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Sermon preached by Mr. J. Delves at "Ebenezer" Clapham on Wednesday evening 7.11.73

Hymns: 1032, 949, 1138

Reading Acts 8 from v.25

73/CC

Text Acts 8. v.26,27.

"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, which is desert. And he arose and went."

This remarkable book of the Acts records some striking circumstances especially of the memorable day of Pentecost and the days that followed it. Earlier in the chapter, we have read, there is mention of Stephen, apparently the first who was brought to suffer martyrdom after the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. We can hardly read what is recorded of Stephen without being moved in our feelings, especially that as they were stoning him the heavens opened and he saw the "Son of man standing on the right hand of God". So it is said that he "fell asleep", although his death was attended with terrible suffering, and this appears to commence a great persecution against the church so that many were scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judæa and Samaria, "Devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him". What really concerns us more particularly this evening is this account of Philip and the eunuch that commences at verse 26. "And they, when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, returned to Jerusalem, and preached the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans. 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, which is desert."

The first point in connection with this is what we may term a divine direction. It was not a matter of Philip thinking, I will go toward the south and see how the country lies, or something like that, but "The angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise and go toward the south". This was indeed a mysterious leading, for Philip had been preaching in the villages of Samaria with great

success, there were miracles wrought, and there appears to have been much of the power of the Spirit in his ministry too; for there was great joy in that city. It would seem then from our point of view that it was highly desirable that Philip should remain there in the city of Samaria for he had been very useful, he had preached Christ unto the people there. What may often seem desirable and even necessary from a natural point of view, is not always the Lord's way or His purpose in matters. He does some things that are very surprising to us and if we view them with carnal reason they can be very stumbling. Even so, whatever we may think about this, the leading that Philip received was abundantly clear. It was not a matter of Philip thinking, I have been preaching about here long enough, I will go down south; but "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, which is desert." What the manner of this appearance may have been it is difficult for us to define, whether it was a literal, visible appearance of an angel or in some visionary form, but that is not the point that concerns us really, the point is that Philip had a very clear command. We may say he had a clear direction; so he did, but this was something more than a direction. You may give a direction to a person and leave them to please themselves whether they follow it; but what Philip received here was more in the nature of a command, "Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert." Many of the Lord's people have had particular leadings in their providences. Some of them have been striking, and they stand out in our lives so far as we may hope we have known something of this, sometimes in opening doors, sometimes in closing them and after all it is a wonderful thing for one to receive a providential direction or more particularly a command from the Lord. It was the Lord through the angel for we read that angels are ministering spirits sent forth to minister to those who shall be heirs of salvation. Later on it is recorded, "The Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot". - the Spirit said to him, not an angel this time. This may be very understandable

because undoubtedly in the latter the case the Spirit of the Lord moved Philip in a particular way to go and join himself to that chariot. Even so in our own lives it is a wonderful thing to feel to have a divine leading or even a command to take a certain course. This seems to have been the case with Abraham when the Lord said to him, "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee". "So Abraham departed as the Lord had spoken unto him"; and so in the case of Philip he did not say, I have no wish to go down there; it cannot be to any purpose; "he arose and went", so it has been in many instances. I do not know about you, but it may be very possible and very likely that you have felt to have received a word from the Lord by way of direction, or even command, that has settled your mind so that you have known what do to and have been like Philip, "he arose and went". There was a divine direction or command and this is very important. I have known godly people who have taken steps of themselves, and have brought themselves into trouble consequently. Some have been under a right leading and trials have followed it too; but where it is a leading of the Lord the Lord will have an end in view for His own honour and glory even if much trial and affliction may attend it. I wonder if this has ever been in a particular way with you when you have followed a direction. This may have been in an answer to prayer that you felt to have received a direction, or it may have been in reading the Word of God, or in a spirit of meditation, or without either of these, in the sovereignty of God your spirit has been impressed by the Lord to take this or that particular course or some particular step in your life. Is not this wonderfully confirming when in a measure at least you can reflect upon that leading and its issues, and can feel very sweetly confirmed in it that it was of the Lord because of what has attended it? So here is the first point, he received a divine command, the angel of the Lord spoke unto Philip and told him what

to do, and where he was to go.

There is another point to notice in connection with this, and that is, there was a divine purpose in that leading. In the case of the eunuch, although it may seem to have been a very mysterious leading, yet it was a leading for a purpose that the Lord alone knew before hand. There has never been a leading from the Lord to one of His dear people without a particular purpose in that leading. It has never been a leading to no purpose. This providential leading has been the case with many of the Lord's children; not in the same striking way as we read in the Scriptures for they do not seem to attend us in these last days in quite the same way; but sometimes circumstances have a leading in them, or some impression upon your mind has had a leading in it, or something has been laid upon your heart from the Word of God with a leading in it, or some door in providence may have opened to you that has had a leading in it from the Lord for a divine purpose. It is noticeable that Philip did not begin to make some excuse but "he arose and went", went down into the desert. This record is quite familiar to us and it is very wonderful too. "And he arose and went: and, behold a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship, was returning". He must have been rather a remarkable man to go all that long distance from Ethiopia to Jerusalem to worship. He may have actually been a Jew of some prominence there in that country, he was a kind of treasurer to Candace the Queen, he held a position of unique importance, but the Lord had a purpose of grace toward him. He was a devout man, other wise he would never have taken such a journey, but the Lord had a favour toward him in that he should be brought to know the Gospel and the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God and the true Messiah. Perhaps you will say, it seems hardly worth it just for that one person; but the Lord never does anything unless it is worth it. You may say perhaps that you do not feel to be worth any favour of the Lord; for who are you and I but poor, guilty, lost and ruined sinners in ourselves? It does not seem, to speak in a natural way,

