



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Acts 8:26-40

Acts

"In Right Place at Right Time"

TRANSCRIPT

If you remember from Acts chapter 8, the persecution occurred in Jerusalem. The church was scattered, and Philip and went down from Jerusalem north to Samaria and began to preach the gospel and a great revival occurred there. That's the context for our passage this morning, which is Acts 8:26-40. One of the features I think that we notice in this chapter is the ways in which God leads His people, and He has various ways of leading us. Providentially, through the circumstances of life, He leads us. We see that at the beginning of the chapter with the persecution that drives the church away from the capital of Jerusalem, and yet the gospel spreads. That was God's will, and He brought it about, brought it to pass through a very difficult circumstance, but God works everything to our good, and He did in that circumstance. Now we see a different way in which He leads His people.

We come to Acts 8:26 and we read, "But an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip saying, 'Get up and go south to the road that descends from Jerusalem to Gaza.'" (This is a desert road.). So he got up and went; and there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure; and he had come to Jerusalem to worship, and he was returning and sitting in his chariot, and was reading the prophet Isaiah. Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go up and join this chariot." Philip ran up and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet, and said, 'Do you understand what you are

reading?' And he said, 'Well, how could I, unless someone guides me?' And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. Now the passage of Scripture which he was reading was this: 'He was led as a sheep to slaughter; and as a lamb before its shearer is silent, so He does not open His mouth. In humiliation His judgment was taken away; who will relate His generation? For His life is removed from the earth.' The eunuch answered Philip and said, 'Please tell me, of who does the prophet say this? Of himself or of someone else?' Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him. As they went along the road they came to some water; and the eunuch said, 'Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?' And 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.' And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he baptized him. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; and the eunuch no longer saw him, but went on his way rejoicing. But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through he kept preaching the gospel to all the cities until he came to Caesarea." May the Lord bless this reading of His Word, and bless us as we go to the throne of grace, which is our privilege at this time. Let's pray.

Father, we do thank you for the great privilege we have to gather together, to read your inerrant Word, to spend time of study in it together and seek to understand in more detail the meaning of the text and how it applies to us, and what it tells us of your grace and your mercy and your power and your sovereign guidance of us. We are certainly reminded of that as we come to this great text and Philip's evangelization of the Ethiopian eunuch and the providential path that was laid for him, and the ways in which the Spirit led him. It reminds us that you are a God who is in absolute control, who guides us at every step. So we praise you for that and pray that through our time together, you would make us more receptive and

more yielded, more willing servants. Make us like your servant Philip. Make us more importantly like your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ of whom this passage speaks. It speaks of His obedience, His submission. May we be like that.

We pray, Lord, for those who have asked for our prayers, those who are in need, who have physical ailments. Father, we pray for those whose names have been listed and some whose names have not. We know of servants who are afflicted greatly, who have serious illnesses. We pray for them, and we pray that you would give healing and that you would restore them to useful service.

We do thank you very much for the privilege we have of serving you. We thank you for the privilege we have of being here in this hour, of reading the Word of God, of studying it together, and pray that it will be very profitable. We know that it will. You promise that your Word will not go forth and return void, and we know that it will not go forth and return void this morning. We are blessed people to be reading it and studying it together.

Bless us this evening as we return to this place and we celebrate the Lord's Supper, and we remember in that hour the gift of life that you've given to your people through your Son, that He came into this world. He humbled Himself. He became a servant, and He died in our place. We're reminded of that. We're reminded of the great cost of our salvation, reminded that it was an effective purchase that He bought us for Himself. We're also reminded, Father, that He's coming again and we are to do that until He comes. We look forward to that day. May we live our lives usefully, faithfully until then. May we redeem the time and be faithful servants, we pray. Use our time this morning to that end. We pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.

