

Believe and Be Baptized//Acts 8:25–40

Hey everybody, Happy Easter... My name is Pastor J.D., I'm 1 of the pastors here at the SC. Good to have everybody with us, especially our guests... I look around and I see some of you that I haven't seen since this time last year... But, at any rate, it's good to have you guys with us.

Today we're going to look at the story about the 1st African who met Jesus. We don't know his name, but we know he was a powerful guy. He was the secretary-treasurer for the entire southern kingdom of Africa. On the outside, he's a guy that has it all together, but on the inside, he doesn't know God and he's searching. I'm going to tell you his story, and then offer you a chance, at the end, to make the same decision he made, to believe on Jesus and make a public profession of that through baptism.

The question for you today as you look at this story will be, *"Have you met Jesus like this?"* Everybody's story is different, but if you've met Jesus, then you have a story.

Before we meet Jesus the Bible refers to us as "lost," and "alienated from God," and "without hope in the world." When we meet Jesus we are "found," "reconciled to God" and saved. The story of how you met Jesus is called a "conversion story" or a "testimony."

If you've met Jesus, you have one. You may not remember the exact day or the hour or all the details of what happened, but you should know that you know Jesus, and be able to talk about how you came to know Him.

On the other hand, if you don't know that you know Him, and you can't talk about how you came to know Him, then it's likely that you

don't really know Him at all. A lot of times I ask people if they know Jesus and they're like, "Well, I think so... I try hard. I'm doing my best. Sometimes I feel like I do." "So, you're not sure that you know God." "Not totally."

- But that doesn't make any sense. If you are married, and I ask you, on a scale of 1–10, how sure you are that you are married... You should probably say, "10!"
 - *I know that I know my wife.* I can tell you when I met her and fell in love with her.
 - You may not remember the exact moment when you 1st saw your spouse, but you probably remember the first time you *noticed* them and felt attracted to them. (You're like, "Naw, I just paid my money and she showed up in the mail").
 - I remember Veronica and my 1st date, our wedding day, when she showed up in the mail... If you asked me, on a scale of 1 to 10, how sure I am that I am married to her, I'd say, "10!" I woke up with her this morning. (She wasn't a 10 when I woke up with her...)
- Well, if it's how it is with another human being, then if you know the God of the Universe, how would you not know that you know Him?
- **So here's the question:** Do you have a story? And do you know that you know God, and that you have a personal relationship with Jesus?

So, let's look at this story... Turn with me to Acts **Acts 8:26–40**

Let me catch give you the context. At the beginning of Acts 8, Christianity literally explodes in Samaria. Samaritans had been, traditionally, enemies of the Jews, but the Gospel had taken root there through the preaching of a Jewish man, and literally the whole city had come to Christ. They're having meetings there with huge crowds and tons of people have given their lives to Christ.

²⁶ Now (in the middle of this) an angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” Narrator adds: (This is a desert (deserted) place.)

- Gaza... was this little nasty, out of the way town. Like one of those old redneck towns you go through on the way to Myrtle Beach where you’re driving down the road and the speed limit is 65 and all of the sudden, without warning, it changes to 25, and there’s 9 police cars hiding behind a sign... and you can just tell it makes their day to write you that ticket. “My job, son, is to ruin your vacation before it starts.” While they are writing you the ticket, you look around and say, “Who lives here? What are you people protecting?” Gaza was that kind of place.
- And more than that, it was a Philistine city. Now, even if you didn’t grow up in church, you know that Philistines, in the eyes of the Jews, are the bad guys.
- Gaza is a nasty, dirty little town filled with Philistines. When you said, “Go to Gaza,” what kind of sound do you think the people of Israel made?
- (So, here is Philip, a Jew, and he is sent 1st to the city of the Samaritans to preach the Gospel and then to the city of the Philistines. Do you see what is happening? The Gospel is tearing down walls of hostility. The church is the one place where people of different races, different nationalities, different socioeconomic classes—people who are traditional enemies, come together, because **they have a common problem, sin, and a common solution, Jesus.**)

²⁷ And he rose and went.

