

The Christian Contrasted with the Hypocrite

Acts 8:26-40

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If we were all to recount what God used in our lives to bring us to faith in Christ, I'm sure we would hear a variety of means. Perhaps it was your Christian parents. Perhaps it was some crisis that the Lord used (an arrest, marital problems, the death of a loved one, a serious injury or illness, or an overwhelming fear). Perhaps it was a friend who cared enough to explain to you your need of Jesus Christ. Or perhaps it was by the preaching of the gospel in a sermon that you were led by the Spirit to trust alone in Jesus Christ alone.

Regardless of the means that God used, it was the sovereign God who ordained and brought all of those events together in your life and gave you understanding of the gospel and gave you faith to receive it unto your salvation. From beginning to end, salvation is of the Lord. God will use **the leprosy of Naaman**—the Syrian Captain, to see that only the God of Israel can save; or **the wealth and covetousness of Zacchaeus** to reveal his need of Jesus; or **the demon possession of Mary Magdalene** to show how helpless she was to change herself; or **the crucifixion of the thief on the cross** to make clear what his sin deserved; or **the great persecution of Christians** to work in the conscience of a Saul of Tarsus; or **the mother and grandmother of Timothy** to lead him to Christ—all such means God uses in order to draw His elect unto Himself. There are many means, but only one gospel to be believed and only one mediator, Jesus Christ, to be received by faith alone for forgiveness, righteousness, and eternal life (“no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” John 14:6).

Let us consider today this Ethiopian eunuch whom the Lord brought to faith in Jesus Christ by a most extraordinary means. The main points from our text today are the following: (1) God's Plan for One Man (Acts 8:26-29); (2) The Gospel Must Be Understood (Acts 8:30-35); (3) The Gospel Must Be Believed (Acts 8:36-40).

I. **God's Plan for One Man (Acts 8:26-29).**

A. As a result of great persecution by the Sanhedrin and Saul of Tarsus against the gospel of Jesus Christ, the church in Jerusalem was scattered. One of the purposes of God in this persecution was to take the gospel beyond and to extend the church outside the border of Jerusalem (to Judea, to Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the earth, Acts 1:8).

1. Philip, the evangelist, together with the apostles, Peter and John were mightily used of the Lord to bring many Samaritans to Christ through the gospel and mighty works of the Holy Spirit. The same salvation and blessings of the Holy Spirit that were given to the Jews in Jerusalem were given to the Samaritans.

2. Now it was at that time that a tare among the wheat was revealed when Simon, the sorcerer, made a profession of faith and was baptized; and yet he demonstrated that he was a hypocrite, (1) when he sought to buy the free gift of God (his faith was in miracles or outward ordinances and not in Christ), and (2) when he asked Peter to pray that he would be delivered from the curse of God (his faith was a mere fire insurance policy rather than a faith in Christ to set him free from the guilt and condemnation of sin). Peter told Simon to pray to God for forgiveness; but Simon pleads with Peter to pray for him that God's curse would not fall upon him (Rome follows the example of Simon with its many intercessors and mediators rather than the example of Peter).

B. Here was Philip in the midst of multitudes coming to Christ in Samaria, and an angel of the Lord supernaturally tells him to go to the lonely desert where animals were many, but needy souls very few (Acts

8:26). Philip was sent from a great revival to a solitary soul in need.

1. And Philip goes without a word of complaint—no objections as to how much he was needed in Samaria or how people were wonderfully responding to his ministry in droves. When God reveals His will in His Word, it is not the time to debate, to delay, or to procrastinate—it's time to act (The Lord's Prayer).

a. How often we make excuses and procrastinate why we cannot do the revealed will of God right now (Haggai 1:2-6). Our delay to do what we know to be God's revealed will is simply rebellion in our own hearts, and choosing our comfort over His pleasure.

b. Likewise, rebellion in our hearts is revealed in our unwillingness to submit to God's providential will and learn in the school of Christ when events in our lives take an entirely different direction than we had hoped. Jesus opens doors that no man can close, but He at times He closes doors that no man can open (Revelation 3:7). The hardest words for us to utter may be: Not my will, but thine be done (Luke 22:42). But there is no more peaceful place to be than at the foot of the cross offering your life a living sacrifice unto the Lord. Doubts, restlessness, and worry will torment the mind when we resist the Lord, but when we lay it all down at His cross, the battle comes to an end.

2. What is truly amazing in this call of Philip to the wilderness is that God's purpose is for Philip to proclaim the gospel to one single man—an Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:27). God's purposes are not necessarily seen in great numbers and huge followings, but are seen in faithfulness to the Lord even if it is ministering to one single person. Here is a caution not to judge faithfulness upon mere numbers, but rather to judge faithfulness upon loving obedience and submission to the will of God.

