, celibate or otherwise not inclined to marry and procreate.

It shows that he was obviously committed and very dedicated. As a eunuch he was the chamberlain to the Queen of Ethiopia. Candace was not the name of the queen but rather a title given to the mother of each Ethiopian king. ¹She ruled on behalf of her son who, as the child of the sun god, was considered too "holy" to be involved in mundane affairs. And her title was Candace, that is, a title like Pharaoh. And this Ethiopia eunuch had come to a position of great trust under the authority of the queen which commanded respect. He was in charge of all of her treasure, much like a Minister of Finance or Secretary of the Treasury. It was the policy of queens to choose outstanding eunuchs to fill official positions in their governments. However, as a eunuch, he would have been barred from the inner courts of the temple. Deuteronomy 23:1 NASB says "*No one who is emasculated, or has his male organ cut off, shall enter the assembly of the LORD.*" Eunuchs were not allowed to be Jews in the full sense, but only "proselytes" (a new convert to a religious faith or political doctrine) of the gate. However, he had come such a long distance to worship in Jerusalem which may mean that ²he was probably a "God-fearer." A "God-feare" was a non-Jew who respected the Jewish Law and sought to worship the God of Israel. They worshiped in the local synagogue along with the Jews. If he was a God-fearer this would be the first known overt example of a Gentile coming to Christ, an indication by God of what was to come. He had come to Jerusalem to worship, so therefore, he was a worshiper; a man who was probably seeking truth.

8:28 Was returning, and sitting in his chariot read Esaias the prophet. The Ethiopian eunuch had traveled over 200 miles, having been to Jerusalem to worship, was now on his way home. This was not a single chariot but he was so important that he traveled with an entourage; a caravan. He was sitting in his chariot reading Esaias the prophet, but his heart was still not satisfied.

Acts 8:29-34 Philip Encounters The Eunuch

8:29 Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot. God gives instruction through different sources. First it was the angel of the Lord and now it is the Spirit of God. Philip found the Ethiopia in his chariot, and the Spirit of God said "*go near and join yourself with his chariot.*" Step by step Philip is being led to his assignment.

8:30 And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest? The chariot is on the move and Philip runs near and hears the Ethiopia man reading aloud the prophet Esaias. That was not unusual. Everyone read aloud at that time. Having been moved by the Spirit of God to speak to this man, and recognizing by the exact portion of Isaiah that the eunuch was reading, Philip received his cue to initiate conversation. The question concerning his ability to understand what he read was natural enough since this man was Ethiopian and not Jewish.

8:31 And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him. The eunuch's response also indicates that Philip was at the right place. God had already prepared

¹ http://www.bereanbiblechurch.org/transcripts/acts/8_25-40.htm

² http://www.bereanbiblechurch.org/transcripts/acts/8_25-40.htm

<http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-sundayschool.html>

the eunuch's heart to receive Philip's witness. If we would obey the Lord's leading, we can be sure that God would go before us and open the way for our witness to others. His response back to Philip was, "*How can I, except some man should guide me?*" Well, the man's need and Philip's teaching ability precipitated the invitation for Philip to come and sit in the chariot with the man. The seeker finds the preacher or the preacher finds the seeker. That was the clue that the man wanted his assistance. God knew what he needed and sent Philip to the desert for that very purpose.

8:32 The place of the scripture which he read was this,— Philip knew the passage the man was reading and began to assist him. This particular passage: **He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth:** came from Isaiah 53:7 NASB. ³The passage from Isaiah was a prophecy about the Messiah. ⁴Isaiah 53 was written almost 800 years before the cross. Yet it reads like an eyewitness account of the crucifixion. ⁵Jews who lived in the first century did not expect their Messiah to suffer. They expected him to beat the Romans. But Jesus had described Himself as a Servant, who would suffer.

⁶The metaphors of "*sheep and lamb*" express the innocence, meekness, and patience of Christ in His sufferings and death; and His being like these when led to the slaughter, and "*dumb before the shearer*", show His willingness to suffer and die for His people, and to become a sacrifice for their sins. ... and to the lamb of a year old being silent while it is being sheared; and both denote the voluntariness of Christ in His sufferings, the stripping Him of his good name, credit, and reputation among men, and of all worldly substance... "*...opened he not his mouth*"— He did not "*complain*" or "*murmur*"; He offered no resistance, but yielded patiently to what was done by others .

8:33 In his humiliation his judgment was taken away:—This particular passage came from Isaiah 53:8 NASB. And here it speaks of, by Jesus humbling Himself, all His rights are taken away; the miserable state which Christ took upon Himself for our sake, in bearing his Father's wrath, justice was denied Him; when he was a man, he had no justice shown him. To take away a person's judgment, is a proverbial phrase for oppressing him. "*He was mocked and put down, never got a fair trial.*" **...and who shall declare his generation? for his life is taken from the earth.**— In other words, who can describe His generation? Who can describe the wickedness that was done to Him? Who will fully relate this man and all His actions? Who will show forth to the world everything He was about? Who will keep His remembrance alive? For His life is removed from the earth; for He was cut off out of the land of the living.

