

The Servant's Gospel

Isaiah 53

Series: The Suffering Servant (Communion Series)

The Village Church

May 2, 2021

I. Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch

A. Acts 8:26–39 (NASB95) —

1. 26 But an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip saying, “Get up and go south to the road that descends from Jerusalem to Gaza.” (This is a desert road.)
2. 27 So he got up and went; and there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure; and he had come to Jerusalem to worship, 28 and he was returning and sitting in his chariot, and was reading the prophet Isaiah.
3. 29 Then the Spirit said to Philip, “Go up and join this chariot.”
4. 30 Philip ran up and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet, and said, “Do you understand what you are reading?”
5. 31 And he said, “Well, how could I, unless someone guides me?” And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.
6. 32 Now the passage of Scripture which he was reading was this: “HE WAS LED AS A SHEEP TO SLAUGHTER; AND AS A LAMB BEFORE ITS SHEARER IS SILENT, SO HE DOES NOT OPEN HIS MOUTH.
7. 33 “IN HUMILIATION HIS JUDGMENT WAS TAKEN AWAY; WHO WILL RELATE HIS GENERATION? FOR HIS LIFE IS REMOVED FROM THE EARTH.”
8. 34 The eunuch answered Philip and said, “Please tell me, of whom does the prophet say this? Of himself or of someone else?”
9. 35 Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him.
10. 36 As they went along the road they came to some water; and the eunuch said, “Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?”
11. 37 And Philip said, “If you believe with all your heart, you may.” And he answered and said, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.”
12. 38 And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he baptized him.
13. 39 When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; and the eunuch no longer saw him, but went on his way rejoicing.

B. Philip was ministering in Samaria

1. Result of the dispersion and persecution
2. Sent by Holy Spirit to a desert road
3. Crossed paths with Ethiopian Eunuch
 - a. Ethiopian = Gentile
 - b. Evidently God-fearer; had been to Jerusalem to worship

- c. God-fearer – believer in the Jewish God; convert except for observance of circumcision and other ceremonial rites
 - d. Serious seeker; reading Old Testament
 - 4. Reading Isaiah
 - a. What part of Isaiah?
 - (1) **Isaiah 53.7-8**
 - 5. Question – “Who’s this about?”
 - 6. Philip’s response
 - a. Preached Jesus to him
- C. Orchestrator of this event was the Holy Spirit
 - 1. Isaiah 53 – the place in the Old Testament that the Holy Spirit used to reveal the essence of the person and work of Jesus Christ
- D. Outcome
 - 1. Ethiopian Eunuch became a Christian
 - a. Believed
 - b. Was baptized
- E. Then it was “beam me up, Scotty”
 - 1. Philip disappeared
 - 2. Eunuch was rejoicing
 - a. And so was heaven!
 - b. Heaven rejoices every time someone comes to faith in Jesus
- F. Isaiah 53 thus began to have a central place in evangelism and discipleship in the early church
 - 1. Not just for Jews; also for Gentiles
- G. This morning we begin a new series for Communion Sundays
 - 1. Just concluded Blood Wonder
 - a. Considered all the places in the New Testament which indicate what the blood of Jesus, the death of Jesus, accomplishes for us
 - b. Rich series!
 - 2. This series: **The Suffering Servant**
 - a. Passage examined by Ethiopian Eunuch: **Isaiah 53:7–8** (NASB95) — 7 He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He did not open His mouth; Like a lamb that is led to slaughter, And like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, So He did not open His mouth. 8 By oppression and judgment He was taken away; And as for His generation, who considered That He was cut off out of the land of the living For the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke was due?
 - b. Isaiah 53 – no better passage to examine each time we gather to remember the Lord’s death
 - c. Which we do every time we observe The Lord’s Supper

II. **The Richness of Isaiah 53**

- A. James Durham
 - 1. Preached 72 sermons on Isaiah 53
 - 2. 17th Century Scottish Presbyterian

