

GREAT JOY IN THE CITY

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A SERMON
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“And there was great joy in that city.”
Acts 8:8.

“PHILIP went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ to them,” and the result of his preaching was that “there was great joy in that city.” He had a very speedy and very remarkable success. He scarcely opened his mouth without gaining attention, and had not long proclaimed his message before people willingly received it, and many were converted to Christ, so that “there was great joy in that city.”

What was the explanation of this wonderful blessing? Something had been done, years before, to prepare the way for Philip. There had come to that region a weary Man who sat on the well at Sychar, and spoke to Samaria's daughter concerning the living water, and she had heard, believed, and been saved. And she, fallen woman as she had been, had gone back to the city to tell the men that she had met the Messiah, which is called Christ. In all probability, the work done by our Lord at Sychar had affected the whole district, so that, when Philip went to the city of Samaria, he found there a people prepared of the Lord. Jesus sowed the seed; Philip came, and reaped the harvest.

Learn therefore that no good work for God is ever lost. If you have labored in a village or town, and have seen no great success, someone else may see it. If you have prayed especially for the salvation of any person, and labored to win that one for Christ, and yet have not brought that soul to a decision, someone else may do it. We are workers together, as well as workers together with God; and what one man begins, another may finish. Paul plants; Apollos waters; someone else may come in to gather the increase; and if God gets the glory, what matters it to you what part you have had in it? If your Lord and Master was satisfied with sowing the good seed of the kingdom, leaving Philip to reap the harvest, can you not be satisfied, if you are called to do work that will not yield an immediate return?

Often, during my winter's holiday, year after year, I have seen the carts coming down towards the breakwater at Mentone, bringing huge masses of stone, weighing many tons, which were thrown into the sea. For a long time, I saw no result whatever of this effort; tremendous blocks of stone were cast into the sea, and covered by the waters. Yet I felt persuaded that something was being done out of sight, though nothing was visible to the eye. After a while, the piles of stone began to show above the surface of the water, and then we saw that the great foundation-work had been done. Now that the structure is nearly finished, and they begin to square up, and put everything in order, we say, “How quickly the work goes on!” Yes, but it really went on just as quickly when we could not see anything of it. Those thousands of tons of stone were not lost, they all went to make the underwater foundation; and whatever is built upon it afterwards is not to have the credit of usefulness any more than that which lay down deep at the bottom of the sea.

Some of us may have to work on for years, and never see any result of our toil. Let us not faint for a moment, nor be disheartened; some other person may come by and by, and all men's mouths may be filled with wonderment at the great work that he does. And yet, after all, He who reads history aright, even the great God who writes it, will know that this man who seems to be so successful owes much of his usefulness to the work of other persons who labored before him. We cannot tell how much the Master's own service prepared the way for Philip's success when he went down to Samaria.

And I believe that, in this great London, we shall see better and brighter days than these, because of all the work that has been done here in years gone by. Do not tell me that the preaching at Paul's Cross, by men who became martyrs for the faith, were lost efforts. I do not believe that those declarations of the Word of God in Smithfield, by men who were burnt there for their fidelity to Christ, will ever be lost. Let

us not imagine that the glorious testimony for Christ of the long succession of Puritan preachers, who occupied yonder churches across the water, will ever be lost. Neither shall it be that the witnessing in later times of John Newton, and Romaine, and Whitefield, and the other faithful preachers of the gospel, shall be in vain, and that all they did shall be lost. No, London may, at this time, be far from what we want it to be; but, as surely as the labors of the Christ were not lost, so the seed sown by those who came and labored for Him, and have now gone to their reward, shall spring up, and bring forth fruit on some happier and sunnier day than this. When, perhaps, some of us shall sleep with our fathers, there shall come a day when there shall be great joy in this city as the direct result of our service for our Lord. In Cromwell's time, if you had walked down Cheapside, at a certain hour of the morning, it is said that you would have seen every blind drawn down, because in every house there was family prayer; and at that hour, every morning, you might have gone from window to window, and have heard the singing of a psalm at almost every merchant's house in the city. It is not so now; but it may be so yet again. Let us have faith in that seed which lies still in the ground; it only needs someone to turn it up, and it shall germinate and grow to the praise and glory of God.

That is a long preface, you will say, for me to have; well, put up with it for once, and let us now come to the text, "There was great joy in that city."

