

ACTS

Please turn in your Bibles this evening to Acts chapter 8 as we continue our study through the Word of God.

In our last study we saw the persecution against believers in Jesus begin and it began with the death of a man named Stephen.

As you remember, Stephen was brought before the Sanhedrin, kind of the Jewish religious Supreme Court, and before them he gave a testimony of his faith in Jesus by looking back at their history.

He pointed to the fact that they rejected Joseph as their deliverer the first time and it was not until his brothers meet up with him again that they recognized him as their deliverer.

Then he spoke of Moses and the same thing. The first time they rejected him as their deliverer and it was not until forty years later that they recognized him as their deliverer.

The point is simple. They had done the same thing with Jesus. Their Messiah came the first time and they rejected Him. But, when He comes again they will receive Him as their deliverer, and that is exactly what the Scriptures tell us!

And then Stephen blasts them for their hard hearts and in Acts 7:51-53 he said, **“You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers, who have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept it.”**

And that was it for these Jewish religious leaders. The Law, their traditions kept them from receiving the truth and they came after Stephen “**. . . and they gnashed at him with their teeth.**” Acts 7:54.

And they took Stephen outside the city and they stoned him to death! Persecution was what Satan was using to put an end to this movement and he continues to do that today. But, as we will see, persecution does not really work for believers.

What does work is that Satan uses people to bring false doctrine into the church to cause confusion, doubt, division and-so-on. And, I am sorry to say, that does work because it is amazing what people will buy into!

As we move into Acts chapter 8 we are going to see the Gospel now spreading to Judea and Samaria as persecution is causing believers to flee for their lives. But this was the plan of God.

Remember what Jesus said in Acts 1:8, “**But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.**”

And that is exactly what is happening, the Gospel message is moving forward by the power of God’s Spirit empowering believers to share their faith and the faithfulness of the believers to walk by faith!

Also, as you may remember, back in Acts chapter 6 we saw God raise-up seven men to wait on tables and hand out food and other necessities to the widows in the church. These men were of good reputation, they were filled with the Holy Spirit, and they used the wisdom of God in their lives, in their actions.

Now, out of these seven God raised-up two men for another ministry.

First, like I have said, we looked at Stephen as he presented his case for Jesus before the Sanhedrin and they put him to death for it.

Tonight, we are going to look at another man that God raised-up and that man is Philip. And, as we will see, what a powerful witness he gives to us. Philip was a nobody, serving tables and God used him in a powerful way.

Make no mistake about it, God uses nobodies and I am thankful for that. He uses us so in the end, He gets the glory because there is no way we could accomplish these things on our own!

But before we get to Philip there is another man we need to deal with and that is Saul. And we will see what happened to this man who was witnessed to in a powerful way and was fighting against what God was doing in his life.

Now before we get to our text this evening, let me share with you the closing words in Acts chapter 7 to show you what happened to Stephen and how this man named Saul was there not only witnessing these things, but as we will see, consenting to them.

In Acts chapter 7, beginning in verse 57 we are told, **“Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord; and they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul. And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on God and saying, ‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.’ Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, Lord, do not charge them with this sin.’ And when he had said this, he fell asleep.”** Acts 7:57-60.

So, with that as our background, let’s begin reading in Acts chapter 8 beginning in verse 1 and let’s see what the Lord has for us as we study through His Word.

**ACTS 8****VERSE 1**

Now we don't have to guess about this man Saul and what his life was all about. The New Testament gives us ample evidence about his life before he was saved and after he was saved.

Saul, being part of the Sanhedrin, a voting member, was there consenting to the death of Stephen. The Greek word used for "**consenting**" is SUNEUDOKEO and it means "to approve, to be pleased with."

Saul was born in Tarsus in Cilicia, we see that in Acts 22:3. He was a "**Hebrew of Hebrews**" or he was a very good Jewish boy and man, (II Corinthians 11:22; Philippians 3:5). He was the "**son of a Pharisee**" (Acts 23:6). He was a Roman Citizen, (Acts 16:37; Acts 22:25-28). He was educated in Jerusalem by Gamaliel, (Acts 22:3). He became a devoted Pharisee, (Acts 26:4-5; Philippians 3:5). And, as he measured himself by the Law, according to what he believed, he was blameless, (Philippians 3:6).

