

Theme: As You Are Going: The Church on Mission

Message: God Ordained Encounters – Acts 8:26-40

Aim: There are no “chance” encounters for the Church on mission.

Intro: How many “chance” encounters have you had of late? A chance encounter is “an unexpected meeting or intersection between individuals that occurs purely by happenstance, w/out any prior planning or intention. It is a situation or occurrence that is beyond our control & is determined by a random event or circumstance.” You might run into an old friend or unexpectedly meet someone in need or someone famous. You don’t plan it; you can only react to it. I remember a chance encounter I had w/my Andi when the BCC choir sang at the Portland AC Church in 1972 or 73. A colleague introduced us. I’m not sure she was very impressed. Little did I know that just a few years later we would become husband & wife. We have chance encounters all the time – or are they really “chance”? Theme: As you are going: the church on mission. As we read thru Scripture there may seem to be many chance encounters, but we find that w/God, there’s no such thing as a chance encounter. Rather there are God ordained encounters. That’s certainly true in our text today & it is true when we, the Church, are going; when we’re on mission w/God, for God. Acts 8:26-40 Note the God ordained encounters. I) **Angel Encounter.** Philip had been enjoying a very successful ministry in Samaria city. Many were coming to faith in Christ as God worked miracles thru him & he preached the gospel. Believers were baptized. A church was planted. Certainly, Philip might have questioned the logic of leaving that situation to go to an unknown opportunity. I believe that’s why God sent an angel to give Philip direction. This was no happenstance! How do you argue w/an angel? We’re not told how Philip (or Luke) knew that this was an angel, but it doesn’t seem questioned. The angel told Philip to get up & go south toward Gaza. Remember that Samaria was north of Jerusalem & Judea. Gaza was southwest, on the coast – as it is today (very much in the news). Philip had to travel a ways to get to this road. According to Strong’s, Gaza was the name of one of the 5 chief cities of the Philistines in Palestine. There’s still a Gaza city in the Gaza strip. Told there were 2 main roads from Jerusalem to Gaza. The Holy Spirit, thru

the angel, directed Philip to take the lesser used one, thru a desert place, which, according to Strong's, would have been “devoid of the aid & protection of others” – but he had God’s protection. Faithful Philip didn’t seem to hesitate, but, as David Gudzik wrote, “was willing to go at God’s bidding, no matter how ‘successful’ his ministry had been or how ‘foolish’ it may have seemed” to go. He obeyed, even tho he didn’t know exactly where he was going nor why. Tho we may not have an angel encounter, how important it is that we learn to listen to God the Holy Spirit. We need to stay close to God, practice His presence, be doing what we know He wants us to do, & learn to hear/follow His promptings. As Philip went, he just so happened to meet another traveler. What a coincidence! II) **Ethiopian Encounter**. It seems that God also led a man from Ethiopia to travel along this road, tho he probably didn’t recognize the Spirit’s leading. He didn’t just happen to be traveling on this road at the exact time Philip was. This was a God ordained encounter. Surely God is at work in the hearts/lives of those w/whom we have what seem to be chance encounters but are really God ordained encounters. Luke tells us that this man was from Ethiopia & was a eunuch – an emasculated man – who was an official in the court of Candace, queen of Ethiopia (probably why he was a eunuch). According to Strong's, Candace was not a proper name of an individual but that of a dynasty of Ethiopian queens. This man was in charge of the queen’s treasury, so he was a very important man w/much authority. He probably had an entourage w/him. Luke tells us that he had been to Jerusalem to worship, so he was a “God fearer,” perhaps a proselyte – convert to Judaism. He was on his way home, back to Ethiopia, & was reading in the book of Isaiah – would have been a scroll. The fact that he had a scroll of Isaiah tells us he was well off & important. Those scrolls weren’t just lying around or in everyone’s library. The Holy Spirit prompted Philip to go up to this chariot – would take a little courage, since the man was probably not alone & would have had security. As Philip neared the chariot, he just so happened to hear the eunuch reading from Isaiah 53 – again, what a coincidence! Gudzik wrote, “When Philip heard the eunuch reading Isaiah (it was common for someone to be reading aloud), he took it as an opened door. We need to be looking for