I. And, first, it was A JOY BORN OF A GREAT SORROW.

Usually, that is the best kind of joy. Joys of that sort are like Jabez, who was more honorable than his brethren; and his mother called his name Jabez, that is, sorrowful, because she bore him with sorrow. The good which comes to us through that which is apparently an evil, is usually the best of all good things.

Now, the great sorrow out of which this joy in Samaria came was this. There had been persecution in Jerusalem, terrible persecution; Saul and other enemies of the truth were making havoc of the church. Good men were taken to prison, excellent Christian sisters were shut up in jail as evildoers, some were cruelly ill-treated; numbers were put to death. Thank God, we do not know, in the real sense, what persecution is, for they cannot do much to us, nowadays, except expose us to the trial of cruel mockery, and there is not much in that to hurt us; but in Jerusalem the Church of God had to bear fierce persecution. Yet, it was that persecution that made the disciples go abroad, everywhere preaching the Word.

The second sorrow that they had was *scattering*, for it is a great grief to people who have lived together in holy communion to be divided, for families to be broken up, for good men who used to meet at the same place for prayer, to be able no more to see one another's faces. Men naturally cling to their homes; but those good folk had to flee from their homes, and go wherever they could, to escape from the edge of the sword. But it was through this scattering that the blessing reached Samaria.

Worse than that, *death* itself came into the church at Jerusalem. Besides others who were put to death, Stephen, the first martyr, fell a victim to the persecutors' rage. He was a good man and true, a worthy leader of the host of God; he died a dreadful death, but through the scattering that followed his death, Philip was made to go down to Samaria, and so, "There was great joy in that city." Sometimes, dear friends, it is a blessing to a church to have a great trial. I am persuaded that it is a good thing for some men to have to encounter a great difficulty. I confess that I owe almost everything to the forge, the fire, the file, and the hammer. How little good we get out of our sweets; and how much we extract from our bitters! This church at Jerusalem, by sore travail, became the mother of the saints in Samaria, and it was not without hard trials and dire struggles that she became useful to others.

I want this church, at this time, to feel that it is called upon by God to awaken itself before any great and overwhelming trial comes. Let us begin to feel for the vast city in which we dwell; and if any of you are under the pressure of the present distress, or if you are tried by the loss of some dear one at home, just as these trials worked on the whole church at Jerusalem, so let them work in their measure upon you, stirring you up to seek the souls of men, and to bring others to know and love our Lord Jesus Christ. Oh, that there was such a heart in the thousands of our church members that everyone desired the conversion of his neighbor! Oh, that we began to feel an inward anguish for those about us who are perishing through sheer indifference, perishing while the glorious gospel is proclaimed so near to them! Oh, that the great sorrow that some of us have had to bear of late might become the mother of a great joy to many others! It was so in Philip's day; there was much joy in Samaria because there had been much grief in Jerusalem.

II. But now, secondly, IT WAS A JOY OCCASIONED BY ONE MAN'S PREACHING: "There was great joy in that city." It was one man's preaching that caused it. Philip went down to Samaria, and preached Christ, and the great joy was the result of his preaching.

Notice who it was that preached; it was *Philip*. Now Philip was a Jew, and he might have said—perhaps he did say—that he was a very unlikely person to succeed in Samaria, for the Jews had no deal-

ings with the Samaritans, and the Samaritans did not care to have any dealings with the Jews. They were nations remarkably like one another, and yet strongly antagonistic to one another. They could not stand each other; and yet, you see, it was the preaching of a Jew that was blessed to the people of Samaria. Never say again, dear friend, “I must not go there; I am not a proper person for that place.” How do you know? The most unlikely person in the esteem of men may be the very person who is the special choice of God. Jew or no Jew, Philip is sent to preach the gospel, and to preach it to every creature, and therefore he goes to Samaria. It must have seemed strange to him that this door of utterance was opened to him, that he was welcomed by the Samaritans, who were so hostile to the Jews. I say again, dear friends, never let us keep back from trying to do good anywhere, and everywhere, and never let any one of us say of any people, “I could not speak to them.” Why not? Go, and try. “They are too cultured,” says one. Cultured people are often impressed by natural, wild bird notes. “Oh, they are too ignorant,” says another. It may be your ignorance that makes you think so, but do not, because you have been better educated than they, be so proud as to disdain to speak to them, for if so, it will prove that you are not very well educated yet, and need a great deal more of the right kind of training. “Oh, but I know that my profession and my trade, and so on, are against me!” Never mind what is against you; go and do your duty, and God will bless you.

