

22—Acts 8.26-40—The Word Continues to Spread—From Desert to Water

- I. Introduction
 - a. As this story of the Acts of the Risen Lord Jesus continues, the focus is on the act of the spread of the word. And as the word spreads God continues to save people from all nations.
 - b. I suppose Luke could have spent time on a series of stories of House Hunters for all the displaced Christians that have fled Jerusalem because of the great persecution. Sure, these believers sought new places to live. New jobs. New everything. But even in the midst of fleeing from the likes of Saul, they continue to speak the good news.
 - c. Let's take note the Lord's work through Philip to save one lost sheep.
- II. Main Point
 - a. By the direction of the Lord himself, the church continues to speak the gospel wherever they go and Jesus continues to save sinners.
- III. Outline
 - a. The Lord on Mission to spread the gospel
 - b. Hope in the Suffering Servant
 - c. The Salvation of the Eunuch
- IV. Exposition
 - a. As we launch into this next section in ch. 8, notice that the Lord is on mission to make the gospel known. This passage sets forth explicitly who initiates the mission. We have a simple confession—God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) saves. His redeemed church joins him in this work.
 - i. Last week we saw the spread of the gospel north of Jerusalem. It's often good for us to look at the maps in the back of our Bibles. They do help us get a better image of what's going on.
 1. I suppose some might have thought that the persecutors would not look for them in Samaria since those people are hated so much. But as we are about to see next week, Saul goes as far north as Damascus! If you do not know where these places are you can't realize to what extent Saul went to track down these Christians. The maps do help.
 - ii. So, whether Philip accompanied Peter and John back to Jerusalem when they left Samaria preaching the gospel or he remained in Samaria for a time we do not know. Wherever he is, the angel of Lord instructs him to go south of Jerusalem on the desert road to Gaza.
 1. Samaria is probably around 40 miles north of Jerusalem and Gaza is about 60 miles southwest on the coast of the Mediterranean. He didn't call an Uber. He walked.
 2. These are the geographic facts of the passage. The gospel is spreading from north to south in Israel. And a key resource for pioneer missionaries has always included a map if available.
 - iii. Now let's notice who initiates the spread of the gospel. V. 26 Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Arise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza."
 1. Missions is not something the church created. This is God's work and God's plan. He is making himself known.
 2. Let me say this as clear as possible. The Lord sent Philip.
 3. Here, he doesn't tell him what he's looking for or what he is going to be doing. He simply commands him to rise and go. Walk down the desert road to Gaza. That's it.
 - a. No questions. No explanation. It says in v. 27 that Philip having rose, he went.
 - i. Ask yourself what you would have done?
 1. See, we think a Christian is someone who simply believes certain things. But a Christian follows Jesus. Whatever he says, that what we gladly do.

2. You might say, an angel of the Lord hasn't told me to do anything. But the Lord has told us in his word. There was no NT at this point.
3. Here are some of the responses of those called to follow Jesus: (Lk. 9:57-62) ⁵⁷ As they were going along the road, someone said to [Jesus], "I will follow you wherever you go." ⁵⁸ And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." ⁵⁹ To another he said, "Follow me." But he said, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." ⁶⁰ And Jesus said to him, "Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God." ⁶¹ Yet another said, "I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home." ⁶² Jesus said to him, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."
 - ii. Philip went. No questions asked. He trusted the Lord even though he didn't know what or where or why he was sent.
- iv. As Philip walks down the desert road, he seems surprised to see someone on this backroad. But Philip is surprised for it says, "Behold...look." There's someone.
 1. I don't think there was a sign on the carriage he saw with the information that follows. But all of this information is important to the story.
 2. Luke introduces this person to us in v. 27.
 - a. This Ethiopia is ancient Cush that is just south of Egypt. His journey home would take months. It seems that he was probably a Gentile but Luke doesn't make that explicit.
 - b. He is described as a eunuch. For those who might not know what this means, he is a male who cannot have children due to a medical-type procedure that had been performed on him.
 - i. For reasons understandable, they normally had charge over the harem and sometime the treasury.
 - c. The unnamed eunuch was also a court official of the queen of Ethiopia.
 - i. He was a man of a high-ranking position within the ruling family who had charge over the queen's treasure.
 - d. He made the journey to Jerusalem to worship. If he was a Jew from exile, it may have been for one of the annual fests or he may have been on a personal journey as a God-fearing Gentile.
 - i. Whether he was a Jew or Gentile, the fact that he was a eunuch barred him from entering the assembly of the Lord according to Dt. 23:1.
 - e. And finally, he has a copy of Isaiah to which he is reading out loud as he sits in the chariot. This is unusual. Most people did not have copies of any portion of the scriptures. All the synagogues would have them.
- v. This is the kind of opportunity you long to find and the Lord directed Philip to this very person on a desert road headed home somewhat empty handed.
 1. It's hard to get more diverse than this man but the Lord came to seek and save the lost. Let's not forget that this man's soul will remain eternally cut off from God's redemption and spend eternity in hell or he will hear the glorious good news and repent and trust in Jesus for salvation.

