

## **The Saving Power of Scripture**

Scripture: Acts 8:25–40

Code: 44-30

### **A NOTE ABOUT THIS TRANSCRIPT**

Let's go to the Word of God in the 8th chapter of the book of Acts, the Acts of the apostles under the power of the Holy Spirit; Acts, chapter 8. We're doing a little series in the 8th chapter of the book of Acts on the faith that does not save and the faith that does save. Last week, we looked at the faith that does not save, as illustrated by Simon the magician. This week, we look at the faith that does save, as illustrated by the Ethiopian eunuch. In both cases, Philip is the key instrument of God in the narratives in this chapter.

Philip – not Philip the apostle – but Philip the deacon from the 6th chapter, a non-Israeli Jew, a Jew who was a non-Palestinian Jew from the Hellenistic world who was part of the church, he was brought to Christ along with many, many thousands of others in the early church. And he was one of those noble men who were chosen to provide service and leadership to the church. He was a very powerful man, a godly man, a Spirit-filled man, power preacher, and the Lord even did miracles through him – an amazing man.

We're going to see his encounter with the Ethiopian eunuch starting in chapter 8, verse 25. But before we jump into that, just kind of a little bit of a running start, if we can do this. And I'm going to stick with my notes because there's a lot to sort of cram in in the next little while.

There was a really wonderful article on the seminary website by Brian Biedebach, our missionary in Malawi, on, "How long should a sermon be? How long should a sermon be?" And in that, he said that the average sermon across the country, and maybe across the world, is about 20 minutes or 25 minutes. That's actually sinful to do that. So you've got to be longer than that or you're going to mess with the average, and that's going to make me look bad. No.

But there was a great quote in the article by John Stott who said, "A sermon can be any length as long as feels like 20 minutes." So the key is what it feels like, not the reality of how long it actually is. But there's a lot here, I'm not going to drag it out, but I'm going to cram it full of a lot of things.

All right, we're in the book of Acts and we're in the flow of the early church from its inception to its early developing years. The tempo of the march of the Holy Spirit is speeding up. It's speeding up. It's accelerating now and it's starting to push over barriers. Significant, if not massive, barriers are being knocked down. As we began the story of the developing church, there were only Jerusalem Jews in the church.

The church began in Jerusalem with those Jews that were gathered there. The barrier, initial barrier, would be against the Greek-speaking Jews, the non-Israeli Jews, the non-Palestinian Jews. But it didn't take long to push that barrier over because many of them were actually there on the Day of Pentecost; and at the end of the Day of Pentecost, there were 3,000 who believed.

And we can assume that they were not just the 120 who were the, essentially, Jerusalem Jews, but the many thousands included non-Israeli Jews who were part of the diaspora, part of the scattering of Jews. They were looked down on a little bit by some of the Jews because they had left the homeland. That barrier went down very rapidly. But it was a difficult adjustment apparently for the Israeli Jews because they weren't taking care of the non-Israeli Jewish widows.

Chapter 6 opens up by saying the Hellenistic widows were not getting their fair share of the care – the food, the supplies, the resources – and so they decided to choose these men, among whom Philip was one, so that they could make sure ministry was going on to these non-Palestinian Jews, non-Israeli Jews. And the church grew through all of this. It grew; it flourished. Those men who were chosen as deacons began to have an influence in the sort of Hellenistic synagogues of Jews that were scattered around the city of Jerusalem, and the church then began to penetrate the Hellenistic Jewish community, and the church grew.

And then there was the next big barrier, which was Samaria. Suddenly, that barrier meant absolutely nothing as Philip and the Christians scattered out of Jerusalem by the persecution of Paul, began to spill over into the hinterlands of Judea, and even across the border to the north into Samaria; and everywhere they went, everywhere they went, they were doing essentially one thing.

If you look at chapter 8, verse 1, the persecution begins as Saul is in hearty agreement with the stoning of Stephen. On that day, a great persecution, a bloodbath began against the church in Jerusalem. They were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria. They all went – scattered into Judea and Samaria, and verse 4 says everywhere they went when they were scattered, they went preaching the Word.

So the barrier is down in Samaria; and it's not because it was so popular the Samaritans invited them to come and preach the gospel, they went there under terrible persecution. And as a result of the persecution, the barriers to preaching the gospel in Samaria collapsed. That was really the second major step in the promise development of the church under the power of the Holy Spirit. Acts 1:8, "After that, the Holy Spirit has come upon you, you shall be witnesses unto Me in Jerusalem, and then in Judea and Samaria, and then the uttermost part of the earth."

So the next thing to fall is going to be the uttermost part of the earth. We've got to get beyond the Jews in Jerusalem – like the 120 – the Jews that are Hellenistic Jews from other parts of the ancient world. We've got to get beyond them into Samaria. By now we've seen that begin to happen. And the next stop is the uttermost part of the earth. So starting in verse 25, we have the first Gentile conversion. This is an individual from Ethiopia, Ethiopia – the foreigner, the alien.

