

ONE TO ONE BIBLE STUDY ON A CHARIOT

Acts 8:26-40

Key Verses: 8:34-35

The eunuch asked Philip, "Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?" Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.

In today's passage, God sends an evangelist to a governmental official who was riding on his chariot. They had one-to-one Bible study on the chariot. Their small Bible study changed the official's life forever on that day. Not only that, their Bible study might have changed the course of history for a nation in Africa. Let us think about why we should regard our small Bible studies seriously.

I. GO TO THE DESERT ROAD (26-31)

Look at verse 26. *Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza."* The Lord told Philip to go to the desert road. At that time, Philip was in the midst of a prosperous ministry in a Samaritan city. Many people opened their hearts when he preached the gospel of Jesus Christ and performed many signs. Impure spirits came out of people, and many paralyzed or lame people were healed. There was great joy in that city (8). But the Lord told him to go south to the desert road. Humanly speaking, it did not make sense to abandon a successful ministry to go to a desert area. It made much more sense to continue his ministry in the city where many people needed to hear the gospel of salvation. Why go to the desert where there were no people around?

But Philip did not argue with the Lord. He did not question the Lord. He did not protest. He did not complain. He obeyed the Lord. Then what happened? Look at verses 27-28. *So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of the Kandake (which means "queen of the Ethiopians"). This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the Book of Isaiah the prophet.* On the way Philip met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of Kandake, queen of the Ethiopians. In today's terms, he was the finance minister or treasury secretary of the African nation. We don't know how, but this high-ranking official had heard about the God of the Hebrews. He came all the way to Jerusalem to worship God, making a long, expensive journey to Jerusalem. There he obtained a copy of the Bible. Now he was returning to his home country. And in his chariot he was reading the Bible. He was a good Bible student. He could have enjoyed the scenery of Israel, as a tourist would do. But his mind was on the Scripture. He was eager to learn from the word of God. He was hungry for spiritual truth. The problem was that he did not understand what he was reading. There was no one to help him in the desert. God did not ignore this truth-seeker.

Look at verses 29-31. *The Spirit told Philip, "Go to that chariot and stay near it." Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. "Do you understand what you are reading?" Philip asked. "How can I," he said, "unless someone explains it to me?" So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.* A historic one-to-one Bible study between Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch took place on a chariot! When Philip approached the chariot, he heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. He was reading the scripture aloud. He probably read the same verses several times, trying to figure out what the scripture meant. But only the echoes came back. He needed a Bible teacher to explain it to him. That's why God sent Philip to him.

One-to-one Bible study and discipleship are the backbone of our ministry. From a business standpoint, one-to-one ministry is a very inefficient way of evangelism. In our campus alone, there are thousands of young people we need to reach. Mass evangelism makes much more sense. But we learn that God cares about one person. Our God is a personal God. Jesus told us this parable in Matthew 18: "What do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off? And if he finds it, truly I tell you, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off. In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should perish" (Mt 18:12-14). To a businessman, keeping 99 percent is not bad at all. Why waste your time and energy to go after one percent if you have the 99 percent? But our God is not like a businessman. Our Lord Jesus is the Good Shepherd. He cares about one person.

We find that one-to-one Bible study is God's way of helping a person. God spent 25 years to take care of one person, Abraham. After embarking on a new journey of faith, Abraham's faith stumbled many times. But God did not give up on him. He patiently led Abraham until his faith grew to the point that he was willing to obey God's command to sacrifice his son Isaac as a burnt offering. Jesus had a one-to-one Bible study with Nicodemus. He also had a patient one-to-one Bible study with a Samaritan woman at Jacob's well. One-to-one Bible seems so small and insignificant. But let us not take it lightly. It is an opportunity for us to help a young person to commit his or her life to Jesus and grow to be his disciple.

