

The Eunuch

Acts 8:25—9:2

The last lesson focused in on the meeting between Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch. This God-arranged meeting was a continuation of the spread of the gospel outside of Jerusalem. Philip continued his travels by going up the coast of the Mediterranean Sea from southern Judea to the northern boarder of Samaria.

Philip was told to meet up with and present the gospel of the Kingdom to this Ethiopian eunuch. Once given the gospel, he believed and was baptized. The question arises, why was it so specifically pointed out that this man was a eunuch? Most people merely look at this incident as an example of missionary work in spreading the gospel, missing some of the deeper aspects of what is going on.

The eunuch was reading out of Isaiah, specifically chapter 53 which speaks of Christ dying as a Lamb going to the slaughter. In the Bible, a eunuch could be an emasculated man, or it could be a title for a man who is serving the king. It is probable that the eunuch to whom Philip was speaking had also read Isaiah 56, which promises that all those, Jews and Gentiles, who join themselves to the Lord will be blessed. This passage speaks specifically of eunuchs and sons of the stranger (non Israelites). Those who keep the commandments of the Lord are promised a place and a name even better than the national sons and daughters of Israel who have turned away from the Lord. This Ethiopian eunuch was more faithful than the leaders of Israel, who almost unanimously rejected Jesus Christ as their Messiah, and therefore they would be looking forward to being rewarded in the Millennial Kingdom. Isaiah 56:7 makes it clear that the Millennial Kingdom will be for Jews and Gentiles, and those who are faithful will have access to the temple to pray and give sacrifices. This Ethiopian eunuch will reap the blessings of the Kingdom while unfaithful Israel will be cut off and disallowed.

This story goes a little bit deeper when held up to an account in Jeremiah 38. God was using Jeremiah to warn Israel of the impending doom of Babylon sweeping in to destroy the city. Instead of taking heed of God's word spoken through Jeremiah, King Zedekiah thought it better to get rid of the messenger, so he threw Jeremiah into a dank, muck-filled dungeon and left him to die. An Ethiopian eunuch, who was serving the king, pleaded for Jeremiah to be rescued from the dungeon. The king agreed and the eunuch pulled Jeremiah out of the dungeon and took care of him.

This story is significant because here we see a eunuch accepting the man of God while mainstream Israel rejected him. Since the eunuch was faithful, he was saved when the Babylonians attacked Jerusalem (Jeremiah 39:19). The events happening in Acts 8 show a continuation of Israel's rejection of God. This rejection is even more striking when we see that those outside of Jerusalem eagerly accept Him. Judgment will come upon the rejectors while the believers will be looking forward to salvation. This was hinted at when Jesus cursed Israel for rejecting Him while stating that the Gentile cities of Tyre and Sidon would have accepted Him had they been given the chance (Matthew 11:22). The acceptance of the gospel by outsiders is a condemnation to the leaders in Jerusalem. This fall of Jerusalem happened when the leaders had Stephen stoned and this fall is pictured in Jeremiah 38.

Persecution

Saul was campaigning to stamp out Christians and Christianity. They were looked upon as problems because the religious leaders perceived that Christianity was tuning people away from the teaching of the leaders of Israel. These jealous leaders were willing to do anything to make sure people were dependent upon them (Acts 5:17). This is also a common ploy of all religions today. They enslave people with their doctrine, promising eternal life if they adhere to their teaching, or eternal damnation for those who don't conform.

Saul was an up-and-coming Pharisee who was willing to do anything to protect his religion (Galatians 1:14; Philippians 3:4—6). He had the zeal, but it was without proper knowledge (Romans 10:2). This lack of proper knowledge was the basis of his deviant behavior. Absolute truth can only be found in the word of God.

He was so against anything to do with Jesus that he ravaged the church, entering house after house and dragging off men and women to prison (Acts 8:3). Not only that, but it is said that Saul destroyed the saints (Acts 9:21) and wasted them (Galatians 1:13). This is why the believers were quite frightened at this time, and why they fled Jerusalem. Since many Christians left Jerusalem, Saul went hunting for them outside of Jerusalem with the permission and backing of the Jerusalem leaders. He brought them back in bonds to Jerusalem to be tried and punished for believing in Jesus as Messiah. Many believers died from the persecution (Acts 22:4).

Saul represents the leadership of Israel headquartered in Jerusalem. Everything he did was by the approval of the Jewish leadership. They didn't stop with the stoning of Stephen, his death actually marked the beginning of great persecution toward the Little Flock of believers, even unto death. This demonstrates how twisted and wicked these men were, and showed how far they were from God. Jesus had stated that their father was the devil, and they were proving this to be true (John 8:44). They were doing Satan's work by trying to eliminate those who left the vapid and dangerous teaching of the Pharisees to follow Christ (Matthew 23:4, 13—15).

I find it quite interesting that Saul thought he was doing the Lord's work by exterminating those who were following Jesus. They were viewed as the heretics who were worshipping someone other than God by the Jewish leadership who assumed they were holy and pious, perfect examples for the nation of Israel. Paul writes that God showed mercy upon him because he did all these things in ignorance (1 Timothy 1:13).

This is why the Lord showed Paul mercy. If he were doing these things with full understanding, then he would have stood in condemnation. This is in accordance with the Mosaic Law. There was no sacrifice for those who knowingly disobeyed the Law. Only those who had disobeyed the law ignorantly could bring a sacrifice for the cleansing of their sin (Numbers 15:25—29).

This is why God had mercy on Saul. In spite of all the signs God did to show Israel that Jesus was the Messiah, Saul, apparently, missed the message but was now given the opportunity to repent of his sin of rejecting the Messiah and trying to wipe out believers.

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