We've all heard the expression, "He was in the right place at the right time," which often is another way of saying, "He was lucky." Well, there is no such thing as luck or fortune, but we can be in the right place at the right time due to the providence of God who guides us by His sovereign hand. In fact, God's people have the assurance

that as they walk by the Spirit, they will always be in the right place at the right time. He will guide us in the right paths of life. He has promised to do that.

Proverbs chapter 3 makes that clear. As we trust in the Lord with all our heart and lean not on our own understanding, but commit our way to the Lord, He makes our paths straight. Though there are times when we feel like our paths are more crooked than straight, and we wonder if we are on the right path at all, we have those questions, and we won't always get the answer that we want, but we can be assured of this; the Christian life is a spiritual life with a spiritual guide, and He always guides us wisely.

That life is the safest life and sometimes the most surprising life with doors that open unexpectedly to unanticipated appointments, divine appointments. That's what Philip had when he was unexpectedly called away from one ministry to have another, a very different ministry in a different place. Philip was a deacon in the church of Jerusalem and an evangelist who had gone to Samaria, preached the gospel with amazing results. The sick were healed and many were saved. Then in the midst of this thrilling work, an angel told Philip, "Get up and go south to the road that descends to Gaza into the desert."

It was a divine command that might have given Philip pause and reason to wonder why he was to leave such an important work at such a time. The fields of Samaria were ripe for harvest. People were believing in the gospel. A church was being established and new converts needed to be grounded in the faith. There were other gifted men in the church. There were 12 apostles in Jerusalem and there were many others who weren't already engaged in the busy ministry in Samaria. So, from the circumstances, it would seem that there were reasons to question the wisdom of the command. It didn't seem to make sense, but Philip didn't question it. In fact, there is no suggestion that he hesitated at all.

Back in chapter 6, he was described as a man full of the Spirit and of wisdom and he was quick to obey the Spirit's leading and head south to Gaza where he would meet a man from Africa. Now, he didn't know that at the time. He wasn't told why he was sent south, just told to go. In all of this, we see something of the nature of Christian service. He is not guided by human reason, but by divine wisdom, by the Spirit of God, by the third person of the Trinity. He is the one who leads Philip throughout this story. We learn from His leading of Philip that God's ways are not our ways, and that His thoughts are not our thoughts. That's what God said in Isaiah 55:8.

What may seem unreasonable and unusual to us, appears that way because we don't have the perspective of God. We don't have the understanding that God has. He is omniscient. He's all-knowing. He's all-wise. His plan is perfect, and He sovereignly guides us in that plan. What we are to do is to trust Him, and if His leading takes us to areas that are unfamiliar to us, we can be sure of this; they are not unfamiliar to Him, and He has already prepared the way.

He certainly did that for Philip. Everything in this account works in perfect sequence obviously guided by the Lord's hand. That's what Luke records. This is the book of Acts, and as you remember from our introductory statement, it has historically been titled "The Acts of the Apostles." At least from the second century on, that is the title that it has officially borne. That's really a misnomer. It's not the "Acts of the Apostles." It's the Acts of the Holy Spirit or perhaps better, the Acts of Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. He is our guide, and His ways are infinitely wiser than ours. Though Philip did not know why he was being led away from a thriving work, still, he obeyed.

That's what God requires of us. He doesn't require that we understand everything that we're doing. He doesn't require of us that we're able to forecast the future or perceive where this is going to lead, and how this is going to be worked out and then to trust Him. He doesn't require that at all. He simply requires obedience. That's

the person He uses, what Paul describes in 2 Timothy 2:21 as, "A vessel for honor, a person who is cleansed, sanctified, set apart, separated from the world, and separated to God."

Philip was that kind of man. His heart was devoted to the Lord's service. It was set on doing what God told him to do even if it didn't make sense to him. That's where we find blessing in this life. We think we can figure out how we're going to be happiest, and that's often what we pursue in life, what is going to meet our comforts. We set our goals and our life according to that. That becomes our guiding light. We'll never find happiness if that's what we're pursuing. We will find joy in this life as we live a life of obedience to the Lord. That's where we find blessing in the obedient life, a life of walking by the Spirit.

