

What's A Nice Eunuch Like You Doing In A Place Like This?

^{NRS} **Acts 8:26** Then an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Get up and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." (This is a wilderness road.)²⁷ So he got up and went. Now there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of the Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of her entire treasury. He had come to Jerusalem to worship²⁸ and was returning home; seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah.²⁹ Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over to this chariot and join it."³⁰ So Philip ran up to it and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?"³¹ He replied, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to get in and sit beside him.³² Now the passage of the scripture that he was reading was this: "Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter, and like a lamb silent before its shearer, so he does not open his mouth."³³ In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth."³⁴ The eunuch asked Philip, "About whom, may I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?"³⁵ Then Philip began to speak, and starting with this scripture, he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus.³⁶ As they were going along the road, they came to some water; and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?"³⁷ ³⁸ He commanded the chariot to stop, and both of them, Philip and the eunuch, went down into the water, and Philip baptized him.³⁹ When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing.⁴⁰ But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he was passing through the region, he proclaimed the good news to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

Having a good attitude- this is an important thing, isn't it? I was taught that if you had a good attitude, a positive attitude- then good things will tend to happen for you. And if you had a bad attitude, a negative attitude- well things would probably just get worse.

I had this one teacher in junior high, Mrs. Hopkins. She was a huge fan of the motivational speaker Zig Ziglar. She made us do these affirmations in the morning. Every day when class would start we would all say aloud that we were going to have an attitude of gratitude. If any of you ever caught Al Franken's character Stuart Smalley on Saturday Night Live, this pretty much captured what this was like. Stuart Smiley is this

positive thinking guy who would always look in the mirror and tell himself: “I’m good enough, I’m smart enough, and dog gone it- people like me.”

What I remember more than this attitude of gratitude, though, was the dark side of positive thinking. As happy as they all want to seem, positive thinking types are the last people you want to talk to when things aren’t going that great. And it makes sense- I mean if it’s totally up to you to think positive thoughts and make your world a better place- it’s also completely your fault when things are going badly. This teacher was like a broken record when it came to people being in a bad mood- she would accuse us of having stinkin’ thinkin’. (I have no idea why everything had to rhyme, but it did.) And she would say over and over again that, “It would be better to just stay home, than to come to school with stinkin’ thinkin’.”

Now again don’t get me wrong. I’m all for having a good attitude. If you do you’re a lot more fun to be around for the rest of us, frankly. But the truth is, there’s not a person I know that has a button they can push to automatically put them in a good mood when things are hard. And sometimes life really is just hard- and there isn’t much we can do about it.

So what are we supposed to do when this happens? Is my teacher right- should we just stay in bed?

Well this question is exactly what our text is about this morning. Philip, our main character- he is as grouchy as they come when we meet him this morning. Now I know this isn’t exactly obvious at first. In order to see this we have to use one of those basic lessons when it comes to reading Scripture. You know one of the first lessons when it

comes to reading and hearing the Bible is to read the context. Read a little bit before the passage you're interested in and a little bit after. Sometimes this just gives you a little bit more background information, no big deal- but sometimes, sometimes it unlocks all kinds of things. And that's what's going on here.

In our story we've got Philip, and none of us really know that much about him. This is not the Philip who is a disciple- this is Philip who was a deacon in Jerusalem. His job was to care for the widows, the orphans, and the poor. But when the persecutions hit all of this stopped. When the persecutions started the lucky ones ran, and the unlucky were put the sword. Philip was one of the lucky ones. He escaped. And he not only escaped- he thrived. Philip high tailed it up North to Samaria and he didn't just hide out up there- he kept working, and he discovered something. He discovered he had a gift for preaching. See, if you read the chapter right before the one for this morning- you will find out Philip started preaching and at first it was just to little groups, but then he started to get a following, and finally Philip found himself in front of crowds of hundreds and then thousands.

Philip was like the David Hasselhoff of the ancient world. Do you know David Hasselhoff- the guy from Night Rider. Yeah, Hasselhoff was on Night Rider and that was alright, but after that there was nothing for him in America. But he went over to Germany, and he literally becomes a god- he becomes singing sensation. This was Philip. In Jerusalem he was just this little guy serving food and looking after children. But in Samaria? In Samaria he couldn't go out in public he was so famous.

And this just had to be incredible. I mean he's got thousands of people flocking to hear him, he was probably working on a book deal, maybe thinking about getting a TV

station- or a radio station at least. But in the middle of all this, at this incredibly high point of success, something terrible happens. God comes calling again.

God comes calling- even to preachers. And Philip was probably all right at first with the idea of God calling again- it worked out all right when he went to Samaria, right? You know, he was probably thinking about what new, incredible place God was going to send him to next- maybe back to Jerusalem, maybe to Alexandria that incredible center of learning in Egypt- or maybe, maybe even to Rome, the greatest city in the world at the time. Oh, Philip could barely imagine what great, important place he was heading for next.

