

Why Stop The Chariot?
John Dicus
Lorain Avenue Church of Christ (12-01-2024)

=====

Good Morning.

=====

It's good thing ... I think ... to look at important issues ... from different perspectives.

You never know what you might learn.

A different view ... maybe even an odd one ... can connect the dots in a refreshing way.

=====

We ask a lot of questions when we study the Bible. And that's good.

So, here's a question ... "Why Stop The Chariot?"

Actually, that's our lesson title for today ... "Why Stop The Chariot?"

=====

Our main text is Acts 8:26-39.

Acts 8:26-39 tells the true story ... of how the Ethiopian Eunuch came to be a Christian.

There are two main characters in the story.

One is the man from Ethiopia ... the Ethiopian Eunuch.

He was the court official in charge of the entire treasury of the Queen.

Ethiopia was located in the southern Nile region of northern Africa. And as the Eunuch is first introduced ... he was traveling back from Jerusalem ... to his home country ... a distance of about 1000 miles.

He had gone to Jerusalem to worship. And as he rode along in his chariot ... he was sitting ... reading from the Prophet Isaiah.

Our other character is Philip. Philip the evangelist, not Philip the Apostle.

He was one of the seven men chosen by the Jerusalem congregation, in Acts 6, to serve under the leadership of the Apostles.

What's the timing of this story? It's after the stoning of Stephen and the scattering of the Jerusalem saints. You'll recall that Stephen was another of the seven men chosen in Acts 6.

=====

Acts 8 shows just how fast the Gospel of Christ was spreading to the known world. It was "the fullness of time" that the Apostle Paul writes about in Galatians 4:4-7. God had sent His Son to redeem the Jews and adopt the Gentiles ... as Eddie preached last Lord's Day.

=====

We know where the Eunuch had been. Now ... where had Philip been?

The scattered saints were preaching the Word of God everywhere they went. And we find Philip heading north to the city of Samaria to preach Christ.

Recall that Samaria is the region of the old Northern Kingdom that had digressed and was given up into captivity ... and that the city of Samaria itself was their center of worship.

Thankfully, many men and women heard the Word in Samaria ... and believing, obeyed the Gospel in Baptism.

There is more to what took place in Samaria. The Apostles in Jerusalem sent Peter and John to Samaria to lay on hands and impart Spiritual gifts to the new Christians. Only the Apostles had this power which was given to them on Pentecost. And only baptized believers could receive the various spiritual gifts.

Philip did not have this ability. He was not an Apostle. He was, however, full of faith, the Holy Spirit, and wisdom ... and could preach by inspiration ... as was Stephen, if you recall his sermon in Acts 7 that "got him killed." The Apostles had imparted this ability to these men, most likely.

=====

I offer this background of the Treasurer ... and of Philip ... for a couple of reasons. One is for context. The other is to show the character, the condition, and the capabilities of both men.

=====

So, how did Philip hook up with the Eunuch?

God decided that Philip had spent sufficient time with the saints in Samaria ... and was needed elsewhere to spread the Gospel.

Think about it.

The Jews ... the Southern Kingdom under the Old Law ... had heard the Gospel in Jerusalem.

Philip had pushed the Gospel north into the city Samaria (the capital city of the fallen Northern Kingdom).

Now God needed Philip to send the Gospel south into northern Africa. Ethiopia was south of Egypt.

=====

As an aside ... let's appreciate How God was letting the whole world know about Jesus Christ ... and offering salvation in Him.

Peter and John preached in various cities in the region of Samaria on their way back to Jerusalem.

Saul ... Paul ... not yet a Christian ... would later be taken to Antioch by Barnabas ... and together they pushed the Gospel up into the region north of the Mediterranean Sea.

=====

And so ... an angel of the Lord told Philip to head south, to the road that leads from Jerusalem down to Gaza ... the strip of land connecting Judea with northern Africa. The distance he needed to travel was a little over 100 miles.

=====

After a while ... Philp spots the Ethiopian Eunuch's chariot rolling down the road. More than likely ... the Treasurer was being chauffeured ... and his conveyance might have been more of what we would call a carriage.

Now ... the Holy Spirit tells Philip to run and catch up with the Chariot. And as Philip does so and paces the chariot ... he hears the Eunuch reading ... and recognizes the words of the Prophet Isaiah.

We would say the Eunuch was reading from Isaiah 53. A scroll. But in those days ... maybe 35 AD or so ... no one had assigned chapters and verses to Scripture. That was the work of man to make it easier to find one's place ... and it wouldn't happen until 1227 AD.

Isaiah 53 foretells the crucifixion of Jesus Christ for the sins of mankind.

=====

Philip asks ... "do you understand what you are reading?"

And the Treasurer answered ... "How can I understand ... unless someone guides me?" Then the Eunuch invited Philip to come up into the Chariot to sit with him.