And here is what is significant: *God sends him away from all the excitement and the big crowds and makes him walk 165 miles down to a nasty, deserted town called Gaza because he has an appointment for him 1 man. 1 man. He leaves the crowds and throngs of people for an appointment with 1 man.*

And there (passing through Gaza) was an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure.

- Candace was not a name in that day, but a title, like “Caesar.”
- Today, Ethiopia, is a little small country. In that day, Ethiopia was basically everything in Africa south of the Nile River. Huge area.
- This guy was the treasurer of the entire region. This is a powerful dude.
- And he is a eunuch, which meant he’d been castrated... if you were going to work in palace with the queen, they wanted to make sure you didn’t get any bright ideas, so they took care of that. (If you have any more questions about that, just ask your campus pastor, they’ll be happy to explain that more in depth to you)

He had come to Jerusalem to worship

- For whatever reason was curious about the God of the Jews... they had lots of religions in Ethiopia; but they worshipped things like the sun, various animals... but maybe this guy had the sense that there was more out there... a God larger than the sun and the animals, a God behind creation and larger than creation. So he’d gone to Jerusalem,

²⁸ and was returning, seated in his chariot,

- I grew up in a church where they did flannel graph, and I always got the image of a guy in one of those little chariots... it’s like a semi-circle, half-turtle shell, he’s riding along and there’s a guy beside him playing the ukulele (and my teacher would move it along the board).
- This was not that kind of chariot. The journey from Ethiopia to Jerusalem was over 1200 miles... this guy is not riding that way, 1200 miles, in a little semicircle turtle shell beside a guy playing a ukulele. This would have been more like a grand carriage, carried on the shoulder by 8 guys. This is how our campus pastors carry me to lunch each Friday.

...and he was reading the prophet Isaiah.²⁹ And the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over and join this chariot."³⁰ So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?"

- I love this part, because I've always wondered what the sequence was... All it says is, "He goes up to the chariot." What does that mean... was Philip just a fast runner, and he comes up beside the chariot, kind of looks in... "Whatcha reading?" "Isaiah." "You understand that?"

³¹ And he said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?"

And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

- And you know who was really ticked off about that... The 4 guys carrying the chariot on their shoulders. They had to be like, "oh, you've got to be kidding me."

OK, so here's what you should see:

- In the midst of all that is going on in Samaria...big crowds, lots of people coming to Christ, we see that God is intensely concerned with 1 guy... 1 guy, He's seeking 1 guy... and He's been preparing him, planting questions in his heart, drawing him—this guy knows he's missing something, but he needs someone to help guide him... and God has sent a messenger to him.
- That's what has been happening to some of you. Here you are in the middle of a huge group of people, lots of crowds, excitement, but God has an appointment with *you*.
- And He's been preparing you. He's been planting questions in your heart. You may not have even known they were from Him...
 - But maybe it is that you have been thinking about eternity... realizing that you are going to die and then all the stuff you've accumulated on earth is not going to matter. It's just going to be you and whether or not

you know God. That's the voice of God speaking inside of you.

- Maybe it's just an internal sense that something is not right, that there's more... *I mean, Do you ever think, there's got to be more to life than this... going to work, coming home, watch TV, have some friends over... looking forward to a summer vacation that wasn't quite as good as we thought it was going to be, then back to the grind again. Just over and over again.* And there's something inside you saying, "There's more and you're missing it!" That's God... (it's what the Bible describes as "deep calling unto deep.")
- Maybe it has been an experience of pain that makes you realize how fragile life is... I spoke once to a professional athlete who graduated from one of our great universities right here whose life had literally been ruined by a motorcycle wreck... he'd lost his contract...
- Here's what I know... God has been preparing a number of you... and that you are here is not an accident. That person that invited you—you may not have realized it, and they may not even have realized it—but God was in that invitation, and He is drawing you.

