

## Acts 8:26-40

### Desert Ministry

Good morning, it is wonderful to be here with you today.

We welcome those of you watching online as well, I am happy you could find us this morning.

This morning we are going to continue our verse-by-verse study of the Book of Acts, we will be in Acts Chapter 8 verses 26-40, with a message entitled “Desert Ministry.”

**Let's pray before we get into our study...**

Rome, during the 5<sup>th</sup> Century, had garnered the name the Eternal City, not only was it the center of the known world at that time, but also, the Christian Church, and its leadership was centered in Rome.

It had garnered that name, the Eternal City, because for 620 years it had seen no foreign enemy invade its walls.

But it was in 410 AD that the Visigoth leader Alaric, with his Arian hordes besieged the city, and eventually the Great City fell, in a tragic and barbaric way.

Refugees from Rome began to spread all over the world, as many wondered if this all meant the end of the Christian Church.

It was during this Great Calamity and upheaval that God raised up an unlikely leader to answer some of the

most difficult questions of the time, and still to this day we feel the impact that the Bishop of Hippo, St. Augustine had upon the church during this turbulent time in history.

Hippo, a seaport in Northern Africa, in Algeria became famous all the sudden by this man Augustine.

Now, interestingly enough, this man, who would be used to change church history, and to bring more clarity to the sin problem in man, and the power of God's Grace, he was not trained up in the church, he did not have an ecclesiastical background whatsoever.

In fact, he was a staunch sinner, and had an incredible defiling passion led by sexual temptation.

He described his master passion as a whirl of vicious love making, and confessed that "there is nothing so powerful in drawing the spirit of man downward as the caress of a woman."

Even with his fallen nature ruling over him, he knew that he needed to get control of his passions.

He tried Manicheanism, which depicted a fundamental belief that there is a universal war between good and evil, and man within is a product of both sides and is continually at war within, the belief was very similar to Gnosticism, even teaching that Jesus had no material body and His main purpose was to teach about this eternal war.

But this twisted view of truth could not keep Augustine disciplined enough to master his passions, and then one day, he heard the preaching of Bishop Ambrose in Milan, and it was there that he was introduced to the real Jesus.

He marveled as he looked at the church of Jesus Christ that how even unlearned men could win such spiritual victories over sin, when he, who at this time had garnered such phenomenal worldly success and was powerless to his passions.

He was baptized, and it was there that he confessed, "The unrest of our past receded from us."

Having lost his dear mother, and his son shortly thereafter, and dealing with his grief, Augustine in his grief began to long for eternity, in his sadness and depression, he longed for heaven.

But God had huge plans for this man.

His insight and unorthodox view of Christianity began to gain popularity, it resonated well with the tone of the church during these years of uncertainty and soon, and against his own wishes the church ordained him, and eventually at the death of Valerius, Augustine of Hippo succeeded the leadership of the world-wide church.

An unlikely man, but God's man, his only achievement within the church, was that he was man who had experienced the power of God's Grace, he was once a

notorious sinner, yet God called him from an obscure seaport to change the course of Church History.

God lifted him up to face the perils of his day, and to bring clarity to the reality that Rome was not the true Eternal City, but we are hoping for a Heavenly City untainted by this world's corruption.

You know for some, they attain prominence with great ambition, for some they are intoxicated with this idea of being seen and known and in the front.

In the church, this lust for power within mankind has brought dark times about throughout history, and today there is nothing more destructive than those who have this unhealthy ambition to be Great and Seen within the church.

For some they manipulate, they scheme and fight their way to prominence.

Now for others Leadership comes to them, they are not looking for it, they are not trying to attain it, they are not hungry for it, and I see it is in those that God tends to do the Greatest Works through.

Augustine wanted nothing to do with leadership, yet it came to him, and God used him profoundly.

And this morning as we continue our Study of Acts, here in Chapter 8, we are following now another man, Philip, who too was risen up to a place of prominence, during a time of crisis and uncertainty in the world,

and he too will not rise through any ambition of his own.

Last week, we looked at simony, and those who will not do anything for the Lord without recognition or announcement, in order to build their own reputation.

