

**Acts 8: 26-40; “Being Providentially Led by God”, Sermon # 38 in the series –  
“Laying the Foundations”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on  
January 29<sup>th</sup>, 2017, in the Morning Worship Service.**

This book that we are going through is entitled, “The Acts of the Apostles”, but it might just as well have been entitled, “The Acts of God”, or “The Acts of the Holy Spirit”, for the thing that we find over and over again in this book, is God doing the great work of leading men and women to the place where they might be saved. And He also guides the persons who will be His instruments to preach the gospel to them, in the time and place of His ordering. The Lord was working providentially here, in the text that I have just read to you. He was arranging the circumstances and working in the hearts and minds, of both Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch. This is very evident as we read the passage. None of these great events, words, decisions, or actions could ever have come to pass if God had not providentially been ordering the circumstances which brought Philip to the place where he would be able to preach Jesus to this man, the Ethiopian Eunuch.

So, this morning I want to point out to you the 6 ways that God arranged the circumstances which led Philip to this man, and Philip’s being able, then, to lead him to Christ, and to baptize him, and his being able to return to his own country to serve God there. 1<sup>st</sup> – An angel directed Philip to the place, and to the man, that he wanted him to speak to. 2<sup>nd</sup> – God worked conveniently (He worked beforehand) in this man’s heart so that he desired to read the Scripture. 3<sup>rd</sup> – The Holy Spirit deliberately brought about the meeting of Philip and this Ethiopian man. 4<sup>th</sup> – The Lord, the Spirit, directed this man to read in a particular place in the Scripture at the very time that he met Philip. 5<sup>th</sup> – The Lord so worked in this man’s heart that he desired to be baptized immediately, once he had believed the word. And 6<sup>th</sup> – The Spirit made the arrangements of what both Philip and the Eunuch would do following the baptism; where they would go and what they would do. In showing you all of these things, it is my hope that you yourself will learn to trust the Lord to lead you and guide you into all the truth concerning salvation and how you might be more useful to Him for service in the future.

**1<sup>st</sup> – An angel directed Philip to the place and to the man that he wanted him to speak to.** (verses 26-29)

Verse 26 says: “Now an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, saying, ‘Arise and go toward the south along the road which goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.’ “This is desert.” “So he arose and went.” Now, in those days of the early Church, God directed His servants, those who preached the gospel, providentially, in a much more direct way than He does today. He directed them by means of an angel speaking with them, or even by the audible voice spoken by the Holy Spirit. Philip was given a command by an angel to arise and go toward the south, along the road which goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza. It was a desert area. Philip could have questioned this guidance, but he did not. He went. I suppose Philip could have said to himself and to the angel who gave him this word: Why should I go to a desert in order to preach the gospel? Who is out there to preach to? But he trusted that this message was a word from the Lord to him, and he did not stand there in doubting unbelief. He went.

And when he went, it says: He beheld this man of Ethiopia. And a great man he was, too. He was a eunuch (a chamberlain) of great authority under Candace the queen of the Ethiopians, who had charge of all her treasury, and he had come to Jerusalem to worship, and was returning.” Let us understand that even though we are not directed by angels in our day, nor do we hear the audible voice of the Holy Spirit, speaking to our mind, nevertheless God does very really guide us into the kind of ministry or service that He would have each one of us have; not just the minister, but also those ordinary Christians whom He would have labor in His vineyard

and win souls to Christ. Not all are called to preach like Philip. He was a herald of the gospel, who went on his preaching tours under the authority of the church at Jerusalem; being led by the Holy Spirit in the most tangible way possible. But I am saying that you and I ought to firmly believe that the Holy Spirit is really there in our heart and mind, if we have sincerely believed in Christ. And we must really believe that He is leading us. We are really led by the preceptive word of God first. That is the most important part of our being led. We really are led by the Spirit to consider all the doctrinal and practical truths, precepts, principles, and commandments of the Bible, as worthy of our most serious consideration. We are to receive these truths and to embrace them, and live them out in our life. They are to permeate everything that we think and everything that we are going about to do.