So, following the Lord's instruction, Philip headed to Gaza, which is about 50 or 60 miles southwest of Jerusalem. It's one of the old Philistine cities near the Mediterranean coast. The road that Philip traveled was the way from Asia to the African continent. As he traveled it, he soon discovered the reason for his journey. He came on a man seated in a chariot traveling southward. He was a eunuch from Ethiopia, a high official in the court of Candace, who was queen of the Ethiopians. Ethiopia at that time was an area that is larger than it is today. It was in the region of the Upper Nile from Aswan in southern Egypt to Khartoum in the Sudan. The Eunuch was the treasurer of the kingdom. It was common for eunuchs to be employed as court officials in the Near East in ancient times even until relatively modern times because they were not subject to the temptations that other men were. This man was given a very high position. He was the minister of finance.

He was an unusual man. We can gather that from the context, a very capable man, an intelligent man, a man highly educated. We read in verse 28 that he was reading the book of Isaiah, and the citation that was given in verses 32 and 33 suggests that he was reading the Septuagint, which is the Greek version of the Old Testament. So in

addition to knowing his own language, he knew Greek, which would be expected from a man of his office. Perhaps he also knew Latin, but in addition to being a man of intelligence and a man of education, he was also a man of spiritual interest and insight. He was returning home from Jerusalem where he had worshipped.

There was a large Jewish community in Egypt and perhaps through this man's official duties and communications, through diplomatic efforts he had come in contact with Judaism. He had responded to the light that he had been given. He had turned from paganism, from worshipping many gods to the one God of Judaism, and become a proselyte, become a convert to Judaism. As a devout man, he made the long journey to Jerusalem, probably to celebrate the Passover, but he may have left the city unsatisfied. He'd only been a partial participant of worship there. The law, Deuteronomy 23:1, excluded eunuchs from entering the sanctuary and joining the worship there. So he would have remained in the court of the gentiles and witnessed everything from a distance. What he saw there, there in the temple and throughout the city of Jerusalem and elsewhere might have disillusioned him. Judaism was lifeless. It had become a formalistic, legalistic religion. It was sectarian. It was divided between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, not to mention the political factions, the Herodians, and the zealots. He likely had seen all of that. He'd seen the party spirit that was there as well as the wealth and the greed in the temple. So the journey to Jerusalem that he had anticipated with great expectation very likely had disappointed him so that he left a very troubled man. Now, that's not an unreasonable speculation, knowing what we know of religious life in Jerusalem and the surrounding areas. Also, what we know from the lives of other men.

Martin Luther was a young monk. He made a pilgrimage to Rome on the advice of his superior in order to gain spiritual peace for his troubled soul. He went with the best intentions and great expectations. When he came within sight of the city, he fell to his knees and he exclaimed, "Hail to thee, holy Rome!" but what he

discovered there wasn't holy. He was shocked by the wealth and the worldliness of the church and the carnal attitude of the priests, and he left more troubled than when he arrived. Well, that can happen in protestant churches as well today. People can come into an assembly seeking light and instead they find materialism or legalism or politics preached from the pulpit; not the Word of God. They can go out of that place completely unsatisfied.

That's how Luther left Rome, disillusioned with religion, but it was a step in the path to his salvation and in the discovery that salvation is not in the sacraments. It's not found there. It's found in the Scriptures. That was the Ethiopian's experience as well. He left Jerusalem unsatisfied, but not empty-handed. Before leaving the city, he purchased a scroll of Isaiah, and he was reading Isaiah 53 about the suffering servant when Philip came upon him. Now, that's providential.

At some point in his journey, he decided to read through the book he had bought; maybe to find some solace for his troubled soul or maybe simply to pass the time on a rather mundane journey. But in all of that, the Spirit of God was working in the heart of this man to create a hunger for the truth. He had created that hunger before.