C. As we consider this Ethiopian eunuch, we see that he was the treasurer for the kingdom under the queen of Ethiopia (Candace is not her name, but her title—much like Pharaoh was a title). He was returning from Jerusalem where he had worshipped (he was likely a Gentile proselyte to the Jewish religion). And he just "happens" to be reading from Isaiah 53. He is reading about the death of the Suffering Servant—Jesus Christ.

1. Dear ones, there are no accidents here at all. All these events are orchestrated by God in order to bring one man to faith in Jesus Christ. Think about all that God amazingly worked out just so that Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch could be at the same place at the same time and that he would have questions about the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 53. This reminds me of what is written about Jesus going through Samaria (a route that Jews did not take) rather than around Samaria just so He could lead one Samaritan woman to drink by faith of the waters of everlasting life (John 4:4).

2. Beloved, the same is no less true of you and all of the intricacies of God's plan that have brought more events together than you could possibly count in order to set the stage for you to hear the gospel and for you to trust alone in Jesus alone for your justification before God. Though there are so many events that God used in bringing you to Himself, they were just as sovereignly designed to accomplish your salvation as was true of this Ethiopian eunuch. God always gets His man, woman, or child without exception.

II. The Gospel Must Be Understood (Acts 8:30-35).

A. As Philip is walking in this deserted wilderness, the Holy Spirit supernaturally commands him to join himself to the chariot. Philip has to run a bit to catch up, but as he does, he hears the eunuch reading aloud from the Book of Isaiah. When Philip inquires as to whether he understands what he is reading, the eunuch is quick to humble himself by declaring he needs help.

1. He has the Scripture. He has the gospel. He has read the words. But he needs understanding. This is the first aspect of faith: Knowledge or Understanding. There can be no trusting in Christ if there is no understanding of the person and work of Jesus Christ.

a. That is why catechizing our children from their early childhood is so very important (2 Timothy 3:15). And not a catechizing that is only about memorization, and only about filling their heads with information, but a catechizing that is bathed with prayer, and love, and instruction.

b. For as important as is the baptism of our dear covenant children, if we do not teach and instruct them as to what their baptism signifies and seals in regard to the promises of God, and that their baptism makes clear their need to receive these promises by faith in Jesus Christ, their baptism will either be to them inconsequential (meaningless) or will go to the other extreme of being of the essence of salvation—their baptism will be nothing or everything without understanding, which you as parents must impart to them daily.

2. It is also noteworthy that the eunuch being such an important person of authority, humbles himself before this dirty, dusty, commoner (Philip) who is running alongside his chariot; and he lowers himself to seek the help of Philip in order to gain light, rather than leaning upon his own pride and self-sufficiency and remaining in darkness.

a. Dear ones, a person who is too proud to admit he/she needs help in understanding the gospel from the Lord and from those sent by the Lord is one who will walk in darkness until he/she confesses his/her ignorance. That is also another very hard thing for sinners (like us) to confess as well (especially to our spouses or to our children, but especially to God).

b. Another characteristic of a Christian is a hungering and thirsting for an understanding of God's truth and a hungering and thirsting to walk in the truth one has understood from Scripture. Something is wrong if you are content to live in ignorance of your great and mighty God and to live in ignorance of your duty to Him and to your fellow man. A hypocrite (like Simon, the sorcerer) will be content to live in ignorance of God's revealed and not practice God's will because what is important to the hypocrite are mere outward forms and impressing others. The Christian is one who is characterized by his/her desire TO GROW in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18).

B. Notice the gospel is read by the Ethiopian eunuch from the Old Testament Scriptures in Isaiah 53:7-8 (in fact the good news of Jesus Christ is revealed in the previous chapter, Isaiah 52:13-15).

1. The Old Covenant and all its ceremonies looked forward to fulfillment of all those types and shadows in the coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. The gospel is the same constitution in the Old Covenant and the New Covenant—One Covenant of Grace—One gospel of salvation. Those who were saved in the Old Testament were saved by faith alone in the coming Messiah alone, who would once and for all take away their sins. This is the very passage that Philip begins to expound to the eunuch.

2. Isaiah 53 is devoted to the gospel of Jesus Christ and the Suffering Servant—the Messiah (approximately 700 years before coming of Jesus). Philip preached Jesus as the fulfillment and realization of this passage to the eunuch—His incarnation, His sinless life, His perfect suffering and death for His people, His burial among the rich, His resurrection, and His exaltation.

C. Though we are told in 1 John 2:27 that the anointing of the Holy Spirit has been given to those who believe and that “ye need not that any man teach you”, let's be clear that this is not a warrant for every Christian to be his own minister or teacher, or a warrant to make the ministry of Jesus Christ to be useless and vain.