Saul was a brilliant man and on his way to becoming a great leader in the Jewish faith, (Galatians 1:14).

And now, it is like there was blood in the water as they put Stephen to death, and the Jews, including Saul, went after believers like sharks in water!

In Acts 22:4-5 Paul tells us of this zeal for God that he had but it was truly without knowledge. Listen to what he was doing, by his own words, **“I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women, as also the high priest bears me witness, and all the council of the elders, from whom I also received letters to the brethren, and went to Damascus to bring in chains even those who were there to Jerusalem to be punished.”**

In Galatians 1:13-14 Paul tells us, **“For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it. And I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers.”**

Saul, also known as Paul, was on his way up. And going after these people who are following after Jesus is only going to make him shine even more before the Jewish religious leaders!

And yet, with all this zeal, I don't think Saul could get the face of Stephen out of his mind. In Acts 6:15 we are told of Stephen, as these Jewish religious leaders were looking at him, including Saul, and what they saw. **“And all who sat in the council, looking steadfastly at him, saw his face as the face of an angel.”**

Not only that, but Stephen seemed to have this intimate relationship with God and that is something that Saul desired with all of his heart. Then what was the problem?

Saul tried to attain this relationship with God through the Law and the Law has no power to do that. All the Law can do is show you where you stand, and, as the Bible says, **“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”** Romans 3:23.

There is no grace in the Law, it is just this. If you broke the Law then you are guilty, and, as James tells us, if you try to keep the Law and break just one of the Laws, you are guilty of them all! (James 2:10)

The faith of Stephen was based in the grace of God and not the Law of God. The Law condemned not only Stephen but all of us. Grace, that is found in the shed blood of Jesus and as we repent of our sins and ask Him to be Lord and Savior of our lives, then all of our sins are cast as far as the east is from the west to be remembered no more! Praise God for His **AMAZING GRACE!**

And even today we see people try to approach God through the Law and they are either miserable because they can't keep it, they keep failing, or they are self-righteous, and they look down upon others when the reality is, they are not even keeping the Law!

And that is going to be Saul, he is going to reject the conviction of God upon his life and he is going to come after believers to destroy them, destroy their faith.

Yet what he didn't realize was that he was about to be hit right between the eyes harder by the conviction of the Holy Spirit than Stephen had been by the rocks that were hurled at him. And we will look at that next time when we get to Acts chapter 9, the conversion of Saul!

Now, with persecution, we see the church move out of its comfort zone in Jerusalem and moving towards the second phase of what God told them they would do, bring the Gospel message to Judea and Samaria.

Let's read on and see what is happening next.

VERSE 2

Keep in mind that they are in Jerusalem and the apostles were there in Jerusalem. So, when Luke tells us that “**devout men**” or “God-fearers” cared for the body of Stephen, it does not mean that these were believers.

Why do I say that? Because they “**made great lamentation over him.**” Acts 8:2. And it seems that these were Jewish men who were horrified at what their own religious leaders did to Stephen. It doesn't mean that they agreed with Stephen, that they were believers, but they did not agree with him being stoned to death!

If they were believers, then they just didn't understand what was ahead for Stephen, he was with the Lord. No pain, no suffering and even though his death seems tragic to us, it was according to the plan of God!

Some of you are aware of the story of Jim Elliot who went to bring the Gospel message to the Auca Indians. I am going to just share part of the story, you can go and read the rest of the story from the web site I got this from. We are told,

When Jim grew up, he and his wife Betty were missionaries to the Indians in South America. They met a missionary from Ecuador, who told them about the needs of the Indians in that country. There were several different tribes of Indians living in the jungle. Some of them were being taught by missionaries already. Others had never heard of Jesus. One of these tribes was a wild and savage people called Aucas!