To possess a scroll was an unusual thing. They're hand-made. They were made of vellum, which is sheepskin or papyrus and hand-written, and so they were painstakingly made. There were not many. It was hard to find one, and those that were there were very expensive. So this man went to great expense to find the Word of God. He treasured that, and he treasured that because the Spirit of God had been working in his heart, and now working in his heart so that he is drawn to that scroll that he has purchased, and he was reading Isaiah.

At just the moment that the Ethiopian reached the critical passage in that book, in fact, we might say the apex of the Old Testament, the passage that addressed his deepest need, his deepest longing at that very moment, Philip arrived. It was a divine appointment. It was no coincidence. It was no accident. There are no accidents in the life of

God's people. God rules time. He rules events, and He makes them all serve His purpose.

Now, you see that in the lives of the saints. That is true in the life of every believer in Jesus Christ, but you see it more predominantly, more obviously in the lives of some people than in others. You see it, for example, in the conversion of Augustan. We've talked about that before, how he entered the garden in Milan under great conviction. He sat there alone, weeping, when he heard a child playing in a neighbor's yard, chanting the words, "Take up and read. Take up and read." He picked up his Bible. He turned at random to Romans 13:13-14, "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh," and he was converted.

It was the end of a long road. God had brought Augustan from North Africa to the city of Rome and from the city of Rome to the city of Milan, and then into that garden. At the same time, He brought a child out to play, and used a simple song to produce a great conversion.

We see that here. Philip arrived from Samaria at the right moment because the Holy Spirit was directing both men along their paths to that appointed destination. The Ethiopian had already picked up and begun to read the Bible, reading it out loud, which was the custom in ancient times. So Philip heard what he was reading and recognized the text, and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit at the prompting or direction of the Holy Spirit, he approached the chariot, and he asked the man if he understood what he was reading. The Ethiopian answered, "Well, how could I unless someone guides me?" Then he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

Calvin commented on the Ethiopian's modesty, how freely he acknowledged his ignorance and his need of instruction in spite of his important position and his great education. He contrasted that with people of his own day who he described as swollen-headed – those are his words – self-confident people, and he suggested that the reason there was so much ignorance of the Bible in his day is because they were too proud. They were not willing to submit themselves to the

teaching of the Word of God. The fact is to be taught of the Word of God, to understand the Word of God, there must be humility. There must be a humble heart. There must be a willingness to submit to it. Many don't do it, but this Ethiopian did. He was eager to learn the truth of God's Word, and he gladly submitted to the teacher that God brought him.

So, Philip joined him in the chariot and began to explain the passage that he had puzzled over. Luke gives us the text in verses 32 and 33. It is the prophecy that describes Jesus as God's suffering servant who became our Savior. Isaiah described Him as the one who bore our griefs and carried our sorrows, a man smitten of God and afflicted, pierced through our transgressions, and crushed for our iniquities.

The eunuch had read those verses in the text, and then he came to the words cited by Luke in verse 32 and 33 which is Isaiah 53:7-8. "He was led as a sheep to slaughter and as a lamb before its shearers is silent, so He does not open His mouth. In humiliation, His judgment was taken away. Who will relate His generation for His life was removed from the earth?"

These are words of sacrifice and atonement, sheep led to slaughter, judgment taken away. All of it had recently been fulfilled in Jerusalem, but the Ethiopian not knowing that asked Philip, "Who is this? Is Isaiah speaking of himself or someone else?" Judaism had taught this man a lot. It had taught him about the one God. It had taught him about the need of forgiveness with the sacrifices at the temple, which demonstrated morning and evening, day after day, and particularly during the high holy days that without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness. It had taught him that. It had given him the promise of the Messiah and the kingdom to come and that great hope, but it had not identified for him the servant of Isaiah 53.

