

“THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO PHILIP.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

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Scripture Texts: Acts 8:29-40

Prayer: Holy Father, on this Labor Day weekend there is important work to be done. The task at hand is to rightly divide and understand and apply your Word. By your Spirit’s presence and power give us wisdom and grace and much fruit for your glory. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Introduction.

An angel of the Lord had sent the deacon Philip out into the desert on the road from Jerusalem down to Gaza. He wasn’t told why.

Now the Spirit of the Lord tells him to go up to a chariot on the road. Again he is not told why or who is in it. Luke tells us it as a very important and highly placed official from the court of the Ethiopian Queen Candace. He was her CFO, in charge of her vast treasury.

His wealth is evident by the fact that he is riding in a chariot driven by servants and by the fact that he has in his possession a hand copied scroll of the book of Isaiah. Few people had such things, mainly only rabbis.

How can I understand unless someone guides me? 8:29-33.

Notice the Ethiopian’s response to Philip’s question. This is remarkable modesty and humility, especially from an important, high official, in a position of power and wealth. Philip is just a common man, and yet this official freely and openly acknowledges his ignorance. He isn’t puffed up, making much of himself.

Most of us feel some shame if any of our ignorance is exposed. We avoid spiritual things and spiritual conversations because we feel inadequate, ill equipped, embarrassed by our ignorance. Our pride keeps us ignorant, our pride keeps us from being teachable, from seeking out wisdom.

This man shows himself wise by seeking wisdom from Scripture. And he shows his reverence and respect for Scripture in admitting it contains things he doesn’t understand. God’s Word is a deep well, and no matter how long and how much we

drink from it, we never plumb the depths. God always has more to say to us and show us about His nature and His glory and His will.

Notice God doesn't send the angel to the Ethiopian, but Philip. God's ordained means of bring us the Gospel and teaching us the meaning of Scripture is through human servants. He does this to humble us. What if we avoided Sunday worship because we believed that if God wants us to know His Word, He will tell us directly, miraculously, not through some man, some preacher.

That's like a person who is sick saying they will only rely on prayer and a healing miracle directly from God, when God has sent down from heaven countless tools for our healing in doctors, medicine and counselors.

Who is wise today? Where is the one who humbly submits themselves and their lives and their family's to Scripture? Where is the one who is teachable, who is hungry and thirsty, who longs to read and dig and search and ask for understanding?

May our attitude be always like this mans.

Notice the personal providence of God to take such interest in this one man.

This foreigner happens to have a copy of the Isaiah scroll in Greek. God sends a deacon from the Greek speaking church in Jerusalem. Philip happens to appear next to his chariot just as he is reading Isaiah 53, one of the greatest chapters in the Bible, the suffering servant text, one of the most Messianic passages in all the OT.

God personally and purposefully sent Philip out of his way to this one man. This story shows us God's remarkable interest in one lost soul. Remember the parable of the 99 and the 1, the one lost sheep. Skeptics like to challenge Christians who say Jesus is the only way of salvation, by asking what about lost people in Africa who have never heard of Jesus, will they all go to hell?

The first problem with that objection is that Africa is more Christian than America and still growing. But, even so, this story shows us if there is one God-fearing, God-seeking, spiritually hungry soul anywhere on this planet, it is no work for God to bring the Gospel to them. If one of you deacons suddenly finds yourself in Africa, remember Philip.

I want us to see and be reminded of God's stunningly personal providence, of how God moves the events of history for His glory and our good.

Look how much trouble God went to for one pagan from Africa.
Look how God can and does send help in our time of need.

[God loves you, God has loved you from before the foundations of the earth. God rejoices over your salvation that He purchased with the blood of His own precious Son. And your salvation is cause for rejoicing, for humble gratitude for His grace that has found out you.

Who is this person the prophet speaks of? 8:34-35.

That is the great question. Who is being referred to in Isaiah 53? It is still the question. Modern Jews say it is Israel, not the Messiah. Just as Jews in the first century couldn't believe Jesus was the Messiah because of what He suffered, so they still don't.

