

Stop the Chariot



ACTS 8:26-40

Bro Ricky Cunningham

This text is one of my most favorite passages in the book of Acts. I love this story. This is an absolutely thrilling story. Let's remember the immediate context before we start. As the church was exploding with growth, there was a murmuring in the church. So for the first time, the church stopped doing what it was doing in its outward focus to focus inwardly. The apostles led the church to set aside seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit, and full of wisdom to make sure the widows in the church were taken care of. This would allow the apostles to do what they had been called to do – to pray, to preach, and minister the Word of God. These seven men who were elected were, we believe, the forerunners of what we call deacons in the church. Chapters 6, 7 and 8 start dealing with two of these deacons, Stephen and Philip. In these chapters, we saw Stephen's story and eventual execution, we saw the church scattered throughout Judea and Samaria while the apostles stayed in Jerusalem, and then we met a deacon by the name of Phillip. Phillip went down to Samaria to proclaim Christ, but there were so many people being

saved that the apostles have to leave Jerusalem to come down to Samaria to check it out. When they checked it out and thought it was alright, they laid hands on the believers who were baptized, and they, too, received the Holy Spirit. The apostles then go back Jerusalem. This is the context.

An Angel Instructs Philip

Get this picture. Try to get into this passage with me...immerse yourself in this. You are Phillip. You are in a city and you are preaching the gospel. Hundreds and thousands are coming to Christ. I can just see him with his evangelistic crusade tent set up. I can see his children outside the door handing out ten commandment tracts. We are getting ready to hold an evangelistic meeting and inviting everybody to come, but all of a sudden (verse 26 says), "...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."

If you were here last week, you heard Kory say that in the book of Acts there are some transitional things and to be careful to make note of them. We see that with baptism. I want you to be alerted to this. In this passage, we will see another transition. In the Old Testament when God was ready to speak to His people, when God was ready to exercise His sovereignty to do certain things, God would send an angel to carry out His mission to His people. The word, angel, literally means messenger, so when God got ready to speak to someone He would send an angel with the message. We see this throughout the Old Testament. We have already seen this in the life of Jesus. Jesus was tempted by Satan, and when the temptation was over and Jesus was victorious but exhausted, an angel came to minister to Him. Do you remember when Jesus got up from the grave? Who was at the tomb? Two angels, who announced the good news that He is not here – He is risen – don't seek the living among the dead.

So, it is not a surprise to us that an angel tells Philip to arise and go. Look where the angel tells Philip to go. He tells him to go out to the road that leads from Jerusalem to Gaza and tells him this is a desert place. The Bible tells us that Philip rose and went. I love that!

Can I ask you a question? Have you sometimes felt you have gotten a message from God and didn't immediately do what God said for you to do? Did you regret it? Have you looked back at a period when you wasted some time because you didn't do what God wanted you to do? So because you weren't doing what God wanted you to do, being where God wanted you to be, you felt you were wasting time. I remember at sixteen years of age, the Holy Spirit of God leading me to believe that God was calling me to preach. I just said, "no way" – for three years. I look back on those three years with regret because I did not respond to God as I should have. If God speaks to you, please do immediately what He is asking you to do.

This will blow your mind. Philip was holding a great revival. He was in town but was asked to go out to the highway that ran from Jerusalem to Gaza, and the Bible says it is a desert place. For years, I thought God was leading Philip from the city to go to the desert. Now, if you are in a desert, what is the last thing you expect to see? Of course, water – but I always thought people. If there is no water, you can't start a lot of towns. It is not a place you would go on vacation. So the last things you are going to see in a desert place are water and people. However, that is not what this is meaning. When Luke said this was a desert place, he was reminding us that Gaza, as a city, was destroyed before Christ came the first time, and it had been rebuilt. When it was rebuilt, it was not at the same location. The old Gaza that was destroyed was in a desert, and it was on a highway that went from Jerusalem to Gaza. It was the most populace road from Jerusalem to Egypt. So the angel was telling Philip not to go to new Gaza, because that would be what he thought – *Wow God, you are leading me from Samaria and now I am going to Gaza where there are a lot of people, there is a rebuilt city, and now I will get to preach Jesus again!* – No, the angel was telling him to go to the old Gaza that is on the desert road. But get this picture...This was the main road between Jerusalem, Judea, and Egypt. So, don't get this picture that he is going out to a highway and he is not going to see anybody. He will see people. They would be traveling either from Egypt to Jerusalem or from Jerusalem to Egypt.