Simony exists in those who like the Sorcerer Simon just need attention and the accolades of man.

This is most of our culture today, their lives are advertised, and they are wrapped up in what others think of them.

Philip as we will see is the opposite of this simony, he cares nothing about getting attention for himself, he just wants to live an obedient life to all that God asks of him.

You will not find any satisfaction in living your life to please man, but you will find lasting contentment in seeking to please your God.

Philip had found his way into Samaria not because he saw opportunity for himself to rise to prominence, he was there as a Refugee, running from those who were trying to kill him.

His own story started back in Chapter 6, where he was chosen to be a table server, and a food distributor to the Greek-Speaking Jewish widows.

He was a lay-deacon doling out portions to those in need.

A faithful worker, yet as we saw last time, chased to Samaria, he remained faithful.

Not like so many today, who grow weary with God through the trials... what stands out in this man Philip, is he was never concerned about Philip, he did not serve God for what he could get out of it.

In fact, we never see him concerned about his own name or reputation, even as he defeated a mighty sorcerer in Samaria, as many were being saved and baptized through his ministry, he did not find it offensive to step out of the way when the Apostles came to town.

Because it was never about him, it was about Jesus' fame.

He was not looking for position, and because of his humble heart and readiness to serve God wherever and whenever, God will be able to continue to use him to revolutionize the Church's reach.

This humble man was used to open up the door to Samaria a racially separated group from the Jews, and now he will be used to reach a Gentile Nation.

Now that seems like an exciting task, he even has angel give him his next directions, but when we see the instructions, many of us perhaps would have never gone if it had been us his situation.

Look here at Acts 8 verse 26...

## Christ Is Preached to an Ethiopian

(cf. Isa 53:7,8)

8:26 Now an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, saying, "Arise and go toward the south along the road which goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." This is desert.

Now please understand the full picture here and put yourself in Philip's shoes.

The Big Names in the Church have taken notice to the incredible ministry being accomplished through Philip in Samara.

He is known, now think of this, imagine you are part of an incredible and historic revival there in Samaria, things are happening, you are being used powerfully, many are coming to the Lord, you have the power to heal, demons are fleeing their hosts.

You were once a table server, now you are respected and honored as a leader, people are being drawn to your messages, and known Pastors are talking about your ministry, and even coming to visit to see for themselves.

This is what we call a successful ministry here in America, numbers, being an influencer, this is the pinnacle of our version of success.

Right, we believe we have to advertise our spirituality to inspire others, the more people we reach with our wonderful advertisements of self, we feel satisfaction.

When people like or comment on the picture of you doing your spiritual deed, you feel as though you have accomplished some spiritual feat.

When we lose a couple followers, our self-esteem is shattered, because ministry today has become about us, and look at me.

Not for Philip, it is not about him at all, remember when he was installed as a deacon he was a man full of the Spirit, which means he exhibited the fruits of the Spirit, love, joy, peace, kindness, goodness, faithfulness and self-control.

Being so in touch with the Holy Spirit, his life was guided by the Spirit.

He did not make his life decisions based upon how Philip's circumstances would be better, or how Philip would become more known to others, but he was a man yielded to the Spirit's direction, apart from his own agenda.

It is rare that people will look today to attend a church to use their gifts that God has given them in the work as a blessing to others, today people seek out how a church can better fulfill them.

But understand, each of you will only find true fulfillment when you are busy about God's Plan for your life.

Philip is told to leave his thriving ministry to go south to the Gazan desert.

I cannot say I would be too thrilled about that, I would have questioned God, “surely you are making a mistake, these people here need me, they are new to the faith, they have an ear for my style of preaching, there is so much fruit God, a desert mission, send someone else who is not so needed here as I am.”

People sometimes dupe themselves into thinking that God’s Work can only continue if they are a part of it.

Sometimes people threaten to leave the church when they are not getting enough attention, and they are self-deceived to think that they are the only ones that God can use in that ministry.

Please remember God does not need any of us, He can use a donkey to do His work, and He has, as He did with Balaam in the Book of Numbers.

It is nothing for Him to remove me, and to put another talking donkey up here each week.