The Samaritans were not tolerable to the Jews, they were not tolerable. The Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans, that was a very difficult barrier. In fact, the Jewish people as such, and the Jewish religion, had such distain for the Samaritans that they didn't evangelize them. They didn't even connect to them. They didn't speak with them.

But at least Samaritans had some kind of distant traditional, even racial link, because they were half-breed people of Jews who intermarried with pagans. But Ethiopians, representing the Gentiles, the nations of the world, had no connection at all historically. But here we find Philip being the

instrument of God for the salvation of an Ethiopian.

The infant church, then born in the upper room with 120 people, begins to develop and expand until it knocks down the barriers of Hellenism and knocks down the barriers of the Samaria a distance and disaffection. It knocks down now the barrier that was set up between the Jews and the Gentiles. We could say this is the Jonah wall that comes down, which had long been nurtured.

In this chapter, we see Philip as the instrument of God confronting, first of all, Simon in Samaria, and demonstrating what a false faith looks like. And now we find Philip confronting an Ethiopian eunuch and showing us what a true faith looks like.

Pick it up in verse 25: “So, when they had solemnly testified – ” after the account about Simon “ – when they had solemnly testified and spoken the Word of the Lord, they started back to Jerusalem, and were preaching the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans.”

Peter and John, who had come – you remember, the Holy Spirit had not come, even though people had believed, under the preaching of Philip – the Holy Spirit didn’t come until Peter and John arrived so the Jews would know that the same Holy Spirit fell upon the Samaritans that had fallen upon them on the Day of Pentecost. And there was repeating of the same phenomena and the presence of the same apostles who’d been there at Pentecost to make sure everybody knew the Jews and Samaritans were in the one church. Peter and John have come having heard about this amazing response by the Samaritans to the gospel. They come up to authenticate it, to lay an authoritative hand on it and validate it, and then go back and say it’s really happened as it has been told.

They leave; Philip stays. He stays in Samaria to continue the gospel work that he began there, which was now affirmed, validated, and approved by Peter and John, and with new energy. Why? Because now, and the purposes of God, the Holy Spirit has come on all those believers.

Now, as I told you last time, if you believe anytime past the early part of the books of Acts, if you believe at any point in time in redemptive history past that transition, the Spirit comes at the moment you believe. But in that early transitional period, it was important for the Holy Spirit’s coming to be attached to the presence of the apostles with the same kind of phenomenon that happened at Pentecost so all the barriers were broken down and everybody knew that all were one in Christ.

With the arrival now of the Holy Spirit, things really begin to happen. Philip is about to encounter an Ethiopian eunuch. This a great day for the church of Jesus Christ. This is the first time the church expands into what we could call the uttermost part of the earth.

Israel, as a nation, had always been called to be God’s missionary people. Israel had always been ordained to reach the nations, to tell the world about the true and living God, to tell the nations around it. But they sort of vacillated between a Jonah attitude of isolation and bitterness and animosity toward the nations around them to what you could call a kind of a Baal worshiping attitude, which was nothing but idolatry and compromise. It seemed like they were eager to shut out the nations or they were eager to suck up the nations and create some kind of synchronistic idolatry that God hated and brought judgment. But the one thing they wouldn’t do was evangelize the nations, which was what they had been called to do.

So the goal of God to reach the world through Israel hit a terrible stalemate, and God, in the church, cuts out a fresh channel, a new people, and sets Israel aside; and they're still set aside, even to this very hour. And they're not going to be back into the mainstream of taking the gospel to the world until you get to the future to the time of the tribulation when God saves 12,000 out of all the 12 tribes of Israel. You have 144,000 Jewish missionaries pouring out the gospel to the world, finally fulfilling what they were originally called to do. So the goal of God to reach the world was unfulfilled by God's allowance through the nation Israel.

But it now begins to unfold on a desert road initially with one person. And I remind you of what I often say: the kingdom of God advances one soul at a time. Right? Not in groups; not in nations. The kingdom of God advances one soul at a time.

Now as we look at this, we could just read the narrative. You could read the narrative yourself and it would be pretty straightforward. You can read the story, it's a wonderful story. I hope you will read it, even after we've kind of look at it a little tonight.

But as we read the story, I want to go a little beyond what you can read and let you know that this story in and of itself presents to us a picture of the elements and the components and the features in a saving faith. Everything you need to know is here by illustration, by implication. So I want to break the story down, and it runs to the end of the chapter. We'll go through it fairly quickly.