worth it that the Lord of heaven should assume human flesh and pass through all that suffering for His dear people. The Lord alone knows how many they are but each one's case is a personal one, and it is a very humbling thought if we can feel any hope in our poor souls that the Lord Jesus Christ came to this poor sin-stricken world, that He felt it was worth it to save a poor guilty sinner like you or myself. It was an amazing act of condescending grace, but you say, that was for millions; so I suppose it was, but it is not the millions that concern us so much as "was it for me?" It is my own case, it is a personal matter. Did He come to save a sinner such as I? Philip was sent there into the desert to preach the Gospel to this Ethiopian eunuch and it is very sweet to notice these following points. This eunuch was returning and sitting in his chariot reading Esaias, "Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near and join thyself to this chariot". Now the light begins to break in. The Lord sent Philip into the desert to bring the light of the blessed Gospel into the heart of this eunuch. "Go and join thyself to this chariot". This was another very clear command; not, perhaps it would be a wise venture to go and join thyself to this chariot. "And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias." He was reading that striking chapter Isaiah 53 but he did not know who he was reading about. "Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest?" "And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him. The place of the scripture which he read was this, He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened not his mouth: In his humiliation his judgment was taken away: and who shall declare his generation? 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 man?". He did not know while he was reading this who the prophet Isaiah was referring to.

Here then is the third point, and that is a divine blessing; and truly it was a divine blessing that attended these remarkable

circumstances. Who is the prophet speaking about said the eunuch, "himself, or of some other man? Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus." There is something rather striking about this in connection with verse 32 where it refers to the Lord Jesus Christ; it is said that He opened not His mouth, "He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth", but "Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus." Philip opened his mouth, but in the case of the Saviour's substitution He was silent in it, He opened not His mouth against His accusers, who in their bitter enmity had brought Him into the judgment hall; He kept silent, He opened not His mouth against them. Neither did He when He was on the cross; He opened not His mouth against them, not even against that poor dying thief that railed on Him; but Philip opened his mouth and preached unto him Jesus. This record from the prophet Isaiah is a very striking one. "He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth: In his humiliation his judgment was taken away". That is to say as I feel we may understand it, He was not given a just trial. His judgment was taken away. A spirit of violence and bitterness and cruel enmity stirred their determination to have Him put to death, although nothing had been done as far as the Saviour was concerned to justify it. We know He came in the divine purpose of His Father to atone for the sins of His people, and He lay down His life and shed His blood to save them, but as far as these chief priests and rulers were concerned they gave Him no just or proper trial, they seemed determined to force the matter. "In his humiliation his judgment was taken away: and who shall declare his generation?" This is more than I can explain. "Who shall declare his generation? for his life is taken from the earth". If we refer this to the mysterious circumstances that attended His birth it was not by ordinary generation, or procreation, and His conception was attended by the overshadowing of the Holy Ghost. Who can declare, or enter into, or fathom that mystery? "Who shall declare His generation?"

This may refer to all those for whom He became a Substitute and on whose behalf He suffered, they were only known to Himself. No one else could declare it, but the Lord knew everyone of them. Some consider that this refers to the wicked generation of that time, which may perhaps have been, but "Who shall declare His generation?".

"Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same Scripture and preached unto him Jesus." There must have been some sweet communion there in that chariot between Philip and the eunuch when he "preached unto him Jesus". We read that Philip was in Samaria and preached Christ unto them but here it is recorded that he preached unto him Jesus. This is the same blessed, glorious Person; Christ refers to that divine anointing that He received from His Father, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek". That refers to His ministry, He was the Christ, the anointed One, Jesus the Saviour, and both are indeed divine and blessed. Philip preached unto him Jesus, and that is the Gospel; and evidently he opened up the mystery of Isaiah 53 for that is what the eunuch was enquiring, he preached Jesus in Isaiah 53, he preached Jesus in that chapter that relates particularly to his substitutionary work. And it was with effect; the eyes of that eunuch were opened in a particular way. All that was involved in that sermon is more than we can say, but it would seem obvious that Philip may have made some reference to the ordinance of believer's baptism for he said as they went on their way, "See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?" This is very wonderful and "Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."; this was heart believing. This heart believing is very blessed is it not? It is referred to in Romans 10.10. Evidently a lot of people believe in their heads and in their judgment; but this was heart believing, and he did believe with all his heart, there was no question about this, he said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God". It had been made so clear to him and was without question. This eunuch had been

savingly convinced of the glorious Person of the Messiah as He was referred to in Isaiah 53. If you and I have a religion that comes inside Isaiah 53 it will take us to heaven, for it is full of the blessed glorious Gospel; and he baptised him.

There are some striking points in this chapter and in the chapters that follow in this book of Acts. It is a wonderful thing to believe in the heart for that softens and breaks the heart; believing in the heart makes Christ precious there. This is something more than a judgment, a person may hold a form of religion, or a cold theology; but to believe in the heart is when Christ Himself comes into the heart, fills the heart with a sweet holy joy. There was nothing to hinder the eunuch being baptised, and so he was baptised, and after that Philip was caught away and he never saw him again. A very striking thing. He was not grieved because Philip had been caught away, "he went on his way rejoicing", his heart was full. Christ was in his heart, he believed in his heart, the Gospel was in his heart, he went on his way rejoicing; and I hope one day it will be with some even in this congregation that you, having received some token of the Lord's favour and mercy and blessing may go on your way rejoicing. Amen.