

## TUESDAY 05 July 2022 "Ethiopian Gospel" (Acts 8:30-39)

Hello my 'Walking with Jesus' friends,

Early this morning I took a look back, over the road we've traveled together in this "Walking with Jesus" journey. *One year ago today, July 5, 2021, we made a fresh start at the beginning of the Bible, the Tower of Babel, in Genesis 11.* From that day till September 15th, we slowly walked through every page of the remarkable story of Genesis. From Sept. 16th through March 7, with the exception of about 20 days to look at the Christmas story, we walked with Moses and the Hebrew slaves in the story of their remarkable rescue from slavery, all the way to the Jordan river 40 years later! And from March 8 till today, we've been traveling the road with Jesus' disciples, first toward their Passover/Easter weekend, then through their amazing experiences with the resurrected Jesus, and now for the past several weeks we're experiencing with them the adventure of the 'Jesus movement' taking root, after Jesus has gone back to heaven, in the first century. *Wow, what a year it has been, six times every week, step by step through the pages of the most important book in the world, the Bible!* I've just recounted them... 319 editions of "Walking with Jesus" since last July 5! Thank you, my friends, for journeying with me, I hope it has been as exciting a journey for you as it has been for me!!

It's true isn't it... ***"The Word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow. It judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart."*** (Heb. 4:12) Yesterday I left you with Philip, one of the 7 deacons, standing alongside the road that goes from Jerusalem south to Gaza, about 2000 years ago. Philip was there because he had a visitation from an angel who had told him to come here, to this road, from the very exciting spiritual awakening that was happening in an unnamed Samaritan city. *Philip had received no explanation and no instructions, but he did as he was told and suddenly a royal chariot came down the road and stopped near him. In this chariot was a royal African official.* He was the man in charge of all the treasury of the Queen of Ethiopia! Philip did as everyone else on that road that day... he stood and stared. I imagine he'd never been that close to a royal chariot or a royal official! But suddenly Philip sensed the Holy Spirit of God telling him to go to the chariot and stand close by it! Time stood still as Philip faced an important decision. We assume that chariot had bodyguards and getting too close to this official might be very dangerous for Philip!

But the Biblical record in Acts 8 tells us what we saw yesterday. Philip approached the chariot and was amazed to hear the royal official reading the scroll of the Hebrew prophet Isaiah. Courageously Philip asked ***"Sir, do you understand what you are reading?"*** I assume the bodyguards jumped to attention and immediately were standing right beside Philip with their weapons drawn, waiting for instructions from the royal official. Amazingly, he answered Philip, ***"How can I unless someone explains it to me?"*** (Acts 8:31) *And then Philip was shocked beyond belief, for the royal official invited him up into his chariot!*

The record tells us the royal official was reading from Isaiah 53:7,8 **"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..."** (Acts 8:32,33) Philip listened carefully as the royal official read in his Ethiopian accent. Then the royal official stopped reading and looking right at Philip said, **"Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?"** Let's freeze this moment in time. *Think back over your life, what have been those times when you've been asked the most significant questions in your life?* Perhaps as a teenager when you came home very late one night, and your mother was waiting up and asked you for an explanation? Or when a teacher, holding your exam paper, looked you deep in the eyes and asked you to explain how you got all the answers correct? Or maybe a police officer asking you probing questions? Or maybe it was someone who, like this Ethiopian official, asked you to give them answers to their deep spiritual questions? *What do you do when facing really important life questions?*

We have no record that Philip had ever gone to any special theological school, but we assume he was a normal Jewish man who had been faithful in his daily study of the Scriptures as all Jewish boys were until they reached the age of working. We presume Philip had been faithful in Synagogue every week and listened well to the teachings. We know Philip had a strong relationship with Jesus and the Holy Spirit of God was very active in Philip's life. So, from what we can tell Philip didn't flinch, didn't make any excuses to the Ethiopian royal official holding the Isaiah scroll and waiting for an answer. The record says: **"Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told the Ethiopian official the good news about Jesus!"** (Acts 8:35) Of course Philip knew Isaiah 53 is one of the greatest chapters in the entire Old Testament describing the Jewish Messiah and His suffering on the cross, *but it was written 700 years before Jesus was born!* Evidently as Philip talked, the chariot resumed its journey heading south, away from Jerusalem toward Egypt and then Africa! Apparently, Philip either didn't notice or didn't care, he simply kept explaining Jesus to this Ethiopian official.

The record says: **"As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the Ethiopian official said, 'Look, here is water! What stands in the way of my being baptized?' And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the Ethiopian royal official went down into the water and Philip baptized him."** (Acts 8:36-38) Now what do you make of that my friends? It tells me the Ethiopian official understood Philip's explanation about Jesus being the fulfillment of Isaiah 53 and further, the official trusted Jesus to be his Savior right there in the chariot! It also tells me Philip had explained what had been happening spiritually both in Jerusalem with Jews trusting Jesus, and also in Samaria with Samaritan's trusting in Jesus for salvation. *Evidently, they both concluded that if God intended the Gospel of Jesus to be for Jews and Samaritans, God also intended that Ethiopian Africans should hear the Gospel and could be saved by Jesus!* And from what we know this Ethiopian official became the first African follower of Jesus!! Isn't that amazing my friends?

Now we don't know exactly which body of water this was where the Ethiopian official was baptized, but what happened next is one of the most amazing moments in Biblical history. The record says: ***"When Philip and the Ethiopian official came up out of the water, the Spirit of the LORD suddenly took Philip away, and the Ethiopian did not see him again, but he went on his way rejoicing! Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and traveled about preaching..."*** (Acts 8:39,40) Now I can't fully explain this, except with God all things are possible, right? (Luke 1:37) What amazes me is that this Ethiopian official evidently accepted it as a spiritual miracle, and continued on his way in his royal chariot, anxious to get home to Ethiopia and report to the Queen about the adventures of his journey. We have no record of what happened in Ethiopia as a result of this miraculous event, *but I can tell you that today, 2000 years later, there is still a strong movement of Jesus followers in Ethiopia!*

Let's pause here and reflect... **how ready are you for something unexplainable to happen in your life?** How available are you to Jesus if HE wants you to make a big change, maybe even leave where you are and go somewhere else to be part of what God wants to do in that place? How alert are you to the questions people ask? Can you discern the guiding of the Holy Spirit so you can be ready, as Philip was, to start with their question and lead them to Jesus?

And here's a song to help us consider these things today my friends...

**Today's Scripture is Acts 8:30-39.**