I was telling another young pastor this yesterday, that we do not preach for people to like us, we do not preach to be popular, we preach to please our God.

We see pastors today trying to be cool, they dress to impress.

Personally, I think I would laugh at myself if I came up here next week in skinny jeans, and a man bun, just because that was the fad, and I was trying to impress you.

I would hope you all would see through that charade. There can be no other goal but to please God, because He does not need us, we cannot live to please man, to appeal to man's flavors, that paradigm is always changing.

You know, He is not looking at numbers or the size of our ministry, He is looking for faithfulness, that is success in His Book, are we faithful with what He has entrusted to us.

I have never understood ambition in the church, this lust for more, this hunger to be liked and popular, maybe it is because I grew up a PK, pastor's kid, I saw the ugly side of ministry.

Every time I hear someone say, I want to be a pastor, or I know I am supposed to be the Senior Pastor, I cringe, they have no idea what they are asking for, and many times that comment is from a place of ego, and desiring to be the man.

You understand, we have a family that comes here each week, a husband, a wife, and their son, and they quietly clean the church each week, twice a week, never seen by man, and they serve unto the Lord, they are faithful to come to clean this place so we can worship distraction free.

Do you understand that a Pastor, who is in the front, who is preaching each week, will not receive a greater

reward then our faithful unseen family that comes here each week to clean.

The reward comes by faithfulness, not by position or popularity.

None of us are anybody, but God sure loves to use nobodies for His purposes.

You see the trouble comes when you think that you are somebody, and something is owed to you.

Philip, had he had ego, would have stayed and become the Pope of the Samaritans, or Bishop of Samaria, but it was never about that for him.

He was content in being a table server, and that is how his title will remain, but God is not a respecter of titles, and He uses any willing vessel for His work.

Notice the angel does not tell him even why he is leaving the revival to go to the desert, Philip does not ask, he knows that the Spirit leads usually step by step, and that is important to keep in mind.

Notice last time, he was led to Samaria not by revelation or by an angel, it was through circumstance, in fact, it was a perilous trial that brought him to Samaria.

And sometimes God leads through trial, maybe you found our church after this Great Trial of the Coronavirus changing our lives dramatically.

God uses circumstances to move people around, this is how Philip was brought to Samaria originally.

But this time, here in our text, God used a heavenly messenger, which is pretty neat, I have personally never had an angel speak to me, from their description in the Bible, I imagine that is a pretty intimidating thing.

But God seemingly uses different ways and changes methods, and this is for our protection, so we do not set up religious institutions on how God speaks.

Because God directed a certain way one time, does not mean He will always do it that way.

**“We must never confine the Spirit’s guidance to the box of past experience.” Hughes p.118**

Philip was first led by difficulties and now he is directed by an angel.

Starting in verse 27 now...

27 So he arose and went. And behold, a man of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under Candace the queen of the Ethiopians, who had charge of all her treasury, and had come to Jerusalem to worship, 28 was returning. And sitting in his chariot, he was reading Isaiah the prophet. 29 Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go near and overtake this chariot."

Philip here is now open to another method of the Spirit’s guidance.

This *subjective inner voice of the Holy Spirit*. Hughes Philip was so close to the Spirit, so sensitive to His guiding that He was now led to the exact spot the Spirit would use him.

And Philip was obedient, ready to serve anywhere at any time.

Even if it meant going from serving in an exciting city and a growing congregation to now serving in a lonely desert to a congregation of one person.

This was not beneath him, some might think he was moving backwards in the ministry... Philip could have said, "I have already served tables Lord, I have waited on widows, and now the Desert, are You sure Lord, I should be ordained by now."

But he goes...

And Luke the writer of Acts, reveals in great detail to just whom Philip went.

A man from Ethiopia, this was a very important man, he was the Queen's secretary of the treasury.

The Queen's title in Ethiopia was Candace, and this was probably not her name.

Ethiopia was a bigger kingdom at that time compared to today, encompassing today's Sudan and parts of Egypt.

This eunuch was a black man and obviously a Gentile or non-Jew.

In the East, eunuchs often attained positions of great power and trust.

