

The Great Search

by J. Glyn Owen

The sermon explores the theme of the great search for God and the importance of seeking Him in our lives, using the story of the Ethiopian eunuch and Philip as a model.

Duration: 50:07

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Mark 10:45, John 14:6, Acts 8:26, Romans 3:23, 1 Peter 2:24

Topics: "Witnessing"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of seeing beyond the superficial details of a story and recognizing the underlying principles. He shares a personal anecdote about a picture that initially appeared to be just branches, but upon closer examination, revealed multiple hidden faces. The speaker draws a parallel to the story being discussed, where many people only see a man seeking God, but fail to see the presence and work of God throughout. He highlights that God is the original missionary and evangelist, and emphasizes the need for believers to recognize God's seeking nature and trust in His power and grace.

Transcript

May I say what a joy and a privilege it is to be with you today. It's good to be back in this dear old sanctuary again, but still more precious to be with you good people. It gives me the opportunity of rendering personal apology that I was unable to keep my last commitment here a week or so ago.

I can only assure you that it was quite impracticable, and if I had come you would have been glad to see me go again. However, thanks to the grace and mercy of God and your prayers, one is able to be here this morning, and I'm very grateful to you for your prayers and to the Lord for his enabling. He is a great and merciful Father, and we rejoice in his goodness.

We find no fault with the Lord. I find no fault with him. But as the days go by, he proves himself to be precisely what he is in his word and in his son.

I must say a word of thanks to Mrs. Washburn and to our dear friend Mark for their ministrations this morning too. Mrs. Washburn knows the way to my heart. I say no more about that, not simply through her cooking, but in other respects as well.

And Mark chose well this morning when he chose that lovely old-time solo. And it fits in so beautifully with the passage of Scripture that the Lord seems to have laid on my heart to share with you this morning. Let us now turn to Acts chapter 8 and the record of an incident beginning with verse 26.

Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, by the way this Philip is not one of the apostles, he is one of the six deacons appointed quite recently, that is at this stage in the event, recently appointed as a deacon in the Jerusalem church. He became later known as Philip the Evangelist. And the angel of the Lord said to him, Go south to the road, the desert road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.

So he started out and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of Candacy, queen of the Ethiopians. This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship. And on his way home he was sitting in his chariot reading the book of Isaiah the prophet.

A spirit told Philip, Go to that chariot and stay near it. Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. Do you understand what you're reading? Philip asked.

How can I? he said, unless someone explains it to me. So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. The eunuch was reading this passage of scripture.

He was led like a sheep to the slaughter. And as a lamb before the shearer is silent, so he did not open his mouth. In his humiliation he was deprived of justice.

Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth. The eunuch asked Philip, Tell me please, who is the prophet talking about? Himself or someone else? Then Philip began with that very passage of scripture. And told him the good news about Jesus.

As they traveled along the road they came to some water. And the eunuch said, look here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptized? And he ordered the chariot to stop.

Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water. And Philip baptized him. When they came up out of the water.

The spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away. And the eunuch did not see him again. But went on his way rejoicing.

Philip however, appeared in a virgin. And traveled about preaching the gospel in all the towns. Until he reached Caesarea.

May the spirit of God rest upon his word. Upon us as we seek to expound it. And upon the congregation as we seek to listen.

And all of us to apply the word to our hearts. The great search is our subject this morning. The book of Acts is far more than a book of history.

It does not simply record historical events. Though of course it does that. And superficially a reader might conclude that is all there is to it.

But that is not so. Underlying the history that is recorded in the book of Acts. There are basic spiritual principles.

Underlined and enunciated very clearly. And this is no exception. You may well read this passage.

Read the record of this event. And you may simply see to see a man. Seeking God and being helped by an evangelist.

And one or two other things. And you get those superficial details. But underneath those superficial details.

There are principles. And I trust that God will enable us to see some of those. As we go through this morning.

You see there is a context here. Let me explain it now at this stage. So that as we meditate upon some of the details.

You may see these fundamental principles. The context is this. The world that crucified God incarnate.

The Son of God. Did not thereby spend all its enmity against the Almighty. There was still more hatred left in the human heart.

