

Message Date: 10-18-20

To the Ends of the Earth- ACTS Part 4: Courage!

Message Title: Week 6, Do you understand what you are reading?

✠ A divine appointment

- ***Have you ever had a 'divine appointment'? You know... a 'god moment'... an encounter with another person that you did not plan, but you unexpectedly found yourself with the opportunity to BE CHRIST to someone...?***
 - ***Someone asking you about your faith... why believe, why church, I was watching you when you experienced something hard... what is it about you?***
 - ***Someone confides a struggle.. pray, encourage, love them..***
 - ***Serve a person, show compassion, be generous, share love of Jesus***
 - ***OR... brace yourself.. actually share Gospel with person who is ready to LISTEN!***
- ***Hold that thought..***

– ***In evangelical culture, there is a HUGE emphasis on PLANNING... near addiction to strategy, tools, plans to grow your church, spread the gospel, get people to give more... it's an industry (books, conferences, consultants)***

– ***Don't get me wrong.. being proactive, creative, purposeful.. even planning... these are all important and can be important ways God leads us in His church.***

– ***BUT! As church leaders, and followers of Christ, we need to be reminded that the OVERWHELMING pattern of scripture of HOW GOD GROWS HIS KINGDOM... how the Gospel spread from 12 misfits hiding in a room to the ENDS OF THE EARTH... is that this happened, almost always, in ways we NEVER WOULD HAVE COME UP WITH on our own!***

✠ In the story of Acts, we see God grow His Kingdom through the lives of TRANSFORMED believers who are AVAILABLE and OBEDIENT to the leadership of the Holy Spirit

– ***Based upon scripture, ACTS in particular, the great principal of how God has grown His kingdom/church, is through lives of TRANSFORMED BELIEVERS, sometimes as individuals, sometimes in larger groups... being AVAILABLE AND OBEDIENT as Holy Spirit led them to share the gospel....to be a WITNESS to the love, hope, good news of Jesus Christ... In ways, places, and to people, they may never have anticipated on their own.***

– ***Think about how we've seen God work so far...***

- ***Through Pentecost. Arrival of Holy Spirit, doing what only God could do, and in one day the believers went from 120 to several thousand.***
- ***Growth of the church in Jerusalem, as the believers practiced radical compassion and generosity as a COMMUNITY of faith. God doing through them what only God could do***
- ***Beginning of persecution. The more the authorities threatened and hurt the apostles, the more the church grew***
- ***Martyrdom of Stephen, launching an all-out assault on the church.. but rather than squelching the gospel, it exploded out of Jerusalem, throughout Judea and into Samaria, fulfilling the first two legs of the great commission***
- ***The gospel was heard by unexpected people... the Samaritans in general, Simon Magus***

– ***NONE of these events would have been anticipated by these first believers... but God did it all through them as their lives were changed by the power of the Gospel, and they told about it as the Spirit led them.***

– ***But most seemingly random, and unexpected event as God continues to grow the gospel is our story today... the famous encounter between PHILIP and the ETHIOPIAN Eunuch.***

– ***ACTS 8:26-40... SUNDAY OCT 18.. finishing part 4.. Pastor E, TRINITY ONLINE***

²⁶ 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] Philip said, “If you believe with all your heart, you may.” The eunuch answered, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.”

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.

– ***If you missed ADDENDUM.. geography.. might go give a listen.. 10 minutes.***

– ***Lets frame out the story.***

✠ From Samaria to Gaza- an unexpected journey!

– ***Philip is in SAMARIA... great things are happening... thousands coming to Christ, God working through him in miraculous ways.***

– ***ANGEL comes to Philip. Not a vision, not a hunch... and ANGEL, physical presence. Had to be dramatic! I thought about what that might have been like if I were Philip...***

○ ***Hey there! What's up? Get it?...***

○ ***Ok.. we are taking this to a new place? Awesome! It's going to be amazing, right? I mean, thousands are coming to faith here... so, what's the bigger city we're heading to?***

○ ***Oh... not a city? Is it a town?***

○ ***No?... uh... okay, just how many people are we talking about? ONE?***

○ ***Huh... well, doesn't seem to efficient, but okay. So, where is this. Nearby?***

○ ***GAZA? Have you been on that road? Not called the DESERT road for nothing!***

○ ***Who am I going to meet? Oh... I'll find out when I get there... right, should have seen that coming.***

– ***Of course, Philip didn't say any of this. NIV says 'started out, literally he 'got up and went'. Philip was available, sense that he was EXPECTANT for what God would do next... and he was obedient.***

– ***Samaria is NORTH of Jerusalem, this road to Gaza is SOUTH... trip of around 100 miles... Week-10 day journey by foot.***

† The Ethiopian eunuch- just who is this man?

