

Well, today we're continuing on in the book of Acts. Last week, Phillip began the mission into Samaria. In Jerusalem the Christians were being thrown into jail, and some were being executed... And so they fled for their lives. And wherever they went, they took the gospel with them.

And so when Phillip went into Samaria, he told the Samaritans about Jesus. And today, I want to concentrate on 2 things about Philip: Philip **listened** to God; and Philip was **obedient** to God....

A man was walking in the mountains just enjoying the scenery when he stepped too close to the edge of a cliff, and he fell. In desperation he reached out and grabbed the limb of a shrub, hanging onto the side of the cliff. Full of fear, he assessed his situation. He was about 30 metres from the top of a 200m cliff. He cried out "Help me!" But there was no answer. Again and again he cried out but to no avail.

Finally he yelled, "Is anybody up there?"

A deep voice replied, "Yes, I'm up here."

"Who is it?"

"It's the Lord"

"Lord, can you help me?"

"Yes, I can help."

"Well help me then!"

"Let go of the branch."

"What?!?!"

"Let go. I will catch you."

"Uh... Is there anybody else up there?"ⁱ

There's 2 parts to it: recognising God's voice; and being obedient to God's voice.

So, how do we know when God is speaking? Well for Philip, it began with a word from an Angel. And that'd inspire a bit of confidence, wouldn't it?... V²⁶.....an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza."

Didn't tell him why. He just told him to do it. ... So, in this instance, God spoke through an angel – a messenger, but God can speak in all sorts of ways. God might speak to you through the Bible. He might speak to you through an intense feeling you get, maybe during a time of prayer. God speaks through dreams and visions. God speaks through other Christians. God speaks through circumstances that might **seem** to be coincidences. But in **every** case it's the Spirit of God, showing you in some way, to do a particular thing.

And sometimes, it might seem like the most unlikely instruction. "Why would God want me to go there?"... "Why would God want me to do that?".....

But the important thing here, that I want us to learn, is "Go with it." If you feel the Lord is saying to do something, no matter how unlikely it seems, **go with it**. Yes, it might disrupt your day. Yes, you might feel a bit silly doing it. Yes, you might even get it wrong. But often, it will be exactly the **right** thing to do.

I know one day, I had an intense feeling that I needed to ring someone (a non Christian) who I used to work with – a rough, godless, hard drinking, swearing boiler maker. I had no idea why. But I did it. I rang him up and I said, "How ya going?" and we talked for a while and I couldn't see any reason why I

*was supposed to ring him. So I told him straight out. Danny, I just had an intense feeling that God told me to ring you. What's going on? Is everything alright? ... And he was a bit taken aback, but he reckoned everything **was** alright.*

*A couple of years later I ran into him. And he brought it up, And he was really touched by what I did that day. Even though I never found out the reason **why** I had that feeling, he was touched because I cared enough to call him. A couple of years later, it still had an impact on his him. Maybe God hasn't finished with him yet.*

Anyway, I consider this incident as, “Well, I **did** it, but I'm not sure that it was actually God after all.”... But for every story like that, where I reckon I might of got it wrong, there are several, where “going with it”, was exactly the **right** thing to do. And some of you have shared with me how God has worked through that sort of situation..

*Around about 5 years ago, I had an intense feeling that I had to go to a certain Christian conference down in Sydney. I had **no** idea what it was about. But I drove all the way to Sydney, and was really inspired by the Bible teaching, and the men of faith who were leading it, but I still wasn't sure, why I had to go. I didn't realise before I went, but it ended up being about “church planting”. And when I came home, I still thought “I'm not a church planter. Why would God send me to a conference on church planting?”*

Well, what's God got us doing now? He told us to leave an existing, established church, and now he's got us planting a bunch of little churches all around the district.

You know, when I came home from that conference, I probably would've chalked that up to "Not sure if I heard God and was supposed to go after all." But now, I can see even back then, God was preparing our path.

So, what about you? What about the times you've felt (out of the blue) God's saying "Go and see so-and-so". It was probably at the most **inconvenient** time. It might have been an interruption to all of the plans that you had set for the day... But did you go with it? And when you did, wasn't it just the **right** thing to do????