Even when Jesus the Son of God was crucified and buried. And now that venom of fallen humanity was directed. Not against the master but against his followers.

And so when the disciples held the glad tidings. That the Christ who was crucified is alive again. And well risen from the dead.

And ascended to the right hand of God. The offer of the sender in fellowship with the Father of the Holy Spirit. The devil and all his hosts trembled.

And reacted with the same kind of violence. As was expressed against the Lord Jesus Christ. But now against the disciples.

Now against the young church. And all the demons of hell were arraigned. To attack now the people of God.

Without my going into details. They were attacked from the outside. And they were attacked from the inside.

Threats, warnings, imprisonment, beating, martyrdom. Those are the things we've read about in the early chapters of the book of Acts. But not only from outside in that sense.

Did the devil show his teeth against the early community of Christians. But from within the Christian community itself. We see evidence of satanic intrigue.

You see the devil isn't content to attack us from the outside. He's very cunning and he loves to come inside. Let me give you just two illustrations as I go on.

First of all there was Ananias and Sapphira. Very loyal, very faithful. In many, many respects.

But you see the devil got hold of them. And they professed something which wasn't true. That's all.

But they lied to the Holy Spirit. And they lied to men and women who were filled with the Holy Ghost. And you can't do that and not disbelieve.

And you can't do things like that and expect the church to enjoy the presence and the grace and the wonder of God's manifestation. You can't. It was a provocative act of Satan laying hold of two of the choicest believers.

And then you have another one. The disgruntled widows. I hesitate to speak like that about widows.

But that's how the scriptures do. There were many widows in these days. And we need to have a heart for them at all times.

And especially at this time as we think of them. They had lost their husbands because of the faith they put to you. But now they were arguing that they were not having their share from the benevolent son.

And you know how the devil got in here. Do you know what he wanted to do? He wanted to divert the apostles from their God given task. Their primary task of preaching the good news.

And they had to deal with all these problems and settle the widows and quieten and pacify their fears. And explain things. And you see whilst they were doing that.

They were not doing the work to which God had called them. Oh there are so many ways in which the devil comes into a community of God's people. Disrupts it.

And he's doing hell's work among the people that are going to heaven. Now the question is this. In the face of such difficulties.

How on earth can the church develop in maturity and in growth. And expand as Jesus had said it should. From Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria to the uttermost parts of the earth.

How on earth could a little community of non-entities. There was no important man or woman among them at this stage. How on earth can they expect to expand and grow and develop and become mature.

And be what God has called them to be. Now here we have an incident that brings out the principles. Really we don't need to be clever.

If you are clever then thank God for all the provisions involved in such a blessing and a benefit. But we don't need to be clever. We don't need all the philosophy and psychology of the world to guide us in spiritual things.

But there are certain things that are basic. And they come out in this amazing little story. This episode.

The great search. We see two things here. A man in search of God.

God in search of a man. And I want us to look at these two as briefly as we can. First of all a man in search of God.

Now the man before us. This black man from North Africa. Must surely be deemed as the epitome of the noblest and the best features.

That either ancient or modern paganism could possibly produce. He is a veritable paragon of virtue. I don't care how you look at this black Ethiopian eunuch.

He's a great man. And the nearer I've come to him over the last number of weeks. The more I've admired him.

And there are things that constantly come to light about him. Which make me think this is a remarkable man. Look at his social qualifications.

Let me just mention these. They're not the most important things. But they are important.

He was first of all as we're told a North African. Hailing from Ethiopia. Now don't get mixed up.

Those of you who read. Do a little geography. There were two Ethiopians in these days.

There was one in Arabia in the east. There was another one to the south of Egypt. That's the one referred to here.

The Ethiopia in the south of Egypt. The capital was Neroi on the upper Nile. It's the equivalent of the modern Nubia.

So don't get mixed up in your geography. He was a North African from Ethiopia. And we're told that he was an important official.

In the charge of all the treasury of Candacy. Queen of the Ethiopians. Now I'm not going to dwell.

I'm not going to attempt to dissect all that and analyze it. But behind that simple statement you see. There is a whole continent of fact.

A man doesn't become a high official in the treasury all at once. A prime minister or a queen or a king. Doesn't go out and just pick the first person he chooses.

