

# The Man Who Receives Spiritual Sight

by T. Austin-Sparks

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*The story of the Ethiopian eunuch illustrates the importance of humility, obedience, and faith in receiving spiritual sight and experiencing the fullness of God's presence.*

**Scripture:** Acts 8:26

**Topics:** "Spiritual Sight", "Humility in Seeking God"

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## Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the transformative journey of the Ethiopian eunuch, who, despite his high status and religious background, was a blind seeker of truth. His humility and openness to guidance led him to Philip, who, prompted by the Holy Spirit, explained the Scriptures and revealed Jesus to him. The eunuch's sincere desire for understanding and his immediate obedience to the call for baptism illustrate the importance of being honest and earnest in our spiritual pursuits. Sparks highlights that God responds to those who genuinely seek Him, and the Holy Spirit is always ready to work in the hearts of those who are open and willing. Ultimately, the eunuch's journey from darkness to light serves as a powerful reminder of the joy that comes from encountering Christ.

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## Transcript

And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, "Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, the same is desert." And he arose and went: and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was over her treasure, who had come to Jerusalem to worship; and he was returning and sitting in his chariot, and was reading the Prophet Isaiah. And the Spirit said unto Philip, "Go near, and join thyself to this chariot." And Philip ran to him, and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet, and said, "Understandest thou what thou readest?" And he said, "How can I, except some one guide me?" And he besought Philip to come up and sit with him. Now the passage of the scripture which he read was this, "He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and as a lamb before his shearer is dumb, so He opened not His mouth: in His humiliation His judgment was taken away: His generation who shall declare? For His life is taken from the earth." And the eunuch answered Philip, and said, "I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? Of himself, or of some other?" And Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this scripture, preached unto him Jesus. And as they went on the way, they came unto a certain water; and the eunuch said, "Behold, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?" And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they both went down into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip; and the eunuch saw him no more, for he went on his way

rejoicing. But Philip was found at Azotus: and passing through he preached the gospel to all the cities, till he came to Caesarea (Acts 8:26-40).

In this simple but instructive incident we have three parties. We have the Ethiopian, the Holy Spirit, and the human instrument, Philip. The incident falls into the compass of our present meditation in this Conference concerning spiritual sight.

## The Ethiopian

### (a) A Confessedly Blind Seeker

When we look at this Ethiopian, we at once see a blind seeker. Though religious, though moving in the circle of long standing and well-established religious tradition, though having been to Jerusalem, to the temple, to the very head-quarters, he is still blind, still a blind seeker. That is quite clear from the questions he put to Philip about the Scriptures of those with whom he was associated, and their prophets. "How can I understand, except some one shall guide me?" "Of whom speaketh the prophet this? Of himself, or of some other?" He is manifestly a man in the dark, a man without spiritual sight, the eyes of his heart have not been enlightened; but the hopeful thing about him is that he is a confessedly blind man.

### (b) A Humble Seeker

He was a very important man in this world, a man of considerable responsibility and influence and standing, and because of his position he might well have hedged things a bit. When challenged about his reading, he might have evaded the point or pointedness of the question and have given some kind of evasive non-committal answer. You know how people do who do not like to be thought ignorant, especially if they are people who are regarded as being of some standing, who have a position to keep up. This man, with all that he was amongst men on this earth, was a confessedly blind man. Without any hedging or evasion, he answers the question quite directly and honestly and frankly. 'Do I understand what I am reading? Well, how can I except someone teach me?' Then, in his openness, he pressed further for information, for explanation, for enlightenment. "Of whom speaketh the prophet?"

Now, that is very simple, I know, but it is fundamental. It is fundamental to any kind of spiritual understanding, it is basic to all spiritual knowledge, it governs every degree of progress in spiritual things. The humility of this great man is the key to the whole story. He does not seek to give the impression that he knows what he does not know, to lead another to think that he understands when he does not understand; he starts right from the place where he truly and really was. He knew in his own heart that he did not understand and he gave no other impression, but let it be known that was exactly where he was, and that gave a fully opened way to the Lord. May it not be it was this that the Lord had seen long before and upon which He was acting all the time? He knew that He had a perfectly honest and humble man in the dark seeking light, and He could move sovereignly in wonderful ways over considerable distances and take some momentous steps; for these were momentous steps that were taken by the Lord in order to meet that life. You see what such a state of heart makes possible from the Lord's side, how much the Lord is prepared to do when He finds a heart like that. A blind man seeking light, but confessedly blind, and so it is not long before he is an enlightened seeker: for the Lord did not leave such a man in the dark; He gave him the light he was seeking.

And may we not say the Lord gave him a great deal more than he was seeking; for I do not think we should be adding anything to the story if we said that, when he went on his way rejoicing, he felt that he

had got a great deal more than he had set out to get. It is always like that. When the Lord does a thing, He does it properly. As Mr. Spurgeon said, My cup runneth over, and my saucer also! When the Lord does a thing, He does it well. The man went on with a full and overflowing cup, an enlightened seeker. He had come to see what all the religious leaders of his day were not seeking, and were incapable of showing him.