- a. Well known in his day
 3. Sermons are not short
 - a. Probably take at least an hour
 4. If preached one each week, with some change of schedule due to holidays, special observances, etc., it would take most of 18 months
 5. Durham died when he was 36 years old; his ministry spanned only about 10 years
 - a. A large part of his ministry was spent in one chapter of the Bible
- B. First observation we should make about Isaiah 53 is that Isaiah 53 doesn't start with Isaiah 53
 1. It actually starts at **Isaiah 52.13**
 2. The passage is one of what we call **The Servant Hymns**
 - a. Poetic descriptions of the ministry of One Isaiah calls The Servant of the Lord
 - b. This particular hymn is made up of five stanzas of three verses each
 - c. The first stanza is actually the last three verses of Isaiah 52
 3. Should also observe that James Durham didn't preach on Is 52.13-15
 - a. If he had, at the rate he was going, it would have taken several more months to get through it
 - b. And probably would have preached 90 sermons on Isaiah 53
- C. Reason why Durham was so affected by Is 53 was not because he was an Old Testament scholar, or was writing his dissertation on Isaiah
 1. He was a pastor
 - a. He saw in Isaiah 53 the essence of the gospel of Jesus Christ
 2. Durham: Jesus Christ and the Substance of the Gospel is ... summed up here... [and] that there is no Scripture in the Old Testament so often and so convincingly applied to Jesus Christ as this is.
 - a. If it was good enough for the Holy Spirit and for Philip, it was good enough for him
- D. 32 quotations or allusions to Isaiah 53 in the New Testament
 1. Quotations
 - a. Already seen **Acts 8.32-33 (Isaiah 53.7-8)**
 - b. **1 Peter 2:22** WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH; (**Isaiah 53.9**)
 - c. **John 12:38** (NASB95) — 38 This was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet which he spoke: "LORD, WHO HAS BELIEVED OUR REPORT? AND TO WHOM HAS THE ARM OF THE LORD BEEN REVEALED?" (**Isaiah 53.1**)
 2. Allusions
 - a. **1 Corinthians 15:3** For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ **died for our sins according to the Scriptures**,...
 - b. **Luke 18:31-33** (NASB95) — 31 Then He took the twelve aside and said to them, "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and all things which are written through the prophets about the Son of

Man will be accomplished. 32 “For He will be handed over to the Gentiles, and will be mocked and mistreated and spit upon, 33 and after they have scourged Him, they will kill Him; and the third day He will rise again.” (Isaiah 53.3)

3. With possible exception of Ps 110, Isaiah 53 seems to be the most used Old Testament chapter

III. The Marrow of the Gospel

A. James Durham’s reason for majoring in Is 53

1. Marrow of the Gospel
 - a. Center of the bone; location for the construction of blood cells
 - (1) Source of life
 - b. Figuratively – Marrow: the choicest or most essential or most vital part of some idea or experience
 - c. Essence, heart, meat, substance
2. Rightly applied that definition to the gospel

B. Durham

1. If we look then to the sum of the words of this chapter, they take in the sum and substance of the gospel; for they take in these two.
 - a. 1. The right description and manifestation of Jesus Christ.
 - b. 2. And the unfolding and opening up of the covenant of redemption.
2. First, Jesus Christ is described. 1. In his person and natures; as God, being eternal; as man, being under suffering. 2. In all his offices; as a priest, offering up himself as a sacrifice to satisfy justice; as a prophet, venting his knowledge to the justifying of many thereby; and as a king, dividing the spoil with the strong. 3. In his humiliation, in the cause of it, in the end [purpose] of it, in the subject of it, in the nature and rise [motivation] of all: God’s good pleasure. 4. And in his exaltation, and deliverance promised him on the back of all his sufferings and humiliation.
3. Secondly, the covenant of redemption is here described and set out. 1. In the particular parties of it: God the Mediator. 2. As to the matter about which it was, the seed [offspring or descendants] that was given to Christ, and all whose iniquities met on him. 3. As to the mutual engagements on both sides, the Son undertaking to make his soul an offering for sin, and the Father promising that the efficacy of his satisfaction shall be imputed and applied for the justification of sinners; and the terms on which, or the way how this imputation and application is brought about... *by his knowledge*. All are clearly held out here.

C. James Durham’s marrow of the gospel

1. Description of The Person and Work of Christ
 - a. Nature
 - b. Offices
 - c. Humiliation
 - d. Exaltation
2. Covenant of Redemption

