

Todd Misfeldt

“Rejoice”
West Valley Presbyterian Church

April 30, 2016

- This morning, I want to speak about an encounter described in the Book of Acts between an Ethiopian and follower of Jesus.
- The Books of Acts describes the actions of Jesus’ following after His death, resurrection and ascension into heaven. If we read and study the Book of Acts, we can see how God was working in the early church. As Christians, we believe that God is still working in us today and the Book of Acts has important lessons for us.
- Last week we ended with the stoning of Stephen in Acts 7. I want to continue with the story that leads up to our text for today. The story continues in Acts 8 begins with these words [On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. ²Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. ³But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison.¹ \(Acts 8:1–3\)](#)
- The text continues to describe the actions of the disciple Philip, who we will hear of more today, went up to Samaria and proclaimed the Gospel with much success.
- Now for our passage for today... Acts 8:26–39

Philip and the Ethiopian

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.” ²⁷ So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of the Kan-da-ke (which means “queen of the Ethiopians”). This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, ²⁸ and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the Book of Isaiah the prophet. ²⁹ The Spirit told Philip, “Go to that chariot and stay near it.”

³⁰ Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. “Do you understand what you are reading?” Philip asked.

³¹ “How can I,” he said, “unless someone explains it to me?” So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

³² This is the passage of Scripture the eunuch was reading:

“He was led like a sheep to the slaughter,
and as a lamb before its shearer is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.

³³ In his humiliation he was deprived of justice.
Who can speak of his descendants?
For his life was taken from the earth.” ^x

³⁴ The eunuch asked Philip, “Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?” ³⁵ Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.

³⁶ As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, “Look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptized?” ^[37] ³⁸ And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. ³⁹ When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing. ⁱⁱ

Thanks be to God.

- Since we are not first century residents of Palestine, I would like to start with some background
 - Who are the persona (the people) in this text?
 - The Ethiopian
 - “This court official did not come from what we know today as Ethiopia; his home was in ancient Nubia, located south of Egypt.”ⁱⁱⁱ
 - Ancient Nubia was the home of a powerful ancient people. The Pharaohs of Egypt used Nubians as mercenary soldiers in their armies. In fact for a while, Nubians were Pharaohs. They were known as “The Black Pharaohs.” The Nubian king Kash-ta took advantage of Egypt’s internal strife and in about 751 BC became the first conqueror of that land in a millennium.” This began the Twenty-fifth Dynasty of Egypt which lasted a hundred years until 656 BC. This was long before Jesus’ time but it conveys the history of Ethiopia.
 - “Ethiopia was considered “the end of the earth” by the Greeks and Romans”^{iv}
 - Luke’s audience would have seen in the Ethiopian as a positive figure, perhaps one to who even an element of mystery would be attached because of his distant homeland.”^v
 - Our Ethiopian is described as a eunuch. In antiquity, “Eunuchs were found to be particularly trustworthy and loyal to their rulers. So widespread was the practice of placing them over the treasury that in time the term “eunuch” became a synonym for “treasurer” and did not necessarily imply that the one bearing the title was castrated.”^{vi}
 - In any case, this Ethiopian was a powerful, well-educated man and a dedicated Jew who could afford to make the long pilgrimage to Jerusalem (hundreds of miles), had his own copy of Isaiah, and could read. For his time, this man was richer and more powerful than any of us in this room.
 - Lastly, the Ethiopian was reading to himself aloud, as was the custom in antiquity.^{vii} Few people at the time read silently to themselves.
 - Next we have Philip
 - He was chosen as one of the seven to look after the Hellenist widows in (Acts 6:1–7)
 - From this passage, we can see that he is an evangelist and is known as Philip the evangelist. He is in tune with God, he listens to the Holy Spirit, he is observant, and acts.
-
- Next we have the Holy Spirit who directs Philip.

- The Spirit gives Philip just enough direction—the Spirit first says “Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” (Acts 8:26)—and Philip goes!
- The Spirit has clearly been working in the Ethiopian too, sowing the seeds of faith.
- Lastly we have God who we see at work.
 - God inspired Isaiah to write the text that the Ethiopian is reading.
 - The Father who sent Jesus who inspired the prophecy of Jesus in the Scriptures.
 - The Father who sent Jesus which lead to the recent events in Jerusalem is what Philip explained.
 - This is what Jesus explained to on the road to Emmaus (NRSV, Luke 24:13–32),
 “²⁷ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.”^{viii}and
 - perhaps what Jesus Himself explained to the disciplines after Jesus rose from the dead. In Luke 24:45–47

Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. (NRSV, Luke 24:45–47).

