

Series: **The Original**
Today's Title: ***"Who is this guy?"***

August 8, 2021 – Acts 8:26-40

Objective: To encourage us to share Christ and keep Jesus front and center.

Do you believe in chance encounters?

Coincidence?

Blind fate?

I don't believe in any of those things.

My faith doesn't have room for 'chance', 'coincidence', or 'blind fate' because God is sovereign, all-knowing, all-wise and all-powerful.

- The Bible teaches that God is able to use evil for His good purposes. (Genesis 50:20)

- Jesus taught that God is aware of every hair on our head - He feeds the birds of the air - and He adorns the fields with flowers. (Matt. 6:26-30)

- The Bible is clear that it is God who raises up kings and political powers, and He deposes kings and brings kingdoms to ruin. (Daniel 2:21)

-The Bible is clear that God is in control of history - and history will end exactly as He has decreed. (Psalm 22:28; Daniel 4:35; Acts 17:26)

So, no. I don't believe in chance - coincidence - or blind fate.

But from my vantage point - from my human and finite perspective - life often seems like a game of chance - of random possibilities that at times fall into place.

Turn to Acts 8:26-40 (p. 917)

Our passage today has a feel of chance - of random possibility - the luck of the draw - being in the right place at the right time.

But there is nothing random about what happened in our passage.

We'll begin today by reading our passage - then walking through the details - and then applying these things to our life today.

First...let's pray.

Read vs. 26-40

God calls and leads us to be His witnesses. vs. 26-33

God uses an angel - and His Spirit to command / lead Philip on the mission.

In general, we have the same mission Philip had.

"...you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." Acts 1:8 - words of Jesus

As was pointed out the last 2 Sundays by Jim and Scott - the persecution which began in 8:1 scatters the Church -

and the Gospel spreads from Jerusalem - to Judea - and to Samaria.

In our verses today we see the sprouting of the Gospel to the “end of the earth”.

We often hear about Gaza in the news today.

Present day Gaza - the Gaza strip - is on the Mediterranean shore - on the S.E. shore of Israel.

It is a self-governing Palestinian territory, and for more than 100 years it has been both caught in the middle of wars between Egypt and Israel - and in recent years it has been used by the enemies of Israel as a launching base for rockets targeting Israeli cities and population centers.

Even back in the 1st century - 2,000 years ago - Gaza was an unstable land due to various conflicts.

It was a strategic area because the main highway from Israel to Egypt passed through the area - and this is the road the angel instructs Philip to travel.

Philip travels the 50 miles to Gaza (if he was in Jerusalem) - and when he arrives in the area, he sees someone - an Ethiopian eunuch.

This man was a government official - and he was on his way back home from a spiritual pilgrimage to Jerusalem - to worship - at the Temple, or in various synagogues.

The Spirit of God leads Philip to approach the chariot (covered wagon), and when he gets close enough, he hears the man reading from the O.T. book of Isaiah.

Philip has obeyed God's command to go to Gaza - and to approach the chariot.

He heard the man reading from Isaiah - and he knew this was no random or chance interaction.

This was a divinely orchestrated appointment.

Philip then asks a question:

“Do you understand what you are reading?”

Asking questions seems to be a lost art in our culture. Everyone is so intent on telling others what they think - what they think everyone else should think.

Instead of asking questions we're always making proclamations.

The question Philip asked is not simple.

This side of the cross - and if you've spent significant time in a church you might think it's a simple question.

But it's not simple.

It certainly wasn't simple for this man - because he never heard about Jesus.

He responds to Philip by saying, “How can I, unless someone guides me?”

That's called an open door - an open invitation!!!

He invites Philip into the chariot - to sit with him and explain what Isaiah's writing about.

Question: Are you looking for spiritual opportunities? Are you more likely to make proclamations - or ask questions about someone's understanding and belief in Jesus?

People are more inclined to listen to a guide - than they are a lecturer.