There are three categories that help us sort it out. There's the preparation in this encounter, that which is already in place before the encounter even begins; and then there is the presentation, how it is that Philip addresses this individual; and then there is the personal response, and that's just kind of a simple and somewhat universal perspective on any encounter, any gospel encounter. There is the preparation which is necessary, there is the presentation which is necessary, and then there is the correct personal response. As we look at those three headings, we're going to see the components of a faith that saves. Let's look at preparation first of all, all right, verse 26 through 29.

"But an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip saying, 'Get up and go south to the road that descends from Jerusalem to Gaza.' (This is a desert road). So he got up and went; and there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of Candace, Queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure; and he had come to Jerusalem to worship, and he was returning and sitting in his chariot and was reading the prophet Isaiah. Then the Spirit said to Philip, 'Go up and join the chariot.'" Now that's enough to let us know that this is a very well-designed and prepared encounter, and the one who is preparing this than none other than the Holy Spirit. So let's start there.

The proper preparation for salvation, for true salvation, begins with the sovereign work of the Spirit. It starts with divine preparation. It starts with God's Spirit preparing the soil, God's providential working.

Salvation is God's work, is it not? It is not man's work, it is God's work. It is initiated by God. It is a reflection of His will; no man seeks after God. The natural man is dead in trespasses and sin, ignorant, alienated from the life of God – hopeless, helpless, indifferent, disinterested. But what happens is by the purpose of God and the power of God, the glorious light of the gospel begins to shine into the darkness and it shatters the blindness, that is natural blindness, sinful blindness; and it shatters that second blindness, which is satanic blindness, the blindness that the god of this world

imposes on sinners. This is, at the very outset, the most important fact regarding salvation, that it has to be initiated by God.

We saw that powerfully demonstrated in Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus, did we not? That, "You must be born of the Spirit. You must be born from above," Jesus said to Nicodemus.

And when we ask, "How does that happen?" Jesus gives the answer: "The Spirit does what He wants, when He wants, to whom He wants, the way He wants, like the wind. You don't know where it's coming from, you don't know where it's going, and you have no control over it."

Salvation is, first of all, a sovereign work of God. God is the one who chooses, God is the one who calls, God is the one who activates the human heart. We don't aid the Holy Spirit in this. We don't aid God in this. We don't help God make a decision about this. Dead men have no recognition.

People who are blind in the darkness of sin and Satan can't see the truth, that's why in John 6:44, Jesus said, "No man comes unto Me unless the Father – " what " – draws him." The preaching of the cross is to those that perish – foolishness. So there is an absolute and utter incapacity and indifference on the part of an unregenerate sinner whether he's a Jew or a Gentile. Total incapacity of the unsaved to see, understand, feel, receive, or believe, has to be overcome by the Holy Spirit.

And, essentially, we know this is happening here because an angel of the Lord speaks to Philip and tells him to go directly to this individual who's a court official of Candace, Queen of Ethiopia, for the sake of the gospel. Here, in this case, we have an illustration. And here it's graphically laid out for us; whereas, in most cases in our lives, or in all cases, we have no idea that that is going on. But in this case, it is recorded for us that this was all the preparation of the Holy Spirit. Now on this occasion, the Holy Spirit used an angelic messenger and the orders are very specific to Philip: "Get up, go south to the road that descends from Jerusalem to Gaza. This is a desert road."

Gaza, or what today is called Gaza Strip – a city of the Philistines, by the way – it was given by Joshua to Judah. It was there at Gaza, you remember, that it was originally a fortified city on the road to Egypt.

In 96 BC it was totally destroyed; and although a new city was built a few miles away, the road to Egypt ran through, for centuries, an old fortress in ruins. So it really was a desert road, even at that time. It was much traveled, however, because there was a constant flow of people going from Jerusalem to Egypt and the other way around. They would go out of Jerusalem, through Bethlehem, down to Hebron, and over to Egypt.

So the Spirit commands Philip to go on that somewhat familiar road; and as he goes, he is instructed that he is to be obedient. And so he goes, verse 27: "He got up and went." All he knows is he's to go. And there was, providentially, an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of Candace, Queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure, and he had come to Jerusalem to worship.

So he's on his way toward Jerusalem, coming from Ethiopia, through Egypt, and up this very familiar road. This is the divine encounter that is prepared by the Holy Spirit. Philip didn't know that. He only knew to be obedient, he only knew to get on the road, and God would determine his purpose. We act, but the Spirit initiates. What a wonderfully, encouraging reality that is.

It is evident that God already had chosen this individual, this man. God had ordained him. God had written his name down in the Lamb's Book of Life, if you will, from before the foundation of the world, that the conversion of this eunuch was in the purpose and plan of God from eternity past, as is true of everyone who is saved. The salvation of this single sinner was the very clear purpose of God for Philip's trip reminding us that the salvation of a single sinner is worthy of the attention of God, and the dispatching of angels, and the action of the Holy Spirit.