If you ever sense that God is saying to you "Go to such-and-such-a-place", do it – go with Him on it – even if you don't know why. In fact, God will **rarely** tell you why. He'll just tell you to do it, and He's wanting us to be obedient.

So this angel told Philip to go to this unlikely, desert road.

Now, if Philip was working to modern day church growth principles, he'd conduct a survey and analyse the census data, and come up with a plan as to how to engage the transient community that would be frequenting that road, in a non-confrontational and culturally sensitive way. ... That's modern church growth principals. But it's not God's way...

And Philip went with God's way. He watched, and continued to listen to the Lord. And along comes a chariot, and its passenger is an Ethiopian Eunuch...

A few weeks ago, we talked about the Diaspora – the Jews who had scattered beyond the holy land. And many of these had followed the trade routes. And wherever they went, they would tend to stick together. They'd form a synagogue in a certain city, and a Jewish community would spring up around it. **And**, the Jews were great evangelists. They would not only keep their **own** faith in the one, true God – they'd invite **other** people to come to know God as well.... We don't generally think of the Jews as evangelists do we? - Well they were...

And one of the regions where this Diaspora could be found, was a long way off, in a place called Ethiopia. (It's not the Ethiopia we know of today, but it's only next door) If you have a look at the map up on the screen, the coloured areas, are the places where Jewish communities could be found at the time of Christ. And you'll notice there, that they populated the delta of the Nile, and then they followed upstream, following the Nile and its riches.

What the Bible refers to as "Ethiopia", was actually the Nubian Kingdom whose capital is Meroe, south of Egypt, which is today part of Sudan.ⁱⁱ

And because they evangelised, converts could be found there as well. People who looked just like today's Sudanese, as black as the ace of spades, had discovered the one true God, and had entered into the Jewish faith.

And so, along comes this chariot with this Ethiopian official. And God speaks to Philip.

A number of years ago, some of us here, did a Bible Study: *Experiencing God – Knowing and doing the Will of God*. And something that we learned, is “God is always at work around us”. And all we have to do, is watch with Spiritual eyes – with our senses tuned to God’s Spirit, “God, what are you doing, and how can we join you in what you are doing????”

And the Spirit told Philip (and we don’t know **how** the Spirit told Him – but from my experience it could well have been an intense feeling in His Spirit) .. But the Spirit Told him to go over to that chariot and stay near it. And so he did.... And as soon as Philip drew near to this chariot, he knew exactly why God had led him to that place...

I can only imagine, what **mixed** emotions this Nubian official, must’ve had. This man had been converted to being a Jew. And he had just made a religious pilgrimage to the Holy City of his new faith. He’d travelled a **tremendous** distance. And can you **imagine** the expectations of what kind of religious encounter, he was expecting to have... But he came away confused....

I don’t know what he’d been taught. I don’t know **what** he was expecting. But he came away confused... Why?...

In his own nation, he was very highly regarded. He was the treasurer of his Queen, no less. (*He’s like Joe Hockey is to Tony Abbot, or maybe a better analogy might be “He was like Wayne Swann was treasurer to Julia*).

He worked very closely with Candace, the Queen of his nation... And **there’s** the problem. Any high-ranking official

(or any man for that matter), working closely with the Queen, had to be castrated. That's what it means to be a Eunuch.

- A ram becomes a whether;
- A bull becomes a steer;
- a stallion becomes a gelding;
- a rooster becomes a capon;
- a bore becomes a barrow;
- a man becomes a eunuch.

And you think **your** employer demands commitment...

Anyway, here's his problem – Because he'd been castrated, he wasn't allowed into the temple. Deuteronomy 23:¹ **No one who has been emasculated by crushing or cutting may enter the assembly of YHWH.**

So, we don't know what expectations he had when he headed **off** on his religious pilgrimage... But one thing we **can** be certain of, is when he got to Jerusalem, he wasn't even allowed into the temple... There were religious barriers, preventing him from coming to God.

And when Philip happened upon him, he was reading from the prophet Isaiah, and I don't think there was any coincidence in this – I reckon this was definitely the activity of God....