I think the use of the word "guides" is interesting. Too often ... religious teachers tell the student what they want the scripture to mean. This is what the Bible calls "private interpretation."

But the Eunuch did not ask for this. Nor did Philip offer this.

Philip used the scriptures to explain the scriptures. He guided him. He didn't steer him.

Now, the New Testament had not been written as of yet. That was in process by inspired writers. The same way the Old Testament was written over time.

This is why God provided Spiritual Gifts. Not only did these gifts confirm the authenticity of the Gospel ... they provided the content of the Gospel ... until such a time as it had been fully revealed and recorded. Then Spiritual Gifts would cease.

This is why Philip (and others) were being sent all over the world. To reveal the Word.

=====

Philip needed to be in the chariot ... to fulfil prophecy with Gospel teaching ... to convict the heart of the Eunuch ... so he would seek salvation in baptism ... and become a child of God.

Please notice that no miracle was involved in the conversion of the Ethiopian Eunuch.

An Angel put Philip on an intersection course with the Eunuch.

The Holy Spirit fine-tuned the intercept. And He gave Philip the words necessary to guide the Eunuch into the truth. Upon hearing ... the Eunuch chose to believe ... and accept ... and obey.

Yes ... a miracle put the two men together. Yes, God's will was miraculously revealed.

But the hearing, believing, and obedience was all on the Eunuch. Just as it was all on the multitude on Pentecost when Peter guided them from prophecy to fulfillment. Just as it was all on the Samaritans when Philip guided them.

And don't forget that Philip was invited up into the Chariot. He did not barge in.

=====

Also don't forget ... it was the Holy Spirit who inspired Isaiah about 730 years earlier. ... when he prophesied that Jesus would die on the cross. Now ... it's 5-10 years after Jesus' sacrifice ... and the Holy Spirit is fulfilling the prophecy by revealing the Law of Christ.

=====

Acts 8:32-34 reads ... "The Eunuch was reading this passage of Scripture ...

'He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before the shearer is silent, so he did not open his mouth.

In his humiliation he was deprived of justice. Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth.'

The eunuch asked Philip, 'Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?'"

=====

The very next verse says ... Acts 8:35 ... "And Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him."

Think of all the things Philip told Him about Jesus Christ.

His birth, His baptism, His ministry, His miracles, His teachings, His crucifixion, His resurrection, His ascension, His great commission, His Priesthood, Headship & Kingship.

=====

Let's back to when Philip was in Samaria ...

Acts 8:5-6 ... "And Philip went to the city of Samaria and began proclaiming Christ to them. And the multitudes with one accord were giving attention to what was said by Philip, as they heard and saw the signs which he was performing.

Acts 8:8 ... "And there was much rejoicing in that city."

Acts 8:12 ... "When they believed Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike."

=====

No matter the preacher ... the message was always the same.

The message the Eunuch heard in the Chariot ... was the exact same message the men and women in Samaria heard.

What the Eunuch needed to do to be saved and become a child of God ... was exactly the same as what the men and women in Samaria needed to do ... and did.

=====

OK ... what happened next?

As the Chariot rolled a bit farther down the road ...

... the Gospel message rolled around in the Eunuch's mind and heart ...

Then ... some water appeared along the way. Water had to have been on the Eunuch's mind.

Acts 8:36 ... “And as they went along the road they came to some water; and the Eunuch said ... ‘Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized.’”

And then Acts 8:38 reads ... “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.

=====

Please consider this so you won't get blind-sided by a false teacher ...

Acts 8:37 reads “Philip said, ‘If you believe with all your heart, you may.’ And the Eunuch answered and said, ‘I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.’”

This verse does not appear in early manuscripts ... and many think a scribe inserted this for clarity. However, you can teach exactly the same thing with other passages. Just so you know.

=====

So now ... to the title of our lesson ...

“Why Stop The Chariot”

Acts 8:38 says that Eunuch commanded the chariot to stand still.

If much of the error taught in the religious world ... concerning baptism and salvation ... were actually true ... there would have been no need for him to stop the chariot.

=====

So then ... Let's ask “why stop the chariot” ... if goodness alone saves?

The Eunuch must have been a good and honest man ... to be holding he job he had.

He was a court official of the Queen. He was entrusted with the wealth of a nation. (Acts 8:27).

His demeanor was respectful, and he was open to healthy conversion. He was on distant travel under his own supervision.

You hear folks say all the time. God would never keep a good, moral man or woman out of heaven. Right”

So ... why stop the chariot ... and go down into the water to be baptized ... if goodness alone saves?

=====

Well OK then ... why stop the chariot ... if being religious is enough?

The Eunuch was a religious man. He had just traveled about a thousand miles in a chariot ... to Jerusalem to worship.

And he had about another thousand to go before reaching home.

And ... he used his time to read Holy Scripture. (Acts 8:27-28).

Not only to read ... but to meditate.

This man is thought to be a Jewish Proselyte. A convert to Judaism.

