

WHAT JESUS IS DOING TODAY

The Lord Empowers His Witnesses

Acts 8:26-40

INTRODUCTION: The country doctor, known as the beloved physician wrote two books. One we call Luke after that author; the other we call Acts.

Luke wrote his gospel to tell us what Jesus began to do and teach.

He wrote Acts to describe what Jesus continued to do and teach.

As we read from the Book of Acts, we are seeing what Jesus continues to do today to bring about the consummation of His Kingdom.

The very first thing that Jesus did was to make witnesses out of His followers.

Jesus said, in Acts 1:8 But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and **you shall be witnesses** to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

In the first six chapters of Acts, we saw folks like Peter and John taking on their role as witnesses – telling people what they knew to be true.

Jesus continues to do that work today. He declares that everyone who trusts Him is to be a witness for Him. However, the more we read the Book of Acts, the more we see that Jesus does not just make witnesses.

Jesus empowers those witnesses to do what He has called them to do – to share the gospel.

THE GOSPEL!

- **Jesus Christ, God's Son, died on the cross for our sins.**
- **Jesus rose from the dead.**
- **Jesus offers forgiveness of sin and eternal life to all who trust Him as Lord and Savior.**

Jesus empowered

- Jesus empowered newly ordained deacon **Stephen** to share the gospel to the High Priest, other religious leaders, and a large group of hostile people.
- He empowered another deacon **Philip** to go and preach to the Samaritans.

- He converted the chief of Christian persecution named **Saul** and then empowered him to give an indisputable witness that Jesus is the Promised Messiah who came into this world to die for our sins.
- He empowered a “died in the wool” Jewish fisherman named **Peter** to go to the home of a Roman Centurion and lead this Gentile man and his whole family to faith in Christ.
- Jesus empowered **two believers from the island of Cypress** to go share their witness of the gospel to Gentiles in Antioch in Syria; and many, many Gentiles were born anew into the Kingdom of God through faith in Jesus Christ.

Dear fellow believer, do not miss the tremendous significance of these things.

We are His witnesses!

We are witnesses whom Jesus is empowering!

- He promised He would empower us.

Acts 1:8 But **you shall receive power** when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

- Jesus promised the Holy Spirit would give us power to be witnesses to the Lord Jesus.
- Jesus has not only made us witnesses.
- He has made us empowered witnesses!
- **What we see Jesus doing in the lives of witnesses in the first century, we can know He can and will do in our lives today.**

I want us to look at just one of the accounts of one of Jesus’ followers who had become a witness, and see up close how Jesus worked in his life to empower him. The account I want us to examine is the conversion of the Ethiopian Eunuch.

THE CONVERSION OF THE ETHIOPIAN EUNUCH

Acts 8:26–40 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.

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." 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.

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.

It was a most unusual sight. A caravan of several chariots accompanied by powerful soldiers on equally powerful horses were moving south on a little traveled desert road that connected Jerusalem to Gaza. There was another road, well to the north, that bore most of the traffic, because the opportunity for food, water, and shelter were far more plentiful.

A caravan, in and of itself, was not so unusual, but this caravan was different. There was no string of wagons carrying goods or camels loaded down with baskets of wares. And every part of this entourage portrayed both wealth and power. The men were strong and fearsome in appearance. The horses were groomed and healthy. The chariots were sturdy, strong, and beautifully crafted. The one at the center was plated with gold.

The center chariot was unusually large, built with a padded seat and back, obviously intended to carry a person of importance. Indeed it did, for seated in the

chariot was a tall, handsome man with skin the color of coal and with a headdress embellished with golden trim upon his head.

What the man was doing was as unusual as this opulent caravan in the middle of such a barren place. The man was reading a scroll! If you had been able to peak over his shoulder, the mystery would have deepened. The scroll was written in Hebrew, and it was exceedingly obvious that this man was not a Jew!