The Aucas were great hunters in the jungle. They hunted wild pigs, monkeys, and jaguars with their spears and bows and arrows. Auca Indians always went barefoot, and they could recognize another person's footprint like we recognize the faces of our friends!

But the Aucas didn't know about Jesus. Their lives were dark and sad and full of fear. They had many cruel customs. If they saw anyone in the jungle who was not of their tribe, they would sneak up and kill them with their spears. They also speared each other, killing their own friends and relatives during the slightest quarrel.

When a man killed another man, the family of the dead man would hunt for the killer and spear him too. Often parents killed their own children, just because they were tired of taking care of them. Everyone was always afraid of being suddenly killed! That is how people live, when they don't know anything about Jesus or God's laws or how to be kind. . . .

After about two months of flying over the Auca village with gifts, the missionaries decided it was time to land on a little beach beside the river, close to where the Aucas lived. They would build themselves a tree house to live in, and try to talk to the Aucas.

There were five men altogether: Jim, Nate, and three others named Pete, Roger, and Ed. They prayed and talked with their wives for a long time before they made the decision to move into the Auca's country. All of them knew very well that it was dangerous. But they loved God and knew that they belonged to Him. They were not afraid to die and go to heaven.

So they landed their plane beside the river and built a house in a tall tree. Some of the men flew over the Auca village again, calling: "Come down to the river! We want to visit you there!" Then they camped and waited.



On the third day, the men were sitting in their camp, when suddenly they heard a shout from across the river! Their hearts jumped as they turned to look. Three Aucas were stepping out of the woods: a man and two women. Calling out, "Welcome! Welcome!" in the Auca language, Jim waded across to meet them. He took their hands and helped them back across to the missionaries' camp. The five missionaries tried hard to show the Aucas that they wanted to be friends. They gave them food and gifts, and smiled and talked. . . .

That night the three Aucas returned to their village. They did not invite the missionaries to come with them, so Jim and his friends stayed at their camp. That was on Friday. On Sunday, Nate called his wife on the radio to say that a big group of Auca men were coming. "Just in time for a church service!" he told her excitedly. "This is the big day! I'll call you back this afternoon and let you know what happens!" . . .

The next day more men took another plane and flew over the camp. They brought back sad news: Jim and Nate and their friends were all dead. The Auca Indians had killed them with their spears!

The five missionaries had guns with them in their camp, but they did not use them to fight the Indians. When the Auca men came toward them with their spears, they did not shoot back with their guns. They knew that if they would shoot the Indians, they could probably save their own lives. But then they would never be able to teach the Aucas about Jesus! So they chose to let themselves be killed, and let the Aucas have another chance to become Christians.

The Aucas always remembered those five strange white men who had been so kind to them and had not tried to kill them. And so a year later when more missionaries tried again to speak to the Aucas about Jesus, they were ready to listen.

Several of the men who had helped to kill Jim and his friends with their spears now became Christians. One of them gave his testimony at a meeting. He counted on his fingers and said, "I have killed twelve people with my spear! But I did that when my heart was black. Now Jesus' blood has washed my heart clean, so I don't live like that anymore." God's love had changed his life!

- <https://www.crossroad.to/Victory/stories/missionary/11-auca.htm>

What is my point? It is simple. God uses persecution, even martyrdom to further His Kingdom, to bring people to saving faith and we see here with Jim Elliot and his friends who were killed by the Auca Indians and yet, through their death, many Auca Indians ended up getting saved.

We look at things like this here in Acts and what happened to Stephen and we may think, "But he could have done so much for the Lord in his life!" The reality is his death is going to stir the heart of Saul so much that he has only two choices to make, to try and silence this Jesus movement or join them! What did Saul do? Let's read on and see.

#### VERSES 3-4

So, we see that the persecution of the church began with the death of Stephen and it truly continues on today!

Now I think God used the death of Stephen two ways.

