



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Acts 8:26–40

“Preaching the Lord Jesus and the Faith That Does Save”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] We’re turning to Acts chapter 8, and reading verse 26 through verse 40, for our Scripture reading. We are in that part of Acts, in which Luke is describing the ministry of Philip, the evangelist. He went down to Samaria; preached Christ unto them, and the people with one accord gave heed to the things which Philip spoke, hearing and seeing the signs which he was doing. And we read last week and commented last week on the ministry of Stephen in connection with Simon Magus. And now, in verse 26, interrupting what was happening in Samaria, the angel of the Lord speaks to Philip and he goes down to the desert to have a memorable encounter with an Ethiopian eunuch.

Incidentally, the Ethiopian eunuch was not from the place that we know as Ethiopia today; but, rather, to the part of Africa that was more central in Africa, what might be called a few years back the Sudan area. The Ethiopia of Scripture, in this instance, does not refer to the Ethiopia that we identify with Haile Selassie, and what is happening there today. Verse 26:

“And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, ‘Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert.’ And he arose and went: and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship, was returning and sitting in his

chariot read Esaias the prophet. Then the Spirit said unto Philip, ‘Go near, and join thyself to this chariot.’ And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, ‘Understandest thou what thou readest?’ And he said, ‘How can I, except some man should guide me?’ And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him.”

By the way, this word “desired” is the translation of a Greek word that, ordinarily, means something like encourage, exhort, sometimes comfort. But in this case, it seems to have a sense related to exhort or encourage and probably should be rendered “urged” him to come up and sit with him. Invite, which is the rendering of some modern versions, is a bit too weak, in my opinion. *parakaleō* is a word that really is more like an exhortation. And so, I think, we should render this, “He urged Philip that he would come up and sit with him.”

“The place of the Scripture which he read was this, ‘He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth. In his humiliation his judgment was taken away and who shall declare his generation? For his life is taken from the earth.’ And the eunuch answered Philip, and said, ‘I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this, of himself or of some other man?’ Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same Scripture, and preached unto him Jesus. And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, ‘See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?’”

Now, the 37th verse, in the Authorized Version is supported by only a few Greek manuscripts of the New Testament. It is found in the Textus Receptus. That’s the reason that it’s found in the Authorized Version. Probably, if you have a modern version, this verse is not there. It may be in a footnote. But I’m going to read the verse as it is in the Authorized Version because, I think, it is supported by some Greek manuscripts. It’s probably not a part of the book that Luke wrote. It probably was added by a scribe, who felt it was necessary to have a good answer of “What

doth hinder me from being baptized?” And, incidentally, the verse itself expresses biblical truth and, particularly, in the light of this context, in which we have Simon Magus, a man who had an incomplete faith. And so in the answer that the scribe inserted, stress is laid upon the fact that one must believe with all thine heart, contrary to the kind of faith that Simon Magus had. And so this is the verse, 37:

“And Philip said, ‘If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest.’ [That is, be baptized.] And he answered and said, ‘I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.’”

Now, if you’re a good student of the book of Acts, you’ll recognize immediately that this is not according to the style of Luke. And if you could read it in the Greek text, you would see it, too. So this is probably not a genuine part of the book of Acts, but it’s true to New Testament theology.

Now, we read verse 38:

“And he commanded the chariot to stand still, and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip that the eunuch saw him no more and he went on his way rejoicing. But Philip was found at Azotus and passing through he preached in all the cities, till he came to Caesarea.”

Later on, in the book of Acts, we’ll have reference again to Philip, and he is living at Caesarea then, so we assume that this was his home. And he is the one, you’ll remember, who had so many daughters; that’s not necessarily anything but a blessing of course. But he had so many daughters and they were prophetesses. Caesarea became the home of this early deacon of the Jerusalem church.

May the Lord bless this reading of his Word. Let’s bow together in a moment of prayer.

[Prayer] We give Thee thanks, Lord, for the reading of Thy Word. We know how important it is to read and ponder the Scriptures; for they are the revealed Word of God to us. We give Thee thanks for them. We thank Thee for the ministry that they have had in our lives. We especially praise Thee for the way in which Thou hast through them brought us to the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who has loved us and given Himself for us. And today, Lord, we celebrate the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and we remember Him on this first day of the week as the risen Lord, able to save all who come unto Him, seeing that He ever lives to make intercession for us. How wonderful it is to have such a savior, who has saved us from the penalty and condemnation of sin and lives to secure for us all of the blessings that He has promised.

