

**Dead to Sin but Alive to Christ: by Graham Mol**

An angel of the Lord spoke to Philip: "Get up and go south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." (This is the desert road) So he got up and went. There was an Ethiopian man, a eunuch and high official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of her entire treasury. He had come to worship in Jerusalem and was sitting in his chariot on his way home, reading the prophet Isaiah aloud. (Acts 8:26-39 CSB)

Philip is one of Jesus' apostles. God had been working powerfully through him as he preached in Samaria, miracles had accompanied his message and many people had believed.

The Ethiopian eunuch, a high up official, had come to worship in Jerusalem. He had come searching for God. Maybe he was responding to the Lord's word through Isaiah:

No foreigner who has joined himself to the LORD should say,  
"The LORD will exclude me from His people,"  
and the eunuch should not say,  
"Look, I am a dried-up tree."

For the LORD says this:

"For the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths,  
and choose what pleases me,  
and hold firmly to my covenant,  
I will give them, in my house and within my walls,  
a memorial and a name better than sons and daughters.

[\*] I will give each of them an everlasting name  
that will never be cut off.

As for the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD  
to minister to Him, to love the name of the Lord,  
and to become His servants—

all who keep the Sabbath without desecrating it  
and who hold firmly to my covenant—

I will bring them to my holy mountain  
and let them rejoice in my house of prayer.

Their burnt offerings and sacrifices  
will be acceptable on my altar,  
for my house will be called a house of prayer  
for all nations." (Isaiah 56:3-6)

The Spirit told Philip, "Go and join that chariot." When Philip ran up to it, he heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, "Do you understand what you're reading?" "How can I," he said, "unless someone guides me?" So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. (Acts 8:29-31)

I was reading an article this week about the number of non-Christians who are spiritually open. The Barna group in USA conduct surveys and they found that 58% of non-Christians believe in God or a higher power. This percentage goes up to 87% of those who are spiritually open (they believe that there is more to life than the physical and regard spirituality as important).

There are many people like the Ethiopian official, searching. But they need guidance to the truth. They need someone to come alongside them and show them the Gospel, to teach them what it means. Not necessarily as a lesson, but through leading by example – living for Jesus aware of those searching around us. Following the prompting of the Holy Spirit, being aware of opportunities to "climb into the chariot" and journey with that person.

Now the Scripture passage he was reading was this:

He was led like a sheep to the slaughter,  
and as a lamb is silent before its shearer,  
so He does not open His mouth.

In His humiliation justice was denied Him.

Who will describe His generation?

For his life is taken from the earth.

The eunuch said to Philip, "I ask you, who is the prophet saying this about – himself or someone else?" Philip proceeded to tell him the good news about Jesus, beginning with that Scripture. (8:32-35)

The passage of Scripture comes from Isaiah 53 that speaks about the Servant of the Lord, that is, Jesus. Philip began with this Scripture to tell the Ethiopian about Jesus the one who fulfilled this prophecy. He would have highlighted parts of the Scripture like these verses:

Isaiah 53:4-6

Surely He took up our pain  
and bore our suffering,  
yet we considered Him punished by God,  
stricken by Him, and afflicted.  
But He was pierced for our transgressions,  
He was crushed for our iniquities;  
the punishment that brought us peace was on Him,  
and by His wounds we are healed.  
We all, like sheep, have gone astray,  
each of us has turned to our own way;  
and the LORD has laid on Him  
the iniquity of us all.

Jesus, the Son of God, came to this earth, taking on our pain and suffering. For our sake He was nailed to the cross, an innocent man dying a criminal's death taking on our sin. Because we like sheep have all gone astray, we have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. The penalty of that sin – death – was laid upon Him. He took the punishment so that we could have peace with God. By His wounds we are healed, not merely physically but our sin-sick souls are made well again. In Jesus we have life – life to the full. Eternal life in His presence.

All we need to do is trust in the saving grace of Jesus. Accept His sacrifice on our behalf and believe in Him. Not just believing that He exists but that in Him is the power to save us from our sin. Only He can make us well, make us whole. For He did not remain in the grave, He rose again, conquering death and sin.

Romans 8:10-11

Now if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit gives life because of righteousness. And if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead lives in you, then He who raised Christ from the dead will also bring your mortal bodies to life through His Spirit who lives in you.

The Ethiopian accepted this truth and put his faith in Jesus. One of the signs or practices to indicate, to declare, that you had accepted Jesus was to be baptised. Baptism in water represented one's baptism in Christ.

Romans 6:1-11

What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried

with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin— because anyone who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Before his meeting with the Ethiopian, Philip had been sharing the Gospel in Samaria. As people had believed in the message they were baptised. This baptism represented their death to sin and new life in Christ. It was an outward sign of the inward change in their lives. It was a way of showing that they no longer lived for themselves but lived for Jesus – the Son of God – their Saviour. The Ethiopian, having accepted Christ as His Saviour, wanted to do the same:

As they were traveling down the road, they came to some water. The eunuch said, “Look, there’s water. What would keep me from being baptised?” So he ordered the chariot to stop, and both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptised him. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him any longer but went on his way rejoicing. (8:36-39)

What would keep you from being baptised?

Let me be clear, being baptised in water is not a requirement for salvation. Faith in Jesus is. The thief of the cross did not get a chance to be baptised in water but because He placed his faith in Jesus, He received eternal life and was in Paradise with God that very day. But for thousands of believers who have placed their faith in Jesus, baptism has been an act of obedience. As they plunged beneath the water – representing their death to their old life of sin – and rose up out of the water – representing their new life in Christ. For them baptism was a way of testifying about the work God has done in their hearts. It was a way to show the world that they were born again. No longer I that live but Christ who lives in me!

Maybe you placed your faith in Jesus years ago but you’d like to make a public declaration of that truth in your life. Maybe the Holy Spirit is moving in your heart right now, calling you to accept God’s gift of grace to welcome Jesus as your Lord and Saviour.

What would keep you from being baptised?