

Acts 8:26-39

²⁶ Then an angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Get up and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” (This is a wilderness road.) ²⁷ So he got up and went. Now there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of the Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of her entire treasury. He had come to Jerusalem to worship ²⁸ and was returning home; seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah. ²⁹ Then the Spirit said to Philip, “Go over to this chariot and join it.” ³⁰ So Philip ran up to it and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked, “Do you understand what you are reading?” ³¹ He replied, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” And he invited Philip to get in and sit beside him. ³² Now the passage of the scripture that he was reading was this:

“Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter,
and like a lamb silent before its shearer,
so he does not open his mouth.

³³ In his humiliation justice was denied him.

Who can describe his generation?

For his life is taken away from the earth.”

³⁴ The eunuch asked Philip, “About whom, may I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?” ³⁵ Then Philip began to speak, and starting with this scripture, he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus.

³⁶ As they were going along the road, they came to some water; and the eunuch said, “Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?” ³⁸ He commanded the chariot to stop, and both of them, 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 snatched Philip away; the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing.

A WOMAN NAMED BRENDA WAS ROCK CLIMBING ON A CLIFF WITH SOME FRIENDS, WHEN SHE PAUSED ON A LEDGE TO REST A MOMENT, ABOUT HALF WAY UP.

UNFORTUNATELY, THE SAFETY ROPE HIT HER IN THE FACE WHEN SHE STOPPED, AND KNOCKED OUT ONE OF HER CONTACT LENSES.

SHE PAUSED TO PRAY SHE WOULD FIND IT, BUT AFTER NOT FINDING IT ON THE LEDGE SHE CONTINUED TO THE TOP.

ONCE SHE ARRIVED THERE SHE LOOKED IN HER BOOTS AND SOCKS BUT IT WAS NOT THERE EITHER.

AGAIN SHE PRAYED FOR GOD’S HELP- THAT BY SOME MIRACLE THE LENS WOULD BE FOUND BELOW.

WHEN SHE AND THE OTHERS HEADED BACK DOWN THE TRAIL, THEY MET AT THE BOTTOM ANOTHER GROUP PREPARING TO CLIMB.

BRENDA AND THE OTHERS WERE SURPRISED AND DELIGHTED WHEN A MAN ASKED THEM, “DID ANYBODY LOSE A CONTACT LENS?”

HE EXPLAINED THAT THE ONLY WAY HE FOUND IT WAS BECAUSE IT WAS MOVING. AN ANT, FOR SOME REASON, HAD PICKED IT UP AND WAS CARRYING IT AWAY.

BRENDA’S FATHER IS AN ARTIST WHO DRAWS COMICS FOR NEWSPAPERS AND MAGAZINES AND SO HE MEMORIALIZED THE EVENT.

HE DREW A COMIC SHOWING AN ANT LABORING UNDER TO BURDEN OF A SOFT CONTACT LENS. THE CAPTION READ:

“LORD, I DON’T KNOW WHY YOU WANT ME TO CARRY THIS THING. I CAN’T EAT IT AND IT IS VERY HEAVY. BUT, IF THIS IS WHAT YOU WANT ME TO DO, I’LL CARRY IT FOR YOU.”

THE COMIC STORY HIGHLIGHTS THE FACT THAT SOMETIMES GOD ASKS US TO DO THINGS, OR GO PLACES, WITHOUT ALWAYS EXPLAINING WHY, BUT THERE IS A REASON.

TRULY, IT COULD BE SAID GOD SOMETIMES DIRECTS US ON A “NEED TO KNOW” BASIS, MOVING US ONE WAY OR ANOTHER WITHOUT GIVING A LOT OF DETAILS.

THE READING FROM THE BOOK OF ACTS OFFERS US A BIBLICAL EXAMPLE OF THIS KIND OF CALL FROM GOD.

PHILIP WAS ONE OF SEVEN MEN CHOSEN AND ORDAINED BY THE APOSTLES TO BE A DEACON.

HE WAS JUDGED BY THEM TO BE A MAN OF GOOD STANDING AND FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT.

ONE MIGHT SAY HE HAD AN ACTIVE MINISTRY IN ASSISTING THE APOSTLES WITH THEIR WORK IN JERUSALEM.

BUT THEN THE PERSECUTION OF CHRISTIANS BEGAN AND GREW-UNTIL IT REACHED A POINT THAT MANY CHRISTIANS FLED THE CITY.

