

ARE YOU SURE LORD?

Text: Acts 8:1-8; 26-40; 12:8,9

Key Word: Assurance

Key Thought: God's Ways are Often Not our Ways

Letting Go

******* A man named Jack was walking along a steep cliff one day, when he accidentally got too close to the edge and fell. On the way down he grabbed a branch, which temporarily stopped his fall. He looked down and to his horror saw that the canyon fell straight down for more than a thousand feet.

He couldn't hang onto the branch forever, and there was no way for him to climb up the steep wall of the cliff. So Jack began yelling for help, hoping that someone passing by would hear him and lower a rope or something.

HELP! HELP! *Is anyone up there? "HELP!"*

He yelled for a while, but no one heard him. He was about to give up when he heard a voice. "Jack, Jack. Can you hear me?"

"Yes, yes! I can hear you. I'm down here!"

"I can see you, Jack. Are you all right?"

"Yes, but who are you, and where are you?"

"I am the Lord, Jack. I'm everywhere."

"The Lord? You mean, GOD?"

"That's Me."

"God, please help me! I promise if, you'll get me down from here, I'll stop sinning. I'll be a really good person. I'll serve You for the rest of my life."

"Easy on the promises, Jack. Let's get you off from there; then we can talk."

"Now, here's what I want you to do. Listen carefully."

"I'll do anything, God. Just tell me what to do."

"Okay. Let go of the branch."

"What?"

"I said, let go of the branch. Just trust Me. Let go."

Everything went silent for few more moments .

Finally Jack yelled, **"HELP! HELP! IS ANYONE ELSE UP THERE?"** *******

There are certain Bible stories that remain in my mind with simple clarity. This happens to be one of them that I'm finding is making more sense in these days. That's why I've titled it **"Are You Sure Lord?"** I'm sure we've all had times in our lives when we question our thoughts. Is it a thought that God has placed into your mind? Is it my own thoughts? Or is the devil up to dirty tricks? Let me remind you that it is not our thoughts that should always guide us. It is also not our emotions or feeling that should guide us.

In 1975 Dr. James Dobson wrote a popular book titled **"Emotions - Can you Trust Them?"** He focussed his thoughts upon guilt, romantic love, anger and how can we interpret our impressions and ultimately understand God's will. These classic books contain ageless truth.

Lets Take Some Time to See What God's Intervention into Philip's Life Tells Us about the Way God Speaks.

I. UNDERSTANDING THE CURRENT PRACTISES

II. UNDERSTANDING THE CURRENT PARTICIPANTS

III. UNDERSTANDING THE CURRENT POSSIBILITIES

I. UNDERSTANDING THE CURRENT ISSUES PRACTISES

When I have a problem understanding certain accounts in the Bible, I usually take some time to study the customs and manners of the time period; I also try to understand issues surrounding the events. This often takes time to study the different ethnic groups which includes their history and their belief systems.

So lets begin by understanding some of the important issues surrounding this portion of Scripture. We must realize that abrupt changes had taken place in the religious practices in this region. Jesus had been crucified, died, rose again and ascended back to heaven. Only ten days after the ascension the Spirit of God was outpoured more than 120 disciples who had gathered for these ten days in the Upper Room. This brought about a vast difference in the foundation that the early Church began to be led by while the New Testament was going to be written.

Thousands of people came to know the Lord as their Saviour. They were full of excitement and felt the great need of sharing their new life with everyone whether they were eager to listen or opposed to their words and actions. Peter and John were used of God to heal a well-known beggar who was lame from his birth and was being carried to the gate Beautiful.

The gate called Beautiful (Hebrew - Yafeh) also known as the Nikanor. It was the most beautiful of all the gates made largely of Corinthian brass and plated over with gold and silver. It was 75 feet high and 60 feet wide. It was used by travellers from Joppa where Peter would be give a vision three times in Acts 10. This Beautiful Gate led directly into the Court of the Gentiles and then the Court of the Women. Up to this time there were plenty of visual reminders that segregation was clearly meant to be maintained with punishment by death for offenders.

I. UNDERSTANDING THE CURRENT ISSUES PRACTISES (Contd.)

This simple act of reaching out and healing this lame man brought about the beginning of backlash toward the early Church and its leadership. The Sanhedrin sent the captain of the temple guard and some of the Sadducees (who objected the teaching of the resurrection of Christ) to stop this new teaching before the people caught hold of it. By this time the believers had grown to 5,000 (Acts 4:1-4). They interrogated them and conferred among themselves what to do. This teaching of Jesus was quickly getting the attention of the people.

“Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.

19. But Peter and John replied, “Which is right in God’s eyes: to listen to you, or to him? You be the judges!

20. As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.”

21 After further threats they let them go. They could not decide how to punish them, because all the people were praising God for what had happened.

22. For the man who was miraculously healed was over forty years old.”

Acts 4:18-22

Peter and John were excited to meet with the growing number of believers and share what had happened. They quoted the words of David (noted as our father).

“Why do the nations rage (conspire - Psalm 2:1) and the peoples plot in vain?

26. The kings of the earth rise up and the rulers band together against the Lord and against his anointed one.”

Acts 4:25,26 (cf. - Psalm 2:1-2)

“Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness.

30. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.”

31. After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.

Acts 4:29-31

II. UNDERSTANDING THE CURRENT PARTICIPANTS

As the Church grew in numbers and influence the persecution as well as the needs became greater. Stephen who had been set apart to serve as a deacon along with Philip and five others became the first martyr of the Church. The floggings and opposition just fanned the flame of these zealous new Christians.

“On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.”

Acts 8:1

The wall of division was being torn down rapidly and many Greeks accepted the Lord and long with Jewish priests. And this was just the beginning. It was time to head north of Judea and reach out to the Samaritans. This is where we begin to see Philip involved beginning with what some manuscripts say *“the city of Samaria”* (which was renamed to Sabaste or Neapolis which is modern day Nablus).

