

The Church in the New Testament, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 4: Evangelism and Obedience

Acts 8:26-40

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This lesson gives your class the clearest picture of personal evangelism in the New Testament, and it is worth teaching slowly, because almost everything a Christian needs to know about sharing the gospel is in these fifteen verses. Set the scene: Philip, one of the seven from last week's lesson, is in the middle of a genuine revival in Samaria. A whole city is responding. And God sends him to a desert road to talk to one man. Let the class feel the arithmetic of that before you go on. Heaven interrupted a citywide work to reach a single traveler, which tells you what a soul is worth to God.

The doctrinal center of the lesson is verses 35 through 38, and it deserves your steadiest hand. Philip "told him the good news about Jesus," and the very next thing out of the man's mouth is "See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?" The class should be helped to reason backward from that question, because it settles an enormous amount. The Ethiopian did not learn about baptism from a later class or a follow-up visit. He learned it from a sermon about Jesus, which means baptism was part of what it meant to preach Christ. You cannot preach the good news about Jesus the way Philip preached it and leave people not knowing they must be baptized. Then let verse 38 speak for itself: they both went down into the water, Philip baptized him, and they came up out of the water. Immersion, and the urgency of a man who saw no reason to wait.

Guard two boundaries as you go. First, in verse 39 the joy comes after the baptism, not before it and not instead of it. This is the order the New Testament keeps, and it protects the class from the modern habit of locating salvation in a feeling or a prayer and treating baptism as an optional postscript. Second, be careful with the angel and the Spirit in verses 26 and 29. This is the apostolic age, when God was directing His messengers before the word was complete; it is not a pattern for expecting private promptings today, and the class should be told so kindly and clearly. God guides us now by the completed Word He was in the process of delivering here. Aim the whole lesson at one target: a class that leaves able to do what Philip did, and a class in which anyone who has never obeyed the gospel is asking the eunuch's question about himself.

Question 1

Student Question:

In verses 26–27, an angel directs Philip to a specific road. What does Philip's immediate obedience teach about readiness to serve when God opens a door?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Let the class feel what Philip was asked to leave. Acts 8 has just described a city in Samaria full of joy, crowds paying attention, people being baptized in numbers. By every measure we use, that is where a man ought to stay. And the angel sends him south, to a desert road, with no explanation of why. Luke even adds the detail “this is a desert place,” as if to make sure we notice how unpromising it looked. Philip’s obedience cost him a revival for an errand he could not yet understand.

Notice how little information he was given and how completely he went. He was told a road, not a reason. He was not told who would be there, what to say, or what would come of it. Verse 27 is four words of narrative: “And he rose and went.” No negotiation, no request for clarification, no waiting to see whether the Samaritan work would slow down first. Help your class see that this is what readiness looks like. It is not enthusiasm; it is a settled disposition to obey before knowing the outcome.

Then set the boundary the class needs, and set it plainly, because someone will want to apply this directly. An angel spoke to Philip. That belongs to the apostolic age, when God was actively directing His messengers because the word had not yet been fully delivered and confirmed. We should not read this as a promise of private promptings, inner voices, or personal directions from God today, and we should not teach people to wait for one. God has finished speaking in His Son (Hebrews 1:1-2), the faith has been delivered once for all (Jude 3), and Scripture equips us for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16-17). We do not need a new word. We need to obey the one we have.

But do not let the boundary steal the lesson, because the point survives it intact. Philip did not need an angel to know that a man reading Isaiah needed Jesus explained to him. The doors God opens for us are not announced by angels; they are the person in the next seat, the neighbor asking a real question, the coworker whose marriage is failing. The angel is not the part of this story we are meant to imitate. “He rose and went” is.

Bring it near the class honestly. Most of us do not miss opportunities because we cannot recognize them. We miss them because recognizing them would require us to rise and go, and we are in the middle of something. Ask the class what they would have to leave in order to be as available as Philip was.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Philip left a fruitful work for an errand he could not understand; obedience preceded explanation (Acts 8:26-27)
- Readiness is a settled disposition to obey, not a burst of enthusiasm
- The angel belongs to the apostolic age, when God directed His messengers before the word was complete
- We should not expect or teach private promptings, inner voices, or personal revelation today (Hebrews 1:1-2; Jude 3)
- God now guides through the completed and sufficient Scriptures (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

- The opportunities God opens for us are ordinary; the imitable part of this text is “he rose and went”

Discussion Prompts

- What would you have to leave in order to be as available as Philip was?
- Why do we usually miss opportunities we have already recognized?
- How would you kindly answer a friend who says he is waiting for God to tell him what to do?

