

April 29, 2018 Fundamental Principles Acts 8:26-39

I was reading my Bible this past week and I stumbled on to the 8th chapter of the Book of Acts. I say, stumbled. What I mean is, I did not set out to read a particular chapter or a specific verse. What caught my eye was a heading. These headings were not part of the original manuscripts. They have been added by translators and editors of Bibles in an attempt to give us a heads up when we are looking for passages. These headings are like the headlines over newspaper articles. They tell us something of what we are going to read about in the passage below...before we read the passage.

Philip, was one of the original 12 disciples of Jesus. Following the martyrdom of Stephen, it became obvious, the followers of Jesus were in danger in Jerusalem. The killing of Stephen had the affect of scattering the followers of Jesus. Philip went to Samaria. It was out of Jerusalem to be sure, but it was also not a major distance away...several days of walking. The followers of Jesus were thus scattered to the 4 winds and every one of them, every where they went told the story of what Jesus had done and taught, what God had given the world, in HIS precious Son, our Saviour and Lord.

When I read the portion about Philip's meeting with the Ethiopian, I found myself making notes. And then I recognized that the notes I was making amounted to a set of Principles concerning faith in Jesus, faith in God the Father and

God the Holy Spirit. In light of the tragedy in Humboldt, and the deaths on Young Street in Toronto, it seemed to me there was wisdom here that should be shared. My suggestion to you is this: we may well find ourselves finding it difficult to make sense of what happens in the world around us...in our nation. And in the world beyond Canada. To me these fundamental principles cast light in a time when we may be troubled by what we observe, and seek to understand.

The first principle is key. In verse 26 we are told that the angel of the Lord led Philip to travel the road from Jerusalem to Gaza. It is a road in the desert. It is not a comfortable place to be. It is a lonely place to be. It can be a dangerous place to be. But the angel of the Lord led Philip to that road and led him in his journey upon it. It is easy for us to lose sight of the fact that our adventures, our travels do not take place by chance. It is not "luck" ...good or bad...that has brought us to where we are. We are not here by the spin of the roulette wheel or the roll of the dice. The Lord has led us into our current circumstances. We are here for a reason. We are pursuing our destiny in the hands of the gracious and loving Lord who redeems.

I must tell you, when I was diagnosed with cancer 3 years ago, my reaction was very much like, "Lord, this is a blessing I would rather not receive." There were a number of moments in my unfolding treatment, when I was puzzled as to how this could possibly fit into God's gracious plan...and yet I

must tell you...there were blessings in the midst of the details of the journey. As an old hymn rightly says, "God leads HIS dear children along." The challenge we always face is to figure out how we can serve God and those whom HE places on our pathway in the midst of our circumstances. Philip was led to this dangerous road. The Lord leads you and I into the paths on which we find ourselves.

Principle # 2. The Ethiopian Eunuch whom Philip met was not just a stranger. He was an important official in the administration of Queen Candace of Ethiopia. He was in charge of the Treasury Department of Ethiopia. He had been to Jerusalem to worship we are told, probably to celebrate the Passover. In other words he was an Ethiopian Jew. When Philip meets the man he is reading Scripture...in fact he is reading Isaiah 53. This second principle spins off the 1st. If the first was God leads us into the circumstances in which we find ourselves, then the 2nd is, "there is no such thing as a meeting by chance." Down the road, God gives to Philip the possibility of sending the Gospel concerning Jesus Christ to the court of Candace the Queen of Ethiopia and therefore sending the Gospel to that nation. Here on this lonely road in the desert, Philip meets a man he was destined to meet, for a reason that is singularly important. We do not meet others by chance.

Principle # 3. The Ethiopian is reading Isaiah 53. He is reading one of the key prophecies about the Messiah...the portrait of the suffering servant. Philip understands that

passage in light of what has happened in Jerusalem during the recent Passover Celebrations. Philip asks the right question. “Do you understand what you are reading.” Not where are you going or how your holiday in Jerusalem. The 3rd Principle is this. Philip takes his cue from what the Ethiopian is doing. Not where the man has been. He is not just making polite conversation, or talking about the weather. If this conversation is about destiny...Philip focuses it on the Ethiopian not himself.

Principle #4. The Ethiopian answers the question directly and intelligently. His frustration bubbles out. “How can I, unless someone explains it to me.” A Jew speaks to a Jew and he says, I need a rabbi. Professional help! Here is the point. The Ethiopian is saying, ‘I need help.’ In so doing he confirms that this is not a chance meeting. Philip is quick to offer assistance.

Now, if you are like me, you could probably quickly respond, well that sort of thing never happens to me. I have never met someone casually reading the Bible on a public road who wanted help to understand it. That has never happened to me either. But I will tell you what does happen to me all the time. In the midst of what would seem to be casual conversations, people tend to tell me they are in need of assistance. That is what the Ethiopian did. Principle # 4...he needs a rabbi.

Principle # 5 is Philip offers to be that rabbi. This is a direct quotation. “Philip began with those very verses from Isaiah 53 and told him the good news concerning Jesus.” What

made the conversation meaningful for both Philip and the Ethiopian is that the Ethiopian had expressed his need and Philip was willing to serve God and the Ethiopian by meeting that need.

One of my heroes in the 20th century church is the late Rev. Dr. Robert Schuller. He was the founding minister of Garden Grove Community Church in Garden Grove, in Orange County in the state of California. If that name does not ring a bell, you may remember him as the minister who led the effort to build The Crystal Cathedral, on the 10 acre site of Garden Grove Church. He spent the balance of his life ministering approximately a mile from Disneyland. When he received new members into the church (over his years of ministry it grew from 0 to 16,000 members) he asked each new member to do one thing: find a need in someone else's life and fill that need. In other words? Be God's servant to the people to whom God leads you, in the strange circumstances in which HE places you, in the time HE chooses.

That is precisely what this odd little story in the Book of Acts is all about.

Let us pray;

Lord grant us the faith to understand we are where you have called us to be. Grant us the faith to accept that the people you bring into our lives you have brought to us, and us to them for your unique and loving reasons. Grant us the faith and the patience to learn what they need. Grant us the faith to

do what we are able to do to provide the answer to that need.
Grant us the faith that your purpose will be met if we try to be
a servant to them and to YOU.

In Jesus name we pray. Amen