

## God's Sovereign Grace At Work (Acts 8:37)

On Thursday evenings we are studying God's plan for the nations, and we were looking at Egypt. In the southern part of that country along the River Nile extending into northern Sudan is a region known as Nubia. That is the area from where the Ethiopian eunuch in the New Testament came.

This Biblical Ethiopia was a very lush region, with an abundance of natural resources. Further back, in Old Testament times it was actually known as Cush, and you will remember Cush was the eldest son of Ham who was cursed by his father Noah. It was from this setting the Ethiopian eunuch made his way to worship in the temple in Jerusalem.

This is the account of how a man met God and how his life was changed. ... Notice how God sent an angel to fetch Philip. Why did he not send the angel to the Ethiopian eunuch? He did not send the angel because Christ did not give the great commission to the angels, He gave it to His disciples, His people. ... And secondly, angels have never personally experienced God's saving grace, and therefore they cannot bear personal witness of what it means to be saved.

Here, God wonderfully directed His servant Philip to this person at the right time. Our study this evening is all about God's grace and how He has made it available for the salvation of men and women, boys and girls.

If you are not saved, - if you don't know the Lord Jesus as your Saviour and Friend, - you listen to how good God saved this person who Philip met in the desert. First of all, the man was ...

### **A FOREIGNER TO GOD'S GRACE**

*"a man of Ethiopia", v.27*

I don't know if you would have noticed it or not at first glance. ... He had his Bible. He had travelled over two hundred miles to attend a series of religious meetings ... and he had his Bible with him.

You would have seen him walk up the steps of the Temple in Jerusalem. You would have seen him dressed in the appropriate manner for worship. You would not have heard a foul word coming out of his mouth. You would not have heard him tell a dirty joke. You would not have seen him standing in the bar getting drunk. This was a man to look up to. This was a man whose religion shaped his life. He had travelled all those miles with a deep sincere religious desire burning in his heart ... [he had come to Jerusalem for to worship.](#)

And the closer he came to the city the more he was looking forward to standing with the great crowds, chanting his prayers and with the psalms of David upon his lips ... These were the most important days in his life, the days he spent in Jerusalem.

He was such a fine example. He had put himself to considerable inconvenience, some would say. "Could you not have worshipped God back in 'Ethiopia' and saved yourself all that trouble of travelling so far!" No, this was the trip of a lifetime, and he was privileged to make it ... to the temple in Jerusalem ... and he was putting everything, - all his responsibilities, - to the one side for a while because of his religion.

As he was returning home to Ethiopia, though, we find he was a man whose searching had not been satisfied. Despite travelling to Jerusalem there was an empty space inside his life was not being filled. On the outside, everything looked fine, ... but in the inside there was a need not being met.

Religion wasn't meeting it ... nor churches, priests or ministers. This man arrived at a stage in his journey only to realise he still hadn't found what he was searching for ... no matter how devout he could become ... Indeed, he was a foreigner, not only to Jerusalem, but he was also **a foreigner to God's grace**. ... The second observation we notice about him was that he was ...

### **A FUGITIVE FROM GOD'S GRACE**

*was returning, v.28*

He was a man of **great authority** (v.27), ... when he spoke, he was listened to. He had an important job, - a financier of Queen Candace, with his own chariot, v.38. This was indeed a clever man, - he had 'a good head on his shoulders'. He had 'a good nose' for business.

He was returning home to do the job he had worked hard to acquire ... but there continued to be, - despite his visit to Jerusalem, - a 'niggling' in his soul. He was *returning* not much better than he had left.

It doesn't take away from how much he enjoyed the religious celebrations in the city ... but, if he had honestly sat himself down and inwardly examined what he got out of the experience, he would have been truly 'hard-pushed' to have given you an answer that would either have satisfied you, or even him!

What is the likelihood he heard either Peter or some of the other disciples preaching the Gospel? What is the possibility he came into contact with the Gospel some way or another? ... Surely it was very likely indeed!

On the Day of Pentecost, Peter had been preaching about Christ. He, and the other disciples, was preaching that God's promised Messiah had already come and that he had been crucified as a common criminal ... the people failing to recognise Who He truly was.

These preachers, in the festival of Pentecost, had used the Scriptures of the Old Testament to base their argument ... the same Scripture opened in front of the Ethiopian eunuch. "But no! I'm trying to see this ... but I can't! I'm not able. Give me figures to add up, and give me accounts to manage and I will do it for you ... but I can't see what I so desperately want to see."

