

A Picture of True Conversion

(Acts 8:9-24)

12/11/19; Wed PM Pine Grove

Introduction

The gadget in the right hand corner of the screen is known as Newton's cradle.

It is series of metal spheres attached to strings and a frame that essentially suspend the spheres in mid air.

I bought one at a yard sale as a kid and it sat in my room for many years.

To use Newton's cradle, you simply pull one sphere back and let it go.

That sphere transfers the energy through the 3 middle spheres into the last sphere which rises an equal distance when struck.

In theory, the gadget will go on forever if no energy is ever lost, but even the best built ones will stop over time.

Personally I loved the gadget.

You could pull two spheres back and let them go and two would rise.

You could pull 3 back and the middle one would switch sides each time it hit.

It was fascinating to watch and play with.

With that picture in mind, we come to Acts 8:25-40.

And it serves an equal but opposite reaction to what we saw last week in Acts 8:9-24.

In that passage last week, we saw an example of false conversion in the person of Simon of Samaria.

He was man who appeared to be saved but was actually lost.

HE appeared to be a true convert but he was in fact a false convert.

Well as that example closes in verse 24, we are now going to see an example of a true convert in an Ethiopian eunuch.

And this is so common in the Bible.

There is an example of what not to do followed by an example of what to do.

So as the sphere of false conversion is released last week and falls an example of what not to do, the sphere of true conversion rises before our eyes this week as what we should do.

So let's look at 3 aspects of true conversion tonight in Acts 8:25-40.

Now before we jump into the the text, let's remind ourselves of what is happening in the book of Acts.

We are looking at an inspired history of the early church.

Though God has had his people in every age, the church is a collection of God's people in this age.

We are not the Israel of the NT.

WE have not replaced Israel of the OT.

WE are simply the people of God who have put our faith in Israel's Messiah.

And we came into being in the book of Acts as Jesus ascended to heaven and the Holy Spirit descended to earth to indwell those who have come to Christ in faith.

The church will continue until the rapture, where we will be snatched to heaven to be with the Lord

as he begins to judge and then save Israel during the tribulation period.

Then the church and Israel will be united under their King for a 1000 year reign and forever in the new heavens and earth.

And that is pretty incredible to think about when you consider how the church began with 120 people gathered in an upper room in Jerusalem in 30 AD.

But that is how the church began, and God has provided great detail about this early history through the pen of Luke on the pages of the book of Acts.

So the church began in Acts 2 with the arrival of the Spirit in Jerusalem.

But by the time, we get to Acts 8, the church has moved from Jerusalem to surrounding areas of Israel.

The past 2 weeks we have seen the church expand into Samaria, which is the mid section of Israel.

And look, this spread is no surprise.

Jesus told the disciples in Acts 1 that they would be his witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

The only surprise is probably how fast this is happening.

Tonight, the prophecy of Jesus will be complete as the witness of the gospel begins to go to the uttermost parts of the earth.

Tonight, a eunuch from an area at least a 1000 miles from Jerusalem will be saved.

And that single conversion will be a picture of two great realities.

First, the gospel will go to the world.

And second, the gospel will save both Jews and Gentiles alike.

So, let's jump into the verses and see this glorious picture of true conversion, and the first aspect we note is this..

I. True Conversion is God Directed (25-29)

Look back at verse 25..

25 So, when they had solemnly testified and spoken the word of the Lord, they started back to Jerusalem, and were preaching the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans.

Who is the “they” of verse 25?

Well, they are Peter and John, and if you remember from last week, they had left Jerusalem and traveled north to Samaria.

And their purpose in going was to confirm that the Lord was saving people through the preaching of the gospel in Samaria.

Remember, this is the very infant stage of the church.

All gospel preaching and conversion had been confined to Jerusalem for the first 7 chapters of the book of Acts.

It was not until chapter 8 that the gospel began to spread beyond Jerusalem, and what was the catalyst for that spread?

It was the murder of Stephen at hands of the Jews

And why was Stephen killed?

For preaching the truth.

For declaring that Jesus was the Jewish Messiah who was murdered by his own people.

However, in trying to stop the spread of truth, the Jews only fanned the flames of preaching by sending the believers in all directions with the truth.

And one of those believers to scatter was a man named Philip who went north to Samaria.

