

Acts 8:26-40

²⁶Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Get up and go south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” (This is an isolated area.) ²⁷So he got up and went. And there was a man, an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of Candace, Queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasury. He had come to Jerusalem to worship. ²⁸He was on his way home, sitting in his chariot and reading the prophet Isaiah.

²⁹The Spirit told Philip, “Go over there and stay close to that chariot.” ³⁰Philip ran up to it and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet.

Philip asked, “Do you understand what you are reading?”

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

³²Now the passage of Scripture the eunuch was reading was this:

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

³³In his humiliation justice was denied him.
Who will talk about his generation?
For his life is taken from the earth.

³⁴The eunuch said to Philip, “I ask you, who is the prophet talking about—himself or someone else?” ³⁵Then Philip began to speak. Starting with that very passage of Scripture, he told him the good news about Jesus. ³⁶As they were traveling along the road, they came to some water, and the eunuch said, “Look, here is water. What is there to prevent me from being baptized?”

³⁸He ordered the chariot to stop. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and Philip baptized him. ³⁹When they stepped up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away. The eunuch did not see him anymore, but went on his way rejoicing.

⁴⁰Philip, however, found himself at Azotus. And as he went from place to place, he preached the gospel in all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

Grace at the Oasis

He was making his return trip. It was a long drive home. Constant attention is needed on any journey of length. You have to keep your eyes on the road; you have to watch the traffic and be on the lookout for all kinds of road hazards; you have to remain alert for any potential problems with your vehicle. Sometimes the best thing to do is just to pull into a rest area for a little while. Focus on something different, just for a few moments.

He pulled over. Not ready to get right back on the road, he opened some newly-acquired reading material and began to scroll along. While his employer might have considered his journey a vacation, the trip had been a learning excursion. The man knew he had only touched the surface. This wasn't information he had grown up with; there was so much more to learn. He had questions. Perhaps this book would provide some answers.

As rest areas often do, this one lured in another traveler. This second one was a speaker of some prominence. Well-regarded and in high demand, suddenly his employer had summoned him and summarily sent him to a completely different location. There didn't even seem to be any planned speaking engagements—just “go,” he was told.

Ok. I don't get it, but...

Now this second man—we'll call him “Philip”—found himself stretching his legs at the rest area. He had received his instructions: “Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, ‘Get

up and go south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.’ (This is an isolated area.)” (Acts 8:26, EHV).

Philip glanced in the direction of the first man. He could clearly see that this was a man of importance. The way he was dressed, the vehicle he drove, his very demeanor indicated that he had power and influence. Philip’s assessment was correct. “There was a man, an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of Candace, Queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasury” (Acts 8:27, EHV). The first man, the Ethiopian eunuch, was the CFO—the Chief Financial Officer—not just of a *company*, but of a *kingdom*.

“He had come to Jerusalem to worship. ²⁸He was on his way home, sitting in his chariot and reading the prophet Isaiah” (Acts 8:27-28, EHV). The learning excursion the Ethiopian had been on was a trip to worship at the temple in Jerusalem. Somehow he had become a convert to Judaism and had made the long journey to learn more. There in Jerusalem he had acquired a Bible. Whether it was the whole Old Testament or just the scroll of Isaiah we don’t know, but the man was studying his Scriptures to learn more about his new faith.

So there the Ethiopian was, in the rest area, in his open-air chariot reading aloud from his scroll. That wasn’t uncommon, by the way. People often—maybe even *usually*—read aloud in those days.

Strolling around the rest area, Philip could hear him reading. Now, the Ethiopian was an important man—an influential man. This was not the sort of man one easily approaches for casual conversation. Philip had been speaking to crowds of people, to be sure, but *they* were all Jews—people like him. He had been telling them that their long-awaited Messiah had come and was named Jesus. *This* was out of his comfort zone. The Ethiopian did not look like him, did not sound much like him, and was obviously out of his league socially.

II.

Philip’s discomfort is easy to relate to, isn’t it? We often find it intimidating to talk to someone who is not in our league socially, or who looks different than we do, or who sounds different than we do.

In fact, it’s intimidating to strike up a conversation about the Savior with people who are *exactly* like us in every discernable way. We seem to be averse to causing offense or to making someone feel uncomfortable.

