

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

CONTACT (ACTS 8:26-35)

BACK TO PHILIP

As Peter and John were still up north in Samaria, Philip was southwest in Gaza. Philip went to this area because an "angel of the Lord spoke" to him.

- Though Gaza was a **desolate and dry** area, Philip didn't argue with God's direction, he **obeyed and trusted that this area was where he needed to be.**

THE FOCUS WASN'T THE LAND

Gaza was not the focus of Philip's mission; it was an influential Ethiopian eunuch that was the treasurer for the queen. He was a convert to Judaism returning home after worshipping in Jerusalem, though he probably couldn't fully participate.

- As Philip is hanging out in the desert wondering why the heck he's there, the Ethiopian rides by in his chariot reading Isaiah 53 aloud. One of the themes in Acts is finding Jesus in the OT because He is the key to understanding it.

IMAGINE THEIR REACTIONS

The Ethiopian longed to know God but was **unsatisfied with his religion because he couldn't fully be accepted or shown grace.** As he was digging in the Word, along comes a follower of the Messiah sent to answer his questions.

- The OT shows us **the need for a personal and gracious Savior because religious practice alone doesn't satisfy.**

SO, PHILIP IS HAPPY TO EXPLAIN

Jesus had quoted Isaiah 53 several times referring to His death. Philip was not one of the original 12, but he had heard the apostles teach the connection of Christ and Isaiah many times. Not hearing it directly from Christ made Philip **have to work and study to be able to accurately explain the gospel.**

ARE WE ABLE TO GIVE AN ANSWER?

1 Peter 3:15 says we're to "be ready to give an answer to anyone who asks for a reason for the hope that is in you." Philip could only be of service to God and the Ethiopian because he had **prepared in advance.**

- **Can we accurately share the gospel? Why do we believe what we do? Can we be effective with so little invested?**

CONVERSION (ACTS 8:36-40)

ACTION FOLLOWS FAITH

Philip understood that baptism follows true belief (v12). He also understood the mode of baptism, submersion, because Luke uses the word batpizo and takes time to mention the coming up out of the water.

- **Baptism is not salvation, but a response to salvation. True belief garners obedience and action. "WHAT WOULD KEEP ME FROM BEING BAPTIZED?"**

Not only was this outsider chopping at the bit to be obedient to Jesus' command to be baptized, but there might have been doubt in his mind that a black non-Jewish eunuch could ever be accepted into the faith.

- **Obedience and acceptance are trademarks of Jesus. All willing people have a place in God's family.**

HEY, WHERE'D HE GO?

Luke records that as the Ethiopian was coming up out of the water "the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him any longer." The Greek herpasen describes a sudden action. Philip is transported (One of the most subtle yet fascinating miracles in the NT) to Azotus, slightly northwest of Gaza. **"BUT HE WENT ON HIS WAY REJOICING."**

The life of the Ethiopian had been forever altered, **not by a disappearing disciple, but by the power of the Holy Spirit.** Philip has reached the hated Samaritans up north and an African gentile down south that will take the gospel to another continent. Now he heads north to Caesarea where he'll put down roots.

CONFRONTATION (ACTS 9:1-9)

"MEANWHILE, SAUL WAS STILL BREATHING THREATS..."

As the church was expanding all over Israel, Saul was working diligently to exterminate the followers of Jesus. He had obtained permission from the High Priest and was commissioned to head out into the neighboring cities.

- At this point followers of Jesus weren't called Christians, but **"The Way"** taken from John 14:6. Saul pursued and brought them back to Jerusalem for imprisonment.

ONE OF THE BIGGEST GAME CHANGERS EVER

On the road to Damascus a "light from heaven suddenly flashed" around Saul and "falling to the ground, he heard a voice say, 'Saul why are you persecuting Me?'"

- The voice that Saul and the others heard asked, "Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" This would have been a shock to Saul because he thought he was persecuting those that blasphemed God.
- In his confusion, Saul sought clarity by asking, "Who are You, Lord [sir]?"

"I AM JESUS, THE ONE YOU'RE PERSECUTING"

Saul thought the greatest blasphemy was claiming Jesus was the risen Son of God, now he is confronted with the reality that the claim was true! Before Saul has time to speak, he is told by Christ to "go into the city" and wait for instruction.

LIFE WAS ABOUT TO CHANGE

Saul was about to experience a **new faith, new interpretation of scripture, new perspective, new identity, and new mission and purpose.**

- **When we have a true encounter with God, we change.** It's a process we all go through at different speeds, but God never leaves us the same.

BLIND AND BROKEN

The ruthless persecutor becomes blinded by God's light and unable to ingest food for 3 days because his world has been rocked.

- **In order to be used by God, we must become broken by God.** This makes little sense to the world, but **to reach our potential, we must submit to the Master's design.**

SET APART (ACTS 9:10-19)

TWO PLACES AT ONCE

As God was speaking to Saul, He was also speaking to a man named Ananias in Damascus. Ananias was told to go find Saul because he was waiting on him in order to regain his sight. Instead of the Temple in Jerusalem, God takes Saul to a **humble disciple who lived on Straight Street.**

USING AN UNLIKELY SOURCE

Unlike when the big guns of the faith came in, Ananias was a very obscure figure in the Bible. **We learn all disciples of Christ are to be used for His Kingdom.**

- God is not in the business of religious ritual or making celebrity followers. **God is concerned about restoration, holiness, and sanctification.**

SCARED, BUT NOT UNWILLING

Ananias expresses his concerns, but is still willing to do what God asks. Notice that he isn't rebuked by Jesus or Luke.

- God knows that we will get intimidated or scared about walking in faith. **This is ok as long as we are not paralyzed or hindered by our fear to move forward.**

VERSE 15 SETS UP THE REST OF ACTS

v15 sets up the church's change of strategy for reaching the world. The entire NT narrative is shaped by the **obedience** of Ananias to "Go!" and Saul to receive.

- **God had chosen the most unlikely vessel** to take His message to the non-Jewish corners of the world. Notice Ananias calls him "Brother Saul."

OBEDIENCE LED TO SIGHT

Saul obeyed the command to go into Damascus and wait, Ananias obeyed and met with Saul to pray for him, and Saul obeyed the command to be baptized after conversion. This obedience led to Saul regaining his sight and his strength. Now the mission for this former Rabbi is about to begin.

GENUINE BELIEF & OBEDIENCE...

- To be a Christian starts with belief, but it does not conclude there.
- We must believe that Jesus has justified our ability to be in right standing with God through the cross.
- Belief leads to obedience to the Word of God in prayer, study, and personal life.

...LEAD US TO SANCTIFICATION

- Belief leads us into obedience that leads us to do works that glorify God (not ourselves) and help others.
- Belief and obedience prepare us to be used by God. We're called to not fall into the selfish and destructive ways of the world, but to be set apart for His purposes.

ASSESSING OURSELVES

- Do we know that God loves us?
- If so, are we humbled and are we being obedient to the Word? Do we know the Word enough to be obedient?
- Are we doing good works for His Kingdom?
- Are we living a life separate from the destructive principles of the world?