This eunuch, who knew something was missing, had gone to Jerusalem to try and find God, but he was returning home more confused than ever. He went to Jerusalem to find God and couldn't do it, so God found Him, and sent a messenger to him.

- Once I sat next to a lady on a plane... I was on a flight to Taiwan. She had gone to Shanghai to find God. She'd been there like 3 months. No job. "Who are you people who have the luxury of just going to Shanghai to find God? I was like, "Well, did you find Him?" She said, "No, and I'm so confused, while I was home visiting some relatives I heard this guy on the radio named David Jeremiah and he sounded like he knew God, and so I got his book, but, I'm halfway in it and I'm more

confused than ever. I've been asking God, if he's there, to please find a way to explain himself to me."

- "Are you making this up?"
- "Your prayers are answered."

Please don't think I'm taking too much on myself. You're like, "Who are you to speak for God?" I am no one special, but I have open in front of me God's word to us, and just like Philip did for the eunuch, I am going to explain it to you.

Just like the eunuch, you need someone to guide you... and that is why you are here.

³² Now the passage of the Scripture that the eunuch was reading was this: *"Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter and like a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he opens not his mouth. ³³ In his humiliation justice was denied him..."*

- This is a quotation from Isaiah 53, which was written almost about Jesus almost 800 years before He came. Isaiah prophesied that the Messiah would be like a lamb led to the slaughter; He would be wrongfully accused of crimes he did not commit, but would not even open his mouth.
- This came true, to the letter. When Jesus stood before Pilate he was accused of heinous crimes he had not done, but he sat there silent, even though he was completely innocent of all that He was being accused of.
 - Why didn't he open his mouth and defend Himself? When you are being accused, in court, and you make no response, what are you conceding? Guilt! Jesus was conceding guilt! But not His own, as He had no guilt (He was the one person to have lived a perfect life). He stood silent because he was consenting to my guilt. You see, behind Pilate and the Jewish leaders pointing at Him Jesus saw the hand of God pointing at Him, accusing Him of my sin, and your sin, and Jesus kept

His mouth shut because He was going to be beaten and punished and put through hell for our sin.

- He died as a lamb. I explained this 2 weeks ago, Lambs were sacrificial animals... every year in Israel the father of a family would take a lamb to the temple and lay it on the altar and confess the sins of the family over it and while he was confessing the priest would slit the throat of the lamb and the lamb would die for the sins of that family in the place of that family.
- Here is the Gospel in 4 words: **Jesus in my place.**
 - Theologians call that "substitutionary atonement."
 - Jesus lived the life I was supposed to have lived, died the death that I had been condemned to die, in my place.
 - That's it; that's how simple it is; that's the Gospel. **"Jesus in my place." (Say it...)**
 - The Gospel declares to you that Jesus has done everything necessary to save you. It's not instructions to try a little harder, or to add a little religion to your life.
 - Around here we say that the Gospel is not good advice, it's good news.

³⁴ And the eunuch said to Philip, "About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?"

- What a lead in!
- **Fajar.**
- Who is this about? It's about Jesus. It's all about Jesus! He's the point of all of it.
 - Around here we say there are two ways to spell religion: Religion is spelled DO... a bunch of stuff you are supposed to *do*, and if I do do what I'm supposed to do, God will accept me; the Gospel is not spelled DO, it is spelled DONE; I am accepted because of what Jesus has done for me.

- We preach Jesus! **Jesus in my place.** The hymn writer said it like this, *“Bearing shame and scoffing rude, in my place condemned he stood, sealed my pardon with His blood, Hallelujah, what a Savior.”*
 - Our message is simple because Jesus did all the work; our worship is intense because Jesus did it all in our place.
 - In the cross we stand silenced because we see that what we deserved was punishment. What God gave us was love by taking our punishment.
 - We stand silenced by the severity of our sin, and stunned with gratefulness at the glory of our God.
- That’s why our message is simple and our worship is intense.
- It’s about Jesus. It’s all about Jesus. I don’t want to know if you’re religious or how good of a person you are. It’s not about that. It’s about Him. Do you know Him?

