



Bible studies for disciples who make disciples

Loudonville Community Church

Volume 1 - Number 12
The week of January 10, 2016

The Unhindered Gospel

Acts 8:26-40

THIS WEEK'S CORE STATEMENT

Unity in Christ - We believe that everyone who has trusted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior have become one in Him.

One of the ways that we, as the Body of Christ, reflect the unity that we have in Him is by being baptized. Please read this excerpt from LCC's documents pertaining to the sacrament of baptism.

Baptism for every child of God is a privilege. The disciples understood the importance of this mandate and, starting at Pentecost, they began to encourage believers, in obedience to the Lord's command, to be baptized (Acts 2:38-41; 8:12, 36-38; 9:18; 10:47-48; 16:15, 33; 18:8; etc.).

While affirming the necessity of water baptism, we must recognize that the New Testament reacts strongly against a formalism which denies the true power of the Christian faith (II Timothy 3:5). We are not saved by the waters of baptism. . . . We are saved by grace alone, through faith. Water baptism is the symbol of this inner work. What finally counts is the inner reality and not the external form. . . . In the New Testament, people are not baptized in order to be saved. Rather, they are baptized because they are saved! This ritual finds its biblical function only when the candidate sincerely repents of their sins and truly believes in Jesus Christ as their personal Savior. Without personal faith, baptism is only a meaningless ritual, void of real significance.

How, then, are we to understand the true meaning of baptism?

IT IS A SIGN - As circumcision was the sign of the Old Covenant, baptism is the sign of the New Covenant (Colossians 2:11-12). The Lord Himself chose this sign. As with all Christian symbols, the sign of baptism is not itself the reality. The sign signifies and symbolizes that the reality exists.

IT IS A SEAL - Water baptism can be a helpful aid to the new Christian which enables them to confirm, or "seal," the reality of their forgiveness and their acceptance before God (Ephesians 1:13-14, 4:30; II Corinthians 1:21-22). Baptism is the official seal of God's acceptance of the believer and of His covenant with the believer (Luke 22:20). It is also the seal of the believer's covenant with God. It binds the believer in obedience to God (Matthew 28:19-20).

IT UNITES US WITH THE VISIBLE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST - Because there is only one baptism (Ephesians 4:4-6); the rite symbolizes the unity of all true Christians. It symbolizes the renunciation of whatever former non-biblical religion the person had, and the public acceptance of the obligations and privileges inherent in being a follower of Christ. By this ceremony, the church publicly receives the believer into the family of God, and acknowledges spiritual responsibility for the nurture of the new believer.

IT IS A PUBLIC TESTIMONY - In the New Testament, baptism is always a public act. It announces to the whole world that this person has been bought with a great price, that they no longer belong to themselves, but belong to God (I Corinthians 6:19-20). Jesus emphasized the public aspect of our faith when He said, "Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven" (Matthew 10:32-33).

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This Week's Complementary Passage

Ephesians 4:1-6 (ESV)

¹ I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, ² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³ eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴ There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

Marking Guide for Acts (not all words occur in the passage)

- appointed
- baptized
- Caesar
- enemy/demons/Satan
- eternal life
- fathers & children [in one color different from Moses]
- Gentiles
- gospel
- grace
- Holy Spirit
- in the name of Jesus Christ
- Jesus
- Jews
- Law (of Moses)
- men of the council
- Moses [in different color from fathers & children]
- prayer
- repent (repentance)
- resurrection (raised up)
- salvation
- suffering
- the Way
- the promise of the Father
- witnesses
- word of God

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STEP ONE . . .

READING what the passage says
(Read it at least three times)
Acts 8:26-40 (ESV)

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.

STEP TWO . . .

