

Sermon: Salvation Comes to Africa

Text: [Acts 8:26-40 ESV](#)

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Introduction: Sometimes even seemingly bad events can be the soil for good outcomes - especially for those who love the Lord. We do not always see the long view or the big picture. We cannot see around the bend in the road. And not everything is as it seems.

Illus. If you plant grass seed and a palm tree seed the same day, the grass will sprout first. To the uninformed observer it would appear that the grass would in the end outgrow the palm since it was growing faster.

The Psalmist says: [Psalm 92:6-8 \(ESV\)](#) ⁶ The stupid man cannot know; the fool cannot understand this: ⁷ that though the wicked sprout like grass and all evildoers flourish, they are doomed to destruction forever; ⁸ but you, O Lord, are on high forever.

He continues: [Psalm 92:12-13 \(ESV\)](#) ¹² The righteous flourish like the palm tree and grow like a cedar in Lebanon. ¹³ They are planted in the house of the Lord; they flourish in the courts of our God.

Man's perspective is always limited because it is finite, human - not Divine with a future in mind. Most of mankind does not plan for the future and are sometimes highly offended when we bring up the topic of heaven and hell.

Illus. If a person who knew nothing about medicine were to walk into an operating room at the hospital and see doctors and nurses performing heart transplant surgery, he might assume that they were a band of criminals torturing their unfortunate victim. He would see them tying the patient down, forcing a mask over his nose and mouth so that he could not breathe, and using knives and needles and other such instruments. Only someone who understood surgery would realize that the team of medical people were trying to help the patient, not torment him (*When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, p. 21).

I. It Can Be Hard to Be Positive When People We Care about Die.

Many of you know how it feels to have a loved one die. *When Jesus died* the disciples must have been crushed. They had invested nearly three years of their life into this man. At the time, they felt all was lost. Their concept, at least initially, was the Messiah and his Kingdom were not about death and sacrifice.

The real Son of God would be a king with an earthly kingdom and with political clout who would bring physical advantages for his subjects. He would destroy all the enemies of Israel - or so they thought!

Jesus' disciples became completely disillusioned. So when Jesus went to the cross almost all his followers were absent except for John, his mother and a few others. And even they were simply waiting to witness what they believed would be the end of Jesus' life and legacy. Most of the disciples were in hiding and denying they ever knew him.

But Jesus did not remain dead and in the tomb. He arose never to die again. Hallelujah! God, the Father in heaven, was not surprised. This had been the plan all along.

Titus 1:2 (ESV) ² in hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began

Hebrews 13:20 (ESV) (Benediction) ²⁰ Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant,

When Stephen died the Church must have felt like they were on another emotional roller coaster ride again. Pentecost, and in the days after, over 5000 souls were added to the Church. The Apostles were in and out of jail. They were threatened. Ananias and Sapphira were struck dead for lying to the Holy Spirit. There was complaining about how Greek widows were being overlooked in food distribution.

This was a time of burnout because of the heavy load of ministry that was not being shared. And just when it looked like the Church was going to get going again with the seven men who were picked in **Acts 6**, one of these Spirit-filled servants was martyred. One of the more prominent men by the name of Stephen was killed by the Jewish establishment. A man by the name of Saul of Tarsus witnessed it. This arch enemy of the Church would later become a great missionary and writer for the Lord, but not before he did a lot of damage to the early Church.

To make matters worse, another servant-leader from this group of seven men went off to Samaria of all places. We spoke of that trip last week. I feel like this was directed by God and maybe not something the other Leaders endorsed. After all we need to keep our good people here, they would say. The Church was being persecuted. To the untrained eye it looked like the Church might even fail in its mission, but all these events were in God's plan.

Because the Church was being persecuted, many Christians were scattered (dandelion seed head effect). Others were sent away; and as they went, they shared the Gospel.

II. As Christians We Need to Be Open to God's Leading.

Phillip was open to God's leading (through an angel, [v.26](#); Spirit of God, [v.29](#)). He had went to Samaria. Now God was asking him to go on yet another journey in the heat of the day to meet an unidentified stranger.

Acts 8:26-40 (ESV) ²⁶ Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." This is a desert place. ²⁷ And he rose and went. And there was an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure. He had come to Jerusalem to worship ²⁸ and was returning, seated in his chariot, and he was reading the prophet Isaiah. ²⁹ And the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over and join this chariot." ³⁰ So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" ³¹ And he said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to come up and sit with 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 before its shearer is silent, so he opens not 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 And the eunuch said to Philip, "About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?" ³⁵ Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus. ³⁶ And as they were going along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, "See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?"**[b]** ³⁸ And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. ³⁹ And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing. ⁴⁰ But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through he preached the gospel to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

Footnotes:

[b] at Acts 8:36 some manuscripts add all or most of [verse 37](#): And Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he replied, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."

From the 8th century B.C. (Greek philosopher, Homer's time) to that current time the Greeks and others referred to the Ethiopians as living on the edge of the world. So, at least in the 1st century Church, the idea of witnessing to the end of the earth ([Acts 1:8](#)) had been accomplished in their view.

[Acts 1:8 \(ESV\)](#) s But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

But the Church did not fulfill [Acts 1:8](#) by accident. We see the Holy Spirit directing virtually every step that Phillip and others would take.

Philip was directed to go south ([v. 26](#), possible translation: “at noon, or mid-day”) on the desert road to Gaza. At that time of the day, there were probably few people out - even though this was a major route to Egypt.