He has seemingly completed a thousand mile pilgrimage to Jerusalem, and many believe that he was proselyte to Judaism and had gone to Jerusalem to learn more of this Jewish God.

He was on a noble quest, a search for Truth, and seemingly disappointed, and perhaps let down at the emptiness of his chosen faith.

Seeing the grand Temple, and the marketplace within, the pompous and phony religious leaders, perhaps it was all just a great disappointment.

Because he was a man of great importance, he was either wealthy enough to buy the scroll of Isaiah, or maybe he was gifted it as a way to impress his highness.

Whatever the reason, the scriptures would be the means to his encounter with the True and Living God.

The Spirit said to Philip, “go near and overtake the chariot.”

And Philip’s legacy is really laid out for us in two verses, verse 27 says, “He arose and went.” And here again at the leading of the Spirit, when Philip was told to go to the Ethiopian eunuch, we see next in verse 30...

30 So Philip ran to him, and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, "Do you understand what you are reading?"

31 And he said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he asked Philip to come up and sit with him.

32 The place in the Scripture which he read was this:

"He was led as a sheep to the slaughter;

And as a lamb before its shearer is silent,

So He opened not His mouth.

33 In His humiliation His justice was taken away,

And who will declare His generation?

For His life is taken from the earth."

34 So the eunuch answered Philip and said, "I ask you, of whom does the prophet say this, of himself or of some other man?"

35 Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him.

36 Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, "See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?"

37 Then 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."

38 So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him.

Understand, as we can learn here, Divine Appointments await us if we are simply obedient to God's leading.

Philip may have had that inner argument with God, about how this man was a man of prominence, perhaps protected by a great retinue.

Philip really had no idea the man was reading God's Word there in his chariot.

But we see something very important about God's Work here on earth, God has chosen to use mankind as His means to reach their fellow man.

It is God's Sovereign Work coupled with man's willful obedience.

We see this clearly in God's Word, there is much debate about the Sovereignty of God and man's choice today within the church, but we see both ideas clearly in the scripture and they go hand in hand.

There is opportunity all around us to join God in His Work, we must choose to join Him.

Pay attention to that inner leading of the Holy Spirit.

It is important to follow His Leading.

In my young zeal for the Lord, I started a street witnessing group, and I would annoyingly go into this

park every week, and just start blasting everyone that I passed with Hell Fire and Brimstone.

As you can imagine that technique did not work at all. And over time, out of frustration, I began to seek God for a better method of reaching people.

And one night I was out with another ambitious brother, who was anxious to show me his ability to evangelize.

And I let him lead, and I watched him go up to people and just start preaching down their throats.

And as I watched, I would see the anger or confusion in the people that were on the receiving end.

And I don't know about you, but when I see myself through other people, I am so embarrassed and ashamed.

That man was me, and the Lord opened my eyes to how foolish my approach was.

I learned that there is an aspect of God's Sovereignty that I was not including in my approach.

I was not seeking out prayerfully those whose hearts were being tethered on by God's Spirit.

You see there are some that God has just ripened to hear the Gospel, and those are the ones that need to be encountered.

And over time, I learned to prayerfully approach people to wait for an open door from the Lord.

It was usually through a simple conversation, noticing a sad countenance and asking if that person was okay.

Seeing someone sitting alone, contemplating things.

This new less ambitious approach meant that I did not have a great number of interactions on any given night, it may just be one or two whose hearts were open and searching.

Those lessons have never left Jess and I, even today when we are in the parks the stores, anywhere in public, when someone starts up a conversation with us, we kind of make eye contact, as we wait for the que to see if this is by God's leading that we are in a conversation with this person.

We do not need to go full throttle on people, be prayerful in your approach, and continually be looking for that open door, they usually come very naturally, it is not some supernatural event, and sometimes all it takes is a truly caring "Hello, how are you?"

Philip here gets an incredible clue that this is the man that he came to see, as he hears him reading out loud the scroll of Isaiah.

He asks a wonderfully simple question, "Do you understand what you are reading."

He does not go plowing into the eunuch with “Repent, you sinner, hell’s flames are hot.”

