

Philip And The Eunuch

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Acts 8:26-40 NIV

Did any of you have trouble with Christmas returns? Did you know the return rules, have the receipt, or become ticked off by a restocking fee? How about online returns and shipping labels? Sometimes you are just better off to keep that ugly tie.

How would you like to have the responsibility of trying to return the Liberty Bell?

The Liberty Bell was made in England and, after being shipped to Philadelphia, this 2000-pound bell cracked. So, they went online and printed a return shipping label...

There are many interesting facts about the Liberty Bell; the online shipping label not being one of them.

Here is the part of the history of the Liberty Bell that I want to use to illustrate value. Did you know that the Liberty Bell had once nearly been bartered away as scrap metal?

In 1828, the city fathers had decided to give the bell to a bell-maker named John Wilbank in exchange for a replacement. Wilbank agreed to knock \$400 off his bill in exchange for the 2000-pound relic. But, when Wilbank went to collect the bell, he decided it wasn't worth the trouble. The city sued him... because th;..

ey really didn't want it either. It's only value to them was the \$400 Wilbank had offered in exchange.

Wilbank didn't believe the bell was worth the trouble of hauling away. The metal was substandard. It was so damaged from structural weakness that it was rung only rarely.

What's the value of the Liberty Bell today? What has made the Liberty Bell so valuable that visitors have to pass through armed guards and metal detectors? It's not because it was made in England or that it cracked and became part of a song about Davey Crocket. The Liberty Bell has value because it had once been rung when the Declaration of Independence was signed. The Liberty Bell has value because of its tie with independence and freedom.

But, there was a time when no one wanted the Liberty Bell. It was cracked and useless and good for nothing.

To me, this part of the Liberty Bell's history sounds like the history of mankind and sin: cracked, useless, good for nothing. Not even worth scrap metal.

But God said that's not true. Mankind has value. He went so far as to show us how valuable we are to Him through His Son. And yet, there are Christians who believe that

they are cracked, useless, and good for nothing, or at least live like they believe it. It's not true, but our enemy, Satan, and his forces, the enemies of freedom in Christ, want us to believe that we are cracked, useless, and good for nothing, even though our creator and savior says otherwise.

Throughout history, there have been people who have become household names. Generation after generation of young and old would say, "If I could be just like...then I could..."

In the New Testament History, we have names like Peter, John, Mary, Phoebe, Priscilla and Aquila; and all the names mentioned in Hebrews 11. And I'm sure that in the last 2000 years there have been church folk that have said, "If I could be just like Peter, or John, or Mary, then I could..."

I know of at least one who said, "If I could be just like Peter and John, then I could pass on the gift of the Spirit." His name was Simon, and he wanted the gift so bad that he offered money to get it.

But, that's not how it works, is it. We know that. I have some news; and then some good news for you.

The news is that the Peter and John that we read about in Acts were not always like

the Peter and John that we read about in Acts. What do you mean, Dave?

I'm glad you asked, because this is where the good news comes in. The good news is that you can be just like Peter, or just like John, or Mary. Because the same way that Peter and John, who were not always like the Peter and John that we read about in Acts, became the Peter and John that we read about in Acts, is available today.

And Philip, the disciple/deacon/evangelist, is going to show us how it is done.

We know from Acts chapter 6, that Philip was a man who was **known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. (Acts 6:3)** This was how he became one of the Seven who were chosen to handle a problem in the Jerusalem Church. This was high qualification for what could be considered a low profile job. These men were to 'wait tables:' to handle the distribution of food to widows.

When the persecution began, Philip left Jerusalem, went to a city in Samaria and began to preach.

After Acts chapter 8, we don't hear anything more about Philip until Acts chapter 21, where we read about his hospitality to Paul and those traveling with him. We also learn a little about Philip's family. **He had four unmarried daughters who prophesied. (Acts 21:9)**

By the time we get to Acts 21, I hope the direct deposit of my retirement will be running smoothly, because I may be fired or worse when I have to open that can of worms.

In Acts chapter 8, there are two new individuals that Luke calls to our attention: Simon, who we are not too impressed with, and an unnamed Ethiopian eunuch.

After Peter and John assist Philip with this new church in this particular Samaritan city, they head back to Jerusalem. On their way, they preached in other Samaritan villages.

Now that this new church had gifts of the Spirit by the laying on of hands by Peter and John, apparently it was time for a new assignment for Philip. In 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." ²⁷ So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian^[d] eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, ²⁸ and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the book of Isaiah the prophet. ²⁹ The Spirit told Philip, "Go to that chariot and stay near it."

³⁰ Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. "Do you understand what you are reading?" Philip asked.

³¹ "How can I," he said, "unless someone explains it to me?" So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. (Acts 8:26-31)

Wow. An angel of the Lord talking to a deacon: that shoots holes in the theory that Philip ran like a coward from the fight in Jerusalem, talked to a few people in the area of Samaria, and accidentally started a church that Peter and John had to visit and straighten out.

