

23a ACTS

Let's begin our study of the Word of God this evening by taking a moment to go to the Lord in prayer. Father, thank you for the many ways and the many areas that you have provided for our needs. We thank you for our physical provision, for our spiritual provision.

We thank you for the fellowship of believers and the opportunity to study your Word together. We thank you for the ever-present Holy Spirit who is with us as a person, as a comforter, as an encourager, as a guide, speaking through your Word to encourage us in the right path. We pray that our study tonight will give him ammunition to speak to us and to help us tread in the direction that we should go.

We pray that we'll understand this section of Scripture as we should and remember it, and that it will be a source of application and blessing in the days ahead. We pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.

We resume our study tonight in Acts chapter 8. And in chapter 8, we have seen this departure. This is sort of a bridge chapter. Chapter 7 was the testimony of Stephen and his martyrdom.

In chapter 8, we have seen the persecution of the church by Saul. This introduces us to him and we'll find out a whole lot more about him in upcoming chapters. We saw the different ways in which the new information and the new dispensation has tried to be thrown off track.

We saw it earlier with Ananias and Sapphira. We've also seen it here with the sorcerer, the Simon Magus, who decided that he would ante up some money and learn how to make people have the Holy Spirit and do miracles. But then, most interestingly, we saw beginning in verse 26, an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, had him go south along the road from Jerusalem to Gaza, which is desert.

Did not tell him why. He rose and went and says, Look, there was a man of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under Candace, the queen of the Ethiopians, had charge of all her treasury, had come to Jerusalem to worship. This tells us something about him already.

He's not just a random, hapless villager from the south, who's walking along the road and gets hit by the divine light of God, and his whole life is turned around. This is a man who already knows God, has a desire to worship Him, is willing to put himself out to do so. He makes this long trip by himself to go to Jerusalem and worship.

And he's now returning and sitting in his chair, he's reading Isaiah the prophet. This is called redeeming the time. We do a lot of commuting in our modern society.

We spend time riding in automobiles. What do we do? What do we do when we're riding in the car? Do we listen to music? Do we think deep thoughts? Do we write poetry? Do we converse? Does our mind just wander off down the garden path to return when we reach our destination? One of the things that technology lets us do is redeem traveling time by listening to a tape, reading a book, meditating. Sometimes you get caught and you didn't realize that you were going to be there a while.

Patty and I were going up to northeast Oklahoma one time, and there was a gigantic pileup on the only artery that goes in that direction. There was no way to get off and make a detour, and so we sat there for like two and a half extra hours before we could get up the road. Well, when we find time like that, even if we don't have a cassette handy or a MP3 or any other form of record, we don't have a book or a Bible, there ought to be things in our soul.

This is a challenge I will give to you. It's a challenge I give to myself. Every week at some point I find myself unexpectedly delayed.

I get delayed in traffic. I get delayed waiting for something that was supposed to happen that hasn't happened. Whatever.

And when I find myself in a delay, I think, here is a little chunk of time that God has given me. I can't do anything physically here but wait. So what can I do to make this time worthwhile? Maybe you don't have a Bible or anything like that.

What about all of the time that we've spent in the Word of God? Everybody in this room has been here before multiple times. Do we remember anything at all of what we've heard? When we have a few spare minutes, it's a great exercise, a great spiritual exercise to say, what was it we talked about in the last Bible class or in Bible class a week ago? I don't strain myself trying to go back more than two or three classes, which is kind of a shame. You wish the human brain was more retentive and resilient.

At least I wish mine was. It would be great if I could think a year ago or six months ago or three months ago, where were we and what were the salient points? What were the things that were helpful? What were the things that were interesting? But just try the last class or two, the last scripture passage you read in your morning devotions or the last one that came up on a radio program and think back. What is that for? Why did God give that to the human race? Why did I run across it? What does it mean to me? Because the Word of God is like fuel in the tank.

