

## Sermon for May 6, 2012 - Easter

Acts 8:26-40

Theme: **Seize the day and witness Jesus!**

- 1) *God sends us opportunity.*
- 2) *God gives us His Word*
- 3) *God grants us joy.*

<sup>26</sup> Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Go south to the road--the desert road--that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." <sup>27</sup> So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, <sup>28</sup> and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the book of Isaiah the prophet. <sup>29</sup> The Spirit told Philip, "Go to that chariot and stay near it." <sup>30</sup> Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. "Do you understand what you are reading?" Philip asked. <sup>31</sup> "How can I," he said, "unless someone explains it to me?" So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. <sup>32</sup> The eunuch was reading this passage of Scripture: "He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before the shearer is silent, so he did not open his mouth. <sup>33</sup> In his humiliation he was deprived of justice. Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth." <sup>34</sup> The eunuch asked Philip, "Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?" <sup>35</sup> Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus. <sup>36</sup> As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptized?" <sup>38</sup> And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. <sup>39</sup> 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. <sup>40</sup> Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and traveled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea.

Have you ever had an unexpected wait in a public place? Maybe it was for a delayed flight or at a doctor's office. You were hoping that you could do the things you had to do and get on with your plans, but God decided to change your plans.

It is easy to get upset during such circumstances: "This is such a waste of my time. Why do I have to wait? " But God doesn't want you to get upset. He wants you to look around, for he may have given you an opportunity. Look at all the souls around you in the waiting room. How many of them are on their way to hell because they don't know about Christ?

There are many lost souls in the world, all of whom Jesus died for. It is our duty, privilege, yes even our joy, to preach Jesus to these people. Let us then learn from the example of Philip to **Seize the day and witness Jesus!** *It is God who sends us opportunities to witness. It is God who gives us His Word to witness, and it is God who grants us joy.*

Part One: *God sends us opportunity.*

Philip was an evangelist, called by the Church of Jerusalem to help the Apostles (Acts 6:5). He went about his work of confessing Christ in different towns with great zeal.

One day an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Go south to the road-- the desert road-- that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza (v.26)." Philip was not told why he was to travel down a desert road to Gaza. He was just told to do it. The road Philip was told to travel was a road that wasn't well traveled. The countryside was barren and you were lucky if you saw another traveler. It was a long, boring road.

But Philip went immediately. He didn't ask God why, or complain that it wasn't what he planned. He didn't go grudgingly. The Lord in whom he trusted sent him. He knew that whatever the Lord had planned for him would be for his good.

Right here we should pause and consider how we are often not like Philip. God puts many detours in our lives that don't seem right to us or fit our plans: a delayed flight when traveling; unexpected sicknesses that leaves us waiting at a doctor's office. What is often our first reaction when these unexpected things pop up? Is our initial reaction that of Philip, who trusted God's promise to guide his life and went forth uncomplaining? Or does this sound familiar: "Why me? Why now? Why this? This just throws a huge wrench in my plans."

Dear Christian, God does know and God does care. Our questioning God actually shows our lack of faith, and how such questioning must sadden our Savior! "Haven't you learned yet to trust me?" He must be thinking, "Have I ever misled you? Go and you will understand!" May God forgive us for our complaining and give us the strength to trust Him, as did Philip.

On the way, Philip met a chariot carrying an important official. This eunuch was not a Jew, though he did have a love for the Jewish faith. We are told that he went to Jerusalem to worship and he was reading the scroll of Isaiah.

It was actually very strange that Philip met this man on this road to Gaza. Normally an official would not take such a boring, back road, but this eunuch did. It could be that he took such a road so that he wouldn't be disturbed as he read. Regardless of what human reason the eunuch had for traveling that desert road, the Lord of history was the one who determined the exact time for the eunuch to meet Philip (Acts 17:26). He wanted the eunuch to hear about his Son Jesus. He wanted the eunuch to believe. God set up the opportunity, and Philip was going to be God's tool to witness to him.

Notice that, when sent, Philip didn't hesitate to witness to the Ethiopian, even though he was of a different race and culture. Philip didn't look at the eunuch's black skin color. He didn't allow any prejudices to hinder him. He saw the man for what he truly was: a soul that Jesus died for. He immediately obeyed God's command and ran to witness to him.

Notice also that Philip's hard and difficult travel was for only one soul. God sends us to individuals. He cares for each one of us personally. He knows each person in this world better than they know themselves – having suffered and died for each one of their sins. This is why God wants us to witness to individuals. He doesn't care about statistics. Over one, just one, sinner that repents there is great rejoicing in heaven (Luke 15:7). He wants us to have the same concern for the person in front of us as he does.