Every Jew in Israel was expecting a triumphant Messiah, not a suffering Messiah. A suffering Messiah was unthinkable. Jesus was the first one to apply Isaiah 53 to himself. There's no better chapter in the Bible from which to preach the Gospel and he just happens to be reading it.

Philip recognizes the moment and seizes the opportunity.

No, this is not a prophet or just some other person, or an animal that makes atonement. This person is none other than the Messiah, the Son of God, Jesus Christ. An innocent victim, the unblemished Lamb of God.

Philip proclaimed the good news of Jesus to him (v. 35)—that "the Lord has laid on him the iniquities of us all" (Isaiah 53:6) and that we are set right with God through his death and resurrection (Isaiah 53:4–5, 11–12).

The Son of God of His own free will was afflicted and suffered and died for the forgiveness of all our sins once and for all. This passage shows how the wrath of God can be appeased and we can be reconciled to a holy God and set free from sin and receive righteousness that is not our own.

All of us should be able to share the good news about Jesus in a few minutes, His incarnation, His suffering, death, resurrection, and why it matters and what difference it has made in our lives.

Our Associate Pastor Search Team is preparing questions for the potential candidates. One of them will be what is the Gospel and can you share it in a couple of minutes.

Philip baptizes the Ethiopian, 8:36-40.

By the grace of the Holy Spirit at work in this man's heart, this Ethiopian believes the Gospel immediately, understands the implications and desires to be baptized. He hears the Scripture explained and believes.

In the further providence of God they happen to be passing by some water in the desert.

It is clear how fruitful Philip's witness was when the man wants to submit his life to Jesus with an outward sign and profession of his faith. He didn't just believe inwardly, he wanted to profess his faith outwardly.

This is evidence that Philip said much more since the Ethiopian knew to be baptized. Something along the lines of what Peter said on the day of Pentecost. And it is evident this man must have given Philip some clear indication of his faith in Jesus.

Acts 2:37-39 Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" 38 And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself."

The Ethiopian went on his way rejoicing in his new found cause to worship God, evidence he was filled with the Holy Spirit, the fruit of which is joy.

Implications and applications.

First, have God's heart for missions and evangelism.

We see what God thinks about missions and evangelism when we compare and contrast this story with the previous one about Philip's evangelism among the Samaritans.

God cares about the 99 (Samaria) and the 1 (Ethiopian).

The Samaritans were a mixed race, half-Gentile and half Jewish.

The Ethiopian was a black African Gentile.

The Samaritans were common ordinary citizens.

The Ethiopian was a distinguished high ranking official in government.
The Samaritans took issue with parts of the OT, especially the prophets and Isaiah.
The Ethiopian was reading the prophets with reverence.
The Samaritans has been taken in by Simon the Magician, they were gullible and easily swayed.
The Ethiopian was a thoughtful seeker of truth, a God fearer.

But notice Philip's method of witnessing. Whether to a large audience in Samaria or privately with one person, he proclaimed the same message, the good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, His coming, His suffering, His death and resurrection, His forgiveness of sin.

And in both situations the response was the same, the hearers believed and were baptized and were filled with much joy. There is one Gospel and it is the source of true joy.

God has been doing this same sort of thing all over the world all the time. Amazing coincidences, incredible timing of events. In mass evangelism events and one on one.

This story should take away the fear of sharing the good news. God is in complete control all along the way, we don't have to worry about how we do, just be available and do it. If the Spirit prompts you, trust Him and respond.

The world already thinks you are crazy, so don't worry about what they will think of you if you share the gospel of Jesus.

Pray for someone near, close, and for the Hausa, far away.

How is God orchestrating bringing the Gospel to the unreached Hausa people? By starting a movement of prayer, by getting people half way around the world to pray.

Second, have the Ethiopian's heart for God and for God's Word.

Seek and pursue wisdom and knowledge, avail yourself of the opportunities around you.

Next Sunday starts a new year of learning opportunities. SS, youth groups, Bible Studies. We have a great adult class to help parents and grandparents and all of us pass on the faith in this post-Christian culture.

