

Obedience To God's Leading

Introduction

So far in the Acts of the Apostles, we have seen mass conversions. We witnessed through God's Word at the day of Pentecost over 3000 souls were saved. We have read of crowds converted as the Apostles preached and performed signs and wonders. Philip goes to the land of Samaria and a great number paid attention to what he said concerning the Kingdom of God and Jesus the Messiah, the people believed and were saved. This was a time of blessing on the young church. From last week's story of Philip, it appears that the revival in Samaria was still growing and Philip was an important part of this, being the chief evangelist. Peter and John had been sent to inspect the work, but they had then gone back to Jerusalem to report to the other Apostles and the church. Philip was key to the advancement of the church in Samara. Yet, it was at precisely this moment when God called him to leave the area. Today's passage shifts, it is about the conversion of one man, not masses of people.

Last week it seemed like Philip was the 1st century Billy Graham, preaching to hundreds, if not thousands. Most of us are not called to preach at great evangelistic crusades, but here in our passage today there is something for all the rest of us. We are all called to do personal evangelism. In fact, just as surely as God called Philip to go down to Gaza, He calls us to go to the people in our lives, to those we meet as we travel through this life and speak the Gospel to them. So, if

you ever thought you are not gifted with the ability to preach to massive crowds, do not fret this day's passage is from God for you.

This scripture passage shows how the general movement of the Gospel to the ends of the earth can begin with one person. How a Gentile African who was traveling back to Ethiopia after coming to Jerusalem to worship was the beginning of the Gospel coming to East Africa. Most scholars place this man in a category of a Gentile proselyte; that is one who is not Jewish but had an interest in the God of Judaism. This Gentile meets a Jew converted to Christianity following the leading of God's Spirit; this morning we will study what God does with Philip's obedience.

My beloved, here is a key thought to take away this morning and live out in your life. **We live in a busy and noisy world and just as Philip was able to listen to God amid the chaos of the crowds, we too, must learn to filter out the world in order to open our hearts to the Holy Spirit's leading, listen intently and obey as He directs us.**

We sometimes struggle with the fact that we may not know all the details of God's plans. What I mean is that here in this passage, Philip was simply given the very first step of his mission and that was it. Go down to the road that connects Jerusalem and Gaza. That is all he is instructed to do and he obeys God without knowing the end result. God will at times place a thought He wants us to act on but we think it is just our own daydream or fleeting thought when in fact it is God and we must not quench the Holy Spirit but act in obedience, even if we do not see where it will lead or end up.

Notice with me just how many times God gets things started here in this passage. God is the First Mover always in the salvation of anyone and it is no different here in this text. Also, notice that Philip was obedient to God as he was

being led step by step. Step one, God's angel messenger said go down to the road and Philip went. Step two, God the Holy Spirit said go up the chariot and Philip obeyed. God had prepared the heart of the Ethiopian to seek answers to what he read from Isaiah. God provided the water in the desert for the Ethiopian's baptism. God is in control and has a purpose, even if we do not see the end result when we take the first step.

God Leads and Philip Obeys (vs.26-28)

The first thing I want us to notice is that God was leading Philip every step of the way. Reading at verse 26, “Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” This is a desert place.²⁷ And he rose and went. And there was an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians (*Candace is not a person's name, but the title, meaning, Queen Mother and first century Ethiopia encompassed present day Ethiopia and Sudan*), who was in charge of all her treasure. He had come to Jerusalem to worship²⁸ and was returning, seated in his chariot, and he was reading the prophet Isaiah.” For Philip, God was just giving him one step at a time. Step one: “Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” Philip traveled 35 miles to Jerusalem and begins his journey on the road to Gaza. At this point, Philip does not even know why he is to go. What I want us to comprehend is that God may also lead us step by step, we do not have to see the finish line. When Philip reached Jerusalem, he took the road to Gaza that led to “a desert place.” Philip then traveled about another 30 miles on the road to Gaza until he met the Ethiopian. So, Philip had walked about 65 miles, which would have 3 to 5 days, before he had a clue what God was doing - but he was obedient.

As I read this passage and studied, I was reminded of how God led Abraham out of his homeland, let me read from Genesis chapter 12, “Now the LORD said to Abram, ‘Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. *God did not tell Abram where the land was – God said go.* ² And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.’ *All the families of the earth – God is announcing His plan for the Gospel to go all the people.* ⁵ When they came to the land of Canaan ... ⁷ Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, ‘To your offspring I will give this land. So he built there an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him.’ (Genesis 12:1-7) Abram journeyed not knowing where he was going and what the result would be. He was obedient and God said to Abram when he arrived “To your offspring I will give this land”.
(v. 7) Obedience to God leads to blessing.