Do you have that picture? Ok, imagine it this way...Brother Ricky is in downtown Hardin. Souls are being saved, we are baptizing people, the

church is growing, and God says, "Ricky, go out to the highway that runs from Murray to Benton." You know I am talking about Highway 641. When I go from Hardin out to that highway, I will actually see more people, but they will be in trucks, on motorcycles, and in cars, but they will be passing by at a great rate of speed.

Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch

In Acts, the angel said to Philip, arise and go, and he rose and went. He got out by the highway and he was not twiddling his thumbs; he is watching everybody pass by. – Allow me to use my sanctified imagination just a little. Have you ever been by a major road watching cars go by, all of a sudden, there is a car that catches your attention? It is one of those classics or maybe it is a truck that has been lifted and has the big wheels, and you have your eyes on it. – All of the people were traveling by their various modes of transportation, and Luke tells us a gold-plated chariot goes by! Now, you are thinking...*My Bible doesn't say that!* Yes, it does; you just didn't see it. The Bible tells us that a chariot passes by and the guy in the chariot is from Ethiopia and he is a eunuch. This means that either by choice, or a decision imposed upon him, he can't have a family. He is dedicated to the service of the queen. He has been so faithful in his service that she has made him secretary of the treasury. He has access to all her treasures. He is an African, a dark-skinned person. If you are a single adult man, not spending any of your salary on your wife or your kids, can you imagine how much money you would have? I didn't mean that in a negative way. Sorry, Celisa! I didn't mean for that to sound like it sounded. ☺ This guy is not driving an ordinary chariot. No, it is gold-plated.

So, this gold-plated chariot with an Ethiopian eunuch, who is Candace's secretary of the treasury, passes by. He has been to Jerusalem to worship God and is now returning home. Most of the Christians had been scattered, but the apostles were in Jerusalem. Now, I can't help it...I am a man, so I can see Philip, wide-eyed, as the chariot passes – *Look at that! I wish I had one of those!* – Then verse 29 says, "And the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over and join this chariot." Do you see the transition? In verse 26, an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip. Now the Spirit of the Lord speaks to Philip.

Church, hear this. We no longer live in the age when angels speak to us. The Holy Spirit speaks to us. Why would you want an angel to speak to you that would have to be sent from Heaven by God (not that this would be a problem) when you have the third person of the triune Godhead living inside you? Wow!

The Holy Spirit Guides Philip

So the Spirit of God within Philip leads him to know that he is supposed to go join that chariot. Look at what the Bible says. I am not using my sanctified imagination here. I am just telling you what the Bible says. The Bible says Philip ran and joined himself to the chariot! Philip chases the chariot, trying to catch it! Then he finds himself beside the chariot, and he hears the Ethiopian who has been to Jerusalem to worship, and guess what? He has his Bible with him, he has it open, and he is reading Isaiah chapter 53! I want you to get this picture. You are the Ethiopian eunuch. You are dark-skinned. You take a break from reading your Bible, look out the window to see a lighter skinned Jew running after you...and he is listening to you. Philip asked the Ethiopian if he understood what he was reading. He looks out of the chariot and asks, not what are you doing, but how can I, unless someone guides me? He invited Philip to stop running and come up in the chariot. He said, stop the chariot, and Philip got up into the chariot.

The Ethiopian had been reading Isaiah chapter 53 where the Scripture talks about someone being rejected, despised, beaten, and mocked, and while all this was happening to him, just like a lamb led to slaughter, he opened not his mouth. The Ethiopian asked this question: Who is he talking about, himself, or somebody else? Luke said that Philip, beginning with this Scripture, proclaimed Jesus to him.

I don't want you to miss out on this. The Spirit of God guided Philip to the Ethiopian eunuch. I believe he still guides us to unbelieving people. The Spirit guided Philip to the Ethiopian eunuch, but the Spirit used Philip to point the Ethiopian eunuch to Jesus from Scriptures. Here is what I am believing...as the Spirit led Philip to the Ethiopian and then led the Ethiopian to Jesus, the Spirit of God leads us to people so that, ultimately,

we lead people to Christ, not from our experiences but from Scripture. Amen? I personally believe the book of Acts teaches that God, in His sovereignty, uses groups of people getting together to worship and proclaim Jesus, and many times, people come to know Christ as Lord and Savior. In God's sovereignty, He has not ordained that all of us come to know Christ in a worship service. God has ordained that many of us come to Christ in what is called personal evangelism. I want you to note this. This man had been to Jerusalem to worship and was returning. He was reading his Bible, and the Bible was talking about Jesus but he didn't know it.