- a. Mediator
 - b. Seed (beneficiaries, offspring)
 - c. Mutual agreement between Father and Son
 - D. You will see those elements unfolding gloriously in Is 53
- IV. **Isaiah 53 and the Ethiopian Eunuch**
 - A. Why is Isaiah 53 so integral to this story?
 - 1. And why so integral to our understanding of the Gospel?
 - B. **Important to the Holy Spirit**
 - 1. Holy Spirit orchestrated this whole experience
 - a. **Acts 8:26** (NASB95) — 26 But an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip saying, “Get up and go south to the road that descends from Jerusalem to Gaza.” (This is a desert road.)
 - 2. Angel of the Lord – the Holy Spirit
 - a. **Acts 8:29** (NASB95) — 29 Then the Spirit said to Philip, “Go up and join this chariot.”
 - b. **Acts 8:39** (NASB95) — 39 When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away...
 - c. Philip had an encounter with the Holy Spirit – appearing, evidently, in the form of an angel
 - 3. The Holy Spirit – God the Holy Spirit – who shares all the attributes of God
 - a. Knows what Philip could never possibly know
 - b. No amount of ministry strategizing could have put Philip in this position
 - c. The Spirit tells Philip, who had been preaching the gospel of Christ in Samaria, to head toward Gaza
 - d. In fact, of the two possible routes from Jerusalem to Gaza, this was the desert road
 - e. Or “the one less traveled by” as the poem *The Road Not Taken* by Robert Frost put it; “and that has made all the difference”
 - f. All the difference, indeed
 - 4. The desert road was not the best, nor the fastest, way to get to Gaza
 - a. But only the Holy Spirit knew where this encounter with the Ethiopian Eunuch would take place
 - 5. Even more, the Holy Spirit selected the person to whom the message of the Gospel would be communicated
 - a. One who was a seeker of the truth
 - b. A Gentile – but one who had been to Jerusalem to worship
 - c. A God-fearer, as they were called; Gentiles who had become Jews in their religion in every way except by circumcision
 - 6. But most importantly, the Holy Spirit selected the text of scripture that would be used to lead this Ethiopian to Christ
 - a. Timing, as they say, is everything
 - b. Philip shows up just to hear the Ethiopian reading Isaiah 53 out loud

- c. That text was not selected by Philip
 - d. The Holy Spirit put the Ethiopian, Philip, a lonely road, and a text of scripture together in a divine appointment
7. If Isaiah 53 is important to the Holy Spirit it ought to be important to us!
- a. The Spirit opened the Servant's Gospel to the heart of the Ethiopian
 - b. Would that He would open the Servant's Gospel to your heart and mine!

C. **Familiar to Philip**

- 1. This Philip was Philip the Evangelist
 - a. Not to be confused with Philip the Apostle
- 2. This Philip was a Hellenistic Jew
 - a. One of the seven appointed by the apostles to care for the Hellenistic Jewish widows in the daily distribution of food
 - b. Arguably, one of the first deacons of the early church
- 3. But like Stephen – also one of the seven – he did much more than wait on tables
 - a. When the persecution broke out, Philip fled Jerusalem and headed into Samaria and became an evangelist
 - b. Leading many Samaritans to Christ
- 4. Philip, whose background as a Hellenistic Jew, was a native Greek speaker
 - a. And his capacity to communicate beyond the Aramaic speaking Palestinian Jews enabled him to reach beyond traditional Jewish boundaries
 - b. And make him uniquely qualified to have an encounter with an educated Gentile, an Ethiopian court official who was reading the Septuagint – the Greek translation of the Old Testament
- 5. But Philip had been following Jesus in Jerusalem when Jesus was arrested, put on trial by the Jews and the Romans, crucified
 - a. And was likely one of those who saw the risen Christ in the days before His ascension
- 6. And Philip knew his Bible; he likely knew this portion of Isaiah 53 inside and out
 - a. So when he heard the Ethiopian reading the chapter he immediately recognized it
 - b. And more importantly, he connected this chapter with what he saw Jesus experience at the hands of the Jewish authorities and Romans
- 7. **Acts 8.32:** “He was led as a sheep to slaughter, And as a lamb before its shearer is silent, So He does not open His mouth.”
 - a. He knew how John the Baptist had declared Jesus to be the “Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world”
 - b. He knew that this Jesus would die the death of sacrifice, taking on Himself the sins of all those who would ever believe in Him
 - c. He knew that in the midst of His trial, Jesus said nothing to defend Himself; how He didn't open His mouth

