

ACCEPTED

The story of the Ethiopian Eunuch stands apart from many of the other conversion stories that we find in the book of Acts for several reasons. For example he was a foreigner, a black man, and a eunuch:- a term defined in the pocket Oxford dictionary as:- *a castrated male person esp one employed in a harem or, in Oriental courts and under the Roman Empire, in State affairs*. He was also rich and very important. A combination of things that made him appear quite different to other believers.

But the one thing that makes his conversion really unique relates to the amount of energy that God seems to put into drawing this one man to Himself.

First, He sent out a special messenger of the Gospel to talk just to him. The evangelist Philip was at that time really busy in Samaria. He had fled there after the persecution had begun in Jerusalem and had straight away commenced preaching the Gospel. And the crowds flocked to hear what he said and to see the miraculous signs that the Spirit worked through him. Acts 8:6 tells us that they all paid close attention to what he said while v12 tells us:-

But when they believed Philip as he proclaimed the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.

What God was doing through Philip was huge. So big in fact that the church in Jerusalem heard about it and sent their two chief Apostles, Peter and John, to Samaria to check it out, and they were delighted with what they saw. When they left to return to Jerusalem they knew that God had begun a new work amongst the Samaritans and were convinced that Philip was the one God had chosen to continue it. They happily endorsed him as God's servant in Samaria and went away believing that God would keep Philip in that place until the work was done.

And I'm sure that Philip felt the same. That's why God sent an angel of the Lord to tell him to move from the place where he was so productive to a desert road some 80k's away where there would be no crowds to preach to—no sick to heal. Just a passing chariot or desert caravan procession to wave at if he was lucky. Philip, I reckon, needed no less than an angelic messenger to make him move.

Second: God got the two men together. When you think about it the timing had to be spot on, and it was. Look at Acts 8:27-29

So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of the Kandake (which means "queen of the Ethiopians"). This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the Book of Isaiah the prophet. The Spirit told Philip, "Go to that chariot and stay near it."

Note that Philip was on his way....he was still moving....when he saw the Ethiopian's chariot. Philip didn't have to set up his tent and wait for the man to arrive. He was walking towards the place where he had been told to head for....the road....and there coming along it was this chariot. And to make sure Philip got there in time the Spirit spoke powerfully within Philip and said, "Go to that chariot and stay near it", and the Scripture says that Philip had to run to do so.

Third: God created the opportunity. As Philip began to run towards the passing chariot he hardly had time to work out how he was going to instigate a conversation about Jesus with this man. He would have seen the Ethiopian's servants looking at him from the chariot, and on that lonely road where the threat of robbery was constant, they would have had their hands on their swords and suspicion in their glances. He would have known that his chances of getting an invitation to join them were zero.

But God had everything worked out way before then. The Ethiopian was reading aloud from the one Old Testament passage that speaks so directly about the suffering of Jesus and he was so perplexed at it, that when someone offered to explain it to him he jumped at the chance.

Can you imagine the relief and delight that Philip would have experienced. He didn't have to engineer a conversation about Jesus. He simply had to respond to a question that allowed him to share the Gospel.

(Acts 8 :35 Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.)

Fourth: God prepared the way into the Ethiopian's heart. This is the most wonderful point of all as far as I am concerned. For it is how God

always works. He sees the deep need that a person has and reveals how He has already met that need in Jesus.

This Ethiopian, the Scripture says (***and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of the Kandake (which means "queen of the Ethiopians"). This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the Book of Isaiah the prophet.***), was an important man. He was in charge of all the treasury of the queen of the Ethiopians. He had great power and authority and the wealth and status that went with it. In fact, the word translated as 'important' comes from the root word *dunamos*, which means power, and from which we get our English word dynamite.

Yet the reason he was able to have all this power, wealth and status was also the reason why he would have been rejected in many circles. For to be eligible for such a position in those days you had to be a eunuch. One who was considered by many to be less than a full man. Who, maybe through an accident of birth, or disease, or more likely through an act of man, had become impotent, and therefore acceptable in the inner sanctum of the queen. Acceptable there but not elsewhere.

And I have this feeling that what that Ethiopian yearned for was to be accepted, and in particular, to be accepted by Almighty God.

Now we know from the story that when Philip met him, he was returning from a visit he had made to Jerusalem in order to worship Jehovah. That in itself is an interesting fact, because although a Gentile could worship in the Temple by becoming a proselyte, a eunuch was barred for life from doing so. So either he had gone hoping to worship and had not been allowed or he had organized someone in Jerusalem to offer a sacrifice on his behalf.

Whatever the case, it would have seemed to him that day as he returned from Jerusalem, that full acceptance by Almighty God was possible to others but not to him.

So that raises the question of why he, an Ethiopian Eunuch, would bother pursuing worship of this Jewish God, who, it seems, wouldn't fully accept him anyhow. The answer is found in the Jewish Scripture he had with him which was from our OT book of Isaiah.

What he had in his chariot that day would not have been the whole of the book of Isaiah. That would have taken up several scrolls. Instead he would have had the scroll dealing with just one section of the book, and that probably would have been the section in our Bibles that begins with chapter 49 and ends with chapter 57. It's the section that deals with The Servant's Ministry.

The reason he would have had that particular scroll becomes apparent when we realize that Isaiah 56 contains the one big promise for eunuchs in the Old Testament. Look with me at Isaiah 56:4-5

For this is what the LORD says:

***"To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths,
who choose what pleases me
and hold fast to my covenant—
^s to them I will give within my temple and its walls
a memorial and a name
better than sons and daughters;
I will give them an everlasting name
that will endure forever.***

We can imagine him turning in hope again and again to this passage in the scroll that he would have purchased at great cost. And on occasions, such as this one, turning to what the prophet had said previously and finding in chapter 53:3 words he could so easily relate to:-

***He was despised and rejected by mankind,
a man of suffering, and familiar with pain.
Like one from whom people hide their faces
he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.***

And then he would have read the words that seem to promise so much in verses 4-5

***Surely he took up our pain
and bore our suffering,
yet we considered him punished by God,
stricken by him, and afflicted.
^s But he was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities;***

***the punishment that brought us peace was on him,
and by his wounds we are healed.***

Is it any wonder that as he read aloud these words and those that followed that he began to wonder who these words were about. The prophet himself or another. For it would have been clear to him that the promises to eunuchs that he cherished so much in chapter 56, were related somehow to this servant who was spoken about here. And by knowing more about this servant, he could perhaps get closer to the acceptance by God that he desired.

And God knew that desire in his heart, because He had created it. All that was needed now was God's servant to be available to tell him about Jesus. And as Philip explained about the crucifixion, and the resurrection, and about the One who loved him and was willing to accept him into the kingdom of God, the eunuch's heart was opened by the power of the Spirit to accept Jesus as his Lord and Saviour.

As I thought about that man's response to the question, "Why are you still a believer ? , I'm sure he would have simply said, "Because He accepted me and loved me" And I do not find it at all surprising that this man, having found in Jesus the full unconditional love and acceptance that he yearned for, desired to be baptized as soon as they found sufficient water to do so. To proclaim before his servants and Philip, the dedication of his life to the One who first loved him.

Today David and Luke do the same thing. They proclaim even as that Ethiopian did, "I belong now to Jesus who rescued me, and by this act I declare that I am His, and He is mine, forever.

As one of the verses of the song that David has chosen for today says:-

***Riches I heed not or man's empty praise. Thou mine inheritance now
and always: Thou and thou only the first in my heart; high King of
heaven my treasure thou art.***