OBSERVING how the passage moves

Return to the passage and **mark key words, phrases and movements:**

- Circle all of the words in this passage that speak of the Triune God (Father, Son, Holy Spirit, etc.).
- Underline the significant verbs/action words in this passage.
- Highlight Acts 8:30.
- In Acts 8:32, highlight the phrase “Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter and like a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he opens not his mouth.”
- In Acts 8:33, highlight the phrase “justice was denied him.”
- Highlight Acts 8:35.
- In Acts 8:36-39, underline the words “water” and “baptized.”
- In Acts 8:39 highlight the phrase “and went on his way rejoicing.”
- In Acts 8:40 highlight the phrase “as he passed through he preached the gospel to all the towns.”

STEP FOUR . . .

UNDERSTANDING what the passage means

This commentary is intended to enhance your own study of the text.

Commentary on Acts 8:26-40

8:26 - Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza. Both verbs are commands and point toward a divinely prepared evangelistic encounter for Philip.

8:27 - A eunuch, a court official. The term “official” is literally the term “eunuch.” However, it is uncertain whether he was a physical eunuch or simply an official at court (the derived meaning). Whether this man was a god-fearer or a proselyte is simply uncertain. The implication is that he was an important and powerful man.

Ethiopia. This was the kingdom south of Egypt along the Red Sea and included parts of modern-day Sudan.

Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. Candace is a title like “Pharaoh” or “Caesar.” The reason the queen is mentioned is because the king in Ethiopia was considered to be a deity and, therefore, it was beneath him to deal with simple administrative or political affairs.

8:28 - He was reading the prophet Isaiah. Apparently this man had bought an expensive leather scroll of Isaiah, which would have been over 29 feet long. Or, perhaps he purchased a copy of the Septuagint, which was the Greek translation of the Old Testament. By the Spirit’s direction, he had opened it to the Messianic passage of Isaiah 53:7-8 and was reading it.

8:29 - Go over and join this chariot. This was again a specific command which literally meant “be glued.” The Spirit is giving Philip every specific guidance.

8:30 - Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet. Ancients read aloud even when alone.

Do you understand what you are reading? What a great question! It is possible to read Scripture and not clearly discern its meaning.

8:32-33 - These verses are quoted from the Messianic passage from Isaiah 53:7-8. Philip begins a conversation from this passage and explains it in light of the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. The OT prophecy has been fulfilled and forgiveness through Christ is offered to everyone!

8:36 - See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized? Philip’s gospel message may have included instruction regarding baptism. Notice he did not need approval from the Apostles in Jerusalem to baptize a convert. It is also noteworthy that the eunuch did not seem worried about being accepted by other Christians even though he had a different ethnic background, came from a different socio-economic class, and did not receive in-depth instruction in Christian theology and practice. All barriers come down in Jesus Christ. Whosoever will may come!

8:39 - The Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away. Whether this is a miraculous occurrence like Elijah’s or Ezekiel’s or simply a reference to his immediate departure is uncertain. The Spirit was intimately involved in this conversion. Notice also that extensive follow-up and catechism apparently did not occur, but the convert had the scroll of Isaiah and the indwelling Spirit to guide him in the faith!

“The eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing. The Good News is always accompanied by rejoicing. The early church father, Irenaeus (130-202 A.D.), records the tradition that this eunuch became a gospel missionary to his own people.

8:40 - As he passed through he preached the gospel to all the towns. Philip continued his evangelistic ministry in the Philistine town of Ashdod (i.e. Azotus) on his way home to Caesarea by the sea. It is obvious that Philip understood the universal evangelistic implications of the conversions of the Samaritans and the Ethiopian. The gospel included even Philistines!

STEP FIVE . . .

SUMMARIZING the message

Acts 8:26-40 is a stirring account of the activity of the Holy Spirit directing His church and Philip, in particular, in an unusual and extraordinary way. An angel appeared to Philip and directed him to head south and take the road that leads from Jerusalem to Gaza. This road ran through an isolated stretch of the desert vacant of any cities or villages. Philip did not hesitate to obey. He left the awakening that was occurring in Samaria to travel down this empty road.