#### (c) A Seeker Who Meant Business With God

But the enlightenment that came to him brought with it a fresh challenge, as it always does. Every bit of new light coming from the Lord carries with it a fresh challenge, a challenge to some practical obedience. Now I am not going to stay to deal with a most interesting, and I think, a most profitable detail of the whole story, but let us note it. Isaiah 53 brought Christ into view and Philip preached from that scripture Jesus, and the very next thing we strike right up against is, "Here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?" Now, you have to do some filling in there, if you are to see how that arises with Isaiah 53. I leave you with that. Do not pass it over: you think about it. All I am going to say is that the revelation which came to the man then, the enlightenment of his eyes, brought with it a challenge to obedience, and this enlightened seeker was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision, but was swift to meet the challenge, quick to run in the way of His command, unhesitant in obedience to the light that had come. So far as the thing itself is concerned, all is very simple; but that is the substance of things. We see a man passing from darkness to light. We see a man passing from a quest to a heart-ravishing knowledge. We see a man fumbling, changed into a man who has a firm grasp, a man whose heart is disappointed changed into one who goes on his way rejoicing. And the two things which from his side make that possible are an utter humility, in that he makes no bones at all about his ignorance and does not feign to know more than he does know, and his swift obedience to light coming to him. You have to say about this man, Here is an honest heart.

And that is how God deals with honest people. They get light and they get joy.

Before we leave him, let us say of him that he is clearly a man who means business. I like this man in his intentness upon knowing and doing. He is right on the mark. All the enervating effect of his Ethiopian climate had not robbed him of spiritual energy. He rose above that, he meant business with God. No element of compromise, excuse, or anything like that at all is found in him. He was simply set upon knowing, if it could be known, and doing whatever there was to be done when enlightened.

Well, to the man who is bent on thus knowing and coming into things, God is going to show Himself of the same kind. God is to us what we are to Him. God will be debtor to no man, and if you and I really mean business with God and are going right out for all that God has for us, all that God wants us to have and to know, and are not going to take on any airs but get right down to the level where we really and genuinely are, in all humility, and we mean that whatever the Lord shows us we are going to do it by His grace without any hesitation, we shall find that, in the long run, God is not going to be our debtor, but He will meet us to the full. This man's story is given an immortal record. It comes in the Acts of the Holy Spirit, and when you come to ask the question, Why is this man included in the record and his story handed down from age to age to last as long as time? The answer is just what we have said: he was a man who meant business with God, was open to the Lord, honest in heart, humble in spirit, and obedient to the light that he had.

#### The Holy Spirit

##### (a) The Ground He Requires

Well, then, the second party in the story is the Holy Spirit, and a brief word only needs to be said. Of course, in reality He was the first party in the whole business, but I mention Him second here because it is perhaps more helpful to examine the incident in this order. The Holy Spirit was aware of such a man, and the Holy Spirit is always aware of such a man. There is a sense in which an Ethiopian must go before the Holy Spirit. You understand what I mean by that. Before the Holy Spirit can really do His work, He must have something upon which to do it that meets His requirements, and the Holy Spirit was cognisant of this man, of his quest and of his heart, and the Holy Spirit is always aware of such people as to where they are.

#### (b) How He Is Hindered

I think there is a very big story hanging upon a statement like that. If we did but know it, a lot of our problems are solved by understanding that. There is the big question which is always confronting us as to why is it that some leap into the light and go on, and others do not, but always lag behind, and never seem to see any more? Is it that there is a selectiveness on the part of God, a kind of elect of the elect that He has, is it that He has favourites? I do not think so. I think a great part of the answer lies here, namely, in what God finds He has to deal with, whether people mean business with Him or not, whether He has a clear way or not, whether the ground is occupied or not already by that which is an obstruction to Him. I do not think anybody will fail to get all the light the Lord wants them to have if they really do mean business with God. The Holy Spirit knows us. He looks right deep down into our hearts and knows whether we mean business. He sees exactly what there is to hinder Him and how far He can go; for the Lord is not going to coerce anyone. If we are taken up with ourselves, occupied with ourselves, circling round ourselves, centering in ourselves, then the Holy Spirit has not a chance. We have to come to an end of ourselves. That is the trouble with so many. They have got a self-complex set up, and all the time it is a continuous going round in a circle and coming back to the same point at which they started, and it is all round themselves, and they are wearing themselves out. Before long they are going to have an awful crash that involves all that for which they are supposed to stand and represent for the Lord, and it will come down with them. The Holy Spirit has not a clear way. We have to get out of the way, so far as this self-occupation is concerned, if we are going to move straight on, and to go on. He knows exactly where we are, whether we are tied up in them that we are not open to the Lord to consider any further light at all. We have got it all, or our people with whom we are associated have got it all, and we are a part of that! You know what I mean. The Holy Spirit cannot do much with folk who are in a position like that; and He knows. His attitude is, It is no use, I cannot do much there, they are too tied up. But, if we are prepared to put everything into the water, then the Lord can go on and get a clear way.

