

February 28, 2021

An Opportunity to Share

Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch



Special Music: “Here Am I”

Mercy Me

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=25xmqs8AEQ>

Acts 8:26-40

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 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,

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.

32 This is the passage of Scripture the eunuch was reading:

**“He was led like a sheep to the slaughter,
and as a lamb before its 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. What can stand in the way of my being baptized?”

[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."

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.

The Gold Coin

When Mandy was only 5 years old, her dad started giving her a gold dollar on each of her birthdays. She would get other presents, dolls, skates, bicycles, but the present that she always looked forward to the most was that moment when her dad would pull her aside, reach into his pocket, and then place a shiny new gold dollar in her hand. With a twinkle in his eye, he would wink and whisper to her, "Mandy, you are as good as gold."

When she was fourteen, Mandy's dad became seriously ill. He was in the hospital for her fifteenth birthday, but everyone gathered around his bed to celebrate her birthday with cupcakes and balloons. At one point, her father asked everyone to leave the room except for Mandy. He called her close and produced a shiny new gold dollar, looked her in the eye, winked, and whispered, "Mandy, you are as good as gold." He passed away the next day.

For all of her life, Mandy held onto that gold dollar. It was her most valued treasure. She kept it with her wherever she went and would have sooner died than ever part with it.

One day, Mandy was in the store to pick up a few items and found herself behind an elderly man in the checkout lane, leaning on his cane. The man appeared to be somewhat distracted and confused. When told his total purchase for the milk, bread, soup and water that he chosen was \$5, he dug into his pocket and pulled out all of his cash and coins and after carefully counting it all out, there was only \$4.15. Mandy figured that she would help him out by just paying for his groceries, but suddenly she realized that she had left her billfold at home.

And then she remembered that she had the gold dollar in her pocket. As much as that gold dollar meant to her, she did not hesitate to pull it out and help the man pay for his groceries. It is what her dad would have wanted her to do. It pained her so to part with the coin, but she watched as the stress left the old man's face as he realized that his purchase had been made complete. He thanked her and slowly wobbled towards the exit, groceries in one hand, cane in the other.

Mandy apologized to the clerk for having forgotten her wallet and let her know that she would go home, get her wallet, and then return to pay for her groceries. She passed the elderly gentleman on the way to her car. He whispered something as she passed by him. "Mandy, you are as good as gold!" She paused because she did not know if she had actually heard it or just imagined it. She turned to ask the old man if he had said something to her. But to her astonishment, he was gone.

I have an old bookcase in my bedroom at the parsonage. It doesn't look like much and no one would call it beautiful, but it has special meaning for me. You see, my dad built it from scratch as a woodworking project. It is one of the few things I have left that belonged to my father and it is made even more special because he hand crafted it. It is now over 50 years old. I remember how proud my dad was when he finished it and it took a prominent place in the house when I was growing up. It would take extraordinary circumstances for me to give it up. But if I found someone who really needed that bookcase, I would not hesitate to let it go. My father would have wanted me to do that.

We all have treasures. What we treasure may not have a significant amount of value monetarily, but the value for us is contained in the emotional memories that we attach to the object. Maybe it is something that was given to us by someone special in our lives, or even by a stranger at a dark point when we were struggling. Perhaps it is something that someone made by hand. I have a shirt that my mother made for my dad before I was born. It cannot be worn. The cloth is rotten, and it is coming apart at the seams, but I just can't seem to bring myself to part with it. But if someone truly needed it, I would give it to them.

Parting with personal treasures can be tough. Even if that treasure is money and has no sentimental value. Sometimes, the value in our treasure is found in how hard we have had to work for it, and because we know how hard we worked, that

money can seem to be more valuable than it really is. “I worked hard for this money. It is mine. No one is going to take it from me.”

We never hear Jesus saying anything like that. When Jesus talked about treasure, he spoke about it in this way:

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Matthew 6:21

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.

Matthew 6:19-20

“If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”

Matthew 19:21

“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.”

Matthew 13:44

Jesus teaches us that earthly treasures come and go, but heavenly treasure awaits us based on how we treat others here on earth. The value that we place on the anything is often based on the perception of our needs. Call it “supply and demand.” Think about being in Walmart in July. You see a beautiful warm coat on the clearance rack. It’s only \$30 and it is just your size and it looks great you. But you think to yourself, “It’s 110 degrees outside. What do I need with a coat?” So, you put it back on the rack. When winter rolls around and the temperature falls into the teens and you realize the coat you have is old and inadequate, you remember that coat in Walmart that you did not buy back in July because it was too hot. Right now, all things considered, you would pay \$100 for that coat that you could have bought for \$30. The value of the coat changed with your circumstances.

That is also true of the immaterial things in our life. We often forget about the high cost of mercy, grace, love and redemption until we realize how much we need it. We drape mercy about our shoulders, tighten the belt of grace around our waist, wrap ourselves in a blanket of love and put on our dress boots of redemption and we are glad that we are warm and toasty when we have to face the cold weather. But when someone asks where we got those things, we have to force ourselves to look into the compassionate eyes of Christ, hanging on a cross at calvary, beaten and humiliated, blood running down the wood, nails piercing His hands and feet, and the slow, shallow, painful breaths mixed with agony in order to understand that, although these warm and fuzzies cost us

nothing, the actual cost was priceless and there is no way we could have purchased them for ourselves, though many have tried.