Question 2

Student Question:

The Ethiopian was reading Isaiah 53 but did not understand it (vv. 30–31). Why is it significant that Philip began with the Scripture the man was already reading?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Start with what Philip did before he said anything, because the class will skip it. Verse 30 says he ran to the chariot and heard him reading. He listened first. He found out where the man actually was before he decided what the man needed. Then he asked a question rather than making a speech: “Do you understand what you are reading?” That question is a small masterpiece. It is humble, it is genuinely curious, it hands control to the other man, and it is impossible to be offended by. Most of our evangelistic failures happen before the gospel is ever mentioned, in the way we open.

Now notice the answer Philip received, and why it mattered: “How can I, unless someone guides me?” The Ethiopian admitted he needed help. Sincerity was not enough, and neither was the text in his hands. He had the Scripture, he was reading the Scripture, and he was getting nowhere. Help the class see what this says about teaching. God has always used people to open His word to people. That is why the church has teachers, and it is why “just me and my Bible” is not the New Testament picture (Romans 10:14; Ephesians 4:11-12).

Then draw out why beginning where the man was reading matters so much. Philip did not redirect him to a better passage or a prepared outline. He started with the man’s own question, in the man’s own text, and went from there to Jesus. That is not a technique; it is respect. It treats the person as someone with a real question rather than a target for a presentation. And it is effective precisely because it is honest: the answer really was in Isaiah 53.

Point out the confidence underneath this. Philip could start anywhere in the prophets and get to Christ, because Christ is what the prophets are about. Jesus taught this Himself on the Emmaus road, beginning with Moses and all the Prophets and interpreting all the Scriptures concerning Himself (Luke 24:27), and told the Jews that the Scriptures “bear witness about me” (John 5:39). A Christian who knows his Bible does not need a script. He needs to know where the road goes.

Bring it home with the obvious application. Most people around us are not reading Isaiah in a chariot, but they are all reading something, and they all have questions they cannot answer. Ask the class what it would look like this week to listen first and ask one honest question instead of waiting for a perfect opening.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Philip listened before he spoke and asked a question rather than delivering a speech (Acts 8:30)
- The Ethiopian was sincere and reading Scripture, and still could not understand without help
- God uses people to teach people; teachers are His design (Romans 10:14; Ephesians 4:11-12)
- Beginning where a person actually is respects him and is honest to the text
- All the Scriptures bear witness to Christ, so a Bible-knowing Christian can begin almost anywhere (Luke 24:27; John 5:39)
- Evangelism starts with listening, not with a prepared presentation

Discussion Prompts

- What one honest question could you ask someone this week, the way Philip did?
- “How can I, unless someone guides me?” Who guided you, and whom are you guiding?
- Why is starting where a person actually is more respectful than starting where we would prefer?

Question 3

Student Question:

In verse 32–33, the passage from Isaiah describes one led “like a sheep to the slaughter.” How does Isaiah 53 point to Jesus, and why is this connection central to the gospel message?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Read the quoted verses aloud with the class and let them hear how specific they are. A sheep led to slaughter. A lamb silent before its shearer. Humiliation, justice denied, a life taken from the earth. Isaiah wrote that roughly seven hundred years before Calvary, and it reads like an eyewitness account of the trial of Jesus, who “opened not his mouth” before Pilate and Herod (Matthew 27:12-14). No wonder the Ethiopian was stuck. He was holding a photograph of a man he had never met.

Then widen the class’s view to the whole chapter, because the Ethiopian was reading more than the two verses Luke quotes. Isaiah 53 is where the Old Testament says most plainly what the cross was for: he was pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities, the chastisement that brought us peace was upon him, and with his wounds we are healed. The Lord laid on him

the iniquity of us all. Peter quotes it directly of Jesus (1 Peter 2:22-25). This is substitution, stated centuries in advance, and it is the beating heart of the gospel.

Now show the class why the connection is so decisive. If Isaiah 53 is about Jesus, then the crucifixion was not a tragedy God salvaged after the fact. It was the plan, announced in advance, exactly as the class saw in Lesson 2 when the church prayed about what God's hand had predestined. A suffering Messiah was not a defeat requiring explanation; it was the promise being kept. That is why Philip could start here and preach good news rather than apologize for a scandal.