The next thing about Philip was that he was not a regular minister. He was one of the seven deacons chosen by the apostles and by the church at Jerusalem to look after the poor members, that the apostles might be able to give their whole attention to the ministry of the Word, and to prayer. Yes, but then anybody may preach the gospel, anybody who can preach ought to preach; and instead of its being the business of a few select gentlemen to go and preach the gospel, is it not written, “Let him that hears say, Come”? All you who have heard the gospel should endeavor to tell it out to others; and the question of every Christian man should not be, “May I preach the gospel?”—That you may certainly do—but, “Can I preach the gospel? Have I such power of preaching it that anybody will listen to me? If nobody will listen, it is clear that it is of no use for me to preach; but if I can so speak that others will hear, if I have the gifts, I am bound to use them, and I ought to try to see whether I have the gifts, or not, for perhaps I have them, and do not know it.” It was Philip the deacon, whose preaching brought joy to this city; therefore, preach away, my brethren; speak in the name of God as best you can on behalf of the Lord Jesus, for in these days there are many who are speaking against Him. This is an additional reason why no tongue that can speak a word for Him should remain silent.

But we are also told that this deacon Philip was a man of excellent character. When the deacons were to be chosen, the apostles said to the members of the church at Jerusalem, “Look you out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.” Philip was one of the seven, and therefore we know that he was a man of sterling character. That is very essential to the preaching that will make a city glad. He was also a man full of the Holy Spirit, and that is the chief qualification for a preacher of the gospel. All the learning in the world is not worth a penny to a man unless he is filled with the Holy Spirit, but where the Spirit of God rests upon any man, He enables the preacher to speak with the power that reaches the heart and the conscience. Without that power, nothing can be done; therefore seek it, my brother. When you try, to labor for God, do it in the power of the Holy Spirit.

But really, I do not care to say much more about who the preacher in Samaria was because that does not signify much. I wish that people did not so often take notice of who the preacher is; the principal question is, *What is preached?*

What did Philip preach? We are not left in doubt about this matter, for we are told that, “Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and *preached Christ* to them.” Yes, that is the preaching that brings great joy to a city! “He preached Christ to them.” He told them that Jesus of Nazareth, who was born at Bethlehem, and who died on Calvary, is the Son of God, the Messiah, the Sent One, that He is Himself both God and man, and that He has come here as a messenger of peace from God to man.

Philip preached Christ to them as the one sacrifice for sin, telling them that Jesus died, the Just for the unjust, to bring them to God. He preached to them of the great substitution of Christ for sinners, and of all the grief He bore in the room and the place and the stead of guilty men; and he bade them believe in this Christ that they might obtain the pardon of all their sins, full justification in the sight of God, and power to become the children of God. He preached Christ also as their Sanctifier, telling them that Jesus could change their natures, take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh, so that they would love that which once they hated, and hate what once they loved. Philip preached Jesus Christ of Nazareth as the great Heart-Changer, the true Moral Reformer, the Man who turns things upside down, and puts evil where it ought to be, under men’s feet, and implants His grace as a reigning power for holi-

ness within their souls. Thus he preached Christ to them. He did not preach up what they could do; but he preached what Christ had done, and he bade them come and accept the work of Christ, all finished and complete. He bade them quit all other confidences, and come and confide in the Lord Jesus Christ. He did not so much try to preach them to Christ, as to preach Christ to them; and there is a distinction between these two things, though the great end in preaching Christ to a sinner is also to preach the sinner to Christ.

Beloved friends, I delight to preach to you all the doctrines which I find in God's Word, but I desire always to preach the person of Christ above the doctrine; the doctrine is but the chair in which Christ sits as a Prophet to instruct us. Christ Himself is still alive; He has risen from the dead, He has gone into heaven, but He is observant of all that is going on here, below; He is making intercession for sinners, and if you trust that living Savior, He will save you. Oh, that you would do so! This is the gospel we have to preach to you, and this it is which, if it is received, will make you glad. It was this that caused great joy in the city of Samaria.

Thus, you see, it was a joy that was born of a great sorrow, and a joy produced by the preaching of one man. You have heard who he was, and what he preached.

III. Now, thirdly, IT WAS A JOY WHICH HAD ABUNDANT CAUSE: "There was great joy in that city."

First, there was joy in Samaria *because the gospel was preached there*. If men did but know it, the greatest gift a city can have is to have the gospel preached in it. Remember the old motto of the city of Glasgow, "Let Glasgow flourish by the preaching of the Word." No city flourishes as well as that which has a clear, powerful, gospel bell ringing in the midst of it. It is a famishing city which has not the bread of life, but it is a flourishing city which has the bread of life freely dispensed from the pulpit every Sabbath day by loving hands.