When we stand at the intersection of salvation, the understanding of who we are, what we have done, what Jesus did for us, and the knowledge that God is creator and we are creation, when we lay our sins at the foot of the cross, we do so with the understanding that our salvation has been purchased at a cost we could never begin to repay. But after a couple of years of wearing those shiny boots of redemption and warm wrappings of mercy, grace and love, and the way that we neglect their care, we begin to forget what the cost was. Instead of taking care of those precious gifts, those treasures bought by someone else at tremendous cost, we set them aside in favor of tennis shoes, sweat shirts, and distressed jeans. After all, it takes time and energy to polish our shoes and keep them looking great. It takes time and energy to keep our clothes looking nice. It takes time and energy to grow our faith and keep it fresh. We didn't have to pay for it, so it really doesn't matter, does it? Let's make it easy on ourselves.

But we aren't planning to get rid of the fancy duds. We just put them away for a special occasion where they do not do anyone any good. We forget that God promises to refill our cup, give us food to eat, take care of our needs. If we give it away to those that need it, he will make sure that we have more than we need. That is so contrary to the way we are taught today. Too often, when we give, we

think tithe. We will give God 10% of our earnings. Nothing more. Nothing less. That's what the old testament law tells us. It brings to mind those old comedy sketches where someone is counting out the take. "One for you, two for me. One for you, three for me. One for God, nine for me," as if our giving is based on some kind of cosmic balance sheet.

You all know this story:

41 Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts.

42 But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few cents.

43 Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others.

44 They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on."

The way that we do accounting is not the way God does accounting. He sees value differently than we see value. He sees intent and grace as having much more value than actual dollars.

So, what does any of this have to do with our passage of scripture today? God tells Phillip to go to a certain road. He doesn't tell him why. He doesn't tell him what to take with him. He doesn't tell him how to prepare. He just tells him to go down to the desert road that leads from Jerusalem to Gaza. And Phillip blindly obeys. God says go and Philip goes.

And Philip sees the Ethiopian eunuch that is in charge of all of the treasury of Kandake, a very important fellow indeed. The kind of person that could have your head cut off if he found you offensive. The eunuch had been in Jerusalem to worship and was on his way home. And God says, "Hey Phillip, go walk beside his chariot, which Phillip does spite of the possible danger of doing so. Imagine Phillip's surprise when he hears the eunuch reading Isaiah 53 aloud.

"He was led like a sheep to the slaughter,

and as a lamb before its 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."

And the eunuch wants to know whether Isaiah is talking about himself or someone else. And, in spite of this particular passage where Phillip has the opportunity to share the story of Christ through the revelation of this Old

Testament prophecy fulfilled, there are Theologians today still asking the same question. Sometimes, planted seeds just don't grow.

But our focus here is that Phillip shares the story of Christ with the Ethiopian eunuch and the eunuch understands, believes, and wants to be baptized so Phillip baptizes him right there in the water beside the road.

There are so many messages that can be found in this scripture and we will explore more of them in the future. But today, I want you to see what Phillip saw. The story of Christ and His redemption of His sheep is the most important treasure that Phillip has, and he doesn't hesitate to share it in spite of the possible consequences. I imagine that he was a little surprised that the eunuch was so open to the presentation of the story and wanted to immediately be baptized. Phillip understood that the precious treasure that is the story of the life, death and resurrection our Lord and Savior, was never meant to be stuck away in a closet. It isn't meant for special occasions. We don't have to dust it off and polish it up to share it. It is readily available at all times. It is always fresh and new. It is the most precious treasure to be found in our souls. It is meant to be shared wherever we can whenever we can at whatever the cost.

When we share it, it doesn't leave us empty. It overflows from God's presence within us. By sharing His story, we are able to grasp what it means to be a

vessel, a pot, a container that overflows with God's grace, mercy, love and redemption.

It is often said that if you want to make and keep friends, never talk about politics or religion. But the love of Jesus that flows from us cannot be contained and it is certainly nothing to ever be ashamed of. Like I have often said, if we can't sit down at the table and break bread together in spite of our differences, then we do not understand the true nature of grace, mercy, and redemption. To sit at the table of our Lord and break bread with each of His children without condemnation and restriction, is to be what Christ expects us to be. When we grasp that the love and grace that flows from us is provided by our Lord and Savior and not by our own resources, we discover that love and mercy unites us and allows us to embrace each other, listen to each other, and feed one another, freeing us from hate, malice, and misunderstanding.

We simply can't diminish or persecute others and praise God for His mercy in the same breath. It just won't work. One or the other is a reflection of our heart at the time we speak. So, if we are sharing the gospel, we can't sit in condemnation. If we are espousing the grace of God, we can't be spewing the venom of discrimination. If we are giving voice to the essence of the mercy of God in our lives, we can't be giving voice to anger and intolerance. Because we are the children of our almighty creator, our nature needs to reflect His countenance. His

story since the time of creation is our story. It culminates at this moment in the grace, mercy and love that He exhibits toward us. It is a story to be shared without reservation.

I love to tell the story

Of unseen things above

Of Jesus and his glory

Of Jesus and his love

I love to tell the story

Because I know 'tis true

It satisfies my longings

Like nothing else can do

I love to tell the story

'Twill be my theme in glory

To tell the old, old story

Of Jesus His love.

Katherine Hankey 1866

AMEN

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