This is an incredible picture, sometimes all too rare, of someone who is *being led by the Holy Spirit*. All service for God must be empowered by the Holy Spirit. Philip left a ministry of great spiritual drama to minister in a very ordinary, obscure place because God told him to. We need to be careful of organizing and over-planning everything that we leave little or no room for the Holy Spirit to move us. He must be free to move in ways beyond our ingenious plans! There are times we need to break out of our “ruts” and respond to the leading of the Spirit in fresh and new ways.

Philip was flexible so he rose and went. As he went he encountered an Ethiopian, a eunuch and financial treasurer to Candace, the queen of the Ethiopians who was returning from Jerusalem where he had worshiped in the outer court of the Gentiles. He was not a Jew but a proselyte to Judaism. And though he was denied full participation into temple worship because he was a eunuch, he was actively searching and his search had brought him to Judaism. He is returning home dissatisfied. As he is riding along in his chariot, he is reading a copy of the book of the prophet Isaiah aloud. The good news of Jesus is not limited to any ethnic or cultural group.

The Spirit instructed Philip to catch up with his chariot. As he did, he heard the Ethiopian reading Isaiah 53. Philip asked him, “Do you understand what you are reading?” And he said, “How can I, unless someone explains it to me?” He invites Philip to sit with him. The passage he was reading was Isaiah’s prophecy about the death of God’s suffering Servant, the Messiah. A coincidence? We think not!

This is *a case of perfect timing* orchestrated by the Holy Spirit. He was reading the perfect passage but was perplexed by it. This passage has always been a puzzle to the Jews. So *the Holy Spirit guided the conversation* using Philip as a teacher who was ready with an explanation. Beginning with Isaiah 53 Philip shared with him the good news of Jesus. As they went along the road they came to some water, the African ordered the chariot to stop, and they went down into the water and Philip baptized him. He was baptized because he had come to a new life in Jesus Christ.

Philip was obedient to the Great Commission (cf. Matthew 28:19-20). This is what can happen in the great adventure of following the Holy Spirit. *Be ready to go any place at any time for the sake of the gospel*. There are these wonderful moments when amazing things happen and God uses you as you present yourself available to Him. God can do amazing things through people who are both available and ready to explain the gospel.

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STEP SIX . . .

EXPLORING the passage through discussion

Conversation Starter: Have a group member or two share about a time when you met someone who was so ripe to hear the gospel it was if the fruit just fell from the tree.

1. What was Philip doing before the angel directed him to take the road heading down to Gaza? What might have been some of his initial objections?
2. We are calling this section in our study of Acts, "*The Sent Church*." A part of the vision for LCC is for us to be a sending community. Sometimes churches are prone to focus more on what is happening in the church than scattering into the world. How can we overcome this tendency? What ways can you or your Growth Group encourage our church and one another to be committed to going and sending?
3. Philip witnessed to the Ethiopian, though they were of very different cultures and backgrounds. What were some of those differences? How do we ensure that the gospel crosses over cultures and goes around man-made barriers? What will this mean for our church?
4. Why is it important that we witness not just with our lives but our lips too?
5. Philip was a prepared witness. What steps can you take to be a ready and effective witness?
6. Philip baptized the Ethiopian. As he shared Christ he must of spoken about the importance of baptism. What is baptism? Why does it matter? If you know Christ and haven't been baptized yet, talk to you group leader, pastor or elder and indicate your desire to be baptized in 2016.
7. The Spirit-filled life is a great adventure. How can you be more open to responding to the leading of the Holy Spirit to go any where at any time for the sake of the gospel?

THE MISSION OF LOUDONVILLE COMMUNITY CHURCH

We are committed to reaching and teaching people to become devoted followers of Jesus Christ, connecting them to one another and sending them to serve their families, communities and world.

10 CORE BELIEFS OF A DISCIPLE

Authority of the Bible *2 Timothy 3:16-17*

We believe the Bible to be the inspired, the only infallible, authoritative Word of God.

