



“Why Stop the Chariot?”

‘Jesus Saves’ Series

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We’re in the midst of our series, *Jesus Saves*, chronicling the spread of the gospel in **the Book of Acts** as the apostles and disciples of the first century began carrying out the great commission of Christ. In our study last week, we followed Philip to the city of Samaria in **Acts 8** where we met Simon and the other converts that Philip made there. When the church was firmly established in that city, Philip was suddenly called away to the south where God had set up a very important encounter for him.

Acts 8:26-39 “Now an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, saying, “Arise and go toward the south along the road which goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” This is desert. So he arose and went. And behold, a man of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under Candace the queen of the Ethiopians, who had charge of all her treasury, and had come to Jerusalem to worship, was returning. And sitting in his chariot, he was reading Isaiah the prophet. Then the Spirit said to Philip, “Go near and overtake this chariot.” So Philip ran to him, and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, “Do you understand what you are reading?” And he said, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” And he asked Philip to come up and sit with him. The place in the Scripture which he read was this: “He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; And as a lamb before its shearer is silent, So He opened not His mouth. In His humiliation His justice was taken away, And who will declare His generation? For His life is taken from the earth.” So the eunuch answered Philip and said, “I ask you, of whom does the prophet say this, of himself or of some other man?” Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him. Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, “See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?” Then 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.” So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him. Now when they came up out of the water,

the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing."

Well, this is a wonderful scene that unfolds alongside the road between Jerusalem and Gaza. There is much we can learn about how the gospel was spread in the first century and how it continues to save people today. I want to pose a question today as the title of our study: Why stop the chariot? This man heard the gospel and believed, which is what many say is all one must do. But something he heard as he went down the road also demanded his immediate attention. So, why did he stop the chariot?

The work of the early church in Jerusalem has now begun to spread to other places after the dispersion of the Jerusalem church due to persecution. Last week, we traveled with the evangelist, Philip, to the city of Samaria, north of Jerusalem, and we saw a city turn to the Lord and obey the gospel. After Philip and then Peter and John fully established the church in that city, suddenly Philip is whisked away on a special mission from heaven. The story that unfolds for us is right here in the last half of **Acts 8**. The story involves a heavenly mission and a man in whom Christ has a very special interest at this time, and it involves the message that Christ had commissioned His apostles and the early church to preach that now, soul by soul, city by city, and nation by nation is spreading throughout the earth. Let's remember now that these events that we're reading about in **the Book of Acts** show us how the apostles and the early church carried out the great commission given to them by Jesus:

Matthew 28:19-20 **"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."**
Amen."

Mark states it this way:

Mark 16:15-16 **"And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.""**

This pattern of gospel preaching and gospel obedience plays out again and again throughout **the Book of Acts** and it's going to happen again along a rural road somewhere outside of Jerusalem here in our story.

First of all, let's look at the mission that the Lord sent Philip on after he has been in the city of Samaria. The record tells us that both an angel and the Holy Spirit are involved in bringing all of the parts together for this man's salvation. Look at what happens.

Acts 8:26-30 **"Now an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, saying, "Arise and go toward the south along the road which goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." This is desert. So he arose and went. And behold, a man of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under Candace the queen of the Ethiopians, who had charge of all her treasury, and had come to Jerusalem to worship, was returning. And sitting in his chariot, he was reading Isaiah the prophet. Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go near and overtake this chariot." So Philip ran to him, and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, "Do you understand what you are reading?""**

People today get excited about angels and what they suppose their work to be, as well as the role of the Holy Spirit and what role He plays in redemption. Those certainly play an essential part in this case, but pay special attention to what part they played. It's very important. The Holy Spirit is, of course, involved in the salvation of all people of all time because, first of all, He revealed the word of Christ to the apostles and confirmed that He had done so through the signs and wonders that the apostles and prophets of the first century were empowered to perform. We have this book today, the New Testament, which reveals Christ and His will to us because of and through the work of the Holy Spirit in those men in that age of time. This is the product of the Spirit and we are convicted of our sins and we learn of Jesus and what to do to be saved by what the Spirit has expressly said and confirmed within the New Testament.

But, in this case, we find the Holy Spirit providing Philip the preacher with some guidance once he reaches this man. He points the man out and tells Philip what to do in order to get to him to teach the gospel to him. It all began with an angel coming to Philip and instructing him to leave Samaria and go to this road between Jerusalem and Gaza. Why did the angel do this? Why was that necessary? Because God was orchestrating this meeting where Philip could preach the gospel to this man who was now ready to hear it. He had such a heart that he would be open to hearing it. The providence of God has always been an amazing thing, all throughout the history of God's people recorded in the scriptures. It's amazing to see how it unfolds in this story.

