

The Word of God in Biblical Perspective
A Case Study of Profiting From God's Majestic Word
Acts 8:26-40

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This is our concluding study in this series. In fact, today there are two conclusions. It is the conclusion for this series and tonight we conclude our study on Jonah. I look forward to the Lord's Day with you in God's Word. After these we start two new series of sermons. Do you remember the series on the Seven Essentials of the Effective Christian Family? The new series we will start is the Seven Essentials of the Effective Christian Life which will begin on September 13, 2009 and on Sunday night we are starting a series on the book of Daniel called Memorable Memoirs and Messages of Daniel, These Are the Days of Daniel. I am looking forward to going into that wonderful book with you on Sunday evening as well. Let's look at our text for this study.

Acts 8:4-6, 26-40 says, **4** *Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word.* **5** *Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ.* **6** *And the crowds with one accord paid attention to what was being said by Philip when they heard him and saw the signs that he did.* **26** *Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." This is a desert place.* **27** *And he rose and went. And there was an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure. He had come to Jerusalem to worship* **28** *and was returning, seated in his chariot, and he was reading the prophet Isaiah.* **29** *And the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over and join this chariot."* **30** *So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?"* **31** *And he said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.* **32** *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.* **33** *In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth."* **34** *And the eunuch said to Philip, "About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?"* **35** *Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus.* **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?"* **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.* **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.*

The grass withers. The flower fades. This is the Word of God and it abides forever. By His grace and mercy may it be preached for you.

Recently, more than once I was asked in the month of August, "Pastor, knowing you have eight more sermons to do in Genesis, and we want to get back to Matthew, why did you take these six weeks and go into these series of sermons on the majesty and

sufficiency of God's Word?" Maybe I can give you an illustration on this. I have a couple of routes that I jog that I enjoy running and one of them is a trail that runs beside a creek. I happen to notice after one of our storms recently that large tree had fallen into the creek. Every time I run past it now I have noticed that something coming down the stream has fastened onto the log. Now, more than that, little animals have made nests and they are starting to live in the brush and things that are attached to that log. So, Harry what are you saying?

Here's why I have done the series. I believe the log that has to be dropped, fastened and immovable in the life of any Christian and every church, must be that which declares our absolute commitment, trust and embracing of God's Word as Truth. We have to be careful. In many churches, we drop other logs like the preacher, the tradition, the denomination and stuff will fasten to it but that's not what we need to drop in our lives and in the church. It's the Word of God. You may quickly say to me, "Wait just a minute Harry, shouldn't what we plant for things to fasten to be Jesus Christ?" While I certainly understand that question, the answer is no.

Who is Jesus Christ, what has He done and how can I possibly know who God is and what God has done without His Word? Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so. It is God's Word that informs me of God's holiness, His love, His providence, His promises and so if I am to have Christ as the anchor of my life then I must have a living, abiding, embracing, engaging, relationship with the Word of God. Hang with me for a moment. I could probably walk through all of us here and we would articulate a high view of the Scripture. In fact I am hoping that through this series of sermons and going through those texts of Scripture your trust in God's infallible, inerrant Word has soared to new heights but while I know in the lives of many Christians and many churches we could hear and articulate a high view of the Scripture. Unfortunately there is not a high use of the Scriptures. Trust and obey for there is no other way. I know that my obedience does not save me. My Savior saves me but I love my Savior and I want to obey Him.

I believe that many of the problems that we face in our personal lives, in our marital lives, many issues that surface within the church, those problems can not only be solved but many of them would never surface if we had a high use of the Scripture in our life. It's not just a high view but a high use of the Scripture, day by day and moment by moment thus to conclude this series I thought we would take a case study that's kind of packed away in the book of Acts concerning Philip and an Ethiopian eunuch. These are two men. One man was called to teach it, preach it and share it and the other who was called to Christ through it. One an African, a black man who had been to Jerusalem and was on his way back and the other was a Jew who had some connection with Gentiles in his background, who had been a deacon at the church in Jerusalem and now used of God in this man's life and beyond that man's life.