8:34 And the eunuch answered Philip, and said, I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man? The eunuch needed clarity about this passage of Isaiah 53. Even the Jewish religious experts were divided on the meaning of this passage. Some believed the slaughtered sheep represented the nation of Israel, others thought Isaiah was referring to himself, and others thought it referred to the Messiah. But Philip had no doubt; there was no question in his mind that this was the "*Suffering Servant*", Jesus of Nazareth (Isaiah 53). The Ethiopian represents many people today who are religious, read the Scriptures, and seek the truth, yet do not have saving faith in Jesus Christ. They are sincere, but they are lost. They need someone to show them the way.

Acts 8:35-39 Philip Baptizes The Eunuch

8:35 Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus. Philip opened his mouth and began at the very scriptures the eunuch was reading in Isaiah, and explained that Jesus had fulfilled this prophecy. Some people think the Old Testament is not relevant today, but Phillip led this man to faith in Jesus Christ by using the Old Testament scriptures. God's entire Word is applicable to all people in all ages. Therefore, we must not neglect to use the Old Testament because it too is God's Word. Philip proclaimed the Good News of Jesus. ⁷Isaiah 53 talks about one who would be rejected by men, one who was familiar with suffering, and one who would take up our infirmities. He is one who would be pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities. By his wounds we would be healed. This is the Good News of Jesus: he paid the price for our sins when he died for us. What Philip was preaching was the death, burial, resurrection, and exaltation of Jesus.

8:36 And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what

³ <http://www.easyenglish.info/bible-commentary/acts-lbw.htm>

⁴ http://www.bereanbiblechurch.org/transcripts/acts/8_25-40.htm

⁵ <http://www.easyenglish.info/bible-commentary/acts-lbw.htm>

⁶ <http://bible.cc/acts/8-32.htm>

⁷ <http://hopeforlife.org/resources/the-story-of-jesus/>

<http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-sundayschool.html>

doth hinder me to be baptized? After Philip had explained the verses to him, the Ethiopian began to understand the gospel because the Spirit of God opening his mind to God's truth. The decision of the Holy Spirit in this incident is apparent again as Philip and the eunuch's arrival at a rare watering place in the desert precisely when the eunuch requested baptism. What did Philip see happen? He saw three significant steps taken by the eunuch:

1. The man desired baptism.

How did he know that believers were supposed to be baptized? Perhaps Philip had included this in his witness to him, or perhaps he had even seen people being baptized while he was in Jerusalem.

8:37 And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. It is not enough for the lost sinner to desire salvation, he must also understand God's plan of salvation.

2. The man believed that Jesus Christ was the Son of God.

He believed that Jesus, whom Philip preached to him, was The Christ, the Messiah, and consequently the Son of God.

8:38 And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. It is the heart that understands the Word that eventually bears fruit.

3. The man believed and immediately followed through with baptism.

This was not a sprinkle but an immersion in water. Because of the evidence in the eunuch's life, and his sincere confession of the deity of Christ, Philip and the eunuch descended into the water and the eunuch was baptized. This becomes a fulfillment of Psalm 68:31b which says "...Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God."

8:39 And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing. After coming out of the water, Philip was no longer needed. His task was done. It was time for him to move on, so the Holy Spirit took him away. The word for "caught away" (*herpasen*) is strong. It means to be snatched away quickly, immediately, miraculously. It's the same word used for the rapture of the church. Elijah (1Kgs.18:12; 2Kgs.2:16) and Ezekiel (Ezek.3:12, 14; 8:3) were also snatched away in a miraculous fashion. This was a powerful confirmation to the caravan that Philip was God's representative. The eunuch went away rejoicing which made the trip even more fruitful!

SUMMARY:

Philip was told by an angel of the Lord to go south down the road from Jerusalem to Gaza which was a desert road where he saw an Ethiopian eunuch; a man of great authority in charge of the treasury of Queen Candace of Ethiopia. He had come to worship in Jerusalem and was riding back home sitting in his chariot reading Esaias (vv.26-28).

Philip is now told by the Spirit of God to overtake this chariot. As he runs near, he hears the eunuch reading from the prophet Isaiah. He asks, did he understand what he was reading? The eunuch explains that he needed someone to teach him. He was invited to explain the passage in Isaiah (Is.53:7-8). The scripture talked about Jesus being led as a sheep to slaughter and like a lamb to the slaughter saying not a word nor opening His mouth. But the eunuch needed to know if the prophet was talking about himself or some other man (vv.29-34).

Philip opened his mouth and preached Jesus, to be the one. Jesus died for our sins, was buried in the grave, and He was raised from the dead. When they came to some water, the eunuch requested to be baptized and Philip did so upon hearing his confession of faith. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit caught Philip away and the eunuch kept rejoicing (vv.35-39).

APPLICATION:

There is no boundary line when it comes to gender or race in ministering the gospel of Christ. There is no boundary line when the Spirit of God leads you to tell or proclaim the truth of the gospel of Christ. The gospel is to be spread to the people in the entire world. Now that's a lot!