The first way was to get the church moving. They were comfortable in Jerusalem, they had no reason to move until the heavy hand of persecution came upon them and they were scattered. And as they were scattered they preached the Word of God, the Good News of Jesus Christ! In spite of the persecution they moved forward!

Secondly, Saul was now acting like a man possessed. He heard the truth of Jesus, he saw the truth manifested in Stephen, and he couldn't handle the truth, so he tried to put the truth out. The word "**havoc**" speaks of an army destroying a city or a wild animal, like a bore, tearing at its meat. That was Saul!

In Acts 22:19-20 Paul speaks of what he did before he was saved, "**So I said, 'Lord, they know that in every synagogue I imprisoned and beat those who believe on You. And when the blood of Your martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by consenting to his death, and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him.'**"

And the conviction of God was heavy upon Saul and he could not get the words of Stephen out of his mind. He could not get the angel-like face of Stephen out of his mind.

These things ate at Saul and I believe it is one of the things that God used to open Saul's eyes to the truth and when we get to Acts chapter 9 we will see the conversion of Saul the sinner into a saint, as I have said!

What does this mean in our own lives? I believe that God will use persecution or other things in our life to stir us up, to get us moving.

Too often it is easy to be complacent, to get comfortable and see no need to move. God will stir things up.

What is God calling you to do that you are not moving on? If you don't move, He may have to stir you a bit more to get you moving and the reality is, you are missing out what God has for you!

Spurgeon put it like this, "In every church where there is really the power of the Spirit of God, the Lord will cause it to be spread abroad, more or less. He never means that a church should be like a nut shut up in a shell; nor like ointment enclosed in a box. The precious perfume of the gospel must be poured forth to sweeten the air."

Now we are going to leave Saul for the rest of this chapter and look at another man, Philip and see how God is going to work in this man and through this man in a powerful way.

#### VERSES 5-8

Philip, like Stephen, was one of the men chosen to serve the church family in practical ways when the dispute regarding Hellenist widows arose (Acts 6:5).

And now he was one of those forced to flee this persecution (Acts 8:1), ending up in Samaria.

And keep in mind that Philip was not an apostle. Philip was what we would call a deacon today; he dealt with the physical things of the church, handing out the food and other things to the widows in the church.

He was faithful in this work, he didn't see it as a stepping stone to another ministry, he didn't complain about it, he just served, and God raised him up for another work.

Today, as back then, people fight and scramble for what you might call "big-time ministries" and they are not satisfied in what some might call "small-time ministries."

I don't believe there are any such things. Whatever God calls you to do is important, you are serving the King!

Wherever God has placed you, be faithful, enjoy it and if He moves you into another ministry, another position, great; if He doesn't move you into another ministry, another position, great! Be satisfied in whatever and wherever God has you!

So, because of the persecution in Jerusalem, we see that Philip goes down to Samaria, which was to the north of Jerusalem, but at a lower elevation than Jerusalem. That is why it says that he **“went down to the city of Samaria.”**

And there in Samaria he preaches Jesus to these people the Jews hated.

You see, to the Jews the Samaritans were the half-breeds, intermarrying with Gentiles after the Assyrians conquered the Northern Kingdom of Israel.

But for Philip, he let go of those prejudices and he preaches to them the Good News of Jesus Christ and people were saved, they were healed, they were delivered from demons, God was working!

And what did it bring the people? It brought them great joy and that is true wherever Jesus is present, wherever God is working!

So God is working, people are getting delivered, they are getting saved and what do you think is going to happen next? Satan is going to use someone to come in and stop the work!

#### VERSES 9-11

Here is this man named Simon who practiced **“sorcery”** or the magical arts like; astrology, soothsaying, incantations, charms, divination, spells and-so-on.

So, we see Philip being used by God to heal people and we have the counterfeit, Simon here, who calls upon the demonic world for his supernatural powers so that he can perform wonders. He was so good that the people said of him, “**This man is the great power of God.**”

And Simon enjoyed this recognition and reverence from the people of Samaria.