The book of Acts is an interesting study. If you want to outline the book of Acts it's very simple. You start with Acts 1:8 that says, "*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.*" That is exactly how the book of Acts unfolds. Acts 1-7 is the power of the Gospel witness through the Holy Spirit in Jerusalem. Acts 8 -12 is the power of the Gospel and the work of the Holy Spirit in Judea and Samaria. Acts 13 – 28, the end of the book, is the powerful work of the Gospel

throughout the whole world and the focus is Paul. In Acts 1 – 7 the focus is Peter and James but in Acts 8 – 12 there are four men whom God uses. One is Barnabas. Another is Saul who gets converted and becomes Paul, the servant of the Lord and thirdly there is Peter. Then fourthly there is a man who we don't do a lot of sermons about and his name is Philip.

Here Philip a man who served as a deacon in Acts 6 and has quite a significant ministry in Acts 8, we find him in three engagements. Persecution has hit the church at Jerusalem. The people have been scattered, everyone but the Apostles and Philip specifically goes to the place where there the disciples were amazed that Jesus would walk through Samaria. Why? It was because those were the people who had abandoned faithfulness to God and had intermarried with Gentiles so no one would go through Samaria. Not only did Jesus go through there but now Philip is sent there. He goes there to preach the Gospel to the Samaritans. Those are people that the Jewish people would have in and of themselves nothing to do with them. To the Jews the Samaritans would have been worse than the Gentiles and dogs were what the Jews considered Gentiles.

So Philip goes to Samaria to preach the Gospel and the people paid attention to him. So here he has been sent to this large city in ministry and he has gotten a good response and then the Holy Spirit sends him out to a desert road. It's Gaza, you've heard of that place, right? He is on the road to Gaza south of Jerusalem and there he meets an Ethiopian eunuch who serves as a treasurer, one of influence and power, for Candace which is not a name but a title. There Philip meets him and ministers to the eunuch and by the way when he leaves there he will go up to Judea and he will go all the way up to Caesarea and there he will meet Romans, Centurions and Gentiles. There Philip will preach the Gospel as well.

I want to look at this situation and draw three very simple lessons from this for you. Can you imagine the heady moment of an effective, evangelistic endeavor in the city of Samaria and then the Holy Spirit says to go to a road at Gaza which is a desert place? That doesn't seem very strategic does it but the Spirit says "go" and Philip just as he obeyed to go to Samaritans, he obeyed and went to a desert road. When he got to that desert road he found a chariot with a man sitting on it from what we would call North Africa reading the Old Testament. He is from Ethiopia which would have been called Cush in your Old Testament. So Philip meets this man who has come up from Cush and the eunuch has come all the way up to Jerusalem to worship.

Why would he have come to Jerusalem to worship? Of course we know the hand of the Lord brought him there but there are a couple of reasons why that might have happened. One is that the people of Cush would not be unfamiliar with Yahweh. Why? There are two reasons. One in the dispersion of the Jewish people in the capturing and dispersion of the ten tribes some had gone to North Africa and they probably would have brought copies of the Bible there. The Bible for them then would have been the Old Testament. Do you remember a guy by the name of Solomon? Do you remember a queen that was interested in him because he was so wise and she started reading a lot of things? She was known as the Queen of Sheba and that's the same place where this eunuch is from.

So God's Word would have probably been there and for whatever reason he has been drawn up to Jerusalem. The eunuch worshiped and now he is on his way back, down through Gaza, down through Egypt and then into Ethiopia and on the way back he

is reading Isaiah 53 from a translation in a language he would have known. He is reading it in the Septuagint. As he is reading in this Greek translation, Philip is brought there. I have tried to imagine this moment in my mind where Philip is running along side that chariot and he can hear the eunuch reading from Isaiah out loud and then Philip asks him a question. Philip has to be breathing hard running along side that chariot but anyway Philip asks, "Do you understand what you are reading?" This eunuch answers in this amazing statement, "How can I, unless someone will guide me? How can I unless someone explains it to me?"