2. We have no control over how someone responds. We are the messenger of the good news. We ask for opportunities. We share the gospel. Pray. Trust the Lord to do what only he can do. God and God alone saves sinners.
3. The Lord is not finished directing Philip. In v. 29, the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over and join this chariot."
 - a. Let me give you a couple more images of what his word "join" means. Unite. Cleave. Glue together. In other words, get close and stick to it.
 - b. And as is Philip's pattern of glad obedience: v. 30 says, and having run up Philip heard him reading Isaiah the Prophet and asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?"
 - i. A primary element of conversion is understanding. One must understand what God has said before we can agree to believe them to be true.
 1. If I walked up to someone and said "believe in Jesus or you will perish forever" do you think they would have some questions?
 - a. Who is Jesus?
 - b. Believe what?
 - c. What do you mean I will perish forever?
 - d. They understand the words I have spoken but they have no idea what they mean. Correct information is important but information alone is not enough.
 - e. Isaiah is a pretty difficult book to understand. That's why Philip asks the eunuch if he understands? If he understands then he can decide if he believes it to be true.
 - vi. One must understand. One must agree or believe. And one must trust and follow. Let's see if he understands. In our area, we have a lot of people of claim to believe as do the demons but they are not trusting and following Jesus.
- b. That gets us to our second point. We clearly saw the Lord directing Philip to this eunuch on the desert road while he happened to be reading Isaiah. Now is there hope to be found in the words of Isaiah for a foreigner and a eunuch? Of all places, he finds himself in Isaiah 53—How can a suffering servant be good news?
 - i. V. 31 the eunuch responds to Philip's question: (Acts 8:31) "How can I, unless someone guides me?"
 1. He acknowledges that he does not understand and needs help.
 - a. The word 'to guide' is the what Jesus promised the Holy Spirit would do in (Jn. 16:13) When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth. It's also used in (Lk. 6:39) He also told them a parable: "Can a blind man lead a blind man? Will they not both fall into a pit?"
 - b. There are several things going on here. The Holy Spirit is at work in the mind of the hearer as well as the guide, in this case Philip. But Philip will be doing the instructing. That includes Philip having worked hard at listening to the apostles teaching on this very important passage and having given himself to deeper meditation himself and prayer.
 - i. The Lord prepares the witness and witness prepares.
 2. Philip is invited into the chariot. A man he had never met. A man he had little in common. If the Samaritans were considered outcasts so too this man—even more so.

