

Guest Preacher Rev. Kenneth M Ferguson

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Date: 13 February 2022

Preacher: Rev Kenneth M Ferguson

[0 : 00] Now, as the Lord enables us, let us turn back to this portion of Scripture we've read together. The Acts of the Apostles on chapter 8, and again reading at verse 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. And he rose and went, and so on. One or two thoughts on this meeting that Philip had with the Ethiopian.

Now, this was a particularly difficult time for the church. It was a time of persecution. We mentioned at the end of chapter 7 here that there is an account of the stoning of Stephen.

And then at the beginning of chapter 8, that Saul approved of his execution. And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem.

[1 : 27] And they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. A time of persecution is a difficult time for the church of Christ.

There were times of persecution in Scotland during the time of the Covenanters. Times of persecution in the days of the Puritans.

And there are times of persecution even nowadays, as we read and hear of in various countries throughout the world. But the statement that the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church is still true.

That the martyrs who give their lives for the cause of Christ don't die in vain. And in our own nation here, the seed of the martyrs has been seen down through the history of our nation to be indeed the seed of the church.

And we see here that Philip was one of those who proclaimed the gospel. And I'd just like to focus under four points on Philip, first of all, as the preacher.

[2 : 58] And the second point I want to highlight is that he is led by the Holy Spirit to a seeker. The Ethiopian eunuch on his way back from having attended Jerusalem.

The third point is the sermon that Philip preached to him. The Ethiopian eunuch had been reading the passage of scripture from the prophecy of Isaiah.

Isaiah and Philip preached from that text Christ to him. And fourthly and finally, the blessing that came into the eunuch's life as a result of him hearing this sermon from the mouth of Philip.

What hinders me from being baptized? And in the authorized version, it reminds us, If you believe with all your heart, you may.

I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, he said. And on the basis of that profession, Philip baptized him.

[4 : 25] Just a thought, one or two thoughts under these four headings. The preacher, the seeker, the sermon, and the blessing.

Firstly, the preacher, Philip. Philip. Now, this is Philip, who's mentioned, first of all, I believe, in chapter 6 in Acts, as one of the deacons appointed to serve the needs of Hellenists, because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution.

This is chapter 6, verse 1. And then, at verse 2, the 12 summoned the full number of the disciples and said, And then, verse 5, it says, And then, verse 5, it says, What they said, pleased the whole gathering.

We find here, Philip mentioned in that group of men who were full of faith and the Holy Spirit.

And we find Philip going down to Samaria. This is chapter 8, verse 4. Those who were scattered went abroad, preaching the word.

[6 : 24] Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ. You remember that the Lord Jesus had met a woman of Samaria at the well of Sychar.

And she didn't give him much of a reception. He asked for a drink of water, and she refused him, at least at the beginning. But the Lord dealt with her for her soul.

And at last she left the well with a new song upon her lips. Come see a man who told me all things that I've ever done.

Is this not the Christ? And some people came out to see Jesus, and they said, Now we also believe, not because of what the woman has said, but we ourselves have seen him and have heard him.

And we believe that he indeed is the Christ, the Savior of the world. But this is now Philip, having gone down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ.

[7 : 34] This is the substance of his message. It's not psychology. It's not emotionalism. It is the preaching of the Christ of the Scriptures.

And you see the effects. The crowds, with one accord, paid attention to what was being said by Philip when they heard him. And saw the signs that he did.

Unclean spirits, crying out with a loud voice, came out of many who had them. And many who were paralyzed or lame were healed.

So there was much joy in that city of Samaria. Wouldn't it be wonderful this evening, if the same Spirit of God were to come into this congregation, this community, this island of ours, this nation of ours, and heal the broken lives with his blessing, and apply the balm, the saving balm of God's Spirit to the many, many broken and shattered lives throughout our nation.

It's as if there is a revival taking place in Samaria. But then coming forward now to verse 26 of chapter 8, The angel of the Lord said to Philip, rise and go toward the south, to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.

[9 : 12] This is a desert place. Philip immediately responds. He arose and went. He left the situation of revival with all the joy associated with that blessedness in Samaria.

And he immediately responded to the Spirit's leading and guiding. Down he went. Probably about 60 or 70 miles south from where he was in Samaria.

Philip doesn't tell us how long he took or how he went. Did he walk? Did he take an ass? Did he ride an ass?

It doesn't say. What it says is that he immediately responded. He rose and he went. So we see a little picture here of Philip, the kind of man that he was.

A spiritual man. A man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit. A man ready to do what God asked of him. A man equipped by the Spirit of God to preach the word.