Clearly, that was God-directed since the Samaritans were often the object of Jewish scorn because they had a family tree of Jews who had married Gentiles.

But the gospel is for the Jew, the Gentile, and for those somewhere in between.

So Philip is sent by God to Samaria to preach Christ, and that preaching leads to salvation in that despised region.

And Peter and John hear of that work of God and come to verify that God is saving the Jews of Samaria.

But they begin to leave the region and head back Jerusalem.

However, note that they are evangelizing on their way back.

Now the scene shifts back to Philip in verse 26.

26 But an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip saying, “Get up and go south to the road that descends from Jerusalem to Gaza.” ([h]This is a desert road.)

Here are a couple maps of the area to help you understand the geography of this verse..

First of all the road that descends from Jerusalem to Gaza is not in Samaria, where Philip has been doing ministry.

It is Judea, the southernmost region of Israel.

And it would be rough terrain in Philip’s day.

Verse 26 calls it a desert road, and that it was.

Now the road would have been 45 miles long since Jerusalem is inland and Gaza is coastal.

And though Philip may have had questions about where on that road to go and why he should go, the next words of verse 27 simply say..

So he got up and went.

You just have to love the simple obedience of Philip.

Now, it should be said that an angel of the Lord doesn't visit you everyday with instructions of what to do, but it should also be said that simple obedience is always the best option.

So why the command to go..

Let's keep reading verse 27..

27 So he got up and went; and there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure; and he had come to Jerusalem to worship, 28 and he was returning and sitting in his [i]chariot, and was reading the prophet Isaiah.

If you look back at the screen, Ethiopia in this time was a large area of Africa.

Today it has distinct borders, but is likely that Ethiopia was much larger in 30 AD.

Now the king of Ethiopia was considered a god in the pagan religions of the region, so the queen did all the work.

And she would have administrators of the kingdom under her, and we meet one here.

His name isn't given, he is simply called a Ethiopian eunuch.

A eunuch is a man who has been castrated in order to serve the king and guard his harem.

This eunuch had risen up the ranks in the Ethiopian kingdom to the position of treasurer.

In other words, he holds an extremely important position in the kingdom as the chief financial officer.

And we see his influence in that he has a chariot and he has the means to travel the 1000 miles to Jerusalem.

Now why had he come to Jerusalem?

The end of verse 27 says that he has come to worship.

What does this mean?

Evidently, this eunuch had heard of the God of Israel.

Maybe there was a Jewish population in Ethiopia.

Maybe he had had come in contact with a Jew in his position as treasurer.

Maybe the ministry of Jesus had reached his ears down in Ethiopia.

We really don't know, but it seems clear that he was searching for God in Jerusalem.

And it seems that he had acquired a copy of the book of Isaiah in his time there, but he is headed home.

But here comes Philip and verse 29 simply says..

29 Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go up and join this [j]chariot."

In case you are ever tempted to think that salvation is a work of man, Acts 8:25-29 remind us that God directs the salvation of every true believer.

Just note what all is going on in this scene.

First of all, God sends an angel who send Philip to a obscure place in Israel.

Talk about being sent to the middle of nowhere for the gospel, Philip was sent to the middle of nowhere for the sake of one soul that the Lord sought to save.

In the late 1800s, Francis Thompson wrote a poem entitled the hound of heaven, which detailed God's pursuit of him and ultimately his salvation.

And many pastors and theologians have picked up on that title for God.

It is not meant to be derogatory or heretical, it is simply a reflection of a God who chases down and saves His people like a great hound of heaven.

That certainly fits the description of this passage.

There is an Ethiopian eunuch on a desert road in the middle of nowhere but it is not the time that God has ordained for his salvation.

And God sends one of his men to hunt down that eunuch and preach Christ to him.

What an incredible picture of God's sovereignty.

He is directing this salvation from the very start.

Now the thing to keep in balance is that God often uses people in the miracle.

The first to note is Philip.

Philip was available and obedient.

He had no idea what God was planning to do, but he knew that obeying the Lord's command is always the best course of action.

So he got up and went and was used mightily in the salvation of this eunuch.

But we also how God has worked in the life of the eunuch.

God has put a desire in his heart for the truth.

God has put the desire to go to Jerusalem in his heart.