PHILIP WAS AMONG THOSE WERE DRIVEN AWAY. HE WENT INTO SAMARIA TO SPREAD THE GOSPEL THERE. PREACHING AND HEALING AND CASTING OUT EVIL SPIRITS.

HIS WORK WAS SO SUCCESSFUL MANY SAMARITANS, IN A NUMBER OF VILLAGES, CAME TO FAITH IN JESUS.

THE APOSTLES PETER AND JOHN WENT THERE TO SEE THE FRUITS OF PHILIP’S LABOR FOR CHRIST. THEY REJOICED IN THE BELIEF THEY FOUND AMONG THE SAMARITANS.

THEY PRAYED OVER THE CONVERTS AND THE HOLY SPIRIT CAME UPON THEM ALL.

AFTER THEY LEFT, PHILIP CONTINUED HIS WORK IN SAMARIA, UNTIL ONE DAY- WHEN GOD CALLED HIM TO GO ELSEWHERE.

LOOKING AT PHILIP’S MINISTRY AMONG THE SAMARITANS, WE MIGHT THINK THERE WAS NO POINT IN MESSING WITH A GOOD THING.

BUT AS THE READING FROM ACTS TELLS US, GOD HAD OTHER PLANS, WHICH IS WHERE TODAY’S READING BEGINS.

GOD SENT A MESSAGE TO PHILIP THAT HAD VERY LITTLE INFORMATION OTHER THAN TO GO TO A PARTICULAR ROAD IN THE WILDERNESS.

HE IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWED THESE INSTRUCTIONS, WHILE ALSO REMAINING OPEN FOR FURTHER INFORMATION.

PHILIP WAS NOT ALONE THIS ROAD, HE SPOTTED A COURT OFFICIAL FROM THE QUEEN OF ETHIOPIA RIDING IN A CHARIOT THAT WAS GOING AWAY FROM JERUSALEM.

WE DO NOT KNOW IF THE MAN HAD BEEN THERE ON OFFICIAL BUSINESS, AS WELL AS FOR A PERSONAL PILGRIMAGE.

WHAT WE DO KNOW IS THAT FROM THE TIME THE QUEEN OF SHEBA VISITED KING SOLOMON, PARTS OF AFRICA BEYOND EGYPT WERE AWARE OF THE GOD OF ISRAEL.

WE ALSO KNOW THIS MAN WAS WEALTHY, SINCE HE COULD AFFORD A COSTLY SCROLL OF THE BOOK OF ISAIAH.

AND WE ALSO KNOW THAT HE WORSHIPED THE LORD GOD, AND SOUGHT TO LEARN MORE FROM SCRIPTURE.

PHILIP SEES THE EUNUCH AND IS TOLD BY GOD TO APPROACH HIM. AS HE DOES SO, HE HEARS WHAT THE EUNUCH IS READING.

THE LORD THEN LEAVES IT UP TO PHILIP TO DECIDE HOW TO USE HIS FAITH AND GIFTS TO INTERACT WITH THE ETHIOPIAN.

NOTICE, THE METHOD OF APPROACH PHILIP USES, WHEN HE COMES UPON THE OTHER MAN.

HIS WISDOM AND HUMILITY COME TO LIGHT IN THIS ENCOUNTER WITH A STRANGER.

PHILIP TESTS THE WATERS, SO TO SPEAK. HE DOES NOT MAKE ANY IMMEDIATE ASSUMPTION ABOUT WHY GOD WANTS HIM TO SPEAK WITH THIS MAN.

INSTEAD HE ASKS HIM A QUESTION ABOUT WHAT THE MAN IS READING.

PHILIP ASKS: “DO YOU UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU ARE READING?”

THIS GIVES THE EUNUCH THE OPPORTUNITY TO BOTH RESPOND, AND ALSO TO EITHER WELCOME PHILIP OR NOT.

AND THE OTHER MAN’S RESPONSE: “HOW CAN I KNOW UNLESS SOMEONE GUIDES ME?” OPENS TO DOOR FOR PHILIP TO SPEAK ABOUT JESUS.

NOTICE HOW PHILIP ALLOWS BOTH THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE STRANGER TO GUIDE HIS WORDS AND ACTIONS.

ONCE THE MAN WELCOMES HIM, PHILIP CONTINUES TO LISTEN AND RESPOND TO THE OTHER’S NEEDS.

GOD THE BLESSES BOTH THE ETHIOPIAN’S WILLINGNESS TO LEARN AND PHILIP’S DESIRE TO TEACH ABOUT CHRIST.