We are grateful, too, Lord, for the other promises of the Word of God, which surround us and protect us and keep us, as we seek to serve Thee in this life that Thou hast given us to live. Deliver us from the sins that so easily encompass us. Deliver us from worldliness. Give us, Lord, the desire to whole-heartedly serve Thee. And may the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the Lord, be truly our Lord in our lives, in the daily decisions of life. Give us, Lord, the strength, the enablement, the wisdom and the courage to have Him as our true Lord of life. We pray for the church, the whole church, all who proclaim the ministry of the Word of God, the ministry of the Lord Jesus in that Word. We bring them all to Thee and pray, Lord, that Thou wilt give fruit. Enlarge the body and bless the body today, through the ministry of the Word.

We pray for our country; we ask Thy blessing upon the leadership in Washington and Austin, in Dallas, those who have the rule over us. O God, give them wisdom and guidance. And, Lord, we would particularly pray for Believers Chapel and its ministry, for its elders who have the oversight over us. Bless them richly. Give them guidance and direction as they seek to have the oversight and direct us as a body of believers into service that will glorify the Lord Jesus and honor Thy name. We pray Thy blessing upon the deacons and others who feel that the hand of God is upon them for service in the local church, one of the ordained instrumentalities for the ongoing of the ministry of our great Triune God in heaven. So, Lord, bless the Sunday school teachers, bless

those who work in the tape ministry, those who are on the staff, we commit them all to Thee and we pray Thy blessing upon the members and friends who are here today.

And, Father, we would pray especially for those whose names are in our Calendar of Concern. Minister to them, Lord, we know Thou art the God of all consolation. Give consolation and healing and encouragement and supply the needs that exist in the lives of so many of us who belong to the body of Christ. And, Lord, we ask that Thou wilt attend the ministry of the Word of God with the power of the Holy Spirit, as we sing and then as we listen to the Word today.

For Jesus' sake. Amen.

[Message] The subject for today in the continuation of our studies in the book of Acts is “Philip Preaching the Lord Jesus and the Faith That Saves.” We noticed last week, in the ministry of Philip to Simon Magus, that there is a faith that does not save, a faith that might be called an historical faith, a faith that the events and life of our Lord truly did come to pass, but, nevertheless, a faith that is not accompanied by a genuine trust or reliance in him.

The Reformers like to speak about a faith that was an historical faith as insufficient to save. They spoke about faith as being characterized by three elements: knowledge, assent, and trust. Knowledge of certain facts, concerning the Lord Jesus and his ministry, assent to those facts, and then they distinguished, also, a trust in them. In fact, they give Latin names for those three things: *notitia*—knowledge; *assensus*—assent; *fiducia*—you recognize that as a word we had in English in fiduciary, fiduciary institutions, like trust companies—*fiducia*—or trust. They were simply trying to point out that it is possible to believe certain facts, and to really think those facts are true, but not to have any personal faith ourselves. So they have objected to that. They have said, “If we really know something, we know it sufficiently to trust in it.” But even if one were to take that position, what he is saying is, essentially, the same thing. If we truly know something included in it is trust. But there is such a thing we all know as knowing facts, but not necessarily relying upon them.

Well, Simon Magus, obviously, was a person like that, because later Peter said to him, “Thy money perish with thee,” or, “Go to perdition with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money.” “Your heart is not right in the sight of God.” And then Peter called upon Simon Magus to repent if perhaps the thought of his heart may be forgiven him. And we pointed out that the term “repent” is always used in the book of Acts of the repentance of people who are not believers. So Simon Magus was an individual who had a measure of religion, but he did not have Christ.

Well, when we come to the next story, and Philip’s preaching to the Ethiopian eunuch, we can say, never has the emptiness and poverty of religion been seen so clearly. Someone said some years ago that, “The Christian religion is the devil’s masterpiece.” Now, what this individual intended to say by that was not that Christianity was bad but the Christian religion. That is, if we think of Christianity only as a religion, like other religions, and if we do not have at its heart a personal relationship to the Lord Jesus then we have an empty, dead religion. And because so many people think that they can be saved by identification with just such a thing, an empty, dead religion; joining a church, being baptized, observing the Lord’s Supper from time to time, even serving as a deacon or an elder in a church, being active in a local church, and think that that brings salvation. If that is so then the Christian religion, understood in that way is the masterpiece of the devil because it deceives so many people.

