

A Faith That Does Save

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Turning the World Upside Down / Faith; Salvation; Jesus; Repentance; Joy; Trust; Knowledge;
Declaration of Assent / Acts 8:26–40
Acts 8:26-40 teaches us about a faith that does save.

Introduction

John Newton was born in 1725 in England and lived a rebellious life.

As a young man, he worked on ships, including slave ships, transporting enslaved people across the Atlantic.

He was notorious for his wild behavior, harsh personality, and lack of faith.

His life, dominated by greed, sin, and the brutal slave trade, left him spiritually hardened.

In 1748, while aboard a ship bound for England, a violent storm hit. It was so severe that Newton and the crew thought they were going to die.

In that desperate moment, Newton cried out to God for mercy, even though he had long rejected the faith of his upbringing.

Miraculously, the ship survived the storm, and that moment of near-death experience caused Newton to think more seriously about Jesus and eternity.

After the storm, Newton began to read the Bible and seek God earnestly.

Though his conversion wasn't instant, over the next few years, he experienced a deep transformation as he turned away from his sinful past and finally surrendered his life fully to Jesus Christ.

He gradually abandoned the slave trade and became a strong advocate against it.

Newton was filled with an overwhelming sense of joy and peace that came from his newfound relationship with Jesus.

He later became a minister of the gospel in the Church of England, preaching God's grace and mercy.

The joy of his salvation was so profound that it inspired him to write the hymn "Amazing Grace," which reflects his gratitude for God's forgiveness and redemption. The words of the hymn reveal the joy and relief Newton experienced:

*"Amazing grace! How sweet the sound,
that saved a wretch like me.
I once was lost, but now am found,
was blind but now I see."*

John Newton was powerfully converted to Jesus Christ.

He had a true faith in the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Despite his past, he was transformed by Jesus Christ, and his life and writings have impacted countless people since.

Today, we are going to examine the story of Philip the Evangelist and the Ethiopian eunuch who came to faith in Jesus Christ as a result of Philip's proclamation of the good news to him.

Last week, we examined the story of Simon the magician. He had a faith that did not save.

In contrast, the Ethiopian eunuch, whose name we do not know, had a faith that did save.

The Ethiopian eunuch's faith was like the faith of John Newton.

So what is it that characterizes a faith that does save?

Today, we are going to examine a faith that does save.

Scripture

Let's read [Acts 8:26-40](#):

²⁶ Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” This is a desert place. ²⁷ And he rose and went. And there was an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure. He had come to Jerusalem to worship ²⁸ and was returning, seated in his chariot, and he was reading the prophet Isaiah. ²⁹ And the Spirit said to Philip, “Go over and join this chariot.” ³⁰ So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, “Do you understand what you are reading?” ³¹ And he said, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” And he invited Philip to come up and sit with 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 before its shearer is silent,
so he opens not 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 And the eunuch said to Philip, “About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?” ³⁵ Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus. ³⁶ And as they were going along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, “See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?” ³⁸ And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. ³⁹ And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing. ⁴⁰ But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through he preached the gospel to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

Lesson

[Acts 8:26-40](#) teaches us about a faith that does save.

Let's use the following outline:

1. There Is a Faith That Does Save (8:36, 38)
2. The Root of a Faith That Does Save Is Grace (8:26-34)
3. The Object of a Faith That Does Save Is Jesus (8:35-38)
4. The Experience of a Faith That Does Save is Joy (8:39-40)

I. There Is a Faith That Does Save (8:36, 38)

First, there is a faith that does save.

The story of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch is fascinating.

The Lord directed Philip to the Ethiopian who was returning to his country.

While he was traveling in his chariot, the Ethiopian was reading the prophet Isaiah. But he did not understand what he was reading.

When Philip came up to Ethiopian, he asked him if he understood what he was reading.

The Ethiopian said that he did not, and he invited Philip to come and sit with him and explain the Scripture to him.

Beginning with the passage in Isaiah that the Ethiopian was reading, Philip told the Ethiopian the good news about Jesus.

What Philip said opened the Ethiopian's eyes and he saw the truth about Jesus.