Here’s the simple truth—the Bible is uncomfortable to the sinner. The Bible offends *everyone*. The Bible says: “The arrogant cannot stand before your eyes. You hate all evildoers.” (Psalm 5:5, EHV). God doesn’t just hate *sin*, he hates the *sinner*. People don’t *like* to hear that God hates what they do—they think God should just excuse what they do, and validate their every evil deed and desire. He doesn’t. It’s offensive.

How comfortable is it to speak the truth about sin?

III.

“The Spirit told Philip, ‘Go over there and stay close to that chariot’” (Acts 8:29, EHV). Get out of your comfort zone, Philip. You were comfortable standing in a Synagogue and speaking about Jesus, the Messiah, to your Jewish brothers and sisters. *This* needs to be done, too. This *one soul* is just as important as any of those you were speaking to before I sent you to this rest area.

“Now the passage of Scripture the eunuch was reading was this: He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he does not open his mouth” (Acts 8:32, EHV). The Ethiopian read what Isaiah had written, but had a hard time understanding what he read. He already seemed to have understood his sin and the need for the Servant of God spoken of by Isaiah. What he didn’t understand was what that *meant*. Who *was* the Servant? Who was the Lamb?

I listened to a rabbi supposedly “debunking” Isaiah 53 and the Servant Song pointing to Jesus. He said that you have to use Isaiah as the foremost commentary on Isaiah, and look at *all* the Servant Songs in Isaiah to understand where they are pointing. If you don’t do this, he said, you are in an alternative universe.

So I did. I looked at the Servant Songs. I guess I live in an alternative universe. They point to Jesus. I think that *God* is the most authoritative commentary on the book of Isaiah, or any other Bible book, for that matter. To be sure, the words of the prophet Isaiah were inspired by God, and to rip them out of context does damage to what God said, as the rabbi said.

But the Bible is a book with the answers in the back. Information about the Old Testament can be found in the New Testament. God verbally inspired *those* books, too. So I look to *God’s* New Testament commentary, like the book of Acts, and the revelation Philip received to speak about Jesus to the Ethiopian. If you ignore what *God* has to say, then you are living in an alternate universe.

Remember that passage from the Psalms? That same God—the One who hates the sinner because of sin—loved everyone so much that he sent his Servant, Jesus, to *do* something about it.

Philip joined the Ethiopian in his chariot. “Then Philip began to speak. Starting with that very passage of Scripture, he told him the good news about Jesus” (Acts 8:35, EHV). The good news from that very passage is that Jesus stood before the courts of Annas and Caiaphas and Pontius Pilate silently—without putting up a defense against the false charges brought against him. He did this because he knew something very important. Jesus *knew* he was the suffering Servant from Isaiah who was the Lamb being led to the slaughter. He was the One and only sacrifice for sin that ever meant anything or *did* anything to solve the sin problem faced by every human being. That’s what Philip told the Ethiopian.

“As they were traveling along the road, they came to some water, and the eunuch said, ‘Look, here is water. What is there to prevent me from being baptized?’” (Acts 8:36, EHV). *Now* the Ethiopian understood what Isaiah had been pointing to. He wanted to enjoy the blessings of baptism—the forgiveness of sins. He received grace at the oasis. The Ethiopian would never forget this day. He came to know and understand the truth. He would be reminded of the love of God in Jesus every day as he looked back fondly at his baptism.

IV.

“When they stepped up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away. The eunuch did not see him anymore, but went on his way rejoicing. ⁴⁰Philip, however, found himself at Azotus. And as he went from place to place, he preached the gospel in all the towns until he came to Caesarea” (Acts 8:39-40, EHV). Back to his day job went Philip—his regular occupation of preaching the gospel. His little side job wasn’t all that different from what he did every day, just to a different audience.

Remember that little aside from the first verse of this text, the verse when we saw Philip being sent to this rest area? “This is an isolated area” (Acts 8:26, EHV).

Every day each of us goes about our daily tasks. There are lots of isolated areas. Watch for the chariots with their tops down in the rest areas. The Lord sees the isolated areas of our families and friends. He sees the isolated areas of co-workers who don’t know Jesus. He sees the isolated areas of the seemingly-chance encounters we have with people from time to time. He sees the isolated areas of people who already know Jesus, but are hungry to learn more.

Be the Philip for those isolated areas. You have seen Jesus with the eyes of faith. Share grace at the oasis. Amen.