You can have the greatest car or the greatest motorcycle or the greatest airplane in the world, but if you don't have fuel in the tank, it is so much wasted effort, wasted metal, wasted electronics. The greatest, mightiest, most powerful vehicle in the world is useless if there's no fuel. We have been striving to improve our souls and to improve our spiritual life and to make our life count for something, but if we don't continue to pour fuel into

the tank, it's a waste of time.

The fuel is the Word of God. That's what ought to be cycling through our thoughts. If we're going to do what we do heartily, as under the Lord, what conditions us, what gives us that point of view? It's the Word of God in the hands of the Holy Spirit.

And all of us have the experience, and I put myself as point man in this little squad, all of us have the experience of deep and egregious failure when we know better because we don't use the Word of God that's in our soul. And there's no excuse. There's no excuse.

It's like sitting there, stomping the pedal to the floor, and the car's not going anywhere, and there's a great big tank of gas sitting right beside the vehicle, and we're just there, why won't this thing go? Stomping it to the floor. Notice what this Gentile, non-Jewish guy is doing. He's got a journey.

He's reading the Word of God. So, Philip came up. We saw a lot of this last time.

He's reading Isaiah. Philip comes up and explains it. Once he understands it, he says, well, this is the Lord Christ he believes.

What is the next logical step once one believes in this new age that has just come about? What did Peter preach way back in the beginning of Acts? When the people who were listening to him were cut to the heart, verse 41, those who gladly received his Word were baptized. And that day, about 3,000 souls were added. The sign at that time, the way to signify that you wanted to partake of this new life in Christ was baptism.

It was a teaching tool. Philip got the chance to explain, this is what the Holy Spirit is doing. He's taking your old life that is worthless, hopeless, useless, pointless, and you die to that.

He took him down in the water. You all know how baptism works, right? Real baptism, biblical baptism. It's not a guy dipping his fingers in the water and flicking it at you.

It's not a guy taking a handful of water and sort of pouring it on your head. It is not baptism. If you're going to do water baptism, you have to do it right.

And biblical, and it is amazing to me, there's dead seas of it. You get up on the web and there's 15 different kinds of baptism and 15 different stripes of people who will defend one another and say, well, you can't, you go to the Greek scholars and they say, well, you can't really tell for sure from the Greek hogwash. That is total and complete hogwash.

If anybody tries to tell you that, just tell them, a guy I know who knows Greek says that's hogwash. Because it is. Baptizo, every time the word is used, you know what that word is used for? When a guy would be in a blacksmith shop and he's got a big hammer and he's

beating a piece of iron into a sword and he beats on it, beats on it, beats on it, or the point of a plow, I like to think of swords.

I think that's the best thing they could make is swords and spear points and something to do battle with. But whatever he's banging away on there, it could be a horseshoe or anything, what does he do when he gets finished? He plunges it into the water. Why does he do that? It cools it off, but he could set it aside and it would cool off eventually, right? When you plunge iron or any of these other alloys into the water, it tempers it.

The rapid cooling that takes place when it is immersed in water changes the nature. It increases the tensile strength. It increases the flexibility.

It gives it kinds of strength that it did not have and would not have if it cooled slowly. There's that rapid molecular contraction. I won't go into all the physics of it, but suffice it to say it's tempered.

It's made stronger. Its nature is changed by immersion in water. And this is the idea.

When we are baptized with the Holy Spirit at the point of our salvation, our nature is changed. We have a kind of strength we would not have without that. But it's immersion, and the picture is immersion.

It also pictures death to the old way of life. Now, I don't know about you, but the last time I looked, when people die, they get horizontal and get buried six feet under the ground, except in Japan. But you can't go by what the Japanese people do.

They're short on space. You know, they bury people standing up over there, right? But most of them are Shinto. They're not Christians anyway.

If they were, they'd bury people the way God intended, laying down. But most people, when they die, what do you do? You lay down. You're horizontal.

You assume room temperature, and they bury you horizontally. It has ever been thus. Go to the most ancient graves in the world.

