

“Ethiopian Eunuch”

Acts 8:26-40

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Introduction:

Probably most of us here this morning are familiar with the “Adopt-a-Highway” program, where organizations are able to volunteer to clean a section of highway several times during the summer. I participated in the program down in Illinois, when I was in high school, and I remember it being a lot of work—a major pain would be more like it—but it was an interesting experience. Just a few weeks ago, when we were traveling up to Owatonna, Minnesota, we had been driving for more than four hours, we were on Highway 14, and just a few miles outside of town, we suddenly saw an “Adopt-a-Highway” sign that said, “Owatonna Church of Christ.” It was good to see, and it was a reminder that the church up there is active in the community.

This morning, though, I would like for us to think back to **Acts 8** and an assignment that was given to a gospel preacher when he was sent by an angel to a certain highway. We know, of course, that he was not there to pick up trash, but he was there for a very specific reason. And the reason goes back to the scripture that was read this morning—a prophecy from the Old Testament book of **Zephaniah**. More than 600 years before Christ, God prophesied that, **“From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia My worshipers, My dispersed ones, will bring My offerings” (Zephaniah 3:10)**. God loved the world so much that He sent His only Son, and now God is demonstrating that love yet again by sending a gospel preacher with a message to a man from Ethiopia riding along a deserted road in a chariot. ****PPT****
If you will, please look with me at **Acts 8:26-40**...

26 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.) 27 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, 28 and he was returning and sitting in his chariot, and was reading the prophet Isaiah. 29 Then the Spirit said to Philip, “Go up and join this chariot.” 30 Philip ran up and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet, and said, “Do you understand what you are reading?” 31 And he said, “Well, how could I, unless someone guides me?” And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. 32 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 SHEARER IS SILENT, SO HE DOES NOT OPEN HIS MOUTH. 33 IN HUMILIATION HIS JUDGMENT WAS TAKEN AWAY; WHO WILL RELATE HIS GENERATION? FOR HIS LIFE IS REMOVED FROM THE

EARTH." ³⁴ *The eunuch answered Philip and said, "Please tell me, of whom does the prophet say this? Of himself or of someone else?"* ³⁵ *Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him.* ³⁶ *As they went along the road they came to some water; and the eunuch said*, "Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?"* ³⁷ *[And Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."]* ³⁸ *And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he baptized him.* ³⁹ *When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; and the eunuch no longer saw him, but went on his way rejoicing.* ⁴⁰ *But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through he kept preaching the gospel to all the cities until he came to Caesarea.*

This morning, I would like for us to look at the conversion of this one man. Sometimes in the Bible, thousands were baptized at one time, and maybe it's a little hard to identify with a thousand people being baptized at once. So this morning, I'd like for us to consider this man from Ethiopia and the very logical progression of this man's faith.

I. One of the first things we notice is that this man READ WHAT HE HAD.

****PPT****

Another way of putting this would be to say that the man from Ethiopia was searching for the truth. He was looking for something more. We have a promise from Jesus in **Matthew 5:6**, where Jesus said, "***Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.***" This man from Ethiopia was hungry and thirsty for God. We remember the words of **Hebrews 11:6**, where the Bible says, "***And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.***" The man from Ethiopia was earnestly seeking God.

As evidence of this, we are told in **verse 27** that he had been to Jerusalem to worship and he is now reading the Scriptures on the way back home. But as we look at this man's interest in the scriptures, we are especially impressed because of how this man is described. We are never given his name (which is rather strange for such a long account), but he is identified as a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. We find that he is in charge of all of her treasure, and we also discover that he is identified at least five times in this passage as a eunuch. That right there is just a little weird to most of us. But we know from history that court officials were often made eunuchs because the rulers did not want any of their officials coming in and taking over and setting up their own royal family. Beyond that, let's just say that there would never be a Father's Day celebration in the eunuch's household.

But in spite of his condition, we find that this man had traveled close to a thousand miles in order to worship God in Jerusalem. According to **Deuteronomy 23:1**,

however, ***"No one who has been emasculated by crushing or cutting may enter the assembly of the LORD."*** So here was a man who had traveled close to a thousand miles knowing that he would not be able to actually enter the temple. How many of us here this morning would travel from here to Boston, on horseback, knowing that when we got there we would have to stand outside on the sidewalk because of our physical condition? And yet that is what this man did.

