

## Sermon Follow-up | April 19, 2020

### **1 Book of History** — “The Witness of Philip”

*Focus Passage:* Acts 8:26–40

*Additional Context:* Acts 8:1–25

*Corollary Scripture...* Acts 1:8

*Other Passages Referenced:* Genesis 1 and Revelation 22

**Sermon Recap:** The LORD directed Philip to engage a high-ranking Ethiopian official on a desert road as he passed by in his chariot. Philip is first mentioned in Acts 6 where he is one of seven men “of good repute, full of the Spirit, and of wisdom” selected to help with food distribution to Grecian widows in the early church. He also preached the gospel with a positive response in Samaria. The Ethiopian was a eunuch in charge of the Queen of Ethiopia’s treasury. He had traveled approximately 1,500 miles to Jerusalem to worship the LORD God. When Philip first saw him, the eunuch was reading Isaiah 53 aloud. He invited Philip to board his chariot to help him understand what he was reading. Philip not only helped the eunuch understand the passage but, “beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus” (Acts 8:35). In Judaism, the Ethiopian man would have been restricted to the outer Court of Gentiles at the Jerusalem temple—as both a Gentile and a eunuch he would have been doubly excluded from fully participating in the Jewish activities of worship. Yet, the LORD used extraordinary means to pursue this Ethiopian man and draw him into relationship. Like the Ethiopian eunuch, all of us were disqualified and unable to get close to the LORD. However, He used extraordinary means to pursue and save us. Like Philip, the Holy Spirit wants us to obey His promptings and talk to others about Jesus with people who do not yet know Him—people on the outside looking in, feeling excluded. We see God directing two men—He pursues the Ethiopian to save him and pursues Philip to send him on mission. How is God pursuing you?

### Introductory Comments

- In our annual focus we repeatedly talk about the Bible as God’s story of creation, rebellion, redemption, and new creation with Jesus at the center. In question 2 of the Grow section, we will consider how to tell the good news of Jesus, beginning with Isaiah 53:3–8. In coming weeks, we’ll repeat the exercise, beginning with passages we have looked at previously in our annual focus. For example:
  - Creation
  - Noah
  - Abraham
  - Joseph and the Hebrew people in Egypt
  - Moses the deliverer and lawgiver
  - the judges when everyone did what was right in their own eyes
  - King David and the promise of a descendant with an everlasting Kingdom
  - the tabernacle and the temple Solomon built
  - the exile to Babylon
  - Job
  - Jonah
- The Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8 provides an opportune moment to recognize the importance of African Christians in the early church. Because most of the Book of Acts and the rest of the New Testament books focus on Christians in Asia Minor and Europe, the role of African Christians is not obviously apparent to us most of us. We see in the New Testament how the gospel spread and multiplied from Jerusalem toward Rome through the ministry of Paul and others. Yet, the gospel was spreading, and churches were multiplying from Jerusalem into Africa at the same time. Without knowing something of the geography of the period, we can easily miss

references to dark-skinned persons in Scripture and church history. Acts 8:26–40 focuses on an Ethiopian who was probably from modern-day Sudan rather than Ethiopia as we know it. However, he was definitely a black man and we believe he is responsible for the spread of the gospel to his homeland and beyond after his conversion. Likewise, Simon of Cyrene, who was recruited to carry Jesus’ cross when He could no longer do it, was from Africa. In Acts 13, we find that the Church in Antioch had leaders including “Simeon who is also called Niger” and Lucius from Cyrene, both black men from Africa. Some of the most influential theologians and church fathers in the first five centuries of church history were from Africa. If you look at any church history during that period you will find names like, Clement of Alexandria, Eusebius, Origen, Tertullian, Athanasius, perhaps the most influential, Augustine of Hippo. Athanasius drafted the Athanasian Creed and some of these men were influential in crafting the Nicene Creed. God used these faithful African saints to protect the church against heresy and to clarify our doctrines of the Trinity and the simultaneous humanity and divinity of Jesus. The Church in the United States and the Western world is indebted to their faithfulness to Scripture, even in times of extreme persecution.

## **Group Gathering- Interaction**

### **Connect:** Making Honest Connections with One Another (Pick one)

1. Please share briefly one of the following:
  - a. A high or low from your week.
  - b. Someone who came alongside you to help you understand what you were reading in the Bible.
  - c. What has God been saying to you through His word, the sermon, or other people?

### **Grow:** Listening to and Learning from God’s Word

#### **Read Acts 8:26–40**

1. What two agents did God use to lead Philip to the Ethiopian eunuch?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Acts 8:32–33 describe the eunuch reading out loud from Isaiah 53:7–8. Luke writes, “beginning with this Scripture he [Philip] told him the good news about Jesus” (Acts 8:35). It seems safe to assume the eunuch had been reading the preceding verses of Isaiah 53 as well. Read Isaiah 53:3–8. As a group, discuss how you might tell someone the good news about Jesus beginning with these verses.
  - a. How might Philip have woven in Isaiah 56:3–5?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. What might have led the Ethiopian eunuch to request baptism at seeing a body of water?

### **Serve:** Serving King Jesus and Others, By Living Out and Letting Others Know God’s Word

1. If you have received Jesus but have not yet been baptized as a response of obedience, there is water, what prevents you from being baptized?

2. Who are you running alongside in your life so that you may tell them about Jesus? ... Perhaps a question similar to Philip's, "Do you understand what you are reading?" might be a place to start.

### Further Resources

- Bible Project –
  - Acts – <https://www.rightnowmedia.org/Content/Series/181310?episode=48>
- Illustrations and quotes from the sermon can be found on the "Sermon Slides" link at the bottom of [www.wcchapel.org](http://www.wcchapel.org)