Sermon preached on Monday afternoon 29th. May, 1967 at "Ebenezer" Clapham by Mr. J.Delves

Hymns: 285, 634, 118

Reading: Acts 8 (from verse 14)

Text: Acts 8.35

"Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus."

This remarkable chapter records the cases of two different characters of whom it is said "They believed and were baptised", but there was a tremendous difference between them. Peter said to Simon "Thy heart is not right in the sight of God" - although it is said that he believed and was baptised and that he continued with Philip - yet all the time it appears that though he may have been attracted by the miracles that Philip wrought, he had certain mercenary motives in his own heart. But I will not enlarge upon this, save to indicate the great solemnity of the ordinances of God and the fact that even in those far off days, there were those who walked in them who had never known a change of heart, but the case of the other character is so different. The eunuch believed by some revelation of the precious gospel and the person of the Lord Jesus Christ to him, undoubtedly by the Spirit of God, so that when Philip questioned him, he could say "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God", - that really is a <u>great thing</u> to know. It may be an easy thing to say, but it is a great mercy to know, savingly, in our own soul's experience that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. The eunuch did indeed believe this, and Philip baptised him.

It is confirming to notice the leadings of divine providence in relation to Philip and the eunuch. Philip had been preaching the Gospel in the city of Samaria with great success so that there was great joy in that city and many miracles were wrought there. It must have seemed a strange thing to have such a

direction as this when the angel of the Lord appeared to him and said "Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert." What an extraordinary leading it must have seemed to go all that distance, I suppose about eighty miles, from the city of Samaria right down to the most southern part of Palestine unto this desert. Philip had evidently been preaching to many for it is said "There was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria". Though in Jerusalem there was great persecution, yet in this city of Samaria there was great joy! It appears that the Jewish rulers had no jurisdiction in Samaria, but they persecuted the disciples at Jerusalem. Truly the Lord has His way in the whirlwind and in the storm. He moves in a mysterious way, and in the providence of His people. Philip was not directed to go down to Gaza to preach to a great multitude of people. There appears to have been, as far as we can see, only this eunuch, and he was a man of great authority, but still, the Lord sent Philip down there to preach the gospel to him, and His purposes must be fulfilled in respect of every vessel of mercy whosoever and wheresoever they may be. As I have been looking at this, it is noticeable that all it says about Philip's journey is that "he arose and went" - like Abraham, when he had the command to take Isaac, he arose early in the morning and obeyed the command. How mysterious it seemed, yet "he arose and went." It behoves us to follow the leadings of providence when they are according to the Lord's purpose however mysterious they may seem to be.

These circumstances are, I know, very familiar. This eunuch was returning from Jerusalem, and was sitting in his chariot reading Esaias the prophet. What he may have heard when he was at Jerusalem, we do not know, but as the dear man was reading this, shall I say the very life and kernel of the gospel, "the Spirit said to Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot . And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest?" A very pertinent enquiry! It might even be questioned of some of

us when we read the Holy Scriptures as to how far we understand what we read. Here we have the eunuch's reply, "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." What a sacred time it must have been. 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 he 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? Then Philip opened his mouth and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus." What a sermon it must have been!

I would like to draw your attention to the text of Philip's sermon, which was in the 53rd. Isaiah, although there it is in the Hebrew, and here in the Septuagint version - but this is the scripture he was reading, "as a sheep to the slaughter and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened He not His mouth". That was the subject, Philip preached unto him that Jesus referred to in that remarkable Scripture. In the prophecy it is said, "He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He opened not His mouth", which may seem, perhaps, more appropriate but we know that the Lord Jesus Christ is often referred to under the figure of a lamb, and a blessed figure it is. We may refer to it in this way - He was led as a lamb to the slaughter and as a sheep dumb before His shearer, so opened He not His mouth.

The Lord Jesus Christ opened His mouth in His ministry, but closed it under His sufferings. He opened His mouth to preach that blessed gospel He was anointed to preach, of which He was the fulness, but when He came to suffer He was silent and did not reply to His accusers in defence of Himself. It is said that He answered them not! This figure of the lamb is very sacred, it runs through the scriptures and refers to the priestly sacrifice and office of the Lord Jesus Christ, and as a lamb was

offered daily in the temple sacrifices, figuratively, so the Lamb of God, the great and blessed anti-type was offered to bear away the sins of His people in His own body. John said "Behold the Lamb of God". Peter said, "Ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold.... but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot". He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and this figure, as I understand it, sets forth the Saviour's innocence, His patience and His subjection to those who crucified Him. The lamb is a very beautiful figure of innocence and meekness. Although the Lord Jesus Christ knew no sin, yet He was made sin. "When He was reviled, He reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not, but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously". He was made subject to the will of His Father - willing - graciously willing. He drank the cup His Father gave Him, saying, "The cup that My Father giveth Me, shall I not drink it?" - not only in willingness, but His willingness, and this He declares of Himself, saying, "I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls". He is the Lamb of God, that dying, precious Lamb of whom Cowper writes:-

"Dear dying Lamb! Thy precious blood
Shall never lose its power,
'Till all the ransom'd church of God
Be saved to sin no more."