Many today believe in Christ. Many try to have their hearts in the right place.

So ... why stop the chariot ... and go down into the water to be baptized ... if being religious alone saves?

=====

Why stop the chariot ... if reading the scriptures is all that's required?

For sure, the Eunuch was a scripture-reading man.

The setting finds him reading from the prophet Isaiah. We know he had been reading from Isaiah 53.

Not only was he reading, but he was also pondering ... he was questioning.

He wanted to be guided.

Many read without questioning ... without connecting the dots ... without seeing the whole picture of God's salvation plan ... without understanding all that God requires.

So ... why stop the chariot ... and go down into the water to be baptized ... if reading the scriptures alone saves?

=====

Why stop the chariot ... if the Eunuch could have been saved by preaching alone.

Acts 8:36 says... that ... "Philip began at the very same passage the Eunuch was reading ... and preached unto him Jesus."

Many hear about Jesus ... over and over ... but this is as far as it goes.

=====

There is a hymn ... I think it's titled ... "Oh Listen To Our Wondrous Story."

It does a great job of "preaching Jesus."

O listen to our wondrous story (Counted once among the lost);
Yet One came down from Heaven's glory (Saving us at awful cost!)

No angel could His place have taken (Highest if the High tho' He)
The loved One on the cross forsaken (Was one of the Godhead three)

Will you surrender to this Savior? (To His scepter humbly bow?) (Pledge Fealty?)
You, too, shall come to know His favor, (He will save you, save you now.)

The refrain is in the form of question & answer.

Who saved us from eternal loss? (Who but God's Son upon the cross?)
What did He do? (He died for you!)
Where is He now? (Believe it thou')
In heaven interceding!

There were two hymns our congregation sang down in the basement of our old building ...
... when a newborn child of God came up the steps out of the baptistry we hacked in the
concrete floor ...

... and dripped all the way to the dressing room ... with brothers and sisters-in-Christ getting
sopping wet by hugging on them.

“Trust and Obey” ... For There’s No Other Way ... and ... “Buried with Christ” My Blessed
Redeemer, Living anew obedient yet free.

= = = = =

Was preaching enough for this man? ... not the Eunuch ... preaching showed him the way to
salvation, but he needed to get out of the chariot and get in the water.

So ... why stop the chariot ... and go down into the water to be baptized ... if preaching alone
saves?

= = = = =

Why stop the chariot ... if the Eunuch had been justified by belief in Christ alone.

The Eunuch believed ... once Philip explained how Isaiah was speaking of Jesus Christ.

If this is as far as the Eunuch’s faith needed to take him ... then why not keep the chariot wheels
rolling?

So ... why stop the chariot ... and go down into the water to be baptized ... if belief alone
saves? Even belief from the heart.

Recall that the believers on Pentecost asked Peter what they “still yet” needed to do. Peter said
“repent and be baptized.”

Recall that ... in Samaria ... when the men and women believed Philip’s preaching ... they still
needed to be baptized.

= = = = =

Why stop the chariot ... if prayer could have saved the Eunuch?

He could have prayed as he kept his chariot rolling along. Pray as you ride ... so to speak.

He could have simply asked for entrance into the family of God ... and Heaven ... without
having to do anything at all.

If it had been introduced 1700 years earlier than it was by false teachers ... the Eunuch could
have repeated the sinner’s prayer.

That prayer has no precedence in Scripture. “Belief only” proponents use it as a prayer of
repentance to renew (in their own minds anyway) their relationship with God.

It goes something like this:

"Lord Jesus, I'm a sinner. I believe You died for my sins so I could be forgiven. I receive You as
my Lord and Savior. Thank You for coming into my life. Amen."

It's so wrong on so many levels.

So ... why stop the chariot ... and go down into the water to be baptized ... if prayer alone saves?

=====

Why stop the chariot ... if baptism was not necessary to save the Eunuch?

Don't we read ... in verse 38 ... that the Eunuch commanded the chariot to stand still. And both he and Philip went down into the water, and Philip baptized Him.

That alone ought to say there was great urgency ... in stopping the chariot.

Again, look at these two verses where baptism was involved.

In Samaria ... in Acts 8:8 ... "And there was much rejoicing in that city."

On the road to Gaza ... in Acts 8:39 ... "And when the Eunuch and Philip came up out of the water ... the Eunuch went on his way rejoicing."

=====

This concludes our lesson.

Thank you for your kind and patient attention.

=====

We're now going to offer the invitation of Christ.

If you are not a child of God ... this is a wonderful time to become a Christian in the waters of baptism.

If you're in this audience and have not obeyed the Gospel ... and if you have been listening... as this lesson has guided you in scripture ...

... and you see there is water in the baptistry behind me ...

... by singing this hymn of encouragement ...

... we're stopping the Chariot ... so you can go down into the water and be baptized ... for the remission of sin.

=====