The Holy Spirit knows. He knows you and He knows me. He knows us a great deal better than we know ourselves. We may have thought that we meant business and have been praying very much a long time and crying to the Lord to do something, while the Holy Spirit knows quite well that we are not at an end of ourselves and our own interests yet. Something more has to be done to bring us to despair before He can do what He wants. But He knows: that is the point. He knew this man. He knew that He had not a great deal to do to make a start with every prospect of a clear way, and He took the opportunity presented, and He was able to act sovereignly. He did that in order to meet this need.

#### The Human Instrument

Now I do not want to take very much time, so I pass to the third of the three, the human instrument, Philip, the means by which, on the one hand, the blind seeker would have his eyes opened, and by which, on the

other hand, the Holy Spirit will be able to accomplish His work. We all want to be in that position where really honest, genuine, business-meaning men and women can find what they are after through our instrumentality if God so will, and, on the other hand, where the Holy Spirit can find in us a vessel to hand where He sees such a need. Surely there is nothing we would desire more than that, just to be as Philip was.

But even in Philip's case, it was not that he was an automatic bit of machinery, something taken up willy-nilly. There were things about Philip which constituted the ground for the Lord; very, very simple matters, and yet not such as are so easy in practical life and outworking.

Philip was at the disposal of the Holy Spirit, and that without any question, and when you look, you see that that meant something in his case. Philip was down there in Samaria. Many were turning to the Lord, a great work of grace was going on, so great a work that they had to send down apostles from Jerusalem to deal with the situation; and Philip was the chief instrument in that work in the first place. Now when you are right in the thing like that, and the Lord suddenly says, "Now, Philip, I want you to leave all this and go down by the way that is desert; I will not tell you why, I will not tell you what I am going to do, I simply say, go to the desert", a man might have big questions. He might have said, But Lord, what about this? But, Lord, look at this big door of opportunity, look what I am doing, what I am in! What will happen here if I leave it? Many questions like that might have arisen. He could have had serious reservations and put them in the way of the Lord. But we do not read of anything like that. The Lord simply said it, and Philip was so much at the disposal of the Lord that, without any questions, he moved. What a tremendous thing it is to be free for the Lord, free to the Lord, to be so much at the Lord's disposal that it is not difficult at all to leave anything, to adjust ourselves to an altogether new situation, if the Lord says it. It is a great thing. So Philip was at the Lord's disposal, and that is a big factor in a work like this of bringing sight to blind seekers, and being, not only the answer to man's need, but the answer to the need of the Holy Spirit; at the Lord's disposal and unhesitating in response to the Lord's suggestion; no delay, but a swift answer. "The Lord has said it, let us get on with it and leave the responsibility with Him."

It turned out all right, it was quite a safe thing to do. Now, the Lord never does explain Himself in advance. The Lord never does tell us ahead how it is going to work out and what He is going to do. He always presents us with a challenge to faith in Him. All His requirements carry with them plenty of opportunities for arguing if you are so disposed; plenty of occasions, humanly speaking, of questions. The one who knows the Spirit knows well that the vindication will come along the line of swift obedience.

Well now, that is the story; simple, beautiful, but containing vital principles of enlightenment. If you want to see people go on, these are the things which the Lord requires. If you want to go on, these are the things which lie behind all real going on, all leaping into light, into knowledge, in the greater fulness of the Lord.

Well, look again at this man. It is a great story. You know that the Bible holds up Ethiopia as a type of darkness: but here is the darkness changed to the light, the full blaze of the noonday; for Christ is that: and that is the basis on which it is done, namely, a heart that is frank, humble, purposeful, and honest in its search.

I do not know what the Lord may be saying to you, but for us all the pivot of the whole matter is, Here is water! I am not saying that baptism is the pivot, but I am saying that it is represented by baptism. Are we ready for everything to go into the grave? Have we something we are holding on to; our position, our reputation, our status and all that, or is it all going into the grave? The Lord here has a man who does not

say, "Is it necessary for me to be baptized; must I? Of course, if the Lord requires it, I will seek grace;" but a man who says, "Here it is, what doth hinder?" That is another angle altogether. Tell me anything that hinders and I will deal with it! Get that kind of spirit. 'If you can show me anything that hinders my going on in the way that the Lord indicates, then I will deal with it. What does He want, Philip? Can you tell me of any hindrance?' Philip found no hindrance, but everything to help. Both went down together and Philip baptized him. The Lord just put into our hearts the meaning of that and give us to be good Ethiopians in this spiritual sense.

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