

- Today is a special day. It's one of my favorite days of the year, when we baptize people.
- Seeing the evidence of God working and changing people's lives and hearing them talk about it is a wonderful thing – God is good.
- We first hear about baptism with John the Baptist. He baptized people as a way to illustrate that they were repenting of their sins and moving a new direction with their life.
- Jesus himself was baptized as an example for us.
- There are several accounts after Jesus rose from the dead and left that talk about baptism and I want to look this morning at one of my favorite.
- It's an account that has supernatural occurrences, strange people and a surprising ending.
- It's a story about someone who really only has this one chapter that contains any detail about his life.
- An account about a man who by listening to God, changed the course of history.
- A story that I believe demonstrates that we can do the same.
- I find it is easy to fall into routine. Routine is fine, but what can happen is that we begin to believe that there is little we can do in God's kingdom. We spend more time surviving than paying attention to the people around us. We get tunnel vision about what we do. We can unconsciously live like God's power is something only found in fantastic stories.
- This account shows **OBEDIENCE RELEASES GOD'S POWER.**

- Let me set the stage.
- It was months, a year or two at most, after Jesus had gone back to heaven. The church had grown dramatically. They had problems with this growth – they appointed 7 guys full of wisdom and the Spirit to administrate to help. The first deacons. One of those guys was a man named Philip.
- After they began to arrest, imprison and even kill Christ-followers in Jerusalem, Philip went to Samaria and people began to be saved, and the church grew. God was performing signs and wonders through Philip. There is this amazing showdown between Peter and a sorcerer.
- Things are humming. God is working. Philip is doing all that God had called him to do. It's the kind of situation that would leave a person content to be there, excited. He was not looking to go anywhere, do anything new.

Acts 8:26 Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Go south to the road – the desert road – that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza."

- It's like being in that perfect situation. Raise, new responsibilities, fun, good team & growing the company. Or a student who has the perfect roommate, schedule & workload.
- 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. 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. 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." 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. 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?" [37 Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." The eunuch answered, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the*

Son of God.”] 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. 40 Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and traveled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea.

- **OBEDIENCE RELEASES GOD’S POWER.**

I. Obedience is more useful to God than ability or talent.

- Philip was engaged in amazing work with the Spirit of God. People healed (paralyzed and lame), demons cast out, signs and wonders, people coming to know Jesus.
- He was told to leave a fruitful and powerful ministry – the instruction was counter-intuitive – by an angel. Perhaps an angel was necessary for exactly that reason.
- Told to go to a desert road. Not another city. Not a populated place. There is some debate over whether this is a well traveled road or a more empty isolated spot. Either way, it is a weird place to go to. There were no additional instructions. Just go there.
- Philip goes not knowing all that God has in mind. But when he gets to the road, the Spirit tells him the next step to take. In verse 29 the Spirit says, "Go up and join this chariot." That's all he says. Not what for. Nor who is in the chariot. Just go to the chariot.
- The Spirit spoke to Philip to go up to a certain chariot. Probably moving slowly enough to read. Not a Ben-Hur type chariot, but more like a carriage.
- He wasn't told what to do, or given any reassurance of what it would look like, whether he would be welcomed or rejected. He had to walk or jog beside the chariot for a bit.
- Put yourself in his shoes for a minutes. I went to this desert road. Just walking along. I see a carriage. I decide to run alongside for a bit. "Whatcha readin?"
- Then put yourself in the shoes of the Ethiopian. He is on the tail end of a trip. He has an entourage. He has power and money. He might have been frustrated because he did not get what he wanted. Then some guy comes jogging across the desert right to his chariot. What is going on? Is this some total weirdo?
- Principle: The impact of our obedience often far outstrips the original act.
- Small acts can lead to life situations you would never have imagined.
- We never know how a small obedience will lead to a large result.
- You see, there is a tradition in Ethiopia & Sudan passed down for centuries that a state official returned from a trip to Jerusalem with news about Jesus. It was through him that Christianity was birthed in Ethiopia & Sudan. Irenaeus wrote in the second century that this Ethiopian became a missionary among his people
- With the emergence of Islam in the 7th century, Ethiopia was the only region of Africa to survive the expansion of Islam as a Christian state.
- We won't always see it – for all we know, Philip never saw this man again nor did he ever see the results of his actions, but **OBEDIENCE RELEASES GOD’S POWER.**
- To God, obedience is more useful then skills or talents.

II. We won't see God work if we don't listen.

- Practice listening to God.
- God spoke to Philip initially through an angel. He probably needed that kind of kick to leave a growing ministry to go to an isolated place.
- But then we are told the Spirit prompted Philip. Somewhere in his spirit, he felt God telling him to engage with this Ethiopian eunuch.
- Practice listening to others.
- The last instruction the Spirit apparently gave was to go up to the man.

- Philip paid attention to what was going on. He listened to what the man was reading (it was often done out loud by the official or by someone reading to him.)
- He just “so happens” to be reading a passage in Isaiah that was talking about Jesus, even though the eunuch did not know it.
- He was invited to go further in his explanation.
- He told him the good news about Jesus. The good news of Jesus life, death, resurrection and the resulting freedom and hope that it brings.
- God’s Spirit will direct us if we are listening.
- If we are not listening, it doesn’t mean God won’t work, it simply means we won’t get to see it, participate in it or experience the power and joy from it.
- Consider, we often want to hear God’s voice for his plan for the next few months or years of our lives. God most often doesn’t work that way. He tells us what to do – today! We are to listen and obey – today! If we do that every day, we will ALWAYS be exactly where he wants us to be.