**"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."

And of course, **we** know that this passage is speaking about Jesus Christ. And Philip, knowing that God had sent him to this man for a reason, plucked up his courage, and boldly asked, **"Do you understand what you are reading?"**
"No! I need someone to explain it."

You see, when God is already at work in someone's heart, sometimes, all it takes, is for us to be obedient, and to help them to see and understand, what God is **already** saying to them. And that's what Philip did...

"Who's this prophet talking about?" he wanted to know, **"Is he talking about himself or somebody else?..."**

I wonder if the Eunuch thought, **"Maybe this prophet's talking about me"....**

The Eunuch **would've** been humiliated – **"You're not an entire man – you can't get into the temple"**. He **had** been deprived of justice... He would never have any children – no descendants to live on, once **he'd** died...

"Who's he talking about? Himself or someone else?"..... ³⁵

Then Philip began with that **very** passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.

He wouldn't have had to go far. Probably only a foot or two further into the scroll, Isaiah wrote this:

Isaiah 56:3–7 (NIV84)

³ Let no foreigner who has bound himself to
YHWH say,

"YHWH will surely exclude me from his people."
And let not any eunuch complain,

"I am only a dry tree."

⁴ For this is what YHWH says:

"To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths,
who choose what pleases me
and hold fast to my covenant—

⁵ to them I will give **within my temple and its walls**

a memorial and a name

better than sons and daughters;

I will give them an everlasting name
that will not be cut off.

⁶ And foreigners who bind themselves to YHWH
to serve him,

to love the name of YHWH,

and to worship him,

all who keep the Sabbath without desecrating it
and who hold fast to my covenant—

⁷ these I will bring to my holy mountain
and give them joy **in my house of prayer.**

Their burnt offerings and sacrifices

will be accepted on my altar;

for my house will be called

a house of prayer for all nations."

Can you imagine what **that** would have meant to this man....

This very passage of Scripture is fulfilled in Jesus Christ. You **were** excluded, but in Jesus Christ, **no one**, who binds themselves to the Lord, will **ever** be excluded.

We don't know that Philip took the Eunuch to Isaiah 56, but I certainly wouldn't be surprised if he had. **Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.** And the Eunuch believed and was baptised with much joy. No longer excluded, but loved and accepted as one of God's children.....

One of the first regions of the Christian church to grow and flourish, was the region from Egypt to Ethiopia. It was called the Coptic church. Today, Coptic Christians are under severe persecution at the hands of Muslims. But they were there a long, long time before Islam was ever even invented. And tradition has it, that this church was begun, through the witness of that very same Eunuch.

All because Philip listened to God, was willing to interrupt his own plans, and when God spoke, he went with it.

Imagine if we were to do the same. Imagine, if when God gives us an urging to ring someone, or visit someone, or to strike up a conversation with a colleague or even a stranger – imagine if we actually did it?

Imagine if when God gives us the prompting, to actually ask a spiritual question, or to share a spiritual truth – imagine if we actually did it.

Imagine if we weren't afraid – and stayed quiet, just in case we got it a bit wrong.

Imagine if we were prepared to be just that little bit embarrassed...

Imagine what God could do...

I guess our challenge is, “Let's stop imagining, and let's begin believing.”

God **does** speak. And when He gives us these little urges, He actually expects us to obey.

But you might say to me, “Michael, I never get these urges – I have no idea what you're talking about”. Let me suggest something: Go deeper with God. When you read the Bible (and I hope you're reading the Bible every day) – but when you read it, don't just read it as an academic exercise, or a religious duty – Read it, praying “God, speak to me through your word.”

And when you pray, pray “Lord, you **are** my Lord. Speak to me, and lead me in your ways. Lord, show me where you are at work, and help me to recognise your voice, as you invite me to join you...”

And then open your eyes and your ears, to see what God does. And you might be surprised, that God **does** speak to you.

ⁱ <http://www.geocities.com/CollegePark/6174/jokes/anyoneupthere.htm>

ⁱⁱ Witherington Ben III. The Acts of the Apostles. Eerdmans. P.295