Here is the problem with man, thinking of himself better than he ought to, and that was Simon’s problem. He loved the attention and he was willing to obtain it at any cost!

Now here is an interesting point about Simon. The early church fathers stated that Simon viewed himself as god incarnate and he was one of the founders of Gnosticism.

They claimed to have the deeper truths of God as the word GNOSIS means “knowledge.” They denied the incarnation, that Jesus is the Christ, that he is both God and man. They saw Him more as a spirit hovering off the ground with no contact with the dirty human flesh!

Harold O. J. Brown said this regarding Simon, “The first two teachers to propagate Gnostic ideas within Christian circles were Simon and his successor Menander. Unlike later and more famous representatives of Gnosticism, both Simon and Menander claimed divinity for themselves. According to Acts 8:9-11, Simon called himself the ‘great power of God.’ The Greek term he used, *dunamis*, was used by later, more orthodox theologians in reverence to both the Son and the Holy Spirit. . . . Justin Martyr also reports Simon’s messianic claim.”

Thus, Satan used Simon to spread false doctrine through the church that later grew into Gnosticism that is still around today!

And now that people are getting saved there in Samaria, here is Satan once again trying to put an end to that. People saw their lives restored, Satan wanted to destroy them!

VERSES 12-13

Here is the difference between Simon and Philip. The people were amazed at Simon's magic, but the people were converted by Philip's ministry!

And Simon, as we will see as we read on, wanted this power, but I don't believe he wanted this faith.

Let me explain. Yes, it says that Simon "**believed,**" but that doesn't mean he was saved. You see, the word "**believe**" is the Greek word PISTEUO and it does not always refer to saving faith.

It is the same word used of the demon's faith in James 2:19 where we read "**You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe - and tremble!**"

So, I don't believe that Simon was saved, and we will see that as we move on, as I have said.

He may have been a professor of Jesus, but he was not a possessor of Jesus! Just because a person is baptized, dipped in water, doesn't mean they are saved, as we see here. Baptism is just an outward expression of what has taken place in your heart already, if you are not saved, this is a meaningless act! (See John 2:23-25; I John 2:19)

VERSES 14-17

Notice that, although the people in Samaria were born again and baptized, they were not yet empowered with the coming-upon of the Spirit. And Peter and John come down and you may wonder why they were needed, Philip seemed to be doing okay!

First, they came to assist in this great harvest of souls.

Secondly, they, as representatives of Jewish believers, were showing that these Samaritans were brothers and sisters in the Lord and what a comfort and joy it must have brought these Samaritans who were seen as outcasts according to the Jews but part of the family of God in Christ!

And lastly, to lay hands on these new believers for them to receive the power of the Holy Spirit.

Why didn't Philip do it? Maybe he didn't have this gift as I Corinthians 12:11 seems to tell us, **“But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills.”**

Now I know there are some who read this and say that these people were not saved yet or they were saved and had not the full indwelling of the Holy Spirit, whatever that means.

But as you look at what they believed, and Philip did baptize them, so this has to be something different, and it is.

Make no mistake about it, they were saved. But they were not empowered until Peter and John laid hands on them and prayed for them.

Remember, the Holy Spirit is ***WITH*** us drawing us to Christ, ***PARA*** in the Greek.

Once we are saved, the Holy Spirit comes ***IN*** us, ***EN*** in the Greek. That is where they were at before Peter and John laid hands on them.

Then the Holy Spirit came ***UPON*** them or ***EPI*** in the Greek, the empowerment to move the Gospel message forward. It is what the disciples were waiting in Jerusalem for, what Jesus spoke of in Acts chapter 1, and what we see come to pass on the day of Pentecost in Acts chapter 2! And we will see this outpouring of this power as we read on in Acts.



VERSES 18-19

Please understands that Simon did not want a relationship with Jesus, he wanted the power so people would once again be drawn to him instead of Philip or the apostles!

Now, born out of his actions, trying to buy this gift of God came the term *SIMONY* and it means the buying or selling of things considered religious or sacred.