So, Philip, like Abram, is obedient to the leading of God through the angel of the Lord. A number of times in the Book of Acts, Luke writes of angels sent by God, working in cooperation with the Holy Spirit. So, Philip journeyed until he meets this Ethiopian eunuch. Here we see the beginning - the Gospel will now not only cross cultural and political boundaries, but will begin to span ethnic people groups and other languages. The Ethiopian comes from northeast Africa. He is one who is in charge of the queen’s treasury and because he works closely with the queen and her court, he is a eunuch. This man is wealthy and at some point, he became a believer in the Jewish God and sought to find out more. I asked myself, how would an Ethiopian know of the Jewish God? Let’s turn back the calendar 1000 years. “Now when the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the LORD, she came to test him with hard questions. ² She

came to Jerusalem with a very great retinue, with camels bearing spices and very much gold and precious stones. And when she came to Solomon, she told him all that was on her mind.” (1 Kings 10:1-2) The queen of Sheba was from Ethiopia and traveled many miles to find King Solomon and his God. How she heard of Solomon I do not know, maybe she heard of him from traders as they traveled. When the queen returned to her homeland, she would have taken with her the writings of the Jewish religion which at that time would have included the first 9 books of the Old Testament. For a thousand years people would have been reading the Word of God in Ethiopia. Now a eunuch wants to know more.

However, this eunuch may have been disappointed after traveling for months to worship in the House of God when he arrived in Jerusalem, because as a eunuch, he was denied access to the temple. We know this because according to Deuteronomy, eunuchs were denied access to the assembly of God, “No one whose testicles are crushed or whose male organ is cut off shall enter the assembly of the LORD.” (Deuteronomy 23:1) He was seeking God, so he travels to the House of God and was denied entrance to where he had been told God resided on earth.

In verse 28 we read he is on his way back to Ethiopia from Jerusalem, which was a 4 to 5-month trip each way. Upon his return he will have influence with the queen, her court and the people. The result was many of the people of northeast Africa came to the Lord as we will discover shortly.

Here is a man who is not Jewish but a Gentile Ethiopian. He is also unclean by the fact that he is a eunuch. The people of Ethiopia were the descendants of Ham and Nimrod, and therefore a cursed people. Yet God in His mercy sends Philip away from evangelizing the masses, where hundreds were being saved to visit this one man, a Gentile, a eunuch, a descendant of Ham, traveling back to his

home after being denied entry to the temple to worship of the One true God. The actions of God towards this man gives hope for all fallen and sinful people, this is evidence of God giving faith to all people groups and even to me a Gentile sinner, I am humbled by God who sought me out, just like the eunuch and saved me.

God Leads With Purpose (vs. 29-34)

Now we arrive at step two in Philip's journey of obedience. Reading Acts chapter 8, at verse 29, "And the Spirit said to Philip, 'Go over and join this chariot.'³⁰ So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, 'Do you understand what you are reading?'³¹ And he said, 'How can I, unless someone guides me?' And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.³² Now the passage of the Scripture that he was reading was this: 'Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter and like a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he opens not his mouth.'³³ In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth.'^(Isaiah 53:7-8)³⁴ And the eunuch said to Philip, 'About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?'"

The Holy Spirit directs Philip to, "Go over and join this chariot". God knew exactly when to send Philip and he arrives at just the right time. Philip's response is to embrace the Spirit's command, so he runs to the chariot. He hears the man from Ethiopia reading the Scroll of Isaiah. Not just any place in Isaiah but Isaiah chapter 53 that foretells of Jesus the Messiah, the Savior! There is no way that he just happened to be traveling along reading Isaiah chapter 53. God had orchestrated these events and guided him to read Isaiah and brought Philip at just that moment – everything was as God determined. As Philip approached, he heard, "Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter and like a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he opens

not his mouth. ³³ In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth.” (Isaiah 53:7-8) The thrust of this section in Isaiah is the innocence of Jesus Christ and the wickedness of mankind. It begs the question what type of generation could kill such an innocent man? Answer; A wicked generation. What a perfect opening for Philip to present the Gospel. Now, the Ethiopian asks the perfect question, “The eunuch said to Philip, ‘About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?’” Philip’s response was it is about someone else, let me tell you about Jesus!