How many friends and family members do you have that don't know Jesus? It is not only to strangers that God sends us, but also to those very friends of ours who are lost. Every day the Lord puts an opportunity in front of us, but do we take it? Are we like Philip or are we more like Jonah, who also went when the Lord called him: he went the other direction! **Seize the day and witness Jesus!** Take every opportunity to show your faith to the people God places in front of you.

### Part Two: God gives us His Word

God not only placed the opportunity in front of Philip, he also placed the Word at his disposal. Philip went up to the chariot and found the eunuch reading a portion of Isaiah that wonderfully depicts the suffering the Messiah would go through in order to rescue the world from sin.

We can clearly understand what Isaiah was talking about, because we know Jesus. Isaiah was showing Jesus absolute humility in suffering and dying for our sins. The Just One suffered injustice for us. But, as Isaiah also says, Jesus didn't remain dead. God exalted his Servant Jesus, and made his descendants (that is, those who believe in him) more numerous than one could ever count.

The Ethiopian didn't understand all of this because he didn't know Jesus. But that is why God sent Philip on that desert road: to reveal Jesus to the eunuch.

Notice that Philip didn't barge in and start preaching. The first thing Philip did was listen to the Ethiopian. He wanted to know what perturbed him. As he listened, Philip was able to see exactly what the eunuch needed to hear, and was more apt to preach Jesus to him.

Philip started with that very passage that the eunuch was reading, and, using God's Word, preached Jesus to him. Philip knew that it was only the Word that could help the Ethiopian. He also knew that it was only the Holy Spirit working through the Word that would bring him to faith.

Brothers and sister, there are two great things we can learn here: 1) Listen to people. Listen before you speak. It is only by listening that you can find out exactly what is bothering a person. It is only by listening that you can tailor God's Word to exactly what that person needs to hear. Listen before you speak.

2) Use the Word. We don't convert people and neither are we called to do so. Converting is the job of the Holy Spirit, and he does that only through God's Word. None of our tricks or rhetoric can accomplish anything. We are called to witness the Gospel faithfully – that's it. Use God's Word.

But that means that you need to know the Word in order to witness it, right? Oh, how sad it is that we don't study the Word, as we ought! How many souls have we failed to preach Jesus to because of our ignorance? What would happen if the person God put in front of us died before he had another chance to hear the Gospel, after **we failed** to witness to him! According to Ezekiel 33:8, we would become guilty of his blood, because we failed to do our duty of witnessing. May God forgive us all, for we all, at one point or another, failed to witness Jesus! Thanks be to God that he punished his Son for our sin, and has forgiven us. May His forgiveness now open our eyes to the opportunities God puts in front of us, and motivate us to be prepared.

Study the Word! Study it at home, in Bible class at Church and wherever you go! Make it your own. Bind it on your minds and hearts. This way you will be prepared to witness. On top of all this, why not also purchase a pocket Bible that you can carry in your jacket pocket or purse? This way you won't be unprepared. This way, when you are waiting in the check out line at the grocery store, you will have something to do that will benefit your soul. And what kind of message do you think reading your Bible in public would send? "This man or woman loves God's Word. He must be a Christian." What if something is plaguing a person around you? If they see you with a Bible, they might well ask you for guidance. Think of the opportunity that you would have to witness Jesus to them. Think of the tool you would have in your hand to do that! **Seize every opportunity and witness Jesus.** Use the Word that He has graciously given you.

### Part Three: God grants us joy.

The account of Philip and the Ethiopian has a very happy ending. We hear that *as they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptized?" And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him.*<sup>39</sup> *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.*

Philip must have told that eunuch a lot about Jesus and the Christian's life. Look, he even knew what baptism was and wanted to become a child of God!

And what joy filled that filled the air that day! The eunuch rejoiced over his salvation: that he was now a child of God. Philip rejoiced because God allowed him to confess Christ to this stranger. Even heaven rejoiced over the lost soul who was brought to faith and salvation.

I can tell you this from personal experience: there are few greater joys in life than being able to witness Jesus and seeing God work faith in a person's heart. There are so many personal stories I could tell you about the joy I received witnessing Jesus to others on airplanes and trains or in waiting rooms at doctor's offices. Many of the people I witnessed to I never had a chance to meet again because the Lord had other plans for me. The Lord also had

other plans for Philip, other people he was to witness Jesus to. This is why the Spirit of Jesus took Philip away – because His work was done.

It must have seemed strange to Philip when the angel said, “Go down that desert road.” But God revealed the high importance of His command in due time. A day that seemed at first a waste of time, revealed itself to be a day more than well spent.

Dear Christian, the next time the unexpected pops up in your life, don't get mad or bored. Open your eyes! Look around. It may be that the Lord has a great assignment for you. **Seize the day and witness Jesus.** *For God has given you the opportunity. He has given you his Word. And He promises you joy when witnessing. Amen.*