And on the way home, he continues his search for truth by reading from the word of God. He was reading from a scroll, and he was reading from what we now know as the book of **Isaiah, chapter 53**. My personal assumption is that this is a scroll that he purchased on his trip to Jerusalem. I know that when I go back to the school where I went to college, I visit the bookstore. And living so far away from his faith, I am sure that this man also took advantage of being there, and so it appears to me at least that he is reading a scroll that he purchased on this trip. Have you ever wondered how much an Isaiah scroll might have sold for back then? I don't know, but how much would we charge to copy all 66 chapters of Isaiah by hand? I would imagine that it would have been quite an investment. It would have been quite a sacrifice. And so the man from Ethiopia demonstrates his interest in God by reading the little bit of God's word that he had. We find a little later on that he did not immediately understand the book of Isaiah, but a lack of understanding did not keep him from reading and finding out more.

So first of all this morning, we notice the importance of reading and studying the word of God. Certainly we can use Bible class books and Bible dictionaries and DVD's and websites, but there is no substitute for the Bible itself. So first of all, when it comes to learning about God, we have to start by looking at the Scriptures.

II. Secondly, not only did he read what he had, but HE CAME TO UNDERSTAND THOSE WORDS THAT HE READ. **PPT**

As this man was reading on his own, he could not understand who the prophet Isaiah was talking about—whether he was talking about himself or about someone else. But before he could go any further, he had to understand. What I find interesting here, first of all, is that the Bible can be understood! Some people have the idea that the Bible is just too complicated, and that is not the case! But what I also find interesting is that God does not answer this man's questions directly. God does not give him any kind of miraculous feeling. There is no direct revelation. But as with all the cases of conversion in the book of **Acts**, God uses another human being to teach and explain the gospel message. We might wonder why the angel did not go and talk to the eunuch directly, but that is not the way it happens. Even with the apostle Paul, before he became a Christian there was a certain disciple named Ananias who was called upon to go and explain things one-on-one. As far as I can tell, God never told people what to do to be saved directly, but He always made sure that the message came from a person—a preacher, or a teacher, or just a disciple (like all of us as Christians who are here this morning).

And so in **verse 30**, Philip runs up beside the chariot, hears that he is reading from Isaiah, and Philip says, **"Do you understand what you are reading?"** And really, a turning point in this chapter takes place in **verse 31**. Instead of being offended by the question (like some people would have been), the eunuch said, **"Well, how could I, unless someone guides me?"** And at that point, **"...he invited Philip to come up and sit with him."**

Humility is not a quality that we always find in the leaders of a nation, but here we find that the treasurer of the nation of Ethiopia humbles himself by asking for help in understanding the word of God. There is nothing wrong with admitting that we need help. In school, we normally tell our children to ask questions, and the same thing should also be true in the Lord's church, because salvation is not possible unless we understand the word of God.

And so if you are here this morning, and if you have some question about a difficult Bible passage, or about something that you have heard us teach or do here at this congregation, we hope you will follow this man's example and ask someone for an explanation. We want to study the Bible! And if we are doing something that you do not understand, or if maybe we are wrong about something—we want to know about it sooner rather than later! It is possible that the providence of God had a part in you being here this morning. I don't know. But we know from the New Testament that God never told people what to do to be saved directly, but He always made sure they ran into a messenger. In the same way, God saw this man from Ethiopia, He saw that he was spiritually hungry, and He arranged for Philip to help answer his questions about the Bible. We are praying that we might be able to help you in a similar way this morning.

First of all, then, the man from Ethiopia read what he had, and then (after asking for help) he understood what he read.

III. As we continue, we also find that this man BELIEVED WHAT HE UNDERSTOOD. **PPT******

We know that simply understanding God's word is not enough, but based on what we read and understand, we must progress to the level of belief. We must have faith that God is who He says He is. We know from **Romans 10:17** that, **"...faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ."** After we hear and understand, we must believe.

Belief is one of those steps that all of us must take in order to be saved. In **Acts 16**, Paul and Silas told the jailer in Philippi that he must believe in the Lord Jesus Christ in order to be saved. They went on from that point to explain the good news about Jesus, and after hearing the message the jailer responded by washing their wounds and being baptized with his entire household. In **Acts 18:8**, we find that, **"Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, believed in the Lord with all his household, and many of the Corinthians when they heard were believing and being baptized."**

So, the Ethiopian Eunuch read what he had, understood what he read, and believed what he understood.

IV. There is a fourth concept here as we find that the officer continued by OBEYING WHAT HE BELIEVED. **PPT******

In **verse 35**, Philip ***"preached Jesus to him,"*** and in the next verse, we have a record of the very next thing that happens. Philip preaches Jesus, and in response to a message about Jesus, the officer just blurts it out, ***"Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?"*** We don't know exactly what Philip preached. We know that the lesson started with **Isaiah 53**, and we know that the subject was Jesus, but it should tell us something when a lesson about Jesus results in someone begging to be baptized! In fact, we might even be able to say that if someone hears a sermon and does not feel the need to be baptized, that it wasn't really a sermon about Jesus after all! Because in Bible times, when people heard a sermon about Jesus, they responded by being immersed in water for the forgiveness of their sins.