They want to have a conversation - to be listened to - to learn - not just be told.

vs. 32-33 - “Now the passage of the Scripture that he was reading was this: *“Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter and like a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he opens not his mouth. In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth.”*

This is a passage from **Isaiah 53**.

Once again...not a coincidence...no random chance.

This is one of the most graphic and detailed passages in the O.T. which pictures Jesus - as the suffering servant. It was written about 800 years before Jesus was born - and hundreds of years before crucifixion was invented a form of capital punishment.

But it describes - in vivid detail - a man being unjustly condemned and crucified.

Isaiah 53:5

“But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed.”

(See also vs. 9 & 12)

God was orchestrating every movement in this encounter - even down to the verses this man was reading when Philip arrived next to his chariot.

Then the man asks Philip the most amazing question. He asks:

Who is this guy? vs. 34-35

That’s the essence of his question.

“About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?”

Who is this guy?

Who is the guy being described in this passage?

This was a government official - he knew what justice was - and what injustice was.

The guy in this passage is suffering - died - because of great injustice.

Who is this guy?

Let’s look at the ‘guys’ in this passage.

The first guy is an Ethiopian eunuch.

- **He is** an Ethiopian - different nationality / different culture.

- **He is** a black man - different ethnicity - a Gentile. This is the first account of the Gospel going outside of Jewish circles - outside of those who had at least a portion of Jewish blood in their veins. The Gospel - the Kingdom of God is for all people.
- **He is** a high-ranking government official - treasurer for the Ethiopian queen.
- **He is a eunuch** - either had his sexual organs removed (castrated) which made him a sexual non-threat to the queen, or he had taken a vow of celibacy which was necessary if he was going to serve the queen.
- **He is** wealthy - owning a scroll of Isaiah would have been a costly item to own. He was in possession of an item most Jews wouldn't have in their home!!!
- **He is** a spiritual man - a convert to Judaism. As a eunuch and a Gentile, he would have very limited access to the Temple, but he made the long trip to Jerusalem despite the limitations.

The second guy is Philip the evangelist.

- **He is** one of the 7 men chosen in **6:5**
- **He is** a Hellenistic Jew - Jewish, but culturally Greek
- **He is** attentive to the Holy Spirit's leading

- **He is** obedient to the call / command of God
- **He is** ready to talk about Jesus
- **He is** a respecter of all persons - *not ethnically, culturally or nationally prejudiced*. He has no hesitation when he has the opportunity to talk to a Gentile, black eunuch about Jesus.

But this passage isn't really about them.

It's about Jesus.

The 'guy' is Jesus.

The 'guy' who suffered such a great injustice - who died for the transgressors - was Jesus.

35 Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus.

Beginning with **Isaiah 53** - and the implication in the text is that Philip used many other O.T. passages which pointed and spoke of the Messiah - of Jesus - and told this Ethiopian official all about Jesus.

Much like we see Jesus doing in **Luke 24** with the 2 disciples on the road to Emmaus - on Resurrection Sunday.

Luke 24:27

“And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.”

This is where some of us may need to do some work - being able to weave Jesus into conversations.

- Knowing how the Scriptures point to Jesus...
- How they point to the forgiveness and grace of God...
- How they tell us again and again how God's desire is to save people from their sins and redeem them to Himself.

The issue is always Jesus.

There are other issues...important issues.

But *THE* issue is always Jesus.

People will often get distracted from the main issue of Jesus.

We get distracted from Jesus!

Distractions come in the most glorious and righteous forms.

The distractions I'm thinking of are good things...very good things.

The various ministries of the church - helping people in tangible ways - bringing the love of Christ to their life.

But if we forget to bring the forgiveness of Christ into the picture - we've let ourselves get distracted.

When you're having a spiritual conversation with someone, the main issue is:

'What do you believe about Jesus?'

'Do you know that Jesus loves you?'

‘Do you know that Jesus died on the cross to pay the price for my sins...and your sins?’

‘Is there a reason why you haven’t put your faith in Jesus and become a Christian?’

