

I Am The Witness

Acts 8:26-40 March 3, 2024

*I am he as you are he as you are me
And we are all together...
I am the egg man
They are the egg men
I am the walrus
Goo goo g'joob*

As far as songs go, *I Am The Walrus* is one of the most confusing you'll ever hear. You may not know that it was *purposefully* nonsensical. As the story goes, John Lennon received a letter from a student at his alma mater telling him they had a class dedicated to analyzing The Beatles' songs. John decided to write a song that defied analysis (and take a pot shot at the songs of Bob Dylan while he was at it). *I Am The Walrus* was *meant* confuse and befuddle listeners.¹

Ten years later Lennon said, "*The words didn't mean a lot. People draw so many conclusions, and it's ridiculous. I've had tongue in cheek all along...What does it really mean, 'I am the Eggman?' It could have been 'The pudding Basin' for all I care. It's not that serious.*"

As a church family, we're right in the middle of a study through Isaiah 53 - *The Song Of The Suffering Servant*. As we've heard, many commentators consider it to be the pinnacle of the Old Testament - the beating heart of the Gospel - that here the whole Bible converges to reveal the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, the Messiah.² A very serious song.

Historically, this song has left some people confused. In fact, in one of the most memorable scenes in the book of *Acts*, we see a man absolutely baffled, saying, "Who in the world is the *Lamb Man*?"

In this text, the answer is revealed to him - the *identity* of the Savior of the world. At the same time, something is revealed to *us*: That God intends to include Christians in His astonishing, providence.

Acts 8:26-27a - ²⁶ An angel of the Lord spoke to Philip: "Get up and go south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." (This is the desert road.) ²⁷ So he got up and went.

We first meet Philip in Acts 6 when he is asked to serve the widows of the Church in Jerusalem. He's described as a man of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom. At times, his life was full of supernatural activity - the Lord used Philip to start a revival in the city of Samaria and even worked miracles through him. At other times, he lived what we would call a normal, average life. He settled down and raised a family. *Whenever* we see him, he is ready to obey God, ready to be led, ready to be a part of what God wants to do. Sometimes that meant waiting tables,

¹ <https://www.mentalfloss.com/article/30523/who-was-walrus-analyzing-strangest-beatles-song>

² See references in Gene Pensiero *Isaiah 52:13-15 - Come & Sing A Suffering Servant's Song Of Sprinkling*

sometimes it meant preaching to strangers, sometimes it meant hosting missionaries in his home, sometimes it meant being a Godly parent.

Philip shows us how an ordinary person walks with an extraordinary God. It's not always clear *why* the Lord is leading us in certain ways and it's not always *easy* to follow. Take this text. To obey God in verse 26 meant to *leave* an active revival that he had been a key part of. "Lord, why would you take me *away* from this thriving ministry and park me in the desert?" We know why, but Philip didn't. On top of that, scholars explain that the directions this angel gave Philip were somewhat vague. There were *two* roads that fit the description.³ Which one was the right one?

We'd expect the Lord to be a *little* more precise with His instructions, knowing how precarious the timing would be. But this was not only an opportunity for Philip to *witness*, it was also an opportunity for him to *walk by faith*. In both regards he is an encouraging example to us.

Not only would it have been somewhat confusing to leave Samaria, it was also downright dangerous. Philip had been driven *out* of Jerusalem - scattered by violent persecution. And now the Lord says, "I'd like you to take the road *from Jerusalem* out into the desert. Go walk right back into the valley of the shadow of death." And that's exactly what he did. "He got up and went."

Acts 8:27b-28 - There was an Ethiopian man, a eunuch and high official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of her entire treasury. He had come to worship in Jerusalem²⁸ and was sitting in his chariot on his way home, reading the prophet Isaiah aloud.

This eunuch was a big deal. He was wealthy and influential. He was also a man searching for God. He traveled *thousands* of miles to try to meet with Jehovah in His Temple. He wasn't there on state business. He would've had to get official permission for this trip. He would've had to go into the throne room of Ethiopia and say, "Listen, I've heard about the God of the Jews, and I want to go and worship there...no offense to the moon god..."

After finally arriving in Jerusalem, he goes to the Temple where he would be told, "Oh, *you* can't come in. No *eunuch* can enter this assembly."⁴ There is no place for him. He's turned away.

But he doesn't leave empty-handed. He left with God's attention fixed on him. And, at some point he picked up a copy of Isaiah and he immediately started to read it. We can sense his genuine desire for truth. Though it seemed like the entire trip was a waste of time, he's *eager* to read. He still wants to learn more about the God of the Jews. He's still hoping to find rest for his soul.

Acts 8:29 - ²⁹The Spirit told Philip, "Go and join that chariot."