³⁵ Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus. ³⁶

And as they were going along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, “See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?” ³⁸ And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him.

- 2 things you see here:

(1) The eunuch made a decision

- Salvation is a gift, but you have to receive it! What do you have to do to receive a gift?
- Ambulance. You don’t have to “do” anything, you just consent to it. That’s what believing the Gospel is like. You don’t do anything, you just consent. Have you done that? Have you ever said “Yes?” to Jesus?
- Or like a chair... Let that chair represent what Christ has done for you...salvation is consenting to it, resting in it... yes, I receive it.

- Have you ever done that? I want to give you a chance to do that right now... then make one final point.
 - Bow your heads... (Not a good time to gather your stuff, because we’re not quite done.) “I believe, and I receive.”

(2) Upon making the decision, he was baptized immediately

- You see, he asked the question, *“What hinders me from being baptized,”* and evidently Philip said, “Nothing,” because the next thing you see is them both down in the water on the side of the road getting baptized.
- You’re like, *“Whoa, whoa... baptism? Aren’t we skipping a few steps? Don’t we need some ceremony... some classes; some confirmation; walk an aisle, pray a prayer? Don’t we need to prove we’re sincere by living the Christian life for about 3 years with no missed Sundays at church, no alcohol binging, and a doctrinal exam in front of some elders?”*
- ***In the book of Acts, baptism always immediately follows conversion. For example, let me walk you through every baptism in Acts:***
 - **Acts 2:38**, Peter preached, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins...” and, *that day*, “all those who believed the word were baptized (3000 of them)!”
 - **Acts 8:12**, Philip preached in Samaria, and a bunch of Samaritans believed, and they were baptized immediately.¹
 - **Acts 9**, Paul was led back by the hand to Damascus after God blinded him and converted him on the Damascus road, and immediately after Paul got there, he was baptized.

¹ Interestingly, this even included one “Simon the Sorcerer,” whom they later discovered had not been truly saved. In other words, we realize that there might be some people who, even after we do our best to be certain they get the Gospel, turn out to not really get it. It even happened with the Apostles!

- **Acts 10:47**, Cornelius and his garrison of Roman soldiers were baptized apparently seconds after hearing the Gospel for the very first time. They heard it, believed, and the Apostles said, “They believe, and there is water... what hinders them from being baptized?” Nothing?
- **Acts 16:15**, Lydia was baptized on the same day she trusted in Jesus.
- **Acts 16:34**, the Philippian jailor believed at midnight and was baptized before dawn of the next day.
- **Acts 18:8**, Paul preached in Corinth, a number of the Corinthians believe, and they are baptized immediately.
- You get the point? In the New Testament, there was never a gap between when you trusted Christ and when you were baptized.
- The reason they did it this way (I think) is because Jesus had made baptism part of the Great Commission. In Matthew 28:18–20, the last thing He had said to the Apostles was, “Go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.” Baptism was to be our 1st act of becoming a disciple.
 - Baptism is the 1st evidence we have surrendered to Christ's Lordship.
 - You've just met Jesus, the Lord of life, you've just been saved from death and hell, you're supposed to show it!
 - You don't just say, “Oh, that's nice... what's for lunch?” You do something! You show it! You get baptized.
- Today, if you were to ask that question in most churches, “What hinders me from being baptized?” You would get a litany of answer: Go to our classes... Do x, y, and z. *Forget about your classes.* That comes later. Be baptized now. That is, if you want do it the Bible way. And that's what we want, right?

Here's the question for you? Have you been baptized since becoming a believer? We're going to give you a chance to do that today! We have extra clothes for you... and we have water at all of our campuses. What hinders you from being baptized? If you believe in Jesus with all your heart, you may. Today is your day.