When he expressed his faith in Jesus, the Ethiopian said in [Acts 8:36](#), **“See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?”**

Philip agreed that he should be baptized upon profession of his faith in Jesus Christ, as we read in verse 38, **“And he [the Ethiopian eunuch] commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him.”**

The Lord carried Philip away and he found himself at Azotus, while the eunuch went on his way rejoicing.

The Church Father Irenaeus (ca 130-202 AD) wrote in the second century that the Ethiopian eunuch became a preacher among the Ethiopian people. He wrote in his book *Against Heresies*:

And he had a mission to the regions of Ethiopia, to preach that which he believed: first that there is one God, He Whom the Prophets proclaim: next that His Son has already realized His human presence, and was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and the rest, whatsoever the Prophets say of Him (S. Irenaeus Bishop of Lyons, *Five Books of S. Irenaeus against Heresies*, trans. John Keble, A Library of Fathers of the Holy Catholic Church [Oxford; London; Cambridge: James Parker and Co.; Rivingtons, 1872], 246).

So, here in the same chapter in the Book of Acts, Luke gives a story about a man who had a faith that does not save (Simon the magician) and a story about a man who had a faith that does save (the Ethiopian eunuch).

Both heard the faithful preaching of God's word.

Both responded to the faithful preaching of God's word.

Both were baptized in response to their professions of faith.

Yet, one was not saved and the other was saved.

What is the difference in a faith that does not save and a faith that does save?

Many people mistake two things for saving faith.

First, saving faith is not mere head knowledge. It is not merely believing in certain historical facts.

[James 2:19](#) warns, "You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!"

The demons believe that there is one God, they believe the truths about Jesus life and death and resurrection, but they are not saved.

And second, saving faith is mere temporal faith. That is, trusting God for temporary crisis such as a financial crisis, a health crisis, a family crisis, and so on.

Many people turn to God when they are in trouble and they want him to help them.

Well, it is good to turn to God during times of trouble and crisis, but that is not saving faith.

So, what is saving faith?

Saving faith consists of three parts. It is really important to understand this. All three parts are needed to have saving faith.

First, saving consists of knowledge. One must know the facts about God and Jesus and ourselves and our sin and what Jesus came to do to deal with our sin and so on. One must know the basic gospel facts.

Second, saving faith consists of assent. One must agree that these facts are true. You must agree that Jesus lived and died and rose again from the dead. You must agree that God is holy and that you are a sinner. You must agree that Jesus paid the penalty for your sins.

These first two parts is what James was talking about in [James 2:19](#). The demons had knowledge about the gospel. They agreed that they were true. But they were missing the last part to be saved.

Third, saving faith consists of trust. One must entrust oneself to Jesus. You must surrender your life to him. You must bow the knee and ask him to rescue you from eternal hell.

It is this last point that is almost always missing from saving faith.

Knowledge and assent are necessary but they are not enough to save a person

The essential third part to be added to knowledge and assent is trust. One must commit oneself to Jesus to be saved.

A simple way to remember the three essential components are the letters *k-a-t*. They stand for *knowledge*, *assent*, and *trust*.

But where does such saving faith come from?

That leads me to my second point.

II. The Root of a Faith That Does Save Is Grace (8:26-34)

Second, the root of a faith that does save is grace.

The salvation of sinners is entirely a work of God's grace.

As John MacArthur writes:

Salvation, both in its eternal planning and its temporal outworking, is totally God's work. Salvation originates in the sovereign will of God ([Acts 13:48](#); [Rom. 8:29ff.](#); [Eph. 1:3-7](#)) and is implemented by His grace ([Eph. 2:8-9](#); [2 Thess. 2:13](#); [2 Tim. 2:10](#); [Titus 1:1](#); [1 Peter 1:1](#)) (John F. MacArthur Jr., *Acts*, vol. 1, MacArthur New Testament Commentary [Chicago: Moody Press, 1994], 252).

Notice how the grace of God came to the Ethiopian eunuch.

Philip was preaching the gospel in Samaria (see [Acts 8:4-8](#)). Samaria was roughly halfway between the Dead Sea and the Sea of Galilee in the north.

Verse 26 says, **“Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, ‘Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.’ This is a desert place.”**

Gaza was about 80 miles southwest of Samaria.

Gaza was on the road from Jerusalem to Egypt.

