

Fifth Sunday of Easter – May 3, 2015
Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church

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Acts 8:26-40 (NIV)

Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Go south to the road--the desert road--that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." 27) So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of the Kandake which means "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." 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) This is the passage of Scripture the eunuch was reading: "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. 33) In his humiliation he was deprived of justice. Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth." 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. 36) As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptized?" 37) 38)** And he gave orders to stop the chariot. 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, 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.

Dear Brothers & Sisters in Christ:

Many of us who are gathered here would find it difficult to think of a time when we did not know about the Lord Jesus Christ. Even if we weren't living our faith we most likely still thought of ourselves as Christians. It's easy for us to take our Christianity, our faith and the blessings of faith for granted. We don't always appreciate the special efforts that are involved with calling us to faith and keeping us faithful to the Lord Jesus Christ. Our text for today helps us to place our salvation in a proper perspective as it reveals to us how

Theme: God Saved a Man from Ethiopia

- 1) God used a sacred text**
- 2) God used a faithful teacher**
- 3) God used the influence of his Holy Spirit**

As we consider this text we'll be reminded that our salvation is a gift from God and that God takes a personal interest in each and everyone of us. I'd like to begin by introducing you the two key characters in this text. The first man we meet is Philip. This Philip was not one of the original 12 apostles. But he did serve in an official capacity among the believers in Jerusalem. He is described as one who was full of faith and wisdom and filled with the Spirit. He was one of the seven selected by the Christians in Jerusalem to oversee the daily distribution of food and to insure that no one – especially the widows of the Grecian Jews – were overlooked.

Following the stoning of Stephen (one of Philip's co-workers and partners) a large scale persecution against the Jewish Christians broke out which caused the Christians to scatter throughout the area of Judea and Samaria. Earlier in this chapter we were told that **Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Christ there. When the crowds heard Philip and saw the miraculous signs he did, they all paid close attention to what he said.** The Lord blessed Philip's work in Samaria – many believed and were baptized.

When news of this reached Jerusalem the apostles sent Peter and John to Samaria to encourage the Christians there.

It is after this visit that our text reports that **an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Go south to the road--the desert road--that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." 27) So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of the Kandake (which means "queen of the Ethiopians").**

These words introduce us to the second character in this text – the eunuch from Ethiopia. He held an important government position – managing and overseeing the treasury of Candace – a title given to the queen of his land. Although there is a modern country of Ethiopia in Africa) this modern country is not the same one that is mentioned in this text. The man in our text lived in an area known as Nubia – located between modern day Egypt and the Sudan. By describing him as an Ethiopian – Luke is telling us that he was a Gentile. He is also describing his race. He was a black man. As we will see, he became the one of the first Gentile converts to Christianity! He was a religious man, a convert to Judaism, who had made a 200 mile journey to worship at the temple in Jerusalem.

Our text carefully points out how special this man was to the Lord. Philip's work among the Samaritans was being richly blessed but now the Lord took him away from the populated area of Samaria and lead him out into an isolated area where he met the man from Ethiopia.

But this was not the first step the Lord had taken to bring salvation to this man. As Philip approached his chariot he heard him reading the words of a sacred text – words from the OT book of Isaiah.

We can learn an important lesson from this man. As he's traveling he makes use of the time to search the Scriptures. He's not ashamed to be seen reading in public. He's not ashamed to admit his need for salvation and for information about his relationship with God. He's not afraid to search the Scriptures. And as we know the answer to his questions about his relationship with God will be answered. The Scriptures hold the answer to our questions about eternal life – pointing us to Christ, as Jesus himself explained. (John 5:39) **You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me.**

The Scriptures were an important tool in bring salvation to the man from Ethiopia in our text. The Lord still uses that tool today to bring people to salvation. We have been blessed personally as we've used our English Bibles. How fortunate we are to have a number of good English translations so readily available to us in written form, in audio form, via the internet and even as apps for our phones. But not everyone speaks English and so *Parts of the Bible have been translated into over 2,100 languages. That's over a third of the spoken languages in the world today.) We have approximately 350 languages with the whole Bible; over 800 that have the New Testament; over 1,000 with at least one book of the Bible and over 2,150 with parts of the Scriptures translated.*

God uses these translations of His Word to make people wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. cf. 2 Timothy 3:15)

In addition to providing a sacred text for the Ethiopian to read the Lord also provided a faithful teacher to help the Ethiopian to understand what he was reading.

