

**Acts 8: The Ministry of Philip
8:25-40, The Ethiopian Eunuch
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Overview

1. Acts 8 and 2 Kings 5
 - a) Recall dependency of the Stephen story on 1 Kings 21: Naboth, Ahab, and Elijah.
 - b) As Simon recalls Gehazi, the superficial believer, so the Eunuch picks up the picture of Naaman:
 - 1) a wealthy pagan nobleman
 - 2) from a far country (Syria, Ethiopia)
 - 3) riding in a chariot (these verses in Acts, and two vision in Rev, are the only occurrences of "chariot" in the entire NT!)
 - 4) with a misunderstood book (letter from the king of Syria, prophet Isaiah),
 - 5) who experiences tremendous healing (cure of leprosy, salvation)
 - 6) by dipping in the water (Jordan, water by road to Gaza);
 - c) Big Ideas:
 - 1) A study in true vs. false conversion; true believers are not always where we expect to find them, nor are our presumptions about who would be interested in the gospel always justified.
 - 2) Why draw these images from Kings? Both Elijah and Elisha ministered in the Northern Kingdom of Israel, which was apostate. So the early church is pictured as laboring in the midst of an apostate religious institution, first-century judaism.
2. Internal structure of this passage shows a case study of an evangelistic confrontation.
 - a) Three stages in the Spirit's leading of Philip to engage the conversation.
 - 1) 26-27, Go out in the desert.
 - 2) 28-30, Go join the chariot.
 - 3) 39-40 (snatches him away to Azotus)
 - b) Three stages in the conversation itself.
 - 1) 31, "Help me understand."
 - 2) 32-35, "Of whom speaks the prophet this?"
 - 3) 36-38, "What hinders me to be baptized?"
3. *Application*: What could be more like our own age?
 - a) The official religious structures are apostate.
 - b) God works through individual "prophets" rather than the system,
 - c) to bring unlikely candidates to faith in himself.

The relation between 25 and 26, like that between vv. 4 and 5, shows us that Philip's experience is to be taken as typical of what was happening far and wide in the church at this time. It was their common practice--and should be ours as well.

A. **The Lord Directs Philip**

Each of the three directions from the Lord to Philip is distinct, either in agent, manner, or content, from the other two. God's directions don't always come through the same channel. We need to be attentive to different signals.

What's the relation of these directions to the Bible? The Word of God gives us static, timeless truths. It shows us God's law, and establishes the criteria for right and wrong. But how do we know what we should present in our SS class, or how we should establish a friendship with an acquaintance who needs to hear the gospel? These are not matters of absolute, eternal truth, but issues of moment-by-moment direction. Let's see how God directs Philip in such issues.

1. 26-28, a command from an angel.

a) Agent: angel ("messenger") of the Lord.

1) In the OT, often the preincarnate Christ.

2) But can be a more generic angel: 1 Kings 19:5,7.

3) Luke 1:11,19 = Gabriel

4) Matt. 11:10, Mark 1:2, Luke 7:27, citing Mal. 3:1 "my [the Lord's] messenger" and identifying him as John the Baptist. Thus some human form appearing with a message from God.

Distinctive feature is its tangibility and ability to work wonders.

b) Manner: gives a command.

c) Content: specific instruction, but no clear motive given. Sort of like a treasure hunt. "Go to such and such a place, and you'll be told what to do next."

Application: Sometimes we think it would be nice if God would speak with us this way, by way of a person who comes up to us and speaks ordinary words. "If God would only appear visibly to me, I'd listen.

1) But sometimes he does! Remember John the Baptist as God's "angel" or messenger. The Bible uses the same word, "messenger," for appearances of the Lord, of superhuman created beings, and of men sent from God with a message. When God gives Francis a message for SS, Francis is a "messenger of the Lord." (And if the Lord *doesn't* give one of us a message, we are on shaky ground addressing God's people!)

2) When God does send someone, human or superhuman, with a

message, are we ready to hear?

- a> Consider the puzzling command here. "Why should I go there, Lord?" Would Philip have been justified in disobeying, because he did not yet see the broader implications?
- b> Compare the Lord's command through his messenger Paul, that sisters are to be covered when praying or prophesying. How often have we seen people refuse to obey this because they do not understand where it is taking them. But it ought to be enough for us to understand WHAT we are to do, leaving the WHY in the hand of God.