Whenever a sinner is converted, we conclude that God chose that sinner, God formed a plan and a purpose, and brought about that sinner's salvation. And salvation doesn't happen to anyone unless they hear the truth about Christ, right? Whoever calls on the Lord can be saved. But how are they going to call on one they don't know? How are they going to know unless there's a preacher? How is there going to be a preacher unless somebody's sent? Somebody has to go and preach because faith comes by hearing the Word concerning Christ. We are all born of the Spirit because the Spirit is the divine regenerator who fulfills the Father's purpose, the Father's will, and brings to reality the Son's atoning work. So the faith that does save begins with the right preparation, which begins in the sovereign purposes of God and the work of the Holy Spirit.

The second is this: The submissive will of a servant. The submissive will of a servant. How are they going to hear without a preacher? How are they going to hear if somebody isn't sent? The Lord has chosen to do His work through human instruments, human instruments. God uses human tools. It was Peter on the Day of Pentecost, in chapter 2, who preached the gospel and 3,000 people were saved. Again, the gospel is preached in chapter 4 and 5,000 are saved. And then the gospel continues to be preached by Stephen

And it's always been that way. The apostles are everywhere preaching the gospel. The persecuted is scattered everywhere preaching the gospel. It's still that way today. People can't know the truth unless they hear the truth. Faith comes by hearing the truth. So the work of the Spirit has to be married to the submissive will of the servant. Somebody has to be the tool, and that is why, of course, the apostle Paul writes words to Timothy that are instructive for all of us, and we need to take them to heart. Listen to these words, 2 Timothy 2.

"Now in a large house, there are not only gold and silver vessels, but also vessels of wood and of earthenware, some to honor and some to dishonor. Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from these evil influences, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful to the Master, prepared for every good work." So you want to be a clean instrument. You want to be a useful vessel. That is a critical plan in God's gospel advance.

It didn't really appear, I guess in one sense, logical. Responsibility was large in a flourishing ministry in Samaria. People were believing the apostles had come; the Spirit was now there. There was new church, you might say. There was enthusiasm, excitement, and response to the truth. To drop everything and head down a desert road with no knowledge of where you were going and for what purpose might have seemed a bit strange, if not absurd. And with no particular destination in mind, it could be a very long and arduous journey.

But all God had to say was, "Go." All He had to say was, "Go," and verse 27 says, "Philip got up and went." That's enough. He got up and went. Even though it didn't appear sensible or logical, he

could have made an argument there were more important things where he was, he obeyed. And, of course, he ran into an Ethiopian eunuch who was a court official of Candace, Queen to the Ethiopians, in charge of her treasure, coming to Jerusalem to worship. He was returning and sitting in his chariot, and of all amazing things, was reading the prophet Isaiah.

And if you want to know how eager Philip was to do what he had been called to do, check out the command in verse 29: "The Spirit said to Philip, 'Go up and join the chariot.'" Verse 30, Philip did what? What did he do? He ran. There's no hesitancy, there's no reluctance. This is boldness.

And, by the way, if there's any characteristic of early church evangelism, it is boldness. You see that all the way back in the book of Acts in chapter 2 where they're boldly preaching the gospel to the hostile city of Jerusalem. You see it in chapter 4 where they preach the gospel. They preach Christ risen from the dead with boldness, even though they've been threatened with prison and already have been literally taken captive by the powers that be. But there is a boldness in the early church. There's an explosive boldness in the early church. God uses that boldness. Philip is a demonstration of that boldness.

So salvation preparation, what are the necessary elements of preparation? There's the sovereign work of the Spirit and the submissive will of the servant. Somebody has to go with the message. And then there's a third element and it's an obvious one. There's the searching of the sinner. There's the searching of the sinner.

Now we come to the individual. There's not going to be any real salvation take place unless the sinner is searching for that. And I say that to people all the time: You can't give the gospel to people who aren't interested in it. But I want you to notice down in verse 27 this Ethiopian eunuch is reading, verse 28, the prophet Isaiah.

Now Ethiopia – you think of Ethiopia as a country. Ethiopia is a term in biblical times for all Africa south of Egypt, through all those massive deserts. So we don't know exactly where he was from. It could have been anywhere south of Egypt. That term covers all portions of Northern Africa, massive Northern Africa. It would include Ethiopia, it would include Libya, it would probably stretch even beyond that. We really don't know where in particular it came from, but the kingdom of Ethiopia was massive in those days. A little bit of background on that.

The king of Ethiopia was venerated. He was so venerated that people thought that the king of Ethiopia was a child of the sun, that he was some kind of divine being; and it was determined that because he was a divine being, he was too sacred to work, he was too sacred to work. They couldn't see him demean himself by getting involved in the functions of secular royal leadership. So according to history, the duties of royalty were passed to the queen mother. While her son, the king, did nothing, she was responsible for everything. The name Candace is not a proper name, it's like Pharaoh. It's a feminine name for a queen mother. So this is the queen mother who's basically running things in the Ethiopian kingdom.

