

The Gospel According to Isaiah  
Acts 8:26-40

Isaiah 53

Isaiah 54:1-15

Responsive Psalm 113

For the past few weeks now we have been seeing this trend in Acts, that persecution has brought about the spread of the gospel to the surrounding areas. Last week in the first half of chapter 8 here, we see that many who fled went to Judah and Samaria, fulfilling what God had told them in the first part of Luke's record of these events, Jesus told them, "You shall be a witness to me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." Now that persecution came upon them in Jerusalem many fled and where ever they went, they preached that Jesus was the Messiah, the one crucified was the one sent to bring salvation to his people. And it would seem that everywhere that they went they were met by large groups who would believe. The word of God and the salvation he brought was spreading like wildfire across the known world.

Today in our text we see the account of Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch. And again we see how the gospel is spreading, again fulfilling what Christ had said....the gospel began in Jerusalem, spread to Judea and Samaria...and now we see its spread into the "ends of the earth." Before we read out text this morning I want to take a bit of time to set the scene and explain a bit why this is equated to Christ's prophesy that the word will go to the ends of the earth. The area that this Eunuch was from, is not from our modern day Ethiopia, but rather from the area that is referenced in the old testament as the land of Cush. It is mentioned in Genesis chapter 10, and again in Ezekiel chapter 30. This area referenced as Ethiopia was actually the Nubian kingdom whose capital was Meroe, which was located south of Egypt in an area which is known today as the Sudan.

To a Jew, this Ethiopian Eunuch would very much be a foreigner and would be from an area that would generally be outside the wider influence of Judaism. But the interesting thing about this man, is that he is returning from Jerusalem back to his home, and reading the book of Isaiah as he does so. There has been some speculation into this, scholars have debated over who this man was, and how he obtained the writings of the prophet. Some say that he is one who may have been influenced by Jews during the time of the Egyptian captivity. It is possible at that time that there would have been some who escaped further south into that region bringing their beliefs with them causing an early influence into that area, but while possible seems unlikely for the simple fact of Deuteronomy 23, which states, "he who is emasculated by crushing or mutilation shall not enter the assembly of the Lord." This would disqualify him from being accepted fully as a follower of Judaism.

But our text says here that he had come to Jerusalem to worship, so somehow he had heard of the God of the Jews, and believed so much so that he would make this long journey to Jerusalem. We also know from the text that he was a man of station, for as we will see when we read the text this morning he had charge over the finances of the Queen of Ethiopia. Which would explain how he would have his own chariot, and could likely afford to purchase his own copy of the writings of Isaiah and have the means to make such a journey. Another historical note, is that it says he served for Queen Candace, which is a translation of the Greek, Kandake. Kandake was not an individual person, but a dynasty, it was a name that was applied to a succession of queens over that region that spanned multiple generations. And this Eunuch, this castrated male held a position high in her court, Eunuchs held powerful positions and were greatly honored and trusted in the courts.

So now that we have laid down a bit of the geology, and history let us read our passage this morning, in Acts, chapter 8:26-40. This account that we are looking at this morning is the first of 3 such accounts that we will see in the coming chapters, first have this Ethiopian Eunuch, then next week we will be looking at the conversion of Paul, and then following that the conversion of Cornelius in chapter 10. Each of these individuals come from various backgrounds, and various religious beliefs, but when they are confronted by the word of God, can do nothing more than believe. After the apostles came down to Samaria to lay hands upon those who believed so they may receive the Holy Spirit, in verse 25, we see that Peter and John went back to Jerusalem, but an angel spoke to Phillip, directing him to go even further south.

The first big stand out thing in this account, is that it is all God's work. God sends an angel to tell Phillip to travel further south, and not to return to Jerusalem with the others, God sent Phillip to this man to share the gospel message with him, to leave the ministry that was going on in Samaria, to an unlikely encounter with a foreigner on a desert road. Think of the implications of this....think of your own experience that God had for you to bring you to him. The people he put in your path to share the gospel. As it says in Jeremiah, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you" Or what Paul wrote to the Ephesians, "Just as HE chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to himself according to the good pleasure of his will." He chose you, before the world was. He chose this Eunuch...before the world was, and he sought him out, and brought him in through the ministry of the word, through the apostle Phillip.