Can you imagine having a Bible and not knowing who Jesus is? Can I make this modern? Maybe it is because I am a pastor that I sense this. I get it because of what I have to witness. Many times, I have to witness you and others gathering with us at Hardin Baptist Church and going home Sunday after Sunday, and you don't get it. Or you watch online Sunday after Sunday, and you don't get who Jesus is. How do I know that? I know it because people tell me what you post on social media. People tell me what you have done. You can't post what you post and do what you do if you know Jesus. You don't get it. Yet, we sit in a large group, worship, have the Bible preached to us, and we don't get it. Why, I don't know, but we don't. Maybe, God in His sovereignty, knowing us, realizes there are some of us who will never come to Christ sitting in a large group. The way some of us will come to Christ is having a personal encounter with someone who knows Christ and can answer all your questions and share Christ with you.

Is it possible that the Holy Spirit is guiding you to someone, and the reason He is guiding you to that someone is so that, ultimately, you might point that someone to Christ? You may have things or experiences in common with that person, but we are not going to let our experiences point someone to Christ. We want to point someone to Christ with God's Word. You are thinking it would be awesome if you sat down on an airplane and the guy next to you had his Bible open, and you look over at him and ask if he understands it, and he says no, will you tell me? We get it... but I just believe there are people in your lives and my life that God has led us to, and they are asking questions that should get our attention to the fact that

they don't know Christ. Because of the relationship we have with them, we have an opportunity to share Christ from Scripture. According to John, one of the roles of the Holy Spirit is to guide us. We are powerful witnesses. We are starting in Jerusalem and going to Judea, and Samaria, and the utter most parts of the earth. Who is our guide? Our guide is the Holy Spirit. I'm asking you to be aware of whom the Holy Spirit might be guiding you to.

There are a lot of people who love to come to Kentucky Lake and go out on our water. When they go out on our water, they catch our fish. They catch our fish because we have people who guide them. Can you imagine coming to Kentucky Lake, loving to fish but with no idea where the fish are? Our guides know where the fish are, and they let people catch our fish because we guide them there. We want them to enjoy our lake. Can you imagine a guy being a guide and not guiding anybody to fish? In the fall, we have people come here to hunt. We have people who guide them in where to hunt. Some people who could not kill a deer are able to do so because of a guide.

Guys, you are guides. I am a guide. The question is who are we guiding? I am not talking about guiding politically. I am not talking about guiding economically. I am not talking about guiding in marital relationships. I am asking who are we guiding that doesn't know Christ? As a church that believes in the sovereignty of God, we clearly understand what God has revealed: People cannot be saved until they hear the gospel! There are many people who God will lead to Christ, but not in an assembly like Hardin Baptist Church or through an online livestream service. They will be led to Christ because you and I will listen to the Holy Spirit, knowing the Spirit is guiding us to people because He is guiding people to Christ. We get to be in on what God is doing!

In the church, we will not pit group evangelism against personal evangelism. We are going to do both. Amen? Yes, we are called to gather on Sunday mornings to worship together, and in our worshipping, we pray that people will come to Christ. But when we scatter, there is a good chance we will get to talk with someone who came within the last week or two and didn't get it, didn't understand. They have questions, and God has

us in their lives to answer the questions. Isn't it exciting to know that God is going to use you and me to guide somebody to Christ from Scripture?

Philip Proclaims Christ

I love what Luke says. Beginning with this Scripture, Philip proclaimed Christ. Philip took Isaiah 53 and showed the Ethiopian eunuch that Isaiah was not talking about himself but that he was seeing the Messiah. When it says beginning with this Scripture, I believe he did not stay in Isaiah 53, but he probably went all over the Old Testament showing the Ethiopian other places where it talked about Jesus as the Christ. Amen? In my mind, I want to believe he probably went back to Genesis 3:15 and showed that Jesus is the promised Seed. I want to believe he stopped in Exodus and showed how he was the Passover Lamb. I want to believe he stopped in Leviticus and showed how he was the offering made on the Day of Atonement. I want to believe he went to Numbers and showed him as the brazen serpent. I want to believe he went to Deuteronomy and showed him as the Prophet greater than Moses. I want to believe he went to Joshua and showed him as the Captain of our salvation. He went to Judges and showed him as the Judge of the whole earth. He went to Ruth and showed him as our Kinsman Redeemer. He went to Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles and showed him as King of kings and Lord of lords. If we had time, I would continue through the entire Bible.