Zach W will be teaching the HS catechism class. Pray for him.

MOPS starts a week from Tuesday. Thursday evening Bible Studies for men and women are on opposite Thursdays so those with children can cover the bases. Women sign up and get your book on the table in the narthex. Men in a month, if you haven't been, plan to come.

Read Scripture. For those following the Bible Reading plan this month happens to be the book of Isaiah. It is 66 chapters so if you read 2 or 3 chapters a day you will get through. Approach God's Word the way the Ethiopian did and see if God will not meet you in it.

As we start a new church year together, lets recommit ourselves to Scripture and prayer. Make these divine appointments and God will meet us there, and lead us and guide us. Follow the Ethiopian's example.

There is so much here that is beyond our own finite understandings to grasp that we should all see ourselves as students, as those needing instruction, and we should all ask for wisdom as we read and as we listen, ask for help from the Holy Spirit and ask for help from those who know more than us.

Third, have the Ethiopian's joy.

What is that about? What is it grounded in?

What is our joy and happiness grounded in? Often we are not much different than the world in this regard. We are happy when everything is going well, when things are good, when we are free from problems and trials and pain.

But this Ethiopian's life wasn't all perfect and wonderful. It would appear he had a good job and some means, but the wealth that surrounded him wasn't his. Furthermore, he was denied the possibility of having a family, of marriage and children. So not that joy.

And he lived in a pagan environment. He had to travel over 500 miles just to go to church with likeminded believers.

What was the source of his joy? Not that life was good or he had the world by the tail, but that God was good and had sent him help. He heard the gospel, the Spirit enabled him to have faith in Jesus, he was filled with the Holy Spirit, he was baptized into the church of Jesus Christ, adopted by the Father, forgiven all his sins, and given the hope and promise of life eternal.

This is cause for joy, this is cause for worship, this is cause for rejoicing no matter how hard or disappointing this short time on earth is. Our fleeting hardships are preparing for us an eternal weight of glory that will far exceed them all (II Corinthians 4:18).

We have been lifted us from the empty joys of this life and this world into the spiritual joys that are eternal and unchanging. Jesus is our joy. Is not joy the true mark of a Christian?

Fourth, Is God pursuing you?

What are these verse here for? What does Luke want us to see? Salvation belongs to our God. He is spreading His Gospel everywhere. He always has and He still is. He is not done saving people.

Is He pursuing you, sending messages, trying to get your attention, convicting you of sin?

An English poet by the name of Frances Thompson wrote a poem in 1893, The Hound of Heaven.

G. K. Chesterton said, "it is the most magnificent poem ever written in English," to which J.R.R. Tolkien responded by saying Chesterton was not giving the poem the credit it deserves.

Thompson suffered from depression and lived a life of drug addiction (opioids) and poverty and homelessness. In this poem he describes God's relentless pursuit of him.

He hears God's footsteps and God's voice, but he is afraid to give up worldly things. The happiness and pleasure that he sought and pursued and ran hard after, was behind him the whole time pursuing him.

Lost people are a great value to God. Jesus told not one but three parables about pursuing what was lost. Do we truly understand the lengths He is willing to go to so we might be reconciled to Him?

If you are running from God, if you are resisting God, if you are trying hard to ignore God. If you think surrendering to God and love and following God will mean a dull life of joyless duties or hardships, know this, you are avoiding your true joy and happiness.

And if it seems like God is making your life miserable and taking things away from you or denying you what you think is good, just know this. He isn't doing that to make your life miserable, He is doing it so that you will turn and find all those things in Him.

God calls people out of the darkest places and out of the most secular and sinful places.

Acts 9 will be the salvation of a hard-hearted Pharisee.

Acts 10 will be the salvation of a Gentile Roman military officer.

Is God pursuing you? Is God calling you to pursue someone who is lost?

Considered what God may be orchestrating on your behalf, what He is doing in your life right now? Now take all these things to heart, believe and go on your way rejoicing.