The Holy Spirit led Philip the evangelist to the desert road in search of one man who was thirsty for the truth of God. When Philip obeyed the leading of the Holy Spirit, he learned the heart of God who cares about one person. I think Philip learned a valuable lesson from this for his future ministry, that is, one person is very important in God's eyes. The late Billy Graham was a great evangelist. Large stadiums were filled when he held his crusades. Millions of people watched him on TV. His simple preaching of Jesus Christ touched many people's hearts. But he said that, if he had another chance to start a ministry, he would focus on personal evangelism.

II. THE GOOD NEWS ABOUT JESUS (32-40)

Let us go back to the story of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch. Look at verses 32-33. *The eunuch was reading this passage of Scripture: "He was led like a sheep to the*

slaughter, and as a lamb before the shearer is silent, so he did not open his mouth. In his humiliation he was deprived of justice. Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth.” The eunuch was reading a passage from Isaiah 53 where the prophet prophesied about the upcoming suffering and death of our Lord Jesus Christ. We know this through our Bible study. But the eunuch did not know, because there was no mention of Jesus’ name in the passage. The prophet Isaiah said that God laid our iniquity on him. He was pierced for our transgressions. To bring about our healing, he was wounded. He was punished for our sins. The eunuch was puzzled. Who was led like a sheep to the slaughter? Who did not open his mouth? Who was humiliated? Why was his life taken from the earth?

Let us read verses 34-35 together. *The eunuch asked Philip, “Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?” Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.* Philip was a patient Bible teacher. Starting from that very passage in Isaiah 53, he told the eunuch the good news about Jesus Christ. Philip told him how Jesus suffered and died on the cross as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (Jn 1:29). He told him how Jesus remained silent before the Jewish leaders and the Roman governor, even though he had plenty to say to defend himself against their false charges. He told him how Jesus was beaten, spit on, and humiliated before his mother and his followers. He told him how Jesus prayed on the cross, “Father, forgiven them for they do not know what they are doing” (Lk 23:34). “In conclusion,” Philip probably told him, “Jesus suffered and died for our sins, my sins and your sins, to give us eternal life in the kingdom of God.” We can imagine how happy the eunuch was to accept this Jesus as his personal Savior and Lord.

The question the eunuch asked Philip is very meaningful—“Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about?” Tell me, who is he? This is the most important question one must ask. Have you asked this question yourself? That is, who is he? Who is Jesus?

We learned earlier that a young rabbi named Saul was in charge of killing Stephen, the first martyr of the church in Jerusalem. On that day, a great persecution broke out against the church. And Saul was at the center of the persecution. He went from house to house to drag off all believers to put them in prison. In Acts 9, we will learn about his dramatic conversion. He obtained a letter from the Jewish authorities to go to Syria to put down the Christian movement there. But on his way to Damascus, a bright light flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” This was when Saul asked the question: “Who are you, Lord?” (Ac 9:5) This was the most important question for the young Jewish scholar to ask the Lord. It was the moment when a man named Saul was changed into St. Paul. He met Jesus Christ personally on that fateful day on the road to Damascus. The encounter changed his life forever.

Who are you, Lord? This is such an important question that Jesus asked his disciples the same question. After discipling the 12 men for three years, Jesus took them to Caesarea Philippi, a city about 25 miles north of the Sea of Galilee. There he asked them two questions. The first question was “Who do people say I am?” It was about public opinion of Jesus. They told him that people had diverse views of him. They

generally respected him as a man of God, but most of them did not really know Jesus personally. Then Jesus asked the second question, “But what about you? Who do you say I am?” (Mk 8:29) This question was personal. One had to know him personally to answer the question. Several disciples raised their hands, but Peter answered, “You are the Christ.” It was his personal confession of faith. Jesus was happy to hear the confession and began to tell them about his upcoming suffering, death and resurrection. “Christ” in Greek (Χριστός) (or “Messiah” in Hebrew) means “the Anointed One.” Jesus was anointed by God to be our Lord and Savior to save us from our sins and to give us eternal life in the kingdom of God. Peter had followed Jesus as his disciple for three years. He studied the word of God with Jesus. He witnessed many miracles of Jesus. He saw how Jesus helped a young rabbi named Nicodemus to see the spiritual world. He saw how Jesus gave a spring of water welling up to eternal life to a thirty Samaritan woman through their one to one Bible study. After experiencing Jesus personally, Peter’s conclusion was that he is the Christ. It was a moment when the fisherman from Galilee received the grace of salvation.