Then I'm sure very thankfully, Philip quits running along side the chariot, gets up in the chariot and sits down next to him. Let me catch my breath and beginning with Isaiah 53 using other Scriptures, Philip explained the Good News, the Gospel and Jesus. The Ethiopian eunuch who has searched the Scriptures and this text hears of Christ. He believes. He repents. He receives the sign of the covenant, baptism, as soon as he sees some running water. There was nothing to prevent him and he is baptized. Then the eunuch is filled with no long bewilderment and it says he went on his way rejoicing even though Philip went on his way to Caesarea and started preaching that same message to Roman soldiers and the occupants of this Judean town by the sea.

This is an amazing moment here. There were some things I jotted down about Philip here and then I want to give you these three simple takeaways. First, Philip is a man called of God and when God called him he responded. Is it Samaria? He said, "I'll go." Is it a desert road? "I'll go." Secondly, he is committed. When God calls him he goes. When God calls him he goes to Samaritans even though that would have been distasteful to all of the people back at Jerusalem. He goes to an Ethiopian eunuch and reaches a man from Africa. He reaches the eunuch with the Gospel News and then he goes to Caesarea by the sea. He is called. He is committed. Thirdly, he is competent. Wherever he goes he is able from the Scripture to present the Gospel and Christ. He is ready. He has been disciplined. He is now ready to give through his life the Message of Life to other people. He's called, he's committed, he's competent and one more thing about him. He is absolutely focused upon Christ. He is Christ centered and Gospel driven. When he went to the city of Samaria he preached the Good News of Christ. When he went up on a chariot and sat down beside an Ethiopian eunuch he gave to him the Good News and showed to him Christ from the Scripture. He goes to Caesarea and he preached the Good News of Christ and salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. He's called, committed, competent and absolutely consumed with Christ and the Gospel.

Now slide over here to the eunuch. Here are some things I jotted down about the eunuch. First of all he had a copy of God's Word in his language, by the way, meaning it was one that he could read. He doesn't look at his copy as a good luck charm thinking if he keeps it in the chariot it will be a good luck charm to get him back to Egypt. Secondly, he was actually reading it. My guess is that hopefully someone else was driving the chariot while he was doing that. He has a copy of at least Isaiah, he's reading it and thirdly he is reading it thoughtfully. What is this saying? Of whom is this speaking? Fourthly, he is reading it humbly. Harry, where do you get his humility? When Philip said, "Do you understand what you're reading?" Do you know what I would have said? I would have said something like, "yeah I got this, no problem, anyone can tell this." Yet this man answered simply, "no." This man received the gift of God's

Word and now acknowledges “I need the gift of God’s teachers and preachers in my life. How can I unless someone explains it to me. How can I unless someone guides me.” Oh it’s a clear message but whom is the prophet speaking? I need someone to guide me.

So he has a copy, he is reading it, thoughtfully, humbly and the fifth thing about the eunuch is he is reading it committed to obeying it. When he hears of Christ, he believes, he repents and that obedience extends to the act of baptism whereby he identifies with Christ. He reads it and doesn’t just have a high view of what he knows but he uses it. He not only trusts, he obeys, resting in Christ and acknowledging the majesty of Christ. So now he is equipped, embraced by the gift of God’s Word, through the gift of God’s preacher and teacher in his life, called and committed and now begins to move forward.

So here are three lessons I’d like to give from this. Before I give you the first one I want to confess something. This one is a life takeaway that we can profit from God’s Word but I confess this does not fit the sermon but I cannot walk by it from the text. So the first one is clearly it’s revealed in the text the priority of personal evangelism for the people of God. Philip personally engaged in evangelism to any and all persons that God sent him to and that came under his life and ministry and contact.

