

The Rock: 07-18-2021

Community series

First reading: None

Title:

Scripture: Acts 8:26-40

Theme:

There is no good place to serve the Lord,
except where he sets you down. -C.H.
Spurgeon

Introduction:

As I sat to study and see what we all
need to look at this week, I thought of
how much God loves and cares for every
human being.

To create "divine appointments" like
this, as weird as it may sound to us,
excites me and gives me comfort and hope.

I thought of being prepared-knowing the
Scriptures-being present for someone-
being obedient.

Thinking too of being in the right place
at the right time both in the giving and
in receiving.

Also, learning how to recognize God's voice, His direction, and providential hand in things. This is no "chance meeting", that Luke records for us here in Acts 8.

Philip was actively listening; the eunuch was as well. Riding in his chariot he was he was reading with an open heart and mind -a holy expectation we sometimes say, to understand and know not just the Scriptures, but who they spoke.

The eunuch read with that type of expectation and he wasn't disappointed. We find here this morning that two worlds collide. A pupil and a teacher.

But the teacher isn't there by accident. Yes, he had been with Jesus, but it's clear he has done his homework. He studied the Scriptures. He was together with the others when they were taught and explained too.

It is true that God can simply drop a word or an understanding in your heart and mind at times. That is a gift He gives to us.

But understanding the Bible really comes in two ways, and they work together: Holy Spirit Illumination and personal diligent study of the word.

This is how many of you have an encouraging word for someone, a scripture verse ready to share, even when you may not feel ready. It comes from your daily time of devotion and reading.

The Holy Spirit stores them up in your heart and mind for a future moment of need. Don't worry about what to say. Easier said than done, I know.

God isn't looking for scholar's, just obedient and faithful people and friends. It is actually super practical, isn't it?

But it does seem to me to be God works 90% of the time, in and through His obedient people. Not because He needs to, but rather because He wants to. Philip and this eunuch were ready and active in the plan and purpose of God for each of them.

The Story:

Do you remember the Miracle on the Hudson? "Sully" Sullenberger, and his miraculous landing of a plane whose engines had been taken out by a malicious flock of geese.

In the two-three minutes between the engines being taken out and his gently landing the plane for every passenger to walk out onto the wing for rescue -A miracle, in every sense of the word.

Yet, at the same time, the 30 or so years of practice, study and faithfulness to his calling as a pilot, Sullenberger had prepared over and over again for those two minutes.

So much so, that when it happened, he simply responded in a way that N.T. Wright says "was in his bones". A miracle of God through and active agent ready and prepared to do exactly what he was called to do.

That's just what we have here in this wonderful story. It's one that shows the obedience of both the lost and the found:

-Acts 8:26-28 ESV

"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. 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 and was returning, seated in his chariot, and he was reading the prophet Isaiah."

This is no accident here, as Luke gives us this narrative it seems to me that life is happening for Philip and this

man. Just the day-to-day stuff we all go through.

Yet, in the providence of God, their routines meet on a road leaving Jerusalem.

Interesting to me anyway, that this happens on the road going out of town, not when they were both in Temple, but as he is leaving -God set's up this "chance" meeting.

It really is a beautiful thing. The sovereignty of God, and His providential care not just for His people, but all of humanity.

I think sometimes we get so practical in our daily doings of life, that we miss moments like this. At least in the sense that God is at work behind the scenes. "Divine moments and appointments" happen all the time. Not so much in the sense like Philip -where an angel shows up and gives you instructions.

But in that gentle whisper of the heart, the tug to give someone a call or to stop and pray. It is God, through His Spirit active in us.

Be sensitive to Him and listen. A prepared heart, a willing Spirit is always going to find itself in the right place and the right time.

I love this. God could do whatever He wants, and He does, through His people, and sometimes even through those who are not. He works this way because He wants to, not because He needs to.

Philip finds himself now in the right place at the right time, listening for his next instruction, and he gets it:

-Acts 8:29-30 ESV

"And the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over and join this chariot." So, Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?"

Chance meeting? On the surface one would think so. But this is a divine set up and it may seem a bit strange to us because Philip asks right away: What are you reading?"

But the habit of reading to ourselves in silence is more a new thing. For most of history when people read, they read aloud no matter where they were.

So, the question makes sense; "Do you understand that?" It's right here where we see the practical obedience of a man colliding with the divine purposes of God.

Again, in this passage we see the "prophetic schemer", the Holy Spirit, working behind the scenes so that this man has the opportunity to hear about Jesus, the very one who fulfills all the Scriptures, including the one he is studying on the ride home.