Judaism was not anticipating a suffering Messiah. It was not anticipating a King who would come and lay down His life as a sacrifice for His people. But as this man read, he found this promise of

God's servant who would be a sacrifice, an idea he seems wholly ignorant of, and he wanted to know who this person was. He's struck by this passage. He's greatly impressed by it, but what does it mean? "Is the prophet speaking of himself?" he asks, "or of someone else?"

Isaiah could not have been speaking of himself and identifying himself as the servant. He has already described himself as a man of unclean lips who dwells among a people of unclean lips, and he has only recently in this chapter said, "All of us like sheep have gone astray." He and the others were sinners. They were not capable or fit of bearing the transgressions of others. They needed the servant to bear their sins, to be crushed for their iniquities.

So Philip answers the Ethiopian's questions. "Beginning from this Scripture," Luke writes, "he preached Jesus to him." In other words, he didn't need to back up and give some background information. He came at the precise moment, at the precise text where he could just continue right on giving the gospel, and he explained how Christ fulfilled the prophecy. The promise of Isaiah 53:11, "My servant will justify the many." It was accomplished in Jerusalem when Jesus hung on the cross wearing the stripes that heal and died for the many. Philip explained all of this, and then I can imagine that he rolled the scroll forward to chapter 55 and he read in verse 1, "Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters." What a promise that is for a man who's literally in the wilderness out there in the desert. "Everyone who thirsts, come to the water; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost."

I wonder if the Ethiopian had seen the merchants and the money changers in the temple and witnessed the importance that money often plays in religion. If so, he learned here that what God offers is free. Salvation is all of grace. Jesus paid it all. All to Him I owe. Sin had left a crimson stain. He washed it white as snow. He paid it all. There's nothing for me to pay. There's nothing for me to do, but just receive by faith and faith alone what He has accomplished. The man

might have wondered if "all" applied to him. After all, he was a foreigner and a eunuch who is excluded from the assembly of Israel. So Philip might have rolled the scroll forward to the next chapter, to chapter 56 and read in verse 3 through 5, "Let not the foreigner who has joined himself to the Lord say, 'The Lord will surely separate me from His people.' Nor let the eunuch say, 'Behold, I am a dry tree.' For thus says the Lord, 'To the eunuchs who keep My Sabbaths, and choose what pleases Me, and hold fast My covenant, to them I will give in My house and within My walls a memorial, and a name better than that of sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name which will not be cut off.'"

The salvation that is in Jesus Christ is a salvation for the world. We're all kinds of people. We're all who are thirsty and who come to the waters of life, who come to the living water, which is Jesus Christ Himself. The Lord had told His disciples to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Philip must have made that statement to him to assure him that, no, the foreigners are brought into this as well. This is a salvation for the world, and they are all to be baptized into the name of the Trinity. I say he must have said that at some point to the Ethiopian because it wasn't long before the Ethiopian said, "Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?" That's amazing. These two are always in the right place at the right time. Water in the desert, and enough for baptism.

When the Lord leads, He always leads to the right place and provides abundantly. Nothing is too hard for Him. When He calls us to do something, if it does not make good sense to us, we're not to lean on our own understanding. We're to trust His Word. We're to follow the leading of His Spirit, and we are to go and we will as we go watch Him provide. I always think of that scene in the book of Joshua when the nation crosses from the east side into Canaan, crosses over the Jordan River. The river was flooding. It was at flood stage. It was impossible to cross, but God said to cross. So the priests, bearing

the ark, went across. They didn't wait for the rivers to stop. They went forward and as their foot touched the water, the river dried up, and they walked across. That's how we walk by faith. We trust the Lord, and as we walk by faith, as we move forward in obedience to Him, He provides. We see His hand. Nothing is too hard for Him.

Well, he requests baptism, and so we read in verse 37, "And 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.'" Now, the oldest manuscripts don't have verse 37. You probably have that noted in your text, and so it is probably not part of the original text, but this verse does express a truth. Some confession of faith occurred, probably a confession very similar to this. Water baptism is based on that. It does not save. It is a public confession of salvation, and the Ethiopian, having believed in Jesus Christ for salvation wanted to make a public confession immediately.