I think we are making a gigantic mistake today in that we think the way we are going to reach the world for Christ is to redefine worship from worship and make worship services evangelistic endeavors. Before anyone throws anything at me, I believe clearly, every time God’s Word is sung, read and preached Christ ought to be exalted, the Gospel explained, the believer encouraged and equipped and those who don’t know Christ, the seekers are drawn to Christ. But we will not turn the world upside down by getting the world into the salt shaker. It’s when the salt gets out of the salt shaker in the world that it was turned upside down. It was when they were scattered from Jerusalem that the Gospel went. When the church gathers it does its great worship and disciple making but its thrust of evangelism is when it is scattered. That means me and you, we have a desert road we go to on Monday, don’t we? It’s our school. It’s our work place. It’s our neighborhood. Now, the question is, are you and I personally bringing Christ to those places?

By the way, don’t miss this. It’s indiscriminant personal evangelism. It’s Samaritans that hold their nose. They wouldn’t even walk through their territory but Philip went to them with the Gospel. It’s a black man from Africa, an Ethiopian. It’s a rich man from a royal court. It’s poor people. It’s Roman soldiers in Caesarea. It’s Gentiles who would have been called dogs. Philip makes an indiscriminant proclamation and communication of the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ to anyone and every one and anywhere and every where that he goes.

Not only is this personal evangelism clearly enunciated and emphasized in this text and its indiscriminant but there’s something else about Philip I want you to see. He is a man who by disciple making in his life and who by the Holy Spirit is sensitive to the opportunity of the moment. He’s out of breath, running along side of a chariot and he hears the man reading the Scripture. I would like to encourage right here to reading the Scripture the way they used to. We usually read silently. In your time in the Word of God and in prayer I would like for you to consider doing it out loud. When I pray out loud I stay focused a lot longer. When I pray silently it takes me about 20 seconds to start thinking about something else while I’m praying. When I read out loud I stay

focused. So this eunuch is reading out loud and Philip hears him. This is a moment and so what does Philip do? He ceases the moment by asking the eunuch “Do you understand what you’re reading?” He treats the man with dignity by asking him a question. The man with humility says, “How can I?” Then readily Philip jumps on the chariot, sits down and explains Jesus to him.

That will happen to you tomorrow. When you have that break and you go get something to drink and the people in the office are there or you are stopping off and you are talking to someone. Or a waitress says to you while you are getting lunch, “Man, I’ve had a tough day...” Boom, bells and whistles ought to be going off and you say, “Can you tell me why your day was tough?” They may say, “I just didn’t sleep well last night.” You say, “I’m sorry to hear that. Is there anything causing that?” If we are sensitive enough to treat people with dignity they are going to say something where all we have to do is ask a question and the door is opened wide to speak of Christ. Just listen for a moment.

The second takeaway is something I think is very important and that is I believe to be effective with the Word of God you need to always be sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit in you life. There’s nobody here who likes to think strategically more than me. I love to think strategically. So Biblically how can we strategically do life and ministry? I love that but I think the thing that is missing for many of us that part of thinking strategically is not only Biblically – what should I do next as a father, a husband etc, but how can I be effective for the Lord strategically with sensitivity toward the Spirit. The Spirit is opening all kinds of door all the way around us all over the place. It’s amazing what He’s doing. Most of us make a plan and then we go ask the Holy Spirit to second our motion. I think the best thing to do is to see what the Holy Spirit is doing and then with our lives second the motion. Wow let’s go there, I’ll talk to that person, I’ll go into that situation! When you do that He’s going to lead you to places that sometimes you don’t think are too strategic but He has His own strategy. I’m Philip and I just had a big meeting up here in Samaria and You want me to go to a desert road? I mean, let somebody who can’t get a call go to the desert road but Philip went and he led an Ethiopian eunuch to Christ.