What an amazing picture: We're on a desert road. We don't know how long Philip waited. We don't know how many other caravans went by. They both were heading south *out* of Jerusalem. It's

³ Ben Witherington *The Acts Of The Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*

⁴ Deuteronomy 23:1

possible Philip had walked *past* this caravan at some point. But *this* is the moment. Suddenly providence and grace come together like a heavenly Rube Goldberg machine.

The Lord *could've* had one of the Apostles talk to the eunuch. The Twelve were still in Jerusalem. But as this fellow moved around the city, the Lord said, "No, not Matthias. Not Andrew. Not Philip the *Apostle*, I've set this aside for Philip the deacon." He wants to include *all* of us in His work and small obediences make eternal differences.

Go and join *that* chariot. This was more like an ox wagon, with space for multiple people.⁵ There would be a caravan of staff and supplies. But now imagine the *spiritual* picture. There's eunuch, one of the most powerful people on planet earth, but *he* has been rejected. He's headed home with his head hanging. What hope does he have? What answers does he have? What good is his wealth or his position? He knows in his heart that he is incomplete, yet has no way to make himself whole.

Then, standing in the dust, is a man who *looks* like just some poor, road-weary traveler. *He* had been *driven* from his home by people who wanted to kill him, but he's not troubled. He may not have chauffeurs or bodyguards, but *he* travels with God the Holy Spirit. He not only has the knowledge of God, but a *relationship* with Him. As a result, *he* has peace and power and hope.

This must have been a nerve-wracking moment. "Go and join that chariot." "That one? The one with the armed guards all around it? You want me to run up to it? And say what?"

Acts 8:30 - ³⁰When Philip ran up to it, he heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, "Do you understand what you're reading?"

Philip was a humble man. He acted kindly, relationally, personally. He entered into the eunuch's world, but with authority and confidence. He did not antagonize or politicize. "Do you understand what you're reading?" Philip heard the words and since he was a student of God's Word, he knew what it was and how to begin from that spot.

Now, Philip probably did not own a copy of Isaiah, but he *knew* it. He put it in his heart. It is no longer difficult to obtain copies of God's Word. But ease of access is not the same as planting it in our hearts. This is why we prioritize the systematic study of Scripture, because we need to understand it enough to explain it to others. We want to keep growing in our knowledge.

The eunuch may be in charge of the entire treasury of the Candace, but *Philip* was in charge of a treasure of his own - just like each Christian here is. *We* are administrators of God's Word, more precious than rubies or silver or gold.⁶ Any Christian can be like Joseph who was entrusted with the life-saving grain in years of famine and gave it to anyone who came in Genesis 47.

⁵ F.F. Bruce *The Acts Of The Apostles*

⁶ Psalm 119:72, Proverbs 8:11

Acts 8:31 - ³¹ “How can I,” he said, “unless someone guides me?” So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

Every aspect of this scene shimmers with providence. The Lord was working so many things together so that *this* individual can hear the Gospel. If we were able to see all the moving pieces it took for each of *us* to hear the Good News, I’m sure we’d be astounded.

Philip was ready to be used providentially. Notice how flexible and gracious he was. With each passing minute they are moving farther and farther south, into the desert. But he doesn’t say, “By the way, it’s inconvenient for me to be here. Can we turn back so I have an easier trip home?”

The eunuch says, “I need someone to explain this to me.” As Christians, we’ve got some explaining to do! There are a lot of misconceptions about God out there, a lot of bad takes on the Bible, a lot of false teachings and twisted concepts. We are called to rightly divide the Word of God and proclaim it to the people in our path.⁷

Acts 8:32-34 - ³² Now the Scripture passage he was reading was this: He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb is silent before its shearer, so he does not open his mouth. ³³ In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who will describe his generation? For his life is taken from the earth. ³⁴ The eunuch said to Philip, “I ask you, who is the prophet saying this about—himself or someone else?”

Eric Burden, the lead singer of *The Animals* and friend to John Lennon claimed to be the Egg Man referenced in *I Am The Walrus*. In a lyric on the *White Album* the fab four sang, “Here’s a clue for you all: The walrus was Paul.” So, who was the walrus? Well, the answer is LSD.

Isaiah did not write under the influence of LSD. He wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. And there, hundreds of years before Christ came to earth in His Incarnation, His identity was revealed. The Savior of the world would suffer and die on our behalf as a sacrifice.

To the human mind, this plan doesn’t make sense. Why would a God with all the power choose to pay the ultimate price to rescue people who are at war with Him? But that’s exactly what He did. And people need to *know* that He did. They need to know *Who* Jesus really is. They need to hear what the Bible is *really* about.

The Apostle Peter encouraged and commanded us to be *ready* to give a defense - to give an explanation - to anyone who asks us about the hope we have. Philip was ready.