Not only was this Ethiopian eunuch going back to where he came from, he was returning and travelling on a road opposite to that where the Gospel was being preached. He was travelling 'away' from the Gospel, leaving its message behind him in Jerusalem. ... There is a word of encouragement for us here ... for those of us who have loved ones not yet saved. We can see them travelling 'away' from the Gospel and leaving it behind ... but here, the Lord reminds us He never allows the sinner that He sets out to save to move beyond His reach.

This Ethiopian who had turned his back on the Gospel message being preached in Jerusalem was [returning home](#). ... "Maybe I'll be able to put it all out of my mind. Maybe I'll be able to forget it". But ... when the Lord begins to work in your heart, and He has a plan to save your life and to bring you to Christ, He will not allow you to travel out of the reach of His grace.

Here was a man that not only was **a foreigner to God's Grace**, but we find he was also **a fugitive from God's Grace**. ... He is sitting at the side of the road in his chariot ... and he could not move any further because he had been '*halted*' by a passage in God's Word. He was not going to move, - for the Lord would not allow him to move, - until he had matters of eternity dealt with concerning his own soul.

God the Holy Spirit was working in this man's heart. This man knew that despite his religion he was a stranger to God and to grace. Peter preached [Repent](#), on the Day of Pentecost, - but that wasn't a message for him, ... an upright, well-educated, well-dressed, well-spoken, influential man of Ethiopia. And he had chosen to get into his chariot and ride away from the place of God's offer of salvation.

Yes, he was **a foreigner to God's grace**; and he was also **a fugitive from God's grace**. But now ... here comes Philip!

**FOLLOWED BY GOD'S GRACE** [And Philip ran thither to him, v.30](#)

Here, now, is where we see a most beautiful picture. Here is where we see the Sovereign Grace of God achieve its purpose.

Philip, a highly-respected member of the church at Jerusalem was one of the first deacons ([Acts 6:5](#)). Following Stephen's martyrdom, he had taken the gospel to Samaria, where God had blessed his ministry ([Acts 8:5-13](#)). God then led him south along the Jerusalem-Gaza road where God brought him to this Ethiopian man. ... And there is no doubt God was at work ... the man was reading from Is. 53. In Acts 8:26 we are shown how God called Philip to meet him, and Philip was ready straightaway ... without hesitation.

Notice, believer, Philip did as the Lord instructed him. He didn't tell the Lord how hard he has been working, or how tired he is, or how if he was to leave the work in Samaria the work in Samaria might 'fold'. ... No, when the Lord called him to go out into the desert, there was no other place but the desert for this man of God to be. ... The Lord was leading him into the desert, for in the desert the Lord would bless him again with fruit for his labour. Imagine bearing fruit in the desert!

Wherever the Lord leads you, - even into a desert, - is the only place you ought to be. Here is the example of Philip. ... God introduced him as a witness to His grace ... *for God followed the man from Ethiopia*.

Can you remember where God found you? Can you remember the person He led along to speak to you? Can you remember the circumstances that surrounded you being saved? ... You hadn't planned it ... but nevertheless, God *made* it happen. You had heard the Gospel so often, - or maybe you hadn't! - but God showed you that you were precious in His eyes.

He brought you to the place of salvation because you saw He loved you, and that He sent His Son to die on the cross of Calvary for you. You saw yourself like a little sheep that had drifted away and become lost. Jesus, - the Good Shepherd, - came to find you and to bring you home. You were like this Ethiopian who was being pursued by the grace of God, ... and God used Philip to speak to him about the Saviour.

## FASCINATED WITH GOD'S GRACE of Whom speaketh the prophet this? v. 34

Look at the interest the Ethiopian had. God arrested his attention, for this man who was seeking was drawn to read Is. 53:7-8, He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken.

Beyond any shadow of a doubt, he already would have read, v.2 For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; there is no beauty that we should desire him. 3 He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. 4 Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. 5 But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. 6 All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.

He was trying to see the picture in his mind, but his religion was blinding him. ... "How could this be Jesus? This is not how I have considered the Messiah." ... But God's Word, - more powerful than a two-edged sword, - was cutting into his heart. He was arrested by the irresistible power of the Holy Spirit.