Point out what this does for the authority of Scripture, since your class needs it. Fulfilled prophecy of this precision is not a coincidence and cannot be arranged by the participants. Jesus could not have engineered Isaiah 53, and His enemies certainly did not intend to fulfill it. The passage stands as evidence that the God who spoke through the prophets is the God who acted at the cross, and that the book in our hands is His.

Then keep it from staying academic. The line the class must not read past is "the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all." Isaiah 53 is not primarily an apologetic argument; it is the announcement that someone else carried what belonged to us. Ask the class to say what verse 6 means in the first person, and the lesson stops being about prophecy and starts being about them.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Isaiah 53 describes the trial and death of Jesus in detail, written roughly seven centuries earlier (Matthew 27:12-14)
- The chapter teaches substitution: He was pierced for our transgressions and bore our iniquity (Isaiah 53:5-6)
- Peter applies Isaiah 53 directly to Jesus (1 Peter 2:22-25)
- The cross was the announced plan of God, not a tragedy God later salvaged
- Fulfilled prophecy of this precision testifies to the divine origin of Scripture
- The gospel's center is that another bore the iniquity that belonged to us

Discussion Prompts

- Read Isaiah 53:6 and put it in the first person. What changes?
- Why could Philip preach a crucified Messiah as good news rather than as an embarrassment?
- What does the precision of this prophecy tell us about the Bible in our hands?

Question 4

Student Question:

The Ethiopian asks, "About whom does the prophet say this?" (v. 34). What does this question reveal about the importance of understanding that Christ is the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Notice that the Ethiopian asked the right question. He did not ask what the passage meant to him, or how it made him feel, or what principle he could draw from it. He asked who it was about. That is the question the text itself raises, and it has only one right answer. Help the class see that this is how Scripture is meant to be read: we are trying to find out what God said and about whom, not what we can make of it.

Then let the class appreciate why he was stuck. The Jews had read Isaiah 53 for centuries and had no settled answer. Was the servant Isaiah himself? The nation? Some future figure? The passage does not fit any of them, and it never did. The man's question was not ignorance; it was honest reading. Only one person in history fits that description, and the Ethiopian was reading it about four decades after He died and rose.

Now draw out the doctrinal weight. If Jesus is the fulfillment, then the Old Testament is not a separate religion, an old book we have outgrown, or a collection of moral tales. It is one story moving toward Him. Jesus said the Scriptures bear witness about Him (John 5:39), and Paul says the law was our guardian until Christ came (Galatians 3:24). This is also why we do not live under the Old Law today. It was fulfilled and taken away in Christ, nailed to the cross (Colossians 2:14; Hebrews 8:13; 10:9-10). Fulfillment is not abolition by neglect; it is a promise kept and a covenant completed.

Guard the class here, because two errors sit on either side. One treats the Old Testament as irrelevant, which leaves the gospel rootless and Isaiah 53 unread. The other tries to keep the Old Law alongside Christ, binding Sabbaths, feasts, or a priesthood that God has fulfilled and set aside. The class will meet the second error head on in Lesson 7 at the Jerusalem council. Philip's answer avoids both: the old writings are precious, they are authoritative, and they are about Jesus.

Bring it near. Ask the class what they do with the Old Testament in practice. If we cannot show a searching friend how the prophets point to Christ, we have handed away two-thirds of our Bible and most of Philip's starting material.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The right question of any text is what God said and about whom, not what it means to me (Acts 8:34)
- Isaiah 53 fits no one in history but Jesus
- The Old Testament is one story moving toward Christ, who fulfills it (John 5:39; Galatians 3:24)

- The Old Law was fulfilled and taken away in Christ; we live under the New Covenant (Colossians 2:14; Hebrews 8:13; 10:9-10)
- Against treating the Old Testament as irrelevant, and against binding the Old Law on Christians
- A Christian should be able to show a searching friend how the prophets point to Christ

Discussion Prompts

- What do you actually do with the Old Testament? Could you show a friend how it points to Christ?
- Why does “who is this about?” matter more than “what does this mean to me?”
- How does fulfillment differ from simply ignoring the Old Law?

Question 5

Student Question:

Verse 35 says Philip “opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus.” What does this teach about the content of the gospel message?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Take the phrase apart with the class, because every piece of it is instructive. “Beginning with this Scripture” tells you the source: he preached the Bible, not his opinions or his experience. “He told him the good news about Jesus” tells you the subject: a Person, not a program, a moral improvement plan, or a set of benefits. Philip preached Christ, from Scripture, to a man with a question. That is the whole method.