No, he was in fact the Finance Minister to the Queen of Ethiopia, and he was reading the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. He had been to Jerusalem, to the temple. He had traveled 2,500 miles to come and worship the God of Israel. At a very large price from a very corrupt priest, this powerful government official managed to purchase the hand copied scroll of Israel's most famous prophet. He had not found much around the temple itself that drew him closer to the One True God he sought to know. He hoped the words of the prophet would enlighten him.

The caravan stopped at a small oasis, the only one they had seen for many miles. The guards tensed when a man, obviously a Jewish man, but a man of very humble means approached the chariots. He could hear the Ethiopian official reading the words of Hebrew, and without regard to protocol, Philip called out to him, "Do you understand what you are reading?" The guards were surprised when the nobleman answered the brazen stranger. "How can I, unless someone explains it to me?"

Philip took the words as an invitation and went to the rich official. He moved over on his seat to make room for the humble Jew. The Ethiopian was reading from Isaiah 53, the prophecy of the suffering Messiah who would give His life for the sins of the world. The official asked, "Is the prophet speaking of himself or another?"

Philip must have chuckled to himself with delight. He was both thrilled and amazed. He had been in the middle of a revival among the people of the city of Samaria, hundreds of people coming to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, when God sent a message through an angel for him to leave, and go to a desert road he knew was empty of travelers most of the time. God offered no explanation, no promise of what he would find, no hint of what he should look for. God just said, "Go."

Philip knew the Lord. He had trusted Him, and walked with the Lord daily. He had served the Lord as a Deacon of the church. He was not a perfect man, but he had learned to obey the Word of the Lord. So when the angel said go down in the desert, he left the burning fires of evangelistic revival in Samaria and went where God said to go.

That's why he silently chuckled. This was just like God! A divine appointment in the middle of nowhere. God had brought Philip to a man who obviously for years had sought the Lord with all his heart. God had put in this Ethiopian's hands that portion of Scripture that would show him the way to forgiveness of sin and knowledge of the True and Living God more clearly than any other Scripture yet written. And God had sent him, Philip of Caesarea, to explain to the Ethiopian Eunuch that the One of whom Isaiah

wrote was God's own Son, the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, and only a short time before, He had fulfilled the prophecy they were reading together by dying on a cross outside the walls of Jerusalem, and on the third day, rising from the dead.

After Philip shared the gospel, the Ethiopian believed and was saved. In the sweet providence of God, they were sitting by the only pool of water for a hundred miles, deep enough to be baptized in. And the official said, "Let's do this now!"

Isn't that a marvelous story?

Isn't it all the more marvelous because it is true?

But friend, let me tell you the most marvelous thing of all about this true story. God had it recorded in His Word for you! For me! And for you, and you, and you!

Because Jesus has made each of us a witness for Him.

And **He wants us to see how He will empower our witness.**

He wants us to see that

I. OUR WITNESS IS EMPOWERED BY DIVINE PREPARATION.

Only God could have put the Ethiopian and Philip together.

- Who knows what God did when this stalwart Ethiopian man was just a little boy?
- Perhaps one night after the young man lay on still warm desert sands looking up into a crystal clear sky, he said to a friend, "There must be a God more powerful than the stone images in our village who could make such stars as these that fill the heavens."
- And because God promises that if a person seeks Him with all their heart, He will be found, maybe God sent a traveler by who told about a God who in the beginning created the heaven and the earth. Perhaps that traveler casually mentioned to the boy that a temple had been built to worship this creator God in the city of Jerusalem.
- Maybe across the years, as the Ethiopian boy grew to be a man and rose to occupy such a powerful position of authority and responsibility in his country, he often remembered that night that he concluded that all he saw around him could not be made by a rock that had been carved into a bizarre image and placed on a stand in his village.
- It could be that it was in the midst of some of his business dealings on behalf of his country, that someone mentioned the name of a city where they had gone to do business with a group of wealthy Jews. The city's name was Jerusalem.