‘Would you like to pray and ask Jesus to forgive your sins - to be your Savior?’

The urgency of baptism. vs. 36-40

We don’t often have a sense of urgency when it comes to baptism - sometimes due to our theology.

By ‘urgency’ I’m not implying ‘*necessary for salvation*’.

But I’m trying to address what often seems to be a lackadaisical - overly-relaxed view and timeline for getting baptized.

36 And as they were going along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, “See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?”

The Ethiopian eunuch has an urgency about getting baptized that I don’t see in our culture.

Some people wait years before deciding to get baptized.

This man jumps on the first opportunity he has!

As they were traveling, they came near a small river or lake - and once again, he asked a wonderful question.

vs. 36b - “What prevents me from being baptized?”

Have you ever asked this question?

Our next baptism is planned for **September 19**.

That day is also National “*Back to Church Sunday*” - a nationwide, 15,000 churches strong movement on that day to invite people, who are likely hungry for connection after the past 17 months of isolation and limited connection.

It fits perfectly with our 2021 theme ‘re-Connect’.

What a perfect Sunday to have baptisms - where those getting baptized will share their testimony on video - and people will see a visual portrayal of the Gospel through baptism.

So...be thinking now about who you can invite to church on **September 19**.

But let’s get back to the man’s question to Philip.

vs. 36b - “What prevents me from being baptized?”

There are 2 things that might be preventing you from getting baptized.

1. You have not put your faith in Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins.

This is the requirement for baptism - that you have put your faith in Jesus.

2. You are preventing yourself - by not asking to be baptized!

For many people, they are the one’s preventing themselves from getting baptized. *‘I don’t like being*

in front of people. 'I don't want to get wet in front of everyone - how will I do my hair afterward?'

Don't prevent yourself from getting baptized.

Contact the office - and we'll get you on the list for September 19th!!!

The answer Philip gave was 'Nothing is preventing you.'

38 And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him.

39 And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing.

Philip baptized him - and the result was rejoicing!

This brought great joy to this man - this new follower of Jesus.

This is always the result of someone getting baptized.

When you get baptized, it not only brings you joy as you are identifying with Jesus giving a public statement of your faith in Christ, but it brings the church great joy!

I often refer to our baptism Sundays as 'Party Sundays' - because it gives us a sense of celebration - a sense of rejoicing - evidence of God working miracles in the lives of those getting baptized.

But we also see something very interesting - and supernatural happening to Philip.

He disappears! Vanishes!

40 But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through he preached the gospel to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

God supernaturally relocates Philip to a town named Azotus - which was the O.T. site of Ashdod (Isaiah 20:1).

This was about 20 miles north of Gaza.

He was an evangelist, so that's what he did - he “preached the gospel to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.”

Caesarea is about 55 miles up the coast - it was a major coastal city - the home of the Roman procurators and the Roman capital of Judea.

About 20 years later - Luke writes in **Acts 21** - it seems this is where Philip settled down and made his home - got married and had a family. He had 4 daughters - and Paul and his team stayed at Philip's house many days on their way back to Jerusalem.

Acts 21:8-9 - “On the next day we departed and came to Caesarea, and we entered the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, and stayed with him. 9 He had four unmarried daughters, who prophesied.”

Apply it...

For the Christian...

1. Live on mission and learn to be capable to talk about Jesus.

1 Peter 3:15b

“always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect...”

2. Get baptized! (Sept. 19)

For the non-Christian...

I assume you are interested in spiritual things...seeking to know more about Christ...curious about Jesus.

1. Read the Bible.

2. Ask questions

In our culture asking questions is thought to be a sign of stupidity - ignorance.

But the reality is smart people...wise people ask questions.

The fool doesn't ask questions - so they continue in their ignorance or false ideas.

Ask questions...seek the truth about your sin - the truth about Jesus dying on the cross for your sins - the truth about the love, grace and forgiveness of God.

Close in prayer