To put in charge of the purse of the realm. There's a lot of education. There's a lot of preparation.

There's a lot of training. And there is a quest for character. To know whether a person of this kind is capable.

And is worthy of such a position. Now you use your imagination. I'm not going into all of that.

But this man has passed muster. And here he is. Living within the excellence of power.

Here he is. In a place of high prestige. Here he is.

A man in charge of the purse of his queen. This man can walk tall on any street and in any company. He's a man who's in the place of power.

But the remarkable thing is this you see. The man's own self-consciousness. As we notice it in the biblical records.

Is not so much of his success. But of his failure. Not of what he's got.

But what he hasn't got. And it's not because he was a self-centered arrogant. Wanting to possess everything for himself.

I don't think so. It wasn't that. The explanation is deeper than that.

True he is all that we've mentioned and that is said here. And much else I believe. But what he is conscious about.

As we are told here in the narrative is. Oh he lacked something. He was without something.

Something far more important than all that he had. Or all that he was. Or whatever prospects were his.

Now since the scriptures don't tell us exactly. How he would have expressed this. I can only pose some questions.

Was it a sense of being unfulfilled? Was it a sense of void in his soul? That with all that he had. He must have had a very good salary. He must have had a pretty good home.

He must have had. Well what not? A man in his position. But was he still sensing some void within.

That all these things could not satisfy. Could not meet. I don't know.

It could well be. Or was it. That there were so many questions unanswered.

Thus far in his life. This man was a reader. I will prove that in a moment.

But will you please take it for granted now. This man was quite a prolific reader. This man knew literature.

This man was a man of many languages. This man knew something about the world. Not only within his own country.

But beyond his own country. Into North Africa. Possibly beyond.

This man was a man of culture. And a man of rich education. But was it.

Was it that he felt that. Though he had all the answers to his own job. And his own post to do that.

Well there were deeper questions. There are deeper problems. There are deeper issues.

And neither religion. Nor success in business. And in government affairs.

None of these things satisfy the inner soul. There is some craving. Some yearning for something bigger and greater.

I can only ask the question. I don't know what the answer is. Or could it be.

I don't know. Was it a sense of guilt. For some reason or other that pursued him.

But whatever it was. The man was a seeker. He's a seeker.

He's not an ambassador. Going into another country to tell. We've got a wonderful country.

And I'm in a wonderful place. And my queen is a wonderful person. That's not his message.

His message is. I'm seeking. I come in search.

I'm looking for someone. Something. Something.

Someone. Somewhere. And he was determined.

He was determined to seek. Determined to do anything. And determined to go anywhere.

In order to find satisfaction. Now it is clear that he had acquired knowledge of the Jewish religion. For example.

We don't know quite what he had discovered. We don't know where it came from. But he had acquired knowledge of the Jewish religion.

And at this point in time. He had determined that he must make a trip to Jerusalem. Because apparently the Jewish religion had something.

That none of the religions around him in his pagan society had. And having exhausted them. And the knowledge of them.

He feels that there is something different here. I must go and see it. I must go and examine it.

I must go. Not just as a researcher. But I must go.

And worship. I like that. He didn't know all that was involved.

But he wasn't going, as it were, to stand on the sidelines. And be the judge. And try to assess academically.

Merely. He was going already prepared. If that were possible.

To join in the worship in Jerusalem. He went as a worshiper. And you know worshippers sometimes discover things that scientists don't.

And the more analytical do not. And he determined to go. And go he did.

I must mention this about him too. I'm not sure whether it is most clearly related either to the fact that he was in a very high post. Or whether it is in the state.

Or whether it is related to his religious quest. But he was a eunuch. Now.

Sex has always been a problem in society. When it is unmastered. When the sexual impulse is out of control in any society.

From the beginning of time right up to the present moment. It can turn everything upside down. And it can bring the wilderness.

The wild wilderness. The savagery of the wilderness. Back into a once well-ordered society.

A way back in these ancient times. Many of these civilizations. The niche.

Well I don't need to go into detail. When for example they would have in those days. Someone in charge.

If you were rich. You would have someone in charge of the home. We would have called them chamberlains.