- ii. We do not know the extent of their conversation. It's very possible that normal introductions would have occurred. I'm sure that how we know the details of who this man is.
 - 1. In fact, these details are important. It's good to ask personal questions first instead of jumping right in to gospel conversations. This is normal. The more I hear them talk helps me know where they are spiritually.
 - 2. We obviously did not hear what passage from Isaiah he was reading aloud but Philip did.
 - a. Luke tells us in vv. 32 and 33. (Acts 8:32-33) "Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter and like a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he opens not his mouth.
³³ In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation?
For his life is taken away from the earth."
 - b. This is another providential moment that only God can do. If all he has is a copy of Isaiah, this is the best and easiest place to connect what he is reading with gospel of Jesus Christ.
 - i. Take comfort in the pre-, during and ongoing work of the Lord when we are called upon to bear witness.
 - 3. The verses are quoted for us the reader. They break the flow of what has been said but we needed to know what verses he was reading.
 - a. In v. 34 it says having answered the eunuch said to Philip, "About whom, I beg you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?"
 - i. This is like having someone set the ball on the tee for you. Wow!
 - b. If we were to reread that entire section beginning at the end of Isaiah 52 and on into 53 which we should probably do, but I have mentioned these verses several times. As you read them here is what you are left thinking who is this lamb and why is he led to the slaughter?
 - i. "Isaiah speaks of this lamb as a Servant. The basic idea is that God's Servant will be exalted and bless many nations. He will sprinkle them like the priest sprinkled the people clean in Lev 16:14-16. But there's a sense of astonishment, something puzzling. How can such magnificent blessing...flow from such horrific suffering? Who could really look on this weak, despicable, lowly, suffering Servant and conclude, "Oh, that's definitely the arm of the Lord; that's definitely God's mighty way of saving us"? What person would draw that conclusion?" (Bret)
 - ii. Well, you can't sprinkle the people clean without blood. So, who is that lamb the eunuch is reading about? Yes. Jesus, who John the Baptist called, "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."
 - iii. And beginning with those verses, Philip told him the good news of Jesus.
 - 1. No signs and wonders. No miracles or magic. He just told him about Jesus. He told him the same message he told the Samaritans. The message is the same for everyone. Repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus and come follow the risen Lord Jesus!
 - 2. There's no need to worry about what to say. It's the same thing the apostles preached. If you change the message, you change the outcome. There's only one gospel.
 - c. Our last point. The salvation of the eunuch.
 - i. Just a quick word about v. 37. It's not in the original manuscripts. It is a true statement. I suppose the lack of hearing the whole conversation makes one want to explain a little more.

- ii. But it is clear enough as is. Obviously, Philip demanded a response: repent and be baptized. Thus the eunuch responds in v. 36—(Acts 8:36) And as they were going along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, “See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?”
 - 1. They are on the desert road. Gaza is the known for the last water stop in southwestern Israel before entering the desert on the way to Egypt.
 - 2. Again, God is providentially providing everything Philip needs to spread the word. Behold, there’s water! Unbelievable.
 - a. This should encourage you to see how God works to provide for his witnesses. He is the one on mission to make himself known. We get to join him in his mission while he provides every resource we need.
- iii. This is the kind of reversal we often see. Deserts to streams of water. Eunuchs or a dry tree to a branch on a fruitful vine!
 - 1. (Acts 8:38)³⁸ And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him.
 - a. This beautiful picture of baptism displays the gospel so clearly.
 - i. By faith, the eunuch dies and is buried in the water but raised to new life!
 - ii. Indeed, he is washed clean. Not the dirt but a clean heart.
 - iii. And, let’s never forget that it is something done to you. It’s absurd to think of someone baptizing themselves. The image is clear. You are saved by another and you are baptized by another.
 - b. In (Acts 8:39)³⁹ And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing.
 - i. Joy came to Samaria because salvation had come.
 - ii. Joy comes to this Eunuch because salvation has come.
 - iii. I suspect he continues to read Isaiah. I just wonder what he thought when he read this in Isaiah:
 - 1. (Isa. 56:3-8)³ Let not the foreigner who has joined himself to the LORD say, "The LORD will surely separate me from his people"; and let not the eunuch say, "Behold, I am a dry tree."⁴ For thus says the LORD: "To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose the things that please me and hold fast my covenant,⁵ I will give in my house and within my walls a monument and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off.⁶ "And the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD, to minister to him, to love the name of the LORD, and to be his servants, everyone who keeps the Sabbath and does not profane it, and holds fast my covenant--⁷ these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples."⁸ The Lord GOD, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, declares, "I will gather yet others to him besides those already gathered."

iv. The Lord had gathered an outcast into his house forever and made him joyful!

V. Response

- a. Is there anything that is preventing you from taking up your cross and following Jesus?
- b. Is there anything preventing us from continuing what Philip continued to do preaching the gospel to all the towns?
- c. Let's rejoice in the good news and let us spread the good news to bring joy!