But, not only does the Spirit lead us into the doctrinal truth of the Bible, but I want you to try to grasp the idea that, as a Christian, you are also being led by the Holy Spirit into what He would have you to do for Christ, in relation to other people around you, day by day, in connection with the truth of the word of God. "Then the Spirit said to Philip, 'Go near and overtake this chariot.'" The Spirit spoke to Philip audibly, and we should not expect that today. The revelatory gifts and revelatory leading ceased when the apostles left the scene. But what we should expect is that the Spirit will be speaking to our heart, causing us to consider what we can do and what we might do to share the truth with others around us. Whether it is in your home with your family, or whether it is in relation to your brethren in our church, you are being led. Whether it is to minister to the poor and needy and lost all around you, or whether it is to carry the gospel to some obscure place in the desert, the Holy Spirit is with every Christian to direct them to those in need; to those whom He would have you to minister to.

He will, by His holy influences upon your mind and heart, direct you to the very place and the very person or persons that He would have you to minister to. Let us not think that just because these revelatory experiences, such as Philip experienced, are no longer happening, that God does not lead His people in regard to their service to Him; He most certainly does. He will often do this by His providentially ordering the experiences which He would have for you, and you must come to terms with this if you would be useful to Him. Let me ask you whether you realize that the Holy Spirit considers who you might personally help through your words or actions? Certainly it will be consistent with His purpose for your life in particular, in regard to service to Him. You bear the precious treasure of the word of God in your heart and mind as you read it and meditate on it, and memorize it. It speaks to you in your heart and to your mind. And God has you in the neighborhood that you are in for a reason. He has you in the job that you are in for a reason.

You are to be salt and light in the midst of a generation where many people do not understand the first things about what is true and false, what is good and bad, what is right and wrong. And who will tell them? And who will show them if you do not? If they have any amount of curiosity at all in relation to spiritual things, it is because God has placed it there. We, as Christians, have a great commission that has been given to us. "Go and preach the gospel to every creature." Go, therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; teaching them to observe, all that Christ has commanded us. And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. If you are sensitive to the Lord's leading, you will consciously consider what you might say, and what you might do, to help others to understand the truth of God's word. God will lead, and He will guide in this regard. But you must pray and ask God – "What would you have me to do, or to say, in relation to the people that you have placed around me?"

**2<sup>nd</sup> – God worked preventively (He worked beforehand) in this man's heart so that he desired to read the Scripture.**

Verse 28 says that this man was returning from having worshipped at Jerusalem. And sitting in his chariot, he was reading Isaiah the prophet. Pretty amazing, was it not? He was sitting in his chariot with a scroll of Isaiah, reading. He wants to understand more about God and Christ, and whether he can come to know this God for himself. What a great thing it is when a person who does not yet know the Lord, wants to come to church to hear the word preached. What a great thing it is when he can get his own personal copy of the Bible and read it for himself. This man had come to Jerusalem, and he had heard some things about God, but he wanted to understand more. And he knew that the only way to find the truth was to search for it in the Scriptures. Let us understand that in the salvation of any person, God's grace goes before to establish certain things. One of those things, in the mind of the person whom God intends to save, is that they are turned to behold and believe the truth; that the Bible has answers to all important spiritual questions in relation to their life. The Bible comes to be seen as being an authority which governs every area of what you are concerned to know and to find. In the case of the person who is seeking for the meaning of life and is seeking for salvation, they do not understand very much about Bible truth yet, but God is going before them. He is shining light into their heart and mind; sometimes quickly as in Saul's conversion, but more oftentimes gradually. But in every case He must shine His light savingly upon their soul. In granting saving faith to any person, He will awaken that person to see their need of Christ.

