

“PHILIP’S DIVINE APPOINTMENT.”

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Scripture Texts: Acts 8:26-40

Prayer: Holy Father, your Word says that Scripture is able to make us “wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. 16 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” By your Spirit, may all of that be true and happen for us here with morning. Make this a divine appointment, for Jesus sake, Amen.

Introduction.

I wonder if Philip was surprised by all the things God did through him. Back in chapter six of Acts he was just helping hand out alms to widows, waiting on tables as the apostles called it. He had just be elected a deacon in his church. It was a nice job, pretty easy, not a big deal, not to demanding.

You know how some people think about deacons. They are sort of junior elders, they are the lower tier of spiritual leaders. Deacons is for the younger men, those starting out, like apprentices.

But clearly God doesn’t look at it that way. Deacons are spiritual leaders gifted and equipped for important spiritual work. There is nothing second class about it. There are different roles and responsibilities, just as there are differences between men and women, husbands and wives, pastors and lay people. We should celebrate and honor the differences without ever slipping into suggesting one is better.

In chapter 8 of Acts Philip has been used of God with great power and influence. Philip is the one who spreads the Gospel to Samaria and to Africa.

He wasn’t an apostle, he wasn’t a professional evangelist, but God doesn’t just use pros. By His Spirit’s power and gifts, God can and will and wants to use every one of us for His glory and the blessing of others. Be open, be willing, be ready. Don’t despise the gifts he has given you. God loves to glorify Himself through what seems weak and foolish. Pray and ask Him to use you.

Philip meets the Ethiopian, 8:27-29.

One day, out of the blue, without prior warning, an angel from heaven came to Philip and said, “Head south toward Gaza.”

Let me stop right there and ask you if you believe that really happened. Do you believe a real angel from a real heaven, an angel of the Lord who is in heaven, came to a man on earth and spoke to him and told him to go to such and such a place?

If you really believe that you are at odds with a huge part of our culture and our world. We live in a culture and world that believes less and less in the supernatural. Our culture believes in secular humanism and scientific materialism.

Secular humanism says man is the beginning and end, all there is. Human reason can explain everything and there is no need for God. The future is in human hands.

Scientific materialism says the physical, material universe is all there is, it is a closed system. What you see is what you get. There is nothing supernatural beyond the observable universe. Everything must be subject to the scientific method of observation and proof.

Everything that is came about by chance, accidentally without any foreordained plan or purpose. Through a staggering process of random and accidental evolution the human being with his human reason is the highest form and power.

These views dominate education, what we are taught in history, science and ethics. These views dominate the universities of our country, they dominate politics and the media, it's the mantra of every museum you walk into. In other words, the world believes a lie and is in the grips of a false worldview.

If you believe an angel came down and spoke to Philip and told him what to do, you are a radical and frankly will be viewed as subversive.

Christians are people “who look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are

unseen are eternal” (II Corinthians 4:18). This is not man’s world, this is God’s world. “In the beginning God created.”

We believe in angels. Jesus said:

Matthew 18:10 See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven.

Hebrews 1:14 Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?

Not only is there an invisible, spiritual realm but it has two parts, a good part and a bad part. There is a real heaven and a real hell.

We believe you cannot begin to understand this world of ours and all that happens in it without understanding there is a great spiritual conflict between the forces of God and of Satan. This is the only way to understand what has been happening in all of human history.

We live in a world controlled by God in which God speaks and acts. God is above us, around us, before us, behind us. He knows all things and rules over and sustains all things.

“Head south toward Gaza.” A divine interruption is about to become a divine appointment.

Philip had a great thing going in Samaria, the whole area was responding to the Gospel, hundreds are responding to the Gospel. The evil practices of Simon the Magician had been shut down and suddenly God sends him off into the desert. In other words, to the middle of nowhere.

Notice God tells Philip to do something without telling him why. That is a common way for God to deal with us. Like when God called Abraham out of the Ur of the Chaldees. Why does God do that? One reason is to test our obedience.

This is a hard lesson for all of us, from young children to the oldest of us. Our default is to question, to ask why, to want to know the reasons before we commit, before we decide if we are going to obey.

God says sex is His good gift to be protected within marriage between one man and one woman. But we say why, we say that is old fashion, we say we want to do it our way, we say what difference does it make if we are going to get married someday. And we don't obey and find out the wisdom of God's reasons and ways.

God says flee from all sexual immorality and worldly lusts and passions. But we say why, we say it won't hurt anyone or us, it feels good, we like it.