There were semitic terms employed. But this is how you translate it. Chamberlains.

People in charge of everything that went on in the home. Buying and selling. Paying all the bills.

Paying the taxes. Choosing the servants. Looking after even the wife.

Or the two wives. Or the three. As they often were in these ancient days.

And the children. You see. Parents were not very happy to put their children.

And their wives. And their daughters. Into the hands of folk that were sexually unmastered.

Undisciplined. And that was one reason how this habit emerged. There were men who wanted to reach the highest places in society and the best paid.

And they were prepared to go through this savage, savage, savage operation. Whereby the male sex organ was completely rendered inoperative. So that they would not have any sexual temptations.

And therefore boys and girls and men and women were safe in their hands. The thought of paying a price for the mastery of sex in our day is not in... It isn't known. Our modern, cultured, philosophic, psychologically oriented society doesn't think of that today.

We've gone beyond that. We must have what we want and have it now. At any cost.

And we're paying a great price. But this man was a eunuch. And not only were chamberlains put in place because there was no danger of there being a sexual pervert.

Men and women were called to positions of state. I could quote you chapters and verses. Just because of this they would give themselves, they would devote themselves entirely to their work.

And certainly this is true of the man before us. And so we come to his spiritual quest. He is still unsatisfied.

He's prepared to pay any price for success in matters of state, in matters of spirituality. Now he's going to Jerusalem. And I just want you to see what he does.

He has to go to his queen or to the prime minister and get time off like most people would, I guess. And then he's got to order a taxi. And he's got to get a driver.

Not the kind of taxi that you would drive in. There would be no springs in it to travel through the desert. All the way up through Egypt and up the Gaza desert to Jerusalem.

And here he goes. And he gets everything together and he makes the long tedious journey taking some days and some nights on the way. But he's determined, you see.

Though I've gone so far to secure what my soul and my heart need and want, I will go further. I will pay any price. I will go anywhere.

I will see what Jewish religion has to offer me. And so he comes to Jerusalem. And at this point in the narrative, he's on the way home.

Now that's all I can say about a man in search of God. Oh, there's more to say. You can read it.

But, but, but, but, I must leave that there. Now I want you to see the other side. Some years ago, it's when our children, our girls were small, and Andrew hadn't appeared on the scene.

I was visiting one day. This was in the city of Belfast, I think. And a mother of some children showed me a large box of puzzles for children.

You know, there were about 500 pieces in the box, cardboard and some pictures on them, torn up into pieces to be fitted together. Now the picture on the cover of the box was one of trees. Not trees laden with foliage, as most of our trees are today.

There was some foliage, but the branches of the trees. This was the significant thing. There were so many trees, you could see nothing but trees.

And the branches of one tree were intermingled with the branches of another tree, one on this side, one on this side, one on that side, one on this side. So it was just the branches of trees becoming intertwined, the one and the other. But the caption on the front of the box was this, Find the man.

And when you read the caption, the concept you had of a man hiding somewhere in the trees. And I looked quite seriously. My sight was better in those days, and I thought if there's a man to find, I can find him.

And I looked and looked, but I just could not find the man. And I wasn't willing to give up either. But anyway, I had to do it.

And the lady said to me, when she saw that I was handing in the towel, she said, Hang on a minute. And then she took the box, and she said, Let's turn it a little bit. I can hear her now with her Irish accent.

Let's turn it a little bit. And she turned it a little bit. And she said, Now, look at it now.

And lo and behold, I saw the face of a man in between some of the branches. One face in the midst of all these branches. And there it was, all right.

There was the face of a man. But then as I looked at that face, I saw there's another face here. And quite frankly, there were faces everywhere.

And you know, when I took my eyes off that picture, I couldn't see anything but the faces of the man was everywhere. You know, my friends, there are many people who are reading the story before us this morning only see a man in search of God. And they don't see the face of God anywhere.

But when once you really see what's here, it's the face of God. It's the hand of God. It's the mercy of God.

It's the work of God that covers the whole thing. And the most important thing in this story is, God is about his business. It is God seeking the man.

And you see, this is the secret how a community of Christian people in circumstances like this, facing persecution, facing martyrdom. Martyrdom, something like the martyrdom of Stephen. Threatened on all hands.