This Ethiopian man was going to search the Scriptures until he found what he was looking for. He thought that by reading them, he might be able to understand how to obtain eternal life. Let me ask you whether you have had that kind of desire, the desire to read the Bible, created in you, in this way? Do you have the desire to search for Christ until you find out what it says about the great salvation which is found in Him? The problem with many of the Pharisees of Jesus' day was that they indeed searched the scriptures because they thought that in having them, that they had eternal life. But Jesus said to them, "These are they which testify of Me." "But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life." You see, Jesus has eternal life to give, but only to those who are willing to receive His words as the very word of God. And the Scriptures are they which speak primarily of Him. If you have wisdom and understanding from above, you will pray to see Jesus in the Scriptures, for they are full of Him. Ask yourself now, in all seriousness, if you have not yet found Christ; is the Bible speaking to your mind and heart, or do you speak to it, and decide what you want to receive from it? Do you receive the Bible to learn or do you judge the Bible according to your own analysis and logic of how you think God should be. No, you must let the Bible speak to you, for that is God's way, in connection with faith in Him; that you will come to know the reality of God leading you and guiding you in connection with the working of His Spirit, by submitting to the authority and infallibility of the Scriptures as a little child.

### **3<sup>rd</sup> – The Holy Spirit deliberately brought about the meeting of Philip and this Ethiopian man.**

Verse 29 says: "Then the Spirit said to Philip, 'Go near and overtake this chariot.'" I want you to notice that there is a directive given to Philip by the Spirit to deliberately run up to this chariot and overtake it, so that he could find out the man's state. Philip does this, and he asks the man, "Do you understand what you are reading?" "And he said, 'How can I unless someone guides me?'" "And he asked Philip to come up and sit with him." I want you to see that it was the Holy Spirit who arranged and directed this meeting of these two men. Similarly, you and I should understand that when it is God's purpose to save a particular person, that He will direct a man or woman who has true Biblical understanding and wisdom to them. This may be a pastor or a preacher or any Christian who is full of the Spirit and has the knowledge of the Scriptures. How many people read, and they do not understand? More than we think. And the Holy Spirit

knows how you can be of help to them, dear Christian, even by asking them simple questions like: Do you understand what you are reading?

The answer given by this man is really quite instructive. “How can I unless someone guides me?” Truly, this shows us that it is a teachable spirit, which we must have if we are to become wise unto salvation. Sometimes people do not find the great salvation in Christ because they will not humble themselves and become like a little child and be willing to be taught. They want to figure it all out on their own, and they do not realize that if they say that they see, without inquiring more humbly and carefully, from others who know the Lord around them, about these all-important matters, they will surely not find the fear of the Lord or discover the knowledge of God. But because this man was humble, because he was of a teachable spirit, he invited Philip up into the chariot with him. Let us understand, my dear friends, that it is grace which makes us teachable. It is only pride, self-sufficiency, and a spirit of independent judgment which does not want to be instructed; that cannot ask what the Bible is saying, or receive the interpretation of what God intends for us to receive if we would be saved from our sins. But this man was eager to be taught by Philip, the man who he had just met. There is another point which can be made here: Let us all learn to be good listeners as Christians. Let us learn to ask good questions which will let us know whether a person really wants to be taught; whether they really want to understand. For this will become evident, and we will be of great help to those who are willing to be taught, by the power of the Holy Spirit confirming the truth that we speak to them, to their heart.

**4<sup>th</sup> – The Lord, the Spirit, had directed this man to read in a particular place in the Scripture at the very time that he met Philip, and this led to his conversion.**

Verse 32 says: “The place in the Scripture which he read was this: “He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb silent before its shearer, so He opened not His mouth.” “In His humiliation His justice was taken away.” “And who will declare His generation?” “For His life is taken from the earth.” Notice that the passage which this man chose to read in, was perhaps the best text in all of the Old Testament Scriptures to preach Christ from. I am not at all sure that the man knew it himself. But, as he read it, he did not understand who it was referring to. Was it the prophet speaking of himself, or was the prophet speaking of some other man? It was not hard at all, for Philip to preach Christ from this passage; to show this man of great authority, under Candace the queen, the man who had charge of all of her treasure, the greatest spiritual treasure of all; Christ, the One who suffered as a lamb before its shearers when He was falsely accused and condemned by the Jewish Sanhedrim, when He was scourged under Pontius Pilate, when He was crucified and died for the sins of all those who would believe in Him for eternal life. Let each of us, if we would be useful to God in service, learn to preach Christ, for this is how they can be saved.