2. 29, a command from the Holy Spirit.

- a) Agent: the Holy Spirit. Before, Philip saw some corporeal form. Here, no tangible vision. Unlike angels, the Spirit never "appears" to anyone.
- b) Manner: another command. This time, just as there is nothing to see physically, there is probably nothing to hear audibly. Angels impact our physical senses; the Spirit deals with our spiritual senses.
- c) Content: "Go near and join yourself to this chariot."

Application: Are your spiritual senses finely tuned enough to hear the Spirit's instructions? You may have heard him and not recognized it: a sense of urgency or compulsion to carry out some spiritual ministry; "Invite that couple over for dinner and a Bible study"; "Talk to X about such and such a subject"; "the really important lesson to present from this passage of Scripture is Y." Often I have felt such an urging to open a spiritual conversation, just as Philip does here; a clear leading in some direction that, in retrospect, has significantly advanced the cause of Christ. Where do these impulses come from, if not from the Spirit of God?

Not every idea or intuition that comes into our heads can be attributed to the Spirit. But if

- a) you are a believer, and
 - b) you are in fellowship with Christ (all known sin confessed), and
 - c) you are maintaining a healthy spiritual diet through daily personal prayer and Bible study,
- you can certainly expect the Lord to guide you, and give him the credit when he does. That, I believe, is what happened to Philip here.

Between the second and third instance of the Lord's directing Philip, he talks with the eunuch and the eunuch becomes a believer and is baptized. v.39 picks up as they are coming out of the baptismal waters.

3. 39-40, a sovereign act by the Holy Spirit.
 - a) Agent: again the Holy Spirit.
 - b) Manner: no command this time. The Spirit just "snatched him away." The verb (*harpazw*) is used of God's taking Paul up the third heaven in 2 Cor. 12; and of the rapture in 1 Thes. 4:17.
 - c) Content: like the first direction, a change in location without giving Philip a clear motive for it. But in fact there is a good reason. Had the Lord left Philip there, or had Philip left by ordinary means, the eunuch might well have tried to stay with him. Compare the demoniac in Mark 5:18,19. It was the Lord's purpose for him to carry what he had learned back to Ethiopia. So he quickly moves Philip out of the way.

Application: Sometimes God commands us and relies on our obedience, but other times he just changes circumstances on us and we have no choice in the matter. If we fret against such changes, we only frustrate ourselves. We need to learn to take the circumstances in our daily lives as being as much the Lord's direction to us as the inner voice of his Spirit or a direct appearance of an angel.

B. 31-38, Three Questions

Are you tongue-tied in conversation with unbelievers about the gospel? Philip's conversation with the eunuch should encourage you. Notice how Philip does not fight the conversation, but for the most part listens carefully and responds briefly but appropriately.

1. 30, In obedience to the Spirit's prompting, Philip draws near and asks a simple question, the only initiative he takes in the conversation. AV has "Understandest thou what thou readest?" The Gk question is phrased in such a way as to suggest doubt: "You don't understand what you're reading, do you?" is perhaps too strong; something along the lines of "That's a puzzling passage, isn't it? Do you understand it?"

Application: Here is an exceedingly simple but powerful way to open a conversation. People are curious; if they are genuinely perplexed about something and think you understand it, they'll ask you for an explanation. And God has so designed the world that there's lots for people to be perplexed about.

In the eunuch's three questions, we can see three stages through which any successful evangelistic conversation runs. Not always do we have the privilege of going all the way through with someone, but every encounter fits into one or another of these three stages.

2. First question, 31, "Help me understand." Evangelism begins with *establishing a relationship of trust*.
 - a) Philip has correctly judged the man's confusion, and the eunuch invites him to ride along. Philip has identified a

- need, and the man eagerly seeks his help with it.
- b) So our discussions about the gospel should be founded on our genuine interest in the needs of others in ways that they can sense. The Spirit of God can use his word in any context, including spray painting "Jesus Saves" on a bridge or scattering tracts from an airplane, but the greatest impact comes when we engage people as people so that they see we have something they want.
3. 32-35, "Of whom speaks the prophet this?" It's not enough to become friends with people. We need to *explain the Scriptures* to them. Where the Spirit is working (as in Acts 8), this won't be too hard, if we just look out for the opportunity.