I should point out that the Ethiopian was a man who needed forgiveness. From the outside, we would never know it. On the outside, he appeared to be a morally upright religious man. After all, he was on his way home from a 1,000 mile trip to worship. He was trustworthy. Any man chosen to be the treasurer of a nation must have some kind of reputation. Many people in the denominational world today would say, "Why worry about this man?" A lot of people today would say, "Well, this man is already saved. After all, he is sincere, and humble, and religious." And yet after learning about Jesus, this man was so convicted that he insisted on being baptized immediately.

In **verse 38**, the Bible says, ***"And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he baptized him."*** Why was it so urgent for this man to be baptized immediately? Because he knew that he was a sinner, and he knew that his sins would not be forgiven until he was baptized. As far as I can tell, from **Acts 2** through the end of the New Testament, once a person decided to become a Christian, he never slept, he never drank a drop of water, he never ate a bite of food—he did nothing until he was baptized. The 3,000 in **Acts 2** were baptized on the same day. In **Acts 16**, the Philippian Jailer was baptized the same hour of the night (sometime after midnight)—so in the middle of the night. In **Acts 22:16**, Ananias said to Paul, ***"Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name."*** If our sins are washed away at the point of baptism, that means that we are lost before baptism, and we are saved after baptism. Since that is the case, we start to understand the urgency of this particular step in God's plan.

And in the same way, as soon as the eunuch reads, and understands, and believes, he notices some water by the side of the road, he asks to be baptized, he orders the chariot to stop, and he is baptized immediately. There was no reason to put it off. A lot of times today, people [*Richard Urban calls to be baptized—6/15/2007*] are looking for reasons to think about it just a little bit more. And so the excuses start

flowing: I don't know enough. I need to study it more. I'm not really sure. Let me check with my priest. Let me check with my family. And on and on and on. But in **Acts 8**, the Ethiopian Eunuch hears a sermon about Jesus and in the very next verse he replies almost as if it's too good to be true: **"Look! Here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?"** The man is then baptized immediately.

V. All of this leads us to a final aspect of this man's journey. According to verse 39, the eunuch REJOICED WHEN HE OBEYED. **PPT******

A lot of times, people in the religious world get this wrong. They have the rejoicing before the obedience. And yet from the Scriptures, we know that rejoicing always comes after baptism—never before. And the reason is that our sins are forgiven when we trust the Lord in faithful obedience.

But back here in **Acts 8**, we have a man who had always been on the outside looking in, and now for the very first time he is invited to come inside. For the first time, he is now welcome in the kingdom of God. He is no longer cut off. He no longer has to travel to Jerusalem to worship. The prophecy of Jesus to the woman at the well has now been fulfilled, **"...an hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father.... But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers."** (**John 4:21-23**).

When it comes to rejoicing, we need to remember that the eunuch was reading from **Isaiah 53**. We can only assume that after Philip was taken away, and as he went on his way rejoicing, that the eunuch continued reading in the scroll of Isaiah. If you will, imagine with me—because three chapters later, a few more miles down the road, still dripping wet, he would have come to **Isaiah 56**. In **Isaiah 56:3-5**, the Bible says...

³ Let not the foreigner who has joined himself to the LORD say, "The LORD will surely separate me from His people." Nor let the eunuch say, "Behold, I am a dry tree." ⁴ For thus says the LORD, "To the eunuchs who keep My Sabbaths, and choose what pleases Me, and hold fast My covenant, ⁵ to them I will give in My house and within My walls a memorial, and a name better than that of sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name which will not be cut off."

Again, the eunuch would have come to these verses just a few minutes after taking on the name of Jesus in baptism. Church tradition tells us that the eunuch went home and spread the gospel in Ethiopia.

Summary:

This morning, we have looked at the example of the Ethiopian Eunuch...

- He read what he had.

- He understood what he read.
- He believed what he understood.
- He obeyed what he believed.
- He rejoiced when he obeyed.

Conclusion & Invitation:

This morning, we are looking for people with honest and humble hearts—like the heart of the man from Ethiopia. And this morning, we ask the question: Does this man's experience agree with yours? I am so thankful that it agrees with mine. There was a time in my life when I read God's word. I understood what I was reading. I believed what I understood. I obeyed what I believed. And I rejoiced after having obeyed the word of God.

If you are not yet to the point of rejoicing, we would encourage you to study the word of God with a member of this congregation, and we would encourage you to make things right with God. If you are ready to obey the gospel, you can let us know as we sing the next song. Let's stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: church@fourlakescoc.org

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