He probably had an audience. As a high public official, he would have traveled in a large entourage of servants and horsemen and guards. So he ordered the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he baptized him. That suggest that the mode of baptism here is that of immersion. They went down into the water and then verse 39 states, "They came up out of the water," and that would suggest for us the significance, the meaning behind baptism. It signified the new life that he had due to his faith in Jesus Christ. Going down into the water signified the death and burial of the old man, and coming out signified the new birth, the new man, the new man made clean in Jesus Christ.

Now he gives testimony to that, and that's what the believer in Jesus Christ is: a new creature, washed of his or her sins and righteous before God. Baptism doesn't cause that. Baptism doesn't affect the cleansing. It does not save. It is not necessary for salvation. The thief on the cross perished without baptism, but he was with our Lord in paradise that day.

Baptism is not necessary for salvation, but baptism is necessary. It is commanded of every believer in Jesus Christ, and the Ethiopian sensed the importance of it so strongly that he did not want to delay it for a moment. He went to the water, and in going to that water, he confessed by baptism that he had believed, that he was a new creature in Jesus Christ. He confessed it before that whole company of officials who were with him. When he emerged from the water, he came out with great joy.

You often see that when you do a baptism. I know you who attend on a Sunday night and see that, have witnessed it along with me. People come out of the water and they have joy on their face, and that joy continues for the rest of the evening and hopefully for days to come. It's heard in the audience as people express their joy at seeing that take place. We certainly see that with this man. He emerged with great joy out of the water. No doubt Philip had great joy with him, but Philip did not stay to celebrate the occasion. He was suddenly, we read, "Snatched away by the Holy Spirit while the eunuch," Philip says, "went on his way rejoicing."

Now, that's interesting because the eunuch now has a best friend in Philip. No doubt he was very close to Philip in those few moments they had together, and would have enjoyed spending the time rejoicing with him. Philip is gone, but the eunuch doesn't appear to be sad. He continues on rejoicing, and why not? After all, he had experienced sovereign grace. God had given him living water in the desert. Christ had come to him, the Great Physician, and healed his sick soul and given him new life. That will make anyone rejoice.

Well, he continues on in that way and then we read as the chapter concludes with Philip traveling up the coast, preaching as he went, until he arrived in Caesarea where he eventually settled. It's not until Acts 21 that we read of Philip again when Paul and his companions arrived in Caesarea and they stayed in Philip's house. There, he is called Philip the evangelist. So 20 years later, he was still carrying on his ministry, doing the Lord's work. According to

tradition, the Ethiopian also became an evangelist, a missionary to the Ethiopians, and no doubt he did. I don't know that he became an itinerant preacher and went throughout Ethiopia doing evangelistic work. I suspect that he continued in his high office and used that office in the court of Candace to be a light in his homeland and beyond. What a position of privilege and opportunity, and he used it no doubt.

Well, we never know where God's call will lead and what the results of our obedience will be. We can never second guess the wisdom of God. It might seem foolish to leave the crowds of Samaria and go to the desert, but Philip had a divine appointment in Gaza. Because he obeyed the call, the gospel was carried down to the great continent of Africa years before it was ever heard in Europe. So the mission that Christ gave to His disciples to be His witnesses to the ends of the earth was now occurring, was beginning to unfold, and it was occurring by divine arrangement. That is what Luke was especially interested in showing, that everything that occurred in this incident was arranged by God and providentially worked out in all of its details.

That's not unusual. We may look at this and be amazed at how it all fits together and how it all works so perfectly, and yet that's not unusual. This is the spiritual life. It is the Spirit-led, God-guided, God-provided life. That's the life that we have. It is a supernatural life, and we are called to be obedient and follow the leading of the Spirit. As we do that, God will work in us in a way similar to the way He worked in Philip, who was not an apostle. He was a man like you and me. He was a deacon. He was a servant of the Lord. He was a man with a gift, and he used that gift, and he used the opportunities that God gave him. He was a witness for Christ. He was obedient to the Spirit, and as you are doors will open unexpectedly, and you will have opportunity to do a work for God.