The Spirit really gave Philip an easy pitch here: Isa. 53, and the question, "Who is this?" Yet it would be easy to muff such a pitch, if we don't know what we're looking for. Notice how Philip answers.

- a) No long academic discourse about twelve different theories about the Suffering Servant. Philip's objective is evangelistic, not academic. His objective is to proclaim the gospel, not deliver a treatise on Isa. 53.
 - b) Also, not the shortest possible answer. The eunuch's next request shows that Philip not only described Jesus, but made clear to his hearer what was necessary to be saved. He *began* at Isa. 53, but certainly didn't stop there. He started telling the eunuch what he asked, but went beyond it to outline the whole gospel and what God expects of sinners.
4. 36-38, "What hinders me to be baptized?" Philip must have described baptism, because the next spring they pass, the eunuch asks for baptism. Philip *experiences the eunuch's faith*.

Note the direction of the initiative here. Philip does not try to lead the eunuch through a prayer, or persuade him that he is a believer. He has made God's requirements clear, but the eunuch asks Philip if he can be saved, not vv. Compare also the Jews in Acts 2:37, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?", or the jailor in 16:30, "What must I do to be saved?" Salvation is not a sale that we are to close by clever questions. We proclaim the gospel, and God stirs up those whom he has chosen to desire what we describe so eagerly that they ask us for it.

Summary

1. Our observations about how God led Philip shows three ways in which God can lead us in daily decisions, the dynamic questions that God's Word does not directly address.
 - a) By visible and tangible instruction from a divine messenger, whether human or supernatural.
 - b) By the inner promptings of his Holy Spirit.

- c) By a sovereign change in our circumstances.
- 2. The conversation with the eunuch shows us three phases in any evangelistic friendship.
 - a) Establishing trust.
 - b) Explaining the Scriptures.
 - c) Experiencing their faith.

Hymn:

Analysis

- A. 8:1b-5, The Great Persecution (last study)
- B. 5-24, Ministry in Samaria (last study)
- C. 25-26, The Apostles vs. Philip

Starts with same sort of contrast that we saw at the beginning of the previous paragraph, between others and Philip.

 - 1. 25 Oi(me\n ou)^n diamartura/menoi kai\ lalh/santes to\n lo/gon tou^ kuri/ou u(pe/strefon ei)s (Ieroso/luma, polla/s te kw/mas tw^n Samaritw^n eu)hggeli/zonto.
 - 2. 26)/Aggelos de\ kuri/ou e)la/lhsen pro\s Fi/lippon le/gwn,)Ana/sthqi kai\ poreu/ou kata\ meshmbri/an e)pi\ th\n o(do\n th\n katabai/nousan a)po\)Ierousalh\m ei)s Ga/zan: au(/th e)sti\n e)/rhmos.
- D. 26-39, Eunuch

Three commands of the Spirit to Philip

 - 1. Go south.
 - a) [26)/Aggelos de\ kuri/ou e)la/lhsen pro\s Fi/lippon le/gwn,)Ana/sthqi kai\ poreu/ou kata\ meshmbri/an e)pi\ th\n o(do\n th\n katabai/nousan a)po\)Ierousalh\m ei)s Ga/zan: au(/th e)sti\n e)/rhmos.]
 - b) 27 kai\ a)nasta\s e)poreu/qh:
 - 2. Join the chariot.

This section is further elaborated by three requests from the Eunuch.

 - a) Setting:

kai\ i)dou\ a)nh\r Ai)qi/oy ... 28 h)^n te u(postre/fwn kai\ kaqh/menos e)pi\ tou^ a(/rmatos au)tou^ kai\ a)negi/nwsken to\n profh/thn)Hsai/+an.

