

Our Journey  
*Begins With One Step*  
May 14, 2017

**Preservice Announcements – Video  
Worship Song – Death Was Arreste**

**Mother’s Day Recognition – Rick**

Good morning everyone.

Today is a very special day because we get to honor some special people who have either built or are in the process of building the next generation – mothers. So, if you’re somebody’s mom, I want you to stand right now so that we can honor you. <moms stand>

We appreciate all of you. As I say every Mother’s Day, we could not have done it without you ... *literally*. So, I want to pray for you today.

- Young moms – strength and energy

- Middle moms – wisdom to guide and encourage
- Grandmas – women of prayer

Now, as you remain standing, I want every other woman in the room to stand as well.

- The value of women in general (“Not good for the man to be alone”)
- Future moms – guide them and grow them now in preparation for that role.
- Not-able-to-be moms – acknowledge the pain but also the power of influence

For all women here – in whatever situation they are in – to have great joy in knowing you and in being a light for your Kingdom. Amen.

## **Greeting**

## **Drama – Anytime**

One of the things most human beings take for

granted is time; specifically, that we will always have more of it.

- More time to enjoy family and friends.
- More time to accomplish our goals, both personally and professionally.
- More time to get around to doing that big “bucket list” thing we’ve always wanted to do.

For that reason, most human beings end up wasting time on lesser pursuits. We give ourselves to things that ultimately don’t matter while postponing the things that do ... such as saying “yes” to a relationship – a friendship – with God.

I want to tell you two stories this morning about two very powerful men who were once given the opportunity to do that very thing – to take the step of beginning a relationship with God – and how they responded.

What’s interesting about their stories is that, like

the character in the drama we just saw, God just sort of showed up for them in a supernatural way that they did not expect or plan for. It just so happened that they were in the right place at the right time and they were given the opportunity to respond.

## **Marcus Antonius Felix**

The first guy I want to tell you about is a man by the name of Marcus Antonius Felix who was governor of Judea (the Holy Land) in the year A.D. 52, which is only about 20 years after the time of Jesus.

At this point, those who knew Jesus and who had witnessed his life, death and resurrection had begun to spread out all over the Roman world and they were taking the message of Jesus with them. Churches were starting everywhere as other people also believed in Jesus as their savior. And the greatest influence and leader of this expansion was the Apostle Paul.

Now, Paul was Jewish by birth. Before he became a believer and follower of Jesus, he was actually a member of the religious leadership group known as the Pharisees and had devoted his life to persecuting and killing Christians.

But one day, the resurrected Jesus met him as he was traveling to his next mission of destruction and Paul became a believer. And then he became a very effective evangelist. And then he became an even more effective missionary and church planter ... all of which eventually led the Jewish religious leaders to hate him. So they began to dream up ways to kill him.

At one point they falsely accused Paul of starting a riot in Jerusalem by preaching about Jesus. And because new religions were illegal in the Roman Empire, that put Paul in trouble with the law ... and eventually landed him in front of the supreme leader of the Empire, Caesar himself!

But before that could happen, Paul had to work himself up the food chain. And his first stop in that journey was the royal palace of Marcus Antonius Felix. It was the responsibility of Governor Felix to hear the case of the Jewish leaders and Paul's defense and then to make a decision.

And that's what happened – sort of.

Felix heard both sides but then said he wanted more information from the commander over Jerusalem who had stopped the riot. Until then, Felix ordered, Paul would be placed under house arrest nearby (a detainment which, as it turned out, lasted for two years until Felix was replaced and moved on to another position).

But here's what's very interesting to me about Felix.

**According to the church historian, Luke  
(writing in the book of Acts),**

*Felix already understood much  
about the Way of Jesus. Acts 24:22  
(NCV)*

Apparently, Felix had been paying attention to what was happening in the religious culture of his day. He was aware of the spread of the Christian faith and what was being taught and proclaimed about Jesus.

**And, it seems he was interested in knowing even more because Luke tells us that ...**

*Several days later Felix came with  
his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish. He  
sent for Paul and listened to him as  
he spoke about faith in Christ Jesus.  
Acts 24:24 (NIV)*

What a nice coincidence; a stroke of good fortune. Felix wants to know more and it just so happens that the guy who can explain it better than anyone else has come to his town and is right next door ... which means ... he can get the straight scoop on Christianity right from the horse's

mouth.

