

7 Conversion of the Ethiopian Eunuch—Acts 8

The conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch follows Luke's account of the conversion of the Samaritans in the first part of Acts 8. Luke records this conversion in Acts 8:26-40. This conversion, just as the previous ones, follows the instructions of the Lord when he gave the Great Commission. This episode begins with an angel of the Lord instructing Philip:

26 Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Go south to the road – the desert road – that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza."

The Ethiopian Adds a Racial, Political, and Sexual Dimension to "All Nations"

27 So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, 28 and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the book of Isaiah the prophet. 29 The Spirit told Philip, "Go to that chariot and stay near it."

The Ethiopian eunuch brings three new dimensions to the meaning of *all nations* as it appeared in the Great Commission—racial, political, and sexual. *All nations* includes people of all races and nations. The Ethiopian was from a country south of Egypt and was most probably a black African. God did not discriminate against people because of race. The importance of this happening becomes clear to Peter, who said in Acts 10:34-35, "Then Peter began to speak: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism 35 but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right." Hopefully, the church in our day has learned this lesson in regard to African Americans. Let us hope and pray that we will take the gospel with zeal to new people coming to live among us: Hispanic, Indians, Orientals, etc.

The eunuch illustrates that the gospel is to go to people of differing political persuasions. Since he was an important official in charge of the entire Queen's treasury, he probably believed that monarchies were a sufficient form of government. Believing in a democratic form of government is not a requirement for salvation. Christians are to accept the rule of those whom God appoints. In Rom 13:1-2, Paul instructed us, "Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. 2 Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves."

The eunuch illustrates that the gospel is to go to all people regardless of sex or sexual orientation, even those who have no sexual inclination at all. In other words, sex is nothing when it comes to the great commission. Jesus put discipleship and sex in the proper perspective in Matt 19:10-12, when he forbade people divorced to remarry, except that divorce was for adultery:

The disciples said to him, "If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry." 11 Jesus replied, "Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given. 12 For some are eunuchs because they were born that way; others were made that way by men; and others have renounced marriage because of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it."

The contemporary issue of popularizing and approving of homosexuality as a life style confronts the church. Yes, the gospel is to go to people with unclear sexual orientation, but these must also be taught that as Christians they must forego illicit sexual conduct (Rom 1:26-27; 1 Cor 6:9:10), even if they must renounce their life style for the kingdom of God." The same is true for those divorced for reasons other than adultery.

The Ethiopian Illustrates the Necessity of Preaching

30 Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. "Do you understand what you are reading?" Philip asked. 31 "How can I," he said, "unless someone explains it to me?" So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. 32 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.*

33 In his humiliation he was deprived of justice.

Who can speak of his descendants?

For his life was taken from the earth."

The example of the Ethiopian illustrated how necessary it is to have preachers. The Eunuch could not himself have found the way from Isaiah to Christ. Philip's opening is one that is useful today. We might say, "Do you understand what the Bible is saying?" The Ethiopian's answer, "How can I, unless someone explains it to me." reflects exactly what Paul taught, in Rom 10:12-15, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." 14 How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? 15 And how can they preach unless they are sent?" Preaching is the essential command to believers.

The Gospel Includes the Good News about Jesus

34 The eunuch asked Philip, "Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?" 35 Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.

Peter told him the good news about Jesus. Older versions say that he preached Jesus. The good news is the death, burial, resurrection, and the appearance of Jesus after his death (Acts 2; 1 Cor 15:1-4). In Acts 8:12, Philip preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ. Peter had also taught in Acts 4:12, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."

The Ethiopian Understood That Jesus Required Him to Be Baptized

36 As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptized?" 38 And he gave orders to stop the chariot.

Jesus had told them that he that believes and is baptized would be saved. Now the Ethiopian says directly, "Why shouldn't I be baptized?" The evidence that we must be baptized to be saved is overwhelming, yet many insist that it is not necessary. Peter said that we must repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins in Acts 2:38. Ananias told Paul in Acts 22:16: "And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name." Paul wrote in Rom 6:4, "We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life." Peter added, emphatically, "And this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also." 1 Peter 3:20-21.

The Baptism Was an Immersion—a Burial

Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. 39 When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away,

Prior to this baptism, a verse 37 appears in older versions showing the Ethiopian making the good confession: "And Philip said, 'If you believe with all your heart, you may.' And he answered and said, 'I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.'" The necessity of the good confession is apparent in the teaching of Jesus and the apostles. In Matt 10:32, Jesus said, "Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven." Paul taught in Rom 10:10, "For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved."

In this example, the mode of baptism is equally clear as an immersion: 1. Both men went down into the water; 2. Philip baptized him; and 3. they came up out of the water. Since the word *baptism* means immersion, the practice is firmly set by the word of God.

Conclusion

And the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing. 40 Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and traveled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea.

The Ethiopian rejoiced after he obeyed the gospel. He had accomplished what the Lord had commanded. He obeyed the gospel preached by being buried with Christ in baptism. He was now a disciple of the Lord, he was saved, and his sins were forgiven. No greater reasons exist than these to prompt rejoicing.

Study Questions

1. How did Philip find the Ethiopian? _____
2. What was the Ethiopian reading? _____ What does this show about him? _____
3. What did Philip preach? _____
4. What did the Ethiopian say when he heard the gospel? _____
5. Why did the eunuch rejoice? _____

