

# God is at work in your life right now

Message for Sunday, June 7, 2015  
by Bruce Fraser

**Scripture:** Acts 8:26-40

## Children's Message:

*I show a picture of a family tree. Have you ever seen a chart like this before? Do you know what it is? Probably some have; ask one to explain it.*

You can also extend the family tree into the future. Let's suppose you have children... oh, let's say ten children. Would that be about right, you think? ☺ So we have a line coming down from you, showing your ten children. Now if each of them has ten children, and so on, pretty soon we'd have enough people for a whole new village of Stirling!

We can do the same thing about people following Jesus. In the Bible reading, it tells us about one of Jesus' followers named Philip. It started when Philip met Jesus. Then Philip met this man from the country of Ethiopia, and told him about Jesus. That man went back home to Ethiopia and told people there about Jesus. And so on.

You and I can do the same thing.

**Message** "God is at work in your life right now"

## 1) A eunuch's life is not easy

I am who I am. It's taken me a long time to accept myself. And even now there are times when I wonder, "What if...?" But since I have known that God loves me and accepts me as I am, I can accept myself, too.

Let me go back a bit to explain. It started when I was very young, when my parents had me castrated. They weren't being mean; actually, they thought they were doing me a favour! They figured that if I could get a good job working for the king, then I would be set for life. Now the king is very particular about the people who work for him — they have to be absolutely trustworthy. But for the men who guard the royal harem, being trustworthy isn't enough. Even the most trustworthy person has moments of weakness. The guards have to be supermen; they must never even be *tempted* to touch one of his wives. You're getting the picture?

So in one way, I was grateful to them for this... and yet, I was angry at them for this. When I was a teenager, the guys I hung around with all got deeper voices. They got muscles. And they got girls. I got left out.

So, I did what I was suited for: I went to work for the king, guarding the harem. I mentioned that people who work for the king have to be trustworthy. Well, I am; and I'm also pretty smart. I get along with people. I

know how to take charge of a situation, and get things done. After a few years, I was promoted to the captain of the guards.

The Queen was just as much impressed by my work as the king. She put me in charge of her own treasury, and sent me on diplomatic missions to various countries. Everywhere I travelled, I learned about different gods that people worship. One time I was sent to Jerusalem, the capital city of Israel, the land of the Jews. Something about their religion impressed me — the majesty, the awesomeness of God; the commandments of justice and mercy. It was like, like... like their God wanted to improve people. In so many other religions, it was like the people wanted to improve God — make God into just the right size and shape so that everything would be comfy and cozy.

From then on, I travelled to Jerusalem whenever the queen had any business to be done there. I became what people called a "God-fearer." That's what the Jews called someone who wasn't a Jew, but who worshipped their God just the same. But no matter how much I believed, no matter how hard I tried, I would never be accepted in their worship. It's not because of my colour. I'm black, of course, but that wasn't a problem the way it is with some of your people.

It's because of what I am. The Bible was explicit about this:

**Leviticus 21:17-20, New Living Translation:**

**In all future generations, those who have physical defects will not qualify to offer food to their God. No one who has a defect may come near to me, whether he is blind or lame, stunted or deformed, or has a broken foot or hand, or has a humped back or is a dwarf, or has a defective eye, or has oozing sores or scabs on his skin, or has damaged testicles.**

**Deuteronomy 23:1, New Living Translation:**

**If a man's testicles are crushed or his penis is cut off, he may not be included in the assembly of the Lord.**

According to the Bible, I'm male, but I'm not quite a man. The Bible says that "Children are a gift from the Lord" [Psalm 127:3]. Therefore, someone who can't have children must be cursed. Anyway, I'm not fully accepted in their religion.

During one of my trips to Jerusalem, I bought a scroll containing part of the Bible. These scrolls are very rare and very expensive, for they are painstakingly copied by hand, and then checked over letter by letter for errors. It's only because of my position that I could afford one.

I was reading it in my carriage on the way back home. It was from the prophet Isaiah. Of course I didn't know it at the time, but Isaiah had some very interesting things to say about foreigners and eunuchs!

**Isaiah 56:3, New Living Translation:**

**And my blessings are for Gentiles, too, when they commit themselves to the Lord. Do not let them think that I consider them second-class citizens. And my blessings are also for the eunuchs. They are as much mine as anyone else.**

God had given to Isaiah a vision of how he wanted to reach out to the whole world, to everyone, no matter who or what they are. Little did I know just how soon I was to experience that for myself!

## 2) A eunuch finds acceptance

I was more than halfway through the scroll, when I came across a passage that intrigued me. It seemed to be talking about me!

