

Sunday Lesson – April 25, 2021

GOSPEL: Acts 8: 26 - 39

Ethiopian Eunuch Baptized

Background

“The Ethiopian eunuch mentioned in the Bible was a high court official of Candace, the queen of Ethiopia. He was in Israel to worship the Lord at the temple, which means he was probably a Jewish proselyte. On his trip home to Ethiopia, he had a life-changing encounter with Philip the evangelist (Acts 8:26–40).

A eunuch is a man who has been castrated for the purpose of trusted servitude in a royal household (see Esther 1:10; 4:4; and Daniel 1:9). A king would often castrate his servants to ensure they would not be tempted to engage in sexual activity with others in the palace (specifically, the royal harem) or to prevent their plotting an overthrow (eunuchs were incapable of setting up a dynasty of their own). Eunuchs have been employed in many civilizations, including the Ancient Middle East, Ancient Greece and Rome, China, Korea, and Thailand. Jesus mentions them in Matthew 19:12.” *(Excerpts from gotquestions.org/Ethiopian-eunuch.html)*

Insight

“God evangelizes the world through obedient Christians who explain the gospel to seeking souls. The story reflects four elements in the conversion of a soul: (1) the Holy Spirit’s initiative and preparation; (2) the Word of God penetrating the minds and hearts of sinners; (3) the obedient Christian who explains the gospel message; and, (4) the response of obedient faith in the person hearing the message. If evangelizing the lost, especially those of other cultures and nationalities, were up to our abilities, it would be hopeless. But, thankfully, evangelism depends on our sovereign God working through our obedience.



It is not given to us to give sight to the blind or life to the dead. God alone is the author of light and life.” *(Excerpts from bible.org/seriespage/lesson-21-how-god-evangelizes-world-acts-826-40)*

Gospel Reading

“Later God’s angel spoke to Philip: “At noon today I want you to walk over to that desolate road that goes from Jerusalem down to Gaza.” He got up and went. He met an Ethiopian eunuch coming down the road. The eunuch had been on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem and was returning to Ethiopia, where he was minister in charge of all the finances of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. He was riding in a chariot and reading the prophet Isaiah. The Spirit told Philip, “Climb into the chariot.” Running up alongside, Philip heard the eunuch reading Isaiah and asked, “Do you understand what you’re reading?” He answered, “How can I without some help?” and invited Philip into the chariot with him. The passage he was reading was this:

As a sheep led to slaughter,
and quiet as a lamb being sheared,
He was silent, saying nothing.
He was mocked and put down, never got a fair trial.
But who now can count his kin
since he’s been taken from the earth?

The eunuch said, “Tell me, who is the prophet talking about: himself or some other?” Philip grabbed his chance. Using this passage as his text, he preached Jesus to him. As they continued down the road, they came to a stream of water. The eunuch said, “Here’s water. Why can’t I be baptized?” He ordered the chariot to stop. They both went down to the water, and Philip baptized him on the spot. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of God suddenly took Philip off, and that was the last the eunuch saw of him. But he didn’t mind. He had

what he'd come for and went on down the road as happy as he could be." *The Message*

What It Could Mean?

"This story revolves around four questions and a quotation. Philip only asks one of these: "Do you understand what you are reading?" With this question, Philip opens the possibility for dialogue with the eunuch. The eunuch responds with a question: "How can I unless someone guides me?" This riposte can be read as the eunuch's scriptural ignorance, although one certainly cannot gauge that from one question. More generously, these questions could be read as an invitation to dialogue between the two men in the tradition of *havrutah*, the Jewish practice of study in pairs.

Luke reprises next the two verses that the eunuch is reading. These come from Isaiah 53:7b-8b, part of the "suffering servant" section of Isaiah. According to Shaye J. D. Cohen, first-century Jews did not study prophetic writings often, preferring Torah. Christians, however, leaned heavily on prophetic writings to interpret their messianic claims around Jesus. This passage from Isaiah 53 highlights Luke's overall claim that Jesus' crucifixion was an injustice, a fulfillment of this prophetic passage. Simultaneously, Isaiah's description of a silenced victim whose generation was cut off may reflect the eunuch's own experience of forced emasculation, which would explain his attraction to the passage.

Following the quotation, the third question invites the mutual textual deliberation to begin. The eunuch poses the question: "About whom...does the prophet say this? About himself or about someone else?" Luke does not tell us what Philip says. It could have been a speech, like Peter's in Acts 2, but equally it could have been a dialogue.

The impact of Philip's conversation becomes evident in the fourth question that the eunuch asks: "What is to prevent me from being baptized?" Here the restriction in Deuteronomy 23:1

hangs in the air. Philip is silent. This may reflect Luke's conviction that Jesus' resurrection ushers in the promise of welcome for "the eunuchs...who keep my sabbaths and choose the things that please [God] and hold fast [to God's] covenant" (Isaiah 56:4).

In most English translations, Acts 8:37 either occurs in brackets or as a footnote. This verse, not original to the story, was later inserted because of ecclesiastical discomfort at the eunuch's missing confession of faith in Jesus. Luke, in his original story, left the question hanging in the air, perhaps for his readers to answer for themselves.

How might you answer the eunuch's question? What question would you ask in his place?

The end of the encounter between Philip and the eunuch also marks the end of the beginning of the story in Acts. In Acts 9, Luke shifts to the mission to the Gentiles, beginning with the conversion of Saul of Tarsus. This mission will bring the church to an important inflection point, a decision about the welcome of Gentile Christians. But that is next week's story." (*Excerpts from workingpreacher.org by Margaret Aymer*)

Readings for Further Study

- [Romans 10:14](#) *In order for a person to accept the truth, he must first hear the truth preached*
- [John 4:35](#) *The field was "ripe for harvest"*

Thought for the Day

"You are the only Bible some unbelievers will ever read" ~ *John MacArthur*

A Prayer

Fulfillment of the prophecies, with Scripture and water you claim people as your own. Claim us with water and the word, so that we may rejoice in the life given to us through the gift of the Holy Spirit, for the sake of the one whose spirit lives in us, Jesus Christ. **Amen.**