

Readings

Scripture

²⁶ Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." This is a desert place. ²⁷ And he rose and went. And there was an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure. He had come to Jerusalem to worship ²⁸ and was returning, seated in his chariot, and he was reading the prophet Isaiah. ²⁹ And the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over and join this chariot." ³⁰ So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" ³¹ And he said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. ³² Now the passage of the Scripture that he was reading was this: "Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter and like a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he opens not his mouth. ³³ In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth."

³⁴ And the eunuch said to Philip, "About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?" ³⁵ Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus. ³⁶ And as they were going along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, "See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?" ³⁸ And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. ³⁹ And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing. ⁴⁰ But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through he preached the gospel to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

- Acts 8:26-40 (English Standard Version)

Reflection

As he approached the chariot Philip heard the voice of somebody reading – whether of a slave reading aloud to his master or of the eunuch himself. He recognized what was being read, and proceeded to ask the eunuch whether he understood what he was reading. For an answer the eunuch confessed his need of an interpreter and invited Philip to undertake the task. He will have presumed, perhaps from his clothing or accent, that he was a Jew and therefore probably able to help him. But the general principle which he announces is significant. The Old Testament cannot be fully understood without interpretation. It needs a key to unlock the doors of its mysterious sayings. Jesus had provided such a key for the disciples (Luke 24:25-27, 44-47). Now Philip was being called upon to help the eunuch in the same way.

- I. Howard Marshall *Acts* (p. 162-163)

"We were very tired," Sebastião Salgado recalls. He was on a 500-mile, 55-day hike through some of the most inaccessible passages in the Ethiopian highlands, a region known as the roof of Africa, where the elevations range from a few thousand feet to almost 15,000. "We had to climb, to climb, to climb," he says in his Portuguese-accented English. Finally he and his porters and guides reached a village. It was about 2 p.m., very hot. Very few people. But "slowly, slowly people start to come out," says Salgado, one of the world's premier photographers. Among the villagers were "two ladies with a kind of basin, wood basin, and with water. They came beside my feet, they took off my boots, my socks, and they washed my feet. Oh boy, I felt the humility of the beginning of the Christians. This sacred encounter, reminiscent of the biblical scene in which Jesus washes the feet of his disciples, was a highlight of the extraordinary journey that led Salgado to create the pictures on these pages. They commemorate a people's profound connection to both the heavens and the earth."

- Smithsonian Magazine, July 2017

Sermon Outline

A Profound Connection
Acts 8:26-40

The Acts of the Apostles
Brad Anderson

Jesus continues to lead the church into the mission of God... (Acts 8:26, 29)

How do we observe the ever-expanding mission in this account?

As the good news about Jesus is shared with the marginalized... (Acts 8:26-31)

As the good news about Jesus is shared from the Scriptures... (Acts 8:32-38)

As the good news about Jesus is shared while living in specific places...

(Acts 8:39-40)

Reflection Questions (taken in part from the Serendipity Study Bible for Groups)

- What textbook was hardest for you to grasp?
- Why does Luke say the Ethiopian eunuch visited Jerusalem? (See Acts 2:5-11 to help shape your answer)
- The eunuch was reading Isaiah 53. In what ways does Jesus fit the picture of the one described there? If you were Philip using Isaiah 53, what would you emphasize about the gospel?
- How did God pave the way for his message? What is the relationship between divine preparation and human initiative in this story?
- What is the significance of this story for a church being persecuted in Jerusalem?
- So far, what has been the effect of Stephen's death upon Philip? Upon the church as a whole?
- Given the way God sets up opportunities to witness (Acts 8:26-40; 3:6-16; 2:5-14), how does that free you from fears in evangelism? What do these stories show about the context in which evangelism is to happen?
- Since the Ethiopian eunuch had been to Jerusalem to worship, he was probably a "God-fearer," meaning a Gentile who worshiped Israel's God but had not become a full convert ("proselyte"). As a eunuch, he would have been barred from the inner courts of the temple, which makes his reading "the prophet Isaiah" (Acts 8:29) especially significant. Isaiah held out the promise that God would grant devout eunuchs a heritage "better than sons and daughters" (Isaiah 56:3-8). How does this reveal the ever-increasing scope of God's salvation? (Use Genesis 12:1-3 to help shape your answer)