The city of Samaria was quite a long way north of Jerusalem, about halfway to the Sea of Galilee. The road to which the angel sent Philip ran to the southwest of Jerusalem, out of Judea, down into the country once occupied by the Philistines and into the city of Gaza along the Mediterranean coast. This is the route that this man would be taking when he left Jerusalem going back down to the African continent to the country of Ethiopia, where he was a government official. Think about the incredible timing as the angel sent Philip on this mission. At the exact point in time that it would take for him to arrive and intercept this man riding along the road, who at that very moment would be reading a scroll of **Isaiah**—precisely, what we know as **Isaiah 53**—which specifically prophesies about Jesus and His death.

So, given where Samaria was (to the north), Philip would've had to leave Samaria at least a day before this man even left the city of Jerusalem, where he had been worshipping. It's a wonderful demonstration of the foreknowledge and providence of God and how He brought it all together. Now, we have no idea today, nor should we speculate about things that God's word does not tell us about. We have no idea how God providentially involves Himself in the affairs of man today, though I have to believe that God IS providentially involved in our lives and in the affairs of the world. But we don't know *how* He carries those things out; we just have faith that He does.

We DO know that in this case and in other cases in **the Book of Acts** in that age of time, God worked through these unique revelations to bring preachers in contact with seeking sinners. Two questions: 1) Why was that necessary then? And 2) Is our situation any different today? Well, yes, it was necessary then and yes, our situation is different today. Remember that this Ethiopian man had no way of learning about Jesus unless someone told him about Jesus. Today, we have the written and completed revelation of Christ in the form of the New Testament. Not I nor any other preacher are going around preaching some revelation that God has given to us. We're preaching THIS revelation that was given to all of us a long time ago.

However, in that time, it was different. The word had not yet been written. Any person can learn of Christ today by either reading the New Testament or hearing someone preach the New Testament. It wasn't that way as the events of **Acts** unfold. All this man had was the Old Testament, therefore he did not have the revelation of *who* the Old Testament was prophesying and speaking about. Today, the New Testament is the Old Testament fulfilled. So, we're living in a different circumstance than he was back then when the gospel was in men and not yet in the book, the new covenant.

Well, what did the angel and the Spirit do in this case? Do we read where the angel appeared to the sinner? No, he appeared to Philip the preacher. Did the angel preach to the Ethiopian nobleman or visit him in some great supernatural transaction and this man left saved? No, there's nothing like that. There aren't any bright lights, visions, or voices. There is nothing here about any special operation of the Holy Spirit on the mind or heart of the eunuch. What the angel and the Spirit DID DO was to orchestrate Philip getting to the eunuch so that he would have the opportunity to hear and obey the gospel and be saved.

II Corinthians 4:7 "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels (that is, mankind), that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us."

Neither angels nor any other heavenly being ever appeared to any sinner telling them what to do to be saved so far as we read in the Bible. Those who claim that they have had some sort of vision or special revelation that resulted in their salvation are claiming something that even this account in **Acts 8** does not claim or even suggest. One must hear, believe, and obey the gospel to be saved. And whatever angels were doing in the first century or any other time to facilitate those opportunities for inspired men to reach seeking sinners does not change the fact that every person who was saved then and every person saved today is only saved after hearing or reading the gospel and believing and obeying it.

So, the circumstances that we read in **the Book of Acts** that led to the conversion of people did just that: they led to people hearing and obeying the gospel. They didn't circumvent or replace the hearing and obeying of the gospel; they facilitated it. Today, we simply preach the New Testament. People have access to the New Testament and can learn what to do to be saved. Angels are not in the preaching business and they've never been in the gospel-preaching business. God entrusted that to people, you see.

Now, consider the man. We refer to him as the Ethiopian eunuch, but the Bible goes even further, telling us that he was the queen's treasurer in that land. He was a dignitary, in other words. It appears that he was a Jew, either by birth or he was a proselyte who was living in Ethiopia at this time. The Bible indicates that he made a long and difficult journey to Jerusalem to worship God, according to the instructions of the law of Moses. Think about this: as the crow flies, that was at least a 1,500 mile trip. But he didn't fly. He rode by chariot, so he would've had to take the longer land route, which would've been well over 2,000 miles--in a chariot. Someone estimated that if he traveled 30 miles a day, it would've taken him a total of perhaps 4 months to make the trip coming and going! Why did he do that? He wasn't on official business of the queen. He was on a personal pilgrimage to worship God. Isn't it interesting that this man of great respect, trust, honor, and such piety and religious devoutness who would make a month's long journey of thousands of miles to worship God—that he is not even considered saved in the eyes of God? That's because no person can be saved without hearing, believing, and obeying Jesus Christ, as we shall now see.