But there was still more joy in Samaria *because there were signs of blessing going with the gospel*. Unclean spirits were driven out of those who had been possessed by them, and lame and paralyzed persons were made to walk. We work no such miracles now, in the physical world, but we work them in the spiritual realm; out of many men have we seen the evil spirits go as the cup of devils has been abandoned. Filthy blasphemy has been given up, and their speech has been seasoned with salt. Fornication has been forsaken, uncleanness of life has been hated and left, theft and dishonesty of every kind have become detestable. We have seen these miracles worked again and again; we have some among us at this time to whom we might say, "And such were some of you, but you are washed." The gospel has washed, and cleansed, and changed them; and it is going to do the same for others, for Jesus Christ has come to cast unclean spirits out of those who are possessed by them, and to make some receive divine strength who have, up to now been palsied so far as any holy action is concerned, that they may henceforth run gladly in the ways of God, and give up their whole lives to His service and glory. Oh, that it might be so with many here tonight! If it is so, there will be great joy in this city.

Once more, there was great joy in Samaria *because so many believed, and were saved*. He that believes in Jesus Christ is saved. The *moment* that he believes, his nature is changed, his sins are forgiven, and his heart is renewed. This great work is done in a moment, but it is never undone. The new life commences with the miraculous, regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, and that miracle is of such a character that it continues to thrill throughout the entire man until at last he is brought safely to heaven made perfectly like the Lord Jesus Christ.

There was also great joy in Samaria *because of the changed lives of those who believed*. When a man is converted, he does not doubt the power of the gospel that converted him; and when men see the changed lives of well-known sinners, they are made to believe that the gospel that works such transformations must be true; or, if they doubt it, they do so in the teeth of the plainest evidence. If our preaching does not turn men from drunkenness to sobriety, from thieving to honesty, from unchastity to purity, then our gospel is not worth a button; but if it does all this, then this shall be the evidence that it comes from God, seeing that in the world, so sorely diseased by sin, it works the wondrous miracle of curing men of these deadly ills.

O my dear friends, what a happy city Samaria was when it was full of men healed, and saved, and converted, and rejoicing in Christ!

IV. And this is the point I am trying to reach in concluding my discourse. THIS IS THE JOY WHICH WE DESIRE TO SEE REPEATED IN LONDON: "There was great joy in that city."

We long to have this great joy in London. We want to see *despairing souls made happy*. My friend over yonder, who has been indulging dark thoughts about whether he can manage to live any longer—his hand almost feels for the fatal knife—live, poor soul, live! There is hope; there is joy even for you! Jesus

Christ is willing to forgive the chief of sinners; He is ready to renew the most debauched and depraved of men. He is able to make a saint of you; He can at this moment take the burden from your heart, and commence a work in you which shall make you a totally new man. What do you say to this? If you can believe in Jesus, there will begin to be joy in this city, for there will be joy in your heart. I remember the day when I despaired of finding salvation, when I could not think that my sin would ever be forgiven, but that voice, "Look unto Me, and be you saved, all the ends of the earth," was a word of life and love to my soul; and I would repeat it tonight to those in this audience who are in the depths of despair. Do not give yourself up; God has not given you up. Do not sign your own death warrant; God has not signed it. "Come unto Me," says Christ, "all you that labor, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Were you, poor sinful woman, almost hiding away for very shame? Come along with you. Remember what Luke wrote concerning Christ, "Then drew near unto Him all the publicans and sinners to hear Him," and He preached to them the blessed word of life. Oh, hear it tonight! Believe in Him, and live; and there will begin to be joy in this city directly when despairing souls are made happy by a holy confidence in Christ.

