

Study following Sunday May 2nd 2021

Prepare: Think about a time you've been able to give someone good advice.

Praise: Spend time thanking God for those who have explained the Bible to you.

Passage: Read Acts 8.26-40

Ponder: Today's passage has many amazing and thought-provoking aspects. It follows the first part of Acts 8 when Phillip begins to evangelise the city of Samaria and is joined by Peter and John who bring a ministry of the Holy Spirit to the new Christians and also face a manipulating sorcerer named Simon. In that previous passage the Holy Spirit is the key ingredient that enables the people to fully follow Christ.

- see Acts 8.15-17

It is the Holy Spirit who also features as the driving force in our passage today.

- see Acts 8.29, 39

The author, Luke, is reminding us that this is the new and dynamic age of the Holy Spirit, and Phillip is an example of one who follows where the Spirit leads.

- How have you experienced the Holy Spirit leading you?

It can be challenging to sense the guidance of the Holy Spirit and then even more challenging to fulfil the call that comes, but reading about the work of the Spirit and the work of Jesus, in the Bible is a really good place to start.

The Ethiopian Eunuch is reading the scriptures but struggling to make sense of them.

- Have you ever struggled to grasp what a particular Biblical writer is trying to say? How did you seek to solve your questions?

It was the norm at that time to read scripture out loud, in fact personal silent reading was not really practised until at least the 400s when St Augustine describes his shock at witnessing Ambrose of Milan reading silently. As Phillip swings up into the chariot the text the Ethiopian is reading is a perfect prophetic text to point forward to Jesus.

- Nicky Gumbel asserts in his Bible in One Year notes that 'Jesus is the one to whom all the Scriptures point.' How have you found this to be true?

Phillip takes the Eunuch on a Bible study that enables him to receive the Good News, as Stott remarks, the Ethiopian's heart has been well prepared by the Holy Spirit.

This passage contains some similarities with another 'discovery' passage - that of Jesus and the travellers on the road to Emmaus - see Luke 24.13-35.

The Ethiopian may not have been able to fully access worship at the temple, but he asks confidently about Baptism. Perhaps he had been reading the section of Isaiah that mentions how Eunuchs and foreigners, who trust God will be blessed, see Isaiah 56.3-5.

There is some debate as to whether this is the first gentile baptism as Luke records the first official gentile baptism of Cornelius and his household in Acts chapter 10. However, I think it very plausible that the Ethiopian was probably either a natural or converted Jew as he is mentioned having been worshipping in Jerusalem (as a Eunuch he would have been barred from entering the inner courts.)

Like those from Emmaus, the Ethiopian receives the good news with great joy, and after the departure of Phillip he goes on his way rejoicing. It seems that for all his high status and responsibility the Ethiopian rejoices at becoming fully part of God's family, welcomed as a child of God, forgiven and saved by Jesus Christ.

Pray: Pray for all who are puzzling about certain Bible texts, may they re-discover new meaning by looking at them through the lens of Jesus' life, death and resurrection.