Puny, unexceptional people. This is the only adequate answer for their possible success. God is everywhere.

Even in the wilderness, God is found. The face of God, the hand of God, the arm of God, the grace of God, the power of God. Come and look with me at the moment.

I want you to take this picture with you, before I close with the details. I want you to see the picture of God as the seeker. You see, God is the original missionary.

He is the original evangelist. He was the first evangelist. Now one disservice that the New Testament has done for us.

Don't misunderstand me. But I must put it like that. The disservice is this.

Many of us have grown up with the idea that God didn't seek hardly anyone before Jesus came into the world. And it is Jesus who comes to seek and to save that which was lost. God sent Jesus to do the seeking.

And he hadn't done very much of it before. I don't know what he was doing. But until Jesus came and until the Holy Spirit came to convict men and women of sin and bring them to the Savior and then through the Savior to the Father, well, well, well, well, Father didn't do very much.

Brothers and sisters, I want you to wake up with me this morning to this remarkable truth. God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, God is the eternal seeker and the original seeker and the essential seeker and he always was the seeker. He was the first evangelist.

He goes into the Garden of Eden when our first parents have brought death upon themselves and upon the race. Do you remember what he does? He calls to Adam and he says, Adam, where are you? Where are you hiding, Adam? And he hasn't gone there just to fund our judgment upon him now. He's gone there to preach what scholars speak of as the first evangelist.

Yeah, but don't get away from it. The first evangelist was preached by the primary evangelist. The Protoevangelium has behind it the evangelist and the evangelist is God.

I have no time to deal with this as it deserves to be dealt with, but later on when the judgment of Noah's day has come and the world is still full of vile sin and wretchedness and rebellion, God goes into a pagan land and he calls a man called Abram and he says, Abram, it is I'm going to start something with you. Oh, I've been doing this kind of thing on an individual basis, of course, from the beginning of time, but I'm going to start something with you and through you all the families of the earth will be blessed. God sought a man.

And every saint is a child of Abram, so Paul tells us. We are children of Abram if we are children of faith in the Messiah. God's seeking.

If you read the prophets, you come to books like Hosea where the great seeker is described and you come to a chapter like Ezekiel 34 where God has been quarreling with some of his servants, the leaders in the church of the day, let us say, because they're not seeking men. And he says, look, I myself am going to come down to seek my sheep and bring home my wayward ones and attend to their needs. I myself am coming down.

God is the seeker. That's just what he did in Jesus Christ. He did not simply send someone distinct from himself, but God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself.

And in Jesus Christ, this is what he said, the Son of Man is come to seek and to serve that which was lost. And Jesus spoke of the sheep that had got lost in the wilderness. And he is the good shepherd that went in search of the sheep.

Oh, brothers and sisters, our God is the great seeking God. And he's not only seeking big, good, great men like this man, rich and opulent and intellectual and much else. No, no, no, no.

You remember Paul going to Corinth. Corinth is one of the things I can never get out of my memory. You know, there are some things like a red hot iron, they burn into your memory.

You forget a lot of things, some things you can't. I can never forget that night described in Acts 18 where Paul has been frightened in Corinth. Paul is afraid.

Nobody knows that, only the Heavenly Father. Paul has been frightened by the sin of Corinth and he's tempted to be quiet and to do nothing and say nothing about it. And the Lord comes to him and says, Now Paul, I've got, I've got many people in this city.

Don't stop witnessing, carry on Paul. He says, do what you're doing, do what you came to do. And for 18 months Paul carried on.

Now, get the picture, will you? Corinth has been called the moral dunghill of the ancient world. Where were God's people when God said that to Paul? I have many people in this city. Where were they? Hold your breath.

They were on the dunghill. They were in the dirt. They were in the filth.

They were in the mire. They were enslaved. They were lost.

They were wallowing in it. But God had chosen them. And they were waiting to be called.

And he said, Paul, don't stop your witnessing and your preaching. Tell them the good news about Jesus. And Paul went on for 18 months.

And the church emerges on the dunghill that was Corinth. And when Paul writes to it, he addresses them as saints in Christ Jesus. Can you see what I'm getting at? Our God is a searching God.

