

## *To God Alone Be The Glory*

Let's talk about growing tomatoes at home. There are two kinds of tomato growers: those who pinch off the suckers and those who don't. Which kind are you? Some people believe that by pinching off the suckers their tomato plants will be more fruitful. Others say that suckers produce as much fruit as the regular branches. I've tried it both ways, and I can't tell the difference. But at some point I always prune back some of the tomato branches so the plants will produce better fruit. In this way tomatoes are similar to the grapes Jesus was talking about in today's Gospel (John 15:1-8). When you prune them, they become more fruitful.

The same thing is true of believers in Jesus: when you prune them, they become more fruitful. And Jesus said, *"This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples"* (John 15:8). "Show yourselves to be my disciples." That's the same message that today's first lesson (Acts 8:26-40) wants us to take home: **SHOW YOURSELF TO BE CHRIST'S DISCIPLE.** Be like Philip and be like the Ethiopian eunuch.

Do you know where we first hear about Philip in the New Testament? In Acts 6, two chapters before our text. He's one of the seven deacons which the church chose to make sure that all of the widows in the church were getting fed. The only

problem: soon after the church set up their terrific system to care for their elderly widows, a terrible persecution broke out in Jerusalem. And the church scattered all over the region and apparently took their widows with them.

What was Philip to do? He went into Samaria. We're not told why, but if you think about it, it was a good strategy for Philip to live among the Samaritans. Most Jews hated the Samaritans. So the anti-Jesus Jews probably wouldn't go looking in Samaria for any pro-Jesus Jews like Philip.

We're told Philip was filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 6:5). One day shortly after he arrived in Samaria, it must have dawned on him, "Hey, these Samaritans are waiting for the Messiah too, just like we Jews were. I better tell them Jesus is the Messiah." And the Lord blessed Philip's witnessing. Many Samaritans believed.

When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that the Samaritans had accepted the Word of God, they sent Peter and John to them (Acts 8:14). And the church just kept growing and growing. Why? Probably because the Samaritans kept bringing their friends to hear the good news about Jesus. That's usually the way a church grows—God's regular people invite someone they know to read the Bible with them at home or to come hear God's Word at church. Most churches whose people invite their friends and

acquaintances—those churches grow. ‘Inviting people to know Jesus better’ is one way that Christians bear fruit, showing themselves to be Christ’s disciples.

Sometimes the Lord does things that seem crazy to us at first. Here’s Philip, working in this fruitful Samaritan field, enjoying a huge harvest of souls. And what does the Lord do? He tells Philip to leave. Uh huh. <sup>26</sup>“Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” <sup>27</sup>So [Philip] started out. Did you notice, Philip doesn’t say, “Why, God? Can’t you see I’m doing something important here?” He doesn’t say, “But God, it’s hot and dry down there in the desert.” He doesn’t say, “I don’t want to. Let someone else do it?” God said, “Go,” and Philip went. \*Children, when your mother says, “Come here,” do you say, “Coming, Mommy” and go to her right away with a happy heart? And when she says, “Let’s go,” do you stop what you’re doing and go right away with a happy heart? If you do, then you are just like Philip in our story. You are showing yourself to be a follower of Jesus, someone who obeys right away. Obey your parents with a happy heart—obey everyone in authority with a happy heart.

What did Philip find on the road when he obeyed the Lord? He found an Ethiopian eunuch. What’s a eunuch? A man whose male parts were deformed, or crushed in his childhood, or cut off—just

the kind of man you could trust around your daughters if you were rich enough to afford household servants. This eunuch was the CFO (chief financial officer) for Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. He was on his way home from Jerusalem where he had worshiped the Lord. We’re not sure how he became a believer in the promised Messiah, but a believer he was. He may have heard about the coming Messiah from the many Jews who moved to Egypt and Ethiopia in the five centuries before the Messiah was born.

So the eunuch didn’t know about Jesus yet. But he still went to church. Isn’t that amazing? And, let’s see: how far is it from Ethiopia to Jerusalem? A long way. But this man wasn’t about to let a couple hundred miles in a bumpy chariot (or probably a wagon) keep him away from church. Don’t you just love it when God’s people quietly but faithfully show themselves to be Christ’s disciples? Faithful church attendance is one of the clearest and quietest ways. And if you miss a Sunday these days, you can get the sermon or the whole worship video online or in print from the table across from the elevator. Almost no one has a good excuse for skipping church anymore.