But 1st, let's finish our story: **39 And when they came up out of the water,**

- By the way, “Came up out of the water.” Not a lot of sprinkling going on here. They were both *in* the water. Sorry. Just had to point that out.
- When they came up out of the water...

the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more,

- I love this... teleportation. That's traveling 1st class.

...and went on his way rejoicing. 40 But Philip found himself at Azotus.. (He's like, what the... where am I?)

- *Two great advantages here that come from the teleportation.*
Advantage #1: That teleportation happened in front of everybody in the eunuch's caravan ... which means the Ethiopian eunuch had a great platform from which to share the Gospel with everybody else in the caravan... for the next 1100 miles. “Hey, see that guy that teleported... he got a message he want me to give to you.”

The ancient historian Eusebius says that this eunuch (and his band of servants) went on to plant the first church in Africa. Isn't that great, before there are any Western, European converts in Acts, we have a thriving church meeting in the capital of Africa!

Advantage #2 to this teleportation: Philip didn't have to walk the 165 miles home. Jehovah-Jireh.

So, here's the question now for you... if you've met Jesus, have you been baptized?

I hear excuses for why people have not been baptized:

- **People say, "It's not that important..."** uh, excuse me? Who are you to say God's first command to you is not that important? If you won't obey God in this one small step, why do you think you'll obey God in the other areas of your life? That's a terrible way to start your Christian life. That's like telling your wife on your wedding night you're going to go out with some old single friends to a club. Not the way to start your marriage. The way to start your walk with Jesus is not by postponing what he's clearly told you to do.
- **You say, "I was baptized as a baby."** Again, no offense, but baptism is presented in the Bible as your own profession of faith. When you were baptized as a baby, that was a statement of your parents' faith... and thank God for that. But now it is time to ratify their decision and declare your own faith in Jesus!
- **You say, "I'm not ready."** If you have trusted Christ, you are ready. Baptism is only the public profession of the inward reality... Baptism says to everyone watching, "I know that I'm a sinner and that I need Jesus. I'm ready to publicly proclaim that He is my Savior." If you say you've accepted Him but you're not ready to go public with that, then I have to wonder how serious you are about Him. You just met God! You need to show it.
- You say, **"Well, it's really inconvenient."** Don't want to go over the top here... but Jesus hung on a cross naked for 6 hours for your salvation, and getting wet in a pool of warm water is too inconvenient for you.
- **You say, "But I don't have a change clothes!"** We have them for you... all sizes. Dark colored T-shirts and towels and hairdryers and personal stylists to get your hair back to the exact form you put it in this morning. (Kidding about that last part... but we have the clothes and towels and hairdryers.)

- **"But I came with people."** *They'll wait.*

Here's what's going to happen. I'm going to pray... And then, your campus pastor is going to come at all of our campuses and give you instructions.

Bow heads... by show of hands:

- How many of you prayed today to receive Christ?
- How many of you have not been baptized since you received Christ, and you are ready to do it today? (If you raised your hand on the 1st question it should be up for the 2nd)

Prayer: *"God, help these to be bold in this 1st step of obedience. When their cp gives them the opportunity, may they step out boldly, and take this step which will mark the beginning of a brand new life for them..."*

Bullpen:

And here is an interesting factoid: Before the 1st European ever meets Jesus, an African does; it's also interesting to me that the church is growing faster in Africa today than anywhere in the world. (I've told you before, on any given Sunday, more Christians attend church in Kenya than in Canada; and there are more Presbyterians at church in Ghana than in Scotland).

Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth.

Anne Rice?

- I've told you before, on any given Sunday, more Christians attend church in Kenya than in Canada; and there are more Presbyterians at church in Ghana than in Scotland

Whoa, whoa... baptism? Aren't we skipping a few steps? Don't we need some ceremony... some classes; some confirmation; walk an aisle, pray a prayer? Prove we're sincere by living the Christian life for about 3 years with no missed Sundays, no alcohol binging, and generosity?