opened doors, expecting God to prepare hearts before us. Philip asked him, “Do you understand what you are reading?” How important that Philip asked a good question. In witnessing, we need to ask pertinent questions. Philip recognized the passage & knew Isaiah was prophesying about Jesus. The eunuch replied, “How can I understand unless someone teaches me?” He wanted to understand, but needed help. There are a lot of people who want to understand Scripture but need help. There are a lot of misunderstandings of Scripture that need gentle, loving correction. How important it is that we study Scripture & have a grasp of what God is saying thru it, so we can be of help to those who don’t understand. Philip evidently studied the Word & knew of what he spoke. And, he knew Jesus. The eunuch invited Philip into the chariot w/him & they traveled together as Philip explained what the man was reading. That’s important. W/some, we need to work toward & wait for an invitation, while seeking opportunities & making ourselves available. And, we need to meet people where they are. What Philip heard the man read was Isaiah 53:7-8 – ***“Like a sheep He was led to the slaughter & like a lamb before its shearer is silent, so He opened not His mouth. In His humiliation justice was denied Him. Who can describe His generation? For His life is taken away from the earth.”*** The eunuch asked, “Who’s the prophet writing about? Himself, or someone else?” Luke recorded that Philip began w/that Scripture & told him the good news about Jesus. As Gudzik notes, “The Jews of that day had different ways of understanding the identity of this suffering servant. Some thought it was the nation of Israel itself, suffering thru wars, exile & persecution. Others thought that Isaiah was writing about himself. Still others correctly considered that Isaiah was writing about the Messiah to come, but that was hard to accept because they didn’t want to think of the Messiah suffering.” But, “This passage described the sacrificial, sin-bearing work of the Messiah to come.” Jesus is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world. His death for our sin is sufficient for all, but effective only for those who believe, receive Christ by faith. Jesus willingly died in payment for our sin, giving Himself over for us, to bring us to God, who reconciled us to Himself thru Jesus’ atoning work. Philip explained who Jesus is & what He had done, which is the

essence of the gospel. That's what we need to share. Jesus is the Son of God/God the Son, who became man – Son of Man, that He might live a perfect, sinless life here on earth, keeping/fulfilling the Law – standard of God which man could not keep, then dying in our place on the cross, bearing in His body our sin & guilt, paying the just penalty for our sin, in order that we might become children of God, forgiven, justified - credited w/the righteousness of Christ, heirs of the kingdom of God & ambassadors for Christ. III) **Water Encounter** – Luke didn't write that the man believed/received Christ as Savior, but that's clearly what happened. It's important to note that Luke didn't write that the eunuch prayed a prayer, saying certain key words/phrases. There's nothing wrong w/praying a prayer, acknowledging our sin & asking for forgiveness & asking that Jesus be our Savior, but that's not necessary. What is important is to truly believe in who Jesus is & what He has done for us. That belief must impact our lives – faith is life response. “I believe; therefore, I yield.” Remember that the demons believe & tremble. Theirs is not saving faith. To believe is to surrender to Christ as Lord, because that's who He is. As they were traveling along, they just happened to go by a body of water – another coincidence! The eunuch said, “Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?” He recognized that baptism was about commitment & identification. He wanted to be identified w/Jesus, to publicly confess his faith in Christ as Savior/Lord before Philip & his own entourage. Now, you may note in your Bible the exclusion (ESV) or inclusion (KJV) of verse 37, “***And Philip said, ‘If you believe w/all your heart, you may.’ And he replied, ‘I believe that Jesus is the Son of God.’***” In other words, He is who He says He is & has done what He says He has done. That's not found in earlier texts but certainly is true – the Eunuch believed & was baptized. It is important that we help those to whom we witness embrace Christ & follow thru w/baptism – confessing Him openly. It's interesting that when “they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, & the eunuch saw him no more.” There's not indication that he was especially taken back by that. Luke simply records that “he went on his way rejoicing.” His life had been transformed. The God he feared & worshipped was now his heavenly Father & the Christ he

hadn't known was his Lord & Savior. I wonder if any of this man's group also believed/received Christ? I wonder what the impact was on his native country of Ethiopia? Even the queen? Gudzik points out that "Coptic Christians [the largest & most significant minority population in Egypt & the largest population of Christians in the Middle East - & greatly persecuted in Egypt] trace their spiritual heritage back to this Ethiopian official" (as well as the evangelistic work of Mark, the gospel writer). The eunuch most likely never encountered Philip again, but this God ordained encounter pushed the gospel further out. This was the beginning of the gospel going to the ends of the earth. Philip "found himself at Azotus" – that must have been quite a trip! "Beam me up, Scottie!" Azotus was perhaps not too far away from his encounter w/the eunuch. It was, according to Strong's, "another of the 5 chief cities of the Philistines, (at this time defunct), lying between Askelon & Janom, near the Mediterranean Sea. Philip was certainly unflappable. He didn't seem to miss a beat. "As he passed thru – as he was going - he preached the gospel to all the towns until he came to Caesarea," up the coast. Look out for "chance" encounters. W/God, there are no such things. They are God ordained encounters. As we are going, let God use us as He orchestrates our opportunities. Let us be a people/church on mission.