 - 1) eu)nou^xos duna/sths Kanda/khs basili/sshs Ai)qio/pwn,
 - 2) o(\s h)^n e)pi\ pa/shs th^s ga/zhs au)th^s,
 - 3) o(\s e)lhlu/qei proskunh/swn ei)s)Ierousalh/m,
 - b) Execution p
 - 1) command: quote p
 - a> quote f: 29 ei)^pen de\ to\ pneu^ma tw^| Fili/ppw|,
 - b> quote: Pro/selqe kai\ kollh/qhti tw^| a(/rmati tou/tw|.
 - 2) execution:
 - a> 30 prosdramw\n de\ o(Fi/lippos h)/kousen au)tou^ a)naginw/skontos)Hsai/+an to\n profh/thn,
 - b> quote p
 - 1> quote f: kai\ ei)^pen,

- 2> quote:)^Ara/ ge ginw/skeis a(\ a)naginw/skeis;
- c) First request--general sense of disorientation
- 1) quote p
 - a> quote f: 31 o(de\ ei)^pen,
 - b> quote: Pw^s ga\r a)\n dunai/mhn e)a\n mh/ tis o(dhgh/sei me;
 - 2) pareka/lese/n te to\n Fi/lippon a)naba/nta kaqi/sai su\n au)tw^|.
 - d) Second request--of whom speaks the prophet this?
 - 1) Setting: awareness quote p
 - a> quote f: 32 h(de\ perioxh\ th^s grafh^s h(\n a)negi/nwsken h)^n au(/th:
 - b> quote:
 - 1> (Ws pro/baton e)pi\ sfagh\n h)/xqh,
 - 2> kai\ w(s a)mno\s e)nanti/on tou^ kei/rantos au)to\n a)/fwnos, ou(/tws ou)k a)noi/gei to\ sto/ma au)tou^.
 - 3> 33)En th^| tapeinw/sei [au)tou^] h(kri/sis au)tou^ h)/rqh:
 - 4> th\n genea\n au)tou^ ti/s dihgh/setai;
 - 5> o(/ti ai)/retai a)po\ th^s gh^s h(zwh\ au)tou^.
 - 2) request: quote p
 - a> quote f: 34)Apokriqei\s de\ o(eu)nou^xos tw^| Fili/ppw| ei)^pen,
 - b> quote: De/omai/ sou, peri\ ti/nos o(profh/th s le/gei tou^to; peri\ e(autou^ h)\ peri\ e(te/rou tino/s;
 - 3) response
 - a> 35 a)noi/cas de\ o(Fi/lippos to\ sto/ma au)tou^
 - b> kai\ a)rca/menos a)po\ th^s grafh^s tau/th s eu)hggeli/sato au)tw^| to\n)Ihsou^n.
- e) Third request--why can't I be baptized?
- 1) Setting: 36 w(s de\ e)poreu/onto kata\ th\n o(do\n, h)^lqon e)pi/ ti u(/dwr,
 - 2) request: quote p
 - a> quote f: kai/ fhsin o(eu)nou^xos,
 - b> quote:
 - 1>)Idou\ u(/dwr:
 - 2> ti/ kwlu/ei me baptisqh^nai;
 - c> 38 kai\ e)ke/leusen sth^nai to\ a(/rma,
 - 3) response
 - a> kai\ kate/bhsan a)mfo/teroi ei)s to\ u(/dwr o(/ te Fi/lippos kai\ o(eu)nou^xos,
 - b> kai\ e)ba/ptisen au)to/n.
3. Snatches him away
- a) 39 o(/te de\ a)ne/bhsan e)k tou^ u(/datos, pneu^ma kuri/ou h(/rpassen to\n Fi/lippon,
 - b) kai\ ou)k ei)^den au)to\n ou)ke/ti o(eu)nou^xos:
 - c) e)poreu/eto ga\r th\n o(do\n au)tou^ xai/rwn.
Cf. 8:8; 13:52; 16:34. Sign of salvation? But the Samaritans!
(Or was it Philip's joy?)
Causal relation: "We know he couldn't see him any more, for he went on his way. Had Philip remained around, the Eunuch would probably have stayed with him, as the demoniac wished to do with the Lord, but with Philip gone, he took his joy on home with him."

d) [40 Fi/lippos de\ eu(re/qh ei)s)/Azwton, kai\ dierxo/menos
eu)hggeli/zeto ta\s po/leis pa/sas e(/ws tou^ e)lqei^n au)to\n
ei)s Kaisa/reian.]

E. 40, on to Caesarea

40 Fi/lippos de\ eu(re/qh ei)s)/Azwton, kai\ dierxo/menos
eu)hggeli/zeto ta\s po/leis pa/sas e(/ws tou^ e)lqei^n au)to\n ei)s
Kaisa/reian.