We saw that and still see that in the Catholic Church with its indulgences, buying your way into heaven. Even the position of Pope was bought by individuals from about 984 A. D. to about the year 1012 A. D.

And they are not alone; the protestant church sells all kinds of things to make a profit off of God and to empower the people.

Let me be clear on this. Nothing of God is for sale; it is all free, as Isaiah 55:1-3 says, **“Ho! Everyone who thirsts, Come to the waters; And you who have no money, Come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk Without money and without price. Why do you spend money for what is not bread, And your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, And let your soul delight itself in abundance. Incline your ear, and come to Me. Hear, and your soul shall live; And I will make an everlasting covenant with you - The sure mercies of David.”**

Then why does it say, **“Come, buy and eat”**? You need to read on because it also says, **“without money and without price.”**

How can that be? Because the price has already been paid for by Jesus! It is as Jesus said in John 3:16-17, **“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.”**

The price for our redemption has been paid in full, all we must do is receive that free gift by faith and that gift is wrapped in Jesus you might say!

Listen to how the last chapter of the last book of the Bible closes, with an invitation. In Revelation 22:17 we are told, **“And the Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’ And let him who hears say, ‘Come!’ And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely.”** You don’t have to buy it, you can receive it freely!

God keeps calling for us to come to Him, even at the very end!

#### VERSES 20-21

Peter does not hold back but let’s Simon know where he stands, and it is not with God. You see, his heart, his motive behind what he was asking for was wrong.

Folks, we can ask and do good things with the wrong motives and God will not honor it no matter how good it may be!

Now we read this, and I don’t think we really ponder what Peter said. Think about it, how did Peter know this about Simon?

By the Spiritual gift of discernment! And like I said, Peter didn’t water it down; he said it like it was. He exposed the falseness of Simon’s conversion and he continues on in the next few verses exposing this lie of salvation in Simon’s life!

In fact, the literal meaning of the Greek was watered down by most translations. J. B. Phillips's rendering goes like this, "**To hell with you and your money.**" Ouch, that had to hurt! I don't think Peter would say that to a believer because a believer is not going to Hell!

### VERSES 22-23

Peter tells Simon to repent, to turn to God and away from his bitter, harsh, and distasteful condition that he is presently in.

In Deuteronomy 29:18 we are told of a very similar thing as we read, "**so that there may not be among you man or woman or family or tribe, whose heart turns away today from the LORD our God, to go and serve the gods of these nations, and that there may not be among you a root bearing bitterness or wormwood.**"

Simon was not saved, as Peter said, "**You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God.**" Acts 8:21. Make no mistake about it, this was a heart issue!

Morgan put it like this regarding salvation. He wrote "Men may come very near, they may be intellectually convinced of the supremacy of Jesus; they may even decide that they will adopt His ethical ideal; they may go so far as to determine that they will imitate the perfection of His example. But these things do not make men Christians."

Then what makes men Christians? Paul said in Romans 10:8-13, **“But what does it say? ‘The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart’ (that is, the word of faith which we preach): that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the Scripture says, ‘Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.’ For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. For ‘whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.’”**

It truly is a matter of the heart and that was not what Simon was interested in as we will see as we read on.

#### VERSES 24-25

This sums it up for us. You see, when Simon was called on the carpet, he didn't say, “Pray that my heart will be changed.”

No, instead he said, “Pray that these things won't happen to me.”

He wasn't interested in having his life corrected. He just wanted to be protected from the consequences of his sin.

You see, he only wanted a short-term escape from his present condition, his present sin and not a complete forgiveness of all of his sins by coming to Jesus!

And I don't think Simon ever repented, because, like I said, according to church tradition, he brought false doctrine into the church, Gnosticism!

Then we see Peter and John head back home but as they go they are preaching in the towns and villages of Samaria bringing to them the Good News of Jesus Christ!

VERSES 26-28

Here we see God call Philip to Gaza, and we will cover that more in a minute.

But, if you remember from our Old Testament studies, Gaza was one of the five chief Philistine cities, along with Gath, Ashdod, Ashkelon, and Ekron.