Remember he was 'religious', ... that was the reason he made the long journey from Ethiopia to Jerusalem. And when he opened his Bible his eyes fell upon the fifty-third chapter of the prophecy of Isaiah. This was the passage of Scripture he was battling with. "What does this mean?" he cried out, "Who is this speaking about? Could it be the One I heard them speak about in the marketplace in Jerusalem?!" ... Can you hear the urgency in his voice?

The Gospel we preach and we believe in is centred round this same Man. Here is a Gospel we proclaim that many people even today are still unable to grasp ... and yet it is the Gospel many millions have proved. It all happens when the sinner's attention is arrested by the power of the Holy Spirit in just the same way God dealt with this man.

As he read [Isaiah 53:7,8](#) he grappled with the words and their meaning, "Someone, ... tell me, what does it mean!?" ... And God had His man right at the very place where he would answer this heart-searching question. And here we see real conviction of sin in a *rebel* searching for God. No matter how long and arduous was his journey ...

He had to stop and find the answer to his question, - Who is the Man the prophet was writing about? The answer was on the page before him, but he couldn't see it. ... And the Bible tells us, **v. 35 Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus.**

The young man would have known the story of Isaac as his father Abraham stood over him ready to offer him up as a sacrifice, with the knife of slaughter in his hand. The young man would have known about the lambs that were slain on the altars of sacrifice in the wilderness wanderings. Yes, he would have been familiar with the idea of substitutionary sacrifices ... but how and why would the Messiah die upon a place of such cruelty and under such callous and unrelenting hatred *for me*?!

Philip didn't preach a heavy, weighty doctrine ... but he preached onto him Christ ... and the greatest need for this Ethiopian man to be saved. It is not enough for the lost sinner to desire salvation ... he must also understand what it was and why it was God did it. It the Holy Spirit that leads sinners to Christ ... and He used Philip to preached to this man, and look what happened,

**FOUND BY GOD'S GRACE**      **I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, v.37**  
 What a great discovery! ... The Holy Spirit kept working with this man until he unearthed this most precious of treasures. The Lord opened his heart and he saw Jesus Christ as the "Lamb of God" Who came to be the sacrifice for *his* sin. There in the Scriptures the Gospel dawned upon him, ... *Jesus Christ died for me!*

Friend, if you are not saved, are you starting to see it too? ... that Jesus hung on that cross *for you!* The words 'lit up' on the page; the man's heart began to beat with excitement, - *Jesus died for me!* This was a personal encounter the Ethiopian eunuch had with the Saviour ... not a dead Saviour in an old storybook, but the living Saviour God promised in the Old Testament.

As he made his way home he was changed through God's Sovereign and Free Grace. ... And at that place, he witnessed to his new-found faith ... how do I know that? Well, somewhere in the conversation Philip told him that if he was to know Christ he must openly confess Him. Philip would have taught him that to be baptised was the way God had laid it out.

Where do you find water in a desert? ... Sometimes people make all kinds of excuses in following Jesus, but the Word of God makes it clear that obedience requires passing through the waters of baptism. ...

Baptism does not save you, but baptism is obedience to Christ's command. And this man wanted to be obedient, and he confessed with his mouth the Lord Jesus, and he believed in his heart that God had raised His Son from the dead, and he believed unto righteousness, and he made confession with his mouth unto salvation (cf. Rom. 10:9,10). ... He confessed Christ in obedience to the Word of God, and the Lord provided the water for his baptism, and as he went down into the water, and under the water, and came up again out of the water his attendants were paying close attention to this man's new faith and witness in Christ.

### CONCLUSION.

Do *you* remember when the Shepherd found you? Do you remember when the truth of God's salvation dawned on you for the first time? It 'burst' in upon your life and it made you realise you were a sinner to whom God was offering His free grace! He opened the door of your heart and He breathed into you new life ... and you were 'born again'.

... Maybe you are not saved yet, but are you beginning to see what the Ethiopian saw? Is it possible God is working in your heart so you are seeing for the first time He loves you and He desires to save you? He loved you more than you can ever know. ... Do what the Ethiopian did: stop, don't go any further until you have this issue sorted out. Get down out of your comfortable chariot in the wilderness, give up your 'religiosity', open your Bible, look into it and accept the words it says to you, *If thou believest with all thine heart, ... And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.*

Come and discover Jesus Christ as your Saviour and Lord for yourself. Come and be saved. Trust in Christ for salvation.

O let the praises of my heart be Thine,  
 For Christ has died that I may call Him mine,  
 That I may sing with those who dwell above,  
 Adoring, praising Jesus, Kings of Love.