God has put the Scriptures in his hands.

And God has put a preacher of the gospel in his path.

God has set the stage, but what is the next act?

Verse 30.

We will call this..

II. True Conversion is Scripture Driven (30-35)

30 Philip ran up and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet, and said, “Do you understand what you are reading?”

As Philip catches up with the chariot, he hears the words of Isaiah being read aloud, and he simply asks a question of the eunuch.

Let me say this here.

When sharing the gospel with someone, questions are often a great way to start a conversation.

Now, it is not likely that everyone will have a Bible in their lap like we see here.

And it is not likely that you will be able to ask them if they understand a Bible passages they are reading.

But that doesn't mean that starting the conversation asking a question is a bad thing.

In fact, I would encourage you to ask people questions in 1 on 1 gospel encounters.

The primary reason is that questions aren't as threatening as statements.

And second people like to talk and offer their thoughts.

And you can offer gain an understanding of them through their answers but you also gain a chance to be heard when you show yourself a good listener.

So Philip approaches and asks a question and gets an answer along with an invitation.

Verse 31..

31 And he said, "Well, how could I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

I mean this is fantastic.

An open Bible and now an open invitation, so what happens next?

Verse 32..

32 Now the passage of Scripture which he was reading was this:

***"He was led as a sheep to slaughter;
And as a lamb before its shearer is silent,
So He does not open His mouth.***

33

***"In humiliation His judgment was taken away;
Who will [k]relate His [l]generation?"***

For His life is removed from the earth.”

34 The eunuch answered Philip and said, “Please tell me, of whom does the prophet say this? Of himself or of someone else?”

It is noteworthy that the passage before the eunuch is not only the most important passage in the book of Isaiah, but it is also likely the most important passage in the entire OT.

Because this is a passage from Isaiah which details the suffering of the Jewish Messiah

The Jews saw their coming Messiah as a King to overthrow their enemies, but what they often overlooked or forgot is this.

The Messiah would be a Savior and a King.

He would be killed before he ruled.

And he would be killed to save his people before he returned to reign with them.

In fact, this chapter in Isaiah is such a clear description of what happened to Jesus that Jewish synagogues still skip it today when they read aloud the book of Isaiah.

Now understand, the fulfillment of this verse is still very fresh.

It was literally a few months ago that Jesus was led to his slaughter.

SO this chapter in Isaiah is so central to the gospel.

And Philip is not being asked about it by an unbeliever from Ethiopia..

So how does Philip respond?

Verse 35.

35 Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him.

At times, people probably why I am so Bible centered?

I preach it verse by verse.

I offer counsel directly from it.

I lead the church to make decisions based upon it.

I study it for hours to prepare messages.

Why the obsession?

Why the focus on Scripture?

Because the very first preachers were Bible centered.

The very first evangelists were Bible focused .

Jesus pointed to the Bible over and over.

Peter preached from the OT.

Paul used the OT in his letters.

And right here, Philip takes this eunuch to Scripture to preach Jesus to him.

Notice that Philip didn't offer his testimony about Jesus.

He didn't offer insight into Jesus.

He took the OT that this eunuch had and he pointed out Christ to him in it.

Where did he begin?

Maybe in Genesis 1 where God says let us make man in our image.

And he told this eunuch that Jesus was a member of the the trinity.

Maybe he read Genesis 3 to him where God promised to send a seed of Eve to crush the head of the serpent.

Maybe he took him through the sacrificial system in the book of Leviticus to show him Christ as the once for all sacrifice.

Maybe he went to the book of Exodus and showed him the Passover lamb that was a shadow of the Ultimate Passover Lamb named Christ who had just come to shed his blood to save His people.

The point is simple.

Philip began with Jesus in Isaiah 53 and preached Jesus to this eunuch.

Now this is important because there is salvation in no other name.

This eunuch may have made a great sacrifice to travel to Jerusalem.

He may have been learning and searching but ultimately, he isn't saved apart from putting his faith in the name of Jesus.

And where do we find the person of Jesus Christ?

In the Bible.

This is why we focus on Scripture in salvation.

You see, creation reveals there is a God, but Scripture gives us the way to God.

True conversion is Scripture driven.

A final aspect of true conversion is found in verses 36-40..