Oh to have an interest in the "Blood" of the Lamb of God, bearing our sins away - offering Himself without spot to God as the price that justice required - in shedding His most precious blood and opening the fountain there, "A fountain opened.... for sin and for uncleanness", and like a lamb, dumb before his shearer, so opened He not His mouth". He was silent in His sufferings here. He opened not His mouth against the claims of justice; He opened not His mouth against those cruel, wicked people who crucified Him. He opened not His mouth against poor guilty sinners on whose behalf He came to suffer, bleed and die. If you and I have an interest here, it can be a striking thought that He opened not His mouth against us, but suffered for us and answered the claims of justice, paying the full price that justice claimed; and satisfying justice,

so that no further claim can be made.

"Payment God cannot twice demand,
First at my bleeding surety's hand,
And then again at mine."

May we each be so favoured to view by faith the Lamb of God as a sheep, Who before His shearers opened not His mouth.

"And in His humiliation His judgment was taken away". By the humiliation of the Lord Jesus Christ we understand that amazing condescension that was in Him to come into this poor world on behalf of guilty people. The apostle explains this in writing to the Philippians saying that He "Being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; But made Himself of no reputation". This explains His estate of humiliation. In fact His whole life was one of humiliation on earth, of all that He endured, of His death poverty and opposition that He encountered, and the scorn and reproach of men. But here, in the judgment hall, he had no fair trial - justice was denied Him - and He was taken away by an act of tyranny and oppression. He was taken away under a false charge and accusation, indicating an act of treason against Caesar, and so on. "His judgment was taken away, and who shall declare His generation?" Some consider this refers to the wicked generation of that day - who shall declare - who shall express the wickedness of that generation who put Him to such a cruel death, but, if we consider it in respect of His eternal generation as the Son of God, we may say who can explain or declare His human generation as born of the virgin Mary? Who can declare the generation of all His people? - generation often referring to a vast number of people as well as a certain space of time. Who shall declare His generation? But the day will come when He will declare it and say "I and the people that Thou hast given me" - and they are a number whom no man can number.

This was the subject of Philip's preaching, "And he preached unto him Jesus". You know the effect of this, the eyes of this eunuch were opened to discern that this Man - this Jesus of Nazareth - was the very person referred to in the 53rd. Isaiah, the very person. The eunuch was convinced, he had a conviction

and this is expressive of what faith is, a conviction in the heart or conscience of a person, concerning the Lord Jesus Christ. It is said to be the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. It is an evidence, and I feel sure, the eunuch felt this confidence in his soul in this Man of whom he had heard so much, (and it may be much against Him too) Jesus of Nazareth that He was the very Son of God, the Messiah, prophesied in the Old Testament Who is particularly referred to in Isaiah 53. It is this glorious, blessed Person whom ministers have to preach - Jesus. He is the great subject. You might say why? Why are ministers to preach Jesus Christ? I can give you several reasons for this, and one is because He is the open manifestation of the love of God in sending Him, or in giving Him, as we have it in the Scriptures. Sometimes we read that the Father gave Him, and sometimes that He sent Him, and in the epistle to the Romans that He did not spare Him but delivered Him for us all. This was an evidence of divine love, the height of divine love. We read of its breadth, and length, and depth and height. This sending, this giving of the Lord Jesus by the Father, is one of the heights of divine love. "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son". In this, was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him". This is one of the reasons why ministers have to preach Jesus. That is what Philip did! There is no better subject! Philip opened his mouth as though he could not keep silent. He had something to say. "He began at the same Scripture preaching unto him Jesus."

Another reason why ministers are to preach Jesus is because there is no salvation without Him! I do not know of any, neither did the apostle Peter when he said "There is none other name given among men whereby we must be saved." No salvation without Him! No gospel, no hope, no pardon of sin, no mercy and no way to heaven apart from Jesus Christ, therefore it becomes us to preach Him. Saviour, that is what His name means "For He shall

save His people from their sins."

