

A Witness To Joy

Acts 8:26-39

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²⁶ Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." This is a desert place. ²⁷ And he rose and went. And there was an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure. He had come to Jerusalem to worship ²⁸ and was returning, seated in his chariot, and he was reading the prophet Isaiah. ²⁹ And the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over and join this chariot." ³⁰ So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" ³¹ And he said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. ³² Now the passage of the Scripture that he was reading was this: "Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter and like a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he opens not his mouth. ³³ In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth." ³⁴ And the eunuch said to Philip, "About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?" ³⁵ Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus. ³⁶ And as they were going along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, "See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?" ³⁸ And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. ³⁹ And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing.

What if you saw your vocation, your trade, your workplace, your school, your neighborhood, your retirement, your post-retirement life as a means to witness about Jesus Christ? What if you re-trained your mind regularly to see that your life on earth matters to live in the joy of Christ and to spread joy to others?

For the next four Sundays, until Palm Sunday, I hope to go through a series on being witnesses for Christ.

Here you see a light skinned Greek speaking Jewish follower of Jesus Christ interacting with a dark-skinned eunuch from Ethiopia. They don't have much in common. Their cultures are different. Their identity is different. Their language is different. And yet they both need the same thing you and I need. They need what humanity is searching for but remains so elusive – Enduring joy, peace or contentment.

1. This world cannot give you this joy. The world's goods can never satisfy you. *"..the world is passing away with its desires..".* 1 John 2:17.
2. You cannot give yourself that joy. Some of the most accomplished people have said their lives are empty. It's only a matter of time emptiness will catch up with you.
3. And the devil wants to steal your joy. His agenda is to steal, kill and destroy. (John 10:10).

Where is lasting joy found then?

Lasting joy and peace are found only in Jesus Christ. Jesus said, *"I have come to give life and life abundantly"*. (John 10:10).

And Philip already found that joy. And this Ethiopian is search of that joy. We are told he came to worship. And God uses Philip to help the Ethiopian find that joy. And when Ethiopian man finds Jesus Christ, he goes away rejoicing.

This is such a wonderful cross-cultural witness to joy.

My prayer is that this passage will spur you to be a better witness for the Gospel and for the joy of others.

I have five implications as we unpack this passage.

Rise up to Witness for Christ.

Verse 26.

²⁶ *Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." This is a desert place.*

Who is Phillip? Phillip was a disciple of Jesus Christ. He was also one of the first seven deacons appointed by the apostles. After his fellow deacon Stephen was martyred, God used persecution to send Philip outside of Jerusalem. So Philip goes

to Samaria. Many people come believe in Christ. Verse twenty-five tells us that Philip returned to Jerusalem after preaching in Samaria. And in Jerusalem, God tells Phillip to take a trip to the desert into Gaza. Same Gaza as we hear in the news these days. Phillip is told to take a road trip. Those days, road trips meant walking for miles. Gaza is south-west of Jerusalem. God tells him ‘rise up’.

Implication: You don’t have to have a title in the church to rise up to share the good news with others. Being a disciple of Jesus Christ is enough to make another disciple. Jesus said, “go and make disciples”.

Do your Gospel aspirations match up to your Gospel actions? Do you desire Gospel fruit without sowing Gospel seeds? Paul said I planted, Apollos watered but God gave the growth.

Charles Spurgeon said *“The Spirit of God does not work by sleepy men! He loves to have us alive, ourselves, and then He will make others alive by us. See to this, dear Brothers”* C.H Spurgeon.

There are sins of commission but I wonder if there are sins of omissions. Doing nothing is as bad as doing something wrong.

Be Available to Witness.

Verses 27 and 28.

²⁷ *And he rose and went. And there was an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure. He had come to Jerusalem to worship* ²⁸ *and was returning, seated in his chariot, and he was reading the prophet Isaiah.*

Philips sees an Ethiopian. This is a very cross-cultural mission. Think about this. Phillip is a Greek speaking Jew. And this Ethiopian is from Africa. This Ethiopia was most likely north Sudan at that time. This man is also a eunuch. Someone who has been emasculated, deemed impotent or has been consecrated to palace duties. We just don’t know. It was common for eunuchs to be serve in palaces in those days. This man was also an official of the treasury of queen Candace. He is like the chief financial officer. He also had the luxury of a chariot like a private limousine in our day. What was he doing? He was returning from Jerusalem after worshipping very likely at the festival of the Pentecost. He was a Jewish convert or

a proselyte. He has not quite understood the message of God but he is the right direction.

Do you see something fascinating here? This man has enough influence and financial resources to obtain a copy of the scroll of Isaiah. Obtaining a copy of the Scripture was not easy in those days, especially for non-Jewish people. How privileged we are to have the entire Bible both Old and New Testaments in many languages today. So, this man is sitting in his chariot and reading Scripture. While, the Ethiopian is still reading Isaiah, Philip still does not have a clue what he needs to do. All he knows is that God has told him to go here and he is available. But God knows exactly what Philip needs to do. Your availability is a key to Gospel witness.

Hear and Inquire

Verses 29 through 31.

²⁹ And the Spirit said to Philip, “Go over and join this chariot.” ³⁰ So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, “Do you understand what you are reading?” ³¹ And he said, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. ³² Now the passage of the Scripture that he was reading was this: “Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter and like a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he opens not his mouth. ³³ In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth.”