Today, if you want to be a preacher, most churches require that you be "ordained". That is, a group of church leaders must vouch for your knowledge of Scripture and your love of Jesus. And that group of church leaders would have laid hands on you, ordaining you to the preaching ministry. And, don't misunderstand what I'm about to say, because ordination is a good thing.

Many churches would require a preacher to have a Bible College education as well, and many even require Seminary training.

But, as far as we know, no mortal man had ordained Philip to become a preacher. He did have hands laid on him by the apostles for the assignment in Acts 6, and we don't have any information what gifts were given by the Holy Spirit to any of those men at that time.

But, he hadn't gone to a Bible College or Seminary that we know of. He hadn't supply preached at church on Sunday morning and he may not even have ever taught a Sunday School class.

If Philip were alive today, and made application for a preaching position in most churches, even though the apostles had laid hands on him, he would still need to be ordained by the local leadership.

So why was Philip preaching? Because, and I want to list this observation right alongside the reasons he was included with the Seven: that he was **known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. (Acts 6:3)**

Along with those qualifications, Philip was preaching because he was open to being used by God. And as a result, this deacon of the church, **this un-ordained preacher, changed**

the lives of hundreds of people. And we are still reading his story 2000 years later.

So, we have Philip, a disciple/deacon/un-ordained preacher, evangelizing what was probably mostly rural pasture land with small villages and a city or two thrown in: nothing like Jerusalem. After all, he wasn't an apostle.

Next assignment Philip; are you ready? The fella I need you to talk to is an important official, and I need you to explain some scripture to him. Well, never mind. Maybe I better get one of the apostles to do it.

It doesn't say that, does it? And Philip doesn't pull a Moses on the angel with a bunch of excuses. Here is one of the rules of discipleship: you are not allowed to try and talk God out of your assignment, no matter how much over your head you think it might be.

Philip was sent to preach to a high official from the court of the queen of Ethiopia.

Why not send one of the important church leaders – the big guns - to preach to this treasurer from Ethiopia? Why send Philip? He's not nearly as important as those other guys.

If the official found out that Philip was a second string player, he might have been offended.

And this is not the only time God does this; sending a seemingly minor player to someone important. For example, we are coming to the conversion of Saul, who becomes Paul, the man who would plant many new churches and who would write

nearly half of our New Testament. Who does God send? A man named Ananias who is mentioned only one time. How important could he possibly be if he is mentioned only one time?

Why would God do it that way? Why would God send in the 2nd string players when converting people of importance?

God did it that way so that we would understand that He doesn't need the big guns; the important Christians to share faith with others. He wants all Christians to share their faith. This extraordinary privilege of talking to other people about Jesus is not just the domain of the ordained; the "super" Christians. Bringing people to Christ is for all believers.

The apostles were not going live on this earth forever. But disciples are still around. It's the disciples; the un-ordained that has kept the church going.

Back to the story:

So Philip is in the chariot with the official. Verse 32:

³² 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.

³³ In his humiliation he was deprived of justice. Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth."

³⁴ The eunuch asked Philip, "Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?" ³⁵ Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.

³⁶ As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptized?"^[1] ³⁸ And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. 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. ⁴⁰ Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and traveled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea. (Acts 8:32-40)

There are at least two sermons that I would like to hear. The first is when Jesus explained prophecy concerning Himself to the two disciples while walking with them to Emmaus. The second is this one: how a disciple explained the life, death, and resurrection of Messiah, then tying it to the beginning of the church. Philip showed this official that Jesus of Nazareth answered the description made by Isaiah years before it actually happened.

After Philip explained the passage, he may have included his personal conversion; that is, how he came to know Jesus. I don't know. That is why I would like to know what he said. But what I do know is this: baptism was a part of Philip's message. Why else would the official request it or mention it?

Now, my message today is not a message on baptism. That message is for another time.

My message today is not about who should be baptized, but who can do the baptizing.

Some act like baptism won't take unless the big guns, the important ordained super Christians do it.

But, here we see a disciple/deacon/un-ordained evangelist immerse to a high official from the court of the queen of Ethiopia.

Evidently, it took. The official went on his way rejoicing, and Philip was off to his next assignment.

Time to wrap up: what's your value? Do you consider yourself an old relic, like the Liberty Bell once was; cracked, useless, good for nothing, and not even worth scrap metal? But, over time, look at what the Liberty Bell became: priceless. Why? Because it rang for freedom.

“But, if I could only be just like Peter , or John, or Mary...” You don't have to be.... All you have to be is just like you.

Over time, God has given you everything you need: full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom. But, it's up to you to be ready, willing, and able, and maybe a little excited about sharing your faith.

A husband and wife with a young son had spent the day moving from their farmhouse into their new house in town. Early the next morning, their 3 year old ran into their bedroom to wake them up. Mom dressed him and told him to explore every inch of his new back yard, hoping that would allow her tired body a little more rest.

About 20 minutes later, he came running back into the house all excited: “Mommy, Mommy,” he cried, “everybody has doorbells and they all work.”

God gave all disciples the extraordinary privilege of talking to other people about Jesus. Let's see if all the neighbor's doorbells work. It may make us a little annoying... but there will be no mistaking about how much we love Jesus.