Well, I say, never has the emptiness and poverty of religion been seen so clearly as in the case of the Ethiopian eunuch. Here is a man who sheds his religion; for he, evidently, was a proselyte to the Jewish religion, Judaism, not understood as true Judaism but the Judaism of the time of our Lord and finds fullness of joy in Jesus Christ. And what may be striking to us is that he finds this religion through a layman and a deacon turned evangelist. For, you see, it is possible for a person who is simply a layman to have a gift of utterance. In fact, it’s doubtful if we ever ought to speak of anyone as a layman, as if we are suggesting thereby that individuals are not laymen. We all are laymen; that is, we all belong to the people; some of us have gifts of utterance and some do not. Office in the

church is the office of elder or deacon. Gifts belong to the whole body and some have gifts of utterance who are not necessarily officers. It's possible to be a man who ministers the Word of God effectively with a spiritual gift, who is not one of the elders or one of the deacons. And, Philip, we know was a deacon because he was chosen as one of those deacons with Stephen. But these two men, Stephen and Philip, though deacons, were evangelists and preachers of the Word of God.

Now, I think, it would be nice if God should lay his hand upon some of our deacons, giving them the gift of utterance. And then having them minister that gift, just as Stephen and Philip did. So let us not think of gifted ministry as being ministry that is limited to the officers of the church. It is not. And Stephen and Philip make that very plain. These men were men who were made evangelists by the Holy Spirit. They had been gifted by God. And, because they had been gifted by God, they were qualified by God to preach the Word.

Now, I know, you might say, “Well they did not go to theological seminary and they did not have M.Div. or a D.D. or a Th.M. or a Th.D. or anything like that. Well, we don't have to have such degrees in order to preach the Word of God with authority and with effectiveness. And down through the centuries that has been demonstrated.

Stephen and Philip were individual who were given gifts by God. You can set such men to serve tables, to make tables, or whatever you will, but they will preach in spite of what you do because God has given them a gift for them to exercise. You may banish them away to Samaria, but you cannot shut the mouths of those who have been gifted by God to minister the Word of God. You can pass them through all kinds of persecution and the Christian church is witness to that. But they'll only come out of the persecution better preachers than they were when they went in; because their experiences will make them more effective in the ministry of the Word of God.

So Stephen and Philip, they were men who experienced persecution and experienced and in experiencing persecution, they didn't become worse preachers but better preachers. You can see from this the wisdom and talent that existed in the early church. Men like Stephen, Philip, and others, they weren't just simply people who came to church on Sunday morning and sat in the pews. But

they were individuals who were active in the proclamation of the Word of God and the church was rich and richer for men such as this.

And when you add to that the fact that the Epistle to the Hebrews was written by someone whose name we do not even know, I know some of you may think that Paul wrote Hebrews but it's really the practically unanimous voice of believing Christian scholarship that someone other than Paul wrote Hebrews. And if that is true, and I personally think that it is, if you read Hebrews in the Greek text and I've told you this many times before, but I took about forty classes through the Greek text of Hebrews in theological seminary, one can easily see that the style of the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews is different from the style of the Apostle Paul.

Now, it's true that he was not an apostle and I think that can be demonstrated, then think of the richness of the early church, that it should have a man such as the man who wrote Hebrews and, actually, whose name we don't even know. So the early church was, undoubtedly, very rich in spiritual talent. And we have the great privilege of seeing what God the Holy Spirit did with men like Stephen and Philip and others.

Now, Luke is tracing the path of the gospel and, remember, the Lord Jesus has given the commission to the church. “You shall be witnesses unto Me, both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and in Samaria and to the uttermost part of the earth.” So the Gospel now has moved from Jerusalem and it is in Samaria through the preaching of Philip the Evangelist. This is the second movement on the way to the fulfillment of the uttermost part of the earth.

Now, Philip is in the midst of what we would call today a great campaign. He has gone down there, practically the whole city, according to Luke, has turned to the Lord. By the grace of God, Philip is performing miracles that attest and authenticate the message that he is giving. Many people are coming to the Lord. In fact, we read, “unclean spirits, crying with a loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them and many taken with palsies and that were lame were healed.” And there was great joy in that city and in fact, Luke says, the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake. It might have seemed a very unwise thing, for God to lift the

evangelist, who is having such success in the city of Samaria, with the multitudes, and send him out into the desert to reach one man. Who would have thought that that was a wise thing to do? In the midst of a successful campaign? But one sheep is enough to move the heart of God to love and to action, in the salvation of this one soul.