So God calls Philip to go down to a dry, barren area, a desert and he doesn't tell Philip why.

Now, think about this, ***“Samaria was the place to be. Salvation is the life for me. Land spreading out so far and wide, forget Gaza just give me that Samaritan countryside!”*** Sorry to all you Green Acres fans!

But really, think about it, things were happening, and right in the middle of this awesome work of God, God says go down to the desert and what does Philip do?

We are told, **“So he arose and went . . .”** People wonder why they are not being used by God? Maybe it is because God called them and they refused to go to the desert area or wherever God instructed them to go. Maybe they were too comfortable where they are at! Folks, God uses human instruments to do His work, and He wants to use you if you will let Him and go as He instructs you! If you want to know what step two is all about, then first take step one as God is leading!

Now, just by chance, not really, but also traveling in this direction was an Ethiopian eunuch who was in charge of the treasury. You might say that he was the Minister of Finance for the queen.

Her name was not Candace but it was a title like Caesar. So this man had all this power, all this prestige and yet he knew he was missing something and he traveled to Jerusalem to find God.

The problem was that the Judaism of their day did not lead him to God, so he left empty, only with the scroll of Isaiah, which cost lots of money to obtain, and thus, it does tell me he was still searching, he did not give up yet!

And what do we read in Jeremiah 29:13, “**And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.**”

Watch what God does here for this Ethiopian eunuch who was searching for God!

#### VERSES 29-34

I love how God orchestrates these events on a dusty, dirty, desert road. We try to organize things and just as Philip was obeying the Lord, doors of ministry opened up to him.

And keep in mind that the eunuch is searching for the true and living God, his life is empty, not complete and God brings Philip to reveal God to him.

Now it was common to read out-loud and that is what this eunuch must have been doing. And Philip hears him reading out of Isaiah.

Here is a great question. How did Philip know where this eunuch was reading from? Because Philip was a man of the Word, he knew the Scriptures and I encourage you to be men and women of the Word, read through the Word of God on your own.

It is as Peter said, “**But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear.**” I Peter 3:15.

Not only to give a good defense to what we believe but to bring salvation to people as Paul said in Romans 1:16, “**For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.**”

And as Philip catches up with this man he begins to question this eunuch about what he is reading. And he says back that unless someone helps him to understand it, to guide him through it, he is lost, he doesn't understand it.

Keep in mind that Isaiah 53 was the passage he was reading, the prophecy of God's Suffering Servant. Isaiah 53 describes our Lord Jesus Christ in His birth (Isa. 53:1–2), life and ministry (Isa. 53:3), substitutionary death (Isa. 53:4–9), and victorious resurrection (Isa. 53:10–12).

But the Ethiopian is focused on Isaiah 53:7–8, which describes our Lord as the willing sacrifice for sinners, even to the point of losing His human rights.

And the question that he asks Philip is simple, “**I ask you, of whom does the prophet say this, of himself or of some other man?**” Acts 8:34.

Philip is now going to answer that question for this eunuch!

### VERSE 35

Here is a very simple thing to remember. Keep the main thing the main thing and the main thing is Jesus!

Not only that but too many preachers today focus on what we must do for God, but the gospel begins with and is founded upon what God has done for us in Jesus Christ.

If we could do it then there would be no need for Jesus to come. But we can't save ourselves from our sins, only Jesus can. He has provided the way and all we must do is follow Him, surrender our life to Him by repenting of our sins and asking Him to be Lord and Savior of our lives!

We don't need a new message, we don't need a different message. What Philip preached in Jerusalem, he preached in Samaria and now with this Ethiopian eunuch, the Good News of Jesus! And that is what we need to do!

Make no mistake about it, the Gospel presentation must center upon Jesus Christ; His life, His death and His resurrection from the dead.

You see, sin has separated us from God, which is the bad news. The Good News is that Jesus Christ has paid in full the penalty for our sins and He has conquered death and so will we as we come to Him!