There is none in whom God has chosen, and predestined to be an adopted child that will not come to him. And it is God who seeks out his children, it is he who put Phillip in the path of the Eunuch, it is God who put the Eunuch in the situation he was in so that he could have the scriptures taught to him. Which brings us to another point of this passage. Notice the interpretation of the text in Isaiah here. It says, beginning in this text Philip preached Jesus to him. He did not peach Jesus and point back to the old texts, but rather showed how these old texts pointed to Jesus. The old has been fulfilled in Christ, and should be understood and interpreted through the lens or understanding of the new testament. As we know there are some how believe that through Christ you have been enabled to fulfill the mosaic law, and they teach the new testament through the interpretation of the old, that is using the new testament to point back to the law. But there is no where in the teaching of the gospels, or in acts, or the letters of the Apostles that this type of ministry is practiced. The understanding of scripture is a forward movement, and the old revelation is to be understood through the new revelation.

Although, I do take that back, we do have an example of those who are making a claim of faith point back to the need to fulfill the law. If we just over to Galatians 3, we see an example of this in practice. This idea that now that you have been justified and saved in Christ, he has enabled you to fulfill the law. "Oh foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified?" If you remember a while back when we were going through the book of Galatians...the issue that they were dealing with were these men who had come and were bringing in the practices of the law and Jewish traditions. Telling the believers there in Galatia, now that you have accepted Christ, you can now fully fulfill the law, and traditions. Continuing on verse 2, "This only I want to learn from you; Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are you so foolish having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?"

So we have this example here of those who after receiving the spirit, are now seeking to return to the law. This is no different than what we see in the faith today, of the sabbath keepers, of those who put forth lists and rules of the things you can, and cannot do on certain days of the week, believing the sabbath day given to the Israelite's is something to be kept, disregarding the fact that it has been fulfilled in Christ, and it is he, the person who is our Sabbath rest. Again as Paul said, "Having begun in the spirit, having been sanctified and justified and made perfect by the blood of Jesus Christ in whom rests your salvation, are you now being made perfect by the flesh? By the law? Of course not, it is Christ who fulfilled the law, who took the punishment of it upon himself for our sakes so that we may be justified outside of the law...by the spirit, through grace.

In the case of this Ethiopian Eunuch, did Phillip point him to the law? No, he pointed him to Christ which is what the passage in Isaiah 53 is about. What did Phillip tell him in verse 37? "If you believe with all your heart, strive to obey the law, observe the sabbath and maintain a proper holy diet you may be baptized." No he said, IF you believe with all your heart that Jesus is the Son of God. The one and only requirement for salvation, is to believe upon the Lord Jesus Christ, confess your sins and follow him. A heart that has been renewed by the blood of Christ no longer needs to Mosaic Law as a guide, for the law is written upon the heart of every believer, that is Christ himself...and through the holy spirit's conviction working in us we strive to be more like our savior. And in the end that is the proof of a genuine faith, as James said, a faith without works is dead. Law keeping and works does not justify, but your life will shine forth with the truth of God's word, you will flee that which is evil, and seek that which is good.

Just as Paul wrote in Romans, "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit." There is no judgment against God's people who with the spirit live to God, but for those who put themselves under the law again, have become a slave to that ministry of death. The law condemns, but the spirit gives life. This is why it is not necessary to point back to the law in our witness and ministry. For in it is only found condemnation, instead we should preach Christ, and him crucified and the Holy Spirit will work conviction in the hearts of God's people, as we see happening throughout the ministry of the Apostles recorded here in Acts. None have pointed back to Moses, and have only ever taught about Jesus.

