

ACTS: THE STORY CONTINUES

ACTS 8:26-40 - BEGINNING WITH THIS SCRIPTURE

OPENING THOUGHT: Why do sincere people sometimes read the same Bible passage and arrive at very different conclusions?

- What determines how we understand Scripture?

INTRODUCTION

- **At the beginning of Acts 8, Philip is ministering in Samaria.**
 - People are believing.
 - Lives are being changed.
 - The Gospel is advancing.
 - Then the Lord does something unexpected.
- **He sends Philip away from a fruitful ministry opportunity and onto a desert road to meet one man.**
 - This encounter becomes one of the most important conversations in the book of Acts because it reveals not only the Gospel itself, but how the earliest Christians understood and communicated the Scriptures.

READ ACTS 8:26-40

“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. 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 and was returning, seated in his chariot, and he was reading the prophet Isaiah. And the Spirit said to Philip, ‘Go over to join this chariot.’ So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and

asked, 'Do you understand what you are reading?' And he said, 'How can I, unless someone guides me?' And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

SECTION 1

THE MAN GOD PURSUED

Goal:

To understand who the Ethiopian was and why this encounter matters.

Discussion Questions:

- What details do we learn about the Ethiopian from this passage?
- What details suggest that he was sincerely seeking God?

Teaching Notes:

- An Ethiopian official serving under Candace, queen of Ethiopia.
- A man of influence, education, wealth, and authority.
- Returning from worship in Jerusalem.
 - A eunuch, occupying a unique position as an outsider despite his desire to worship the God of Israel.
 - Deuteronomy 23:1 bars men with some sort of mutilation or damage to the sexual organs from participation in certain aspects of worship within the assembly of the Lord
 - Leviticus 21:20 bars those of the priestly line from approaching the altar
 - **What would have been the Experience of the Ethiopian Eunuch in Worship while he was in Jerusalem??**
- Possesses a scroll of Isaiah, something that would have been extremely valuable in the ancient world.

Teaching Thought:

- The Lord intentionally directs Philip **away from a large ministry opportunity** in Samaria **to pursue one seeking individual on a desert road**.
- God is not only gathering crowds, He is also pursuing individual people.

SECTION 2

THE QUESTION THAT DRIVES THE STORY

READ ACTS 8:32-35

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 it's shearer is silent, so he opens not his mouth. In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth.' And the Eunuch said to Philip, 'About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?'

Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus.

Goal:

To understand the central question of the passage.

Discussion Questions:

- What question is the Ethiopian actually asking?
- Why is the identity of the servant so important?

Teaching Thought:

The Ethiopian has Scripture, he has sincerity, and spiritual interest, but he still lacks understanding.

His question is ultimately: ***"Who is this passage about?"***

The answer to that question is the key to everything he has been searching for.

SECTION 3

THE GOSPEL PHILIP PREACHED

READ ISAIAH 53:4-9

Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. 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? And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth.

Goal:

To see why Philip immediately connected this passage to Jesus.

Discussion Questions:

- What details in Isaiah's description remind you of Jesus?

- Why do you think Philip began here when explaining the Gospel?

Teaching Thought:

Hundreds of years before the birth of Christ, Isaiah describes a suffering servant who bears the sins of others.

Philip begins with this Scripture and tells the Ethiopian about Jesus.

The Gospel Philip preached was not disconnected from the Old Testament.

It was the fulfillment of it.

Jesus, the Apostles, and their Disciples ONLY had the Old Testament. They always preached the gospel out of the Old Testament.

SECTION 4

HOW DID PHILIP LEARN TO READ THE BIBLE THIS WAY?

READ LUKE 24:25-27

And he said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

Goal:

To understand why Philip instinctively saw Christ in Isaiah 53.

Discussion Questions:

- According to Jesus, what do the Scriptures ultimately point toward?

- How does Luke 24 help explain what Philip does in Acts 8?

Teaching Thought:

Jesus taught His disciples to read the Scriptures as a unified story that finds its fulfillment in Him.

- The apostles learned this from Jesus.
- The early church learned it through the apostles' teaching.
- Stephen understood the Scriptures this way.
- Philip understood the Scriptures this way.
- Paul – as one of the most highly educated theologians of his time - understood the Scriptures this way.
- **Throughout Acts, we repeatedly see believers understanding the Scriptures through the lens of Christ.**

SECTION 5

CHRIST: THE KEY TO UNDERSTANDING SCRIPTURE

Goal:

To understand why a Christ-centered interpretation matters.

Discussion Questions:

- What common pattern do we see in the way believers throughout Acts handle the Scriptures?
- How does the way we understand Scripture affect the way we communicate Scripture?

Teaching Thought – What Lens Are We Reading Scripture Through?:

- III – Red/Blue glasses

People naturally read Scripture through the lens of whatever concerns them most.