According to one commentator, a traveler could take one of two roads from Jerusalem to Gaza. Luke's addition that **“this is a desert place”** indicates that the angel wanted Philip to take the road that was not in much use in those days (Simon J. Kistemaker and William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles*, vol. 17, New Testament Commentary [Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953-2001], 311).

So, Philip was directed to take a road that was not well traveled.

That is an indication that God was sovereignly working for Philip to meet the Ethiopian eunuch who was traveling on that road.

Verses 27-28 say of Philip, **“And he rose and went. And there was an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure. He had come to Jerusalem to worship and was returning, seated in his chariot, and he was reading the prophet Isaiah.”**

The Spirit of God then directed Philip in verse 29, **“Go over and join this chariot.”**

Philip obeyed immediately and heard the eunuch reading the prophet Isaiah.

In those days, people used to read out loud. That is how Philip knew the eunuch was reading the prophet Isaiah.

Philip asked the eunuch if he understood what he was reading.

The eunuch replied, “**How can I, unless someone guides me?’ And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him**” (v. 31).

Philip did so.

The eunuch was reading from [Isaiah 53:7-8](#). He was trying to understand about whom the prophet was speaking.

Do you see the grace of God at work here?

God sent a Christian to a non-Christian who was traveling on less-traveled desert road to explain the gospel to him.

There is no way the Ethiopian could have orchestrated that.

There is no way that Philip knew what God was doing.

Philip simply obeyed God.

God’s grace was at the root of the faith of the Ethiopian eunuch.

III. The Object of a Faith That Does Save Is Jesus (8:35-38)

Third, the object of a faith that does save is Jesus.

After Philip sat next to the Ethiopian, he started explaining the meaning of the text to him.

Verse 35 states, “**Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus.**”

Jesus!

The object of saving faith is Jesus.

It is not obedience.

It is not works.

It is not being nice.

It is not going to church.

It is not giving money to the church.

The only one who saves is Jesus.

Apparently, after Philip's explanation to the Ethiopian eunuch about the Person and Work of Jesus, he believed in Jesus.

He realized that he was a sinner and that he had broken God's law.

He knew that God had sent Jesus to live a life of perfect obedience.

He understood that Jesus went to the cross and died to pay the penalty for all his sins.

He believed that God raised Jesus to life after three days in the tomb as a sign that he had accepted Jesus' payment for sin.

So, the Ethiopian eunuch turned to Jesus in faith and repentance so that he might have eternal life.

Then we read in verse 36, **“And as they were going along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, ‘See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?’ ”**

Then we read in verse 38, **“And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him.”**

What I want you to notice in your Bibles is that your version most likely goes from verse 36 to verse 38.

What happened to verse 37?

The oldest and most reliable Greek manuscripts do not have verse 37. But some manuscripts do have verse 37. It is likely that verse 37 was not originally penned by Luke, which is, **“And Philip said, ‘If you believe with all your heart, you may.’ And he replied, ‘I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.’ ”**

Those words were not likely written by Luke.

But clearly the Ethiopian eunuch professed his faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God.

So, the object of faith is Jesus.

IV. The Experience of a Faith That Does Save Is Joy (8:39-40)

Finally, the experience of a faith that does save is joy.

Verses 39-40 tells us, **“And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing. But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through he preached the gospel to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.”**

Azotus was a town on the coast about twenty miles north of Gaza. The Spirit carried Philip there and he continued preaching to people all the way up the coast to Caesarea.

The eunuch continued his journey to Ethiopia.

The text says that he **“went on his way rejoicing.”**

Joy is the mark of every true believer.

Charles Spurgeon once said, “Joy in God is the happiest of all joys.”

Joy is what you have when you are in a right relationship with God.

Joy is what you have when you know that your sins are forgiven.

Joy is what you have when you know that you are destined for heaven and not for hell.

Joy is what you have even in the midst of pain, knowing that you are deeply loved by God himself.

Conclusion

So there it is.

Luke teaches us that in contrast to a faith that does not save there is a faith that does save.

Its root is grace. God's grace finds sinners wherever they are so that they can receive faith.

Its object is Jesus. It is not works or good deeds or performance, but it is the Lord Jesus Christ himself.

And its experience is joy. Joy is a fruit of the Spirit that characterizes every child of God.

I pray that this faith is your faith, for this is the only faith that will take you safely to heaven. Amen.