

The Conversion of the Eunuch

(Acts 8:26-39)

An Expository Sermon

by Avon Malone

“ . . . And the eunuch answered Philip, and said, I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other? And Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this scripture, preached unto him Jesus. And as they went on the way, they came unto a certain water; and the eunuch saith, Behold, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they both went down into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip; and the eunuch saw him no more, for he went on his way rejoicing” (Acts 8:26-39).

This could well be the greatest day in your life, the day that could affect the rest of your life and your eternity. The New Testament is replete with stories of people whose lives were dramatically and decisively changed. I suspect that for many of those people the day of decision might have started in a rather ordinary way, maybe as your day started today. But these people were never the same. No matter how the day may have started, no matter how ordinary it might have seemed, it was a day during which a life-changing commitment was made. This day, therefore, could be the greatest day of your life. The story of the eunuch’s conversion makes us keenly aware of this truth.

The reading I have used is the very familiar KJV. Manuscript Laudianus 35 is the earliest manuscript containing Acts 8:37. In light of such passages as Romans 10:9, 10, “. . . if thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord, and shalt believe in thy heart that God raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved: for with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation,” there can be little doubt that this eunuch did exactly as it is rendered in the familiar KJV.

Let us examine this account of conversion in detail.

I. THE SPIRIT OF SUBMISSION (8:26, 27A)

We see, first of all, a spirit of submission. Verses 26 and 27 say, “But an angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza: the same is desert. And he arose and went: . . .” One might make a rather casual perusal of this passage and say, “What is so significant about the statement, ‘He arose and went’?” Put it in its setting, and you will see its significance. Philip had been preaching in Samaria. He had gone to that mixed race that was so despised by the purebred, full-blooded Jews of the first century. He had preached Christ to them (Acts 8:5). He preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, and the preaching had been well-received. A number had been led to faith, and that faith had expressed itself in obedience. Now that we understand what Philip had been doing, we see the angel’s request in verse 26 in a different light. We might even want to raise an argument or two about the request. We might want to say, “Look, Philip is preaching in Samaria. The preaching has been attended by remarkable results. Many of the Samaritans have believed and been baptized into Christ. Simon the sorcerer, a notable man among the Samaritans, has obeyed the gospel. Why is Philip being asked to leave and go out to the way that goeth down to Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert”?

Let me explain, parenthetically, that the phrase “which is desert” doesn’t mean dry, arid, parched country like parts of West Texas. It actually refers to a sparsely populated area.

Years ago I read a report on the work one man was doing. He told about his work, and then closed with a simple sentence. It hit my funny bone. He said, “I am doing a good work, I think.” Philip could have made that statement.

He could have said, "I am doing a good work. Why leave a populous area like Samaria where people are receptive and responsive and go out to a sparsely populated one?" To Philip's credit, the next verse and the next sentence reads, "And he arose and went: . . ."

Philip possessed something we desperately need: the spirit of submission. We see this same attitude of submission later in the eunuch. This unnamed eunuch from Ethiopia appears suddenly, swiftly, and dramatically upon the stage of scripture. He just as swiftly disappears. He leaves us, however, with a great lesson. The Word is opened and explained to him, and he warmly embraces it. I would to God that we could always have that spirit. This was the spirit expressed so eloquently so long ago by the prophet when he said, "Speak, Lord, thy servant heareth. Command and I will obey." This was the spirit that leaped from the lips of Saul on that Damascus road: "What wilt thou have me to do, Lord?" So in the one who bears the good tidings and in the one who hears the good news a spirit of submission is found. Submission is seen in the preacher and the prospect.

II. A SERIOUS SEARCHER (8:27-31)

Look closer at this serious searcher. Luke says, "Behold, a man of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority" (v. 27). He was the queen's treasurer who occupied a prestigious and authoritative position. He was either a Jew who, like Daniel of old, rose to prominence in a foreign land, or a Gentile who had become a proselyte to the Jewish religion. He had made the long trip from Ethiopia to Jerusalem to worship. He was a treasurer, but his journey was not a business trip. He was a man of position, but he was not out trying to make money for himself or for the queen of Ethiopia.

I do not doubt the sincerity of this man. I am not at all disposed to question his honesty or genuineness. Hence, I cannot accept the idea that just as long as we are honest and sincere we are all right with God. This man was a religious man and nobody can doubt it. He was very sincere and genuine in his religion. This fact proves on the very face of it that sincerity alone is not enough. We do need to be sincere, but we must sincerely follow the Scriptures. One can be sincerely mistaken. Saul, of course, bore testimony

to this fact when he stood before the council in Acts 23:1 and said, "I have lived before God in all good conscience until this day." In Acts 26:9 he said, "I verily thought with myself that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth." We can be sincerely mistaken.

