Acts 2024 Juan Seo (June 2, 2024)

**PHILIP PREACHES THE GOSPEL TO THE ETHIOPIAN EUNUCH**

Acts 8:26-40

Key Verse 8:35 ***“Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.”***

Last Sunday, we learned the story of the evangelist Philip, who obeyed Jesus' command ***“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth”*** (Ac 1:8) and went to Samaria to preach the gospel. Many Samaritans then believed in Jesus and were baptized. The season of Christ had arrived among the Samaritans. In today’s passage, the Holy Spirit led Philip to another place: ***“Go south to the road-the desert road-that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza”*** (1). Look at the map here; the red line is the desert road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza. Gaza is where the Israel-Hamas war of 2023 took place. Philip was probably very busy helping many people in Samaria, and he may have even made plans to evangelize the entire province of Samaria by going from one city to another and sharing the gospel. But the Holy Spirit's leading was something Philip didn't expect–something different from his plan. Philip might have thought the Holy Spirit's command was irrational: “Go to the desert road...is it inhabited? What am I supposed to do in the wilderness where no one lives?” Besides, the distance from Samaria to the desert road was about 100 miles, which would take two days and three nights on foot. If we were in Philip's situation, we might have followed our own plans instead of obeying the direction of the Holy Spirit. But Philip had no doubts or complaints, only trusted in the Holy Spirit and obeyed without hesitation: ***‘So he got ready and went.’*** What happened then? ***‘On his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch.’*** How was it possible to meet that person in the wilderness, where no one else would be? It was truly remarkable, so when we look at the original Greek, there's an exclamation, ***“ἰδού (idou)-look, behold-an Ethiopian eunuch.”*** This was indeed a divine encounter led by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit had sent Philip, who was in Samaria, to preach the gospel to this man.

What kind of person was the Ethiopian eunuch? In verse 27, he is described as an important official in charge of all the treasury of the Kandake. Kandake is also called Candace, a title that refers to “queen of the Ethiopians” and means “great woman.” The biblical Ethiopia should not be confused with the modern nation Ethiopia. In biblical times, Ethiopia was a kingdom located south of the Nile River, a region that was called Cush in Hebrew in the Old Testament and translated into Greek as Ethiopia. The kingdom of Ethiopia was an important political force and center of trade (Is 45:14). The Ethiopian eunuch was a high-ranking official in his kingdom, like a minister of finance who was in charge of all the queen's treasury. Why would such a person be on the desert road from Jerusalem to Gaza? Verse 27 says that this man had gone to Jerusalem to worship. He was probably a convert to Judaism, believing in the God of Israel. He was so devout that he traveled all the way from Ethiopia to Jerusalem, a distance of about 1,500 miles, to worship God in the temple. This distance is similar to the distance from Flushing, NY, to Austin, TX. And on the way back, he was sitting in his chariot reading the Book of Isaiah. Perhaps he chose a quiet desert road with few people, rather than a fast, busy road, in order to read God's word. His delight was in the law of the Lord, so he meditated on the word of God day and night (Ps 1:2). As the deer pants for streams of water, he was panting for God (Ps 42:1). He wanted to know more about who God is, and he wanted to realize the meaning of God's word more deeply. Would God overlook someone who seeks God with such a deep spiritual desire? God is the one who meets us when we earnestly seek Him. ***“I love those who love me, and those who seek me find me”*** (Prov 8:17). That's why He tells us to seek Him eagerly. ***“Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know”*** (Jer 33:3). If we have a spiritual desire like this Ethiopian eunuch, God will surely meet us. Do you believe this?

The Holy Spirit commanded Philip, ***“Go to that chariot and stay near it.”*** It seems that the chariot was moving slowly because the Ethiopian eunuch was reading the Bible, so Philip ran up to the chariot and could hear the Ethiopian eunuch reading the Book of Isaiah. Most likely, the Ethiopian eunuch was reading the Bible aloud, which was the Jewish way of reading the Bible. The Jewish rabbis believed that reading a manuscript aloud helped with memorization, while silent reading contributed to forgetting it. So, reading the Bible aloud helps us memorize the text. How did Philip approach the Ethiopian eunuch at this point? Philip asked him, ***“Do you understand what you are reading?”*** Philip did not approach him by saying, “Hello, I'm Philip; what's your name?” Instead, Philip addressed the very topic that the Ethiopian eunuch was interested in and troubled about. Philip had no prejudice at all against him for being a dark-skinned gentile. On the contrary, Philip observed him closely taking an interest in what he was doing and what was troubling him.

When we want to share the gospel with someone we don't know, it's not easy to approach them. We don't dare to speak to them for fear of rejection, and we limit our outreach with excuses like, “She doesn't seem to have a spiritual desire,” “He's too intimidating,” “He's not my style,” and so on. But Philip boldly approached the man, trusting the Holy Spirit who had been leading him. When we want to evangelize to someone we don't know, it's important to get their attention. We can start with a very effective question, as Philip did. “Do you understand what you are reading?” When Jesus met a Samaritan woman, he opened the door to conversation by asking her a simple request: “Will you give me a drink?” (Jn 4:7) Then she began a conversation with Jesus. Jesus addressed her interests, exposed her sin problem, and eventually led her to meet the Messiah. I think the story of Jesus helping the Samaritan woman provides a good example of how we should help skeptical young people in our current post-modern era. Some of us are excellent evangelists. I was amazed when I heard that missionary Peter Song approaches Chinese people with a Chinese greeting and Hispanics with a Spanish greeting. What a friendly and engaging way to reach others! I took an evangelism class at my seminary school and learned about different methods of evangelism. We need to share the gospel in the most effective way for each audience and situation. I wish we could have an evangelism workshop someday.