This man worked for her as she was doing the work of the king. He is a eunuch. He'd been castrated to serve in a harem. People in ancient times were castrated and served the king in the harem. Sometimes they served as priests in some pagan religious rites. Very common. Eunuchs were very common in ancient lands in pagan courts.

Now this man is not just another eunuch among many, he is the official chamberlain – that's an old English word you might remember from history – the man who is responsible for the treasury. This would be the CFO, the Chief Financial Officer of Ethiopia – trusted, respected, honored.

By the way, God has a dim view of this, castration. In fact, you can read it yourself. Deuteronomy 23:1 identifies God's attitude toward castration. And it was crystal clear that God forbid that, not only for its own sake because it is basically – it is abusing, it is maiming the image of God. But also, it was associated with paganism. This would be another way to prevent the Jews from engaging in pagan religion.

Now he's come to Jerusalem to worship. The best guess is that's a thousand miles, that's a thousand miles. Just imagine walking a thousand miles, or being carried a thousand miles, all the way to Jerusalem.

What do you have here? You have a searching heart. Something's going on in this individual because he's coming, he's coming to Jerusalem to worship. Somewhere along the road, he has heard about the God of Israel. Some Jews must have migrated into that area. We know they were in Egypt. We know there was a great rabbinical library in Alexandria, and it probably extended its influence and he had found out about the true God.

His answers, the answers to his heart questions weren't being answered in paganism. He wasn't getting the answers his heart was crying for. So he's going to make a thousand, some even say a twelve-hundred-mile trip. He's weary with his own gods; he's weary with the assorted elements of his own religion; he's weary with the loose morals of paganism; he weary with the suggestions of other nations. He's maybe wandered through various religious options. He's come to Judaism.

Some people think he may have been a proselyte. That would be a Gentile who actually was circumcised and joined Judaism. Maybe he took the law upon himself. Maybe he even found another group of Jews that he could be associated with and attended some kind of synagogue in Ethiopia; we don't know that.

Whether he was what they called a God-fearer, a Gentile who had converted to Judaism or not, we don't know. But he was certainly drawn to the God of Israel. He had it in his heart to know the God of Israel. He had come all the way to Jerusalem to worship the true God. He was empty, however. He was unfulfilled in his search. All he found, no doubt, in Judaism up to this point was ceremony, ritual, routine, cold formality; no answer to his searching heart.

So here's another component in issues in true salvation: a genuine hunger for the truth, a genuine hunger for the truth. That's a prerequisite: a desire for the truth, a longing for the truth. That's the beatitude, isn't it? "Blessed is the man who hungers after righteousness, who thirsts after righteousness, for he will be filled." God meets the heart that has been prompted to hunger and thirst in seeking, which is not natural to the sinner.

Second Chronicles we read this: "These are good things found in you in that you have taken away the idols out of the land and have prepared your heart to seek God. That's a good thing. You're weary with your idols, you're done with false religion, and now you're seeking God."



Second Chronicles 30: “The Lord God pardons everyone who prepares his heart to seek God.” Or 2 Chronicles 30, a couple of verses later, of Hezekiah: “To seek his God, he did with all his heart.” Or Psalm 119:2, “Blessed are they that seek Him with the whole heart.” Or Hosea 6:3, “You shall know if you follow on to know the Lord.” Or Jeremiah 29:13, “And you shall seek Me and find Me when you shall search for Me with all your heart.”

Or those wonderful words of John 7, in verse – I think it's verse 17: “If anyone is willing to do His will, he will know of the teaching whether it's of God or whether I speak from myself.” So a willing heart, a seeking heart, a hungry heart, a longing heart. Salvation comes to those who hunger for it. This man sought for salvation.

So what is the preparation for a true salvation? The sovereign work of the Spirit, the submissive will of the servant who will be God's instrument, and the searching worship of the sinner; and then it all culminates in a fourth, the scriptural Word of God, the scriptural Word of God. At this point, it's time for the Word of God, it's time for the Word of God. That puts all the pieces together. It all comes down to this, the truth; and he is reading the prophet Isaiah. And he's not just reading anywhere in the prophet Isaiah – and there are 66 chapters – he happens to be reading, according to verse 32, chapter 53.

We would probably agree that is the most important chapter in the whole book of Isaiah, and it is the presentation of the gospel. In fact, when we went through Isaiah 53, I called it the first gospel; Matthew is the second. All that is necessary with the preparation work of the Holy Spirit, with the ready willingness of the servant, and the searching heart of the sinner, all that is necessary is the Word of God, the Scripture. Maybe he picked up the scroll somewhere along the line, scrolls were around; but you only had a scroll if you were very, very wealthy. But this is a very wealthy individual and he's reading out loud, which was the traditional way you read, and he's reading Isaiah 53.