1. Even though this great blessing of the Holy Spirit's teaching the New Covenant believer is true, the Lord Jesus never intended that His people be without a called, trained, and ordained ministry to give further light and understanding of the gospel and of Christ's doctrine—otherwise Jesus would not have commissioned His apostles to teach whatsoever Christ commanded, and the apostles would not have ordained pastors and teachers to instruct and lead the flock of Jesus Christ (Ephesians 4:11-15—extraordinary offices and ordinary offices).

2. Even though Philip was an ambassador of Jesus the Messiah, he did not exalt himself before the eunuch. He was simply the servant of Jesus Christ, doing His bidding. The gospel is not about me (or any other minister), it is about Jesus Christ. And the more I get in the way, the less of Jesus that will be seen. He must increase, and I must decrease. When we forget as ministers that we are simply to be “voices” for the Lord (not celebrities for ourselves), we will make the ministry and the gospel more and more about money, power, and fame.

III. The Gospel Must Be Believed (Acts 8:36-40).

A. Simon, the sorcerer, believed and was baptized (Acts 8:13), and yet he was a hypocrite within the Visible Church—a tare among the wheat. What distinguishes the eunuch’s saving faith from that of Simon’s pretense to saving faith?

1. It is clear that the eunuch desired and received knowledge of the gospel. He was already a powerful man, but humbled himself to learn of the Suffering Servant from the Old Testament Scriptures. Simon’s pretense to saving faith was fixed upon the miracles and power and ways of making his own name great and prosperous.

2. It is also clear that the eunuch received as true what was declared concerning Jesus being the Suffering Servant, and that he also rested in Jesus Christ, as his own Savior from sin. That was the thrust of Isaiah 53. That was his confession in Acts 8:37: “I believe that Jesus (Jehovah saves from the guilt, the power, and the condemnation of sin) Christ (the anointed Messiah of God—Prophet, Priest, and King) is the Son of God (the Second Person of the Holy Trinity).” This was a true confession of his faith in Jesus Christ alone without works (Acts 16:31).

3. That, dear ones, is the simplicity of the gospel—no payment, no bribes, no qualifications—just faith alone in Jesus Christ alone to save you from your sins on the basis of his sacrifice and obedience. Simon, the sorcerer, was trusting in Jesus plus works (miracles or outward ordinances) to save him. This is the mere pretense of saving faith. The eunuch was trusting alone in Jesus Christ alone to save Him.

B. What were the fruits of the eunuch’s saving faith? (1) Obedience—he desired baptism (Acts 8:36-38); and (2) joy—he was rejoicing in his salvation (Acts 8:39).

1. Obedience. Where there is no desire to walk in the commandments of the Lord, where there is no hungering and thirsting to grow in bearing the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23), there should be serious examination as to whether there is the life of Jesus Christ in such a person. For the response of saving faith is, “I want to show my love for such a Savior by obeying Him.” The eunuch understood from Philip that it was the commandment of the Lord to be baptized.

a. Baptists have made this a proof text for administering baptism by immersion—plunging the whole person beneath the water. For it says, “they went down into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized them” (Acts 8:38); “And when they were come up out of the water” (Acts 8:39). But if the going “down into the water” and the coming up out of the water” refer to immersion, then not only was the eunuch immersed, but so was Philip. We know from historical records that there were no bodies of water deep enough in this desert in which to immerse a person, but there was enough water to wade out into it, and to take some of it with the hand to sprinkle or pour upon the head of the eunuch. Where might the eunuch have read about baptism and Philip taught about Christ’s command to be baptized: Isaiah 52:13-15 (which also spoke of the Suffering Servant and the fact that He would “sprinkle” the nations—the same word used throughout the Old Testament for the ceremonial baptisms of cleansing performed by the priests of the Old Testament—Jesus the greater Priest would sprinkle the Gentiles who come to Him by the New Covenant sprinkling of baptism).

b. When did the Ethiopian eunuch become a member of the Visible Church? When he believed, as confirmed by the outward sign of entrance into the Visible Church—baptism. He was a member of the Visible Church even before there was an organized body of believers with a minister to lead them. As the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (25:2) accurately summarizes the teaching of Scripture: “The visible church... consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion, together with their children....” It is a great blessing to have a settled church with ministers, elders, preaching, sacraments, church government, and church discipline, but those are not the essence (or being) of the church, but are the well-being of the church. The Ethiopian eunuch, departed from Philip, and did not return to Ethiopia outside the Visible Church, and neither does anyone throughout the world who professes the true religion.

2. As I close, let us not overlook the second fruit of the eunuch’s faith: joy. Faith produces thanksgiving which produces joy. Where there is not a thankful heart, there will not be a joyful heart. Dear ones, when you run out of things for which to be thankful, you can then excuse yourself from rejoicing in the Lord for all that you have received. Until then, be daily recounting the free gifts of the Lord to you and rejoicing in them. To do otherwise is to live as an unbeliever. The joy of the Lord is your strength!

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