

MONDAY 04 July 2022 "Strategic Surprise!"

(Acts 8:26-31)

Good morning my "Walking with Jesus" friends all around the world, **Today is July 4th.** Perhaps in your part of the world this is just another normal Monday, in the United States, today has great significance. **This is American Independence Day.** On this date in 1776 a large parchment containing a very carefully worded, handwritten declaration of Independence, was signed... first by Mr. John Hancock, representing the colony and people of Massachusetts, then eventually 55 other men, representing the rest of this fledgling new nation.

Certainly, the USA is today far, far different from what it was 50 or 100 years ago, still the journey of the American people, especially those who are Jesus followers, from that day in July 1776 to the present, has touched most every corner of the world, and in large measure has brought hope and help to most places American feet have walked. The document signed that day begins with these powerful words: **"When in the course of human events, it becomes necessary..."**

Today, I'd like us to build our reflections around that simple but very significant statement. It was *in the course of human events*, as humanity has rejected God in every place, every generation of humanity since the Garden of Eden, that God made a gigantic decision! Rather than obliterating the human race and this planet, and starting all over, *God developed a Ransom Plan which required the death of Jesus, God the Son, in order for God to act in Holy Justice and pardon sinners*, as we repent and trust fully in Jesus' atonement death to be sufficient payment for our sin!

In the course of human events, or as Paul wrote it, **"When the time had fully come, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law that we might receive the full rights of sonship..."** (Gal. 4:4,5) Just as those drafters and signers of the US Declaration of Independence determined the time had come for radical action, *so God, as He evaluated human history, determined exactly the right time for Jesus to be born* in Bethlehem, raised in Nazareth, die and rise again in Jerusalem.

In the course of human events, you, and me and every human has been born. God, in His sovereignty allowed us to be born and live today... at a time in history when technology can connect you and me, all around the world, through this 'Walking with Jesus' experience. *For the disciples, they were born at just the right time to become part of that group of men who had the privilege of spending those months with Jesus and then going out to tell His story to the world.*

Today let's rejoin Philip as *in the course of human events he* is experiencing a great movement of God in a Samaritan city several months after Jesus' death and resurrection.

Jerusalem had erupted in violence, specifically persecution of all followers of Jesus, and Philip, one of the 7 deacons, had fled Jerusalem for his life, going north into Samaria and to an unnamed city. As Philip shared the story of Jesus and did some Holy Spirit empowered miracles there, a great spiritual awakening took place and many **Samaritans** trusted in Jesus and were baptized, and the Holy Spirit of God came upon them. *Through this experience God made a HUGE statement, changing the course of Christianity for all time: Jesus' Gospel is intended for ALL people, including Samaritans!* That was a very big deal for Jewish Christians in Jerusalem, including the apostles, who believed salvation through Jesus was only intended for Jews!

For Philip, suddenly another major event took place. The record says: **"Now an angel of the LORD said to Philip, 'Go south to the road, the desert road, that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.'" (Acts 8:26)** For Philip, I imagine this came as a total surprise. Philip was busy enjoying a great movement of God in Samaria, north of Jerusalem, and he was the primary teacher and leader of this movement. *As he received this message of course his natural response would have been lots of questions? WHY? Who will continue my responsibilities here in Samaria? What will I do on the road to Gaza? Who should I look for? And more. But from God's perspective something significant was happening in the course of human events!* So, I have an important question for all of us... have you learned to be available to God, so when God gives you directions you will respond obediently, and you'll be able to participate in what God is doing? Or will you ignore God, or argue with God, or outright reject God's invitation? *Or is it possible you won't even notice that God is speaking to you and guiding you to a specific action step?*

What Philip didn't know was that God had been watching closely the course of human events in Africa, and in particular one nation, Ethiopia! One Ethiopian man had achieved a very influential and important position in that nation. He is not named, but his role is described as **"an important official in charge of all the treasury of the Queen of Ethiopia"** (Acts 8:27) Evidently this African man was also very religious and had become a worshipper of the Jewish God, and he had come to Jerusalem to worship. As far as I know our friend Philip had never met an African, much less a very important, high ranking, government official of Ethiopia, *but God was working the logistical details for a very strategic encounter between the two of them.* Now think about that my friends, as you consider how many people you encounter each day. *What might God be working in the normal course of human events in your day to be a significant, maybe strategic encounter?*

The record tells us this Ethiopian official was on his way home, **'sitting in his chariot reading the Book of Isaiah the prophet.'** Now picture that my friends. A royal official, in a royal chariot, reading his own copy of the Hebrew book of the prophet Isaiah! And standing alongside that road, having moved out of the way so the chariot could pass, was guess who... Philip! Evidently the chariot stopped for a moment, perhaps the official needed a drink in the hot sun. *Suddenly Philip received another message from God.* The record says: **"The Spirit told Philip, 'Go to that chariot and stay near it.'" (Acts 8:29)** Look at Philip.

He's looking this way and that, up and down the road, and looking at this fancy chariot, trying to figure out what to do. Very likely the chariot had bodyguards, for this was a very important official. Then as now, coming to close to someone with bodyguards can be a dangerous thing! I wonder if Philip hesitated and maybe even argued with himself about what he should do. What would you have done my friends?

The record says... **"Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. Philip asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" The Ethiopian official answered, 'how can I unless someone explains it to me?"** (Acts 8:30,31) And in that defining moment, history stood still! This was definitely a God directed, 'when in the course of human events' moment! Evidently Philip just stood there, not saying anything but being available *and watching to see what God would do!* The record says: **"The Ethiopian official invited Philip to come up and sit with him in his chariot."** (Acts 8:31) I doubt words can express what Philip was feeling and thinking in that moment! It's likely Philip had never stood that close to a royal chariot; much less been invited up into the chariot and to sit next to a royal official!!

So, let's just soak in this moment and try to understand what God is doing here 'when in the course of human events' a very strategic, defining moment has been prepared by God. *So easily this moment could never have happened.* Philip could have made a good case for being **too busy** to go south to the desert road. The Ethiopian official could have been **too prideful** to pay any attention to a normal looking Jewish guy on the roadside. Philip could have been **too fearful** to approach the chariot. The Ethiopian official could have been **too embarrassed** to admit he didn't understand what he was reading. *But friends, can you see the evidence of God at work here in bringing these two men together on the side of the road that day?*

Together we'll watch what God did in that remarkable, God designed encounter, tomorrow. For today, could I invite us to ponder seriously that little phrase "when in the course of human events" and *how might God be working in the details of your life and mine, TODAY to position us for something significant?* Will you recognize it?

On this day, here's a Patriotic song to help us consider the implications of what God was doing in the course of human events, on July 4, 1776.

Today's Scripture is Acts 8:26-31.