God is sovereign in this work of Salvation, there can be no forcing it, nor can there be any chance of failure if it is of God. It is God who told Phillip to go south so that he may meet this foreigner, it was God who put the desire for understanding and hunger to know more which caused the Eunuch to ask, "Does the prophet write of himself, or of another?" I had Clay read Isaiah 54 this morning because it is he followup to 53 which as we know is the famous passage foretelling of the suffering and death of Christ. Isaiah 54, is the process in which that salvation comes showing that it is all of God.. Right after 53 ends with "He was numbered with the transgressors, and he bore the sin of many and made intercession for the transgressors...54 picks up rejoicing, saying "Sing O Barren, you who have not borne! Break forth into singing and cry aloud you who have not labored with child, For more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married woman." It is obvious that he is not talking about actual child bearing, but rather it is a metaphor for the salvation of Christ brought in chapter 53. Salvation brought not to the holy, but to the transgressors, and the children of God are brought up not from the married woman which would be Israel under the old covenant, but from the desolate, for the new birth brings life from the dead.

Isaiah goes on, talking about the desolate, the barren, the dead....and says Do not fear, for you will not be ashamed nor disgraced for your Maker is your husband. You were desolate, undesirable, lost, alone, afflicted...but as it says in verse 6, The Lord has called you like a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, like a youthful wife when you were refused.” It is God who has made the barren and desolate to give life. With out God it is impossible for such is a supernatural work, without this grand intervention we are all still dead in our sins, lost in hopelessness and shame, just as a barren woman is unable to give birth and bring forth a life, so to is our desolate and barren heart unable to produce life, it must first be renewed by the Spirit of God. So that we may, like Isaiah here, Sing and give praises for the life given to us through God.

As I was studying to prepare for this week, it is this passage that stuck out to me the most, Isaiah 54:7-10. “For a mere moment I have forsaken you, But with great mercies I will gather you. With a little wrath I hid my face from you for a moment, but with everlasting kindness I will have mercy on you Says the Lord, your Redeemer.” This is each and every one of us who believe....before we came to Christ.....for a little while, we who have been chosen since before the foundation of the world were forsaken, left in our sins and rebellion....but with great mercy God gathered us to himself. For a little while, while forsaken... God hid his face from us for a moment, so that we may experience a little wrath, so that our sin drives us to suffering and despair making his everlasting kindness, and mercy toward us all the sweeter. And that suffering, he says in verse 9...” Is like the waters of Noah to Me; For as I have sworn that the waters of Noah would no longer cover the earth, so have I sworn that I would not be angry with you, nor rebuke you.”

For those who are God's, the suffering and despair and wrath that he allows us to feel is limited by his sovereign hand, to go so far and no further. And now that you have been called, you have been redeemed by his everlasting kindness and mercy, he has sworn that the waters of judgment shall no longer cover you, he has lifted you up out of those waters, from death to life and has placed you upon the solid rock of Christ. And you are now so secure upon that rock, it doesn't matter if the mountains should fall, and the hills be removed...his kindness shall not depart, nor shall his covenant of peace be removed. There is nothing that can separate us from the love of our Redeemer, the husband to the barren, and the life giver to the dead. And look at verse 11...”Oh, you afflicted one, tossed with tempest, and not comforted, Behold I will lay your stones with colorful gems, and lay your foundations with sapphires, I will make your pinnacles of rubies, and your gates of crystal, and all of your walls of precious stones.

IT is God who justifies us....we do not make ourselves worthy through hard work and law keeping...it is God who adorns us with precious stones, it is God who sets our foundation upon him and garnishes it with Rubies. We are undesirable, miserable, afflicted, tossed in the tempest, a slave to selfish desires and ambitions, wicked, broken, unloved.....and God takes us, calls us to himself and says I will make you beautiful to me. And he adorns us with faith, with his love, with his mercy, kindness, and grace....we who were lost, have now become precious to him. Then in verse 13 he says....All your children shall be taught by the Lord, and great shall be the peace of your children.” The barren widow, the desolate ones shall bear. God has given us a new life, and that life bears witness of him, and likewise bears new life through the ministry of the gospel.

It is all God, through the holy spirit that brings the new birth. And now, that we have been brought out of the condemnation of sin and death, to be joined to the one who gives us life, there is therefore no longer a need to be tied down and limited by the law, for we are justified by the spirit in Christ Jesus, we are called to walk in the spirit..God has adorned with the precious stones of his salvation, we are justified by him, and we are sanctified through him. And our lives and our works are simply a reflection of his work with in us.