III. True Conversion is Fruit Bearing (36-40)

Verse 36..

*36 As they went along the road they came to some water; and the eunuch *said, "Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?" 37 [[m]And Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."] 38 And he ordered the [n]chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he baptized him. 39 When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; and the eunuch no longer saw him, [o]but went on his way rejoicing. 40 But Philip [p]found himself at [q]Azotus, and as he passed through he kept preaching the gospel to all the cities until he came to Caesarea.*

Once the eunuch had made of profession of faith in Christ, Philip must taught him about baptism.

He may have stayed with him a while teaching more truths about the faith..

And though this was a desert road, God put them in a place where they would pass by some water.

So the eunuch demonstrates a heart of obedience to Christ and is baptized.

And all us Baptists need to note verses 38 and 39..

Philip and the eunuch went down into the water.

The eunuchs is going to be baptized and Philip is going to the do the baptizing.

If this eunuch was only sprinkled or poured, there would be no need for both to go down.

But both go down because this is immersion.

And notice that both verse 39 says that when they came up.

This would suggest a coming up out of the water for the eunuch and a coming out of the water for Philip.

Either way, this is a picture of immersion, but even better, this is a picture of the fruit of obedience.

Which should remind us all that true conversion bears fruit.

I wonder about people who profess Christ but wait on baptism.

If Jesus is indeed your Lord, and he has said to be baptized, why wait?

But even beyond the obedience of baptism, there shouldn't be a delay of obedience in any area of life.

If Christ is indeed your Lord, you follow his commands not your timetable.

This eunuch was saved, and this eunuch showed the desire to obey immediately.

Now, we get some details of what happens to Philip here.

Verse 39 says that he was snatched away, and it is the same word that used that is used to describe the snatching away of the church in the rapture.

And notice that the eunuch no longer see him, in the same way that the world will not longer see the church after we are snatched away.

Now that must have been a sight.

So Philip is supernaturally moved back north to a town in Judea called Azotus and he will preach along the coast until he reached the city of Caesarea in northern Samaria.

Essentially, God pulled him out of mission in Samaria, used him in the life of the eunuch, and then put Philip back on his mission in Samaria.

Now what do we need to pull from this scene tonight?

Conclusion

#1- God directs the salvation of every believer.

If anything is clear in this passage, it is that God is the director of this whole scene.

He sends Philip to the road.

HE makes sure that the eunuch is on the road back home.

He has prepared the heart of the eunuch to give him a hunger for truth.

To give him a copy of the OT Scriptures.

To open his ears to Philip.

Just like Jonah said at the end of Jonah 2 this week.

Salvation is from the Lord.

That being said..

#2 - God allows people to take part in the miracle of salvation.

We cannot miss the reality that Philip was obedient.

WE cannot miss the fact that the eunuch had come to Jerusalem.

WE cannot miss the fact that the Philip preached Christ to the eunuch.

Look, God could speak the truth of gospel into the hearts of everyone he saves.

But he allows us as his people to take part.

Philip was an agent of the Lord.

The eunuch was searching for truth.

Understand this.

God commands us to go and make disciples not because he is a demanding God.

He commands us to do that to allow us to play a part in the miracle of salvation and to be blessed by it.

Sharing the gospel is not a burden, it is a privilege.

#3 - God saves to the ends of the earth.

WE cannot overlook the big picture of the book of Acts.

God has now saved in Jerusalem, in Judea, in Samaria and to the uttermost parts of the world.

And that will be the case for all of church history.

In Homer's *Odyssey*, he calls the Ethiopians the last of men, which is a reference to how far south they lived in Africa.

This eunuch was quite literally from the end of the earth in 30 AD.

But now the great hound of heaven has saved a man from the farthest reaches.

This is such an important milestone in redemptive history.

Not only is this eunuch from an area far away from Israel, this eunuch is also far away spiritually in the sense that he is a Gentile.

He is someone that NT describes as being far off but now brought close to God through Christ.

And it is not that God has never saved a Gentile.

Rahab was saved in the OT.

The whole city of Nineveh was saved.

The issue is this.

No one is beyond the reach of the Lord.

Whether he is geographically distant from the land of Israel or spiritually distant from the Lord, God can and does save people from the ends of the earth.

What an incredible reality and what an incredible God.

Let us pray.