We are reminded of the passage in Matthew chapter 18, where the Lord Jesus is speaking and he asks the question, “How think ye? If a man have an hundred sheep and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains and seeketh that which has gone astray? And if so be that he findeth, verily, I say unto you, he rejoiceth more of that sheep than of the ninety and nine, which went not astray.” So here is a sheep astray and through God the Holy Spirit, Philip now is the instrumentality to bring him to the Lord.

It’s interesting to me that Philip ministers to an Ethiopian eunuch. In Psalm 68, a psalm that was important in the early church because it pictured our Lord ascending up on high and receiving gifts which he gave to men. In fact, Paul cites that psalm in Ephesians chapter 4, in connection with the gifts of evangelist. And then later on in the psalm it says that, to give specifically the words “Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands to God.” And so one almost senses in this the fulfillment of not only our Lord’s ascension and the gift of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost; but now, the spreading of the gospel out to the Gentiles.

Remember, until the time of the cross, the commission that the believers had was to go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel and not to go to the Gentiles directly. Gentiles could be saved, but they were to be saved by becoming Jews; by entering in to Judaism, into Israel, being circumcised, doing the things that the Old Testament set out, in order to become a believing member of Israel. But now, of course, the Gospel is going out to all and the law has been done away with and circumcision, as a means of entrance into the body, has been done away with, as well.

Now, we read in verse 26 that, “The angel of the Lord said to Philip.” Someone asked me, after the message this morning, “How did the Holy Spirit or the angel of the Lord, both are speaking here to Philip, how did they do it?” Did they do it audibly? I don’t know. I don’t have the slightest

idea. I wasn't there. I've never had the angel of the Lord speak to me. I've never had the Spirit speak audibly to me, and so I must say if the Spirit speaks audibly and if the angel of the Lord speaks audibly then I'm a stranger to that experience, myself. I do think I've had the experience, as probably all of you who are believers have, of God the Holy Spirit impressing upon you a certain course of action that you are to take. And, sometimes, I've had this experience, I imagine you've had this, too, you have felt that you were impressed by God to take a certain action and when you did there was a sense of anxiety that came over you, and you realized that that was probably a mistake. And if you were wise, I wasn't always wise, but if you were wise, you would draw back and rethink your decision and your decision then would probably follow in a different path.

I would imagine that this is a great impression upon the heart of Philip in both of these instances. And what is expressed in the words is a description of what it meant for him. But, now, if we get to heaven and Philip says that, “The angel spoke audibly to me, and Lewis was wrong when he told you otherwise,” I'll accept that. [Laughter] Then.

Now, so the angel of the Lord has spoken to Philip and he has told the people in Samaria, “I must leave the meeting.” Everybody was saying, “Why are you leaving?” “Well, the Holy Spirit has given me a message that I should go down to the desert and I should minister the Word down there.” And, I know, that he must have received some quizzical looks as he arose and went “toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza.”

There, however, he met the Ethiopian eunuch. We would imagine, since he was from the Sudan, that he was a black man. He was a man who was a very high official in Candace's government. Candace, incidentally, was not the name of the queen. That was something like a title. We have evidence in history of other Candaces from this particular area. I'm not suggesting it's exactly like a Tsar or like Caesar or like a Kaiser but something like that. So Candace was not her personal name but her title. And she was queen of the Ethiopians, and this man is an eminent man, because he has authority under Candace the queen; so an eminent man.

Often, incidentally, eunuchs, who were emasculated men, often obtained high position. The reason they did is because they were not afflicted with the temptations of others and, thus, they could be relied upon in certain situations. So this man was the treasurer of Candace the queen of the Ethiopians, he was the Don Reagan of his day, a very important man. He was, obviously, a very well educated man because he could read the Old Testament. Now, we know from the study of the particular text that is cited here in verse 32 and 33, that this is a text that is very close to the Greek text of the Old Testament.

Now, the Old Testament was written in Hebrew, remember? But, before the time of Christ, the Old Testament was translated into Greek. Traditionally, it was done by seventy men. That is, probably, not true. But that was the tradition and that is why the Greek translation of the Old Testament, to which I'm referring, there were other Greek translations, incidentally, but this was the primary one. It was called the “Septuagint” for the seventy who translated it.