This is the passage of Scripture the eunuch was reading: "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. 33) In his humiliation he was deprived of justice. Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth."

Those are words that Philip heard as he approached the man's chariot on the desert road that went from Jerusalem to Gaza. Once again we see that it is the Lord who is directing and controlling the situation. **The Spirit told Philip, "Go to that chariot and stay near it." 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.**

The words that the man was reading were simple enough to understand. But without additional information from the Scriptures they left a number of questions unanswered. Philip gladly seized the opportunity to share what he had learned about the Lord Jesus. His question, "Do you understand what you are reading?" opened the door for a longer conversation with this man.

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.

There are lots of people today who are looking for solutions for sin, for information about their relationship with God, for assurances regarding eternal life. Although there are many who refuse to turn to the Scriptures for these answers, many others are willing to use the Scriptures but may have trouble understanding them. Perhaps you have trouble understanding what you read when you pick up your Bibles. Maybe that has caused you to set your Bible aside rather than making it a part of your daily routine. If that's the case – you can benefit from a faithful teacher – one who is able to use Scripture not their own ideas) to explain things to you.

That's why the Lord Jesus continues to call and send faithful pastors to serve in Christian congregations – men who are thoroughly trained and equipped to teach the truths of God's word in a variety of settings such as sermons and Bible study classes. Why not make it a point to tap into the knowledge of your pastor by participating in a Bible study class with him? Or feel free to do some investigating of the Scriptures on your own and then ask him for assistance when you come across a hard to understand portion.

Perhaps you have a Christian friend who has had the opportunity to study the Scriptures more completely than you have – use them to help you grow in your knowledge and understanding of the Scriptures. And don't be afraid be a faithful teacher yourself – be glad to share what you have learned in sermons, Bible classes and personal study with others.

Perhaps you could serve as a teacher for children – learning for yourself first and then sharing with the children.

And because we realize how important it is for others to have faithful teachers let's not forget to support Christian mission efforts with our prayers and our offerings. As we have seen from the account of the man from Ethiopia the Lord uses faithful teachers to bring the message of salvation to others.

Finally as we continue to examine our text for today we are reminded that **God used the influence of his Holy Spirit God used the influence of his Holy Spirit** to save the man from Ethiopia and us.

It is the Holy Spirit who inspired the Scriptures and supplies them with the power of God. It is the Holy Spirit who opens our minds and hearts to understand and believe the Gospel as it taught by faithful teachers. And it is also the Holy Spirit who uses the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper either to create or to

strengthen our faith. In our text for today we see the evidence that the Spirit worked faith in the heart of the Ethiopian through the Scripture as he used Philip to explain those Scriptures to him. Philip told him of Jesus and his work. It seems likely that Philip must have also spoken about Jesus' command to make disciples of all nations by teaching and baptizing them.

As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptized?" 37) 38) And he gave orders to stop the chariot. 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, 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.

From what Philip had told him, from the conviction the Holy Spirit had worked in his heart through the Gospel the Eunuch requested to be baptized for the forgiveness of his sins and Philip administered this precious means of grace for his comfort and assurance. Our text tells us that after this the Spirit took Philip away from the man from Ethiopia – his work in this situation was done. There was work for him to do in other places and with other people.

We are also told that the eunuch went on his way rejoicing – no doubt he shared what he had learned with others as the Lord provided him with the opportunity.

The Holy Spirit also uses our baptisms to bless us and to fill our hearts with joy. Many of us were baptized as young children and then instructed. But not everyone is baptized as an infant. In a situation like that we follow the same procedure that Philip used. He provided instruction in the word and then baptized the man from Ethiopia.

As we've discovered our salvation is the result of God's special effort in our lives. May we always praise and thank him for his special attention to us. Amen.