THE MAN LISTENS AND HIS HEART AND SPIRIT ARE MOVED BY FAITH, HE THEN ASKES TO BE BAPTIZED.

PHILIP DOES SO, BUT BEFORE HE HAS A CHANCE TO INTERACT FURTHER WITH THE EUNUCH, PHILIP IS SNATCHED AWAY.

THE FRUIT OF HIS LABORS FOR CHRIST WITH THIS ONE INDIVIDUAL IS BELIEVED TO HAVE PRODUCED THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH IN ETHIOPIA, WHICH IS ONE OF THE OLDEST IN THE WORLD.

THUS THIS SHORT STORY PROVIDES US WITH MUCH FOOD FOR THOUGHT.

FIRST WE SEE GOD’S ACTIVITIES NOT ONLY IN THE LIVES OF COMMUNITIES, BUT ALSO INDIVIDUALS.

WE ALSO SEE THAT WHILE FROM A HUMAN PERSPECTIVE, DIRECTING PHILIP AWAY FROM A SUCCESSFUL MINISTRY AMONG MANY- TO MEET WITH JUST ONE PERSON, SEEMS LIKE A POOR USE OF RESOURCES, BUT PRODUCED GREAT RESULTS.

AND THIS STORY PROVIDES AN EXAMPLE OF HOW THE WORDS OF JESUS IN JOHN 15 HAVE BEEN, AND CAN BE FULFILLED.

THE SAVIOR SAID: “ABIDE IN ME AS I ABIDE IN YOU...I AM THE VINE AND YOU ARE THE BRANCHES. THOSE WHO ABIDE IN ME AND I IN THEM BEAR MUCH FRUIT, BECAUSE APART FROM ME, YOU CAN DO NOTHING.”

HERE, IN THE STORY FROM ACTS, WE ARE SHOWN WHAT JESUS MEANT BY BEARING FRUIT. IT IS TO SHARE HIS LOVE AND PLANT SEEDS OF FAITH.

AND THERE IS MORE: WE CAN ALSO LEARN FROM THE ETHIOPIAN, WHO SHOWS US THE VALUE OF READING SCRIPTURE WITH A DESIRE TO LEARN.

HE ALSO WAS NOT AFRAID TO ASK QUESTIONS, NOR TO BE TAUGHT BY SOMEONE WHO WAS IN SOME WAYS HIS SOCIAL INFERIOR.

AFTER ALL, HE WAS A GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL, AND A WEALTHY MAN, WHILE PHILIP WAS A NOBODY.

AND YET THE BARRIERS BETWEEN CLASS, RACE, AND NATIONALITY WERE OF NO CONSEQUENCE TO EITHER THE ETHIOPIAN OR TO PHILIP.

HERE WE SEE THAT GOD’S WORK THROUGH PHILIP AND WITHIN THE ETHIOPIAN, PROVIDED THE QUEEN’S TREASURER WITH A TREASURE BEYOND MEASURE, WHICH IS SALVATION THROUGH JESUS CHRIST.

FINALLY, THERE ARE MANY THINGS WE CAN LEARN FROM PHILIP’S EXAMPLE.

HE WAS EMPOWERED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT TO SPEAK ABOUT JESUS, AS WELL AS TO PERFORM MIRACLES IN JESUS’ NAME.

THIS REMINDS US THAT FAITH IS MORE THAN PASSIVE BELIEF IT INCLUDES ACTION DONE IN PARTNERSHIP WITH GOD.

PHILIP ALSO SHOWS US THAT HAVING GREAT BLESSINGS FROM THE LORD, INCLUDING STRONG AND VISIBLE SPIRITUAL GIFTS IS NOT A CAUSE FOR PRIDE, BUT RATHER HUMILITY.

HE WAS NOT ARROGANT OR AGGRESSIVE TOWARDS THE ETHIOPIAN, BUT ALLOWED THE MAN TO EXPRESS HIS NEED AND TO WELCOME PHILIP'S HELP.

HE ALSO DISPLAYED AN OPENNESS TO THE HOLY SPIRIT'S DIRECTION, EVEN WHEN WHAT GOD WAS TELLING HIM TO DO DID NOT IMMEDIATELY MAKE SENSE.

THINK ABOUT IT, PHILIP WAS IN THE MIDST OF PRODUCING A REVIVAL OF GREAT PROPORTIONS AMONG THE SAMARITANS WHEN GOD SUDDENLY CALLED HIM TO LEAVE THERE.