Now, the early church read the Septuagint. Many of them were Hellenistic Jews, and they could not read the Old Testament Hebrew. They read the Septuagint, something like you read your English translation of the Greek and Hebrew Old Testament. So he was reading the Septuagint. He was reading the Greek translation. He had the ability to read Greek. So that's an indication of the fact that he not only was a man of authority, he was a very well-educated man. And, incidentally, a very, very intelligent man because he was reading the best of books. The best reading of all is the reading of the best book, and the best book is the Word of God. He was an intelligent man because when Philip comes up alongside the chariot, he asks a very intelligent question. In verse 31, after Philip has said, “Understandest thou what thou readest?” He doesn't say, “Of course, I understand,” when he really didn't. Or he doesn't say, “I've read the Bible through half a dozen times, you cannot tell me anything about that.”

Mr. Spurgeon has a little incident in which he says that he that week ran into a man who was very much opposed to a certain doctrine that Mr. Spurgeon held, which he believed was plainly taught in the Bible, and this individual said, “I've read the Bible through six times, on my knees, and

I’ve never seen that doctrine taught in the Bible.” Mr. Spurgeon said, “I said to him, ‘First of all, that you ought to read it in a better position’ because if you read through the whole Bible, six times, on your knees, you’re not going to be very comfortable for reading and understanding.’ And, my suggestion also is to you, that you not read it so rapidly, that you get up and get in a nice comfortable chair and read through slowly, and think about what you’re reading.”

Well, there are, you know, people who think, and they will frequently say to you, when you talk to them about the things of the Lord, “Well, I’ve read the Bible, and I don’t see those things in the Bible.” And, frequently, if you ask them about a certain text, they haven’t any idea where in the world that text is. That’s just the way they seek to turn aside the conversation from something that might be embarrassing to them. But this man is an intelligent man. When Philip says to him, “Understandest thou what thou readest?” He says, “How can I except some man should guide me?” He knows his limitations. And he’s able, also, to sense the kernel of the problem. In a moment he will say, “Of whom speaketh the prophet this? Of himself or of some other man?”

It’s a beautiful thing, I think, here that this question, “Of whom speaketh the prophet this? Of himself or of some other man?” It is the question that is still debated in our theological seminaries. When the book of Isaiah comes up, and lectures are given, on the Old Testament text, one of the questions that we still seek to answer in our study of the Hebrew text of the Old Testament of the book of Isaiah is this, “Of whom speaketh the prophet this? Of himself or of some other man?”

Today, there are interpreters who believe that the prophet did speak of himself; that is, that Isaiah is the person who is referred to in Isaiah 53. “All we like sheep have gone astray. We’ve turned everyone to his own way and the Lord hath laid on him,” the Prophet Isaiah, “in his troubles and as the innocent suffer the iniquity of us all.” Strange, isn’t it? In the light of the fact that Isaiah in chapter 6, speaks of himself as a sinful man; he couldn’t die for anyone. Then there are those who feel that the servant, referred to in Isaiah 53, is the nation Israel. But the nation Israel cannot be a substitute for others, and the iniquity of us all has not fallen upon the nation Israel, and they have not

borne in substitutionary fashion the penalty and judgment of God. This man asks a very intelligent question. Unfortunately, we’ve not given always intelligent answers to the question. In fact, Henry Ward Beecher used to say that, “When the angels want a little amusement, they read the commentaries that men write, on the Bible.” [Laughter] Some of them are funny!

There was a famous German scholar, who lived just a few generations back, who taught Old Testament in Germany for about forty years. He espoused, during his career, four different interpretations of Isaiah 53. At one period in his life, one interpretation; then he gave that up and tried another; then he gave that up and tried another; then he gave that up and tried still another. And this man, throughout his career, never reached any sense of what Isaiah was speaking about.

Well, the Ethiopian eunuch was also a wealthy man, too. We have a great deal of high regard in our society for people who have money, because we live in the society that practices the politics of envy. And we all want to be rich, do we not? Come on? One person smiled. The rest of you were hiding what you felt, deep down within. Wouldn’t you like to be rich? Well, yes, you would. He was a wealthy man. He had a chariot. I don’t know what kind of chariot it was. It wasn’t a Mercedes Benz, but it was an evidence of the fact that he was an important man and a wealthy man. In addition, he was a religious man. He had gone up to Jerusalem to worship, so Luke said. He was, evidently, a proselyte to the Jewish faith and, yet, he did not have a faith in Christ. He had gone up, around the feast time, in order to celebrate the feasts and, perhaps, to find some reality in his religion. He had gone up to worship. But now, he comes and it’s obvious he’s now on the way back home and he did not find in Jerusalem what he had come to Jerusalem to experience. Like a Presbyterian, who might go to Montreat, in order to experience what Presbyterianism is really about or a Baptist who might go to Ridgecrest to find out what Baptists truly believe or the Methodist who might go to their particular place and so on.

