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"EXCEPT SOME ONE SHALL GUIDE ME"

– ACTS 8:26-40. – MARCH 7. –

Golden Text: – "Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life; and they are they which testify of me."

– John 5:39.

THE pith of this lesson is the Divine supervision of the Gospel work and use of consecrated talents in the unfolding of the Divine Purposes. Deacon Philip, whose ministries of the Truth were so abundantly blessed of the Lord in Samaria, evidently continued humble, so that the Lord could use him further as his agent and mouthpiece. The message of the Gospel was to be sent into Africa. An Ethiopian eunuch in high station under Candace, the Ethiopian Queen, was a suitable person to bear the message. For a considerable time he had knowledge of the true religion of the Jews. Because a eunuch he could not become a Jew (Deut. 23:1), except as "a proselyte of the gate" – one who adopted the Jewish worship. He had come to Jerusalem to worship on one of the holy festivals. Under the Lord's providence, the hope of Israel, Messiah, was prominent before his mind. He was returning to his home in Ethiopia and, after the custom of the time, was reading aloud from a scroll. It was Isaiah's prophecy, which he had probably purchased at Jerusalem at considerable cost. He was puzzled by what he read, which seemed to relate to Messiah. Some statements implied his great glory, honor, dignity, power, [R4333 : page 52] while others seemed to mention him as despised and rejected of men – led as a lamb to the slaughter. Many other men had read the same passages for centuries with similar perplexity. Why? Because the right time had not come for them to be understood and God had not sent servants or messengers to interpret them.

"THE SPIRIT SAID UNTO PHILIP, GO!"

Meantime the Lord, as able as willing to make "all things work together for good," directed Deacon Philip on a journey which, at the right time, brought him in contact with the eunuch's company, for it is entirely probable that so notable a man would travel with considerable escort besides the driver of his chariot. Philip did not expostulate with the messenger sending him. He did not urge that he had business matters which required his attention, for it was his first business to serve the interests of the Kingdom. If the Lord ever sends us on a mission and makes it possible for us to fulfil it, that should be considered the chief business of life for the time, and everything else secondary, inferior.

Arriving at the appointed place, Philip was on the lookout for service. How we wish that all of the Lord's people might more and more attain to this attitude of heart and mind – a readiness, waiting, looking, to note the Divine providences in their affairs and to use them wisely, as did Philip!

Evidently the chariot had passed Philip and he had heard the reading. He knew that this meant that the eunuch was a man interested in the Word of God and that his mind was centered upon it. He may even have surmised that the Lord had directed the eunuch's attention to this very part of the Scripture at this very moment, so as to make Philip's mission opportune. The Spirit of the Lord told Philip to run after the chariot and get into communication with the reader. In what way the Lord's Spirit thus prompted him we are not informed. We may consider, however, that the holy Spirit dwelt richly in Philip, quickened his perceptive powers to a realization of the opportunities of the moment and suggested to him that this was a way in which his knowledge of the Lord and his consecrated powers might be used in proclaiming the good tidings. So each of us should be so full

of zeal for the message, so full of the desire to assist others into the grace of God, that the Spirit of the Lord in us would prompt us to speak a word in season.

Paraphrasing the account we may suppose that Philip, running near to the reader in the chariot, called out, "Friend, do you understand that which you are [R4333 : page 53] reading?" So much depends upon a word in season, and the right word! Not only our words, but our tone of voice should be considered, when we attempt to represent the great King as his ambassadors. Kindness and brotherly love should be indicated in our faces and by our words, and made a part of the message we deliver.

The honesty of the eunuch, his readiness for the Truth, his humility of mind, are all indicated by his reply, "How can I understand, except some one shall guide me?" The arrogance which would have given Philip a haughty stare would have meant a heart unready for the Gospel – unworthy of it. The pride which would have said, "I suppose that I understand it as well as you do, sir," would have indicated a heart not meek enough for the Truth, and to be its servant in Africa. A superstitious reverence which would have said, "None but the Doctors of the Law are supposed to understand these writings," would have meant a bounden condition of heart, unready for the message. The eunuch's answer was the proper one for a heart in the right condition towards God and the Truth. It admitted his ignorance of the Prophet's meaning, and it admitted the Divine power which would explain the seeming contradiction in due time, and it admitted that the Lord would probably in his own time and way send the interpretation through human instrumentality. His invitation to Philip to ride with him in his chariot was a further indication of his meekness and that he realized that in Philip he had found one who, like himself, was deeply interested in the Word of the Lord and his promises to Israel. He would give

Philip a lift on his journey and would, doubtless, the while enjoy fellowship with him in holy things.

Many in our day are hindered from receiving a proper knowledge of the Divine Word and Plan through a lack of meekness, humbleness of mind, teachableness. Some of these have concluded that because the Scriptures declare "They shall all be taught of God," therefore they should expect angels or angel voices to guide them individually in the understanding of the Scriptures. Under this error many have been led clairaudiently of the evil spirits into various fanaticisms. Rather we should give heed to the Lord's Word on this subject, and not *how* all of his true people will be taught of him. The Apostle explains *how*, saying, "And he gave some apostles, some prophets and teachers for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the Body of Christ." (Eph. 4:11,12.) He who rejects the Lord's way evidences the fact that he is not in the right condition of heart and hence is not taught of God.