You can see the Holy Spirit working and preparing this servant, Philip; working and preparing the seeking heart of the sinner; and working and preparing that he got to the right scripture. He's reading the very best passage you could ever be reading. So there you have the preparation. What is necessary to prepare for someone to make a genuine response to Christ, sovereign work of the Spirit, submissive will of the servant, searching worship of the sinner, and the scriptural word? That's the preparation.

Now the presentation. Look at verse 30, the presentation: “Philip ran up, heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and said, ‘Do you understand what you are reading?’ And he said, ‘Well, how could I, unless someone guides me?’ And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

“Now the passage of Scripture which he was reading was this: ‘He was led as a sheep to slaughter and as a lamb before its shearers is silent, so He doesn't open His mouth. In humiliation His judgment was taken away. Who will relate His generation? For His life is removed from the earth.’

“And the eunuch answered Philip and said, ‘Please tell me, of whom does the prophet say this? Of himself or of someone else?’ Then Philip opened his mouth,” listen, “and beginning from,” what? Beginning from what? “The Scripture. He preached Jesus to him.”

Philip obeyed; Philip went. Everything was prepared by the providence of God. Philip ran eagerly up to this man, heard him reading Isaiah the prophet, verse 30, and asked him a simple question: “Do you understand what you’re reading?” And he said, “How could I, unless someone guides me?” And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

Simon wanted to power, right? This man wanted the truth. Simon was willing to pay money for the power. This man desperately wanted the truth. So here’s the first part of the presentation, the key to effective presentation: pointing people at the Scripture, pointing people at the Scripture; pointing their attention, their focus at the Scripture.

You say, “Well, hey, not everybody’s interested in that, and they don’t want to get bogged down in the Bible.” Huh. If they’re not interested in what the Scripture says, they’re not expressing a desperate hunger for salvation, because if the Holy Spirit is moving in their heart and is in the work of regeneration, the Spirit will drive them at the truth.

“I need to understand, but I don’t have anybody to guide me.” By the way, that’s the same word used in John 16:13 for what the Holy Spirit does. “The Holy Spirit will guide you into all truth.”

“I need somebody to explain this.” What do I see here? I see humility here; I see meekness here; I see a teachable attitude here. Psalm 25:9 says, “The meek, He will teach His way. The meek, He will teach His way.” In your presentation, look, you go right at the Scripture; and if there is no interest in the Scripture, if there’s no interest in the divine solution to the hungry heart, then you’d better wait for another day.

The passage he was reading, verses 32 and 33 was that great passage out of Isaiah 53, which describes the substitutionary atonement of Christ as He was led as the sacrificial Lamb of God to slaughter, silent, humiliated, not a fair trial, his life removed from the earth. He’s reading this, trying to figure out what this is, who this is. It’s a prophecy of the death of the Messiah.

The Holy Spirit had led him to that passage. The Holy Spirit had prepared his heart for an explanation of that passage, and the eunuch couldn’t understand it. “Tell me,” he says in verse 34, “who is he talking about? Himself? Is this about Isaiah? Who is this about? I don’t know who this about.” He was reading about the Suffering Servant. He was reading about the Messiah.

By the way, the Jews have referred Isaiah 53 to themselves as a nation, they are the suffering servant. Some Jewish commentators have referred it to Isaiah, he’s the suffering servant. Some of them have even said Isaiah is talking about Jeremiah, who was the suffering, weeping prophet. But throughout Jewish history, most scholars, most Jewish rabbis said it is Messiah, it is Messiah. While you only have verses 7 and 8 quoted here, but he’s reading the whole chapter and he’s saying, “Who is this?” And in verse 35, “Philip opened his mouth beginning from this Scripture, he preached Jesus to him, he preached Jesus to him.”

I don’t want to generalize off of the particular, but I don’t think I’m doing that. If someone is in the process of being brought to the knowledge of the gospel in a saving way, they will want to know about Jesus, they will want to know the Scripture, they will want to know about atonement.

Here’s the other side of it. He couldn’t go to a better place than Isaiah 53. Since none of the gospels

had been written yet, that really was the only place to go for the biography of Jesus. And Philip was ready. He preached, starting at that scripture. He preached Jesus to him.

This is the second part of the preparation. The Holy Spirit has to drive the sinner to the Scripture, so you as the servant of the Lord, if you're going to make the presentation, you drive the sinner to the Scripture. But here's the corollary: Once you get there, you've got to be able to explain. You've got to be able to explain it. This puts the burden on you.

He is truly an evangelist, Philip. He's called Philip the evangelist. He's truly an evangelist because here in a kind of a serendipitous, though divinely orchestrated encounter with this man, he is confronted with the need to completely explain to him Jesus, starting at Isaiah 53. And if I can just reach back to the beginning of the book of Acts, what marked the apostles after the resurrection and ascension of Christ was they understood the Old Testament.