Samaritans came about when the 12 tribes of Israel broke off into 10 tribes who kept the name Israel to identify all of them and Judah to identify the 2 southern tribes of Judah and Benjamin keeping to the name Judah. Jeroboam became the king of Israel and Rehoboam became the king of Judah. Jeroboam quickly made changes and set up idol worship in both Dan and Bethel. They no longer went to Jerusalem on their yearly pilgrimages.

In time the Assyrian army led by Sennacherib defeated the Israelites. You would think his name had something to do with cherubs but that would be wrong. It is actually composed of three words “SIN”(a name of one of their gods); “ahu” (meaning “brothers”) and “riabu” (meaning “to replace”). These combine to give the meaning *“sin has replaced by lost brothers.”* He was ultimately murdered by his both sons as they competed for the throne in Nineveh.

Eventually they also only accepted the first 5 books of the Old Testament (Pentateuch) and rejected the poetic and prophetic books. The Israelites also intermarried with the Assyrian women (Deuteronomy 7:3-4). They were eventually referred to as *“dogs”* or *“half breeds”* similar to some of the divisions we have experienced in our Canadian Metis communities.

II. UNDERSTANDING THE CURRENT PARTICIPANTS (Contd.)

So it is clear that Philip was navigating into uncharted waters when he began to preach about Jesus the Messiah in Samaria. There was also no doubt that God approved of what he was doing.

“When the crowds heard Philip and saw the signs he performed, they all paid close attention to what he said.

7. For with shrieks, impure spirits came out of many, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed.

8. So there was great joy in that city.”

Acts 8:6-8

I’m not trying to sound pessimistic when I say that we must always keep on our guard especially when things are going well and God’s Word is advancing in unexpected ways. I think the best way to deal with this “**participant**” is by considering the following quote.

“What Satan could not accomplish through destruction he here sought to accomplish through deception; the lion becomes the serpent ([John 8:44](#)). Simon the sorcerer made a profession of faith in Christ and was even baptized; but subsequent events proved that his heart was never changed . . . Simon was in the bond of iniquity. Simon was a Satanic counterfeit, a "child of the devil." Wherever the true seed is sown, Satan sows his counterfeits.”

Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the New Testament
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The last participants that I want to highlight are the apostles Peter and John. We need to be reminded that God uses us together to build His kingdom. The apostles that were remaining in Jerusalem praying and immersing themselves in God’s Word were ready when the opportunity arrived to go and help in Samaria. They helped by laying hands on the believers and witnessing God’s Holy Spirit fill them (Acts 8:14-17).

“None of us have got it all together, but all of us together got it all.”

III. UNDERSTANDING THE CURRENT POSSIBILITIES

It would definitely appear that God would now send in more troops to expand the work of this amazing outpouring. Remember this was not a revival or even a renewal. After all we tend to believe that God always works through us. I'm not suggesting He doesn't. But I would propose that God had just saved, healed, delivered and filled the Samaritans with His Holy Spirit. It was now THEIR time to pass it onto THEIR people to avoid an unneeded division.

So what happened next reminds us to keep open because even though God never changes, He does use a vast variety of ways to reach out to those who have a hunger for Him and His Word.

“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

What! Did you say go to the Judean wilderness? ARE YOU SURE LORD? There are few communities because the people are transients. You can't establish a Church with the nomadic Bedouin clans that roamed the Judean desert? Just when we think we've got God figured out, He throws us a curve ball. God knows how to adapt to changing situations without compromising His established Word.

*“So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of the Kandake (which means “queen of the Ethiopians”). This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship,
28. and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the Book of Isaiah the prophet.
29. The Spirit told Philip, “Go to that chariot and stay near it.”*

Acts 8:27-29

The distance between Jerusalem and Gaza is just less than 100 km as the crow flies. It was the main route for those travelling to Egypt. It's not exactly where you would expect to meet an Ethiopian eunuch sitting and reading from the scroll of Isaiah. It would also be unusual to catch up to a person travelling in a chariot. That is probably why Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the Ethiopian reading the exact Scripture referring to Messiah.

“The eunuch asked Philip, “Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?”

Acts 8:34

III. UNDERSTANDING THE CURRENT POSSIBILITIES (Contd.)

How much easier can it be? The surprises of this story are not over yet! They travel along the route until they came to water. It is then that the Eunuch asked.

“Look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptized?”

Acts 8:36

The answer that Philip gives him is not written in all manuscripts.

“Philip said, ‘If you believe with all your heart, you may.’ The eunuch answered, ‘I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.’”

Acts 8:37

The story ends just as dramatic as it began.

*“When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing.
40. Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and traveled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea.”*

Acts 8:39,40

We don't know the exact distance to Azotus (Ashdod was one of the five chief Philistine cities in the OT - I Samuel 5:1) because we're not sure of the final place they were at the time of the baptism. Yet it would be reasonable to say that Philip was transported more than 30 km.

I'm not sure why anyone would think that living and serving God is a boring thing to do without many blessings. Rejoicing is written all over this Biblical story. Are you prepared and available for what God has in store in the near future? I truly hope so.

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Date: Feb 14/21

Place: FCA

Time: 10:30 Am

Song: Famous For

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II. UNDERSTANDING THE CURRENT PARTICIPANTS

Acts 8:1; Deuteronomy 7:3-4; Acts 8:6-8; Acts 8:14-17

III. UNDERSTANDING THE CURRENT POSSIBILITIES

Acts 8:26; Acts 8:27-29; Acts 8:34; Acts 8:36; Acts 8:37; Acts 8:39,40; I Samuel 5:1