He's a seeking God. He seeks the high. He seeks the low.

He seeks the black. He seeks the white. He goes to North Africa.

He goes to South Africa too. He goes everywhere. Our God is the great seeker, the great searcher.

I must close with this. It's his sufficiency. You see, really, really, you don't need to look too much at the problems.

If you know that God is the seeker. If you are the seeker, dear friend, if you are alone the seeker, you better be worried because the devil is pretty strong and pretty tough and pretty wiry and wily. But there's one thing, there is one thing that can quieten your heart this morning if you're doing something vital for

God, if you too are seeking the lost for him.

It is this. God is our sufficiency in this too. Now, let me just give you a little snippet.

I won't keep you long. I've learnt my lesson. I bring a calendar with me to the pulpit now and the watch.

Look at the story here. Let's take it as it is given to us. Look at it.

First of all, the thing I want you to notice is that in verse 26, God has angels at his disposal for the fulfillment of his task in calling his elect unto him. Now, an angel of the Lord said to Philip, Go south to the road, the desert road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza. Now, Philip is up, you see, in Caesarea.

In Samaria, I'm sorry. And in Samaria, many people are coming to know the Lord Jesus as Saviour through the ministry of Philip at that time. It's very exciting.

Some people call it revival. Well, I'm not sure whether that is the right word or not. But there was great excitement there and great victories were evidenced in the name of the Lord Jesus as the gospel was preached.

And Philip was at the heart of it. He was, humanly speaking, the leader. But the angel of the Lord comes to Philip and says, Philip, pack up your bag and go down to the road that leads south to Gaza, the wilderness road, the desert road.

There were two. You go through the desert road and no more. Now, you may not know much about angels.

I may not know much about angels. Brothers, it doesn't matter. God still has them whether we know much about them or not.

Oh, we know that they are ministering spirits sent to serve those who will enter into salvation. We all know that because we've read the epistle to the Hebrews. But practically, we may know next to nothing about angels.

Well, Mary didn't know much about angels either. She didn't know all the mysteries relating to them. But the angel came to her.

As to her cousin Elizabeth. And you read the record of the Bible in the Old Testament and the New. God often calls upon the ministry of angels to do certain things.

That's where it all started here in this incident. It goes back further, of course. But that's where it started as far as this incident is concerned.

The next thing I want you to notice is that God has his servants, his human servants. The angel came and told this man, Philip, Philip and no one else, you go down to the road that leads to Gaza, the road that is in the wilderness. You go.

Now, who was Philip? Well, Philip was, as we've mentioned before, one of the six deacons. He had a great character. He was a man full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, we are told.

But he wasn't anything perfect. Now, I underline that word perfect. Because many people feel that they can be of no service to God until they can say that they are almost blameless.

The one thing I will say without adding to it is this. Philip was very successful in doing what he was given to do in Samaria. Many were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

But it required the ministry of Peter and John to lead them into the fullness of the salvation that Christ had procured for them by the Holy Spirit. So, even though Philip was a great man, a great evangelist, he wasn't all that perfect. And yet God had him in his hand, and God appointed him to be his servant, and God could call upon him, and this is the thing.

He was available, you see, for God. He only needed to be called. He only needed to be told where to go.

God called him and told him where to go, and he went. The next thing I want you to notice is this. Though God sent his servant Philip, God calls himself on the same errand.

Angels can do so much in the work of God, but there are certain things that angels can't do, great as they are. God is now commissioning Philip to go and lead this black man out of spiritual darkness into light. From the kingdom of Satan to the kingdom of God, angels can't be involved in that, or if involved, only in a secondary way.

The Holy Spirit of God, God himself can bring new birth and bring men to become new creatures in Christ Jesus. The Spirit of God himself must be there, and so he went. And the Spirit said to Philip, Go near to this chariot, and of course he went immediately, and he had the surprise of his life.

You see, God's providence is over all these things. You see how sufficient he is. His providence is over all these things, and as Philip comes near to the chariot, his breath must have been taken away, because he heard the man in the chariot, whom he'd never met before, he heard him reading aloud.