And so that's what he does.

### **However ...**

*As Paul talked about righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and said, "That's enough for now! You may leave."*

Now, part of the reason that Felix is afraid is that Felix is a pretty bad dude. In fact, the Roman historian Tacitus says of him that "with all cruelty and lust he exercised the power of a king with the spirit of a slave."<sup>i</sup> He was one of the most depraved men of his time<sup>ii</sup> so any talk about "The Judgment" rightfully scares him.

### **So, he tells Paul:**

*"When I find it convenient, I will send for you."* Acts  
24:25 (NIV)



Over the next two years, Felix does send for Paul. And he continues the dialogue about faith in Jesus.

But, apparently, the conversation always ends the same way: “OK, that’s enough, Paul. I’m not ready to say yes to Christ. It’s not yet convenient for me” which pretty much means “If Jesus really is God in the flesh, I’m sure He will want me to make changes. But I’m not ready for that. I want to keep pursuing the life I already have.”

And that’s what he does.

Even though God has shown up for him – through Paul – in a way he did not expect or plan for ... and it just so happened that he was in the right place at the right time ... Marcus Antonius Felix chooses to waste what was left of his time on lesser pursuits.

The only other thing we know of him after this is

that he moved on and turned Paul's case over to the next governor of the province.

So, that's the first guy.

## **An Ethiopian Official**

The second guy I want to tell you about is also a government official, though he does not oversee soldiers or a province. Instead, he is in charge of the treasury of the Kandake (a term which means "queen of the Ethiopians").<sup>iii</sup> He is CFO of the Ethiopian monarchy, so to speak.

We do not know his name but we do know that his story takes place a little earlier than that of Marcus Antonius Felix, probably around 31 or 32 A.D. just a year or two after the time of Jesus. We also know that ...

- He was black-skinned
- And a convert to Judaism

- And a eunuch – which means that, at a young age, he had been castrated ... which is what kings often did to their male servants to protect their queen and their harem from any “extra-curricular activity.”

We also know that as a eunuch he was not allowed (by Jewish law) to enter the Temple in Jerusalem.<sup>iv</sup> And yet, his story begins with him returning home to Ethiopia from a trip to Jerusalem where he had gone to worship.

I think that’s pretty interesting: even though he would have been excluded, he still went anyway ... which, shows an interest in spiritual things similar to that of Felix.

And God is about to show up for him in a way he does not expect or plan for. It just so happens that he is in the right place at the right time because there is a young evangelist by the name of Philip who is traveling the exact same road that he is.

And the Holy Spirit says to him, “Philip, see that chariot parked over there? Go stand near it.”

As Philip approaches, he hears something very unusual. The man in the chariot – the CFO of the Ethiopian monarchy – is reading aloud from scroll of the prophet Isaiah (which would have been a very expensive purchase on his part).

So, Philip asks him:

*“Do you understand what you are reading?”*

*The man replied, “How can I, when there is no one to instruct me?” And he begged Philip to come up into the carriage and sit with him. Acts 8:30-31 (NIV)*

And, so, Philip does.

Now, Luke the historian tells us that the passage of Scripture he’s reading ...

**... is this:**

*“He was led as a sheep to the slaughter. And as a lamb is silent before the shearers, he did not open his mouth. He was humiliated and received no justice. Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth.”*

*Acts 8:32-33 (NLT)*

And so this high-ranking government official asks Philip: “Was Isaiah talking about himself or someone else?”

*So Philip began with this same Scripture and then used many others to tell him the Good News about Jesus.*

*Acts 8:35 (NIV)*

... because that’s who Isaiah had written about, prophetically, some 700 years earlier!

## **The Good News**

Now, Luke doesn't tell us exactly *how* Philip explains the good news about Jesus, but I'm pretty sure that he would have talked about the same kinds of things that the Apostle Paul would one day discuss with Felix.

Remember what we read earlier? When Paul spoke with Felix he talked about righteousness, self-control and the coming Judgment. Specifically that ...

- Our lack of self-control reveals that we are sinners.
- And because we are sinners, none of us measure up to the perfect righteousness of God. We might be better than a few others here and there but we all fall short of God's perfection.
- And because we are not perfectly righteous, there is a Day of Judgment coming. And rightfully so, for True and Perfect Justice

always requires that lawbreaking and lawbreakers be punished (otherwise there is no justice and no hope of ultimate restitution for anyone).