[10 : 29] To declare the unsearchable riches of Christ. And then that man, in the hand of the Spirit of God, is taken all the way down to a desert place.

And there he's going to meet someone who's a seeker after truth. It says here that there was an Ethiopian.

Verse 27. A eunuch. A court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. Who was in charge of all her treasure.

Well, this man, he was high up, as it were, in the government of the nation.

I suppose we could say he was something like the chancellor of the exchequer in our own nation.

Somebody who had charge of all the treasure of the queen of the Ethiopians.

[11 : 40] But then it says about him that he was coming back from Jerusalem, having gone there to worship.

It doesn't say exactly what association he had with the Jewish religion. Maybe he had been a Jew from birth.

Or maybe he had been a proselyte from heathenism into the Jewish religion. It's not particularly clear.

In any case, he was taken up with the Jewish faith. And seemingly, he had seen it as his privilege and duty to attend one of the feasts in Jerusalem.

Do you remember that there were three particular feasts that the Lord appointed males who followed the Jewish religion to attend in Jerusalem annually?

[12 : 47] The feast of Passover, the feast of Pentecost, and the feast of Tabernacles. And it looks as if he was attending one of these feasts and now was coming back home.

I tried to do a little bit of figuring out as to the distance this man would have had to travel from Ethiopia all the way up to Jerusalem.

It's maybe something like a thousand miles that he would have had to travel to come from his home all the way up to Jerusalem.

And then this was him on his way back again. How many seekers in our island would be happy to go that distance to hear a sermon?

If somebody really is seeking the Lord in truth, they'll go here, they'll go there. But how committed are we?

[14:01] How committed are we if we say we're seeking the Lord? How committed are we to seeking Him at all costs and in every situation, whatever the cost might be?

I know this man may have had a lot of attendance with him. I can't see him being all on his own, a man of such high rank.

Nevertheless, he was willing to undergo all of that traveling trauma in these far-off times in order to go up to Jerusalem and fulfill his commitment to his religion.

But it looks as if on his way back he was sitting there still looking for something that he hadn't really received in Jerusalem.

He was reading the prophet Isaiah and he just wasn't understanding it. Let's say he had been up to the Passover feast.

[15:17] He would have seen the Passover lamb and understood the ritual as it were from the outside. But now having come back it didn't really make as much sense to him in his soul as he wanted it to make.

And he's reading this particular section of the prophet Isaiah and he's wondering what does this mean? maybe that's the way you are.

You've heard the gospel for years you've come and you've gone from this building and other buildings and you still haven't really connected in your heart of hearts with the Christ of the gospel. people but the Lord knew this man's plight and the Lord knows your plight also and the Lord sent Philip a spirit filled man to draw alongside this Ethiopian with all his frustrations and all his questions and he said join yourself to this chariot go over and join this chariot and Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked him do you understand what you're reading and so many people are like that aren't they they read the scripture but they really don't understand what the message is and this man answered truthfully how can I except someone guides me and he was hungering and thirsting for guidance and for light because he invited Philip to come up and sit with him a man he had never seen nevertheless the spirit of the

Lord is here bringing people together for the glory of his name and for the good of this man's soul how can I except someone guides me he invited him to come up and to sit with him no thirdly the sermon the text was this 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 in his humiliation justice was denied him who can describe his generation for his life is taken away from the earth who is he talking about he said is he talking about himself or is he talking about some other person then Philip opened his mouth and beginning from this scripture he told him the good news about

[18:45] Jesus of course the section that he was reading was from the prophecy of Isaiah chapter 53 chapter 53 he like a sheep was led to the slaughter and like a lamb before its shearer is silent so he opens not his mouth Philip puts the light of the gospel onto these marvelous words for him and he preached unto him Jesus these words are about Jesus what are they saying about him well it says like a sheep he was led to the slaughter like a lamb before its shearer is silent he opened on his mouth first of all it talks about his humility the fact that he took our nature and

John the Baptist saw him walking one day and he said behold the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world the lamb of God the eternal God in human nature and John the Baptist was able to see the reason for which he had come into the world he was the lamb of God going back to the reason for the Passover having been observed on an annual basis you see the Passover lamb was put to death and was an annual reminder to the Israelite nation that this is where their redemption and blessings lay in the death of the