Well, he had gone to Jerusalem and he had not found the truth there. He was still seeking after he had left the home of religion; like a Catholic who might go to Rome and yet come home feeling empty. He was a very sincere man and when Philip came up alongside, he urged Philip to

come up and sit with him in the chariot. And to put it altogether, he was not only all of these things but he was a man who saw that the Scriptures were the important thing to read. He was reading Esaias. He read Isaiah! Incidentally, he didn't read Genesis. He didn't read the chapters of the Bible that have to do with those remarkable experiences of men like Gideon and Samson. We like to think that those are the really exciting parts of the Old Testament; and then we skip over passages like Isaiah.

But Augustine was a catechumen in Milano and was just at the eunuch's stage of spiritual life not having yet come to faith in Christ, Ambrose, who was his teacher, directed his pupil to the study of Isaiah. And Augustine said later on, “But I, not understanding my first lesson in that prophet, laid it by to be resumed when I was better practiced.”

John Bunyan also tells that when he was at the beginning of his spiritual experience and the reading of the Bible, he much preferred the adventures of Joshua and Gideon and Samson to Isaiah or Paul. But this Ethiopian eunuch is already beyond Augustine and Bunyan. But he's not yet come to faith in Christ.

Now, Luke tells of the contact with the eunuch, in verse 29 through verse 35, and it's a beautiful illustration of sovereign providence. By the way, did you notice that this all began with the initiative of God? It was God who moved in the heart of Philip to go down to Gaza in the first place. And it's God who's working to bring this man to the knowledge of himself. The eunuch is prepared by his ignorance of the truth and by his desire for the truth and Philip, on the other hand, is prepared by the possession of the knowledge of the truth and possession, also, of the sense of the fulfillment of Isaiah 53, in the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. And what chapter, of all the chapters in the Old Testament, should he be reading when Philip draws up by the side of his chariot? Now, in those days, people read aloud because if you read ancient manuscripts, you'll see that all the letters follow one after another. There are no spaces between the words. And so you have to read slowly and it's also helpful to pronounce the words out loud, so you can remember the sense as you read along. So he heard him reading and he heard him reading Isaiah chapter 53. And I can just imagine that Philip

said, “Thank you, Lord.” Because there is no better place from which to preach Christ in the Old Testament than from Isaiah chapter 53. “Me thinks Isaiah writes not a prophecy but a gospel,” Augustine said. And this is the heart of the gospel.

And, by the way, he ran up to the chariot. Bishop John Taylor Smith used to say, “If he had not run, he would have been out of Isaiah 53 into Isaiah 54.” But it was providence and God led him to the Ethiopian eunuch, just at the right time with what that man needed. Just, you might say, the reason why you are here this morning. If you do not know the Lord, it may well be, that you have come in this door, the door to our auditorium this morning, because the message is Isaiah 53, and Philip preaching to the Ethiopian eunuch.

So he heard him preaching. You might ask yourself, “Why was he reading Isaiah to start with? Why was he even reading a Bible?” Now, this is speculation. I just suggest that this man went to Jerusalem to worship and while he was there, since he was probably attended the Hellenistic synagogues; he heard Stephen and he probably heard Paul debating the claims of Jesus of Nazareth. And just like the others, he saw that those individuals in the Hellenistic synagogue were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which Stephen spoke. And that impressed him. And he saw Stephen, no doubt, using the Old Testament, and finding Christ in the Old Testament, and showing how the events in Jesus of Nazareth’s life fit the prophecies of the Old Testament; and he thought, “You know, it’s a remarkable thing if that is true. I’d like to get myself a copy of the book of Isaiah and read it for myself.”

So he went down to Miriam’s bookstore, which is at number nine Dan Street, and he walked in and he said, “Do you have a copy of part of the Old Testament Scriptures?” Of course, he said, just a part of the Scriptures. And Miriam said, “You know, it just so happens that the other day, I was able to procure a scroll of the prophecy of Isaiah. And I have it here and it’s very expensive. I’m not sure that you want to pay that much for it.” And the eunuch said, “Don’t worry about that. I’m the treasurer of Candace the queen of Ethiopia, and I have a little cash in my pocket.” And with that, he pulled out his sack filled of gold pieces and he bought that scroll. And that’s what he was reading.