Now do the piece of reasoning that makes this lesson turn, and let the class do it rather than telling them. Ask what Philip must have said, and then read verse 36. The very next words from the Ethiopian are, “See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?” Where did he get that? Not from Isaiah 53, which never mentions water. Not from prior instruction, since he did not even know who the passage was about. The only possible source is the sermon. Philip “told him the good news about Jesus,” and somewhere in it the man learned that he needed to be baptized and needed to be baptized now.

That settles a question your class needs settled. Baptism is not an appendix to the gospel, a second topic taken up after someone is saved, or a matter for later membership classes. To preach Jesus in the New Testament is to preach a Christ who is obeyed, including in baptism. Watch the same thing happen everywhere else in Acts: Peter preaches Christ and the crowd is told to repent and be baptized (Acts 2:38); Philip preaches “good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ” in Samaria and “they were baptized, both men and women” (Acts 8:12); Paul preaches to a jailer at midnight and he is baptized “at once” (Acts 16:32-33). If our preaching of Jesus leaves people not knowing about baptism, we are not preaching what Philip preached.

Guard the balance, though. The subject was Jesus, not baptism. Philip did not preach a plan of salvation with Christ attached; he preached Christ, and the plan of salvation is how a man responds to Him. Keep the class from reducing the gospel to a checklist of steps, which drains the Person out of it, and equally from preaching a Person with no commands, which drains the obedience out of it. The good news is a crucified and risen Lord who is to be trusted and obeyed.

Then make it practical. Ask the class to name what they would actually say if the conversation opened tomorrow. Not the outline, the content. If we cannot get from a text of Scripture to Jesus and from Jesus to what a person must do, we have not yet learned what Philip knew.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Philip preached from Scripture, and the subject was a Person, not a program (Acts 8:35)
- The Ethiopian's question about water can only have come from the sermon, so baptism was part of preaching Jesus
- Baptism is not an appendix to the gospel or a topic for after salvation
- The same pattern holds throughout Acts (Acts 2:38; 8:12; 16:32-33)
- The gospel is not a checklist of steps with Christ attached, nor a Person with no commands
- Preaching Christ means preaching a Lord who is trusted and obeyed

Discussion Prompts

- If the conversation opened tomorrow, what would you actually say? Not the outline, the content.
- How do we preach the plan of salvation without losing the Person at the center of it?
- What does it tell us that the eunuch knew to ask about water?

Question 6

Student Question:

In verse 36, the Ethiopian says, "See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?" What does this immediate response reveal about what Philip had taught him regarding baptism?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Slow down here, because this verse does more doctrinal work than almost any other in the passage. Look at the urgency: he is not asking whether he should be baptized, or when, or what it would signify. He sees water and asks what could possibly stop him. A man asks that question only if he has been taught that baptism is necessary, that it is for him, and that it is for now. Nobody hurries toward an optional symbol on a desert road.

Draw out the three things the question proves about Philip's teaching, and let the class name them. Philip taught that baptism is required, or the man would not have raised it. Philip taught that it is urgent, or the man would have waited until he got home to a proper assembly. And

Philip taught what it is for, because the man understood it as the thing standing between him and what he now wanted. This is a preacher's teaching reflected perfectly in his hearer's response.

Now handle verse 37, because someone in the class will notice it is missing or in a footnote. In many translations, including the one these lessons use, verse 36 runs straight into verse 38, with verse 37 in a note: "And Philip said, 'If you believe with all your heart, you may.' And he replied, 'I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.'" The earliest and best manuscripts do not contain it, which is why modern versions set it aside. Be honest with the class about that. And then reassure them: nothing whatever is lost. The truth in that verse is taught plainly elsewhere. Baptism is for believers, and confession with the mouth that Jesus is Lord belongs to salvation (Romans 10:9-10; Matthew 10:32). We do not need a disputed verse to establish what the New Testament teaches everywhere.

Then put the eunuch's question to work as the plainest test in Scripture of our own teaching. If a person heard you present the gospel, would he end up asking what prevents him from being baptized? If instead he would ask whether he needs to be baptized at all, or assume that baptism is a nice thing to do sometime, then the sermon he heard was not the sermon Philip preached. This one question quietly measures everything.

