

August 8, 1999

Acts 8:26-40

Bedded in the book of Acts are stories of people whose lives have been touched by God. It is amazing in the Bible how much it is stories of peoples lives. Maybe you and I learn better when we read about what has happened in the lives of others. In the eighth chapter of Acts is one of those stories about a man who was a very important man, high official in his country whose life was going to be changed by some miracles that happened and because he came to meet Jesus Christ as his Savior. I would like for you to read with me that passage of Scripture from Acts 8:26. There are two characters in the story, one we do not know his name, we only know where he is from, only that he is an Ethiopian. The second person is Philip, one of the seven. If I told you he was one of the twelve, you would say he is one of the twelve apostles. He is one of the seven. When you open up the book of Acts the twelve apostles had so much to do, they said lets find seven people who can help us do the work. We only hear from two of them, Steven and Philip. This is a story about Philip. In verse 26 'The angel of the Lord said to Philip go south to the desert road that goes from Jerusalem to Gaza. He started out and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasure of Candace, the queen of the Ethiopians. This man had gone up to Jerusalem to worship and on his way home he was sitting in his chariot reading the book of Isaiah the prophet. The spirit told Philip go to that chariot and stay near to it. When Philip ran up to the chariot he heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. He said do you understand what you are reading? How can I he said unless somebody explains it to me. So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. Now the eunuch was reading this passage of scripture. We know it is Isaiah chapter 53. He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, as a lamb before his sheerer is silent so he opened not 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, is the prophet talking about himself or someone else. Philip began with that passage of scripture and told him the good news about Jesus. They traveled on down the road and came to some water. The eunuch said look here is some water, what will hinder me from being baptized. He gave orders to stop the chariot and both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. 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 he went on his way rejoicing. There are many individuals who become very disenchanted about life. They really grow tired of so many competing demands on them and one of the great goals of their life is that they can get some sense of order, can get their priorities in order. They feel like they are almost being pulled apart because it seems like this is important and this demands their attention and they would like very much to get to the point where they felt they could give themselves to one thing and make that the priority of their life. Then they have grown tired because they look around at their life and the life of others and they feel like they are already suffering consequences of choices they have made. They started off with what they felt was a little harmless fun but they have ended up hurting others and they ended up damaging themselves. They would like very much to make some changes, to get on the road that is different and not continue on down the road

that every body else seems to be going. These are the individuals who turn to God. They try to pray, they try to read the Bible but when they read it, it doesn't seem to make sense to them. There is so much that they read that do not understand and they really wonder if they will ever figure it out. What makes it worse for them, is that they get along fairly well in the rest of their life. They are important people, they have done very well in their business, but when they come to the Bible and try to read it, they almost feel like a first grader trying to understand the alphabet. They really can not seem to make sense of it. Sometimes when they go to church, that makes it worse because it seems like everybody else has it together. They sit over here feeling pretty fragmented and feel like they alone are sitting in the congregation and they have not been able to find the answers for which they have been seeking. Another thing really worries them and that is that they would really like to go somewhere where they really felt accepted. They have come to church and they feel like people have held them off at arm's length and received them at a distance. The story I have just told you is a composite story of the passage I have just read. If you had to describe the Ethiopian man that was him. He lived in a world that believed in many God's. You gave some allegiance here and some allegiance here and what he was yearning for was somebody he could give one allegiance to and somebody who could guide and direct his life. He lived in a world, that was in his life, people were very wealthy, very powerful and very corrupt. Everywhere he looked there were individuals who seemed to be going down the wrong road. He saw the unhappiness and he saw all the things that were going on and he really was tired of that and he did not want to be a part of it anymore. He was a very trustworthy man, he was the treasurer of the whole country. When he looked out, he said life has to be more than this. I want something better than this. Finally one day he heard about Judaism. Judaism said there is one God and the Ethiopian said oh, that is what I want. Now I can get a order of priorities. This is first, everything else can begin to fall into line. He became so excited by the time we read him, he has gotten into a chariot and gone to Ethiopia to Jerusalem and that is a thousand miles. He crossed the Sinai Peninsula. He is wealthy enough that he has been able to buy a Bible. He has gotten all excited and is on his way back home and he is trying to read it and he still doesn't understand. He wishes there was somebody who can help him understand what he was reading. You could color the Ethiopian and say seeker because he was trying to find but he couldn't seem to get a hold of the truth. He had also felt that even though he had come all the way to Jerusalem that he really had not been accepted because in Judaism of that day, unless you were a whole person, you could not be accepted. They had said we welcome you but then they had put their arm up and said but you can't go all the way. Here is this man going back home, excited about what he saw, wondering about what he read, feeling that he had never been accepted, still seeking to try and find God. The reason I tell you the story is because some of you like him are here today. You have gotten kind of tired of where you are going, you feel this pull of going into a hundred different directions, you wish that some how or other you could say this is what is important and then begin to get some priorities. You look around at the world in which you live and understand I don't want to live like this. I don't want that kind of thing to happen in my life. You have come and you have sought. You have come to church and you have read the Bible and it doesn't seem to make sense to you. You really wonder if you will ever go somewhere and understand., you can go