So Philip is a believer in Jerusalem and he's under the apostles. It was the apostles who chose him for his position, who set him apart for his ministry. No doubt, he had sat under the apostles who had also taught him about Jesus from the law, the prophets, and the Holy Writings, just as he did on the Emmaus road to the two disciples. Took them back to the Old Testament and explained all the things concerning Himself.

Remember our series "Finding Christ in the Old Testament"? He was truly an evangelist. He could meet a man face-to-face who has his Scriptures open in front of him; and starting there, he could preach Jesus fully to him – complete evangelist.

In Samaria, he's preaching to crowds. He's preaching to crowds; he doing miracles. Large crowds are coming to him in the first half of the chapter. He can go from that to a one-on-one encounter and an explanation of Isaiah 53.

I say this to you from time-to-time and I just repeat it because it's absolutely true: I trust and pray that we are teaching you the Word of God in a way that allows you to learn it well enough to pass it on. You're not the end. This isn't all about you being the bucket and we dump all this in. But you're the funnel, you're the channel. It's got to go through you.

Peter put it this way: "Always be ready to give to every man an answer for the reason of the hope that is within you with meekness and fear." Wherever the question begins, start where they are and get them to Jesus. It just so happened that Isaiah 53 is a really good place to start. So we could say the second thing in the presentation – first, get them to the Scripture; secondly, get them to the Savior, get them to the Savior. He preached Jesus to him. He preached Jesus.

You remember when our Lord in John 15 was talking to the disciples in the upper room. He says, "When the Spirit comes, He will testify to you about Me. He will show you Me." It's about Jesus; it's about Jesus.

All the sermons in Acts – listen – all the sermons in Acts are about Jesus, crucified, risen, atonement salvation. All the sermons in Acts, that's the apostolic preaching of the cross that dominates the church, all of them. All are Spirit-energized testimony to the truth concerning Jesus Christ. You do have a few personal autobiographies: Paul, toward the end of the book.

Why is Paul giving his testimony? Because he is before a tribunal in which he is asked to account for his life, and so he explains that, "I was a persecutor of the church," whether he's talking to Agrippa or Festus or Felix, whoever it is in these tribunals, he explains what happened in his life. But, eventually, he gets to Jesus.

So I just might warn you a little bit: watch out for too much autobiography in your presentation of the gospel. Don't be too caught up in you because you're not the issue. It's wonderful what the Lord has done in your life, and you can affirm that and declare that. But a clear presentation of Christ is absolutely everything in gospel presentation.

That's what Paul did. Preach Christ; preach Christ; preach Christ. Preach Christ crucified. He says, "I went everywhere. I don't know anything among you except Christ and Him," what, "crucified. That's all I have to say." And, of course, he was mocked and laughed at because he didn't get in all the machinations of the orators of his day.

So point at the Scripture, point at the Savior. Thirdly, in the presentation: Point at salvation, point at salvation. Explain why He was a sheep led to slaughter, why He was the Lamb of God, why He was literally killed, His life was removed from the earth. Explain the doctrines of salvation. Go to the Scripture, go to the Savior, go to salvation.

You say, "Well, people might be offended." Fine. If they're offended at that point, then this isn't the time for their salvation. You can't sneak salvation in the side door, it's got to be the main purpose that is in the heart of the sinner.

Sometimes it happens like this. I was on a flight somewhere, coming across America, and a guy sat down next to me, and I had my New Testament, and he looked over at me and said, "You wouldn't know how I could have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, would you?" "Uh, yeah, as a matter of fact." Sometimes that happens; not very often.

Patricia will remember that story. I was kind of like this. They're not always going to be like that. But they have to be interested in the Scripture, and the Savior, and salvation from sin. That's what salvation is.

Philip even taught him baptism. Philip taught him baptism. How do you know that? Verse 36: "As they went along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, 'Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?'"

Well, what does that tell you? First of all, Philip probably had a jug of water, or he had a jug of water, so it wasn't going to be a sprinkling. There had to be a pool of water. Why is that significant? Because baptism signifies union with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection.

So he understood that. He understood baptism, which we've seen tonight. This demonstrates that the issue was salvation. True evangelism takes time to go to the Scripture, go to the Savior, go to the issues of salvation, teach the doctrines of salvation which encompass the substitutionary atonement of Jesus Christ and union with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection.

Now all that's left – final word – is a personal response at the end. Personal response? We saw some of it in verse 36. “Okay, I'm ready. Look! Water!” Joyous discovery. Why? They're in the desert. Do you think God misses anything?

How important is baptism? God allowed for this providential encounter in a place where there's no water except there. How important is baptism? That ought to give you a clue. Even when God providentially orders the process of salvation, He makes sure there's water.

So we could say three things demonstrate his immediate response: faith, faith. He's ready. “Look! Water! I want to be baptized. I want to be obedient.” Or you could say faith and obedience. Nothing is hindering him, nothing. “What prevents me? Is there anything that prevents me?”