Let the class feel the answer to his question too. What prevented him? Nothing. He believed, and there was water, and there was a man to baptize him. That is still the answer for almost everyone who asks it. The obstacles we imagine, the arrangements we want to make, the waiting we counsel, are mostly ours and not God's.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The urgency of the question shows Philip taught baptism as necessary, personal, and immediate (Acts 8:36)
- No one hurries toward a merely optional symbol
- Verse 37 is absent from the earliest manuscripts, which is why modern versions footnote it; be honest about this
- Nothing is lost by its absence: baptism is for believers, and confession of Christ is taught plainly elsewhere (Romans 10:9-10; Matthew 10:32)
- The eunuch's question is a test of our own preaching: would our hearers ask it?
- The delays and obstacles we place before baptism are usually ours, not God's

Discussion Prompts

- If someone heard you present the gospel, would he end up asking the eunuch's question?
- Why would nobody hurry toward an optional symbol?
- What "prevents" people today, and are those obstacles God's or ours?

Question 7

Student Question:

The text says they both “went down into the water” and Philip “baptized him” (v. 38). What does this description teach about the mode and meaning of baptism?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Have the class read the physical description slowly, because Luke is unusually detailed and it is all evidence. The chariot stopped. They both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch. Philip baptized him. They came up out of the water. Ask the class a simple question: how much water do you need to sprinkle a man? None of this is necessary unless the action required going down into water and coming up out of it. Two grown men do not wade into a desert pool for a few drops on a forehead.

Then let the word itself settle it. Baptizo means to dip, plunge, or immerse; that is what the word meant to everyone who heard it. This is why John baptized at Aenon near Salim “because water was plentiful there” (John 3:23). Sprinkling and pouring came much later, and they came from men, not from Scripture. Help the class see that the mode is not a matter of preference or convenience. We do not get to redefine an action God commanded.

Now go from the mode to the meaning, because the mode exists to carry the meaning. Paul says we were “buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:3-4). Colossians 2:12 says we were buried with him in baptism and raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God. Baptism is a burial and a resurrection. Immersion is not an incidental detail; sprinkling cannot picture a burial, because it is not one. Change the action and you have erased the very thing the action was given to portray.

Then press the meaning further, because the class may still hear “picture” and think “symbol only.” This is where the New Testament is emphatic. Baptism is when we are clothed with Christ (Galatians 3:27), when sins are washed away as we call on His name (Acts 22:16), when we are baptized into one body (1 Corinthians 12:13), and it is what “now saves you... as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 3:21). Guard the boundary carefully in both directions: the water has no power in itself, and it is not magic apart from faith; it is the blood of Christ that cleanses (Ephesians 1:7). And it is not a mere symbol added after salvation. Baptism is the appointed moment when a penitent believer, trusting the death and resurrection of Jesus, contacts that blood.

Bring the class back to the chariot. The Ethiopian went down into that water a man reading about a stranger and came up a man clothed with Christ. Notice that Philip went down with him. Someone always does. Ask the class who went down into the water with them, and whom they might go down with next.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The physical detail (down into and up out of the water) is unnecessary for anything but immersion (Acts 8:38-39)
- Baptizo means to dip, plunge, immerse; sprinkling and pouring are later human substitutions (John 3:23)
- Baptism is a burial and resurrection with Christ, which sprinkling cannot portray (Romans 6:3-4; Colossians 2:12)
- In baptism we put on Christ, are added to the body, and have sins washed away (Galatians 3:27; 1 Corinthians 12:13; Acts 22:16)
- Baptism “now saves you,” yet the water has no power in itself; the blood of Christ cleanses (1 Peter 3:21; Ephesians 1:7)
- It is neither magic apart from faith nor a mere symbol added after salvation

Discussion Prompts

- How much water do you need in order to sprinkle someone? What does the detail of this verse settle?
- If baptism pictures a burial and resurrection, what happens to the picture when the action is changed?
- Who went down into the water with you? Whom might you go down with next?

Question 8

Student Question:

In verse 39, the Ethiopian “went on his way rejoicing.” What was the source of his joy, and what does this teach about the assurance that comes from obedience to the gospel?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Point the class to the order first, because the order is the doctrine. He rejoiced after he was baptized. Not before. Not instead. Luke places the joy on the far side of the water, and that is not an accident of storytelling; it is the consistent New Testament sequence. The jailer at Philippi is the same: he was baptized at once, and then “he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God” (Acts 16:34). The joy follows the obedience.