Of course, that's not the *good* news. That's the *bad* news ... but you have to know it in order to understand and appreciate why the good news is so good.

And the good news is that ...

- When Jesus was led to the Cross as a sheep to the slaughter ...
- When He was humiliated and received no justice (because he had done nothing to deserve the degrading punishment He received) ...
- When His life was taken from the earth ...

The good news is that He did all of those things for

us and, on the cross, a Great Exchange took place.

### **Specifically ...**

- Because his self-control demonstrated his perfection – that He was not a sinner as we all are ...
- His perfect righteousness became ours.
- The judgement that was rightfully due to us – earned by us – became his.

In other words, Jesus lived the perfect life we should have lived and died the death we deserved to die because of sin, and now, because of that, we can receive the credit for his perfection and righteousness as if it were our own.

It's like when you take a test at school and you know you did really bad. The teacher can't pretend that your wrong answers are right. That would be a lie. It would be, technically speaking, *unjust*.



But if there was another student in the class who made a perfect score and that student said, “I will trade my score for yours” and if the teacher allowed it that would be good news, wouldn’t it?

It’s like when someone has gone so deep into debt that they have no way of ever paying it back. The bank can’t just pretend the debt doesn’t exist. It doesn’t work that way (though many of us wish it would). If a bank cancels debt, someone else – depositors – lose out because banking is a zero-sum game. It’s basically stealing.

But suppose another person – a wealthy person – decides to step in and pay the debt ... which is so huge that it costs them everything. The original debtor is credited and released from the obligation to repay while the benefactor is debited down to zero.

That’s the kind of exchange that happened on the cross. That’s the good news that Philip told this Ethiopian official about and Paul told Felix about.

Well, that's not *all* of the good news. What makes this news even better is that to get in on the deal you don't have to do anything other than to believe that it's all true.

- That you are a sinner because you sin and you can't stop (whether it's big or little sins)
- That Jesus gave his life to atone for your sins
- And that He rose again from the dead so that you can have a new life that begins now and will never end.

I'm pretty sure that when Paul and Philip talked about Jesus and the good news – and how it is received by faith and not any attempt on our part to prove ourselves righteous or to make up for the bad we have done – I'm pretty sure that was the gist of it.

## **Getting Personal**

And that's what you have been told if you've been coming to this church for any length of time (or any other church that talks about Jesus and the Good News and faith).

See, many of you are just like these two men. You're here because you have an interest in spiritual things like they did. You're here because God has shown up for you in a way that you did not expect or plan for. It just so happened that you were in the right place at the right time and you were drawn to a place where you have been given the opportunity to respond ... just as they were.

The question is ... which man will you be like?

*Some of you are going to be like Marcus Antonius Felix who said, "I don't mind hearing about it; I don't mind discussing it from time to time but, really, it's just not that convenient for me right now. I have other things I'm pursuing with my life right now. There'll be time later to know Jesus and*

follow Him. Maybe someday.”

But here’s the deal – and you need to know this: *someday may never come*. You are not guaranteed additional time. You are not promised tomorrow.

And I don’t say that to try and scare you – well, maybe a little. But it’s just the truth.

Next Sunday afternoon, I’m going to stand up here on this stage to do a funeral for a woman who (along with her husband and her daughter who is still in High School) has been part of this church for several years. She was young.

Two weeks ago, she went into the hospital with a few pains here and there and some tiredness. Last Tuesday she was gone.

Friends, do not wait for a more convenient time in your life to begin a relationship with Jesus; to believe in Him and receive Him!

That time may never come and, quite frankly, there never will be a time that's convenient. That's the lesson we learn from Marcus Antonius Felix and his wife.

Sadly, some of you will be like him.

*But some of you are going to be like that Ethiopian CFO.* And I know you're thinking, "Ok, but Rick, you haven't told us about his response yet."

Correct, so let me do that. Let's quickly finish the story.

Philip has explained to him the Good News about Jesus.

**And then, at some point ...**

*As they rode along, they came to some water, and the man said, "Look! There's some water!"* Acts 8:36  
(NIV)

Now, why would he say such a thing? Without the proper context, it actually sounds a little silly. “Well, looky there, there’s some water!”