"SO HE OPENED NOT HIS MOUTH"

The portion of the prophecy which the eunuch was reading referred to Messiah as meekly enduring the opposition of sinners against himself, saying all manner of evil against him possible, and declaring that in this respect he was like a lamb dumb before his shearers. And what was true of the Master should be increasingly true of all those who are seeking to walk in his steps, in proportion as they make progress in the good way and become copies of God's dear Son.

The eunuch further manifested his humility of mind by asking Philip's interpretation of this prophecy. Did it relate to Isaiah himself or to some one else? We read that this opened Philip's mouth to preach unto him Jesus as the antitypical Lamb of God, as the one who suffered severe humiliations, even unto death, even the death of the cross. We can imagine his

explanation of the prophecy, "His generation, who shall declare? for his life is taken from the earth." Philip doubtless explained that although our Lord had ceased to be of the earth, earthy, and had been resurrected to the spirit plane of being and the Divine nature, nevertheless he would have a generation, or a posterity. His posterity, his children, will be on the earthly plane and will be Adam's children, whom he has adopted as his own. In due time, under the Millennial Kingdom, he will become their Life-Giver or Father, their Regenerator or Deliverer, freeing them from the power of the tomb and then restoring to full human perfection as his children all who will receive and profit by the blessed knowledge and opportunities of that time. Thus he will become in due time "The everlasting Father" of the redeemed and restored race of Adam. We can imagine that his preaching of Jesus went still further than this and showed the eunuch that before that glorious day of the world's regeneration another feature of the Divine Program will be called out, namely, the selection of a Church to be the members of the glorious Body, under the Headship of Jesus – the Body otherwise styled, "The Bride, the Lamb's Wife." He doubtless explained to the eunuch that this is the message of the present time, the message or invitation to become heirs of God and Joint-Heirs with Jesus Christ our Lord, and members of the great antitypical Messiah, the antitypical Prophet, Priest, King and Judge of the world. He doubtless explained the two steps necessary as an entrance into this grace, this privilege, namely, (1) the abandonment of sin and the acceptance of Christ as Redeemer; (2) a full consecration of the justified humanity to the service of the Lord and of his brethren and of his Truth.

The eunuch's meek, teachable, honest attitude made it easy for him to receive this glorious message in its simplicity and beauty. He was already a believer, to the extent that he knew. He was already justified by his faith in the Redeemer promised. Now that justification became *actually his*, as his mind and heart

grasped the thought that the Crucified One was the Son of God who bought us with his own precious blood. He was already devoted to the Lord, so far as he knew his will. So now, with clear knowledge directly sent to him through Philip, his consecration was revived, renewed, enlarged, practically applied. Evidently Philip explained to him the New Baptism, not only in the sense in which we are baptized into Christ's death, but also the appropriateness of symbolizing this by water immersion. Note the promptness of the eunuch to confess his full submission to the Lord and to symbolize this in water immersion. Had he not been in ready condition of heart, this, too, would have been put off with some excuse. How evident that God had chosen in him a suitable vessel to bear his message to the Ethiopians – to be a foreign missionary!

Ancient manuscripts omit verse 37. It evidently was added later as a marginal note, as an answer to the question of verse 36. Quite probably such words, or many more, were used by Philip. Evidently the account does not pretend to be a report of all that was said, but merely of the leading features of the conversation. The eunuch commanded the driver of his chariot to stop. Philip and he alighted and he was baptized – immersed. And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more. But the latter went on his way rejoicing in the glorious message he had received, which "satisfied his longings as nothing else could do." Doubtless he talked with his charioteer or others of his company and ran by-times of his homeward journey. Tradition has it that amongst his converts in Ethiopia was a Queen herself. **[R4334 : page 54]**

As to how the spirit caught Philip away we may not certainly know. But that was the day of miracles and doubtless his miraculous transportation would not only serve as an encouragement to himself and assurance that his service was under the Lord's supervision, but his vanishing would give the

eunuch additional faith in what he had taught him, for it would testify that God was with him, and that he was being used as the angels had been used previously.

The general lesson to us is, (1) readiness, alertness, to serve the Lord in season and out of season, when convenient to ourselves, and when not convenient – glad of any opportunity and at any cost to be the ambassadors of the King; (2) the necessity for humility and promptness of obedience, if we would make progress, and either maintain, or attain to usefulness in the Lord's service.

THE GOLDEN TEXT

As our Golden Text points out, the Lord is revealed in the holy Scriptures, and those who would know him should seek their information from that quarter. Under Divine providence, apostles, prophets and teachers are necessary, indispensable. But no words of man are to be taken as instead of the Word of God. On the contrary, their presentations are to find acceptance only in proportion as they are found to be in harmony with the Scriptures, and to discern this harmony, the holy Spirit is necessary. The Scriptures must be searched, but only by coming into a condition of heart harmony and teachableness, and then by a full consecration receiving the holy Spirit, can we hope to understand the Divine message and to obtain therewith the eternal life which it promises to those guided and taught of the Lord.