Passover lamb and if you go back to Exodus chapter 12 you find there that during these difficult days in the land of Egypt when the Israelites were enslaved and they were ready to be released it was through the door upon which the blood of the Passover lamb had been set on the door posts and on the lintel it was through these doors that they went out to their liberty and freedom and this is what we have here that the Lord Jesus Christ is brought before us as the Passover lamb the one

who came into this world and the sins of his people were laid upon him in such a way that he paid the price for having our sins forgiven and these marvelous words here the Ethiopian just can't make sense of them as they are before him like a sheep he was led to the slaughter talking about Jesus as it were uncomplainingly and unresistingly going to the cross isn't it amazing when you read in the gospels the way the Lord Jesus went to the cross he didn't stop any of those who tried to keep him from the cross you remember when Peter found objections when Jesus told him I am going to be crucified these things must not happen to you Jesus said get behind me

Satan you see the Lord Jesus moved deliberately and willingly to the place of crucifixion just like this picture we have here a sheep led to the slaughter and like a lamb before its shearer is silent he opens not his mouth isn't it amazing when you read the account we have of Jesus before Pilate and Jesus before Herod it's as if he doesn't in any way at all argue his own case in front of them nevertheless they found fault enough with him to crucify him he stood before them and opened not his mouth

[24 : 10] Jesus was appointed to death by crucifixion in his humiliation justice was denied him it says here Pilate said I find no fault with this man but the Jews said crucify him crucify him why what evil has he done crucify him crucify him will I not release Barabbas anybody but Jesus they said we don't want this man to reign over us justice was denied him he said he was the son of God they didn't believe him he said who he was but they didn't want him it's not the way we are by nature we don't want

Jesus to reign over us we would rather the company of the Barabbas of this world as we are by nature we don't want holiness we want involvement with the things that satisfy our carnal nature we want involvement with the world and as much of the world as we can possibly load on to enjoy but Jesus having taken the sin of his people he went to the place of crucifixion and he went to the place where he was going to suffer in the room and instead of his own people his life is taken away from the earth who can describe his generation there's a lot of discussion about the meaning of these words who can describe his generation and somebody said well what kind of generation is it that will take his life from the earth what kind of people were they who said crucify him crucify him what kind of nation was it that said we don't want this man to be ruling over us that's exactly the way we are by nature what kind of people are we we are sinners by nature and practice we are lovers of sin and by nature we are disregarding

God and his word and his law that's the way we are by nature our hearts are deceitful above all things and desperately wicked who can know them who can describe this generation God describes us very well and he says that we are without him we are lost in dead in trespasses and in sin but Philip preached Jesus to him the good news about Jesus the bad news is that we are sinners the good news is that he is the sinner saviour the bad news about us is that we are dead in trespasses and sin and we love our sin as we are by nature but the good news is that Jesus came to seek and to save that which was lost the bad news is that we are prodigals enjoying life as far away from God as we can but the good news is that the Holy Spirit can give us to come to ourselves just like he did with the prodigal when he came to himself it says I really am in a bit of a mess I think about my father's house and I will go back and say father I have sinned against heaven and before you and I'm no more worthy to be called your son and the marvelous news is that the father was looking out for him and the father saw him when he was still a great way off and he ran to meet him and he embraced him and gave him new clothes shoes for his feet a ring for his finger the best robe on him and slew the fatted calf and they rejoiced because this son of mine was dead but he's alive again he was lost but now he's found

Jesus the good shepherd seeks his people out he seeks them until he finds them and he finds them in so poor a state that they cannot really do anything for themselves he lifts them upon his shoulder and takes them home rejoicing philip opened his mouth beginning with this scripture he told him the good news about Jesus i don't know how long or how far they traveled as this sermon was going on i don't know but i often think that the two who were on the road to emmaus who started off in such gloominess thinking about the death and burial of jesus christ we thought it was he who was going to redeem israel and now this is the third day since he was put to death but jesus drew near them and he explained to them from the scriptures from the law and the prophets and the psalms the things concerning himself and as they were going on the bible says that their heart burned within them as he spoke to them by the way and opened to them the scriptures and i think

something like that happened here as Philip was preaching Christ on the basis of the words of that text from Isaiah 53 something marvelous was happening in the heart of this Ethiopian you know things were starting to make sense and his heart was warming to the Christ of the gospel has that ever happened in your experience have you sat there or under a sermon or have you read the scriptures or have you been on your own in prayer and has your heart flooded with that heavenly peace and warmth and joy that comes when the Holy Spirit takes a word and applies it to you applies it to your situation applies his word in such a way that you know who you now believe [32 : 36] I know whom I have believed the apostle said and that he is able to do for me far above what we're able to ask or even think this man knew the blessing of the gospel and he loved the Lord Jesus to the extent that now he says behold water what hinders me from being baptized baptism of course was the mark of public profession of faith and as I mentioned in the authorized version Philip responds in these marvelous words if you believe with all your heart you may I believe that Jesus Christ is the son of God he said and Philip it says here went down into the water with him and he baptized him what an amazing journey this

