

THE ETHIOPIAN EUNUCH

Acts 8:26-39

Philip was one of the seven deacons who were chosen to assist the apostles in carrying on the work of their Master in the church at Jerusalem. Shortly after these men were chosen a violent persecution arose against the Christians. Philip fled to Samaria and preached Christ to the people. His ministry there was greatly blessed of the Lord. He preached the Word with signal success, whereupon multitudes were saved and added to the church. Just when things seemed to be at their best the Lord called Philip elsewhere.

From the human point of view, this command to abandon his work and go south to a desert, with little prospect of any success, seemed unreasonable and foolish. Since Philip was in the midst of a flourishing and sweeping revival in the city, the average person would have thought it would have been a serious mistake for him to leave, but the Lord's ways do not conform to man's ideas.

Even though he did not know the exact destination or object of his mission, Philip responded immediately to the call of God. He had faith enough to obey God, in spite of the fact that many considered his action foolish and ridiculous. He did not complain about a short notice. Neither did he linger to settle any affairs nor to arrange a farewell gathering. He knew that the mandate came from the Lord, so he obeyed forthwith without a single complaint. He departed without knowing the purpose of his journey, but he was sure that the Lord was not leading him on a fool's errand.

Traveling directly south, he reached the place to which he had been sent. Just in the nick of time he reached the assigned post. Had he hesitated, thought the matter over, or consulted his friends, the opportunity of a lifetime would have been lost. Presently he saw a chariot coming towards him. Then, he heard the command of the Holy Spirit, "Go near, and join thyself to this chariot." Again, his response was immediate, for he ran to the chariot.

Riding in the chariot was an Ethiopian eunuch. He was a man of prominence and distinction. He ranked high in civil life, holding a very prominent office in Abyssinia. This eminent officer naturally had great pomp. He also wielded tremendous power. He exercised authority over all the treasures of Candace, the queen of the Ethiopians. He was a man with great possessions. As the Minister of Finance or the Chancellor of the Exchequer, he had all that many people desire--position, pomp, power and possessions. Notwithstanding all of these things, he was far from being satisfied.

This Secretary of the Treasury was in sore distress. By birth he was not a member of the Jewish race, but evidently by choice he had become a proselyte, or what some might choose to call an associate member. Having conformed to the ways of the Chosen People, he had gone from far-away Abyssinia to Jerusalem to worship at the great Jewish feast. There he had sought light and spiritual wisdom at the center of the Jewish faith. It was not easy for him to travel those hundreds of miles to worship, but when one is anxiously longing for light upon matters of vital importance he will not allow distance to be an obstacle in his way.

Before leaving the Jewish capital, he either possessed or purchased a portion of the Old Testament Scriptures. Disappointed, but not despairing, he was reading from the prophecy of Isaiah as he wended his way homeward under the heat and glare of the sun. Even though the eunuch was a great man, he did not think it unworthy of him to read and study the Word of God. While busily engaged with the affairs of the kingdom, he refused to plead the pressure of business for the neglect of the Holy Scriptures. Even though he found them beyond his understanding, he did not cast them away as unintelligible, but he studied them with humility and diligence.

Troubled in heart, earnest in spirit and eager to learn, he was diligently seeking after the truth. He was poring over a passage from the book of Isaiah. As was the custom in the East, he was reading aloud. He was reading that deep and moving lyric of vicarious sorrow, the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, which delineates the sufferings of the Servant of the Lord. However, he was somewhat mystified by what he read.

In order to get near to the eunuch, with eagerness, earnestness, and enthusiasm Philip ran to the chariot in which he was riding. One of the secrets of success with men and women always is to get near them. Quietly Philip made an inquiry which really meant, "Pardon me, but do you understand what you are reading?" "Understandest thou what thou readest?" was a pleasantry which was meant to pave the way for something better, and it did. While it must have been a very strange experience for the eunuch to have an unknown man approach his chariot and ask him a question like that, Philip's face was so radiant and eager that the great statesman felt at once that here is one who knows.

So, Philip's question drew a frank and modest answer, and thereupon a sudden friendship sprang up between the two men. Each felt that the other was the man he needed. As is frequently the case, God was working at both ends of the line.