But where did send him? Where did he wind up? You heard it- God sent him out to that isolated, lonely little road out in the middle of nowhere. A wilderness road, the text calls it. A desert road. I imagine it was something like those little roads running through the middle of Oregon when you're coming back through the high desert. When Melis and I were coming back from the Wallowas, we came back through Condon and Fossil stopping through the Painted Hills. And we were running low on gas. And Condon- it doesn't even have a gas station. I mean how can you have a town with no gas station? And when we finally found another town- the gas station was closed. I had to get a guy to unlock the commercial tank they had, which we paid out the nose for. This is the kind of road I imagine Philip was on- a road to nowhere. I mean it wasn't even a place- it was like a place on the way to a place. I mean this is like the greatest demotion in the Bible. From preaching to thousands to tumble weeds.

Now to his credit he did go- he didn't try to get out of it like Jonah. He did go. But he wasn't happy about it.

And you know this. When he sees that eunuch- he didn't just go running over there did he? This famous preacher, this big evangelist- I mean he's in the middle of nowhere, and he sees this guy out there reading aloud from the book of Isaiah. Back in Samaria Philip would have been all over that. He'd walk right up to the guy and do his thing. He didn't even need an opening line. But this Philip- out there in the wilderness. He's cranky. And he keeps his distance. The Spirit literally has to prod him saying, "Go over to that chariot." Do you have those days? Oh man, I hate those days. Those days where it's like pulling teeth just to show up.

And Philip goes, and he's like stomping his feet over there. Melis tells me she can always tell my mood at night when one of the kids is yelling for us by my feet. Like the first couple of times I have to get up, I'm just cat like. But the crankier I get, the more I'm just kind of stomping through the room. And Philip was like this, and why not- I mean he was used to preaching to thousands! And there here is this weirdo alone in the desert. And so when Philip talks to the guy, I mean you can just hear the impatience in his voice.

(Sigh) "Do you even know what you're reading?" (Bigger sigh) "I mean do you even *know* what you're reading?" Oh Philip is grumpy.

But do you see what he does? In spite of being in a terrible mood, in spite of having terrible stinkin' thinkin', Philip does go. In spite of his bad attitude Philip helps out. Philip doesn't feel like doing this. He doesn't even feel like being there. But he does it. He crawls up into that chariot. He sits down. And he shares what he hears in the story. He shares his experience with Jesus Christ. And whatever Philip said- wow, does

this guy get it. The Ethiopian eunuch, hungry for what Philip is talking about, spies an oasis- Philip's words literally being water in the desert for this man. And the Ethiopian, wanting even more of this water, he says, "What's to keep me from being Baptized?" I mean this guy gets it- he gets that God loves us not for where we come from, not for the beliefs we have, not for the rules we follow- but God loves us because of who we are. And he gets that this means even him, even some random eunuch in the middle of nowhere.

And did you see what happens next? Did you see what happens to Philip? something happens to Philip here, too. See, Philip's an insider. He's a church guy. And he knew the rules about baptism. He knew if it was dodgy talking to Samaritans- it was absolutely ridiculous to be talking to this guy. In Philip's world you still had to become a Jew before becoming a Christian. And eunuchs were considered damaged goods- too damaged for God to use. So when the eunuch asks what is there to prevent me from being baptized- the correct answer is everything. Absolutely everything.

But Philip, grumpy no more, Philip just takes that man by the hand, gets down off that chariot and leads that man to the water, and he pours that cool water over that man's head in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit telling him he isn't an Ethiopian anymore, telling him he isn't a eunuch anymore- telling him he is a new creation in Christ. Period.

You kind of get the feeling that two people came to new in life in Christ that day. And all because while God may love a cheerful giver- God can work through us when we're not.

Well it's Mother's Day. This week I was talking to Melis about the essence of mothering- like what does it mean to be a mom down deep. And yes, I know normal people don't ask questions like that. But after nearly 11 years now, she's given up on trying to make me normal. And she actually answered. Humorously she said learning how to live with being constantly interrupted- which is absolutely true. More seriously she talked about how being a mother is like your heart walking around outside your chest all the time- with this sense of overwhelming love and of the fragility of life.

For me this text helped. To me part of the essence of mothering, something we're all called to be- the essence of mothering lies in doing all the thousand loving things- even when you don't feel much like doing them.

I mean *anyone* can do loving things when they feel like being loving- that's easy, right? But mothering is what happens when you do these things when you don't feel like it. Mothering is when you do what needs to be done even when you're bone tired and stressed out and feel like you want to run away to Bolivia with a soccer player. Can I get an amen sisters?

The good news this morning is what every mom knows and what Philip found out- God doesn't stop with us when we're tired and grumpy and don't feel particularly loving. Indeed, when we're able to pull through and do what needs to be done even when we feel like Philip- that it's in these times, these tough times, we find out what we're made of, and we come to know in a new way that God really is with us and gives us maybe not everything we'd like, but everything we need.

I can guarantee that something will happen to you this week, friends. I'm not sure of a lot of things, but I can guarantee you this- I can guarantee that you will meet an Ethiopian eunuch this week- you will meet someone who needs your help and you won't feel much like giving it. You will be tired. You will have other things to do. You will think they are weird and you won't like them. But you will meet them and they will need your help. This week as you remember your own mom and the things she did she probably didn't always feel like doing, and you think about Philip- I ask you this. When you come across this Ethiopian eunuch- what will you do? **Amen.**