Philip was directed to go to a specific person ([vv. 29-31](#)). His appointment was with a eunuch from what is called Ethiopia which is modern day Sudan. The eunuch worked for the Queen and took care of the country's finances. The King was thought to be a god and not to be bothered by these kinds of things. More than likely the eunuch was a convert to Judaism (proselyte).

Philip was to engage him in a certain way. Many times we confront people with the gospel without a plan or proper preparation. Even when you are planting a garden, the ground needs to be readied. The Holy Spirit had been working in the heart of this Ethiopian official through Scripture ([Isaiah 53](#) specifically). Philip was provided an opening to share, and the timing was perfect. There were questions.

The Ethiopian eunuch was open to God's leading. He wanted to understand, but he lacked a teacher. He was searching for meaning by reading God's word. The Ethiopian was reading aloud (the common practice) and in his chariot (maybe even an ox cart). More than likely he was reading from the LXX (the common text for the early Church as well). Because it is in Greek, and that just happens to be Philip's native tongue, everything is perfect for a dialog between these two men.

Some have said this black man was the fulfilment of the prophecy in [Isaiah 56:3-8](#). This is a section found just three chapters later than the passage the eunuch was reading.

Isaiah 56:3-8 (ESV) ³ Let not the foreigner who has joined himself to the Lord say, “The Lord will surely separate me from his people”; and let not the eunuch say, “Behold, I am a dry tree.” ⁴ For thus says the Lord: “To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose the things that please me and hold fast my covenant, ⁵ I will give in my house and within my walls a monument and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off. ⁶ “And the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord, to minister to him, to love the name of the Lord, and to be his servants, everyone who keeps the Sabbath and does not profane it, and holds fast my covenant—⁷ these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.” ⁸ The Lord God, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, declares, “I will gather yet others to him besides those already gathered.”

III. As Non-Christians You Need to Be Open to God’s Leading.

God’s plan of salvation is hinted at in the O.T. But it takes Jesus’ coming to earth to make prophecy make sense. Much like our situation today, it takes Christians living out Jesus’ principles in their lives to be a witness to the Non-Christian (Oh, so that is what it means to *really* love someone).

Jesus is the literal fulfilment of the passage the eunuch was reading. The eunuch was reading **Isaiah 53:7-8** which is found in the verses of our text. Luke tells us: **Acts 8:32-33 (ESV)** 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 before its shearer is silent, so he opens not his mouth. ³³ In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth.”

The Jews of the first century lacked a doctrine that taught of a suffering Messiah. It takes Jesus to show them what it means to be God and love them like children. Jesus was lead away like a sheep to its slaughter. He became the paschal Lamb (both Priest and Sacrifice). John the Baptist had recognized Him as such when he said: “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”

The WORD of GOD did not say a word to stop his own sacrifice.

Jesus was humiliated. He suffered injustice and died, but that was not the end of the story. He was made alive again after three days.

Like the eunuch, non-Christians need to be open to the gospel message -the good news about what Jesus offers. Let us look at the ingredients of this story:

Philip was open to being sent anywhere by God. We need to be a missionary people!

Philip was open to hearing what God had to say. That means we need to quiet ourselves and listen in prayer!

Philip was open to doing what God wants. We must follow and obey the Master!

The Ethiopian was aware of God, and studying God's Word.

The Ethiopian was ready to be taught what he did not completely understand.

The Ethiopian as a result of his conversion wanted to share the Gospel with others.

Let's look at how this account unfolds. Once the Ethiopian official realized he was a sinner in God's eyes and in need of baptism, he asked to be baptized (immersed).

Let's spend a little time here discussing this idea of baptism in a balanced way. The word used in the book of Acts, that is rendered baptism" here, is ALWAYS meaning to immerse. There is not one exception to this! In all fairness when it says "going down into the water" and coming up out of the water" - this is no more a proper argument for pouring, sprinkling, or immersion (you could do all three in the water, although it seems a little silly to do the first two in the water).

And certainly using ancient art as an argument also lacks believability (Stott). It is the Greek word for baptism that is the clarifier. And Philip must have certainly explained the significance of baptism to the Ethiopian. Baptism is:

- 1. washing away of sin**
- 2. a sign and seal of belonging to God's people**
- 3. an entrance into the Kingdom (Church)**
- 4. a receipt of the Holy Spirit**

Once Phillip verifies through a verbal confession of faith (i.e., the eunuch was aware of his commitment to God) the Ethiopian is baptized.

You may have noticed in the reading of the text - [verse 37](#) was omitted. In most modern translations it is intentionally left out because it is not found in the earlier and most reliable mss. It is true theologically, but it just is not in the early texts.

God will never coerce you into following Him. It is a free choice of yours. He does, though, want willing participants to enter into this fellowship of the redeemed by faith, through grace and in baptism. Christianity is not for those who are weak of character. He may call you to be persecuted or even die for him (martyrs). He wants committed people of integrity who are willing to give their everything to God.

In [verse 39](#), the Ethiopian convert went on his way *rejoicing* because of God's Spirit dwelling in him. We do not know from biblical record what happened next, but Irenaeus (a 2nd century Church Father) says the man became a missionary among his own people. And isn't that the way it *should* work?

When we catch up with Philip some twenty years later in [Acts 21](#), it appears he has settled down in Caesarea. He is still faithful and has four unmarried daughters who prophesy. Whether on the desert road or at home, God calls us to be faithful witnesses.

Conclusion: We know from Scripture that it is God who grows His Church, but we as Christians are responsible for sharing the Gospel, teaching others, and following God's lead for our lives. If you are not a Christian, and you would like to study the Scriptures, we stand ready to help. If you already *know* what God wants you to do, put your faith in Him and be baptized yet this day. Don't put off this critically important decision.