- **MEETS ETHIOPIAN EUNUCH. Who is this?**
- **Important official- CFO for the Ethiopian queen.**
- **Kingdom of Ethiopia was south of Egypt, modern Sudan, a little north of modern day Ethiopia. For person living in Israel, Ethiopia was pretty much the southern edge of the world as you knew it... in fact... 'ends of the earth'**
- **EUNUCH... if you don't know what that means, go look it up. In that time, men were made into eunuchs so they could be focused on a very specific job, no longer having the distraction that comes with having... well, look it up.**
- **He had gone to Jerusalem to worship- trip of months. But WHY? Several theories**
 - **Diaspora Jew. His ancestors had been taken to Ethiopia, and he had come to this place of influence, enabling him to go back to his homeland. Possible, but considered unlikely, as the world south of Egypt was practically unknown, the Jewish diaspora had been more to the north and west, throughout the established Roman empire**
 - **Gentile convert to Judaism (Proselyte)... again possible, but unlikely because being a Eunuch, the OT law would not have allowed him to fully convert and enter the temple as a Jewish man (Deut 23:1- you might wince)**
 - **Most likely, he was what some commentators call a 'god fearer'... he had learned at least something about the Jewish God, and had traveled to Jerusalem to worship that God, even though he didn't fully understand the Jewish faith. Today, might call him a 'seeker'.**
 - **THIS would explain confusion as he read from scroll of ISAIAH. BACK to story.**
- **Spirit tells Philip to run up to chariot. (Angel, now Spirit... God is directing this encounter). Philip does, and hears the man reading out loud (common) from Isaiah.**

† A key question

- **HERE, PHILIP ASKS KEY QUESTION... "Do you understand what you are reading?"**
- **KEY response. No! How can I, I need someone to explain. So he invites Philip to sit with him. That's important...**
- **THE PASSAGE being read was from Isaiah 53- most famous of all the OT prophecies about the suffering messiah. He was reading verses 7-8, meaning he had just read vs 5-6...**

But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

- **Luke tells us the scripture he is contemplating, which is from the SEPTUANGINT (Greek OT)**

"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."

- **The man asks Philip... "who is this talking about? Who is this man?"**

- **THAT’S THE OPEN DOOR** God provides for Philip... and Philip is ready to respond. The literal text says **“PHILIP OPENED HIS MOUTH”**... Starting with that passage, he tells this man about the Good News of Jesus. **AND THE EUNUCH BELIEVED.**

† The eunuch’s response

- **Part of what Philip shared must have included baptism, because when they come upon a body of water, the Eunuch asks “what can keep me from being baptized?” ... ‘what can keep me from becoming a follower of Christ?’**
- **The answer is NOTHING.** Through the work of the Holy Spirit and Philip’s obedience, all the barriers have been removed, and a gentile eunuch, a foreigner from a land on the edge of the known world, who was also racially different than Philip, is baptized into faith in Jesus Christ.
- **HERE we have an interesting detail in the TEXT of the story.** Depending on your translation, you might not have a verse 37. If you do, it probably has a footnote saying that the oldest manuscripts of NT don’t include this verse. Most NT scholars think it was added later – 2nd century- for clarification, because what it tells us certainly happened in some form.

VS 37: And 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.

- **Even if this wasn’t part of Luke’s original text (which it most likely was not), it DOES describe for us how people confessed their faith by the second century of the church, and it reflects the confession of faith Paul describes in Romans chapter 10:9-10**
- **So the chariot is stopped, and Philip and the Eunuch ‘went down into the water’, and after Philip baptized them, they ‘came up out of the water’.** This language is significant as it almost certainly describes a baptism by immersion.

† Teleporting, Joy, and what only God could do!

