

THE REST OF THE STORY

Studies in the Book of Acts

***“We will move the world not by criticism of it, nor conformity to it –
but by combustion within it of lives ignited by the Spirit of God”***

Vance Havner

Text

Acts 8:26-40

Topic

Philip is sent to the desert on a mission to inform the Ethiopian eunuch that he is reading about Jesus Christ

Title

Operation Desert Inform

Acts 8:26 Now an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, saying, "Arise and go toward the south along the road which goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." This is desert.

Acts 8:27 So he arose and went. And behold, a man of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under Candace the queen of the Ethiopians, who had charge of all her treasury, and had come to Jerusalem to worship,

Acts 8:28 was returning. And sitting in his chariot, he was reading Isaiah the prophet.

Acts 8:29 Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go near and overtake this chariot."

Acts 8:30 So Philip ran to him, and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, "Do you understand what you are reading?"

Acts 8:31 And he said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he asked Philip to come up and sit with him.

Acts 8:32 The place in the Scripture which he read was this: "HE WAS LED AS A SHEEP TO THE SLAUGHTER; AND AS A LAMB BEFORE ITS SHEARER IS SILENT, SO HE OPENED NOT HIS MOUTH.

Acts 8:33 IN HIS HUMILIATION HIS JUSTICE WAS TAKEN AWAY, AND WHO WILL DECLARE HIS GENERATION? FOR HIS LIFE IS TAKEN FROM THE EARTH."

Acts 8:34 So the eunuch answered Philip and said, "I ask you, of whom does the prophet say this, of himself or of some other man?"

Acts 8:35 Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him.

Acts 8:36 Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, "See, *here is* water. What hinders me from being baptized?"

Acts 8:37 Then Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."

Acts 8:38 So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him.

Acts 8:39 Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing.

Acts 8:40 But Philip was found at Azotus. And passing through, he preached in all the cities till he came to Caesarea.

Introduction

Which statement is more true:

1. The Ethiopian was a man of great power, authority, and wealth.
2. The Ethiopian was impotent, enslaved, and impoverished.

The answer depends on your perspective:

1. From an earthly perspective he was a man of great power, authority, and wealth.
2. From a heavenly perspective he was impotent, enslaved, and impoverished.

His occupation was to maintain the great treasure of Candace, queen of Ethiopia. It was as high as he could rise in government. Yet for all his worldly success he was on a spiritual pilgrimage to find genuine meaning to his life. Along the desert road in Gaza, when hope seemed lost, he encountered Philip by God's divine appointment. Here was a man of **spiritual** power and authority. Mostly here was a man who didn't simply maintain a treasure; **he contained one!**

Believers are described in the New Testament as having the treasure of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in earthen vessels (2Corinthians 4:7). The earthen vessels are our frail human bodies. Nevertheless we've been given the power and the authority to share a message that is the greatest treasure in all the universe – how to have your sins forgiven and receive eternal life.

As we work through these verses we'll note the stunning contrast between these two men and especially their relationship to treasure.

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 Your Life Is More Than Maintaining Earthly Treasures That Fail To Satisfy, and #2 Your Life Is Meant To Contain Heavenly Treasures That Fully Satisfy.

#1 Your Life Is More Than Maintaining
Earthly Treasures That Fail To Satisfy
(v26-35)

There are many oddities in this story. For one thing: Why send Philip, a lay minister, to meet the Ethiopian along the desolate desert road when there were more qualified apostles in Jerusalem who could have spoken with him there?

That is what we would have done because that is how we think. Stories like this serve to remind us that God has His own wisdom that can at first seem like foolishness. It is a strong reminder to remain open to the leading of God rather than depending upon our own common sense.

Acts 8:26 Now an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, saying, "Arise and go toward the south along the road which goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." This is desert.

Luke nonchalantly tells you that an **angel** spoke to Philip. By now in the Book of Acts you are ready for all manner of supernatural occurrences!

Let's recall that Philip was in Samaria leading a great revival. Seemingly at the height of his success he is called upon to leave the work. He's given no more information than his destination – which is simply to hang-out along a desert road.

It requires a real sense of submission to entertain this kind of leading. Kudos to Philip.

Acts 8:27 So he arose and went. And behold, a man of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under Candace the queen of the Ethiopians, who had charge of all her treasury, and had come to Jerusalem to worship,

This man of Ethiopia may have been a Jew whose family had settled there during a previous dispersion. More likely he was a native

Ethiopian, a Gentile, who had heard about the God of Israel from the settlement of Jews in his country.

