

LIVING HOPE
STUDY GUIDE:
BOOK OF ACTS

Acts 8:1-8, 26-40

Philip & the Ethiopian

THE CHURCH — EVER CHANGING



I: INTRODUCTION

Many volumes are written defining or describing what the church of Jesus Christ is. We could say: “a people called, set apart and sent by the Holy Spirit”. Or we could say, we are a people set apart consecrated and commissioned. Some would likely call the church a community of love and caring, committed to prayer and ministry in the name of Jesus. We could be called a people empowered by the Holy Spirit, redeemed by Jesus Christ, and living out the truth of God’s word.

In Acts we read of many situations where new believers are confronted with amazing changes in the way God builds His church. Jesus came for Jews and Gentiles alike. God’s people at that time were called to open their hearts to the holy Spirits leading as people from all nations, all cultures, all geographic areas were called to be in the Kingdom of God. There is nothing exclusive about salvation in Jesus Christ.

“For God so loved the world that he gave His one and only Son, that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.” John 3: 16

II: PHILIP AND THE ETHIOPIAN

The story of Philip and the Ethiopian illustrates the extent of God’s plan of salvation for the Gentiles. Only two of the seven lay people chosen in the early church, for their wisdom, gifts and willingness to serve are expanded on – Stephen and Philip. Stephen worked mostly in Jerusalem. Due to wide persecution of the Church after the stoning of Stephen many believers fled Jerusalem including Philip, who became the evangelist in Samaria.

It is interesting to note the choice of Samaria since the Samaritans and the Jews hated each other and very little contact occurred between them. The people of Samaria were hungry for the Gospel and Philip’s ministry there resulted in many converts, -- people willing to believe in Jesus Christ and live for Him. Philip cast out evil spirits, healed the sick and brought joy to the area. This gospel message for the people of Samaria was an amazing gift from a Jewish missionary to a “despised” people. In some ways it was one of the first stories of salvation outside of God’s people, the Jews. “The ends of the earth” were not in sight, but the first steps had been taken.

From a highly populated area and a successful ministry, God called Philip to a desert road in Gaza, south of Jerusalem, to one man from Ethiopia. We do not know his name, but we know he was a eunuch and an important “Minister of Finance” to the Queen of Ethiopia. We also know that he acknowledged God, was a student of the Old Testament and travelled many days to find experts who could explain what he had learned from the word of God. He was seeking and had so many questions.

God said “Go” and Philip went. It was a big change for Philip from Samaria to Gaza. Meeting up with a significant official from Ethiopia was also highly unusual, especially because it was at God’s command. Philip joined the official in his carriage and together they read the description of Jesus in Isaiah 53:7.

“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.”

The Ethiopian struggled with the words and so desperately wanted to know who it was that the prophet Isaiah described there. Slowly re-read Isaiah 53 and consider what the Holy Spirit was doing in the heart of the Ethiopian.

The two men spent some time together travelling down the road as Philip shared the life changing story of salvation to the Gentile from a foreign land. Note that the heart of the Ethiopian had been prepared by the Holy Spirit. We cannot convert anyone, only God, the Holy Spirit can accomplish that. We are called to be the ones who share the good news of Jesus Christ with anyone God places in our path. Mission work is not a one-time event limited to opportunity or designated places. Sharing the gospel is something we are called to as we live each day. It is a 24/7 activity for God’s people.

The eunuch from Ethiopia was baptized, something which would have amazed Philip. Eunuchs were not allowed in the temple. This acceptance of another Gentile into the Church of Jesus Christ was a miracle for the Christian Jews and a change that only the Savior of the world could accomplish. God used Philip to accomplish His purposes. The Ethiopian official went on his way rejoicing as his new life in Jesus Christ claimed his heart. He became an ambassador for Jesus Christ in Northern Africa. Philip was taken elsewhere by the Holy Spirit. His work on the Gaza road was done.

1. Notice how Philip spoke about Jesus Christ, not about religion or the church. He listened, used God’s word and then the Holy Spirit accomplished His work in the Ethiopian. Can you think of times when God sent someone for you to bless and keep you focused on ministry in His kingdom?

2. Why can it be easier to send missionaries to faraway lands than invite those who are different or social outcasts into our lives?

3. Who, in your life, needs to hear the story of Jesus from you?

4. Refugee programs, food banks, extreme weather shelters, programs for the homeless, breakfast programs and many other works of outreach are happening in our city. When you think of Living Hope Church, what do we do to reach out to those who are in need? In need of the gospel?

5. How do you, despite the pandemic, grow in becoming in tune with the Holy Spirit?