According to a recent survey of 20,000 people, 46% of Americans feel lonely sometimes or always. The most surprising result of the survey was that the feeling of loneliness was most prevalent among young people (18-22 years old). How can this be? They have hundreds of friends on Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat. They can reach out to friends as fast as their thumbs can type. Clearly, they don’t feel that all these people are their friends. I cannot blame them. They feel lonely because these “friends” on social media do not understand what they are going through in life. They need someone who really understands them and can help them. In other words, they need Jesus. They need a Savior. They need a true friend in Jesus. They need to study the Bible, asking the question, “Who is Jesus?”

So what did the Ethiopian eunuch decide to do after he found out who Jesus is? Look at verse 36-38. *As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, “Look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptized?”* [Some manuscripts include verse 37: *Philip said, “If you believe with all your heart, you may.” The eunuch answered, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.”*] *And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him.* When he heard the good news about Jesus from Philip, heavenly sunlight came upon his soul. He realized that God loved him so much that he sent his one and only Son Jesus to die for his sin. God loved him so much that he sent Philip to have a one-to-one Bible study with him. He wanted to declare to the world that he accepted Jesus as his personal Savior. As soon as they came to some water beside the road, he wanted to be baptized. The chariot was stopped. The two of them went down to the water and Philip baptized him.

Look at verse 39. *When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing.* After baptizing him, Philip disappeared, because the Holy Spirit took him away. The eunuch did not see him again. But it was not necessary. He had the gospel in his heart and returned to Ethiopia rejoicing. Tradition says that the eunuch carried the gospel back home to Ethiopia and founded the church there. Because of Philip’s

obedience and one official's conversion, the gospel spread to a nation in Africa. God was fulfilling Acts 1:8. We know that among African countries, Ethiopia has had a strong Christian foundation dating back many centuries. M. Victor tells us that it is the only nation in Africa that was never colonized. Philip had only one Bible study with the eunuch. This small act of obedience had a big impact on God's redemptive history.

A missionary in Urfa, Mesopotamia, worked hard for 13 years with no visible fruit. He had baptized only one convert. Humanly, he felt discouraged, even hopeless. Then an epidemic of cholera hit the region. People fled in panic, deserting the sick and the dying. But the missionary took care of the sick. People were thankful and blessed his name. Finally, the missionary fell a victim to the disease. In sorrow, people carried his body to a little grove outside the city. It seemed that the work of the missionary was finished without fruit. But that was not the case. He was a kernel of wheat that fell to the ground to produce many fruits. When a new missionary came to the region, a large number of people turned to Christ. We should not despair when we see no immediate fruit for our labor of love. As long as we share the gospel of Jesus Christ in obedience to his command, God will bless us to be a source of blessing to many people.

So what happened to Philip? Look at verse 40. *Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and traveled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea.* Philip continued to obey the Spirit of the Lord. He continued to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. Azotus (or Ashdod (1Sa 5:1)) was one of the ancient Philistine capitals. It was about 19 miles from Gaza and 60 miles from Caesarea. Philip probably lived in Caesarea for the next 20 years preaching the gospel there. He had four daughters who prophesied. On his return trip from the third missionary journey, St. Paul stayed at Philip's house in Caesarea (Ac 21:8-9).

We learned today that God cares about one person. He sent Philip who was in the midst of a successful ministry to one man so that they could have one-to-one Bible study on a desert road. His Bible student asked an important question—"Who is the prophet talking about?" On that day, on his chariot, this man met the Lord Jesus Christ. His life was changed. Perhaps the course of his country's history was also changed, because he accepted Jesus as his personal Savior. May God help us to remember this when we study with one student at a time!