Men in the employ of the queen were castrated rendering them **eunuchs** incapable of producing children. It was an effective deterrent to coup attempts.

Candace, by the way, is a title like Pharaoh, not a proper name.

The Ethiopian had come to **worship**. The word used indicates a pilgrimage. He was sincerely seeking the truth, desiring to be spiritually satisfied.

Acts 8:28 was returning. And sitting in his chariot, he was reading Isaiah the prophet.

Was returning is a sad moment in the text. He was returning to his regular life having received no help or hope in Jerusalem.

He did have one thing: He'd purchased, at great cost, a scroll of the Book of **Isaiah**.

Luke mentions his **chariot**. You have to get the big picture. This guy would be traveling with a much larger group – soldiers to protect him and servants to wait upon him. This was more like a caravan.

Acts 8:29 Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go near and overtake this chariot."

The larger group surrounding the Ethiopian would be traveling on foot. His chariot was moseying along at a pace that made it possible to catch-up with it.

How long had Philip been hanging-out along the road – wondering what God had in mind? We don't know but we admire Philip's faithfulness. I'm betting that he wondered at each passing chariot or traveler who it was God wanted him to contact.

An angel had sent Philip; now the **Spirit** of God whispers within him to **go near and overtake this** particular **chariot**.

Acts 8:30 So Philip ran to him, and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, "Do you understand what you are reading?"

The Ethiopian was **reading** aloud. Philip must have been blown away to hear Isaiah being quoted! This was the guy!!!

Acts 8:31 And he said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he asked Philip to come up and sit with him.

Apparently this was a two-seater chariot.

God had been prepping the heart of the Ethiopian. Based upon the fact that God so loved the world, I think that we should expect that He is prepping the hearts of people we encounter.

Acts 8:32 The place in the Scripture which he read was this: "HE WAS LED AS A SHEEP TO THE SLAUGHTER; AND AS A LAMB BEFORE ITS SHEARER IS SILENT, SO HE OPENED NOT HIS MOUTH.

Acts 8:33 IN HIS HUMILIATION HIS JUSTICE WAS TAKEN AWAY, AND WHO WILL DECLARE HIS GENERATION? FOR HIS LIFE IS TAKEN FROM THE EARTH."

Coincidence? Providence? Let's call it a God-incidence.

Acts 8:34 So the eunuch answered Philip and said, "I ask you, of whom does the prophet say this, of himself or of some other man?"

The Jews taught that Isaiah was talking about Israel as a nation; or himself; or another prophet. The Ethiopian may have asked them this question in Jerusalem. He was unsatisfied with their answers. None of those fit.

We know that Isaiah was speaking about the coming Messiah of Israel and Savior of the world, Jesus Christ.

Acts 8:35 Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him.

The passage in Isaiah describes what we call the substitutionary atonement of Jesus. I'm sure that Philip put it simply by describing how Jesus substituted Himself as the sacrifice for our sins. Because Jesus was God and therefore sinless His sacrifice was acceptable. Because Jesus was also man He could take the place of mankind.

Where Philip went from there is anybody's guess; but it was enough that the Ethiopian understood he was a sinner in need of His Savior.

The Ethiopian had risen to the highest rung on his career ladder. He was the one who maintained the great treasure of Ethiopia.

From an earthly perspective, men and women are climbing career ladders everyday. Even if you get to the very top the best you can hope for is to be maintaining earthly treasures. For sure you will have more of them than the people on the rungs below you... But so what? What do you achieve if you gain the whole world and lose your soul? Earthly treasures have a tendency to become your master rather than your servant.

There are many testimonies of incredibly wealthy folks who nevertheless were spiritually unsatisfied. Your life is more than pursuing and then maintaining corruptible earthly treasures that will ultimately fail to satisfy the deepest needs of your heart.

The wealthiest man in the world, without Jesus, is an impotent, enslaved, impoverished sinner in need of the free gift of salvation.

#2 Your Life Is Meant To Contain
Heavenly Treasures That Fully Satisfy
(v36-40)

Philip contained heavenly treasures in his frail human body. He was indwelt by the Holy Spirit of God; he had the Gospel of Jesus Christ to share.

The Ethiopian also became a container!

[Acts 8:36](#) Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, "See, *here is* water. What hinders me from being baptized?"