And what’s this eunuch doing as he rolls down the road? He’s reading. Reading what? Reading Isaiah. What’s Isaiah from? The Bible. This man doesn’t know who Jesus is yet, but he’s reading

his Bible! He either brought the Bible from home, or he bought it while he was in Jerusalem on this trip. Do you know how much Bibles cost back then? Take your hourly wage and multiply it by the number of hours it would take you to hand copy the 66 chapters of Isaiah. That's about a week's wages—for one book of the Bible. But this man wasn't about to let several hundred dollars keep him from reading the Bible. Isn't it thrilling it when people quietly but faithfully show themselves to be Christ's disciples? Bible reading is one of the clearest and quietest ways.

<sup>29</sup>*The Spirit told Philip, "Go to that chariot and stay near it" (literally "associate yourself with it").* Notice Philip didn't challenge God with: "You called me away from a thriving ministry among many Samaritans in order to talk to one individual?!?" No, Philip didn't say this. But if he had, the Lord could have responded, "Yes, I want everyone to hear the good news. Every single soul is a precious treasure to me. That's why I had my Son die on the cross for them all." And you don't hear Philip objecting, "But he's not from my culture. His skin color is not the same as mine. I'll have trouble understanding his accent." No, Philip just obeys. He runs right up to the chariot and offers to help the man understand the Bible. He sees a need and offers to fill it. That's how you make friends: see a need and offer to fill it. This is the second time Philip has shown how eager he is for people of other

cultures to have salvation. And there's only one way for people to have salvation—through faith in Jesus. Philip's example reminds us that God wants us to be just as color-indifferent and accent-deaf as he is. When you look at a person, no matter what culture, show yourself to be Christ's disciple by thinking, "For this one too Christ died."

<sup>30</sup>*"Do you understand what you are reading?" Philip asked. "How can I," [the eunuch] said, "unless someone explains it to me?" So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.* What a great example this Ethiopian sets for us! He's not just reading his Bible, he's willing to ask for help to understand what the Lord means. Friends, this is another way you can show yourself to be Christ's disciple: ask a fellow Christian to help you understand.

<sup>32</sup>*The eunuch was reading this passage of Scripture: "He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before his shearer is silent, so he did not open his mouth. In his humiliation he was deprived of justice. Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth." The eunuch asked Philip, "Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?" Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.* Now we get to the heart of the matter: Christ. I've been urging you to show yourself to be Christ's disciple. But there is danger in how I've been

going about this. Whenever you compare yourself to someone else, one of two bad results can happen. Either you say, with a little bit of pride, “Yeah, I do that, and I do that, and I do that—I’m a good disciple. Pat me on the back.” Or you say, “Aw, now I feel guilty because I don’t do that. I don’t study the Word of God like the Ethiopian.” I suspect most of us feel guilty when we’re compared to good examples, like we’ve been doing this morning. Who of us is as eager for the salvation of others as Philip? And who of us isn’t busy? We’ve got so much to do that when the Lord says, “Take some time to serve me, especially by sharing the good news,” we are likely to think, “I’m so tired and worn out, I need some rest.” And we do need rest. But rather than continuing to work as hard as we do so that there’s no time or energy left for the Lord, why not cut back on work in order to honor Jesus by helping others? Or better yet, help others for a little while first, and then go get your work done.

But we’re still dancing around the heart of the issue. Think about what Philip and the Ethiopian were discussing: the good news about Jesus, who humbly bore what we deserve for our pride and inadequacies. Philip is explaining to the Ethiopian that all his sins are forgiven because Jesus died on the cross. And then Jesus rose from the dead. Listen well, dear friends. This good news is for us too. It was this good news, wasn’t it? that led you to become one of Christ’s

disciples in the first place. It is this good news, is it not? that motivates us to ratchet up our eagerness for the things our God is eager for, to make time for the gospel ministry so that souls can be saved.

There’s two more good examples in our text for us to follow. <sup>36</sup>*As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, “Look, here is water. Why shouldn’t I be baptized?”* This Ethiopian sure loves the Means of Grace, doesn’t he? This is another way we can show ourselves to be Christ’s disciples: to love the Means of Grace. (The Means of Grace are the ways God gets his grace to us: baptism, the Word, and Lord’s Supper. Love these Means of Grace!) <sup>38</sup>*And [the eunuch] gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him.* <sup>39</sup>*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.* Dear friends, when you go on your way today, go rejoicing. Set your burdens and cares, your relationship problems, your money problems, your health problems—set it all aside. Say to yourself, “I have been with the Lord in his house. And because of Jesus, God loves me and will bless me in just the right way.” Go on your way rejoicing. Show yourself to be Christ’s disciple.