No, he simply enters into the man’s world with a harmless question.

And instantly he sees this is a man whose heart is being worked over by the Holy Spirit.

Now there are not many Old Testament passages that would have been easier for Philip to preach Christ from than the one that this eunuch was stuck on.

We see in verse 35 that Philip open his mouth, sometimes that is the hardest step of faith when we are sharing our faith.

But don’t we usually find out, that after we open it, God fills our words with His wisdom, love and Grace?

The Eunuch here was reading out of Isaiah 53, and he was stuck in verses 7 and 8.

Here Philip could have shared the doctrine of the suffering Messiah, and perhaps Philip shared other prophetic scriptures of all that Jesus fulfilled.

But the main thrust was from this text there in Isaiah 53, **John Philips opens up this passage in Isaiah wonderfully, as he connects it to Jesus...**

**“The text tells of the Messiah silent before His shearers. We see Jesus abused by the Sanhedrin, ridiculed by Herod, scourged by Pilate, scoffed at by the soldiers. We see Him stripped, seemingly as**

helpless in their hands as a sheep in the hands of a shearer. All the dignity that comes from dress was stripped away. But silence clothed Him with dignity no insult or injury of man could ever take away.

How Philip must have seized upon the silence of Jesus! Yonder in glory were twelve legions of angels, straining over the battlements of heaven with drawn swords, waiting for a word. One word, and they would have flashed down the skyways of the stars, burst upon our planet, stamped flat the high hills of Judea, turned to blood the waters of the seven seas, and ushered in Armageddon then and there. But that word never came, He was silent before His shearers.”

What a powerful text for Philip to expound upon, and from the scriptures this Ethiopian was won to Christ.

All of us should be able to preach Christ from the scriptures, there is no more effective witnessing tool than God’s Word, and bringing people to the Truth’s within it.

And this Ethiopian’s heart exploded with joy, as his lifelong search for Truth was finally satisfied, and he was marvelously converted.

As a Jewish proselyte he knew water baptism was a symbol of leaving his former life and committing fully to his new faith.

It was a symbol of a Gentile’s repentance and conversion.

He is the one who asks Philip if he could be baptized. Imagine such a man of great authority asking permission here from a lowly table server to be Baptized, he could have demanded it, but he asks for permission.

And Philip obliged after he gets this man to confess his new faith as we are told in **Rom. 10:8-10** But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith which we preach): 9 that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

The Baptism took place in that ancient desert, and a life was changed, and soon an African Kingdom would be changed as the door to the Gentiles had been opened by this table server.

Let's finish up the chapter now... starting in verse 39...

39 Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing. 40 But Philip was found at Azotus. And passing through, he preached in all the cities till he came to Caesarea.

Still soaking wet, the eunuch looked for his teacher, and he was gone, vanished.

The explanation here, is that the Spirit of God caught Philip away, or snatched him away.

The eunuch must have been further convinced and stunned at all of this.

What a story he would have to tell upon his return.

The early church father Irenaeus claimed that this man became the first missionary to the Ethiopians.

Notice at the end of verse 39, the eunuch went away rejoicing, the fruit of Philip's ministry in Samaria was great joy, and again the joy of the Lord was at work in this new convert to Christianity.

Wherever the Spirit rules, joy rests in the hearts of His people.

The Ethiopian went singing all the way home.

And Philip was found 20 miles north of Gaza in Azotus, and he preached up the coast until he arrived in to Caesarea.

A city full of Gentiles, as it was the capital for all the Roman administration in the Region.

Soon the Holy Spirit would lead Peter to minister to a Roman Centurion, in whose home the Gentile Church would be born officially here in Caesarea.

Philip was not chosen for that task, but he could have been there when the work took place, maybe a seed planter or even preparing the ground for the great work that Peter will do there.

This seems to be the place Philip finally sets his roots down, we will still see him here 20 years later when Paul comes through.

Philip is a testimony to the fact that our God loves using the most unlikely person in the most unlikely place, because it brings Him all the Glory.

Whether it be Augustine in Hippo, or Philip in the desert, God tends to do Great Works with the most unlikely people in the most unlikely places.