He had prepared and commissioned Philip to go to the Ethiopian, and then He saw to it that the eunuch was in such a state of openness of mind and eagerness of heart that he would receive the Lord's messenger and any word he might bring. Before one can ever enlighten another spiritually, there must be on the part of one a disposition to receive knowledge and on the part of the other an ability to impart it.

Having confessed that he did not understand what he was reading, the eunuch invited Philip to enter the chariot with him. He gladly accepted the invitation, mounted the chariot and seated himself beside the eunuch. His first inquiry was about whom the prophet Isaiah was speaking. He wanted to know if he was referring to himself or to some other prophet. Philip answered his question in a very fine spirit and to his complete satisfaction.

Philip made the most of his golden opportunity. With a fine Christian aggressiveness Philip began with the Scripture which the eunuch was reading and preached unto him Jesus. He brought the glorious light of the gospel to bear upon the written page of prophecy and upon the spiritual ignorance of the Ethiopian.

"Jesus, O how sweet the name,
Jesus every day the same."

So far as anybody knows the eunuch had never heard the gospel of Christ before. But he is a splendid example of the power of the Word to prepare a soul to hear the gospel of Christ and to accept the Saviour. And Philip showed real wisdom by preaching Christ, for He is the substance of all gospel preaching. He is a theme which can never be exhausted by all the sermons of all the ages. Every Christian should preach Christ to the individual whenever God gives the opportunity. Such preaching as Philip did is the hope of the world. It is also the hope of the churches. Pulpits will lose their power and pews will fail to be a blessing when Jesus Christ is not preached. There in that chariot, riding across that dusty desert, under the scorching heat of the sun, was a man seeking the way, and Jesus was that way; was a man seeking the truth, and Jesus was the truth; and was a man seeking life, and Jesus was the life. Therefore, Philip preached Christ to him.

Upon being convinced that Jesus Christ was the Lamb of God Who taketh away the sin of the world, the eunuch immediately believed on Him and accepted Him as his personal Saviour, whereupon his sins were forgiven and he was saved. Wasn't that wonderful for him to accept Christ as his Saviour the first time he heard the gospel message?

After he had heard the old, old story of Jesus and His love, he truly believed on Him and was gloriously saved. He passed from death unto life, because he had trusted Christ. Our Lord said, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth

on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life." John 5:24. He also said, "He that believeth on me hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." John 3:36.

As they traveled along, Philip taught him that it was the Christian duty of every child of God to follow Christ in baptism. He considered baptism his first opportunity to conform to the expressed will of Christ, so he was anxious to be baptized. When they came to the place where there was ample water in which to be baptized, he requested Philip to baptize him. Of this even we read, "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." Acts 8:38.

Having been saved by the Lord Jesus, and then having followed Him in baptism, great joy came into the soul of the eunuch. If he had possessed one of our songbooks, doubtless he would have gone his way singing:

"O happy day that fixed my choice
On Thee, my Saviour and my God!
Well may this glowing heart rejoice,
And tell its raptures all abroad!

"'Tis done; the great transaction's done!
I am my Lord's, and He is mine;
He drew me, and I followed on,
Charmed to confess the voice divine.

"Happy day, happy day,
When Jesus washed my sins away!
He taught me how to watch and pray,
And live rejoicing every day;
Happy day, happy day,
When Jesus washed my sins away."

The experience of being saved is enough to make anybody rejoice. The eunuch rejoiced because Christ had satisfied the deepest desires of his heart. He was going back to a savage land, and he would be the only Christian in the whole country. He was going back to spiritual isolation, and quite probably to persecution and to death. Yet, he went on his way rejoicing because he had come to know Christ as his personal Saviour and that He would be his inseparable Companion for ever. Great joy continued in his soul as he anticipated his increased usefulness to his people in delivering the message of Christ to them. His joy increased as he realized that his people had never heard this message of eternal life in Christ. As he rejoiced in his experiences, and in anticipation of future service for Christ, so may we be happy in Christ and in His service, and rejoice along the way to the land of eternal joy.