There are no coincidences in life. God sovereignly guides us and leads us to divine appointments so that we are in the right place at

the right time. Dr. Martin Lloyd Jones, who for many years preached at Westminster Chapel in London, told the story of a man who had been active in the congregation for some time, but fell into sin and left his family and left the church. He made a terrible mess of his life, and things got so bad that he was determined to commit suicide. Finally, one Sunday evening, he made his way to the bank of the Thames River and prepared to throw himself in when suddenly it occurred to him that Lloyd Jones will be in the pulpit about this time. I'll go back one more time and hear him preach.

So he went to the church. He entered quietly, went into the gallery so no one would see him while Lloyd Jones was dealing in prayer. Lloyd Jones didn't know the man was there and without any forethought, without premeditation, Lloyd Jones said something about God's love even to the backslider. It was a common statement he said, but what he said was in Lloyd Jones's word, "A shaft of light from God to that poor soul." Just as he came in, he heard that said, and it pierced his heart. He came back to the Lord, reunited with his family, and he lived out his life in fruitful service for the Lord. It was a divine appointment. It was a work of grace, which shows the Lord not only leads the obedient. He also directs the disobedient. He leads them into discipline in order to lead them out and to bring them into restoration.

For everyone here this morning, this is your divine appointment. You are here because it's God's will. He's scheduled this hour in your life, this appointment from all eternity. Now, you may not be back next week, but you are here this week because God decreed it and led you here so that you could hear this text of Acts chapter 8. Maybe you needed to hear about the spiritual life, how God sovereignly directs our steps and be encouraged by that to be sensitive to the Spirit's leading, to be yielded to Him, willing to respond to His direction.

Maybe you needed to hear about God's love even for the backslider because that's what you've become. You've grown cold in

your love for Christ. You've begun to drift off. You've begun to fill your life with other things. God won't let go of you. He will let you sink deeply. He will let you lose everything, but He will never let go of you. Maybe today is your appointment with Him to realize from where you have fallen and repent. Maybe your appointment is like the one the Ethiopian had in Gaza where he met God's evangelist. He heard the words of life, the words of forgiveness, words of atonement for sin.

If you're here without Christ this morning, God has brought you to this place. He's brought you to this hour in order to hear your need of salvation because if you don't have Jesus Christ in your life, you're under the wrath of God. Don't treat this moment lightly. Realize your need, look to Christ. Trust in Him who bore our griefs and sorrows, who was pierced through for our transgressions, who paid it all. Trust in Him, and the moment you do that, you will have the full forgiveness of sins. You will have life everlasting, and you will go forth from this place the way that Ethiopian did, rejoicing. May God help you to do that, help you to see your need, and see the solution in Jesus Christ and come to Him and help all of us to rejoice in the life that we have and follow the Spirit, be obedient. Let's pray.

Father, we do thank you for your goodness and your grace, and we come to a text like this and we see it. Life is not governed by chance. Life is governed by your sovereign will, and that give us the encouragement to rest in you, not be troubled. This is a world that's full of trouble and it does trouble us to read the news and consider the circumstances of life and consider the direction that society seems to go, and the list goes on. Yet, we bow to your sovereignty and recognize all of it is under your control. We don't understand it, but we must confess that because you say it is so. That's not just true in the great scheme of things. That's true in our lives personally, individually. We praise you for that, that you are in control, that your hand is upon us. We thank you for that. We praise you for that, and

yet Lord, we confess that we have our responsibilities, and we pray that we will meet them, that we will be obedient to the Spirit.

I pray that if there be any attending this morning who has not put his or her faith in Christ that you would convict –