- Political
- End-Times Speculation
- Personal Success
- Ameri-centric
- Environmental
- Legalistic/Morality
- Social Justice
- Gender Equality
- Racial Equity
- Sexual Identity
- Environmental Stewardship
- Conspiracy Theories...
- The question is not whether we have a lens. The question is whether our lens is the same one Jesus gave His disciples.
 - Jesus and the apostles consistently read the Scriptures through the lens of Christ.
- So then, what about the other issues???
 - Justice, Equity, Environmental, Eschatological...?
 - *“For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face, that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God’s mystery, which is Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”*
~ Colossians 2:1-3

- **Allowing Christ to be our primary lens – through which we interpret, understand, and communicate scripture - does not diminish the other concerns of Scripture.**
 - Rather, it places them in their proper relationship to Him.
 - Justice finds its meaning in Christ.
 - Equity finds meaning in Christ
 - Holiness finds its meaning in Christ.
 - Mercy finds its meaning in Christ.
 - The Kingdom finds its fulfillment in Christ.
 - The nations find their Savior in Christ.
 - The future finds its destiny in Christ.
 - Everything finds its proper place in relation to Christ.
 - As we are conformed to the real Jesus, our hearts and minds are also conformed more and more to HIS nature.
- **Why was Philip's presentation of the Gospel so effective?**
 - Because he rightly understood the Scriptures and faithfully proclaimed Christ from them.
- **How we understand Scripture will shape how we communicate Scripture.**
 - **When we interpret Scripture through a narrow lens, we will proclaim a narrow gospel.**
 - Conservative Politics are NOT the gospel
 - Liberal Politics are NOT the gospel
 - Being “Pro-Israel” is NOT the gospel
 - Social Justice is NOT the gospel
 - Racial Equity is NOT the gospel
 - Environmental Concern is NOT the gospel
 - Eschatological Speculation is NOT the gospel
 - LGBTQ rights and pride flags... are NOT the gospel
 - Narrow Gospels don’t save sinners. Jesus saves sinners.

- When we understand Scripture through Christ, we discover that every promise, prophecy, theme, and hope ultimately finds its fulfillment in Him.
 - The hope of the gospel is that Christ has come to make a way for us to be reconciled to our Creator
 - That HIS KINGDOM is being manifested in HIS CHURCH now – and more and more as she is sanctified
 - And ULTIMATELY that He will return to right every wrong, and make all things new

A BEAUTIFUL DETAIL

The Ethiopian went on his way rejoicing after being baptized into Christ

- If the Ethiopian continued reading Isaiah beyond chapter 53, he eventually would have encountered Isaiah 56, where God gives a remarkable promise concerning foreigners and eunuchs who draw near to Him.
 - *'For thus says the Lord: "To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose the things that please me and hold fast my covenant, I will give in my house and within my walls a monument and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off. "And the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord, to minister to him, to love the name of the Lord, and to be his servants, everyone who keeps the Sabbath and does not profane it, and holds fast my covenant— these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples." The Lord God, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, declares, "I will gather yet others to him besides those already gathered." ~ Isaiah 56:4-8*
 - Whether or not he ever made that connection, Acts 8 beautifully demonstrates that the Good Shepherd welcomes those who were once far off, once marginalized, once kept

from full inclusion in God's people. He cleanses them, and brings them near through Christ.

THE RESPONSE

READ ACTS 8:36-40

“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?’ And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. 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. But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through he preached the gospel to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.”

Goal:

To see the result of rightly understanding the Gospel.

Discussion Questions:

- How does the Ethiopian respond after hearing the Gospel?
- What evidence do we see that he understood and believed the message?

Teaching Thought:

Philip began in Jerusalem with Jewish people, and preached Jesus to them

Then preached to the crowds in Samaria – people who were considered “estranged relatives” of Israel...

- They accepted the first 5 books of Moses and rejected the rest of the Old Testament
- They rejected Jerusalem as the center of worship.
- Philip “...proclaimed to them the Christ” (verse 5)

Then he preached the Gospel from the Old Testament to someone completely different than before...

- He was the first African to hear the gospel and believe
- He was a Eunuch: a man who – under the Old Covenant – was marginalized.
 - Yet Philip doesn’t preach a different gospel to him
 - Philip preaches JESUS to the eunuch
 - The Ethiopian believes.
 - He is baptized.
 - He goes on his way rejoicing.
- Philip continues his ministry elsewhere.
- The Gospel has once again accomplished its purpose.

APPLICATION

- How does this passage challenge the way we read Scripture?
- Are there lenses or assumptions that sometimes keep us from seeing Christ clearly in the Scriptures?
- How might seeing Christ throughout Scripture deepen your understanding of God's plan of redemption?
- Is there someone in your life who may be searching for answers the way the Ethiopian was?

KEY TRUTH

Jesus and the apostles teach us that Christ is the key to understanding the Scriptures.

The Bible is rightly understood when it is understood and the gospel is rightly communicated through Him.

FUN FACT:

ACTS 8:40

“But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through he preached the gospel to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.”

ACTS 21:8

“On the next day we departed and came to Caesarea, and we entered the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, and stayed with him.”