A further reason why it becomes ministers to preach Jesus Christ is because it is eternal life to know Him. The apostle Paul felt this himself when he said "I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord." This means nothing else, but Jesus Christ and Him crucified. It is the one great thing, and what the Lord Himself said "This is life eternal, that they might know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent." I believe it. I have not the slightest doubt about it. I wish I could feel that I knew Him more, for I believe I could preach Him better then, I seem just to be talking about Him. I believe what the hymn-writer says:-

"Jesus Thy Godhead, blood and Name,
O! 'tis eternal life to know."

I am sure of that. What a mercy it is for any poor sinner to be blessed with a knowledge of Him.

Another reason why it becomes us to preach Jesus Christ is because it will be everlasting joy to be with Him one day; to go no more out. It is great to get a glimpse of Him here - it is a glimpse - it is like glow-worms in the sun, and drops in ocean lost, but there, it will be a cloudless sky, a day without a night, a sun without a cloud, a fulness of joy that the redeemed of the Lord are realising now, who have finished their earthly sojourn and have gone to be for ever with the Lord. So it becomes the Lord's ministers to preach Jesus. That is what Philip did. One feels they would have liked to have a record of Philip's sermon, but this we do know, that it was undoubtedly a very blessed explanation of this sacred Scripture. "He preached unto him Jesus".

What a mercy it is to have an interest in the gospel, for the issues of eternity, as I often say, are so tremendous. Eternal life or eternal death awaits every one of us, and this is profoundly solemn. We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ to receive of the deeds done in the body, good or bad. We have a destiny that is overwhelming, even in the prospect of it, and that great word "ETERNITY" is a tremendous sound. What a mercy

to have our eyes opened, and to possess that divinely given faith which we believe the eunuch had, and to view the precious Son of God in His humiliation in these particulars. To view Him by faith in His willingness. His willingness is a beautiful point. His willingness to die.

"How willing was Jesus to die
That we fellow-sinners might live"

And not only His willingness, but we may contemplate the love that moved Him thus to suffer, bleed and die, as Hart expresses it,

"O tell me Saviour, tell me why
Thou thus didst suffer, bleed and die?"

and he gives us the reason,

"The motive's plain, 'twas all for love"

No love can compare with this. Love moved Him to come, and love sustained Him in all that He passed through.

Now there is another point that the Lord's ministers are to preach, and that is a living Jesus, an exalted Jesus Who rose again from the dead, appeared to His disciples, and went up into heaven, into glory, where He is a mediator between God and poor sinful men. What a blessing this is for you and me, at least I know it is for me, and sometimes it has been a transporting thought in my soul that I have a Representative there, an advocate there Who will never lose a case, and to have Him there to plead for us means that His heaven is our heaven. We shall never come short, nor fail, if we have a place in His all-prevailing intercession.

"For all that come to God by Him,
Salvation He demands;
Points to their names upon His breast,
And spreads His wounded hands."

He is a living Saviour, able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him.

Well friends, He is all I need. I know that. I have felt that. I have had a moment in my life when I felt a sweet satisfaction in Him, not in myself, not in my knowledge of Him, but I know what it is to feel satisfied with Christ. It is very sweet. This is the soul's rest, to feel Him as our foundation and

as the Rock of ages. I have been trying to preach JESUS for a few years, since 1929. Thirty eight years ago I began to try to preach JESUS unto the people at Brighton. The first text I ever had in public was "That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death." That is where I am now - "That I may know Him". In the providence of God I have been sustained here for 32 years. I feel I cannot just by-pass this without acknowledging the kindness and compassion of my God to supply all my need through these years, and to give me a gospel to preach, though I do not preach it as I would wish. Through these years I have been the subject of much kindness, consideration, affection and patience by my people. They have continued to bear with me until this present time, when I realise that my powers are failing. The powers of memory fail with me now, but He does not fail. Moreover I have His blessed word to this end "I will not fail thee nor forsake thee." Though it cannot be very much longer, now, I desire, by God's grace to continue to preach unto the people, Jesus. As I come to the end of my ministry, and the end of my life here, I want to feel that He is my Jesus. I feel rather like dear old Mr. Dickens of Rotherfield, who when in his last illness, said to my late Pastor, I have been "talking" about Him for years, but now I feel I could preach Him. The dear man must have had some sweet sense of the Lord's favour in his heart. I can say this, it is in my heart to lift Him up, and to speak of Him in all that He is to poor, needy sinners. The apostle Paul was just like this when he said to the Corinthians "I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified." Writing to the Galatians he said, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world."

I realise I have come very short, but, after all, the great thing is to possess a saving knowledge of Him as a poor, lost, guilty sinner, casting oneself upon Him with nothing better than filthy rags, feeling unclean, and yet finding in Him all that is necessary to sanctify, justify, and deliver us from the wrath of God and grant us an abundant entrance into His everlasting kingdom. Amen.