What was the Ethiopian eunuch's response to Philip's question? ***“How can I (understand) unless someone explains it to me?”*** How do you feel when you hear this response from the Ethiopian eunuch? My heart was touched by the spiritual condition of the Ethiopian eunuch, who was troubled and anguished because he couldn’t understand the word of God even though he read it. His response is so sincere and humble. It's as if he was asking, “Please explain this Bible passage to me.” If I could find someone like this man, I would run to him right now and teach him the Bible. But it seems there are not many people around us who have this kind of spiritual desire. Since you are here today to worship God, you could be called the Ethiopian eunuchs of this era. However, many people don't have time to meditate on God's Word because there are so many things in this world that are more interesting than God's Word. An hour or two goes by quickly watching YouTube, TikTok, Reels, or K-Drama, and they don't have time to read the Bible. A day goes by quickly playing mobile games. Our days are so hard and go by so fast, working at our jobs and taking care of our kids. But even in the midst of it all, I'm sure there are people who love God's Word and are desperately seeking God. I'm sure there are people like the Ethiopian eunuch that God has prepared. They are desperate for a Bible teacher like Philip to come and teach them the word of God. The young brothers I am currently doing one-on-one Bible study with are very faithful like the Ethiopian eunuch. I thank God for them. There are many excellent Bible teachers among us. I pray that we can meet someone like the Ethiopian eunuch and teach them the Bible through the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

The Ethiopian eunuch invited Philip to come up and sit with him. He was so open and humble even though he was the treasurer of a kingdom because his spiritual desire for the Word of God was so great that it broke down all barriers. He told Philip the text he was reading, which was Isaiah 53:7-8. ***“He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he did not open his mouth. In his humiliation he was deprived of justice. Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth.”*** The Book of Isaiah is a prophecy about the Messiah and is not easy to understand. It is no wonder that the Ethiopian eunuch did not understand this text. He had a specific question about the text: ***“Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?”*** His question was so sharp that it hit the core of the text. It would have been difficult for even the best Bible scholars of the day to give an answer to this question because the text was about the suffering of the Messiah, and no one who had not encountered Jesus as the Messiah could give a correct answer. Philip was the one who was equipped to give the answer: ***“Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.”*** As soon as Philip saw the text the Ethiopian eunuch was reading, he understood who it was about, and he preached the good news about Jesus the Messiah.

What would have happened if Philip hadn't understood the text? “Let me read it again. I don't know who this is about. I'm not very good at studying the Book of Isaiah. Let me ask my Bible teacher now, and I will give you an answer soon.” Would the Ethiopian eunuch have been able to accept the good news about Jesus? Philip would have missed a golden opportunity to preach the gospel that God had given him. Of course, we can't understand every word of the Bible. There are so many things I don't understand in the Bible. If anyone asked me a question out of the blue, there would be so many questions I wouldn't be able to answer. That's why we need to always study God's Word and prepare ourselves. Last Friday, we had a workshop on the Bible study method, and I presented my personal Bible study method. You can watch it on the NY UBF YouTube channel. It could be helpful for your Bible study. It is very important for each of us to have in-depth Bible studies using the right Bible study method. This week, I had my own personal Bible study on today's text, and I had two group Bible studies: one with Fellowship leaders last Tuesday evening and the other with my Fellowship members yesterday. I learned a lot of things from them that I hadn't thought of. I hope all of us have a group Bible study with our fellowship members every week. Fellowship Group Bible Study is a wonderful time for us to have loving fellowship in God's Word. May we enjoy God's Word and grow as disciples of Jesus and teachers of the Word of God through personal and communal Bible studies.

After hearing the good news about Jesus Christ through Philip, the Ethiopian eunuch accepted Jesus as his Savior. And when they came to some water, he did not hesitate to be baptized right away. ***“What prevents me from being baptized?”*** He was baptized and accepted into the Christian community. And he went on his way rejoicing. Here, we can learn that salvation comes from hearing the word of God. If we don’t preach the gospel to others, nothing happens. As Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away. Philip appeared at Azotus and traveled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea. Here's a map of Philip's missionary journey. He went from Jerusalem to Samaria and preached the gospel. From Samaria, he went back to Jerusalem and met the Ethiopian eunuch on the desert road and preached the gospel. He was then snatched away by the Holy Spirit and appeared in Azotus, and preached the gospel in the surrounding area. And then he settled in Caesarea. The missionary journey of the evangelist Philip is truly impressive. He was a man who dedicated his life to preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. He was a co-worker in God's mission in obedience to the voice of the Holy Spirit.

We need to think about the three main characters in this story. Who are they? The Holy Spirit, Philip, and the Ethiopian eunuch. Let's look at their roles from a missional perspective. The Holy Spirit is the one who plans and organizes missions. Philip is the co-worker who joins God's mission. God is always pleased to use humans to accomplish His mission. And the Ethiopian eunuch is the object of the mission. This text of the Ethiopian eunuch receiving the gospel is about more than one person being saved. The story of the Ethiopian eunuch, a Gentile, is a foreshadowing of the mission to the Gentiles that the Holy Spirit would accomplish through using the Apostle Paul as a light for the Gentiles. So, the next story is about the conversion of the Apostle Paul. I am very excited about studying the story of the Apostle Paul's conversion. Now, we're going to get into the story of the gospel going to the Gentile world. May we encounter God deeply as we read and meditate on God's Word! May God prepare us with His Words to be outstanding Bible teachers like Philip. May the Holy Spirit guide us to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with many people, especially college students, who, like the Ethiopian eunuch, are eagerly seeking God. Amen.