

May 5th 2013: The Value Of A Soul: Acts 8:26-40

The story of the Ethiopian Eunuch is a story that I have preached about on many occasions. Indeed I distinctly remember that the last time I preached on it here, our thoughts were centred on the unique message that the passages of Isaiah that this official was reading, would have had for this particular man. Something that I found to be a great testimony to the personal relevance of God's Word for those whom He is seeking out for Himself.

But today I simply want to focus on the one to one example of witnessing that this story exhibits and how it relates to us. For this story is as much about Philip, and God using Philip, as it is about the Ethiopian. And Philip in this account stands as the representative of every Christian who is prepared to be obedient to God's calling.

Philip is a very interesting character indeed. He is not what one might refer to as a 'low level Christian' or a pew warmer. He is an active leader in the growing Christian organization and part of the group that is ranked just behind the Apostles.

In Acts 6 we read that "when the number of disciples were increasing in the church", (and we know from way back in Acts 4 that at that time there were at least 5,000 men—a number constantly increasing), the Apostles decided that they needed some help. So from all the disciples they chose seven men who were known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom, to become deacons. And Philip was one of them.

So he is a very important, efficient, and valued leader in the Christian community, and this becomes even more apparent when we read in Acts 8 about the persecution that scattered the believers. For Philip was also forced to flee to Samaria and there he preached the Gospel, did miraculous signs by the power of the Spirit, and transformed the city so that it was full of joy. From absolutely nothing a church is built instantly because of the faithfulness of Philip, and immediately Peter and John were sent from Jerusalem to confirm the work Philip was doing.

So Philip was uprooted because of persecution and led by God to Samaria where he establishes a large group of believers, and then God uproots him again.

Acts 8:26 ***“Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.”***

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And this time God does not send him to be the agent of transformation for a whole city, but for one man. He doesn't send him to a five star hotel but to a lonely desert road to spend an hour or so with one non-Jewish individual.

What an amazing testimony this is to the value of one soul in the sight of God. That God really does love each individual so much.

And it is also a strong reminder that we are all agents in the hands of God. Followers whom He will use as he wills to extend His Kingdom in His way.

Philip was indeed an important cog in the machinery of the growing church. An evangelist and miracle worker able to speak to hundreds. But on that day God needed him to be a one to one agent of the Gospel in a barren an empty place, and Philip was obedient.

This account surely teaches us not to question those times when God removes us from the hustle and bustle of an effective ministry to a place that may seem so empty of opportunities for service. Or those times when God lays just one name upon our hearts rather than many. Because it is there that God in His grace has His purpose for us.

As well as that this account also makes us aware that being available to God will be costly but also joyous.

Philip had to respond to the Angel when he said “Go”. That instruction was questionable, because Philip was at that time having a really

successful ministry where he was. It was demanding because it involved a long journey towards a rather vague destination...somewhere on a desert road.

So the cost was not just the physical travel but having to cope with the uncertainty of it all.

Then on top of all that he had to be dependent on the Spirit to guide him when he got there regarding his mission. Now thankfully the Spirit came through, pointed out the chariot of the Ethiopian, and told Philip to stay near it.

Which of course would have been a lot easier if the chariot had stayed still, but it was moving. So Philip had to step out of his comfort zone and run alongside the chariot. That was all part of the cost of being obedient, and if he had not been prepared to do that, he would never have heard the Ethiopian reading aloud the book of Isaiah which then gave him the ideal opening to speak about the Lord.

The joyous part, of course, came for Philip when he heard, right out of the blue, this stranger reading a passage from Isaiah that was a prophecy about Jesus. Then to be able to talk about the One of whom it spoke. Jesus. And to do so from inside the chariot because he had been invited to take a seat and to do so. Can you imagine the joy he had because he followed the Spirit's leading??

And when it comes to one to one witnessing, God still needs us to listen to His Spirit as Philip did and to be prepared to obey His voice, despite any emotional or physical cost involved. And if we are motivated, as Philip was, by our understanding of the value of a soul, then our joy will also be great.

You see I'm sure that the joy Philip had when He spoke about Jesus was because he knew how much this man needed Jesus in his life, and how precious this man's salvation was in the sight of God.

So the inconvenience, the hardship, the embarrassment...If any of that had been there in his mind, was forgotten in the joy of sharing with a precious soul the story of Jesus.

This Missionary month we each need to set ourselves to be available for the Spirit to use us as He used Philip. To be prepared to say yes, and not no when the inner urge to speak to someone comes upon us. To pay whatever price emotionally or physically is needed for the sake of the joy that will be theirs and in which we will share.

Finally, when I first started to prepare this message I was motivated by the following devotional that appeared in Our Daily Bread for last Sunday. I like to read it to you in closing:-

"God saves us one by one. If you have access to one, that is your mission field. "Every soul with Christ is a missionary; every soul without Christ is a mission field." One person cannot reach the entire world, but we can love our neighbor. "Who is my neighbor?" we ask. The next person we meet along the way.

The Spirit brought Philip to the Ethiopian Eunuch who was reading the Scriptures and needed someone to explain them to him. The Spirit gave Philip the right words to say, and the eunuch confessed his faith in Christ.

Ask God to bring to you the one He has prepared. He'll get you to the right place at the right time to speak to that individual. He will speak through your lips, work through your hands, and fulfill in you the great purpose of His will.

You are a success in God's kingdom if you are faithful where He has placed you.