I'll skip that verse 37 and I'll comment on it in a minute. Go to verse 38: “So he ordered the chariot to stop.” There's an interesting discussion of whether or not this chariot was being pulled by animals or this was one of those kind of carriage chairs that were on the backs of slaves.

But, anyway, it stopped, and they both went down into the water – again, immersion; Philip, as well as the eunuch – and he baptized him. First official baptism of somebody from the uttermost part of the earth. We're only in the 8th chapter of Acts, and the gospel has gone, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost part of the earth.

Now I'll comment about verse 37. That verse does not appear in any of the ancient manuscripts, any of the earliest; so it was added later. Maybe it was added because somebody felt it needed to be there, obviously; or it become a sort of baptism formula. Philip said, “If you believe with all your heart, you may.” He answered, “I believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God.”

Well, that's the formula. And you heard people confess that essentially, “Do you confess Jesus as Lord?” That has been the traditional baptismal formula. There's nothing wrong there; there's nothing untrue there. But in the most ancient manuscripts, that did not appear. But it can certainly be assumed he believed and he immediately demonstrated his faith by obedience.

So there is faith and there is obedience. This is the proof of a genuine faith. There's one other thing: “When they came up out of the water – ” I don't know how you can get sprinkling out of that. “When they come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away.”

Wow; whoa. What is that? That's a miracle, folks. You can read about that with Elijah and you can read about it with Ezekiel. But it's pretty rare. I can only think of Elijah and Ezekiel. “And all of a sudden, the Lord snatched Philip away.” He disappeared. He's gone.

You say, “Well, what about follow-up?” He's now in the hands of the Lord. “And the eunuch no longer saw him.” What does it say? “But he went on his way – ” wondering? He went on his way, what? There's the third element of a true salvation. There is faith, there is obedience, and there is joy, joy.

So Philip gets snatched away – this is time travel. This is the amazing leap from one place to

another without traversing the space in-between. Philip found himself at Azotus; and, certainly, the eunuch is scratching his head and saying, "This is a validation that I have just had an encounter with God."

He found himself at Azotus and he passed through and kept preaching the message, the gospel, to all the cities, until he came to Caesarea. The Lord relocated him in a miraculous way; really an astonishing reality. A miracle was a confirming sign, certainly to the eunuch, that God was truly in this; and God put him exactly where He wanted him to be.

Azotus was a New Testament title for the town of Ashdod. Do you remember Ashdod? Ashdod was a Philistine city where they took the ark. Ashdod, about 20 miles north of Gaza where this happened, halfway to Joppa. All of a sudden, he arrived there, and he preached in all the cities.

There were lots of cities. They're all listed back in 1 Samuel 5. There's Ekron, Jamnia – not all of them – but Ekron, Lydia, Joppa. By this time, there were cities with Greek names: Antipatris, Caesarea. Apparently, this was Philip's new headquarters for the preaching of the gospel. The Holy Spirit would take over the work with those that had come to salvation.

Irenaeus, the early Church Father says the eunuch became a missionary. I'm sure. I'm sure the eunuch became a missionary. And there are some sections of Africa in which historically, groups of Christians claim this eunuch as the founder of their church. That's tradition maybe. But, perhaps, the tradition grew because of a real influence from this man's life.

So these are components of a faith that saves, and I hope it's helpful to you, not only to see the story, but to see sort of in the story these elements; give you some direction and guidance in your own ministry. Let's pray.

Father, we are, again, in awe of Your Word and Your truth. Its consistency, its power, its clarity always thrills our hearts. Thank You. Thank You for the blessing it is to hold in our hands divine revelation. This is Your Word to us. Every word is true. Every word is pure, like silver refined seven times in a furnace.

Thank You for these models of early church encounters that are so instructive and helpful to us. Lord, may we be faithful like Philip was. May we be the instrument that You can use, the vessel unto honor, fit for Your use, ready for Your use. May You call from among us many missionaries, many preachers of the gospel, many gospel witnesses; and would You empower all of us to do that when we're given opportunity.

But, Lord, raise up people who will go to take the gospel to the ends of the earth. Put it on the hearts of many to give up the comforts and the ease of life here to go somewhere in the world and bring the gospel to those who desperately need to hear. Raise up many like Philip, many faithful missionaries to continue Your work, even in this day.

And bless our missionaries as they're scattered all over the globe. Bless the truth as it goes out through electronic means, through the Internet, books, CDs, radio, television. May Your gospel be spread continually across the earth so that there will always be a messenger to accomplish Your purpose.

There will always be, in some form or another, a Philip – someone who will speak the Word, or write the Word, or proclaim the Word by which You can do Your work of salvation. And, Lord, again, call many from this congregation to give their lives in that endeavor, we pray in Christ's name. Amen.

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