When you find somebody, I saw them digging up some pyramid builders from 1,000 years before the time the children of Israel were in Egypt, 1,000 years before Goshen, 1,000 years before Moses. These people were out there building the pyramids. And so they were digging them up and grinding them to powder and putting them in a cyclotron and getting DNA and seeing if they were related and doing all kinds of interesting things.

But when they found them and they uncovered them and brushed away the dust, horizontal. So guess what? If baptism is a picture of death to the old life and resurrection to a new life, what's going to happen? When you die, they don't prop you in a chair and sprinkle dust on your head. What sense would that make? So when you're baptized to

simulate death, you get laid down in the water and you get raised back up.

That's so anyway. I'm belaboring this point, but don't let anybody ever tell you that there's some other kind of water baptism. There is one kind of water baptism.

John could have walked the streets of Jerusalem baptizing people if all he had to have was a bucket of water and five fingers. He had to be at the Jordan because he needed enough water to immerse them, to submerge them. They had to come to the water.

The water didn't come to them. This is another reason God uses immersion in a body of water because you have to make the trip. The water doesn't come to you.

Some of these denominations and pseudo denominations will come to you and maybe you're too sick to go down and see the priest. He'll come to you with a little jug of holy water and sprinkle you with it and say, well, you're baptized. That's not the picture.

You have to come. You have to make the trip. You have to decide to go.

That's what happens here. Remember, this was desert. It was a desert place that he went to.

We were told that for a reason. Now, at the appropriate time, when it is needed, when it is the teaching tool that Philip needs to complete the Ethiopian's education on what has just happened to him by putting his faith in Christ, they come upon water. In this whole stretch, if you look on a map from Jerusalem down to Gaza, it is dry wadis.

And I think this was miraculous. God preserved a pool of water. And just like a rate-time-distance-formula story problem, you know, one leaves Boston, one leaves Chicago, and they're traveling, and where will they meet? Well, God figured out ahead of time, it's going to take Philip 47 minutes to explain Isaiah 53.

It's going to take another. And just as they come up, the Ethiopian eunuch looks over, and he says, look, water. What prevents me from being baptized? And it was right there when it was needed.

This is God's provision. God will provide what we need when we need it, no matter how miraculous it may seem, or what a desert place it may look like, at the point that it's supposed to be there, at the right time, at the right place. They came over a little rise, looked over in a dry wadi, and somehow, here's a pool of water, deep enough to get in and submerge, that suffices to make the point.

So, he is baptized. Notice, the Ethiopian, in verse 38, commanded the chariot to stand still. He makes the stop.

He walks over to the water. He says, Philip, I'd like to be baptized. Philip baptizes him.

The picture in water baptism by immersion is not just death to the old life and resurrection to the new. It is not just identification and change of nature by submersion. It is also, this is the third aspect of it, it is a mark of volition, of voluntarily saying, I am going to do this.

People do not tackle you and haul you down and throw you in the water and say, there, now you're baptized. You have to do it. You have to stop your chariot.

You have to say, look, water. I'd like to be baptized. This is the picture in the first century.

So, what does it mean for us? You go through interpretation, application. What does this mean? Do we all need to go be water baptized? Should, before the water gets too much colder, go out to my nice swimming pool there in the backyard and we'll just have a mass baptism. What does it mean to us? Why do we need to worry about this at all? This is why.

Those three aspects, death to the old life and a new creation, is something that ought to be reflected every single day. Anybody can fail. Anybody can screw up.

Anybody can spiral down the flushing, spiraling downward, rushing water of sin and evil. Anybody can do that. It takes no brains.

All you have to do is throw your hands in the air and let your nature do its thing and you'll go right down the drain with millions of other people who have done the same thing. It takes an act of volition. We have to choose and we follow up that choice like we talked about last Sunday with a series of choices that establish a pattern.