It was no accident that this man had turned to this particular passage in the Scripture. It was the Holy Spirit providentially leading him and guiding him to turn to that particular passage, and to think about it. Let us understand that the Lord, the Spirit, knows how to work in the hearts and minds of sinners and saints alike. He knows how to providentially bring to your attention exactly what He wants you to look at, in the Book of God. He knows how to create holy curiosity, and He knows how to bring someone to you, to help you understand it. Similarly, He knows how to so work in the hearts and minds of His ministers and his people that they will be directed to attempt to help persons who are in need of spiritual understanding. He does all of these good things in connection with His eternal purposes, to have a people for His own possession. You will say to me, “Well, why doesn’t God just do this automatically; open the eyes of the blind automatically, so that all see and all are saved?” Well, from my study of the scriptures I see that God wants a real interaction with you as a sinner, and with you as a saint, if you come to know God through Jesus Christ. Salvation is all of God, and all according to His

eternal purposes, but God did not create you as a robot. He would have a real interaction with every single person whom He has created, over what they really see, and whether they are willing to consider their own native spiritual blindness and hardness of heart.

Sometimes we speak of persons as willfully blind, and so they are, if they say that they will not acknowledge their need of grace, which comes only through Christ. They are like the Pharisees of Old. These proud men were really trying to justify their own false system of theology which they made up on their own, by the strength of their own mind. But this is the reason for their continued blindness; their own stubborn determination not to listen and consider the truth of the Scriptures. Listen to what Jesus says in John chapter 9, verse 39. "For judgment I have come into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may be made blind." "Then some of the Pharisees who were with Him heard these words, and said to Him, 'Are we blind also?'" "Jesus said to them, 'If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you say, 'We see.'" "Therefore your sin remains." Let us understand that there are many persons out there like those Pharisees of old, who want to incline to their own understanding in spiritual matters. They will perish if they do so. Lean not to your own understanding the Bible says, but in all your ways acknowledge Him and He will direct your paths.

There are many people who the Spirit is striving with, and if it is God's purpose to save them, He knows exactly how to lift the veil from their eyes so that they will come to understand and be saved. In cases like this, He will direct them to the particular passages of Scripture that He knows will open the eyes of their understanding, and He will by His Almighty power, convince them of the truth by His powerful working. This was what happened with this Ethiopian man. Philip preached Christ to him, and he was immediately converted. Let us learn that the Scriptures teach immediate conversion. This conversion was of the Lord's timing, as are all conversions to Christ. Regeneration, the granting and giving of saving faith, the opening of the spiritual eyes of the heart to understand, the circumcision of the heart to see the hatefulness of sin, the raising of that person's heart from their death in sin; all this takes place in a moment of time. It may take a person some time to understand what has happened to them; what is happening to them, how they have been changed in their heart, and how they were turned to see and believe in their need of Christ. But conversion to Christ consists in the working of God in the heart in regeneration, and the response of faith by the person being saved, by their believing in the gospel, repenting of their sins, and their beginning their walk of faith with Christ in accordance with the truth of God's word.

**5<sup>th</sup> – The Lord so worked in this man's heart that he desired to be baptized immediately, once he had believed the word.**

It says in verse 36 – "Now as they went down the road, they came to some water, and the eunuch said, 'See, here is water.'" "What hinders me from being baptized?" Now, I hope that you will know, that it is true that a person may not know, themselves, exactly, when the regeneration of their own heart, by God, took place; but they should still be able to think through their own experience and conclude that there was a particular time, or time period, in which they were converted; a time during which they personally came to understand the gospel, saw their need of Christ, and then they most deliberately believed in Him for salvation from all their sins. This man knew that he had been saved. I know that there is a difference between faith and assurance, and sometimes a person may legitimately doubt whether they have been saved or not. But I believe that from what we see in this man's life and experience, we need to see that it is a good thing in a new believer, not to doubt, if he or she has believed in what Christ has done for them. There was no doubt about it in this man's mind. And so, once he realized that he truly did believe in Christ, he desired to declare his faith, publicly, in baptism.

