

Acts of the Apostles

Week 9: Acts 8:26-40

The Angel commanded Philip to “Go to that chariot and stay near it” (8:26-29).

- An angel of the Lord commanded Philip to “Go south to the road – the desert road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.”
 - o When God moves in new ways, he often sends an angel to either guide or rescue believers (Luke 1:11-2:15; 24:23; Acts 5:19; 8:26; 10:3, 7, 22; 11:3, 12:7-11).
 - o Peter and John had already been pushing the boundaries of Judaism by preaching to Samaritan villages (8:25).
 - o Now an angel commands Philip to leave Jerusalem on the road headed down to Gaza and eventually Egypt.
- On his way, Philip met an Ethiopian eunuch.
 - o The Ethiopian would have stood out as an exotic foreigner in Jerusalem.
 - o He was very wealthy – he is the passenger in the chariot not the driver.
 - o He was a “God-fearer” and had come to Jerusalem to worship.
 - o His status as a eunuch (mentioned five times in the passage) would have kept him from totally being at home in the Jewish faith or the ancient world.
 - In the ancient world servants were castrated either as a form of punishment or to make them a safer option in a royal court (see Esther 2:3, 14-15).
 - As a eunuch, he was unable to participate fully in Temple worship. He would be despised and derided as effeminate.
 - Without children, his future was precarious despite his wealth.
 - The Old Testament both forbids eunuchs from Temple worship and foretells of a day when they will be included (see Isaiah 56:3-8).
- He was reading the Book of Isaiah.
- The Spirit told Philip, “Go to that chariot and stay near it” (8:29).

Philip engaged the Ethiopian in a spiritual conversation (8:30-35)

- Philip ran up to the chariot and engaged the Ethiopian in a spiritual conversation.
 - o He started with a simple question about understanding.
 - o Once invited to sit in the chariot, Philip continued to engage the man with a discussion of the Scripture.
 - o Amazingly, the Ethiopian was reading from Isaiah 53:7-8, a key verse for the early church's understanding of Jesus as the Messiah.
 - o The Ethiopian asks a gospel question “Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?”

- Philip seized the opportunity to tell him the good news of Scripture (8:35). It's clear this was a much longer conversation than is recorded here. Philip started with Isaiah 53 but likely moved to other passages of scripture in his explanation of the gospel. His gospel presentation likely included scripture and testimony.
- These verses reveal how the Spirit can be at work in both the evangelists and the prospects lives at the same time.
 - The Spirit guided Philip's actions and words.
 - The Spirit guided the Ethiopian to the right part of God's Word.
 - The Spirit stirred the Ethiopian's heart to yearn for that which only Jesus could provide.

The Ethiopian believes and is baptized (8:36-40)

- When they came to water, the eunuch asked a profound question, "What can stand in the way of me being baptized?" (8:36).
 - For many Jews, his status as a eunuch, a foreigner, a servant, all prevented him from being a full member of the family of God.
 - Philip's willingness to baptize him revealed that such things no longer served as prohibitions against membership in God's family thanks to the grace available in Jesus Christ (8:38).
- As they come out of the water, the Spirit suddenly takes Philip away to Azotus where he went about preaching from town to town until he reaches Caesarea.
 - Philip's preaching ministry is a reminder that all believers, not just the apostles were to be evangelists.
 - Philip's preaching prepares the way for Peter's encounter with Cornelius (10:1).
- The Ethiopian is unbothered by Philip's disappearance and goes away rejoicing.
 - In Christ, the man who could not have a biological family had been given a place in the family of God.
 - We can assume he returned to Ethiopia taking the good news of Jesus with him.

Sources

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