When you die to an old way of life, why would you go back to it? If people died and went to heaven the way people traditionally understand it, and you're up there with streets of gold and heavenly music and wonderful joy, would you want to dig a hole in the middle of a golden street and jump down the manhole and find yourself back on earth where there's sickness and disease and death and poverty and all other kinds of remnants of evil and sin? If you've arrived at the new life, who would tunnel out of it and come back to the old? It doesn't make any sense. And yet that's what we do. We've died to the old way of life.

We're not supposed to be victims of fear. We are not supposed to be victims of worry. We are not supposed to be victims of our sinful nature.

We're not supposed to be beset and dragged down. And if it's happening, we have to look and figure out why. Because we have died to that life.

We don't belong to it anymore. We have a heavenly citizenship. We have God's Spirit within us.

We have God's Word. And it is a matter of choice. If we find ourselves down that hole, we have chosen some way, somehow.

There's no other explanation. Secondly, what's the second picture in baptism? It is identification. It is a change of nature.

They anneal metals. They temper metals. They are changed by this rapid submersion.

And we have been changed. We have a new nature. This is an area that I have not ever tried to delve into and teach in our studies.

But you can read books where people talk about man being dichotomous before salvation and trichotomous after salvation. Well, what is dichotomous and trichotomous? That sounds to me like something to learn in biology. But a dichotomy is two unlike things stuck together.

A trichotomy is three separate things stuck together. And so they say, well, body and soul is what man is before he's saved. And then after he's saved, he's body, soul, and spirit.

And so you go from being a dichotomy to a trichotomy. And you have these three different parts. And then people will go on to tell you all the different parts.

There are six parts of the spirit, and there are six parts of the soul, and there are six parts of the body. And they go into all of these details. The reason I have never broached this subject before and probably won't again for a long time is I have read my Bible cover to cover.

I have translated most of it out of Hebrew and Greek and Aramaic. And I have not found trichotomy and dichotomy. It talks about the soul and it talks about the spirit, but it's fairly obvious from the context what's in view.

And I don't have a need to know whether my volition resides in my soul or in my spirit or whether my memory center is in one place or another. The Bible just doesn't dwell on it. And there are so many things it does dwell on.

That's what we choose to dwell on. But here's the point. Our nature is changed.

Some people would say that at the point of salvation, you acquire a human spirit that you did not have before. Fine. If it makes it easier for you to understand, then great.

Now you have a spirit you didn't have it before. The point is we have capabilities. We have options now that we didn't have before.

But suppose you're sitting there in my earlier illustration and you're pushing the gas pedal to the floor and the car is not moving. You're turning the key and it's just grinding

and grinding and it's not starting, right? And you say, I don't understand this. And so you give up and you sit there and you think, this is really a nice looking car.

The upholstery is comfortable. The paint is shiny. The windows are clear.

Well, while you're sitting there musing, somebody pours gas in the tank, but you never bothered to try starting it again. And you're sitting there saying, you know, this is a really beautiful car, but it just doesn't go. It doesn't accomplish its purpose.

And yet now there is gas in the tank and the person with the empty gas tank is walking away and you say, oh, I could see you were out of gas, so I poured in 15 gallons there. You ought to be good to go. You say, oh, great, thanks.

But then you never start the car and you never go. It would be just exceedingly ridiculous, wouldn't it? That's what you were after. That's what you were striving for is a car that would go.

Someone has just fixed the problem. Now you have a car that will go and you don't drive it. You just sit there.

And I can't even explain what someone would be thinking. It just makes no sense to me. If there is now gas in the tank, let's turn the key and go.

Well, guess what? Our nature has been changed. We have the ability to live in a whole new realm. There is a power.

There is a peace. There is a stability. There are problem-solving ways of thinking that are available to us.

The gas has been put in our tank. And we've been told about it. That's why we come to Bible class.

We find out that there are ways of thinking that are beneficial and ways of thinking that are destructive. Subjectivity. Remember that? What are the three? See, here's a thought.