Well, then, dear friends, suppose also that some *sinful men and women should be changed in character*, what joy there will be in this city! The man, who used to swear and curse, goes home like a lamb. What a joy for his wife as well as for himself! The man who was known to the police—better known than one might like to be—suppose that he should become known as much for his integrity and uprightness as he has been for his wrong-doing? What a change for him, and what a change for all around him! It is a wonder what an amount of misery some men cause to others. O you wretched creatures, it is a marvel that God Almighty should let you live at all when you beat your wives, and blast your children's lives almost from the day of their birth with your drunkenness and blasphemy! But if the Lord comes and changes you, and you give up the drink, and henceforth you become Christians, truly following Christ, what joy there will be in this city! Why, there are some men whom I have known, whose wives would hardly recognize them if they became kind, and spoke tenderly to them! If they were to bring home all their wages on Saturday night, the wife would say, "Whatever has come over Charlie? I cannot imagine what has caused such a change as this." And if, instead of a word and a blow, or a blow without a word, such a man were to become gentle, and kind, and amiable—ah! Well, it would not matter that you had lived in one room, it would not matter that you had but scanty wages, all that would soon be altered; but even if it were not immediately changed, there would come rays of sunlight through that dirty window, and the house itself would speedily become clean and bright, and when there is a happy father, and a happy mother, there would soon be happy children. Yes, there is joy in a city when such a change as this is worked in men and women who have gone far into sin.

Now you suppose that I am speaking only to the poor, but I am doing nothing of the kind. Why, there are some men who are rolling in riches, yet they are grumpy, and stingy, and quarrelling with everybody in the house, from the youngest servant right up to the wife. They make everybody unhappy by their wicked ways. The Lord have mercy upon you poor rich people who do not know what you want, but are always wanting something or other! May God give you new hearts and right spirits, and teach you the sacred art of living according to the law of love! When you once get that word "love" thoroughly worked into your nature, and into your lives, there will be joy in your houses; and, as houses make up a city, by and by, this wondrous work of grace will make great joy in this city. The practical effect of Christianity is happiness, therefore let it be spread abroad everywhere. Let men begin to think about one another, and care for one another, and minister to one another's comfort; and, before long, the sure result of the gospel faithfully preached, and cheerfully accepted, and lovingly manifested, will be great joy in the city.

Oh, but what great joy there is because of *the heavenly hopes which true religion creates within the soul!* The man who is a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ has many joys even now, for—

*"Tis religion that can give
Sweetest pleasures while we live;"*

but he has much more bliss in reversion, for it is also true that—

*"Tis religion must supply
Solid comfort when we die.
After death its joys will be
Lasting, as eternity;
Be the living God my friend,
Then my bliss shall never end."*

What a number of Christian people there are who are very poor, and what is worse, perhaps, very sick, and often suffering great pain, but they say to themselves, "It is not for long; we shall soon see the face of

the Well-beloved.” I do not suppose that there is a man in London suffering more than our dear brother and deacon, William Olney. His pain is such that, if I were in his place, I would prefer death to life; yet, if there is a happy man anywhere, he is to be found down the New Kent Road. If there is one brother whom I envy more than another—I do not think I envy anybody—it is that one man. Even in the midst of his pain, he is always peaceful, always joyful, always as merry as a cricket, because he is looking for the coming of his Lord, abiding His will, and expecting soon to be with Him where He is. Oh, dear people, if you do but get a good hope through grace, that will make you rich, that will make you joyful, that will make you strong. I wish that you all had it; my very soul keeps longing within me that you might all be converted to God! I cannot work that great miracle; it is only the Spirit of God who can do it, but He works in answer to prayer. I wish that all God’s people would silently breathe this prayer to Him now, “Lord, save every sinner in this house! Bring every unconverted one to Your feet!” He can do it, you know; only let us cry to Him, pleading His own promise, “I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them: I will increase them with men like a flock.” So let us cry to Him, “Lord, save this people! Lord, save this people, for Jesus Christ’s sake! Amen.”

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON: ACTS 8.

Stephen had been stoned to death; and with his latest breath he prayed for his murderers. Then this chapter begins—

Verse 1. *And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.*

Saul, having tasted blood in the murder of Stephen, became more and more furious in his persecution of the Church of Christ at Jerusalem, and the brethren had to escape for their lives. They all did so, except the apostles, who were especially cared for by divine providence.

2. *And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentations over him.*

As well they might, for his death was a serious loss to the Church. He was one of the best workers for Christ of that day; and when he was thus put to death by the judicial murder of stoning, the devout men who were spared to mourn his loss “made great lamentation over him.”

3. *As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison.*

At first, we can hardly believe that this was the very man who afterwards became the greatest preacher of the gospel, and the builder of the Church of Christ, but it was even so. He was always earnest in whatever he did. When he persecuted, he did it with all his might; and when he became converted, then he preached with all his might. He was a thorough-going man. I like these thorough-going men; they are worth saving. When they are converted, they bring great glory to God.