Acts 8:35 - ³⁵ Philip proceeded to tell him the good news about Jesus, beginning with that Scripture.

⁷ 2 Timothy 2:15

Philip focused on the Gospel. He didn't launch into some pet doctrinal issue. He preached *Jesus* to this man. And what he preached was *Good News*.

Have you noticed all the news out there is bad? I love the term I've started to hear about social media. They're calling it the *doom scroll*.

Jesus Christ is *Good News*. Forgiveness of sin and strength for living and a place in heaven are Good News. When Christians are as combative and aggressive and antagonistic and argumentative and vengeful as the unsaved world around us, something has gone terribly wrong.

We don't know the specific points of Philip's message but we can speculate about what some of the eunuch's questions might have been. Probably high up on the list would be: But is this just for Israel? Remember - he would've been turned away as *unfit* for worship in the Temple.

But then, Philip could've said, "Well, let's look a few columns over." And in what we call Isaiah 56 they would've read these words:

Isaiah 56:3-5 - ³No foreigner who has joined himself to the Lord should say, "The Lord will exclude me from his people," and the eunuch should not say, "Look, I am a dried-up tree." ⁴For the Lord says this: "For the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, and choose what pleases me, and hold firmly to my covenant, ⁵I will give them, in my house and within my walls, a memorial and a name better than sons and daughters.

This man was denied a place in the temple but promised a home in heaven thanks to Jesus Christ. Not only was Scripture attesting that to him, but Philip could then say, "Not let me tell you *my* testimony. God sent me *to you*. God knows and loves you, *personally*. Enough to send *me*. Enough to change the course of *my* life so you could hear that God is real and He loves you."

There were no signs or miracles in that chariot, at least not in the way we think of them. Of course, it was all miraculous - the movements of providence. But God brought Philip to this man with a simple message. And that was enough to save this man's soul and transform his life and change human history.

Acts 8:36 - ³⁶As they were traveling down the road, they came to some water. The eunuch said, "Look, there's water. What would keep me from being baptized?"

You know what you don't usually find in the desert? *Water!*⁸ But at the very right moment, there's an oasis large enough for a man to be baptized. God had every detail covered.

One resource explains that the eunuch's words were more like, "I should get baptized, right?"⁹ He had a desire to obey - a desire to leave his old identity behind and now publicly affiliate with Christ.

⁸ Donald Grey Barnhouse *Acts: An Expositional Commentary*

⁹ *The NET Bible First Edition Notes*

Depending on your translation, you may or may not have verse 37. Many scholars consider it a later addition to the book, though nothing in it is unbiblical. In it, Philip asks the eunuch to confess his faith. Romans 10 tells us, "If you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."

Acts 8:38 - ³⁸ So he ordered the chariot to stop, and both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him.

You know what I like about this? There was no baptism class. No drawn out process. A believer can be baptized anywhere, from a backyard pool to the Jordan river.

Acts 8:39 - ³⁹ When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him any longer but went on his way rejoicing.

So, Philip is on to his next assignment. And the Ethiopian is on to his *first* assignment as a Christian. Apparently, God considered him good-to-go. He would be the only Christian in his country, but the Lord thought, "Yep, this guy is enough because he has the Holy Spirit and the Isaiah scroll and he has an excited and obedient heart, and he's overflowing with joy and hope. He'll be fine."

When Philip ministered in Samaria, the result was a city full of joy.¹⁰ When he ministered to this man, the result was joy. Christian activity should lead to joy because the joy of the Lord is our strength, it is a fruit of the Spirit, and a joyful heart is good medicine.

Acts 8:40 - ⁴⁰ Philip appeared in Azotus, and he was traveling and preaching the gospel in all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

Philip suddenly found himself 20-30 miles away. Ray Stedman points out that Philip did not wait for an angel to tell him the next thing to do. He just went about his regular, Christian life.¹¹ Maybe the Lord will lead you in dramatic or supernatural ways, we welcome that. But otherwise, we're to just carry out our Christianity. Exercise our faith. We've *already* been led in all sorts of ways. And as we walk with the Lord, He will catch us up in His providential work. We would benefit to remember God's desire to pull us into His providential plans.

At the end of Acts, Philip is still in Caesarea. The days of miracles and revivals and angel visits seemed to be over for him, but he's *still* being used by God.

God wants to use us. He has all of these tasks and opportunities that He'd like to involve us in. But He uses people who *want* to be used. He uses people who choose to obey - who listen for His leading. While the world is wasting their time wondering about *I Am The Walrus*, we get to move through life in the knowledge that *I Am The Witness*.

¹⁰ Acts 8:8

¹¹ Ray Stedman *Acts 1-12: Birth Of The Body*