Notice in verse 30 that Phillip has been walking on the desert road. When God tells him to go join the chariot, Phillip starts running. Scripture was read aloud in those days. So Phillip runs next to the chariot, he hears what the Ethiopian is reading and asks him ‘do you really understand what you are reading?’ The Ethiopian is an honest man – he says ‘I need some guidance’. Verse 31 – he pleads with Phillip to come up and join him. So Phillip stops running, he jumps into chariot to sit next to the Ethiopian. And he was reading a passage from the Old Testament.

Tell Good News About Christ

Verses 32 through 35.

³² Now the passage of the Scripture that he was reading was this: “Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter and like a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he opens not his mouth. ³³ In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth.” ³⁴ And the eunuch said to Philip, “About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?” ³⁵ Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus.

The Ethiopian is reading from Isaiah 53 verse 7 and 8 but the last part of verse 8 is omitted.

Here is the full text from verses 7 and 8 – “*He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.*” ⁸ *By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people?”*

The Ethiopian begs Phillip to explain about whom is the prophet Isaiah talking about. (Is he talking about himself or someone else?). This is like a puzzle to him.

God had been preparing this man’s heart until this point.

So what does Phillip do? He tells the Ethiopian about this ‘*someone else*’. This ‘someone’ is the only One that matters. Phillip tells the good news of Jesus Christ. This is the God ordained moment for Phillip. This is why God sent Phillip to the desert road. Phillip was obedient. Now we do not know what language this scroll of Isaiah was written in – it could have the Septuagint – which is the Old Testament in Greek. But Phillip knows exactly what to say.

And what does he tell the Ethiopian? ‘*And Phillip began to open his mouth and beginning from this Scripture, he proclaimed the good news about Jesus to him*’.

What Phillip exactly shared with the Ethiopian is not detailed here but we know enough. Phillip was also a disciple of the apostles. He was appointed by the apostles in Acts chapter 6. So he knew the whole gospel and why Isaiah was written that way.

1. Philip tells the Ethiopian that the prophet Isaiah was not talking about

himself but about a Savior who would come to deal with sin once and for all. This is the suffering servant of the Lord. Isaiah was talking about Jesus Christ who came to suffer and die on behalf of sinners. Verse 7 of Isaiah 53 says “he was *oppressed* and *afflicted*” for no fault of his. Why? Because he was trading places with sinners. There is no one who is without sin but Jesus is sinless and yet he was humiliated, oppressed, inflicted. Philippians 2:8 tells us that Jesus “humbled himself”. Jesus would voluntarily suffer. But Jesus also was silent before his accusers. Why? He could have defended himself. But he did not open his mouth. His silence was as if he was taking the blame on himself because of your sin and mine. By his silence, he was bearing your fault and mine. This is the only way you can be accepted before God.

2. Philip very likely shared these important things as well
 - a. Phillip told the Ethiopian that he needed to repent. He told the Ethiopian that if God wants to accept his worship he would have to repent of his sin. Repentance is changing the way you see yourself, changing your thinking, change your mindset in the sight of a Holy and a Just God. Knowing that you are a sinner in the sight of God. The first step is acknowledging you are spiritually bankrupt, knowing you have no standing before God, knowing you fully deserve judgment for your sin. In that evaluation of yourself, you run to God as He has provided a way to forgive you based on the death of His Son – Jesus Christ. God forgives only those who are truly repentant. Forgiveness through Jesus Christ alone through faith alone. You owe a debt to God and Jesus paid the fine. Jesus paid it all. Jesus died but he did not stay dead. He rose again from the dead conquering death and sin.
 - b. Phillip also told him about the need to be baptized, the need to publicly declare his new identity in Jesus. Baptism is simply making public that Jesus is now your Master.
 - c. Phillip also told him about the joy of salvation. There is happiness, a contentment, a happiness knowing your sins are completely forgiven.

Rejoice.

Verses 36 through 38.

³⁶And as they were going along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, “See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?” ³⁸And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. ³⁹And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing.

This was a rhetorical question. The Ethiopian was not asking if there was something preventing him. He was saying “I need to get baptized now. What’s the delay”. The Ethiopian could not contain his joy. He does not say gently say there is water. He exclaims “Look here is water, I want to be baptized”. Verse 38.

The Ethiopian found the source of true joy and peace – Jesus Christ. And he went away rejoicing.

Here is a practical application:

Next time you have a conversation with someone or someone asks you a question, consider using the question or conversation to spring board into a Gospel conversation. You never know what the Lord is doing in their heart. God wants to use you. You need to be willing, available, hear and inquire and tell them the good news. Rise up and witness for Christ!

Maybe this morning there is someone who is going through life’s challenges and does not know where to go. Every thing appears bleak and hopeless.

I have good news for you. Jesus is able. You will not find a more able Savior than the Lord Jesus Christ. Trust in Him. Cry out to Him. He will save. He will bless!

----- Discipleship Questions-----

MESSAGE SUMMARY: A Witness To Joy. Acts 8: 26-39

HEAD: These questions help you examine the truth of God's Word.

1. How did Philip respond to the angel's command to witness to the Ethiopian?
What parallels do you see with the angel and Jesus' command to his disciples in Matthew 28:19?

HEART: These questions help you wrestle with what you believe.

2. What do you observe in Philip's engagement with the Ethiopian eunuch? Go around and share at least three observations. Do you believe you can be a witness for Christ too? How will you apply this passage?
3. What is God convicting you of and to believe in light of this message?

HANDS/HABITS: These questions help you bring the truth into your everyday life and develop behaviors that change your habits.

4. For personal reflection: What will you do to witness about Christ to others?