III. Just because it doesn’t make sense to you doesn’t mean it doesn’t make sense.

- Let me tell you about this guy that Philip encountered.
- Ethiopia was an ancient African nation south of Egypt on the Nile river. This is now known as the Sudan.
- In NT times it was ruled by a woman with the title of Candace.
- It was on the outer frontier of the known world.
- He was a foreigner, an Ethiopian
- We’re not talking about a Jew or even a Samaritan. This guy is a pure Gentile.
- He was a career man, a eunuch
- Eunuchs were often employed by ancient rulers in positions of high importance. They were senior level officers in government. They were usually physically castrated as sign of devotion to their job; it also was protection from seduction and betrayal. Kind of puts a whole new meaning to being married to one’s job!
- He was successful, an important official in charge of all the treasury of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians.
- He was the state official in charge of the nation’s treasury. From all appearances, it seems he has it altogether - position, power, wealth, job security.
- He was seeking, this man had gone to Jerusalem to worship
- The ancient world was full of gods and religions to choose: Egyptian, Greek, Roman, Pagan.
- Centuries earlier an Ethiopian queen visited Jerusalem and was impressed with king Solomon and the God of the Jews. Maybe this guy is looking for something more than these other religions and he’s going to check out what his ancestors spoke of. One thing is for certain, he wants to worship God.
- He might even have been a convert to Judaism.
- He had traveled 750 – 1000 miles to worship at Jerusalem.
- This guy arrives in Jerusalem hoping to worship in the temple, but there’s a big problem. He is a eunuch. According to God’s law (Deuteronomy 23:1), eunuchs are prohibited from entering the temple assembly. He travels all this way to find God and he’s not allowed in.
- He is *reading the book of Isaiah the prophet*
- He wants to find the true God. I’m sure it’s not coincidental that Isaiah tells of a time when eunuch will be accepted by God and will be free to worship as equals (Isaiah 56:3-5).

- But Philip did not know any of this! It simply was weird to go to a desert highway and then walk up to a strange carriage and strike up a conversation.
- It doesn't make sense to pay for the person's groceries in front you when you are struggling with money.
- It doesn't make sense to buy a gift card for the guy who pumps your gas and let him know you are praying for him.
- It doesn't make sense to quit a job to take one that makes much less but seems that God is leading.
- It doesn't make sense to pick up the phone and call a friend on the basis of only a thought or a prompting.
- It doesn't make sense to use your life to tell people in a hostile and third world country about Jesus.
- It doesn't make sense to ask someone to pray for them in the middle of a public space.
- If we act simply based on what makes sense to us, we will not get to see God at work. This is when God does some of his most amazing work. What makes sense to me is not the deciding factor in our decisions.

IV. Don't look for his power without abiding in his presence.

- The eunuch desired to be baptized. He was going back to a country that did not know Jesus. He himself is a changed person. He wants to cement this commitment in his life.
 - When I was little, I pictured this being just Philip and the Eunuch. But in fact, there were probably a number of people who watched, who saw, who heard and it were witnesses to what God was doing in his life and what he was proclaiming.
 - The eunuch was filled with joy. He rejoiced. Any life turned over to Jesus is worth getting excited about. His was a life changed. It appears as though it impacted an entire nation.
 - Philip's obedience changed the course of history.
 - v39 is one of my favorites – Philip simply disappeared. Vanished. Reappeared in Azotus, where he continued to listen to the Spirit and obey.
 - You see, this momentous occasion was the result of a pattern of listening and obeying.
 - Philip was a person filled with the Holy Spirit.
 - He simply spent time knowing and being with God.
 - God was not a means to an end.
 - He practiced listening to and knowing God.
 - Hear me, God is interested in you. He wants you to know him. He wants to hang out with you. He wants you to abide, to spend time with, to have a conversation.
 - You cannot skip this and be someone who God regularly uses with power.
 - If want God to do amazing things, then we must practice being with him, listening to him, and obeying his promptings. Only then will we experience his power.
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- Every time we see a baptism, we celebrate what Jesus has done and is doing in the life of the people being baptized.
 - It should also remind us of our commitment to follow Jesus. To put him in charge of our future.
 - *"In every Christian's heart there is a cross and a throne, and the Christian is on the throne till he puts himself on the cross; if he refuses the cross, he remains on the throne. Perhaps this is at the bottom of the backsliding and worldliness among Gospel believers today. We want to be saved, but we insist that Christ do all the dying. No cross for us, no dethronement, no dying. We remain king within the little kingdom of Man's soul and wear our tinsel crown with*

all the pride of a Caesar; but we doom ourselves to shadows and weakness and spiritual sterility.” (A.W. Tozer)

- I used to pray that God would give me power to do the things in my week, or in my month. Here’s the thing, the Spirit empowers us to do what HE has directed. We are never promised his power for our agenda’s, our motives, our plans.
- But when we live an obedient life where we listen to him, abide in him, practice listening and then doing, God moves in power.
- If God is not moving in power in my life, I am left to wonder – perhaps that is because I am not listening and obeying his move in my life.
- **OBEDIENCE RELEASES GOD’S POWER.**
- God finds obedience much more useful than talent or ability.
- We need to practice listening to God and listening to others.
- Then we need to stop deciding that we will only do what makes sense to me, because God decides what makes sense better than we do.