The eunuch had gone to Jerusalem to worship. That city may have been buzzing. It may have been pulsating with the name of Jesus of Nazareth. You remember, Stephen had been martyred just prior to this episode. As chapter 8 begins the church is persecuted and scattered. It may be the eunuch arrived in Jerusalem when the excitement was at a peak.

Perhaps he had heard of Jesus. He seemed to be purposely searching through the great prophecies. He may have heard of this Jesus and was puzzled. "Who is the prophet talking about in this passage?" he asked. Up to this point he was unable to resolve that critical, crucial question that all of us must face and none can evade, "What shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?"

The Spirit spoke to Philip and said, "Join thyself to this chariot." The Spirit did not say run but Philip did. Philip ran "hither to him and heard him read the prophet Isaiah." We run to class, don't we? Sometimes we run to the bank on Monday. We run to the job. But when was the last time we really got excited about telling somebody about Jesus? This man is burdened with a message that has to be told. That may be a big part of the effectiveness of his work in Samaria. It is rather clear in the language used that the eunuch was reading aloud—audibly and orally. He was reading from the prophet Isaiah. Philip asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" This serious searcher is altogether honest and does not bluff his way. He said, "How can I except some man shall guide me?" He invited Philip to come up and study with him.

III. A SIGNIFICANT SCRIPTURE (8:32, 33)

The place in the Scriptures he was reading was Isaiah 53. One young Jewish boy went to his father and said, "What does Isaiah 53 mean?" His question was greeted by a cuff on the cheek. Later on that young man restudied that passage and came to see that the great prophet seven or eight centuries before the incarnation spoke of our Lord's suffering and humiliation.

One old traditional but mistaken view of this passage says that the passage speaks of the nation of Israel. Obviously, it refers to the individual Jesus. This is not a reference to the disciplinary suffering of a people but to the vicarious, substitutiary suffering of the Savior for us. Jehovah laid upon Him the iniquity of us all. Philip could very easily begin at this Scripture and preach Jesus.

This passage argues for the deity of Jesus Christ, for Jesus fulfills completely the demands of Isaiah 53. This passage also argues for the inspiration of the Word.

What if we took forty archers and scatter them at various points along a road to shoot at a target they could not see? In the darkness and blackness of the midnight each of them draw their bows and shoot their arrows. When the morning light breaks on the eastern horizon, how many arrows would be found in the bulls eye? How remarkable it would be if all the arrows hit the bulls eye. God's inspired bowmen, draw their bows under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and let the arrows go, "searching what manner of time the spirit of Christ which was in them did testify when He spoke beforehand of the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow after" (1 Peter 1:10, 11). Every inspired arrow struck the bull's eye. All of those lines of prophetic, predictive statements converge on one person, Jesus of Nazareth. This line of argument was used by Paul in the synagogues of the Greco-Roman world of the first century. This is the line of argument employed by Philip, no doubt, in this story.

Luke wrote,

The place of the Scripture that he read was this. 'He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; And as a lamb before his shearer is dumb, So he openeth not his mouth: In his humiliation his judgment was taken away: His generation who shall declare? For his life is taken from the earth.'

And the eunuch, said, 'Of whom speaketh the prophet this?'

IV. A SAVIOR PREACHED (8:35-37)

The text says, "And Philip opened his mouth, . . ." We talk about the weather, the Democratic convention, who is going to win the National League Pennant, grade point averages, jobs, and crops. Jesus said in Matthew 12:34-36,

For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. The good man out of his good treasure bringeth forth good things: and the evil man out of his evil treasure bringeth forth evil things. And I say unto you, that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.

It is not wrong to talk about the weather, politics, or who is going to win the pennant, but there is something wrong when that is all we talk about. How we need within the church of today people who will open their mouths and preach Jesus.

He began with the same Scripture, Isaiah 53, and preached unto him Jesus. Luke says, "And as they went on the way, they came unto a certain water; . . ." What did the preaching of Jesus include? This same herald in Acts 8:5 preached the Christ in Samaria. That involved preaching Jesus as the Anointed One because the word *Christ*, corresponds with the Old Testament word Messiah. The offices of prophet, priest, and king are combined in Him. He is God's chosen One, God's Anointed One. He fulfilled the great Messianic expectation that appears throughout the pages of the Old Testament.

Acts 8:5 says he preached Jesus. *Jesus* means Savior. We read in Matthew 1:21, ". . . And thou shalt call his name Jesus; for it is he that shall save his people from their sins."