Water baptism was important to these first Christians. It ought to be important to us. *It does not save you!* We just saw, in the previous story, Simon the Sorcerer get baptized to no avail.

Something interesting I'll just throw out. Jesus gave the Great Commission, saying we should **Go therefore and make disciples of all**

the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19). Philip does exactly that! He goes (by the leading of God), makes a disciple from another nation, then baptizes him.

I also note this in passing. How much discipling did the Ethiopian receive? Not much! I think one-on-one discipling is great, but God is always greater.

Acts 8:37 Then Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."

When godly men translate the Bible they use the best, most reliable existing manuscripts. Your Bible either omits this verse or says, in the margin, that it isn't found in every manuscript. Thus verse thirty-seven may or may not be inspired by God.

If it isn't, it's still accurate. We know from Church history that those who were baptized gave a verbal confession of faith in Jesus Christ that He was God's Son and their Savior.

Acts 8:38 So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him.

Remember I told you that his chariot was part of a larger caravan? You don't **command the chariot to stand still** if it's a one-man vehicle with no one else ahead or behind. The Ethiopian gave a public testimony to his entourage that he was a Christian.

It was a two hundred mile journey back to Ethiopia. It would take a few days and nights. Do you think they had some campfire meetings? Do you think the Ethiopian shared Christ with them? Do you think some got saved?

Here is a possible message he may have developed. The Ethiopian had come to worship God according to the Law of God. At some point in his approach to God the priests would have stopped him and read to him Deuteronomy 23:1,

Deuteronomy 23:1 "He who is emasculated by crushing or mutilation shall not enter the assembly of the LORD.

Wow! He had traveled two hundred miles, at great expense, to worship God only to discover that a man in his condition could not fully enter the assembly of God.

But wait! He had in his possession the scroll of Isaiah. He'd been reading at chapter fifty-three. In chapter fifty-six he would read this:

Isaiah 56:3 Do not let the son of the foreigner Who has joined himself to the LORD Speak, saying, "The LORD has utterly separated me from His people"; Nor let the eunuch say, "Here I am, a dry tree."

Isaiah 56:4 For thus says the LORD: "To the eunuchs who keep My Sabbaths, And choose what pleases Me, And hold fast My covenant,

Isaiah 56:5 Even to them I will give in My house And within My walls a place and a name Better than that of sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name That shall not be cut off.

Wow again! He had found grace in Jesus Christ. What the Law could not give him Jesus provided for him.

Acts 8:39 Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing.

Hold your thoughts on Philip for a moment and let's finish with our Ethiopian brother. **He went on his way rejoicing.** Church history describes a thriving Christian community in North Africa and Church tradition attributes it to this one man who was saved on the desert road in Gaza.

This Ethiopian only had the scroll of Isaiah; he only had a few moments of discipling. It was enough to lead others to Jesus and a revival in North Africa.

No matter how little you know, or think you know, about Jesus, if you are saved then it is enough to help others receive Him.

Back to the baptism. As they were leaving the water Philip was caught away. He was gone! He was supernaturally snatched away from there and found himself somewhere else.

Why transport Philip supernaturally to another location? Any answer we give is pure speculation. Allow me this speculation. If you are

Philip you probably want to go to Ethiopia and lead a revival. At the very least you'd feel an obligation to disciple the Ethiopian for a time. God acted in such a way as to reveal His will to both men.

Acts 8:40 But Philip was found at Azotus. And passing through, he preached in all the cities till he came to Caesarea.

I wonder how long it took him to figure out where he was! What's cool about is that it pictures, for us, the idea that it doesn't matter where you are in the world. Wherever you are you are to see yourself as simply **passing through**. Along the way you are to share about Jesus.

Twenty years from this episode we will encounter Philip still in **Caesarea** the proud father of four daughters who serve the Lord with the gift of prophecy. They had meetings of the Church in his home. He would show hospitality to the apostle Paul who stopped there on his way to Jerusalem.

In other words Philip had an incredibly rich and fulfilling life serving the Lord!

1. He was an outstanding deacon.
2. He was an anointed evangelist.
3. He was a great dad.

Your life is meant to contain heavenly treasures that ultimately satisfy. If you are a Christian you already have the indwelling Holy Spirit and you already have the treasure of the Gospel in an earthen vessel.

You can also have treasure waiting for you in Heaven as reward for your serving God on the earth.

And you can have treasure on earth as you give birth first to disciples but then to your own kids who go on to love and serve the Lord.

Seek ye first the kingdom of God!