I had the opportunity to take people to Israel to learn the Bible in the land of the Bible and one of the last places we go is the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. This is the traditional and I think the actual site of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. Did you know that the Church of the Holy Sepulcher is seven churches? The one that I always go through, when we walk through it, it is small. You actually have to bend down to get through the door. Inside there are some very short, black clerics. It’s the Christian church from Ethiopia. Did you know that not too many years after this North Africa will become the center of Christianity? Did you know that North Africa not many years after this will have the greatest Christian library that has ever been in existence? Did you know that out of North Africa it will produce great men of God like Augustine? Did you know out of that North Africa and Ethiopia that most of the manuscripts that authenticate your copy of God’s Word came from there? Thank God for Philip being willing to go to an Ethiopian on a desert road. It is amazing what yet had to be done for the man willing to go to an out of the way place, an ordinary man with extraordinary results that God had yet in store. When the Holy Spirit is leading you your strategy will be there next week. When He’s leading follow Him. Go to whom and where He is leading you.

The last takeaway is yet awaits us to see what would happen with Christians and churches that embrace and engage God's Word with confidence and the exaltation of Christ. Are you and I like the Ethiopian eunuch? Do I have my copy of God's Word? Do I have a high view of it? Do I have a high use of it? Am I reading it thoughtfully? Am I reading it searchingly? Am I reading it humbly that I not only need the gift of God's Word but I not only have a hunger and thirst for it but I will long and want for solid preaching and teaching that exalts Christ and brings the Gospel home to my life? Is that in my life?

This Bible I am holding in my hands there's a man who knew it was necessary for me and his name was William Tyndale. He died when he was 42 years old. He was in 12 years of exile in Europe. He translated it into the English language and he was expelled out of his country by King Henry the VIII. Later King Henry the VIII invited him back and Tyndale wrote back a very respectful letter that said, "I'll be glad to come O king and I'll be glad to give my life to come back but O king will you remove the edict and let me translate the Bible in the language of the people?" The king said, "no" so he said, "I will not come." Tyndale gave up home and family. Eventually he was able to translate 3,000 copies of the Bible and smuggled them into England and it set loose the reformation in England.

The Bible that got this country planted called the Geneva Bible, it was what Tyndale did in translation that enabled it, but he died for it. He was strangled to death and hung by chains and burned alive at the same time. He died unmarried. He died unburied but he died with a love for the Word of God so that you could hold it in your hands and then use it, read it thoughtfully. Meditate on it. Memorize it. How can a young man keep his way pure? It is by Your Word. Then to hear it preached and taught. What would happen if you and I embraced this wonderful privilege to be in God's Word and then the persistent, faithful preaching and teaching of this, the Word of God throughout the ages?

I am convinced that for many of us and I put myself right with you, the culture and the circumstances of life are shaping our decisions in life more than Christ and His Word. I am convinced with the culture and its celebrities, its pressures, its peer pressures that the culture and circumstances are shaping our decisions in life more than the Scriptures. Do you know why I don't evangelize like I ought to? Some think it's because I don't love lost people enough. That's not why we don't share the Gospel. We don't share the Gospel because we don't love Jesus enough. Do you know why I'm willing to give up on my marriage when I don't have to give up on my marriage? It is because I don't know and trust Jesus and His Word enough. Do you know why many of the issues surface in my personal life, in my marital life and many issues in the church surface? It is because we don't know, trust and obey the Word of God.

When we falter and we will, we have a Savior who is ready to forgive us and grow us. Flee to Him. O that by God's grace we would not simply with symbol a high view of the Scripture but with life we will embrace a high view of the Scripture and when we have a Scripture reading from our heart we will say, "Thanks be to God for His Word." It is the Word of Life that in the hands of the Spirit sets me free. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together in Your Word and in worship. Thank You for the privilege to know not only the sufficiency and majesty of the Word but the effectiveness of the Word. God, would You hear our plea that we might know Your Word which is Truth and the Truth would set us free? Father, thank You for that Word that reveals the majesty and glory of our God whom we worship. Thank You for that Word that directs the lives of the people of God and we would obey it. O Lord, this Lifeline from heaven, Your Word, may we feast upon it, feed upon it, consistently, intentionally, humbly and may we see Christ. May that Gospel message of salvation by grace in Christ take hold of our lives, not this world's life view that destroys us, but the Word of God that frees us. Thank You for Him, Jesus, who gave us His Word and in His Name I pray, Amen.