8. **Acts 8.33**: “In humiliation His judgment was taken away; Who will relate His generation? For His life is removed from the earth.”
 - a. Philip knew how the Romans humiliated Jesus; how they beat Him
 - b. How they cursed Him, and spit on Him
 - c. How they pressed a crown of thorns into His scalp, mocking His claim to be a king
 - d. How they dressed Him up in a royal robe, pretending homage to a pathetic figure only barely hanging onto His humanity
 - e. And how they crucified Him; hung Him on a cross, driving a spear into His flesh until he was dead
 - f. How they had Him buried in a tomb, sealed and guarded with armed soldiers
9. All of this was familiar to Philip
 - a. And as the Ethiopian was reading, Philip could see in his mind’s eye the very figure of his humiliated Savior
10. This is the same mind’s eye that we use when we approach this table
 - a. The same imagination that enables us to remember what Jesus did for us on the cross
11. The same ears that Philip used when the Ethiopian asked him, Acts 8.34: “... of whom does the prophet say this? Of himself or of someone else?”
 - a. The same mouth that Philip used to tell this seeker, “This is all about our Savior, the man Jesus Christ”
12. This description was familiar to Philip
 - a. He knew exactly who it refers to
 - b. Do you also find this description familiar?
- D. Significant to the Great Commission
 1. **Acts 1:8** (NASB95) — 8 but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.”
 2. As the Book of Acts unfolds, Philip is integral to the plot
 - a. The persecution and the dispersion of Christians caused the Gospel to explode out of ground zero in Jerusalem
 - b. In concentric circles from Jerusalem, Judea, into Samaria, and to the remotest part of the earth
 3. Philip finds himself first in Samaria
 - a. Samaritans were a mixed race people; Jews having intermarried with Assyrians and other Gentiles during the times following the fall of the northern kingdom of Israel
 - b. Thought of as half-breeds, illegitimate by pure Jewish standards by the Jews in Jerusalem
 - c. They were hated by the Jews; separated by culture and religious expression
 4. But the Gospel crosses those boundaries
 - a. It was Jesus Himself who set the stage for Samaritan ministry with the woman at the well

- b. Who would herself introduce many Samaritans to Jesus
 - c. Philip preached to the Samaritans; many were healed as well as converted
5. And then God the Holy Spirit would take Philip beyond even the next boundary
- a. He would be led to this Ethiopian Eunuch
 - b. A pure Gentile
 - c. Not even native to the Middle East
 - d. He was from the biblical land of Cush; native to the upper Nile region of east Africa
 - e. A black man; distinguishable not just by religious expression, but by race and ethnicity
6. But the Great Commission crosses all of those boundaries
- a. And Philip is right in the midst of it
 - b. Leading to Jesus this prominent official in the court of the Queen
 - c. Indeed to the chancellor exchequer of her kingdom; the secretary of the treasury
7. But it's not just the testimony of Philip that is integral to this man's conversion
- a. It's Isaiah 53
 - b. It's the Word of God in the Old Testament that so clearly lays out the person and work of Jesus Christ
 - c. The Suffering Servant of Yahweh
8. It is the Servant's Gospel that he's reading
- a. And it is the Servant's Gospel that Philip explains to him
9. We don't know how long this took
- a. It was a lonely road; no traffic to worry about
 - b. Nothing but time for reading, for exposition
10. And through it all, the Ethiopian asks, "Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?" (**Acts 8.36**)
- a. **Acts 8.37**: "And Philip said, 'If you believe with all your heart, you may.' And he answered and said, 'I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.'"
 - b. Do you believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God?
 - c. Do you believe He is the Servant of the Lord that Isaiah 53 describes?
 - d. Do you believe that the Suffering Servant has died as the Lamb of God, taking upon Himself your sins as Isaiah has described and as the New Testament testifies?
11. Whether Jew or Gentile
- a. Regardless of race or ethnicity
 - b. Irrespective of geography or nationality
 - c. Isaiah 53 crosses every boundary to proclaim the Servant's Gospel
 - d. And is the source of salvation
 - e. For this Ethiopian

- f. But also for you and me and anyone else who will place their faith in Jesus Christ

V. Prepare for this table

- A. Just as the Ethiopian prepared for baptism
 - 1. Just as Philip proclaimed the Servant's Gospel
- B. And hear the prophet proclaim
 - 1. **Acts 8:32–33** (NASB95) — 32 ... “HE WAS LED AS A SHEEP TO SLAUGHTER; AND AS A LAMB BEFORE ITS SHEARER IS SILENT, SO HE DOES NOT OPEN HIS MOUTH.
 - 2. 33 “IN HUMILIATION HIS JUDGMENT WAS TAKEN AWAY; WHO WILL RELATE HIS GENERATION? FOR HIS LIFE IS REMOVED FROM THE EARTH.”