And he was thinking about the things that Stephen had said and that Paul had said, Paul who was Saul at that time, Saul had said. And he was comparing Scripture with what he had heard and with what he was reading. “He was,” as someone has said, “Pouring over the most wonderful writing, seeing glimpses of light, catching strains of music, but unable to understand fully what he was reading.” Just when Philip comes up alongside and says, “Do you really understand what you’re reading?” A poignant question to a high official.

Incidentally, that illustrates that we ought to always be bold; and even though the individual may be a very important person, if you, as a simple Christian, have the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, be bold. Don’t let the face of anyone keep you from proclaiming the Gospel of Christ. God does not receive the face of any man. And it’s often the bold man who is the successful soul-winner. And so this deacon from the church in Jerusalem, Philip, asked this high official, “Do you understand what you read?” And he said, “How can I?” He admits his need. He shows his humility. He said, “Come up and sit beside me here and explain to me.” And Philip came up and Luke says that “Philip opened his mouth and began at the same Scripture, and preached unto him Jesus.”

Now, what an easy thing to do, from Isaiah 53, I can imagine he went over that whole chapter and these two verses are what he just happened to be reading at the time that Philip met him. He probably went back to the beginning, and he spoke about the things that Isaiah said. And he must have emphasized verse 6, “All we like sheep have gone astray; we’ve turned everyone to his own way, and the Lord hath laid on him, the Messiah, the iniquity of us all,” and then by comparing Scripture with Scripture and the experiences of Jesus of Nazareth, he brought home to this individual that the Lord Jesus was the fulfillment of Isaiah chapter 53, always fresh to preach Christ from the Old Testament. By the way, that suggests to us that the Old Testament needs interpretation, but that the interpretation comes from the Holy Spirit.

He applied the truth, he turned perhaps to 54, Isaiah 54, when the eunuch said, “But that’s for Jewish people. Upon us all, the Lord hath laid the iniquity of us all upon him, but that ‘us all’ is a reference to Jewish people.” And so, he turned to the 54th chapter in the 3rd verse, and he pointed

out that the salvation that Israel has from Abraham and his promises is for Gentiles, also. And if the eunuch did say, “But I’m a eunuch and in the Old Testament, remember, a eunuch could not be an inheritor of the Abrahamic promises.” He went on to chapter 56 of Isaiah in verse 3 through verse 5, and read what must have been for this Ethiopian eunuch proselyte, remarkable words.

“Neither let the son of the stranger that hath joined himself to the Lord, speak, saying, ‘The Lord hath utterly separated me from his people: neither let the eunuch say, Behold, I am a dry tree. For thus saith the Lord unto the eunuchs that keep my Sabbaths, and choose the things that please me, and take hold of my covenant; even unto them will I give in mine house and within my walls a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters: I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off.’”

I can see the eunuch is saying, “My, if God has done that for me, I will have this Jesus as my savior.”

Well, the consequences of the meeting are spelled out by Luke, in the words that follow in verse 36, we read, “And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water, and the eunuch said, ‘See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?’” Now, you can tell a lot of things about baptism from this one experience and I don’t want to lay more stress on it than it should bear. But I’d like for you to notice that it’s believers’ baptism. This man has come to a faith in the Lord Jesus and so he is baptized.

Now, I think that is the teaching of the New Testament; believer’s baptism. Individuals who are baptized should be believers. It is also immediate baptism. We do not have any scriptural authority for saying, “You need to wait for a year or two, to be sure that you are a believer that we might be sure that you are a believer.” But he was baptized immediately. Incidentally, it was unwitnessed baptism. That is, the only ones who saw it were Philip, the evangelist, and the people who were with this important man. And, it was done by an unordained man. Isn’t that interesting? You see, in the Bible, we have such a simple presentation of the Christian truth that we have

cluttered up with so much religion. That is, no one but an ordained man can supervise at the Lord’s Table. That’s not scriptural. Only an ordained man can baptize. That’s not a scriptural statement. Un-ordained men may baptize. Un-ordained men may serve at the Lord’s Table. These are the things that the Scriptures set forth. But we have covered over the Word with so many things that are not found in the Word.

Well, we talked about verse 37, and we said that it’s probably not part of the book of Acts, but it expresses a truth. “Yes, if you believe with all your heart, you may be baptized.” And he answered, “I believe that thou art the Son of God.” “And, he commanded the chariot to stand still, and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch and he baptized him.”