God says bring at least a tenth of all He gives us into the storehouse of His church. We say why, we say that's too much, we say we will when we have more, we say we don't like how some of it is being spent, we say we want to do what we want. And we wonder why our lives don't go as well as we hoped.

God says to seek Him in His Word and in prayer. We say we don't have time, life is too busy, we are too tired. And we don't obey and wonder why we feel spiritual dry, disconnected from God and don't seem to have His direction.

I am reminded of the story of a man who was out in a field with his young son. When he looked up, he saw his son had wandered out onto the dirt road. He yelled at his son to lie down now. He did just as a tractor drove over him. He was unhurt because he obeyed immediately, if he had said but why dad, he would have been hit.

Obedience saved his life and it saves ours. This is why discipling our children and training them to obey is so crucial, even lifesaving. The home is where they learn how to obey God.

God is God, perfect, wise and infinitely good. He cannot command anything in His Word to us that is not for our good. We can obey without questioning and know that the promises of God will all work for our good.

Now there might be someone who will object and say that it would be a lot easier to obey if God would ***send an angel down from heaven*** and make it really plain what He wants us to do. Sort of like the Jews who demanded a sign from heaven.

God's answer to that is "I have given you my Word." Everything that He requires of us, everything He wants to say to us is right here, written down for

us. It is our slothfulness and neglect that keep us from knowing what to do and doing it and knowing the joy of obedience.

Let us all humble ourselves before the eternally wise and good God and submit and obey His commands even if His reasons don't make sense to us in the moment.

This Ethiopian was an important official in the court of the queen, in charge of her treasury. And that was no small thing, for we know from ancient history that at this time Ethiopia was a kingdom of magnificent power and splendor and wealth.

Most people traveled on foot, those with some means might travel by donkey, the wealthy traveled by chariot.

We have reason to believe he is a God-fearer, and a Gentile convert to Judaism. This Ethiopian had gone to Jerusalem to worship and was on his long journey home.

God tells Philip to go to that chariot. Again, He doesn't say why, or who is in it, just go up to it.

The purposes of God will always seem strange to us as long as He doesn't show us the whole picture. We only see a few pieces of the puzzle, He has the whole thing in view. To Philip this might all seem very pointless.

At this point Philip learns what we will all learn if we submit to God and obey Him. We will eventually discover the good reasons God has for all He says, and it will turn out to be good.

God is a God of chance meetings, coincidences, happenstances; of it just so happened encounters, divine appointments.

When we think about the doctrine of the providence of God, we often think of it in huge terms, God's providence over creation or history, over salvation. But notice how personal God's providence is. God sees a man in spiritual need, and God cares and sends help. God's providence reaches down to the smallest detail, down to the timing of Philip being on the right road at just the right moment to walk up to a chariot where at just that instant a man is reading just the right specific verses in Isaiah.

Divine appointments can change the course of history, and they can change the course of our lives or someone else's life. Think of the Samaritan woman at the well with Jesus. Think of the lame beggar at the gate with Peter and John. In Acts 9 there will be a mother of all divine encounters with Paul.

This is an open universe, filled with angels, filled with the Spirit of God, filled with spiritual purposes. This is God's world and He has plans and purposes for everything in it and for each of us, and how He intends for us to be a part of His providential purposes.

They happen in every imaginable way. Sometimes an angel unawares. Sometimes in life's inconveniences. Inconveniences to us are divine purposes. It may seem to us that our day was ruined, totally changed, but not in God's appointment book.

It sure seemed like Philip's life was one interruption after another. Persecution breaks out, suffering, pain, heartache. What is God doing? This doesn't make sense. And then things start to make sense in Samaria and start going great. Then an angel shows up and tells him to leave.

Crazy stuff like this happens all the time.

Too often we forget and live like the world lives, that this world is all there is, and we are the captains of our souls and the masters of our fate. But this story should be a great comfort to us, that there is a great God with a great and good purpose, and we are part of it. He is running the universe and our lives and has everything well in hand. Does that comfort you? Does that give you a picture of the kind of Father God running the universe and our lives?

We are at the start of a new church year together, let's recommit ourselves to divine appointments with God in Scripture and prayer and worship. And let's commit ourselves to keeping our eyes and hearts open for divine appointments. Pray and ask God to give you one this week. Make these divine appointments and God will meet us there and lead us and guide us. Join us this evening for prayer as we begin the year seeking Him.