When you're stuck, when you're waiting, the dentist is still drilling away on another patient in there and you're waiting, you think, all right, let me just run some things through my mind. What's the different kinds of thinking that there are? There's objective thinking and subjective thinking. What are the categories of subjective thinking? Y'all can dredge this up.

We've reviewed it enough. What are the three areas of subjectivity? Eyes on self. Eyes on people.

Eyes on circumstances. If I am just rolling it around, you've seen an old dog just gnawing on a bone, and he gets on one end and he turns it and he turns it and he turns it, and

then he gets on the other end and he turns it and he turns it and he turns it, then he doesn't want to do anything else but just gnaw on that old bone. Well, if we're gnawing on people and what they've done and how they act and what they said and who shot John, and then we throw away that bone.

We get tired of that one. We find another one over here and start gnawing on it. Circumstances.

Oh, boy, you know, here's this and that and the other. And then we decide that it's me and my problems, my desires are unfulfilled, whatever it may be. Subjectivity.

There is a fourth option. Did you know that people who are not saved, those are the only three options they have. If you are in contact with an unbeliever, I promise you, any conversation you have, any aspect of their thinking that comes your way that you observe, you can classify it in one of those three areas.

That's the only choices they have. They will either be consumed with themselves, they will be occupied with other people, or they will be digging and rooting in the world. Circumstances.

Details of life. How can I get ahead? How can I get stimulated? How can I have a good time? How can I improve my lot in life? I promise you, you think about any unbeliever you know, and at any given moment, it's one of those three, always. A believer not hitting on their spiritual cylinder, sitting there in the driver's seat without the engine running and not using the gas in the tank, is identical.

There is no difference. We will also be caught up in one of those three. But, as believers, there is a fourth choice.

What is this Ethiopian eunuch doing here? He's exercising his fourth option. He says, you know, I came to Jerusalem. I got this copy of Isaiah.

I'm going to figure it out. I want to understand. I want to know what it means.

I want to think this way. I want to live this way. God says, there is a man after my own heart.

You know what I will do? I will take one of my functioning believers in Jerusalem, and I will walk him down this road, 23 miles, and bring him to this guy so that he can explain it. Give him the information he's looking for, because it's a rare thing. You and I have the chance to exercise our new nature.

In our new nature, we can think in a fourth way, and that is divine viewpoint. It's God's perspective. What does God think about this situation? And it's amazing.

All of the things shift. I've given you this example before. You all are sitting in reasonably

comfortable seats right now, aren't you? And you don't really have, well, this is an assumption.

Let's assume that you don't have any particular desire to get up and leave right at the moment. That you're reasonably fixed in your spot. Maybe you have a good reason for not leaving.

You might get pounded on the head if you stand up and try to leave. So for whatever reason, you're staying in your chair, right? If I gave you, in the next 30 seconds, totally convincing evidence that there was an explosive device on a 15-second timer under your chair, suddenly, you would have a strong motivation and would probably follow it up with action. You would leave your chair, right? I have given you a piece of information that shifts your priorities.

I have told you a truth in my illustration. And this piece of truth, you say, you know, as interesting as your class is, there's an explosive device under my chair, and I'm really going to leave now. Do you see what I mean? One fact can change the level of priority that any given circumstance has, right? You might decide that you're going to do something.

And somebody might come up, and it sounds attractive, and you've got your plans laid, you're ready to do it. Someone comes up and says, if you do that, I'm going to make you the most miserable individual in a five-mile radius. And you say, well, I know this person can do that.

I'm going to have to change my plan. One fact, one piece of information, changes what you're going to do, right? Well, listen, as believers, God gives us information from his word. Unbelievers can't digest it, can't comprehend it, can't see it.

You and I can. And this information tells us what we need to know, and it changes the relative priority. It changes the value.

It takes us out of subjectivity into objectivity, because God's truth gives us the real picture of what's important. You and I can avoid suffering. We can avoid heartbreak.