Paul, in I Corinthians 15:20-22 tells us, **“But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.”**

I think we have lost sight of how people are saved today. We don't see the Word of God as being important and we replace the Word of God with all kinds of other things that will never save a person.

Think about it. Why did Philip preach the Word? Because, as Paul tells us in Romans 10:17, **“So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”**

It is the power of the Word that brings us to Jesus; it reveals Jesus to us as His Spirit opens our eyes and hearts.

What was the response to the Gospel message? Let's read on and see!



VERSES 36-39

It seems probable that Philip had explained to the Ethiopian the privilege of Christian baptism, identifying oneself with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. Now as they near a body of water, the eunuch signifies his desire to be baptized.

And today, we would be ready to dunk them under the water and proclaim another soul for Jesus. But that is not what Philip did.

Philip wants to make sure that this man understands what he is doing. He wants to make sure that this man understands who Jesus is and what Jesus has done for him.

Philip could have been thinking, “Hey, this guy has a big influence, lots of money, if I allow him in I am going to be set for life!” No, that is not what he did. He was not going to let the influence of this man make him do something that was not right.

And think about it. Baptism is an empty ritual. It does not do anything, it doesn't save us. Baptism is an outward expression of what has taken place in a person's heart!

So Philip wants to make sure that he has come to saving faith because if he has not, then this man will believe that he is saved and will spend eternity in Hell because he is not saved!

And notice what this man says, “**I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.**” In other words, he believed that Jesus is the Messiah, the One who has come to take away his sins and ours!

As they come across this water in the desert, this man is baptized, BAPTIZO is the Greek word, which means “to dip” or “to immerse.”

Thus, all his servants who were traveling with this eunuch saw this outward expression of his inward faith in Christ!

Now think about this for a minute. This eunuch who went to Jerusalem to find God left Jerusalem without finding God. Maybe he was sad, maybe he was depressed.

But now his whole life has changed. He is now full of joy! Why is that?

Because he found God or really God found him. He came to the Savior of the world, to Jesus and as he did all of his sins were cast as far as the east is from the west to be remembered no more and that brought great joy in his life.

I wonder how many people come to a church looking for God and end up leaving not finding God because the message of Jesus was not given? May we never do that!

Now, why wasn't he sad at Philip's departure, which was sudden?

Because his faith was not in Philip but in the Lord and no one can take Him away, He will never leave us or forsake us!

What happened to this Ethiopian eunuch and his faith? According to the church father Irenaeus he became a missionary to Ethiopia and spread the Gospel message to them!

#### VERSE 40

Philip is miraculously transported to Azotus, which was some twenty miles north of Gaza. And Azotus use to be called Ashdod, an ancient Philistine city.

I love Philip here; he doesn't miss an opportunity to share his faith as he heads to Caesarea, giving people the Good News of Jesus Christ.

According to Acts 21:8-9 we are told what happened to Philip, **“On the next day we who were Paul's companions departed and came to Caesarea, and entered the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, and stayed with him. Now this man had four virgin daughters who prophesied.”**

Some twenty years later he was still in Caesarea and his faith was still strong as he had four saved virgin daughters who prophesized the things of God!

As I begin to close this evening, think about this for a minute. In your walk with the Lord and your work for the Lord, like Philip, you will go through different seasons. There will be times when you'll wait tables and minister practically. There will be other times when the Lord might use you to speak to multitudes as you minister publicly. Other times, you will work one on one as you minister personally. Still other times, you'll invest in your kids as you minister to your family. To everything there is a time and a purpose. Trust the Lord. Go with the flow. Walk with Him one step at a time, and He'll lead you in paths you could never imagine. Just ask Philip!

You see, what may seem silly to us, foolish to us, unfruitful to us in our eyes and mind, if God calls, look at all He can do if we step out in faith.

Look at what Paul tells us in II Corinthians 5:7, "**For we walk by faith, not by sight.**" May we apply that to our lives and walk by faith as He leads us and see what He can do in us and through us for His glory as we walk!