I can imagine the joy of Philip as he considers the power of God, putting him in the right place and the right time – I have experienced this also - Oh, what a God we serve! I have no doubt of Philip’s excitement as he began sharing the Gospel. God led him straight to this man. God was working in Philip’s life and no doubt working in the heart of the Ethiopian. My beloved, if you open your heart to God’s calling and direction, you too, will experience this wonderment of God! You will have the thrill of God using you to bring a soul to Christ.

Philip Leads The Ethiopian To Christ (vs. 35-40)

God does not need to tell Philip what to do next. Philip opens his mouth and out of his heart comes the Gospel. Reading at verse 35, “Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus. ³⁶ And as they were going along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, “See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?” *³⁸ And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. ³⁹ And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away about 15 miles to the west, and the eunuch

saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing.⁴⁰ But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through he preached the gospel to all the towns until he came to Caesarea. The Holy Spirit carried Philip away and he traveled about 60 miles from the province of Judea to the province of Samaria and he preached the Gospel of Christ the whole way.

* Verse 37 is absent in most translations. It is believed it was added at a later date.

“Then Philip said, ‘If you believe with all your heart, you may.’” (NKJV)

The scripture passage tells us Philip starts with the Isaiah text and explains who Jesus is and what He accomplished. He no doubt tells this man that he is a sinner in need of forgiveness. He no doubt explains how God through His mercy and grace has made forgiveness possible through the death and resurrection of Christ. All this Philip shared with the Ethiopian as they traveled until God again brings them to where He ordained. Once Philip was done leading the man to accept Christ as his Savior and Lord, they find themselves having arrived at a body of water – in the desert!

I can sense and I hope you can sense the joy in the Ethiopian. He believes and looks up and with excitement says, “See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?” A few verses earlier told us they were in a desert region, where water was scarce. Was it a spring or a miracle of God? I cannot answer but I wonder, either way, it was God ordained.

Here was a man who by all intents and purposes should not have been saved. He was from a cursed ethnic group. He was not Jewish, he was a eunuch, denied access to the temple, he was on a lonely desert road heading back to a pagan land - but God had placed His affection upon him. God was and as He

always is, the Prime Mover, it was God who made all this happened just as He had determined.

Now from Jerusalem to Addis Ababa, the capitol of Ethiopia is a little over 2400 miles, a 4 to 5-month journey through the desert. The Sinai Peninsula and Sudan are truly desert, as I can attest to having worked there. We read in verse 39, “And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing.” Now, that the Spirit of God lived within him, the eunuch would be able to grow in his faith over the months of travel preparing him to share the Gospel with his people.

I am not sure, we are not told, but I have to think this man kept reading Isaiah and perhaps other books of the completed Old Testament, where God through His Spirit revealed Jesus more and more, and with faith given - he rejoiced. If he continued in Isaiah, which I believe he would have, when he got to chapter 56, he would have read this wonderful passage, ³“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.’ ⁴For thus says the LORD: ‘To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose the things that please me and hold fast my covenant, ⁵I 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) This would have caused him to stop the chariot again and let out another shout of praise to the God who saves!

Tradition has it that this man returned home and shared the Gospel and many in that land became followers of Jesus Christ. Today Ethiopia statics report 68% of its population is Christian and there is a Jewish population of over 200,000 that are recognized by Israel as both Jewish and ethic Ethiopians, they are referred to as

Beta Israel or House of Israel. Here is Acts 1:8 lived out, as commanded by Jesus, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” All believers, including you and me, have received the Holy Spirit, so like Philip, like the Ethiopian and believers all through the ages, God commands us to “Go” and take the Gospel to the world! Are you obediently sharing the Gospel with the lost?

My beloved, do you not find it absolutely amazing to see how God works? How God began arranging for Philip to meet the Ethiopian over a 1000 years earlier with the queen of Sheba. Here is an account of the Gospel coming to one foreigner and then of him taking it back home where the Gospel continues to spread to this very day.

So, I return to where I started, my beloved, we live in a busy and noisy world and just as Philip was able to listen to God amid the crowds, we too, must learn to filter out the world in order to open our hearts to the Holy Spirit’s leading, listen and obey as He directs.

Let me close with a passage the Ethiopian may very well have read during his journey home and we should also be encouraged by and this is also my benediction to all of you, my beloved, as you leave here today. I read Psalm 67, “May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us, *Selah*² that your way may be known on earth, your saving power among all nations.³ Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you!⁴ Let the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you judge the peoples with equity and guide the nations upon earth. *Selah*⁵ Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise

you! ⁶The earth has yielded its increase; God, our God, shall bless us. ⁷God shall bless us; let all the ends of the earth fear him!” Amen!