

Alright church folks, as we study the book of Acts through May and June, I urge you to really commit to participating in the daily readings that we send out. The only frustration that I have in this message series is just how much really amazing information that I have to pass by to give you some of the highlights of the early church's history. During the time of today's reading, the church was following the pattern that Jesus had prescribed for her to take the gospel message to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

Soon before the story we read today, widespread and sanctioned persecution began that included beatings and even murder. In today's message we will look briefly at Phillip following the prompting of the Holy Spirit. [Take a moment to Read Acts 8:26-40, if you haven't already]

26 Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." 27 So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of the Kandake (which means "queen of the Ethiopians"). This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, 28 and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the Book of Isaiah the prophet. - Acts 8:26-28

If you have been following the daily readings you may remember Philip as one of the Seven Leaders selected to distribute food to the Jewish widow's who had converted to Christianity in Acts chapter 6. That section of Acts describes him as a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit. What is interesting in this story is the location. Philip is instructed to go to a desolate road that would have been the alternative route of travel in those days. It was used so infrequently that it would have been a strange request to Philip. But he went. Maybe because an Angel told him to. That would seriously work for me! On his way he comes across this Ethiopian Eunuch.

A eunuch is a man who has been castrated for the purpose of being a trusted servant in a royal household. A king would often castrate his servants to ensure they would not be tempted to engage in sexual activity with others in the palace (others meaning the royal harem). And since they were physically unable to produce children and set up a Royal lineage, they would be unable to secure an Heir to the throne making them very unlikely to overthrow the current king or queen.

It is significant that the Ethiopian was described as God fearing. This is a specific religious term not a general term and it means that he believed in the one true God of the Israelites. He followed Hebrew laws and customs as best he could and worshipped the Hebrew God right up to the point where he became excluded.

As a Eunuch, by Hebrew Law he was excluded from the Jewish Temple. So even though he had reached a high level of leadership in his own country he was still excluded from fully worshipping God in the Temple in Jerusalem and would not have even been able to be considered a full convert to Judaism. So technically he would

have even been a spiritually 3rd class citizen. This left him deeply in love with God, but separated from him racially, socially, and physically. As wonderful as the trip to the Holy City of Jerusalem was, I'm sure that it must have been a sad reminder that he was just not good enough.

I believe this story reveals the heart of God and the deepest needs of every person. This is born out in how God responded to this man's heart cry in a way that nothing else could. There may be no harder emotion to work through than rejection. When our hearts are broken it even causes us to question the value of life itself. Those whose hearts have been severely broken grieve as if a life has been lost. Though this man loved God deeply and followed him wholeheartedly in a culture far removed from Israel, he was not accepted in the Hebrew culture as Jewish and though his wealth was significant he could not buy his way out of spiritual second class citizenship.

As he sat in his chariot I am sure that rejection, disappointment and brokenness weighed heavily on his mind. He may have even chosen the Prophet Isaiah because of the promises made to foreigners and eunuchs found in it.

3 Let no foreigner who is bound to the Lord say, "The Lord will surely exclude me from his people." And let no eunuch complain, "I am only a dry tree." 4 For this is what the Lord says: "To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose what pleases me and hold fast to my covenant—5 to them I will give within my temple and its walls memorial and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that will endure forever. Isaiah 56:3-5

I'm sure that he left Jerusalem with the same empty longing to connect with God that he visited there with and was looking to the Lord to comfort him with his words. But God had a plan for him as a reward for his sincerity and righteousness. God told us through the prophet Jeremiah that;

You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. Jeremiah 29:13

And this story is evidence of that profound truth. So in reward for his deep heartfelt search for God;

29 The Spirit told Philip, "Go to that chariot and stay near it." 30 Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. "Do you understand what you are reading?" Philip asked. 31 "How can I," he said, "unless someone explains it to me?" So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

I may be wrong or maybe I am just taking too many liberties with the text, but I have to believe that Philip's response was somewhere along the lines of; "Seriously God. It can't be this easy." But it was. Why? *If God is asking you to go somewhere, He is*

already there. The groundwork has been laid and the moment is simply awaiting an obedient disciple.

As I was studying this passage, the more I read about and prayed about this encounter, the more I came to realize the likely depth of this man's hurt. The Holy Spirit was not telling Phillip to go to this man to explain the scriptural connection between the Old Testament prophet Isaiah and Jesus. He was asking him to go and care for this man in his immediate pain and in his emotional need. The last words and the first command that Jesus gave his disciples before he ascended into heaven were that we are to "Go" but we have inadvertently substituted that we are to "know." Most of our disobedience when it comes to sharing Christ is based on our lack of understanding. But Jesus said nothing about knowing, only about going. So Philip went.

32 This is the passage of Scripture the eunuch was reading: "He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he did not open his mouth. 33 In his humiliation he was deprived of justice. Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth."

I find it interesting that in the verses just prior to this he would have read these words;

He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. 3 He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem. Isaiah 53:2-3

So having left the Holy City where he was likely confronted with his spiritual inadequacy. As one of the most trusted men in his country he was likely facing rejection for the first time in his life. As one who feared God, he had read these words in the past, but he now sees them in a new light. He even saw himself in that scripture as he felt despised, rejected, suffering, and in deep pain. He was in the same place that many of us were in when we opened up to Christ. He was badly in need of being saved. Why was Jesus so attractive to him? Because Jesus knows exactly how he feels. Rejected and held in low esteem which is why Jesus can reach us at our lowest points.

34 The eunuch asked Philip, "Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?" 35 Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.

And Philip would have been able to say; That man was not just a prophet, he was the son of God and this story doesn't end in humiliation...it ends in victory. Yes, He was despised, rejected, torn, beaten and led to slaughter and death. But that man did not stay dead, He has risen from the grave. That death paid the penalty for the sins of all who would receive the truth. He has now returned to the Father and because He loves you, He has prepared this moment for you. How will you respond?

He must have responded favorably because this is what we read next.

36 As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptized?"

38 And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. 39 When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing.

The Eunuch made a powerful statement about who he is in Christ by being baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in front of his large entourage of family, friends and servants. Prior to this moment he was a good man who feared God but all of his goodness he could not meet his own basic need which is to be connected with a Savior who loves us so much that He died for us.

And it didn't stop there, according to the church father Irenaeus, the Eunuch became a missionary to the Ethiopians bringing the good news of salvation to countless others in his life and beyond.

Questions to consider:

1. When have you felt spiritually inadequate? Do you believe and know in your heart that the power of the Holy Spirit has transformed you so that you are no longer a "spiritually second class citizen"? "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!" - 2 Corinthians 5:17
2. Ask Jesus and the Holy Spirit where it is He would have you "go". Listen. And Go.