That text is no absolute proof that baptism was by immersion. They went down into the water. They came out of the water. The suggestion is surely that it was likely to have been immersion; but it’s possible that they went down in the water, and down in the water, Philip poured over his head water. That’s possible. So we cannot say this proves that immersion is the proper way to baptize. In fact, it’s very difficult to prove that immersion is the proper way. It seems the likely way. It seems the reasonable way. And in the Scottish Presbyterian church, which it’s faith documents affirms baptism by aspiration or by, well, by pouring or by sprinkling. It is striking that just a few years back that three New Testament professors, who pronounced on this, who were Scottish Presbyterian New Testament professors, all granted that the early church practiced immersion.

So that’s the likely thing; but we should remember the way in which we are baptized is not the most fundamental fact. We should be baptized in testimony to our faith. Baptism is important. And everyone who has believed in Christ should be baptized. That’s the way you testify to your faith. Not by raising your hand in a meeting. Not by signing a decision card. Not by coming forward, but by going by the offices of the church and saying, “I have believed in Christ. I want to be baptized in testimony to my faith.” That’s the way the Scriptures set it forth.

Well, he was baptized and as he came up out of the water, briefly, after that, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, and the eunuch didn’t see him anymore, but he went on his way rejoicing. I

love that. He’s not puzzled. He’s not dazed. He’s not wondering about spiritual things now. He’s rejoicing in the providence of God and the guidance of God and the grace of God to him. And so he’s forgotten Philip because he now is in touch with the Lord Jesus himself. “The rich young ruler came to our Lord and after refusing to respond to our Lord’s directions, he went away sorrowful,” the Scriptures say. Here is a man who did and he went away rejoicing.

Let me sum it up, for our time is up. It’s evident that eminence, education, intelligence, wealth, religion, sincerity and interest in the Word of God is not enough for salvation. As the Lord Jesus said to Nicodemus, “Ye must be born again.” And if we say that all of these things are not enough, we can say that Christ alone is enough. And you’ll notice that he preached Jesus. He didn’t preach Jesus and the church. He didn’t preach Jesus and baptism. He didn’t preach Jesus and religion. He didn’t preach Jesus and the minister. Or he didn’t preach Jesus and the denomination. He didn’t preach Jesus and philosophy. He didn’t preach Jesus and social action and all of the other things. He preached simply the Lord Jesus Christ as the fulfillment of the Scriptures, as the savior of sinners, as Israel’s Messiah. And, through Him, the forgiveness of sins. No substitute will work. All of the substitutes that men think for the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, all, ultimately fail. The history of humanity is the history of failed substitutes for the Gospel found in the Word of God.

“Can the Ethiopian change his spots?” Jeremiah said, or the leopard change his skin or the leopard his spots? Well, the answer is no physically, but spiritually yes. Those of us who are Ethiopians and leopards, naturally, in the spiritual sense may become spiritual men through faith in Christ; only one human condition, to recognize our need and to rely upon our Lord Jesus Christ.

Here is a man who was the treasurer of Candace, the queen of the Ethiopians, but he came to Ethiopia. Irenaeus said he became an evangelist and a missionary to the Ethiopians. We don’t know about that. But one thing I do know about him; he came back and he was richer than Candace when he came back. Because he had, not only his high position, but he had a true saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. So you came in this morning and you all wanted to be wealthy, didn’t you? You do now.

Well, do you know that you can leave this morning and be truly wealthy? If you have never believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, we invite you to trust in him, upon whom God has placed the iniquity of sinners, and salvation through him is preached and offered to all. If you are here this morning and you do not have the assurance of the forgiveness of sins, you may have the assurance of forgiveness of sins as you pass out of those doors if, in your heart, if you have not to this moment, at this moment bow your heart before God and say to him, “I thank Thee, O God, that Thou hast given Jesus Christ for sinners. I am surely a sinner. I need redemption. I receive this redemption as a free gift which you offer, through Christ and what he has done.” And upon that decision, God gives you a new life. The Holy Spirit comes to indwell you. You become a true Christian; shedding your religion, if you had it before, for the truth as it is in our Lord Jesus Christ. May you come to him. Don’t leave this auditorium without that faith in him. May God enable you to come to him. Shall we stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Our Heavenly Father, we are thankful to Thee for these marvelous incidents, which Luke has gathered from the history of the early church and preserved for us. We thank Thee for the Ethiopian eunuch and the decision that was made through the Spirit’s ministry to him; for it gives us encouragement to realize that the same Lord who worked while He was here in the flesh is working still as He lives at the right hand of the Father on High. And, Lord, if the [End of Tape].