

Easter 5
May 3, 2015

"Privileged to Talk about Jesus"

ACTS 8:26-40

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 Candace, 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 The eunuch was reading this passage of Scripture: "He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before the 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. Why shouldn't I be 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.

I have to admit that when I hear this account about Philip talking to an Ethiopian man about Jesus, I am envious. An angel tells Philip to leave Samaria and go to the desert region south of Jerusalem. Then the Holy Spirit tells Philip to go to an Ethiopian man in a chariot. He hears him reading about Jesus from the Old Testament prophet Isaiah and tells him about Jesus. It doesn't get any better than this when it comes to being given privileges to talk to people about Jesus.

Yes, I have to admit I am envious. I wouldn't mind if an angel told me some morning to go to Costco and do my shopping. I wouldn't mind if the Holy Spirit said push your shopping cart next to the man in front of you and start talking to him about Jesus because he has lots of questions and has been searching for answers. Instead the Lord allows you and me to wake up in the morning, stumble around as we make our first cup of coffee, and then venture out into our every day affairs of life not knowing when suddenly and unexpectedly we are given a privilege to speak to someone about Jesus.

Remember the famous line from the movie *Forrest Gump*- "Life is like a box of chocolates, you never know what you are going to get." Witnessing to Jesus is like a box of chocolates. You never know what privileges or surprises are going to come to you.

Jesus knows. From the right hand of his heavenly Father he is micromanaging your life and mine. He will lead us to people just as he lead Philip to the Ethiopian. He will even give us his Holy Spirit to say the right words to people at the right time. Let's take a closer look at this amazing account of Philip and the Ethiopian to see more clearly how privileged we are to talk about Jesus.

Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Go south to the road-- the desert road-- that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." Everything is going so well in Samaria. Large numbers of people are coming to faith in Jesus and being baptized. How strange it must have been to hear an angel tell him to go to a desert region south of Jerusalem. If you are going to preach the gospel to people don't you go to a place where there are people? But then God's ways are not our ways.

"So, he started out." Philip did not ignore the angel that spoke to him. He obeyed the word of the Lord just as you submit yourself to the word of God you have come to know in the Bible. Jesus said, "Blessed are those who hear the word of God and obey it."

It did not take long for Philip to see what the Lord had planned for him on this very special day. **So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the book of Isaiah the prophet.** Here was a VIP, a very important person. He was the treasurer for Candace the queen of Ethiopia. The word for chariot can also be translated as carriage. One look at the chariot or carriage, one look at the way the man is dressed, one look at his large entourage and you realize in a moment this is a very important person.

Not only was he a VIP but he was also a VRP- a very religious person. He has taken weeks out of his very busy schedule to travel 600 miles across desert roads from the upper regions of the Nile River to Jerusalem. He worshipped in the temple and even purchased scrolls of the Old Testament including a scroll of Isaiah the prophet? Can you imagine how much such scrolls might cost in our money today? He is even able to read these scrolls because he has taken the time to learn the Greek or Hebrew language in which they were written. He was a very religious person but he does not know about Jesus and his resurrection from the dead.

Now the Holy Spirit speaks directly to Philip and tells him to go to that chariot and stay there. See him walk up to the chariot. See him walk alongside the chariot as it is traveling south on this desert road from Gaza to Jerusalem. Interspersed with sound of the clip clopping of horses hooves is the voice of the Ethiopian reading from the prophet Isaiah. He was reading these well known words about Jesus. **"He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before the shearer is silent, so he did not open his mouth. In his humiliation he was deprived of justice. Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth."**

Philip asks him if he understands what he is reading. The Ethiopian says he needs someone to explain what these words mean. Was Isaiah speaking about himself or was he speaking about another person? Can't you hear Philips heart pounding with joy and excitement?

Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus. In baseball there are some pitches that are hard to hit and others that come right down the pipe at just the right speed and they can be hit out of the park for a home run. The opportunity for talking about Jesus could not be better than this. You just don't get such a soft and easy pitch that often in life.

You see dear Christian the words this man was reading from Isaiah so clearly to us about what Jesus has done to save us. Jesus was led like a sheep to the slaughter. He was like the lamb being sheared that did not protest and open his mouth. Philip had the opportunity to direct this man's attention to the sacrifices he had seen in the temple in Jerusalem. He had the opportunity to speak about Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Here is a religious man seriously looking at what he can do to save himself. Philip has the privilege of pointing to the death and resurrection of Jesus as the answer to how our sins are forgiven and how we have peace with God.

Philip told him the good news about Jesus. The good news about Jesus was totally different from what this man heard from religious leaders in Jerusalem. They told him about rules and regulations of Old Testament law and extra rules and regulations of the rabbis. They told him if he followed these rules he could be accepted by God. Philip told him the truth. Don't you think he had this man read the verses before this in Isaiah 53 that pointed out clearly the need for a Savior? "We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all." Word by careful word he showed him how this place he was reading predicted the death that Jesus would die for the sin of the world including the sin of his past life.

I am thankful to the Lord for the many opportunities he has given me to tell people of about Jesus. Let me tell you about a very special day when I had the opportunity see firsthand how the Lord opened a man's heart to believe through these words of Isaiah 53. It did not happen in a desert. It happened in Atascadero. It was my first visit with Beckey's father shortly after her mother died. For years Beckey had been praying for her father to come to know the peace and forgiveness she had been given in Jesus her Savior. On one of my first visits with her father, Craig Cunningham, I gave him a Bible from our church and because he was hard of hearing, I had him read verses from Isaiah 53 to show him the good news of Jesus.

He read slowly and carefully as he always did. Because of his hearing loss, I showed him the best I could how this pointed to Jesus' death on the cross for his sins, 700 years before it happened. Then he came to verse 11 in Isaiah 53 where it reads, "After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life and be satisfied." He paused. He was thinking. Then he asked, "Does this refer to the resurrection?" The joy he found in Jesus his Savior continued as he read the Bible through several times in the years that followed. I treasured those times with him as we read portions of Scripture. He did the reading often commented on things he read. Privileges. Privileges. Privileges. The Lord gives us privileges to speak to others about the good news of Jesus.

We aren't told how long they traveled together in the chariot, or how many stops they made along the way, or whether they sat around a fire at night and talked more about Jesus and his resurrection. We do know from what follows that Philip talked to this man about the blessings of Baptism in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

As they are traveling along the Ethiopian sees some water and asks, "Look here is water, why shouldn't I be baptized." He wanted the blessing of baptism that Jesus offers to all people. As Paul reminds us in Romans 6, "We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order than, just as Christ as raised from the death through the glory of the Father, we too may life a new life." See the joy on this Ethiopian man's face as Philip baptizes him. See the joy on Philip's face as he sees this man so filled peace because he has come to know the good news about Jesus.

Dear Christian, look for the chariots in your life. Look for the privileges the Holy Spirit gives you to talk about Jesus and his resurrection from the dead. Moms and dads, look at the little chariots in your home. See the opportunities the Holy Spirit give you to help your children know about Jesus. Brothers and sisters, look at the opportunities that will come as you get to know people and they begin to ask you more about what you believe.

Why did the angel tell Philip to go to the desert? Why didn't Jesus send the angel directly to the Ethiopian? Surely the angel would do a better job than Philip or you or me. He wants us to have the privilege of talking to people about Jesus. These privileges are further evidence of how much he loves and cares for us. The Lord knows the privileges and opportunities he has planned for us. He knows the chariots that are waiting for us. Amen.