The Godhead *2 Corinthians 13:14*

We believe that there is one God, eternally existent in three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The Deity and Sinlessness of Christ *Colossians 2:9*

We believe in the deity of our Lord Jesus Christ, in His virgin birth, in His sinless life.

The Sufficient Atonement of Christ *2 Corinthians 5:19-21*

We believe in His vicarious and atoning death through His shed blood.

The Resurrection and Return of Christ *Acts 1:3, 9-11*

We believe in His bodily resurrection, in His ascension to the right hand of the Father, and in His personal return in power and glory.

Salvation By Grace *Ephesians 2:8-9*

We believe that for the salvation of lost and sinful man, regeneration by the Holy Spirit is absolutely essential and that a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

The Ministry of the Holy Spirit *John 14:16*

We believe in the present ministry of the Holy Spirit by whose indwelling the Christian is enabled to live a godly life.

Unity in Christ *Ephesians 2:14-17*

We believe in the spiritual unity of all believers in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Eternity *Revelation 21:22-27*

We believe in the resurrection of both the saved and the lost; they that are saved unto the resurrection of life and they that are lost unto the resurrection of damnation.

Stewardship *1 Timothy 6:17-19*

We believe that everything we have or own belongs to God.

10 CORE PRACTICES OF A DISCIPLE

Undiluted Worship *Matthew 22:37-40*

Loving the Lord God with all of our physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual vigor and, my neighbor as myself.

Constant Abiding *John 15:1-11*

Abiding in Christ in order to be faithful and bear fruit.

Bible Study *Hebrews 4:12*

Reading the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for daily life.

Desperate Prayer *Psalms 66:16-20*

Praying to God to know Him, laying requests before Him and, finding direction for daily life.

Biblical Community *Acts 2:44-47*

Fellowshipping with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, other people's lives and, in the world.

Spiritual Gifts *Romans 12:4-6*

Using my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Total Forgiveness *Ephesians 4:30*

Practicing forgiving others as God has forgiven me in Christ.

Tangible Compassion *Matthew 25:31-46*

Showing compassion to those in need and so minister to Jesus Himself.

Generous Giving *2 Corinthians 8:7*

Giving away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

God Space *Ephesians 6:19-20*

Increasing the quantity and quality of our gospel conversations.

10 CORE VIRTUES OF A DISCIPLE

Love - a sincere affection for others *1 John 4:10-12*

Love is acting in someone else's interest no matter who they may be, no matter how you feel, and no matter what it costs.

Joy - a delight unaffected by circumstances *John 15:11*

An inner delight in God that is sustained in spite of the changing seasons of life.

Peace - an abiding sense of harmony *Philippians 4:6-7*

Relationships are free from friction. Positively, it describes harmonious relations with others in the church.

Patience - a willingness to stick with things *Proverbs 3:3-4*

Being willing to live with a difficult situation for a long time—even if things are slow to change or never change.

Kindness - a sense of compassion in the heart *Job 6:14*

An inner disposition that puts others at ease and out of which kind actions flow.

Goodness - a goodness that flows outwardly *1 Thess. 5:15*

Choosing to do the right things in my relationships with others.

Faithfulness - an unwavering loyalty *Psalm 26:3*

Being the kind of people who keep our word to one another.

Gentleness/Humility - an attitude of humility without any entitlement; a lack of self-awareness *Philippians 4:5; 2:3-4*

Gentleness is power and strength under God's control.

Humility is considering others above myself, if I consider myself at all.

Self-Control - an ability to direct your energy wisely

Titus 2:11-13

The strength to restrain our desires, emotions, and actions has to come from within rather than from some outside source.

Hope - a certainty of what is to come *Hebrews 6:19-20*

Coping with the hardships of life and with death because of hope in Christ.

Each week this Bible Study will feature either a core belief, practice or virtue vital for growing disciples.

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