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THE ETHIOPIAN CONVERT.

– MARCH 7. – ACTS 8:26-40. –

"Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same Scripture, and preached unto him Jesus." – Acts 8:35.

WE are not to suppose that up to this time the gospel had been preached to any except Jews. The eunuch, the story of whose conversion is before us, was a Jew. The law made special provision by which an alien could become a Jew, and this Ethiopian evidently had availed himself of that provision. He was [R2110 : page 59] a devout Jew, an Israelite indeed, a man of influence and some wealth; his devotion had led him to the Holy City, to which hundreds of thousands came yearly from various quarters.

His sincerity as a worshiper of the true God was evidenced by his desire to know the will of the Lord, as indicated by his searching the Scriptures. It is to such that the Lord draws nigh and reveals himself: not by whispering to him an understanding of the passage in question, but by sending a Philip to him to expound the Scriptures; just as in the case of Cornelius, Peter was sent to tell him words of salvation that should be for the saving of himself and household. Philip was evidently a zealous servant of the Lord, and hence was used of the Lord in the especial manner recorded in this lesson; the Lord seems to look out for those who are of a ready mind, emptied of self and filled with his spirit, and zealous, to be used in his hand, and such are his special servants. Let us all more and more be emptied vessels for the Master's use made meet.

Philip's inquiry – "Understandest thou what thou readest?" was a very pertinent one; a question that might be applied to a great many Christian people today who, if they answered truly, would admit that very much of the Scripture is to them "as a book that is sealed" – some claiming that it is sealed, others claiming that they are unlearned and

therefore unable to interpret. (Isa. 29:11-14.) Would that more had the spirit of the eunuch – a desire to understand the Scriptures and to avail themselves of such humble instruments as the Lord may be pleased to send to them for their aid.

How the Lord drew the attention of the eunuch to the particular passage of Scripture which perplexed him is not recorded; but no better one could have been found as a text from which to preach Christ crucified, a sin-offering, a sin bearer, a ransom for all. And Philip improved the opportunity to preach Jesus as the fulfilment of this prophecy, the propitiation for our sins, by whose stripes we are healed. Whoever will read over the announcements of discourses for fashionable churches in almost any large city will be struck with the dissimilarity of the themes discussed from those upon which Philip and the apostles discoursed with so much power and with so great results eighteen centuries ago. And who will say that this has nothing to do with the admitted coldness and deadness in the nominal church? The gospel which is the power of God unto salvation is not the gospel of politics, nor of social reform, nor of temperance, etc., but the gospel of salvation from sin and death by a Savior who has bought us with his own precious blood.

Philip's directness of discourse is worthy of note. He did not ride along in the eunuch's company avoiding the principal theme, making inquiries about Ethiopia, the condition of crops, the business outlook, etc., but, as having a particular business to attend to as a **[R2111 : page 59]** servant of the Lord, he got to preaching immediately. But then, the eunuch was an attentive inquirer. As a Jew he had been waiting and hoping and praying for the Messiah and his Kingdom. He knew of certain passages of Scripture which extolled the glory of that Kingdom and the blessings that would flow from it: other passages which seemed somewhat in conflict he did not understand, and now an explanation had been offered to him which in every sense of the word fitted the prophetic statement and reconciled all differences. What else could he or any honest man do than accept the facts of the case? Quite

possibly indeed he had already heard of Jesus, and possibly had heard this very Scripture referred to as fulfilled in him.

Now that the matter was set clearly before his mind – what it meant and how it was fulfilled – he wasted no time in acknowledging Jesus the Messiah; he straightway inquired whether or not anything hindered his espousal of the cause of the Nazarene and his recognition as one of his disciples by baptism? We should mark also the directness of Philip's answer. He did not say, You will have to go to the mourners' bench and be prayed for, quite a while, before God will accept you; nor did he say, The proper thing for you to do is to join this or the other denomination after you have studied its catechism and made a profession of its lengthy man-made creed or covenant. On the contrary he said, If you believe with all your heart, you may properly perform this symbol of union with Christ, burial into his death.

It is well to note also that Philip did not say to the eunuch, It is sufficient if you have the real baptism, the real consecration of your life to the Lord, the burial of your will into the Lord's will, and you need not perform the *outward symbol in water*. Philip said nothing of this kind; nor had he or anyone else authority to thus offset the word of the Lord and the apostles, directing all believers to thus symbolize their faith and consecration. It is worthy of note, also, that Philip did not say to the eunuch, "I will go yonder and fetch a little water in the palm of my hand, and sprinkle it upon your forehead;" but the record says that "they both went down into the water" and came "up out of the water."

In what manner the Lord by the spirit caught Philip away is not stated, but we should remember that this was at a time when means of locomotion were limited and when God was pleased to exert his infinite power in various ways in connection with the establishment of his Church.