somewhere where people will reach out and accept you. I want to tell you the rest of the story because it is three miracles. In those three miracles it will tell you how God wants to work in your life because you are just like this Ethiopian. The first miracle is the miracle of an appointment. I want you to look at geography for just a moment. We already know Philip was in the next state from Jerusalem. He was in Samaria. The Ethiopian was in Jerusalem but he was going the other way. God came to Philip and said I want you to leave and go down to the road going to Gaza and I am going to let you meet somebody. Think for a moment if you have ever tried that before to go one hundred miles on one road and meet one person. Yet, Philip left and the Bible says that going along the road and the angel of the Lord came and said, that is the man, go to him. When you look at that and realize the movement of it, you recognize that is a miracle. The right man, got to the right place, at exactly the right time, God had a divine appointment that He wanted Philip to meet the Ethiopian. You need to understand about your life that God doesn't like to play hide and seek with you. God doesn't like to sit up in heaven and let you guess about Him. God really wants you to know Him. Sometimes people say I have been looking for God, but I have news for you. God has been looking for you a lot longer than you have been looking for Him. God really wants you to understand His word and understand His will for your life. When you read the Bible many times, it is not men telling us about God, but God telling us about Himself. We call that revelation, not the last book of the Bible, but God reveals Himself and God wants you to know. The good news I have for you this morning is that if you are here and you have been seeking and searching, God honors your search. What God will do, is do a miracle in your life, and God will bring somebody or some situations in your life to help you to understand what His will is for your life. The good news if you think God is up here someplace and you are down here, no there are already events moving in your life to help you be honored in your search for Him. When I went away to college, I was standing in line for registration. In front of me was a man who was older, made a little different and had on different kind of clothes. I punched him on the shoulder and said my name is Jim. He said my name is Nikoli . I knew I had met somebody different. What I found out about Nikoli was that he had been a second lieutenant in the Russian paratroopers in World War II. He had made it to Berlin and the Americans came in, liberated Berlin, and he was cut off from his troops. In those days, he had been told that as an officer, if he were going to be captured, he had to commit suicide. Nikolia said I couldn't do that so I decided to hide out in the ruins of Berlin. He had stolen a gun and while sitting in a bombed out shelter, he was trying to decide whether to kill himself or what he was going to do. He said it was so cold he reached over to get some debris and built him a fire. As he glanced at the fire, he noticed some pieces of paper around it. He reached over and pulled a paper out and to his amazement it was in Russian. He began to read that ' but God commended His love toward us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.' Nikoli said he had been told all of his life that there is no God and now I am told that not only is there a God but that He loves me and He sent His Son and His Son has died for my sins. In that place, I got down on my knees and I said "God, if there is a God, I don't know who I am talking to or what I really want, but what I want more than anything is You in my life and I want to give my life to Jesus Christ." After all of those years when I went away to school, here was a young man, who through the help of American military people had ended up in

Louisiana going to a Baptist college. He went on get a doctorate and spent the last twenty years of his life teaching Bible in a Baptist college. Think about it just for a moment. Here was a young fellow saying I don't know where to turn, but God you are part of my life. God honored that. The good news I want to tell you is this, God honors your search and He will send somebody or some event in your life to help you to understand. You may sit here this morning and say I don't know who this is. I have been looking and nobody has come yet. I see that hand. You see mine. I want to volunteer. If you are here and you are saying I really want to know, I really want to search, I really want some answers, then I say to you, I or I will get somebody who will help you to understand what God wants to do in your life. You see that in the Bible there are two kinds of time. There is a time that is spelled chronos, we get our word chronology from that. It means I got time on my hands. There is another word, karios. Karios means you have come to a point and you have to decide which way you are going to go. I believe that in everybody's life there comes karios times. There comes a time when God meets you, there is a divine appointment and you have to decide which way you are going to go. I want to tell you that God already has the angle on you and God will honor your search. The miracle of appointment. There is a second miracle and that is the miracle of acceptance. Let me tell you what He did. The Ethiopian went this thousand miles to worship but the Jew said because you are not whole, you can not really be a Jew. He is going back home and sitting down reading the Bible that he bought. He is reading Isaiah chapter 53 and all of a sudden Philip shows up and Philip explains to him what the prophet was saying. He understands he is talking about this new Messiah, he is talking about Jesus. The next thing you read they are going down the road and they come to a ditch, with some water, and he said there is water, why can't I be baptized. Everybody says wait a minute. How did baptism get into this story. You need to know that about one hundred years before Jesus came the Jewish people decided that what they would do is that if a person wasn't born a Jew and he wanted to become a Jew he would be baptized. They called that proselyte baptism. People like the Ethiopian eunuch were called God fearers and that is the reason that when you open the new Testament and John the Baptist is there and baptizing, nobody is surprised. That is the common practice in the day. What they would do is take a person and they would immerse him under the water. In the first service we had baptism and what we as Baptist believe is when a person is baptized that it ought to be on the profession of his faith and that he ought to be immersed in water. That is not the point of this story. Let me tell you what the point is. He wanted to be a Jew. They said no. He turns to the only Christian he has ever met and he said, what barriers do you have? Can I be baptized, can I be a full fledged Christian? Are you going to come to me now and say no, we can't really accept you. The question is, will you accept me? You and I believe that deep down in everybody's heart, will you accept me. Will you accept me for who I am. I am not like everybody else in this room, would you accept me for who I am. Philip said, stop the chariot and get out. I will baptize you and the message that goes out is if you give your heart and your life to Jesus Christ, take my hand, you and I are brothers. I will accept you. The good news is that what ever your circumstance, that once you come to Jesus Christ, all of a sudden you become accepted. There is a movie called Iron Weed. It stars Jack Nickolson and Meryl Streep. It is set in the north west, it is snowing, and they are walking down the street one day and they see a