But Philip took Scriptures and showed him Jesus, and that is the ultimate purpose of your life and my life! Some of us are chasing the things we are chasing, believing God has told us to chase them, and when we get there, it is not about us, it is about the person we come in contact with who does not know who Jesus is. Philip has a sincere desire in his heart because this man has been to Jerusalem to worship and is returning home, not knowing Christ! Philip didn't catch the chariot to enjoy a chariot ride. He caught the chariot because of the person in it. We have to get our eyes off ourselves. We have to stop thinking this is all about us. Yes, we pursue the Christian life, but we pursue it so God can give us the opportunity to open our lips and tell someone about Christ. We don't dare start lipping this until our lives give us that opportunity. We don't choose between life and lip; we put them both together. Amen? That is why the Bible tells us about this man

who was a deacon, gifted and set aside to take care of widows. But we never hear anything about him taking care of the widows, Luke pictures him taking the gospel to the Samaritans, and now he takes the gospel to an Ethiopian.

I know I have to be careful because there is a lot of insensitive stuff out there. I know with Twitter, Facebook, and other social media you can be misinterpreted, but you know me. Here was a Jewish person who took the gospel to a group of people that the Jewish society said was half-breeds, now God is leading him to meet a man who is African, and he gets to preach Jesus to him. We are talking about a gospel that knows no walls nor barriers! We are Christians. Our hope is not in an elephant or a donkey; our hope is in the Lamb of God! Our gospel calls us to be multi-national, and we see it in the book of Acts...not just in a group setting, but in you and me, personally believing God is calling us as a church to take the gospel to people who do not know who Jesus is.

The Eunuch Gets Baptized

I don't know how long Philip's sermon lasted, but Philip isn't running anymore. He is riding in a gold-plated chariot and he has just told this guy about Jesus. The guy looks out the window and guess what he sees? Water. Now, that is the last thing you expect to see in the desert. When he sees the water after hearing who Jesus is through Philip telling him the gospel, he asks, what hinders me from being baptized? That is in verse 36. Do any of you read from the ESV translation of the Bible? In this version, the verses go from 36 to 38, leaving out 37. Don't write the editorial board of ESV saying they have made a typographical mistake. They did not. There are other versions of the Bible such as the King James and others that have a verse that is not in the ESV translation because they do believe it should be there. The reason the ESV board feel it should not be in the Bible is because it is not in some of the older manuscripts of the Bible. They tell us in a footnote that verse 37 has been added. We have the Ethiopian asking the question, what hinders me from being baptized? Then, verse 38 tells us Philip yelled out to stop the chariot. The chariot was stopped and they both went down into the water, and Philip dips the Ethiopian. Yeah! I love it! That isn't what the ESV says. It says Philip

"baptized him." I know. I wish it didn't say that. I wish it said what Luke said. Luke said that Philip went down into the water with the Ethiopian, which, in my mind, means they were at least waist deep, or possibly chest deep, or even shoulder deep. They were not in the water to get a drink. They went down into the water so that Philip could dip the African, the Ethiopian eunuch. He put him under the water and raised him up out of the water. He dipped him.

Why, then, does your Bible say baptize? In 1611 when the King James interpreters were translating a Bible for the king, they came to the Greek word, baptizo. They knew it meant to dip, submerge, immerse, or plunge, but they knew the king had not been dipped, submerged, immersed, or plunged, so they didn't translate it into English. Instead, they coined a word, baptism. They took the Greek letters, brought them into English, and thus we get baptized. Now, here is what you know. Churches baptize today by dipping, sprinkling, or pouring. You can't support that from the Greek New Testament. You can't support that from the Greek dictionary. Philip dipped him. Philip immersed him. Philip submerged him. I love this...Philip plunged him. That is what it means to be baptized.

Now, what about verse 37? Why was there a time when someone thought that verse should be added in? I don't know why, but this is probably what happened. Because baptism is a transitional thing, we want to make sure we understand who we are baptizing. So, here is what the King James Version, the New King James Version, and other translations say, "Then 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.'" Then, as soon as he said he believed that Christ is the Son of God, Philip yelled out, stop the chariot, and they went down into the water and Philip dipped him under the water.

Now, get this picture. There were cars passing by, not cars, but vehicles, donkeys, camels, people on foot, people in chariots, and people in pony carts. (If you were in that world, when Philip dunked that guy under you would have stopped, thinking this man was drowning that guy!) Philip put him under the water and brought him out of the water. When he went under the water, it said that the Ethiopian who had gone to Jerusalem to

worship, who was a sinner that didn't know God, was now dead. When he came up out of the water, he was proclaiming that he was a brand new person. His salvation was because his trust was in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. That is why we get baptized. That is why we get dunked. We get dunked to let the world know that our faith is in a Savior who died, was buried, and He rose again for you. The moment you put your faith and trust in Him, the person you were died and you became a brand new creature in Christ Jesus! The Spirit leads us to people so that He can lead them to Christ, through us, with the Scripture. Once they come to Christ, we dip them. We dunk them. We plunge them. We immerse them. We submerge them. Are you a believer? Have you been dipped, not because you wanted to join the church, but because you wanted everybody to know that your faith is in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ?