Ask the class what he was rejoicing about, and make them be specific. Notice what he did not have. He did not have Philip, who was gone. He did not have a congregation; he was going home to a country with no church in it. He did not have a dramatic experience to replay. What he had was a settled fact: he had heard, believed, and obeyed, and he was in Christ. His joy rested on what God had done, not on what he felt.

This is where the class most needs help, because assurance is where many Christians live in confusion. Feelings rise and fall, and a faith anchored to them will rise and fall with them. But if God said that the one who believes and is baptized will be saved (Mark 16:16), and that baptism is where we are clothed with Christ (Galatians 3:27), then a man who has done that can know

where he stands on a day when he feels nothing at all. Assurance comes from the promise of God, tested against what we have actually done, not from the temperature of our hearts (1 John 5:13).

Guard one more thing while you are here, because Luke has put the contrast in this very chapter. Earlier in Acts 8, Simon “himself believed, and after being baptized he continued with Philip” (Acts 8:13). He was in the church at Samaria. And within a few verses Peter tells him, “I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity” (Acts 8:23). Let the class sit with that. A man can be baptized, be a member of a sound congregation, be there every time the doors open, and be lost. Assurance does not come from belonging to a group, and no congregation can supply it or substitute for it. The eunuch had no congregation at all and went home rejoicing; Simon had one and was in bondage. What separates them is not affiliation.

Now guard the boundary carefully, because two errors are close by. This is not “once saved, always saved.” The eunuch went home responsible to remain faithful, and Scripture is full of warnings to Christians who could fall away (Hebrews 3:12-14; 2 Peter 2:20-22). Real assurance and false security are not the same thing. But neither is this the anxious, endless doubt that some Christians carry, forever hoping they have done enough. The eunuch had assurance without presumption: he had obeyed a Lord who keeps His word, and he could rejoice.

Then land it where the class lives. Many people have been taught to look inward for evidence they are saved, and inward is exactly where the evidence is not. Ask the class where their own assurance rests today. If the honest answer is a feeling, this verse is an invitation to move it onto firmer ground.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The joy comes after baptism, which is the consistent New Testament order (Acts 8:39; Acts 16:34)
- His joy rested on what God had done, not on an experience or a feeling
- Assurance rests on God’s promise measured against what we have obeyed (Mark 16:16; Galatians 3:27; 1 John 5:13)
- Against locating salvation in a feeling; feelings rise and fall and cannot bear that weight
- Against locating salvation in affiliation: Simon was baptized, was in the church, and was in the bond of iniquity (Acts 8:13, 23)
- The eunuch had no congregation and was saved; Simon had one and was lost. Belonging is not what separates them
- Against “once saved, always saved”: the Christian remains responsible to be faithful (Hebrews 3:12-14; 2 Peter 2:20-22)
- Genuine assurance is neither presumption nor endless anxiety

Discussion Prompts

- Where does your assurance actually rest today? Be honest.

- The eunuch had no preacher, no congregation, and no experience to replay. What did he have?
- How is real assurance different from “once saved, always saved,” and different from constant doubt?

Question 9

Student Question:

How does this passage challenge the modern idea that baptism is optional, merely symbolic, or unrelated to salvation?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Let the class answer this one from the text before you add anything, because the passage has already done the work. Put the pieces on the board. Philip preached Jesus, and the man immediately asked about baptism. He asked what could prevent it, treating it as an obstacle to be cleared rather than an option to consider. He was baptized on the spot, in a desert, by a stranger, with no assembly present. And he rejoiced afterward, not before. Now ask the class: does any of that fit the idea that baptism is optional, symbolic, and unrelated to salvation? Not one piece of it does.

Take the three claims in turn. If baptism were optional, this baptism was absurd; you do not stop a chariot in a desert for something that can wait. If baptism were merely symbolic of a salvation already received, the urgency is inexplicable, and so is the eunuch’s language, since nobody asks what prevents him from putting on a badge. And if baptism were unrelated to salvation, the whole sequence is upside down: the man would have been saved during the sermon and then baptized later at his convenience, which is precisely what did not happen.

Then let the class see how uniform the New Testament is on this. Peter: “Repent and be baptized every one of you... for the forgiveness of your sins” (Acts 2:38). Ananias to Saul: “Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name” (Acts 22:16). Jesus: “Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved” (Mark 16:16). Peter again: “Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you” (1 Peter 3:21). Paul: as many as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ (Galatians 3:27). There is no passage anywhere that puts salvation before baptism, and no conversion in Acts where baptism is delayed.