- This is what has been explained to you and me.
 - I wish that we had time this morning to go over Isaiah 53. It so describes Jesus. Go over it this week on your own.
- [[pause]]
- Now we have the stage set – two human players and God
 - This text is filled with responses to God’s call.
 - First The Ethiopian is responding to the study of scripture.
 - Philip responded to the HS when He first says to go to this road – can you be that responsive? God says go to this road/place?
 - Philip responds to what he sees and acts – engages in conversation
 - The Ethiopian poses the question that has been asked ever since Isaiah penned those words. He is asking the key question of this text. “Please, sir, about whom does the prophet say this? About himself or about someone else?”^{ix}
 - What is the answer? ... Jesus!
 - The Ethiopian responds to Philip’s proclamation of the Gospel. He is inspired by the HS. He now knows who the prophet Isaiah is speaking about—Jesus.
 - The Ethiopian says “Look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptized?” I like this man. He knows what he is looking for and when he finds it he

acts! He is baptized.

[[pause]]

- Do you remember your baptism?
 - I imagine that some here do remember their baptism. Others, like me, were baptized as an infant. But if we stop and think about what that baptism means, what a gift.
 - The ECO essential tenants say: “the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper are signs that are linked to the things signified, sealing to us the promises of Jesus. (By sealing I mean that we are “confirms or authenticates, attestation, confirmation, certification” with the promises of Jesus) In the Baptism ... (we are) claimed as a member of the covenant community, a child of God, cleansed by grace and sealed by the Spirit; ... we confess our confidence that God’s grace can make us new creations.”^x
 - Imagine what the Ethiopian must have felt as he was baptized.
 - Close your eyes and picture being submerged into the water. You are shocked a little bit as the water surrounds you. You know that you are in a different environment and it surrounds you. You are committed to the water. You are disoriented and you hold your breath as if you are stuck in limbo, between two places.
 - Then you are lifted up, out of the water. Your face rises to the sky and you feel the old self, the old habits draining away from you like the water from your face, down your hair and back. You are like a whale breaching (jumping out of the water) into the air. You inhale a new breath. You reorient yourself. You are alive to a new life.
 - You are cleansed by grace and sealed by the Spirit to Jesus.
- And Jesus meets us.
And we like the Ethiopian rejoice.
-
- When I read this and think of our baptism, I too rejoice.
 - I rejoice because from the beginning God cared, He planned, He loved you and me.
 - I rejoice because God deemed that I was worth the cost as told in Isa 53.
 - I rejoice because of what Jesus did for you and me.
 - I rejoice because the Holy Spirit is alive today, The Spirit brings people like Philip to proclaim the Gospel to us when we are ignorant. The Spirit fills us with understanding.
 - Because like the Ethiopian I am baptized, I rejoice.
 - I rejoice because we can celebrate our salvation today.
 - If you have never been baptized, if there has been something holding you back, I encourage you to delay no longer. Take the step, meet with Pastor Ron, and express the desire to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, seal yourself to Him, and rejoice.

Please join me in prayer.

Dear Jesus,

- We rejoice in actions of those like Philip who proclaim Your Gospel.
- We rejoice in the example of the Ethiopian who upon hearing the Gospel, accepted Jesus into his heart and was baptized.
- We rejoice because of all that you have done for us. For the sacrifice that You made upon our behalf. We are so glad and we can never repay You.
- We rejoice that we have the opportunity to accept you into our heart.
- Thank you Jesus.

Amen

- i *The New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Ac 8:1–3.
- ii *The New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Ac 8:26–39.
- iii Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (vol. 1; Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 436–437.
- iv John B. Polhill, *Acts* (vol. 26; The New American Commentary; Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 222.
- v Beverly Roberts Gaventa, “Ethiopian Eunuch,” ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 667.
- vi John B. Polhill, *Acts* (vol. 26; The New American Commentary; Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 223–224.
- vii Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (vol. 31; Anchor Yale Bible; New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 413.
- viii *The New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Lk 24:27.
- ix Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (vol. 31; Anchor Yale Bible; New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 414.
- x A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians, “Essential Tenets & Confessional Standards”, <http://eco-pres.org/static/media/uploads/resources/Essential%20Tenets/eco-essential-tenets-confessions.pdf> (accessed April 23, 2016), 4.