- **THEN, again unexpectedly, the Spirit ‘took Philip away’, basically teleporting him to a city called AZOTUS, near modern day Ashdod, on the Mediterranean coast, north of Gaza. (God, couldn’t you have done this teleporting thing when I walked 100 miles down here!)**
- **Philip then continues to preach, moving up the Mediterranean coast to Caesarea, on the upper edge of Samaria.**
- **THE ETHIOPIAN EUNUCH continues on his travels home, rejoicing as he went. SUBTLE NOTE... he didn’t have a chance to really get to know Philip at all, he witnessed no miracle by Philip... his JOY was the result of the Holy Spirit who came into his life because of his faith in Jesus Christ.**
- **SO!! THINK ABOUT WHAT GOD ACCOMPLISHED HERE.**
 - **Philip went from peaching to thousands, to sharing the gospel with one person. THIS PERSON, however, was a man of great influence in a land practically unknown to the apostles, who took the Gospel to his own people.**
 - **INTERESTING- Church history (not the Bible) indicates that the land of Ethiopia, which is south, but adjacent to the kingdom of ancient Ethiopia, was one of the earliest, if not THE earliest, lands to declare itself a Christian nation, in the 300’s AD. ALSO, Ethiopia**

was the only African Christian nation to survive the spread of Islam in the 7th century, and it remains predominantly Christian to this day. AND THIS HAPPENED, VERY LIKELY, because Philip was faithful to obey God, and left his ministry to thousands to walk a hundred miles of dirt road and have a brief encounter with ONE MAN.

- *PHILIP then, continues up to Caesarea, establishing the gospel along the bulk of the western coast of Israel. When we see Philip again in Acts 21, he is still in teaching in Caesarea, now known as Philip the evangelist.*
- *WE'VE NOW SEEN the gospel move from Jerusalem to all of Judea, to Samaria, and now, from a first century perspective- to the end of the earth. AND IT'S ONLY ACTS 8*

† So... what does this story say to us?

– *AMAZING STORY, INCREDIBLY IMPORTANT in history of the birth and growth of the church. WHAT DOES THIS SAY TO US?*

– *The hope of people coming to know the Gospel is not dependent on our creativity, our strategy, our planning, or our tools and resources. These can be important! BUT...*

† The only thing God needs to accomplish His purposes:

- A life being TRANSFORMED by him
- *God is at work in our lives. We know the Truth of who Jesus is because our lives have been CHANGED by who Jesus is.*
 - A heart that is AVAILABLE to him
- *We have a DESIRE to see God work through us... we believe that GOD IS GOOD, and when he leads us, even if it is into a situation we would not have expected, where we MUST depend upon God and walk by faith... we desire to go there with him!*
 - A mind that is ATTUNED to him
- *We are expecting God to work! Watching for him to work. Like a radio tuned to a frequency, our minds, our hearts, are tuned to God in our relationship with God.*
 - A person ready to be OBEDIENT to him
- *When the Spirit leads us... and we full believe and expect that he will, we are ready to respond. To walk through the door that God opens.*

† Philip's example

- *Philip here sets a powerful example of a life that is ready to be used by God*
 - *He's ready to share the word when God calls upon him.*
 - *He's willing to cross cultural barriers. Racial. Political. Cultural.*
 - *Sensitive to hearts that are prepared by God. He doesn't force this situation, but trusts that if God is working in this person's heart, that they will hear the message. He listens... hears the person's questions, and is ready to answer.*
 - *His answer is rooted in scripture. We might not be a scholar, vocational minister, but we understand the essence of our faith, and are able to share this.*
 - *The center of his testimony is Jesus.*
- *We aren't Philip the evangelist, and we haven't been sent on mission by an Angel. I haven't. BUT we are indwelled by the Holy Spirit, and HE WILL work through us. Perhaps it might look something like this.*
- *A door opens for you to enter a person's story. God provides a divine encounter.*
- *You ask them... "tell me what is happening" YOU LISTEN. It starts to become clear that there's a question, a struggle, you can help them understand.*

- ***STARTING WHERE THEY ARE, STARTING WITH that place in their life, you begin to tell the story of faith in Christ. This might entail serving them. Just loving them. Being a friend, being an encouragement. Praying with them. Walking alongside them in their journey.***
- ***AND Because you have experienced Christ's presence and hope in your life, you are able to share that hope, and trust God with how he will use your testimony.***
- ***"In my story, I've come to know and experience that Jesus Christ is real, he really loves me, and he is my source of life. Could I share this with you?"***
- ***RIGHT NOW, in the craziness of this world around us, JESUS IS AT WORK bringing His Life to people, and HIS PLAN is to do this through us. Like Philip, may we be sensitive to see and follow the Holy Spirit's lead, and become part of God doing what only He can do.***