

Acts

Part 23 – “The Seeker”

Acts 8:26-40

This is the second episode narrated by Luke concerning the ministry of Philip. In this passage Philip is led out of Samaria by the Spirit of God to an Ethiopian eunuch. He is a man of means and high status as one who serves as an official representative of the queen of the Ethiopians. But because of his race and physical condition he is also excluded from the life of God's covenant people. Nevertheless he had been in Jerusalem to worship God and is now reading a scroll of Isaiah. Philip explains to the Ethiopian that Isaiah's prophecies were of Jesus who came to be a suffering Savior dying in the place of sinners. The Ethiopian believes and is baptized. This is the first example given to us by Luke of the conversion of an individual.

Exegetical Outline:

- I. The Conversion of the Ethiopian Official (8:26-30)
 - A. Introduction: Philip and the Ethiopian (8:26-28)
 - B. The Encounter of Philip and the Ethiopian (8:29-31)
 - C. Philip Proclaims the Gospel (8:32-35)
 - D. The Conversion and Baptism of the Ethiopian (8:36-38)
 - E. Philip and the Ethiopian Go Their Separate Ways (8:39-40)

Main Idea: The church's mission to take the gospel to all peoples is directed and empowered by God and fulfilled as the church relies upon those means which God has provided.

1. God's power is directed toward the advance of the gospel.

- Vv. 26, 29, and 39 emphasize God's initiative in the mission to take the gospel to all peoples. Over and over in Acts the power of God is applied primarily to the advance of the gospel. It is God who directs his witnesses and gives them the boldness to speak. It is God who opens the ears and hearts of those who believe.
 - Vs 26 – “The angel of the Lord” – Describes a divine intervention not uncommon in Acts. The identity of the angel of the Lord is not important and should not be cause for speculation. The activity of the angel points to God's command over the host of heavenly beings.
 - Gaza and Azotus (formerly Ashdod) were major cities of the Philistines who were the chief persecutors of God's people during the days of the Judges.
- God's power to advance the gospel in no way diminishes the church's responsibility to be active witnesses to Jesus Christ.
- a) **Philip was available** (vv. 27, 29) – Philip goes as he is directed to the extent of chasing down a chariot.
 - b) **Philip was eager** (vv. 29-30, 38) – He did not allow differences in race, status, or moral standing keep him from reaching out to the Ethiopian.
 - c) **Philip was prepared** (vv. 30-35) – He knew how to explain the Scriptures.

2. God's grace extends to the unclean and excluded.

- Vv. 27-28 – In the Greco-Roman world of the 1st century, Ethiopia (Nubia) was located south of Egypt and north of modern Ethiopia. One thousand miles separated Jerusalem from Ethiopia. In the Old Testament this region was known as Cush. It was ruled by a succession of queens each having the title “the Candace.” Because of their physical mutilation, eunuchs were considered trustworthy and therefore given great responsibilities. The Ethiopian Eunuch was entrusted to watch over the treasury of the queen. He was a man of means seen in his mode of travel, his high status, and his possession of a pricey scroll.
- The Ethiopian had been to Jerusalem to worship the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. How he came to desire entry into God's covenant community is unknown. His desire to worship in Jerusalem is all the more amazing considering the fact that his physical condition rendered him an outsider (Deut 23). What then can explain his desire to worship a God whose laws excluded him?
- Nevertheless Philip treats the official with dignity as a fellow image-bearer of God. Philip understands the gospel of Jesus is not the property of any race or nation. It is God's story and is intended for all the nations. Not only that, the gospel is intended for and most joyfully grasped by those who know themselves to be sinners.

3. God's Word is the sufficient means of conversion.

- Vv. 30-33 – It is significant that the Ethiopian is reading from Isaiah (ch. 53) who prophesied that the Messiah would be a suffering servant bearing in himself the sins of God's people. Philip is eager to explain the meaning of the text. Like anyone who is lost, the Ethiopian cannot understand the meaning of the biblical text (Rom 10:14-17; 1 Cor 2:14).
- Vv. 34-35 – Philip draws a straight line from the words of Isaiah to the person of Jesus. This is the way that Jesus taught his disciples to understand the Scriptures (Lk 24:26-27).
- Repeatedly Luke, both in his gospel and in Acts, holds forth the sufficiency of Scripture as the chief means by which God produces faith in the heart of the unbeliever. This is why the success of the church is consistently measured in terms of the advance of the Word.
- The mission of the church requires the careful study of Scripture and proclamation of Jesus. Philip's work to explain the meaning of Isaiah's prophecy is the central task of his witness. Philip does not ply the Ethiopian with moving stories or even a personal testimony. He explains the meaning of Scripture. The faithful proclamation of Jesus Christ depends upon the right understanding of Scripture.

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.”

For thus says the LORD:
 “To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths,
 who choose the things that please me
 and hold fast my covenant,
 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.

(Isaiah 56:3-5)