**Acts 8:32-33, New Living Translation: <sup>1</sup>**

**He was led as a sheep to the slaughter.**

**And as a lamb is silent before the shearers, he did not open his mouth.**

**He was humiliated and received no justice.**

**Who can speak of his descendants?**

**For his life was taken from the earth.**

I knew about being humiliated, all right! And who can speak of my descendants? But Isaiah talks about horrible things happening to this man. What can it mean? Who is he talking about?

Just then I looked up, and saw a man walking along the road beside my carriage. He had heard me reading and talking to myself, so he asked me, "Do you understand what you are reading?"

Of course I didn't, and if he did, I would be glad to have his help. Since we were going the same direction, I invited him to sit in the carriage with me, so we could talk more easily.

His name was Philip, and he began showing me how Isaiah had been describing exactly what happened to a

man named Jesus. This Jesus and I sure had a lot in common:

- ◆ Jesus, too, was cut off, having no children
- ◆ Jesus, too, knew about injustice
- ◆ Jesus, too, was humiliated.

Philip went on and told me more about Jesus: how he lived, what he taught his disciples, how he died, but then how he rose from the dead, and how he lived in people still today by his Spirit. And last but not least, Philip told me how Jesus had told them to tell everyone about his message, that all were invited to be his followers.

This was it! Finally a God who understood me, who accepted me as I am, who cared for me, and who loved me! So I was baptized right then and there!

## 3) Coincidence or God-incident?

That's the basic story in Acts 8:26-40, with a little creative interpretation. Now I want to dig a bit deeper into this passage. In particular, I want us to see how God was working all through this set of circumstances.

### a) The man was castrated as a boy

Now I'm not saying that God planned and arranged for that to happen. But God *allowed* it to happen, and then worked with the results. It is normal for life to have difficulties. Paul wrote about this in his letter to the church in Rome:

**Romans 8:35, Today's English Version:**

**Who, then, can separate us from the love of Christ?**

**Can trouble do it, or hardship or persecution or hunger or poverty or danger or death?**

So often people look at the suffering and the evil in the world, and come to the conclusion that there is no God. What God says to us through the Bible is the very opposite: God desires to be with us through it all. It is at times like those that we need to trust God with our whole heart and soul. Earlier in that same chapter, Paul wrote:

**Romans 8:28, Today's English Version:**

**In all things God works for good with those who love him, those whom he has called according to his purpose.**

So this man was castrated as a young boy. Yet that resulted in him being one of the king's servants, which brought him into contact with the queen, which meant that he travelled widely on business for her, which brought him to Jerusalem, which allowed him to learn about God.

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<sup>1</sup> Acts 8:32-33 is a quote from Isaiah 53:7-8, yet it doesn't read the same as Isaiah 53 in our modern Bibles. That's because it quotes from the Greek translation of the Old Testament which was used at that time, which wasn't a very good translation.

Again, I'm not saying that God was there every step of the way, forcing the eunuch down this path. It was very much the eunuch's choice and hard work that got him where he was. But the hand of God was there as well.

#### **b) God sent Philip to a meeting in the middle of nowhere**

We read earlier in this chapter in Acts that Philip was preaching the good news about Jesus to people in Samaria. It was exciting to see how eagerly the people responded, how lives were being changed, how God was bringing revival to a people that many had written off. Right in the middle of that, God sent an angel to tell Philip to leave there, and to take a two-day journey south to some place in the wilderness.

Philip didn't understand why; it didn't make any sense to him. But he was learning that God meant business, and he did not hesitate or make excuses. He obeyed immediately.

God may place you in a situation where you don't understand why you're there; it doesn't make any sense to you. At least Philip had the assurance of an angel's message. We rarely have that. What we do have, though, is the knowledge that God means business. There is a purpose for what is happening. Whether you have it all figured out really doesn't matter. What does matter is, are you going to be a willing servant, available for God to use as he needs?

#### **c) Philip and the eunuch meet at the exact spot at the exact time**

Imagine how Philip must have felt: perhaps a little put out that he was missing all the action back in Samaria; more than a little bewildered as to what he's supposed to do now that he's here in the wilderness. And then a chariot goes by, and he hears the passenger reading aloud from Isaiah's prophecy about the death of Jesus... "Aha! Now I see!"

Five minutes earlier or later, and they would have missed one another. Even a minute later, and the eunuch would have been reading in Isaiah 54, something about barren women bursting into song. That would be a great conversation starter with a woman who was having difficulty becoming pregnant, but hardly a great opener for a eunuch.

Coincidence? I don't think so. When these things happen, I call them "God incidents."

I wonder how many times in a week, or even in a day, that things happen in your life that God has had a hand

in arranging just so? Do you stop and give thanks to God for the little blessings, as well as the big ones?

#### **Next Steps:**

- Will you be open to God working in your life this week?
- Are you ready to serve and obey?
- Will you look for those precious opportunities to reach out to others with God's love?
- Read Acts 9 in preparation for next Sunday.