Personally I think that this speaks profoundly to this little church in the smack dab middle of Old Town Victorville.

Perhaps the Lord has brought you here from a thriving and exciting ministry, He led you here from your own Samaritan Revival, and you are wondering what gives.

Why this little obscure church.

Firstly, I understand your concern...

When God called Jess and I here, we were involved in a very exciting ministry, we had a large group of these young adults meeting each week, as went verse by verse through God's Word with them.

We had exciting plans for the future of the ministry, we thought that is where we would be for years, and we had deep relationships built, lifelong relationships.

I will never forget the fear that came over me, when my pastor who is my father as well, called me into the

office, and asked if I was interested in guest speaking at Calvary Chapel Victorville, because the pastor here was looking to retire.

In fact, I told him “No” immediately, because I was not interested in leaving the ministry that I was a part of, and I went back into my office and went back to work.

I have never wanted to be a Senior Pastor, God knew that.

I had stability for my growing family there at my former church, the elders in that ministry took great care of us, I did not want to leave to go to somewhere I did not know if that stability would be found.

Then as I thought about these things, and realized the selfishness of my thoughts, I had a warm conviction come over my body, I knew then, that God might be tugging me out of my comfort zone.

I came back immediately into his office, and said, I will pray about it.

And as I did, God reminded me how He had always placed this part of town on my heart, and how I would even come over here, not even knowing the pastor that was here, and Jess and I would pray for him in the parking lot, and in the park next door.

I knew, that all of this could not be coincidence, so I agreed to do the guest speaking, it was a Sunday morning, and I came through those doors, I was the first one here with my wife and babies, besides your

faithful usher Randy, who stopped me at the door and said, “Can I help you?”

I replied, “I am the guest pastor that is going to speak today.”

He replied quite honestly, and said, “You don’t look like a pastor.”

I thanked him for the compliment.

But Jess and I that day fell in love with the people, God really confirmed that day that we were supposed to come.

Now, although there was an attachment here, and a confirmation that we were supposed to come, that did not take away the fear and doubt.

In fact, the first day in the office, I sat in the parking lot and quit to God.

But He helped me find strength to move forward.

And that first step of faith was the greatest step I have ever made in my entire life.

If you would have told me that day that we would be where we are here now 4 and half years later, I would have laughed at you.

We have seen God do some spectacular things here in this part of town.

And maybe you just cannot wrap your head quite around the fact that God has called you here, you have

left a flourishing ministry, and here you are, and like Philip you are in a desert.

Please consider Philip's obedience, it was never about him, and always about Jesus, he obeyed even when it did not make sense.

He went from his revival to the desert for one man, and he was used to pass on that revival to go with that man to Ethiopia.

Ethiopia Historically has always had a great Christian presence.

I wonder why God called you here to this ministry, I imagine there is a great purpose for you, you have done the hard part, and you have taken the first step of faith; now be patient until God reveals the next step of obedience that you are to take.

It is not about you, it is about His Ministry in you, and Him working through you.

If your name is known or not known, that does not matter.

In fact, after this event, Philip falls out of the narrative, he successfully obeyed God and the mission that was put before him, if Philip said "no," God would have raised up another.

But Philip obeyed, and we see him only one more time in Acts as I mentioned, when Paul comes to town, and we see his ministry continued decades after this, and

what I like about this man, is his daughters were so dramatically impacted by his ministry, they in turn had their own ministries.

**Acts 21:8-9** On the next day we who were Paul's companions departed and came to Caesarea, and entered the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, and stayed with him. 9 Now this man had four virgin daughters who prophesied.

I hope and pray my own children can be impacted in such a way that they continue on in their own ministries.

But we see here, even after all these years, Philip had no inclination to ambition, here joyfully being hospitable to the man now being used in that prominent place in the Church, the Apostle Paul.

It is not about us, or even our own comforts or own legacy, our lives are meant to bring God Glory, and to make Him known, no matter where we are, in the midst of a thriving and busy ministry, or even in the middle of the desert ministering to one person, or here in Old Town Victorville, live to make Jesus famous.

**Amen?**