



SERMON
Acts 8:26-40

Unpacking the theme

What does obedience mean? In a world where there are more options for personal choice than ever before, and where societally the individual is valued more than the whole, how do we explore, yet alone seek to describe, the concept and value of obedience to our generation?

Key point

Prepared to obey!

Introducing the theme

Coming from a family with many military connections, and having ministered within such a field, I have at times questioned why unquestioning obedience is of such value. Why on an assault course should the PT instructor have such power (and induce such terror and physical pain)? Why are drills practised so vigorously and repeatedly? Why is unquestioning obedience demanded in all areas of life? The answer, of course, is so that in the heat of battle, training kicks in, orders are obeyed, resilience is vital, the community is more than the sum of the parts, and thus lives can be saved.

Exegesis

- ◆ 'Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip' – Throughout Luke's writings he uses this phrase when he wants to stress the special presence and activity of God. This is such an occasion.
- ◆ 'Go south to the road – the desert road – that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza' – the Greek verb *harpazo* is used here. It literally means Philip was snatched away from where he was and critically offered no resistance. How does this example of obedience challenge us today?
- ◆ The road down to Gaza was not a desirable road to travel. It was a desert road, with inherent danger.
- ◆ God placed in his path the very person he was meant to minister to. Henrietta Mears says: 'By chance, you say? When you are in the will of God, things do not just happen. No friend crosses your path by accident.'¹ God meant this encounter to happen.
- ◆ The eunuch was a man of high standing and importance, and he was prepared for the encounter. He was most likely a proselyte to Judaism, had been to the Temple, was reading the Scripture but not understanding.
- ◆ Philip approached and asked the right question: 'Do you understand...?'
- ◆ Philip started from the eunuch's own point of reference in Isaiah and took his listener to what he wanted him to hear - the good news of Jesus.
- ◆ The baptism signifies new understanding.
- ◆ Philip is again suddenly taken away. His job is done.
- ◆ The eunuch went on his way – who knows what impact his testimony would have had?

¹ Henrietta C. Mears, *What the Bible is all about*, Carol Stream, Tyndale House Publishers (2015) p511

Key headings to explore the passage

HOW PREPARED ARE WE TO RESPOND TO GOD'S DIVINE INTERVENTION?

We will be prepared if, like the military soldier, our minds have been trained to hear the order when it comes. Now military soldiers are not automatons. They have also been trained to use their senses, their intelligence, and all that they have within them to be the best. For anyone responding to God's call, God takes and uses all of who we are – 'Take my life and let it be...' (SASB 623). We need to be tuned into God's Holy Spirit, as the soldier is tuned in to their commander's voice.

HOW PREPARED ARE WE TO TAKE THE ROAD LESS TRAVELLED?

Philip had to go through the desert to meet with the eunuch. Desert times are not wasted times. They can be times of great preparation. And it was here, in the unexpected place, that, in winning one soul for Christ, the world was changed.

HOW PREPARED ARE WE TO PUT THE 'COMMUNITY' ABOVE PURPOSE OF 'SELF'?

The missionary stories of old often portray this – the individual setting off into the unknown, sacrificially giving up their all to follow. But the story doesn't stop with them. It carries on today. *'It is true that Christ alone can save the world, but Christ cannot save this world alone.'*² We must be his witnesses. The military soldier thinks not just about themselves on the battlefield, but about their buddies, their mates – together they serve. Each one is part of the whole. Everyone can make a difference, what difference can you make?

Illustrative resource

See YouTube channel – All Christian Videos – God's way vs man's way / A funny animation

www.youtube.com/watch?v=2utXPjySWdE

² Mears, *What the Bible is all about*, 501