And what was he reading? He was reading the Jewish scriptures, and now the Christian scriptures. He was reading from Isaiah 53. He was reading about the suffering servant of Jehovah, the one who had come to bear our sins in his body to the tree, wounded for our transgressions, and so forth.

And he was reading that. And Philip, in the hand of the Spirit, put a question, a very straightforward question, that could only be given if you're sure that the Spirit was asking you, and bidding you, and enabling you. Do you understand what you're reading? And the dear man looked at Philip and said, No, he said, how could I unless somebody explained to me.

And then later he said, when he invited Philip into the chariot, Is this man speaking about himself or about somebody else? Do you remember what happened? Arising out of this, Philip told him the good news about Jesus. The Jesus of Isaiah 53, the Jesus of the New Testament, the Christ of Gethsemane, and of Calvary, and of the empty tomb, and of the enthroned glory, and was sent to the Holy Spirit. And the man was brought into the kingdom.

I've left one thing out. Look at this man coming home. He's been to Jerusalem, disillusioned, more than ever coming from Jerusalem.

You see, this man couldn't really take part in the Jewish religion. One, because he was probably a Gentile. Two, because he was a eunuch.

Do you know whether Gentiles and eunuchs stood if they went to one of the services in the temple? It would be the equivalent of you good people coming here this morning, and you didn't belong to the folk

who belonged. You could only come to the outside door, which would be closed in your faces, and you could neither hear nor see anything going on inside. Just because this man was a Gentile, and because this man was a eunuch, he could not come over the step, he could not come inside anywhere, and he couldn't see and he couldn't hear, outside there in the cold.

How disillusioned he must have been when he came back from Jerusalem. You see, Jesus did say, did he not, that your house is left unto you desolate. You have made what was meant to be a house of prayer to become a den of thieves.

You've become robbers of what God meant this place to be. That's where the Ethiopian went and came away, as distracted and disappointed as ever, even more so. But in the process, the providence of God had done something it could not do before.

The man was humble enough, humble enough, on his return journey in that rickety chariot, to confess to a stranger that he didn't understand what he was reading, and he needed help. And God, the Holy Ghost, had come alongside Inphilip and had put in his hand the Scriptures. And with the Scriptures and the servant, God was able to finish his work.

And there in the wilderness, a seeking sinner is embraced by a seeking Heavenly Father and Redeemer, and their life, eternal, comes into the heart and experience of what was probably the first North African Christian. Brothers and sisters, can you see the principle? God is sufficient. That's what it says.

God in himself. If God is in the business, the tragedy is, you see, that we want to do things our own way. As I read of affairs in the church, as in the state today, but particularly in the church now, the thing that bothers me, the thing that hurts me, the thing that makes me wounded in spirit, is how many churches, how many Christians, want to do things the world's way and their own way, rather than the revealed way of God in his Word.

We don't even know the Word of God well enough to obey it. But with the Word of God in our hands and being taught us, and our obeying it by the Spirit of God and the servant of God, brothers and sisters, there is nothing that can stand in our way of gathering in God's elect from the North and the South and the East and the West in the face of persecution, in the face of unbelief, in the face of whatever the devil can turn up. If you are a seeker this morning, I want you to know you are only a seeker because God has put the search in your soul.

And he's come to meet you into the wilderness that is yours. And he wants to come down to you and put his arms around you and end that aspect of the search by his pardoning mercy offered freely to a humble penitent and believer right here this morning. As there on the road that went down from Jerusalem to Gaza, the desert road.

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, we pause in worship of your greatness, in adoration of your glory, in praise of your person. Did you not give us anything? We must praise you and honor you and glorify you, for you are all glorious in yourself.

And the picture of you that emerges from these scriptures that we have been meditating upon this morning is a picture that elicits from the heart of every child of yours a sense of wonder. We worship you, and then we ask of you, give us to see the meaning of all this and its application to us in our lives and in our circumstances today as individuals, yes, and this congregation as a church, and the church at large

throughout this city and throughout this province and this country and the whole world. Oh, manifest yourself as the God who is sufficient, the sovereign, glorious God.

Gather your people unto you. And if you should send an angel to bid us be your servants, give us the listening ear and the obedient will and forgive us our sins. Through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord.

Amen.

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