

Eternity Daily Bible Study - No. 387

Series: The Primal Church - Acts Chapters 1-8

Verses: Acts 8:26-35

Topic: The Ethiopian Eunuch

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Acts 8:26-35 MKJV And the angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, saying, Arise and go toward the south, on the way that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza, which is a deserted place. (27) And he arose and went. And behold, a man of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had charge of all her treasure and had come to Jerusalem to worship, (28) was returning. And sitting in his chariot he read Isaiah the prophet. (29) Then the Spirit said to Philip, Go near and join yourself to this chariot. (30) And Philip ran there to him and heard him read the prophet Isaiah, and said, Do you indeed understand what you are reading? (31) And he said, How can I unless some man should guide me? And he asked Philip to come up and sit with him. (32) And the content of the Scripture which he read was this: "He was led as a sheep to the slaughter, and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so He opened not His mouth. (33) In His humiliation His judgment was taken away, and who shall declare His generation? For His life is taken from the earth." (34) And the eunuch answered Philip and said, I beg you, of whom does the prophet speak this? Of himself or of some other man? (35) Then Philip opened his mouth and began at the same Scripture and preached the gospel of Jesus to him.

This fascinating story is a great example of the Spirit-led life. It is also full of important historical details. I shall try to weave both together today.

Philip leaves the revival in Samaria and goes to a "deserted place" between Jerusalem and Gaza. As you would know from the news, Gaza borders on Egypt and the way south to Ethiopia. Gaza symbolizes the Philistines, the wilderness, the 'edge' of the land, the beginning of the desert. This is evangelism on the edge!

The Ethiopian eunuch was returning home and was a God-fearing Ethiopian Jew. Ethiopian Christians have traditionally said his name was Indich. The eunuch may have also been an important title rather than an actual state as there are records of "eunuchs" such as Baalam having children and Potiphar who also was a "eunuch" had a wife!

Indich (we shall use his traditional name rather than the cumbersome phrase) was a great man of court with authority over the treasury of Queen Candace. Candace

was the common name of Ethiopian queens from Meroe (an important island in Ethiopia) just as Louis was often used for the kings of France. There is a double play on the treasure motive here – as Gaza also meant Riches. The ancient writer Servius says of Gaza: Gaza is a Persian word, and signifies Riches: “hence Gaza, a city in Palestine, was so called because Cambyses, king of Persia, laid up his treasures in it, when he waged war with the Egyptians.”

This story could be called “the treasurer discovers real Treasure near the city of riches and treasure.” Even with all his power and authority and wealth and piety Indich the Ethiopian Jew still needed something more – and that was Christ.

Indich was a student of Scripture, and a true worshipper of God and a pilgrim who had traveled many miles to worship in Jerusalem. Adam Clarke’s commentary gives the following account of how the Jewish religion began in Ethiopia with the Queen of Sheba who visited Solomon: “It has been long credited by the Abyssinians that this queen, who by some is called Balkis, by others Maqueda, was not only instructed by Solomon in the Jewish religion, but also established it in her own empire on her return; that she had a son by Solomon named Menilek, who succeeded her in the kingdom; and, from that time till the present, they have preserved the Jewish religion.”

The Ethiopian eunuch was thus a black Jew and thus the “next step’ in the advance of the gospel after the Samaritans. Scripture does not regard him as a Gentile. He was a true God-fearing worshipper of YHWH. In converting a black Ethiopian Jew to Christ it was as far as the gospel could go and remain fully Jewish.

Philip follows the Spirit’s leading to an encounter with Indich’s chariot. This sort of “divine appointment” is something we should pray for regularly. Common sense and strategic planning would have left Phillip back in the Samaritan revival. But God moved Philip on to a much greater opportunity – that was out in the wilderness. A pastor may get a call to a remote church and wonder why – but God may have a great door opening there! This is what I love about the Internet, a devotional like this can intersect with people in all sorts of situations. You never know what God can do with it!

Ministry is more than numbers in seats and finances. Philip was ministering to just one person, one seeker. But that seeker was strategic. Osama Bin Laden visited Sweden when he was 14, maybe someone could have shared the gospel with this over-serious teenager back then! We have no idea how important it is to share the gospel with leaders and with people from powerful families. Ministry to overseas students is incredibly strategic as many will be leaders back in their nations.

God had prepared the heart of the Ethiopian eunuch for the gospel, he was reading Isaiah 53 and puzzling over what it meant. Indich was teachable and appreciated Philip’s ministry. I find that most people have “patches” of say six months or so when they are spiritually hungry and most receptive to Christ, often these patches in the early teens, the college years, after a serious illness or the birth of a child and around mid-life. We need to ask the Lord to lead us to the people that He has prepared and who are ‘ready’ to hear his Word.

“Then Philip opened his mouth and began at the same Scripture and preached the gospel of Jesus to him.” Philip was a flexible evangelist. He started with the very Scripture that Indich was reading! Evangelists must start with “where the person is at”. Canned approaches turn people off. The question that was asked was an almost academic one: , “I beg you, of whom does the prophet speak this? Of himself or of some other man?” and that was the question Philip used to point Indich to Jesus.

Powerful people often ask quite academic questions that are enormously meaningful to them. These questions must be honored and answered first before any personal application to Christ is attempted.

To be a flexible evangelist we need a solid knowledge of the Scriptures and of apologetics so we can “start anywhere” and lead to Christ, we also need a great sensitivity to God and to his leadings. We also like Philip have to be able to go from preaching to “New Age” Samaritan villagers to witnessing to a high official of the court on the same day, without feeling unintimidated!

Blessings,

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