I mean, why didn’t he say, “Wow, Phil, I’m so glad you took the time to explain all this to me! Should I say a prayer or something right now? Should we find a church so I can walk down the aisle while they sing *Just as I Am?*”

Now, I don’t know that he *didn’t* say a prayer to receive Jesus, although I’m quite sure he didn’t go walk down the aisle at the end of a church service (they didn’t do that back then). *And there’s nothing wrong with either of those responses* so don’t hear what I’m not saying.

But the reason he excitedly made the comment about water is because of what Luke the church historian tells us just before this incident.

**He writes:**

*When people believed Philip as he was proclaiming the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they began to be baptized, both men and women.*

*Acts 8:12 (NIV)*

When Philip the evangelist went around telling people about Jesus and they believed what they heard from him – that Jesus had lived the perfect life they should have lived and died the death they deserved to die because of sin, and now, because of that, they can receive BY FAITH the credit for His perfection and righteousness as if it were their own – when people believed the Good News ...

### **They. Were. Baptized.**

Because that's what Jesus taught the first disciples to do whenever someone believed the Good News about Him.

And that's what happens to this government official from Ethiopia. When they come upon a body of water, he exclaims "Look, there's water!"

## And then he asks the question of the hour:

*“What prevents me from being baptized?”*

Apparently, the answer was “nothing” because the Bible says that ...

*He commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the official, and Philip baptized him. Acts 8:38 (ESV)*

It's so simple and yet, we've made it so complex through the years. I could do a whole message on that – and I have done a message on it so I won't.

Instead, I'll just say that baptism now means so many other things culturally that we've almost lost the original purpose of it.

So, very simply, let's just say this:



**Baptism marks the first step of faith in Jesus as savior and Lord. It's the public declaration of faith that says "Yes! I do believe!"**

## **Baptism Invitation**

And today, we have our baptism pool set up so that anyone who wishes to – anyone who needs to – can make that declaration.

And we're going to do that in just a minute but first, since I've told you the story of two guys from a long, long time ago, I thought it might be helpful to show you the story of someone a little more recent – as in, still living.

This past week, I had the opportunity to sit down with Nick Ballard who is going to be baptized today. And I asked him to share a little bit of his journey to believe in Jesus.

As we watch the video, see if you notice the

similarity between his experience and the experience of the two men we've been talking about. And if you don't catch it, I'll explain it in a minute.

Here we go. Let's watch.

### **Video – “Nick Ballard Baptism Interview”**

Notice how God showed up for Nick in a supernatural way that he did not expect or plan for. It “just so happened” that he was in the right place at the right time and God used that experience to lead him to NHCC – where he could hear the Good News about Jesus and have the opportunity to respond ... in baptism.

And that's what some of you need to do this morning, too.

### INSTRUCTIONS

1. Get up and move during the song. Family &

Friends move too.

2. We have everything.

3. What will happen?

a. Get in the pool

b. Ladell says “because of your faith I baptize you in the name ...” – baptism doesn’t save; faith saves

c. Ladell dunk you under as he says “buried with Christ, raised w/Christ” – the picture

Note: not going to baptize anyone younger than Middle School in this service unless you’ve gone through the class. We’ve found it necessary to make sure one-on-one that our kids really understand what baptism is.

<Middle schoolers/parents>

The question of the hour: Look, here is water!  
What prevents you from being baptized?

Nothing!

**Feature – O Come to the Altar**

**Transition/Encouragement – Rick**

Divine appointment for you. Been praying for 30.

**Baptism & Worship Songs – From the Day / This  
Is Amazing Grace**

**CLOSING COMMENTS**

1. Prayer Experiment

**Prayer Experiment 1**

**Prayer Experiment 2**

**Prayer Experiment 3**

2. Offering @Door

# Video - POSTSERVICE Announcements

## Endnotes

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<sup>i</sup> A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1930), III, p. 408.

<sup>ii</sup> [https://bible.org/seriespage/35-paul-stands-felix-preacher-and-politician-acts-241-27#P4013\\_1741417](https://bible.org/seriespage/35-paul-stands-felix-preacher-and-politician-acts-241-27#P4013_1741417)

<sup>iii</sup> Acts 8:27

<sup>iv</sup> Deuteronomy 23:1