Philip has been invited into his world on the road of life, as it were. How many times has this happened to us and perhaps we didn't even know it? At least not until after the fact.

How many times have you had someone come along side you? Or who knows, maybe you were the one who came along side someone, even for just a short time.

Helping, explaining, just walking with someone giving them encouragement and strength in that moment. Have you ever thought that either you or that other person was simply; "the answer to a prayer"?

I often wonder, because the text isn't clear, if in his reading, the eunuch hadn't asked God for a better understanding of the passage from Isaiah -and God answered -it makes sense, doesn't it?

We can be strong believers that God answers our prayers -He does. I think a

good lesson for us all is to grow in our awareness and be sensitive to His Spirit to see the HOW of answered prayers.

You and your words could very well be the answer to someone else's prayer to God. Philip sure was:

-Acts 8:34-35 ESV

"And the eunuch said to Philip, "About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?" Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus."

Well, let me tell you about Jesus. All the Bible in some way points to Him, and Philip starts there. Now, I have to assume we got the cliff note version of this conversation.

Luke says that Philip told him the good news of Jesus -the Gospel, and all of a sudden, the eunuch got it. I want to assume and have to that somewhere in the talking to this man Philip remembered the command of Jesus:

-Matthew 28:19-20 ESV

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that

I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

This is what Philip was doing, and the eunuch got it. I believe, I want to accept, I want Jesus as savior and Lord in my life. I believe He is the promised one.

Doing that is step one. Step two in this story is being baptized. How did he know? Again, I'm convinced Philip explained that in their conversation.

That's the public declaration of what has just happened inside of him as they went along the road that day. Why not do it, after all, Jesus was baptized by his cousin John showing everyone the way of obedience.

Just like the story of the people of Israel, passing through the Red Sea to freedom and a new life, baptism symbolizes the same thing.

When we confess Jesus as Lord and savior, being baptized is the next step of obedience. It doesn't save you, but it is your declaration that Jesus has saved you and you want people to know that you are His.

In the waters of baptism, you are symbolically dying to yourself, and being raised to new life with and in Jesus.

Washed clean and a new creation in Christ:

-1 Peter 3:21-22 ESV

"Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him."

It seems that not only did Philip share about Jesus in an understanding and clear way, the eunuch received Him as the fulfilment. "Let's not waste any time here! Stop the bus!! Let's do this Philip."

-Acts 8:36-38 ESV

"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?" And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him."

It's into the water they go, where I am sure Philip baptized him just as Jesus commanded: "In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit." Amen.

Then, BOOM! Phillip doesn't even get to hang around for the closing prayer and benediction -God has other plans for him. Another assignment:

-Acts 8:39-40 ESV

"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. But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through, he preached the gospel to all the towns until he came to Caesarea."

With God's purposes and plans fulfilled there on the road out of town, the eunuch now a child of the King, and a servant of a queen, he continues on his way home to his duties as a court official.

A new man for sure, but back to work doing what he was called to do, and Philip, well, he found himself, "in Azotus"

If you have a bible with maps in the back you can find Azotus on the one that says: Palestine in the time of Jesus.

It's almost directly west of Jerusalem, but certainly not right next door. In fact, it's all the way to the coast of the Med.

How did he get there? Did he jump on the orange line away from the city? I'm just not smart enough to figure that one out, and honestly, I'm not sure we are meant to.

It's fun to speculate and wonder, but if we do that for too long, we end up down a rabbit hole talking to Alice and wondering how we got here.

No, I think what is important here is what Philip does once he realizes where he was. He got right back to work preaching the Gospel to all the towns along the coast until he arrived in Caesarea in the north.

Just going along doing the next right thing in front of him. I mean, he had to think it a bit strange that one second, he was just south of Jerusalem, and the next he was watching the waves roll in on the shores of the great sea.

Hey, it couldn't have been too weird though. He's lived through seeing blind people see, when they have never seen. He has watched lepers be touched by Jesus and be completely healed.

He's seen thousands being fed with a little boy's lunch made of a few fish and some bread. He's seen Jesus killed,

buried, and alive again cooking fish for breakfast on the shores of lake Galilee.

So, in the grand scheme of things, perhaps it wasn't as weird as we think it would be. Being in Jerusalem baptizing a new found friend and brother on minute, and then preaching the gospel on the shores of Azotus, is just another day in the life being led by the Spirit of God, doing the work of God.

All under the comforting hand of God's providential care.

Can we get to that place in our lives? I believe so, and think that many times we are, we just aren't quite aware of it.

Just step into the next right thing that is in front of you in simple obedience and get to work. That's all.

He will take care of everything else.