AND YET HE DID NOT COMPLAIN OR REMIND GOD HOW IMPORTANT HIS WORK IN SAMARIA WAS, INSTEAD HE OBEYED.

THUS PHILIP REMINDS US TO SEEK TO BE OPEN TO THE LORD AS WELL AS OBEDIENT AND AVAILABLE TO DO GOD'S WILL, AS MUCH AS WE ARE ABLE.

TRULY, PHILIP'S TRUST IN THE LORD AND HIS FAITHFULNESS ARE GOOD THINGS FOR US TO NURTURE WITHIN OURSELVES.

A SHORT POEM BY JOHN OXENHAM EXPRESSES THIS SIMPLY AND BEAUTIFULLY:

“NOT FOR A SINGLE DAY, CAN I DISCERN MY WAY. BUT THIS I SURELY KNOW-HE WHO GIVES THE DAY, WILL SHOW THE WAY, SO I SECURELY GO.”

THIS IS AN EXPRESSION OF HOW TRUSTING IN GOD, AND FAITHFULNESS TO HIS CALL, GO HAND IN HAND.

OF COURSE, PEOPLE BEING WHAT WE ARE, THIS IS NOT ALWAYS COMFORTABLE FOR US OR EASY, ESPECIALLY WHEN WE DO NOT HAVE ALL THE INFORMATION WE WOULD LIKE, OR THINK WE NEED.

AND YET TRUSTING IN GOD AND BEING FAITHFUL TO HIS CALL IS VALUABLE AND NECESSARY FOR THOSE WHO LOVE THE LORD, AND SEEK TO MORE FULLY ABIDE IN CHRIST, WHO ABIDES IN THEM.

FURTHERMORE, IT MAY HELP US ON OUR JOURNEY OF FAITH TO REMEMBER THAT WE WILL NOT ALWAYS BE SUCCESSFUL, OR AT LEAST SEE IMMEDIATE OR VISIBLE RESULTS.

AND IN FACT SOMETIMES WE WILL FAIL ALTOGETHER, BUT THIS DOES NOT MEAN WE SHOULD DROP OUT OF THE RACE.

HERE IS AN EXAMPLE FROM NASCAR RACING I CAME ACROSS THAT MAY HELP ILLUSTRATE THIS POINT.

I READ THE NASCAR CHAMPIONSHIP IS NOT WON BY A SINGLE RACE LIKE THE SUPER BOWL GAME IN FOOTBALL, NOR EVEN BY WINNING MORE RACES, LIKE IN THE WORLD SERIES IN BASEBALL.

INSTEAD THE CHAMPIONSHIP IS WON BY THE NASCAR TEAM THAT ACCUMULATES THE MOST POINTS OVER THE YEAR.

THIS MEANS YOU CAN WIN THE CHAMPIONSHIP EVEN IF YOU NEVER WIN A SINGLE RACE, BUT COME IN CLOSE ENOUGH TO ACCUMULATE MORE POINTS THAN EVERYONE ELSE.

TO DO THIS THE DRIVERS NEED TO BE CONSISTENT IN THEIR RACING. THEY NEED TO TRUST THEIR TEAM MEMBERS AND THEMSELVES, AND BE FAITHFUL TO THE LARGER TASK RATHER THAN WORRYING ABOUT WINNING A SINGLE RACE.

THIS IS NOT UNLIKE RUNNING THE RACE OF FAITH, AS THE APOSTLE PAUL DESCRIBES THE CHRISTIAN JOURNEY.

HE WROTE IN 2 TIMOTHY 4:7 “I HAVE FOUGHT THE GOOD FIGHT, I HAVE FINISHED THE RACE, I HAVE KEPT THE FAITH.” MAY THIS ALSO BE OUR GOAL.

LET US PRAY: ALMIGHTY GOD, WE PRAISE YOU. WE PRAY YOU WILL SEND YOUR SPIRIT TO HELP US ON OUR JOURNEY. MAY WE ALWAYS TRUST YOU, AND TO OBEY YOU WHEN YOU CALL US. AND GRANT US, WE ALSO PRAY, FERVENT LOVE, AND FAITHFULNESS IN ACTION, SO THAT WE MIGHT BE GOOD REFLECTIONS OF YOUR DIVINE LOVE AND GRACE. IN THE NAME OF JESUS WE PRAY. AMEN

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