Now teach the class how to answer the objection kindly, because they will meet it. Someone will say baptism is a work that earns salvation. Answer with the passage, not with heat. The eunuch did not earn anything in that water; he submitted to what God appointed, and Colossians 2:12 says he was raised “through faith in the powerful working of God.” God does the saving. We are not paying for grace by being immersed any more than Naaman purchased his healing by dipping in the Jordan. A command obeyed by faith is not a wage claimed.

Then keep the class humble about it. This truth is worth holding firmly and worth holding graciously. Most people who believe baptism is optional were taught that sincerely by people they trusted, exactly as the eunuch had been taught Isaiah by people who could not tell him whom it was about. He did not need to be argued into it. He needed someone to open the Scripture and tell him the good news about Jesus. So does your neighbor.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The urgency, setting, and sequence of this baptism are inexplicable if baptism is optional or merely symbolic
- The joy follows the baptism, so salvation is not located earlier in the sermon
- The New Testament uniformly ties baptism to forgiveness and salvation (Acts 2:38; 22:16; Mark 16:16; 1 Peter 3:21; Galatians 3:27)
- No conversion in Acts delays baptism, and no passage places salvation before it
- Baptism is not a meritorious work; God does the saving, and faith receives it (Colossians 2:12)
- This truth should be held firmly and taught graciously, as Philip taught it

Discussion Prompts

- How would you kindly answer a friend who says baptism is a work that earns salvation?
- Which single detail of this account is hardest to square with the idea that baptism is optional?
- Philip did not argue the eunuch into anything. What did he do instead, and could you do it?

Question 10

Student Question:

Looking at Acts 8:26–40 as a whole, what model does this passage provide for how the church should approach evangelism and how individuals should respond to the gospel?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Bring the class back over the whole road and let them assemble the model. Philip went where he was sent. He listened before he spoke. He asked a question instead of making a speech. He began where the man already was. He preached Jesus from the Scriptures. He answered the man's real question. He baptized him immediately, in whatever water was available. And then he let him go. That is the entire method, and there is nothing in it that requires a gift your class does not have.

Point out how thoroughly ordinary the human side of this is. Philip was not an apostle. He was a man from Lesson 3 who had been chosen to distribute food to widows, and here he is doing the most celebrated personal evangelism in the New Testament. Nothing about this required an

office. It required a man who knew his Bible, would go, and would open his mouth. Help the class see themselves in him, because Luke plainly intends them to.

Then draw out the response side, because the passage models that just as carefully. The Ethiopian listened to someone who knew more than he did. He admitted he needed help. He asked honest questions. He acted the moment he understood, without negotiating the timing. And he went on rejoicing in what God had done rather than in what he felt. That is what obedient faith looks like from the inside, and it is the answer to anyone who thinks obedience and joy are opposites.

Keep the class from making this a story about a special day. Notice the last verse: Philip went on to Azotus and preached the gospel in every town until he reached Caesarea. And notice where the eunuch went: home, to Ethiopia, alone, with no congregation and no preacher, carrying Christ into a place that had none. Neither man treated this as a peak experience to be relived. Both of them just kept going. That is the unglamorous shape of a life that takes the gospel seriously.

End with the mirror, and let both questions sit. If God arranged a chariot for you this week, would you know what to say when you got there? And the eunuch's question is still the sharpest one in the chapter, so ask it of the room, gently and without pressure: if you have heard the good news about Jesus and believed it, what prevents you from being baptized?

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The model: go, listen, ask, begin where they are, preach Jesus from Scripture, baptize immediately (Acts 8:26-38)
- Philip was not an apostle; effective evangelism required no office, only Scripture and willingness
- Obedient faith listens, admits need, asks honestly, and acts without negotiating the timing
- Joy and obedience are not opposites; the joy came from what God had done
- Both men simply continued: Philip preached on, and the eunuch carried Christ home alone (Acts 8:40)
- The eunuch's question remains the proper response of anyone who has believed the gospel

Discussion Prompts

- If God arranged a chariot for you this week, would you know what to say when you got there?
- Philip was a table-server, not an apostle. What does that remove as an excuse?
- If you have heard the good news about Jesus and believed it, what prevents you from being baptized?