When Philip reached the Gaza road at exactly the right moment, the Spirit instructed him to go and catch up with the chariot in which this nobleman was riding. At that very moment, he was reading from the scroll of **Isaiah**, what we know as **chapter 53**. The eunuch was reading aloud, and when Philip caught up with him and heard what he was reading, it gave him the perfect opening to approach the man by asking, *"Do you understand what you're reading?"*

Acts 8:30-31 **"So Philip ran to him, and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, "Do you understand what you are reading?" And he said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?"**

He was reading a prophecy about Jesus, one of the greatest prophecies in the Old Testament about Jesus and His death. But he didn't know who Jesus was and he didn't know who fulfilled that prophecy or if it *had* been fulfilled. This brings us to the message that this man now hears. That is, the gospel message, and that's the only message that saves anybody, then or now. Philip gets up in the chariot with him and the Bible says this:

Acts 8:35 **"Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him."**

Friend, I want to give you a word of caution: beware of any so-called preacher who doesn't *begin with the scripture*. Notice that he didn't begin with an explanation and then proceed to scripture to back-up his explanation. He began with the scripture, then proceeded to the explanation of that scripture. And he showed him that the Messiah who was promised was Jesus. He told him who Jesus was and how He fulfilled this prophecy. There is no doubt whatsoever that Philip used this wonderful prophecy of Isaiah to teach the eunuch about how Jesus died for our sins and that He was buried and rose again the third day because, after all, that IS the gospel.

I Corinthians 15:1-4 **"Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you--unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures,"**

But it's also obvious that when the Bible says that *he preached Jesus unto him* that he also told him what Jesus requires because look at his response.

Acts 8:36 **"Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, "See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?""**

How many preachers today tell us that baptism is a 'church ordinance' for new Christians and not a part of the transaction of salvation? Well, almost all of them. But here, when Philip preached Jesus to this man, there was obviously something included about the Lord's command to be baptized, and it was an urgent, immediate thing because this man sees a pool of water alongside the road and he asks why couldn't he be baptized right then. If Philip didn't preach baptism to him as he preached Christ to him, how did he know he needed to be baptized? Because Jesus said to the apostles (and Philip is operating under this commission), **"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved."** (Mark 16:16)

Notice how Philip answers. He doesn't correct the man. He doesn't scold him for thinking that baptism is such an urgent thing. He merely places one condition on it.

Acts 8:37 "Then 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."

What does this tell us about infant baptism and the Catholic doctrine of baptismal regeneration? The Bible teaches that a person who believes is regenerated at the time of baptism (**Titus 3:5**), but you see, that regeneration is on the basis of that person's faith that is exercised in baptism. First of all, sprinkling isn't baptism according to the Bible. Immersion is. That's what the word means. Second, baptizing a person who either doesn't have the ability to believe or refuses to believe does them no good whatsoever. We are saved by grace through faith, Paul said, and that faith is what includes and necessitates obedience to the command of Christ to be baptized.

Philip says, *If you believe, you may.* And this eunuch utters the most wonderful words that can ever fall from human lips. "***I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.***" That says it all.

Acts 8:38 So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him."

Predicated upon the faith that he confessed, he ordered the chariot to stop right there and Philip baptized him alongside the road. Now, let's ask the question, why stop the chariot? If baptism is merely an ordinance of the church for new converts, why the urgency to take care of that matter right then and there at the very moment this man confessed his belief? If baptism is merely an outward sign of an inward grace as our religious neighbors suggest, why stop the chariot? Why not wait until he returned home? Like what usually happens in these big crusades we've seen through the years on television. Did you ever see any of the big crusade preachers in these large stadiums baptizing people there when they called upon them to place their faith in Christ? No, because they don't believe and preach what the Bible says about baptism. That's why.

Why stop the chariot? The Bible gives us the answer to that. Peter said on the Day of Pentecost in **Acts 2:38**, "***Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins...***" Why would this man want to continue down the road without his sins forgiven now that he's learned that they can be? He didn't, that's why he stopped the chariot.

Galatians 3:27 "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ."

Why would this man want to continue down the road still outside of Christ? He didn't, that's why he stopped the chariot. Ananias asked this of Saul:

Acts 22:16 "And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord."

Why would this man who has now learned about Christ and the blood that He shed which can wash his sins away want to continue down the road one minute longer without having his sins washed away? He didn't, that's why he stopped the chariot.

I Peter 3:21 "There is also an antitype which now saves us--baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,"

Well, why would this man who now wants to be saved continue down the road for one mile with a guilty and sin-laden conscience? He didn't, that's why he stopped the chariot. And he was baptized that very hour before he went on his way.

Acts 8:39-40 "Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing. But Philip was found at Azotus. And passing through, he preached in all the cities till he came to Caesarea."

Philip baptized him and God dispatched the preacher someplace else, and the eunuch went on his way rejoicing. And, friend, if you believe the gospel, will turn from your sins, confess your belief, and be baptized in water like the eunuch was, you can go on your way in life rejoicing, too. Maybe you need to stop the chariot today, right now, and do what the Lord commands you to do, be saved, and go on your way rejoicing.

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