- Perhaps a memory was triggered; Jerusalem, a temple to worship the One True Creator God.
- Folks, we do not know. Seeing how God drew the Ethiopian Eunuch to Jerusalem to worship, how God put the rare and precious scroll of Isaiah into his hand, how the Lord caused him to be reading Isaiah 53, is one of the replays I am going to request be streamed into my mansion when I get to heaven.
- But this I know for sure. God revealed enough of Himself for this man to seek Him with all of his heart. God responded by revealing more of Himself. And as the man kept seeking, God kept revealing until finally God sent Philip to give the Ethiopian the gospel so that he could be saved.

And God shows us this much so we can know that

If you will be a willing witness, God will make divine appointments for you.

I don't mean you will have an Ethiopian experience every time you share, but you will have those times you recognize that God has set up a divine encounter for you and the person you are talking to.

I remember about 6 years ago, God had led us to plan a mission trip for a team to Valente, Brazil. I did not know in advance the divine appointment God had made for me in that place.

It wasn't easy to get there. There just aren't any flights from Panama City, FL to Valente, Brazil.

So we flew to Atlanta

then to São Paulo Brazil

and on to Salvador

From there we took a bus to Valente.

In Valente, we divided the team into three parts to work in three places.

My part of the team was to go in a tiny neighborhood on the edge of town called Petrolina.

There was a street I and my translator were assigned to.

That was my divine appointment! Right there on that street.

Folks, I could tell you of dozens of divine appointments, for me and for many who have gone to Brazil, Mexico, Africa, India, and right here in Panama City, FL.

Because **GOD EMPOWERS WITNESSES BY DIVINE PREPARATION.**

Secondly,

II. OUR WITNESS IS EMPOWERED BY SUBMITTING OUR WILL TO THE LORD.

This was the key for Philip. He went when God said to go. He did what God said to do.

We are often hampered by a “why” mentality,

- **as if we can require God to explain Himself**
- **or as if He has to prove to us that His way is best.**

Delayed obedience is disobedience.

During a revival in my church in Slidell, a lady was giving testimony of how she had resisted submitting herself as a wife to the decisions of her husband.

She said, “I have never liked the S word.”

But I will tell you, men don’t like the S word either.

None of us like to submit. We all like to do things our own way! In fact, the Bible has a special word that means exactly that – doing things our own way – Iniquity!

SUBMITTING OUR WILL TO THE WILL OF THE LORD EMPOWERS OUR WITNESS.

III. OUR WITNESS IS EMPOWERED BY THE POWER OF THE GOSPEL ITSELF.

Romans 1:16 For I am not ashamed of **the gospel of Christ**, for it is the **power of God to salvation** for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.

You don’t need to be an orator or fancy speaker.

The power is not in you or in me. The power is in the gospel itself.

The gospel is a story that stirs the emotions, but that is not its power.

The power of the gospel is infused from on high.

It is supernatural, and it is inextinguishable.

Many times, I have had people say to me, I want to go with you to Brazil but I have never led anyone to the Lord, or I have never witnessed to anyone. I am not sure I can.

And I always tell them, "You can!" And I know that is true. Because the power does not have to be in them. The power is in the gospel. If they will share the gospel, they will see people get saved.

I have never taken a person with me to Brazil, that when they shared the gospel, they did not lead a number of people to the Lord. Never!

CONCLUSION: One of the great joys of my life was the discovery that I did not have to eloquently or cleverly persuade people to trust in Christ.

All I have to do is be a witness.

Jesus empowers His witnesses.

Are you saved? If not, you can be today.

The rest of you, are you saved?

Then you are a witness.

Jesus calls upon you just to tell what you know is true. Tell the gospel.

THE GOSPEL!

- **Jesus Christ, God's Son, died on the cross for our sins.**
- **Jesus rose from the dead.**
- **Jesus offers forgiveness of sin and eternal life to all who trust Him as Lord and Savior.**

If you will be a witness and share the gospel, Jesus is working, and He will empower you.