

In the Steps of the Apostles

Preaching Jesus

Acts 8:32-36

At the Ethiopian eunuch's invitation, Philip joined him in his chariot. The eunuch was reading from the prophet Isaiah and didn't understand what he read. The specific scripture, Isaiah 53:7,8, is quoted by Luke like this:

He was led as a sheep to slaughter;
And as a lamb before its shearer is silent,
So He does not open His mouth.
In humiliation His judgment was taken away;
Who shall relate His generation?
For His life is removed from the earth.

After Philip and the eunuch read the prophecy together, the eunuch said to Philip, "Please tell me, of whom does the prophet say this? Of himself, or of someone else?" And, beginning at this scripture, Philip preached Jesus to him.

Here is an important thought for any preacher of the gospel: there is no better message to preach, than to preach Jesus. It is easy for preachers today to get caught up in preaching on current issues, or to expound on the social needs of modern man. Sermons on such topics may, on occasion, be appropriate.

People want to hear how to have better marriages and how to raise happy, well-adjusted children. Such sermons are badly needed provided the answers given are from God's book.

But fundamental to all human need is the need for Jesus Christ. Man's basic problem is sin. It is because of sin that our families are not as they should be, and sin is responsible for most social deficiencies. People need to hear about Jesus. They need to know the Savior and what He did. People everywhere desperately need to feel His love.

Suffering Persecution; Enjoying Growth

What does it mean to preach Jesus? When Philip preached Jesus to the eunuch, he used Isaiah 53 as a springboard for his thoughts. Isaiah pointed to the suffering Jesus. He was led as a sheep to slaughter. Though innocent, He uttered no protest, but went willing. In humiliation He was denied justice. The One who came to give life had His life cruelly taken from Him.

The things which Isaiah foretold are the things we would expect to hear when we hear Jesus preached, but there is more. Philip must have also preached why the Savior died and the demands which His death impose upon the sinner. Philip showed the eunuch his sin and called upon him to repent. He showed him the need to be baptized for remission of his sins. How do we know that? Because by preaching Jesus the eunuch was constrained to exclaim, “Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?” Teaching men to obey is part of preaching Jesus.

On His Way Rejoicing

Acts 8:36-39

As they rode along in the chariot, Philip preached Jesus to the Ethiopian eunuch. Philip must have explained to him his sinful condition and what he needed to do to be saved because, as they rode, the eunuch suddenly said, “Look! Here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?” Philip answered, “If you believe with all your heart, you may.” We should not be surprised at the eunuch’s response. He said, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God” leaving no doubt of his belief. Then he ordered the chariot stopped. They both went down into the water, the record says, and Philip baptized him. And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit snatched Philip away, and the eunuch went on his way rejoicing. There are several important points to notice here. First, the way into Jesus Christ is through baptism. When Philip convicted the eunuch of his need by preaching Jesus to him, the

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man's response was to request baptism. He felt the guilt of sin. He saw the answer was in Jesus, and Philip had shown him that the way into Jesus Christ was through baptism.

Second, baptism is valid only when preceded by belief in Jesus Christ as the Son of God.

Third, belief is valid only when it proceeds from a sincere heart and when it is confessed both with the mouth and with obedience to the Lord's commands.

Fourth, baptism requires more than a little water. The eunuch said, "Look, here is water!" then commanded the chariot to be stopped so they both could go down into the water. Neither sprinkling nor pouring as a mode of baptism fits this story. Both men went down into it and came up out of it. The eunuch was immersed in water as were all those in New Testament times who were baptized into Christ.

Finally, only after baptism does the sinner have reason to rejoice. Please notice that the eunuch believed in Jesus as a result of Philip's preaching, but his rejoicing came only after his belief was consummated in baptism. Do you remember what Peter gave in Acts 2:38 as the reason for being baptized? He said, "For the forgiveness of your sins." The eunuch had no reason to rejoice until *after* baptism because until then his sins were not forgiven. When his sins were washed away he rejoiced.

How about you? Have you been immersed in the waters of baptism to wash away your sins? Only then can you truly rejoice.

Preaching The Gospel To All

Acts 8:40

After baptizing the eunuch, Philip was caught away by the Spirit and apparently deposited at Azotus, the old Philistine city of Ashdod about twenty miles north of Gaza. The Bible says no more

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about Philip's miraculous trip. He was caught away and then he found himself at Azotus. That's all we know.

And all we know about the Ethiopian eunuch is what we have already seen down through verse 39. The last word we have of him, he is pictured as going on his way south toward Ethiopia rejoicing over his new life in Jesus Christ. Did he remain faithful? Was he the human instrument by which God took the gospel to that nation of people? That seems to be the implication (and what a hopefully promising one it is!), but we are left to wonder. The Bible says no more on the subject.

When Philip found himself at Azotus, he continued on through that city until he came to Caesarea on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea about sixty miles or so north of Azotus. Why is not stated. Perhaps the Spirit directed him there, or perhaps he went of his own volition. It is not really important why, though later in Acts we learn that he settled there and raised a family including four unmarried daughters who were prophetesses.

What is important is what Philip did as he made his journey. He did just what he had done when he journeyed from Samaria up to Jerusalem: he kept preaching the gospel to all who would listen. How pleased the Lord must be with a Philip. What better way to emulate the Savior than to do what Philip did? Jesus came into the world to seek and save that which was lost. Those who are his disciples, his learners, must occupy their time in the same way the Master did - seeking and saving the lost.

“Who Art Thou, Lord?”

Acts 9:1-5

Do you remember Saul? We met him back in chapter seven. He was standing on the sidelines cheering on those who stoned Stephen to death for preaching Jesus. Now in chapter nine we meet him again, and he is still wrecking havoc on the church. Luke

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introduces him in this chapter by saying, “Now Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked for letters from him to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.”

Saul was looking for those “belonging to the Way.” “Way” is capitalized as a proper name. Up to this point in the history of the church the disciples were not called Christians and the church seems to have known by no proper name, as such. The believers were simply called disciples, or believers, and their cause was called “the Way.” Saul breathed threats against it, and backed up his threats with strong action sanctioned by the high priest himself.

So Saul made his way from Jerusalem north to Damascus clutching letters of authority given him by the high priest and looking for any he could incarcerate. As he drew near to Damascus, suddenly a bright light from heaven flashed around him, and he fell to the ground. A voice from heaven said, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” Saul was bewildered by it. “Who art Thou, Lord?” he asked. The answer came. “I am Jesus whom you are persecuting, ..”

The light from heaven, and the voice, convinced Saul of a Divine presence before he knew precisely who spoke. An angel perhaps, or Jehovah Himself? Saul didn’t know at first, but He had no doubt that heavenly authority was behind the voice. “Who art Thou, Lord?” “Command, Lord,” He might have added, “And I will obey.”

What a thunder-blow it must have been when Saul heard the words, “I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.” How wrong he had been! He believed he was doing the will of Jehovah. He had persecuted the Way as a sincere act of devotion to God. How wrong he had been! How sincere, but how wrong! Can you imagine somehow the mixture of emotions that must have welled up within Saul just then? Surprise that he could have been so wrong. Overwhelming sorrow for the death and suffering he had caused.