He preached to the Samaritans the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, and the Samaritans were baptized (Acts 8:12). Surely he preached the same message to the eunuch. In fact, the very question of the eunuch implies that the preaching of Jesus included baptism. The preaching no doubt included His death for our sins according to Scriptures, His burial, and His resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:3, 4). Preaching Jesus included preaching baptism into Jesus Christ. The eunuch heard Jesus preached and said, "Here is water, why can't I be baptized?" I am driven to the inevitable, unavoidable conclusion that the preaching of Jesus here included the command that the crucified, resurrected, risen, and soon-to-be-ascended Lord gave when He said, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved" (Mark 16:16).

V. SURRENDER AND SALVATION (8:36-39)

This eunuch said, "Here is water. Why can't I be baptized?"

That is the spirit of surrender. Luke says, "... And they both went down into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him." I sometimes illustrate this by stepping down steps. Luke places a rather striking stress on the plurality involved. "They" is a plural word which would include both the immerser and the one to be immersed. "They" would include both Philip and the eunuch. But Luke does not stop there. Luke, guided by the Holy Spirit, adds, "And he baptized him."

In 1311 at the Council of Vienne sprinkling was formally adopted as a substitute for immersion. But the very system that brought in that innovation added the footnote: "In apostolic times immersion was the mode of baptism practiced but later the church changed it." The church is the body and Christ is the head (Colossians 1:18; Ephesians 1:22, 23). The body does not make the orders; the body takes the orders. Christ, the head, has authorized immersion. Colossians 2:12 says, "Buried with him in baptism. . . ." Romans 6:3, 4 says, "Buried with him by baptism." In terms of action, baptism is a burial. In terms of its purpose, baptism is into Christ (Galatians 3:27) and into his death (Romans 6:3). Here we see surrender as this man is buried with his Lord in baptism.

The word *baptizo*, from which we get the transliterated word *baptize*, means to dip, submerge, immerse, overwhelm, or cover up. A man obeys from the heart a form of doctrine. The doctrine centers in the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. The form of doctrine points to that very doctrine for we are buried in a liquid grave and raised to walk in newness of life. We surrender, and salvation is imparted by the Savior. The power and cleansing efficacy of His saving blood are only appropriated as men and women do as did this eunuch. He confessed with the mouth Jesus as Lord. "I believe that He is the Christ, the Son of God," he said. Upon that confession he was buried in the grave of baptism.

After his surrender, Luke said he rejoiced. Why did he rejoice? Because of what he had learned. He had learned of Jesus who is the Savior. He had learned of the Christ who is the

Anointed One, the Chosen One. He, no doubt, like the Samaritans, had learned of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ. He had learned of biblical baptism for the penitent believer. He rejoiced because of what he had learned.

He rejoiced because of what he had become. He did not become something that results from reciting one's religious experience. Whatever he was, he was not something that results from some kind of vote because no vote took place. Whatever he was, it was not the result of a mere intellectual faith which stopped short of obeying the Word. He was simply a New Testament Christian. He was a member of the body of Christ, the body of the saved. He now enjoyed forgiveness of all his past sins. He had listened earnestly. He had come to believe in Jesus. As a penitent believer, confessing faith, he had been baptized into His death.

I want to ask you a question: When was the last time you really rejoiced? When was the last time you knew joy, unspeakable and full of glory? When was the last time you really knew the peace that passes understanding? When was the last time you knew a pure joy, unsullied by an uneasy conscience? When was the last time you knew a conscience untarnished and unmarred by the burden of the guilt of sins? When was the last time you really went on your way rejoicing?

Carl Young has said that one-third of the cases coming under his observation involve no clinically definable neurosis. They simply suffer from the emptiness, barrenness, and futility of one's own life. What causes so much of the misery? Sin. We can go on our way rejoicing only when we come to that great Lamb of God of whom Isaiah speaks in Isaiah 53. We come to Him in faith and baptism into Christ for the forgiveness of sins.

CONCLUSION

J. B. Phillips, a translator and religious writer, on one occasion wrote, "To learn that our futile, hopeless efforts to pay our spiritual overdraft can be safely abandoned is unspeakable relief." There is a debt you owe and can never pay. A thousand lifetimes would be insufficient. We sing,

Could my zeal no respite know,
Could my tears for ever flow,

All for sin could not atone,
Thou must save and Thou alone.

You might be diverted or distracted for a
little while, but there is no real permanent peace

or lasting happiness unmarred by the pangs of
an uneasy conscience apart from coming to
Christ. Those who come to Him can go on their
way rejoicing.

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