

A REMARKABLE CONVERSION

Acts 8:26-39

Philip was a man who had a genuine Christian experience. He 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. He was chosen as a deacon because 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.

Shortly after the seven deacons were chosen the Christians were subjected to a violent persecution. To escape death Philip fled to Samaria and there he preached Christ to the people. His ministry there was blessed greatly by the Lord. He preached the Word of God with signal success, whereupon multitudes were saved and added to the church. He did this work not as an apostle or an ordained minister, but as a layman and a deacon. What a joy it is to see a layman who loves the Lord and people enough to introduce the lost to Christ!

Just when his soul-winning efforts were most successful and everything looked so promising, the Lord called Philip elsewhere. Very suddenly and unexpectedly he was given another work to do. He was commanded to abandon his work and go south to a desert. From the human point of view, this did not appear to be a wise thing to do. Since Philip was in the midst of a flourishing and sweeping revival in the city, the average person would have considered it a serious mistake for him to leave and go to a place where there was little or no prospect of success. This fact reminds us that the Lord's ways and man's ideas do not always coincide.

Even though Philip did not know the exact destination or object of his mission, he responded immediately to the divine call without a single excuse or a word of complaint. He had faith enough to obey the Lord promptly in spite of the fact that many considered his action foolish and ridiculous. Philip did not complain about the call being too sudden. Neither did he linger to settle any affairs nor to arrange for a farewell gathering. He knew that the mandate came from the Lord, and that was enough for him. 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, Philip reached the place to which he had been sent just in the nick of time. Had he hesitated, thought the matter over or consulted his friends, he would have lost the opportunity of a lifetime. Presently, Philip 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. Observe his eager and enthusiastic spirit as Philip ran alongside that moving chariot ready and anxious to witness for Christ.

Riding in that 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 large possessions. As the Minister of Finance or the Chancellor of the Exchequer, he had all that many people desire--position, prestige, pomp, power and possessions. Notwithstanding all of these things, he was far from being satisfied.

This eunuch had gone from far-away Abyssinia to Jerusalem to attend the great Jewish feast. It was not easy for him to travel that long distance, but, when a person is anxiously seeking light upon matters of vital importance, he will not allow distance to be an obstacle in his way. Disappointed at not obtaining a personal knowledge of God, which was what he had hoped to receive, 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 and held a high position, he did not think it was unworthy of or unnecessary for him to read and study the Word of God. While busily engaged with the affairs of state, 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 reading aloud that deep and moving lyric of vicarious sorrow, the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, which delineates the sufferings of our Saviour. However, he was somewhat mystified by what he read. He longed for someone to lead him into the light. With eagerness, earnestness and enthusiasm Philip ran to the chariot and quietly made an inquiry which really meant, "Pardon me, but do you understand what you are reading?" 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 statesman felt at once that here is one who knows.

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 so often the case, God was working at both ends of the line. He had prepared and commissioned Philip to go to the eunuch, and then He saw to it that the latter was in such a state of mind and heart that he would receive the Lord's messenger and any word he might bring. Before one can 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 and willingness to impart it.

Having confessed that he did not understand what he was reading, the eunuch invited deacon Philip to enter the chariot with him. He gladly accepted the invitation, mounted the chariot, seated himself beside the eunuch and began with the scripture which he was reading and preached unto him Christ. It is always the task of a Christian to point a sinner to Christ, and then to get out of the way.

So far as we know, the eunuch had never heard the Gospel of Christ before. But, he affords us a splendid example of the power of the Word to prepare a soul to hear the Gospel of Christ and to accept the Saviour. 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 every time that God gives the opportunity. Such preaching as Philip did is the hope of the world. The eunuch proved to be a responsive hearer. A responsive hearer makes a good preacher. The pew makes the pulpit what it is.

Upon being convinced that Christ was the Lamb of God Who taketh away the sin of the world, the eunuch immediately believed on Him, or received Him as his Saviour, whereupon his sins were forgiven and he was saved. Wasn't

it wonderful that he accepted Christ as his Saviour the first time he heard the Gospel message?

After the eunuch had heard the old, old story of Christ and His love and had truly believed on Him, he passed from death unto life. 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 the eunuch that it was the Christian duty of every child of God to follow Christ in scriptural baptism. Having a sincere desire to conform to the expressed will of Christ, 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 event 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. And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing" (Acts 8:38-39). 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 saved him and had satisfied the deepest desires of his heart. He was going back to a heathen 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. Great joy flooded his soul as he anticipated his increased usefulness to his people in telling them what Christ had done for him and would do for them if they would only trust Him. We, too, may be exceedingly happy in Christ and His blessed service, as we witness to our unsaved loved ones and friends about our wonderful Saviour.