No doubt he had had the truth of the reason for baptism, explained to him by Philip, or he had seen young Christians being baptized while he was in Jerusalem, but he knew that this was

the right thing to do. Our 1689 Confession states: “Baptism is an ordinance of the New Testament, ordained by Jesus Christ, to be unto the party baptized, a sign of his fellowship with Him in His death and resurrection; of his being engrafted into Him; of remission of sins; and of his giving up unto God, through Jesus Christ, to live and walk in newness of life.” This man knew, because of the Spirit’s working in his mind and heart, that he was in union with Christ; that He was having fellowship with Christ in His death and resurrection, by believing in Him. It is by the resurrection power of Jesus Christ that we have real fellowship with Christ every day following our conversion to Christ. This man knew, because of that grace, that it was his real intention to walk, from that time forth, in newness of life.

So, seeing water nearby, he requested this for himself. He made this request for baptism to Philip, a duly appointed deacon and minister of the gospel from the church in Jerusalem, and so Philip could legitimately grant his request provided that he answered the one question that he gave to him. He said to him: “If you believe with all of your heart, you may.” And he answered and said, ‘I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.’ You see, if you want to be baptized, it is not enough for you to say that you believe in Jesus Christ in some general sense. It is enough if you believe in Jesus Christ in this more specific sense, with all of your heart; that you see what He has done for you in dying for your sins, and because of that, you have given your heart to Him to be changed by Him. In baptism you are declaring your faith in Him. You are identifying yourself with everything that He has done for you in His obedience and sufferings, and you are solemnly promising to Him that you want to walk with Him in this newness of life which He has purchased for you. He has given His Spirit to those who believe in Him.

Now, there may be someone here today who has believed, but has never yet been baptized. I would urge you to think about this and be baptized if you think that you have believed in Jesus with all of your heart. Jesus is not calling you to have a casual relationship with Him. He has saved you in order that you will have fellowship with Him; that you will live your life for him, and not live it to yourself. He has called you to publicly identify yourself with Him before the gathered church, and to join with that church in order that you might more effectively serve and glorify Him. May it be that you will see the truth today: “He who believes and is baptized shall be saved. He who disbelieves shall be condemned.” This man had the Spirit of God working so strongly in Him that he wanted to be baptized immediately. And Philip did not forbid him. They went down in the water together, which is a sure indication that it was immersion baptism that was practiced by the early church. Let us understand the symbolism rightly. It takes immersion to rightly represent the truth that you have died with Christ are buried with Him in baptism. It is not part of you that was buried with Him, but all of you that was buried with Him. All of your person, body and spirit, and all of your sins, were buried with Christ. Let the churches practice such Biblical baptism.

**6<sup>th</sup> – The Spirit made the arrangements of what both Philip and the Eunuch would do following the baptism; where they would go and what they would do.**

“Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing.” “But Philip was found at Azotus. And passing through, he preached in all the cities till he came to Caesarea.” The Lord knew what he wanted this Ethiopian man to do at this point. He wanted him to go back to his home in Ethiopia; back to his service to his Queen, and so, He made this plain by catching Philip away. Let us all remain in the condition in which we are called; in the same calling, as it says in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 7: 21. This man would come back to His Queen and his country bearing the precious treasure of Christ which he had found. He would be in a good position to personally evangelize the country with the gospel message. And Philip? He just kept preaching Jesus. May you and I see the importance of trying whole-heartedly to see the Lord’s leading in our lives. For there is much work to be done, and Christ would have us to share the truth.