Ethiopian had starting from Ethiopia heading for Jerusalem in anticipation of fulfilling his duties and responsibilities to the Judaistic religion attending one of these feasts but by the time he comes back the whole as it were puzzle of how things fit together and how salvation comes to him was worked out for him because the Holy Spirit was present to apply to him the redemption purchased by Christ and without the Holy Spirit's application of the word of God things remain the way they are but when the Holy Spirit comes to apply the word in season things change and that's what happened with this man he wanted to identify now with

Jesus as his Saviour and as his Lord and he wanted to live for him and to live to his glory and it says here that the spirit of the Lord caught or carried Philip away and the eunuch saw him no more and he went on his way rejoicing Philip had done his duty Philip had brought the word as it were in season through the working of the Holy Spirit and now there was no more need for Philip at that particular point he was found elsewhere at Azotus and as he passed through he preached the gospel to all the towns until he came to Caesarea but what does it say about the Ethiopian he went on his way rejoicing he wasn't rejoicing when Philip first met him

I don't think he was rejoicing leaving Jerusalem because he hadn't had any of his questions answered he wasn't rejoicing until he saw with the eye of faith Jesus Christ a saviour and he bowed before him who had done for him what he couldn't do for himself he had paid the price to justice and God's law he went on his way rejoicing life can you can you imagine when he reached Ethiopia there may have been a set of problems awaiting for him at the court of Candace the queen of the Ethiopians what change has come over you you look at things differently he had to live where he was as this new man that he was showing forth the praises of Christ who called him out of darkness into his marvellous light he had to be a light in the palace of Candace the queen of Ethiopia and the same with us when we taste that the Lord is gracious it's as if the Lord lights a light in your life burning brightly by the

Holy Spirit and wherever you go you must let your light shine let your light so shine he said before men that they may see your good works and glorify your father who is in heaven who knows what effect this man's witness had in the court of the queen who knows what effect his witness had when he went home maybe his wife and children who knows in the circle of his friends I'm sure he would be very keen to tell them about the experience he had on the Gaza road with a stranger whom we had never seen and who disappeared without even knowing where he went Philip was caught away by the

[38 : 51] Holy Spirit and the eunuch saw him no more he would be very happy to maybe you're remembering blessings you got through ministers long ago who are no longer here they've gone to heaven maybe you're remembering texts you heard expounded by men years and years ago and you're still receiving blessing through what you heard from their lips the preacher used by the Holy Spirit the seeker known by the Lord and every question and every situation that he had the Lord knows about and the Lord is able to address it and he did that with the eunuch of Ethiopia the sermon the exact sermon that he needed to hear at that particular point and the blessing he received he received

Christ for himself what about you you have a lovely preacher here in this congregation see that you pray for him that you come seeking this Christ every time this church opens up if you're serious about your seeking be here every time you can what about the sermon well the word of God here is

the only rule to direct us and you be close to the word and be prayerful over the word day after day after day and the Lord knows your need and he's able to draw near you answering your questions giving you light on these areas that are still so dark and full of difficulty for you he is still the same Lord able and mighty to save even to the uttermost all who come unto God through Jesus Christ may the Lord bless these thoughts to us let us pray help us O Lord to be found at your word as the Ethiopian eunuch was awaiting the enlightening of your spirit upon us and awaiting a word in season from yourself we pray for your grace to seek you early and to seek you always for they who seek you will find you you remind us of that often enough ask and it shall be given to you seek and you shall find knock and the door shall be opened up to you bless this congregation we pray each one of us according to our needs and part us now with your blessing forgiving your sins which are many in Jesus name amen let us now bring your worship to our close singing from psalm 31 in the Scottish psalter psalm 31 verses 21 to 24 all praise and thanks be to the lord for he hath magnified his wondrous love to me within a city fortified for from thine eyes cut off i am i in my haste had said my voice yet heardst thou when to thee with cries my moan i made all of the lord for he hath o'er o praise and thanks be to the lord for he hath magnified his wondrous love to me with collaboratorsant■

Magnified His wondrous love to me within a city fortified.

For all I know is the top of the eye, I in my haste to stay.

[44 : 56] My voice yet as the wind turning, with rise my morn I may.

O love the Lord all ye in His saints, because the Lord doth guard the faithful and he plentifully.

The Lord doth guard the Lord, be of good courage and be set.

Until your heart shall send, only whose hope and gold let the Lord depend.

Amen. Now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, rest upon and abide with you all, now and forevermore.

[46 : 39] Amen.