The next verse tells us one effect of the havoc worked by Saul—

4. *Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word.*

They might have stayed at Jerusalem, and made a comfortable and strong church there, if they had not been persecuted; but, being scattered abroad, they were like seed in every furrow of the field: “They went everywhere preaching the word.” Now, out of this church, there is a continual drain of brethren and sisters, who leave their native land to go to distant colonies; such are the exigencies of the times that many have to go abroad. I charge you, wherever you go, carry the Holy seed with you. Be yourselves a seed for Christ in every land.

5-11. *Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them. And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spoke, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed. And there was great joy in that city. But there was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one: to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, this man is the great power of God. And to him they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries.*

And there are those in all ages who set up to be prophets, and who seek to draw men after them, of whom it is well to beware.

12-13. *But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. Then Simon himself believed also:*

Simon believed after a certain style and fashion. He saw that there was a real power about Philip, which he did not himself possess, and he was obliged to bow down before the manifest presence of God.

13-17. *And when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done. Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John: who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Spirit: (for as yet He was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus). Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.*

That is to say, they received a share of those miraculous gifts which attended the introduction of the gospel of Christ. It has therefore been supposed that certain superior persons should visit the churches, and lay their hands upon people. So they should, if they have the power to bestow such a gift as Peter and John gave; but to lay empty hands on the heads of men and women is a vain ceremony. When the apostles laid their hands on these converts in Samaria, they received the Holy Spirit.

18-26. *And when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money, saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Spirit. But Peter said unto him, Your money perish with you, because you have thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. You have neither part nor lot in this matter: for your heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you. For I perceive that you are in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity. Then answered Simon, and said, Pray you to the Lord for me, that none of these things which you have spoken come upon me. 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 spoke unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goes down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert.*

Philip, who had been so useful to the multitude, must now be of service to a solitary individual. My dear brethren, if you can gather a crowd of people together, preach the gospel to them; but if you cannot do that, preach the gospel to one person, if you can only reach one. It was a desert, but the angel of the Lord bade Philip go there.

27. *And he arose and went:*

Not hesitating, but at once obeying. If the Lord should send you to the wilderness, depend upon it that He will send somebody else there for you to bless; go, therefore, without fear.

27, 28. *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 to worship, was returning, and sitting in his chariot read Isaiah the prophet.*

He was a devout man, a studious man, a Bible-reading man. We do not often find such persons in great authority under queens; but here was one.

29-31. *Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join yourself to this chariot. And Philip ran there to him, and heard him read the Prophet Isaiah, and said, Do you understand what you read? And he said, How can I, unless someone should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him.*

See how God honors the Christian ministry by making even His Word to be in some respects insufficient for some men; at any rate, they need that some living voice should come and guide them into the meaning of it. Oh, that He would bless our voice tonight that some who have gathered with us in this Tabernacle might be brought to understand the Scriptures through our guidance!

32-35. *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 you, of whom speaks 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.*

It seems that, wherever Philip went, he had but one subject. When he went down to the city of Samaria, he preached Christ to them; and now that he talks to this Ethiopian eunuch, he preaches unto him Jesus.

36, 37. *And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what does hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If you believe with all your heart, you may. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.*

That is the great confession of faith that is to be made by all who have believed in Jesus.

38, 39. *And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. 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: and he went on his way rejoicing.*

The Holy Spirit will not permit us to depend too much upon men as our teachers. The Spirit of the Lord did not take away the Bible: that was left for the eunuch. He only caught away Philip after the evangelist had furnished the inquirer with the key with which he could open the Scriptures, then he could unlock the Word himself. That he did so, if history is to be believed, is very clear. He went home to Ethiopia, perhaps to Abyssinia, and the people there heard the gospel from him, and to this day there are some traces of our holy faith in that land.

40. *But Philip was found at Azotes: and passing through he preached in all the cities, till he came to Caesarea.*

We know quite well what “he preached in all the cities, till he came to Caesarea,” although it is not mentioned here. Wherever he went, he had but one theme: “the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ.” So may it be with us wherever we go.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—956, 531, 465, 538.

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“Then they that feared the Lord spoke often one to another.”
(Malachi 3:16)

“Exhort one another daily.”
(Hebrews 3:13)

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Members forming the Union agree to commit to memory a passage of Scripture, daily; and whenever they meet friends, or fellow members, to greet them by repeating the daily portion, or by asking for the “Text for today, please.”

Thus, the golden links of memory will bind the Bible to the heart, and the Word of God will be a bond of friendship to all who join the Union.

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