women laying in the snow. Jack turns to his actress and says do you know her? She said I don't know. Is she a bum or what. She is a bum, she is an alcoholic and has been all of her life. No, not all of her life, what was she before she was a bum. She was a prostitute up in Alaska. What was she before she was a prostitute in Alaska. I don't know, I guess she was a child. Oh, a child. Well a child is important, lets pick up this child and get her out of the snow and take her home. You know what most of us do. We look at the externals of people, we look at the bums, prostitutes, alcoholics and the different color skin, different education and the different this and that. We never look past it til we see who the person really is. The good news I want to tell you today is that in Jesus Christ, He looks and His people are learning to look past the externals and they are looking to see somebody who is valuable in Jesus' sight. Let me tell you one of the goals I have always had for this congregation is that this congregation would be a group that it didn't make any difference what your education was, what color your skin was, what your nationality was, your money, it didn't make any difference about anything as long as you had given your heart and you life to Christ. I pray that one day there will be throughout all of this area a congregation that will be reflective of all society around it and that people will walk by this building and say, that is the place you can go and they will accept you. There is a third miracle. The third miracle is a miracle of appreciation. The Bible said that Philip went away but the Ethiopian eunuch and went on home and we already know what happened when he got home. History. If you go to Ethiopia today, we have a couple of Ethiopian's who are members of our congregation. If you go to Ethiopia today, three point five million of those people belong to what is called the Coptic church. Two point five Egyptians belong to the Coptic church. About six million people in the world belong to the Coptic church. Do you know when the Coptic church began. The first century. Do you know where it began. Because one man went back home and said I want to give my life to Christ and I want to tell you about Him. He began to recognize that what God does many times is that He reaches out and touches people's lives and then those lives are used by Him to spread the message. What God wants to do many times is give you something so you can be the instrument to pass it on to somebody else. Two weeks ago I was standing with two of the men from our congregation in Tanzania. Both of the men asked the question in different ways but this was the question. Why do we have so much and they have so little? Dear friend, it is not Tanzania it is most of the rest of the world and the question you have to deal with when you see abject poverty, why do we have so much and they have so little. I don't have a good answer for that but I do know this. God many times will bless somebody and use them to take those blessings and pass it on to somebody else. One of the things that God has done with you, for most of you, He has already met you and your job is to pass it on to somebody else and God has blessed you financially and all kinds of things and what He wants to do is pass it on to somebody else. As you know I lived in Germany for three years. Before I got there the Russians had built a wall right down the city of Berlin. One day an American president, John Kennedy, stood in front of that wall and they had built a platform for him to stand on and look over the wall. He said some words that day that the Germans still remember. He said , I to belong to Berlin. Again, before I got there, the Russians had blockaded that city and the only way food could be gotten in was for Americans to fly in. When I got there they pulled out a headline and this is what it said.

We Germans do not fear. We have never gotten over what an American president said . We do not fear. What ought to happen to all of us, we ought to never get over that one day Jesus Christ came and said “I am with you, I will stay with you, I will bless you” and regardless of what may happen in our life we know that He is there and out of appreciation to Him for what He has done for us, we are going to take his blessings and pass them on to others. Let me ask you, if I were to paint the picture of your life, would I put down at the bottom, seeker, really would like to know, recognize that we don't, wonder if you would be accepted. I have good news for you today. God will honor your search and God will accept you and His people will.