We can avoid loss. We can avoid losing blessing in this life and inheritance in the next. But we have to be willing to consider what God says.

Give it the priority. Follow what it gives us. Now, there's one more point I'm going to give you before we stop out of this story.

It told us in verse 26, An angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, saying, Arise and go. Philip went. At the end of this story, in verse 39, it says, The spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more.

God's got the angel of the Lord maneuvering around in this area. He's in this story. The spirit of the Lord is maneuvering in this area.

He's in this story. Who is the guy that needs help here? It's the eunuch. He's the one that is getting the benefit of all of this action, right? Here's a question for you.

See if you can answer it. Why did God not send the angel of the Lord to the eunuch? Why did God not send the spirit of the Lord to the eunuch? Wouldn't that be the most efficient answer? Spirit of the Lord comes and says, Behold, eunuch. Isaiah 53 means this.

Behold, water provided by the Lord. I'll dunk you. He doesn't do that.

And this is an important principle of the word of God you're going to see over and over again. When someone needs information from God, even in these supernatural times at the beginning of the church age, God deploys people to speak to people. God uses human messengers to deliver certain kinds of information.

You say, Well, now wait a minute. Why didn't he use a human messenger to tell Philip to go down to the eunuch? Listen to what I'm saying. There are certain kinds of information that God details communication person to person.

Not angel to person. Not spirit to person. Person to person.

Well, it would be very helpful to know what that category of information is because then we would kind of know where to look for different kinds of truth, right? But this is not the only case. We're going to see one in the very next chapter. We're going to see it throughout the word of God that there are certain messages that God sends, and he will not send it by an angel.

He will only send it by another person. This is an example. So if you've got a sharp mind and an eye for detail, you can look at this story and begin to figure out what kind of information it is that is designed by God to be transferred person to person.

But here's the corollary to that. Sometimes we are going to be the speaker, and other times we are going to be the speakee. We are going to be the receiver.

Sometimes other believers will speak the truth to us in love. Other times we will be the believer who is supposed to speak the truth in love to someone else. Again, if we're going to sort that out, it would be helpful to know what exactly are we talking about here.

What sort of information should I be prepared to pass along? What sort of information should I be prepared to receive from my fellow believers? Well, that's going to be an interesting study that we're going to have to save for after the break. As we conclude this story of Philip, I just want to point out one other thing. He started out going down the

road to Gaza, and he ends up at Azotus.

Azotus is the ancient city of Ashdod. It's a Philistine city on the coast. And passing through Ashdod, or Azotus, he goes preaching in all the cities until he came to Caesarea.

This is not Caesarea Philippi. This is Caesarea that is also called Straton's Towers. It's also got another name, Caesarea Sebaste.

It was named for Caesar Augustus, or dedicated to him by Herod. It's also in the Philistine region. And the point here is, you remember the two kinds of Christians we talked about? There were the Hebrew-Hebrew Christians, and there were the Greekish, return from far away, Greek culture type of Christians.

Do you remember which group Philip is in? He's in the second type. He's the Greek type. He's talked to an Ethiopian eunuch, and now he's going to preach in a largely Gentile area.

Very few Jews in this coastal area, because it had always been traditionally Philistine and coastal, and was full of foreigners. There are small Jewish communities there, but it is largely Gentile. This chapter is positioned here for a reason, because it is introducing, it is foreshadowing for us.

You remember in Genesis, it says God created male and female, and then you get the whole chapter of details? Here, we have the summary. This is the Semitic way of telling a story. You tell in summary what's going to happen, and God uses this story of Philip to say, the Gospel is going to the Gentiles.

And now we're going to see how, in the career of the Apostle Paul. Let's pause here and take our break. When we come back, we'll try to answer the question we have posed for ourselves.

When is it that God wants people to speak to people? Instead of using angels, visions, and the spirit. And then we're going to get into chapter 9, and see what exactly is going on on the Damascus Road.