

A REVIVAL IN THE DESERT

Acts 8:26-40

Philip had gone to Samaria. There he had preached the Word of God with signal success and multitudes were saved and added to the church. While he was doing so well there, the Lord called him away from that seemingly important work, and told him to go down south on the road leading from Jerusalem to Gaza. From the human point of view this command seemed unreasonable and foolish. Since Philip was in the midst of a flourishing and sweeping revival in the city, why should he leave it and go to a desert and talk to a single soul? Was that worth while? The Lord thought so (verse 26), and so it proved to be, for by leaving the city he reached a continent. Perhaps most of us would have thought that it was a serious mistake for Philip to go, but the Lord's ways are not our ways. He often interrupts our plans and our service in very remarkable ways that we sometimes find difficult to understand.

I. The Eunuch.

1. He was sincere.

He "had come to Jerusalem to worship" (verse 27). It is thought that he was in Jerusalem at the feast of Pentecost. Had he not been sincere, he would never traveled hundreds of miles to a foreign land in pursuit of God.

2. He was studious.

He was returning to his home in Ethiopia, without having found what he went after, namely, a personal knowledge of the only true God. He was a dissatisfied man, notwithstanding the fact that he had position, power, and possessions. He was also a very disappointed man. Before leaving the Jewish capital, however, he either possessed or purchased a portion of the Old Testament scriptures. On his way home, he was reading aloud the great fifty-third chapter of Isaiah in search of additional information. His heart was hungry for the truth about God.

3. He was seeking.

Although he was in a bewildered state of mind, the eunuch was very teachable. He is a splendid example of an honest seeker after the truth. Failing to have a definite experience with God while in Jerusalem, he did the next best thing, which was to secure a copy of God's Word, with a view to studying the matter for himself.

4. He was submissive.

Reading the scriptures as he rode along, the eunuch had a longing for someone to lead him into the light. He was prepared to listen with an unprejudiced mind to anyone whom the Lord might send to him for the purpose of leading him into the light. When the Lord's messenger arrived where the eunuch was he found a prepared hearer. God was working at both ends of the line, as is so often the case. Philip asked him if he understood what he was reading, and the eunuch confessed that he did not, whereupon Philip accepted his invitation to ride with him in the chariot and began to instruct him out of the Word of God. The eunuch proved to be a responsive hearer. To have a responsive hearer is to make a good preacher. The pew makes the pulpit.

The eunuch was submissive to Philip, the servant of God, and to Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Hear his confession: "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." Moreover, he submitted to the ordinance of baptism. "And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him." (verse 38).

5. He was satisfied.

Well might he rejoice, for he was now delivered from guilt and condemnation.

He had peace with God and joy in the Holy Spirit. His joy sprang out of the newly-received salvation. Salvation is enough to make anyone rejoice, even though he may be alone, or ill, or in prison.

II. The Evangelist--Philip.

1. His religion was genuine.

Philip was a man with a genuine Christian experience. He was chosen as a deacon for the reason that he was filled with the Holy Spirit. He had an eye trained to see the things of God, an ear trained to hear God, and a soul trained to sense quickly the presence and the leadership of God.

2. His reputation was good.

He was a man of honest report, which is one of the requirements for the deaconship. There is a difference between reputation and character. Caesar had a good reputation, but a poor character. Christ had a good character, but a poor reputation among some people. Our reputation is either an asset or a liability to the cause of Christ.

3. His reliance was great. (verse 26-27a).

From a busy and successful revival meeting in Samaria, the Lord suddenly called His servant Philip to speak to an individual many miles away. And the directions were sketchy and vague. All he was told was that he was to go to the road that led from Jerusalem to Gaza, the southernmost city in the land of Palestine. And moreover, he was to go to the desert part of that land. That was all the information that God's angel gave him.

God saw an hungry and eager soul on that old road leading to Gaza. He knew He had a man He could depend upon to hasten to His aid. Many workers would have demanded complete directions before setting out on such a journey, but not so in the case of Philip. As he went, he knew that God's Spirit would provide further light on the case. Philip went forth in abounding faith. The way was not clear to the end, but he went as far as he was told, trusting God to open the way farther.

4. His readiness was glorious.

In verse 30 we read, "Philip ran thither to him." Philip did not go unbidden. He was definitely sent by Almighty God. He had an obedient spirit upon learning the will of God. What a difference it makes in Christian service when one is sent by the Lord! Alas! many are going forth today without a divine conversion and commission. We must be saved before we can hope to be serviceable. See the evangelist running alongside that moving chariot! Catch his eager and enthusiastic spirit! What an example of readiness! Philip was both ready and willing.

5. His resources were gigantic.

These consisted of three things:--

(1) Scriptures.

Philip could see Christ in any and all parts of the Word of God. He began at the same place in the scriptures where the Ethiopian was reading and preached unto him Jesus. A messenger should be able to present Christ in any kind of situation and from any starting place. Philip could begin anywhere and "preach Jesus." How few in the churches today have such a working knowledge of the scriptures! How few have discovered Christ in every book as well as in every chapter of the entire Bible. He "opened his mouth," and "preached unto him Jesus." One tragedy in church life today is the closed mouth. Church members open their mouths to eat, to talk, to gossip, and to criticize, but seldom to preach Christ.

(2) Supplication.

Philip prayed. Many church workers today claim that they do not have time to

pray. A prayerless Christian is always a powerless Christian.

(3) Spirit of God.

Philip was "filled with the Holy Spirit. (Acts 6:3)

6. His results were glorious.

(1) He magnified Christ.

"He preached unto him Jesus," not himself, or his personal experiences.

(2) He satisfied man.

The Ethiopian eunuch "went on his way rejoicing."

(3) He glorified God.