The Spirit Carries Philip Away | The Eunuch Goes Home Rejoicing

I want you to watch this. They both came up out of the water. That did not mean that both got baptized. It just meant that both went down into the water where Philip baptized, dunked, the Ethiopian. They came out of the water, and it said the Spirit carried Philip away and the eunuch went on his way rejoicing. Wow! Do you see that? Can I tell you what the Spirit did to Philip? He raptured him. Can you imagine what the Ethiopian was thinking? You look out of your chariot and there is a guy running beside you. Now, he has just baptized you. You come out of the water, you look, and Philip is gone. He was carried away, not by an angel but by the Spirit. See, we are transitioning from an angel of God doing God's work to the Spirit of God doing God's work through His church. The Spirit carried Philip away.

Watch this. The Ethiopian did not want to go back to Jerusalem or Samaria and stay with Philip. He wanted to go home. When he went home, he went rejoicing because he had Jesus. Luke is telling us that he did not have the person in his life who led him to Christ, but he is OK. He will be fine because he has Jesus. If you have Jesus, you also have the Holy Spirit of God living inside you. So, can I make a simple application here? Grow up. Quit whining because you can't have enough time with the person who led you to Christ. If that person really led you to Christ, you have got Jesus

and you should be rejoicing. You should be going on your way. The moment you come into the Kingdom, no matter how young you are in Christ, you have a purpose. Your purpose is to realize that the Holy Spirit will guide you to people. The reason the Spirit is guiding you to people is so that you can point people to Jesus from the Scripture, so that ultimately those people come to Christ. When they come to Christ, the church baptizes them. That baptism signifies the new relationship they have with Jesus. Now, I am not minimizing discipleship. I am not minimizing any connections in a small group. But you have Jesus! You have the third person of the triune God living inside you. Wow!

Philip Continues to Proclaim Jesus

You can read this in the ESV translation. I am not using my sanctified imagination. Philip found himself in Azotus. This is almost like one of those Star Trek movies where a man is beamed off the Enterprise to a planet! When they get beamed down, they have to look around for a minute or two because they have gone to different surroundings. Listen to this. The Spirit carried Philip away and he found himself in Azotus, which means he didn't know where he was. Right? Can you imagine that? You walked from Samaria to the desert place. You have ridden in a gold-plated chariot. You are closer to Ethiopia, to Africa, than you have ever been, and all of a sudden, you wake up and you are in Azotus! – *Where am I? I had better ask somebody!* – He asks someone and he finds out he is in Azotus. Now, Luke is clever with this. Philip didn't decide then to go home from Azotus. The Bible tells us he went from Azotus to Caesarea. What did he do on the way? He proclaimed Jesus. Wow!

How many times have we decided to go somewhere and were only focused on getting there because life is about us? We had no thoughts about anybody between here and there. No one... No one...No one. I want to make two observations. Either the Holy Spirit is not guiding us to lead people to Christ, or secondly, we are not listening. I can't make that decision for you. Yes, our lives have been interrupted. We are trying very hard not to spread a virus. If you are not trying very hard not to spread this virus, shame on you. Shame on you. This is serious. Did you hear me? It is serious. While we choose not to spread the virus, we have to believe

that our ultimate purpose is to spread the gospel. Let's not get so focused on not spreading the virus that we don't spread the gospel. God is doing some amazing things.

Let me tell you what happened yesterday. I opened the door of my truck while on the side of the road in Marshall County. There were people getting in their car just across the road. They looked at me with big grins on their faces. They said, "Brother Ricky, we are so glad to finally get to meet you." I said that I was glad to meet them. They said, "We watch you every Sunday online." Do you understand the opportunities that God has given us as a church, in this climate, to spread the gospel? Not just online, not just with in-person worship, but by personally following the Spirit, taking our Bibles, and answering people's questions about who Jesus is, and by being sensitive – not to our flesh, but to the Spirit – of when a person has truly come to faith. Then, we encourage them to go down into the water and identify that faith in baptism.

Can I just say this? If you have ever led someone to Christ, it is a rapturing experience. There is nothing like it! But here is the truth. That person you just led to Christ – I am not saying don't follow up with them – but I am telling you they are going to be good because they have Jesus. It is better for them to have Jesus and the Holy Spirit because they now have the same guide we have. Amen!