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## The Ministry of Illumination

*by T. Austin-Sparks*

*Edited and supplied by the Golden Candlestick Trust.*

Reading: Acts 8.

### **The Ethiopian Eunuch**

I was struck with the conclusion of that incident in Acts chapter 8, with the man who disappeared and the man who went off. It says, "*The Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip and the eunuch saw him no more; for he went on his way rejoicing*" (v.39). And I think we have a very beautiful example and representation of just how things ought to be: the instrument disappearing and the one blessed going on rejoicing. It is a very sound basis and sound principle of service. I was also impressed with the little word "for" he went on his way rejoicing. He did not look for him, he did not hunt for him, he did not stop to make a search and say, "Where is that fellow gone?" The Greek tense there means: he kept on going on. That is the way to go on in the Christian life, to keep on going on.

What is deeper than that to me is this: now the eunuch was occupied with the Lord Jesus and not with Philip or even with the Scriptures, as such; he was occupied with the Lord Jesus. Philip had brought the Lord Jesus into view. That is the work of the Lord's servants, to exchange personalities with the Lord Jesus. Used by the Lord, brought on the scene, tentatively linked with the chariot for a purpose and then bringing the Lord Jesus into view as the chief Object and then disappearing and leaving the Lord Jesus to occupy the ground. That is the model servant, that is the man of God who is led by the Holy Spirit. Philip was led by the Spirit into this service and that is always the result

when the Holy Spirit is in charge of an instrument, that the Lord Jesus is the ultimate Object and the instrument disappears. That is something for those who desire to be the Lord's servants to think about.

If you have a desire in your heart to be a servant of the Lord, to be used for His glory, do not set your heart upon being something yourself, occupying the platform so to speak, being in the limelight, monopolising the attention of people, but in your heart ask that the Lord Jesus shall blot you out and all others shall become taken up with Him. That is true service. Much that is called, or thought to be, "service for the Lord" is otherwise, and the servant looms very large on the horizon. It is not so when the Holy Spirit is in the servant of the Lord. He decreases while the Lord increases. There is also a new emphasis in connection with this man and ministry that was fulfilled in this case.

This was a representative man, this eunuch. Ethiopia is the Biblical symbol for spiritual darkness, because this people is the darkest skinned of all races. It is interesting to note that darkness is almost universal in any realm in the book of the Acts. Chapter 8, the Ethiopian coming out of darkness into light. Chapter 9 shows a man full of religious light coming out of darkness into light, no lesser change than that of the Ethiopian. Chapter 10, a European, Cornelius, comes out of darkness. The Lord is touching the nations in these cases. The Holy Spirit, in charge of this thing, is taking the initiative. It is a blessed thing to see the Holy Spirit going ahead of Philip, knowing all about this man in the desert, and bringing Philip in his train to deal with this situation.

The ministry fulfilled to this man was a ministry of interpretation which resulted in this illumination unto jubilation. Interpretation unto illumination unto Jubilation! He went on going on rejoicing. Why? Because he had come to know what he knew! That is all. Philip's question to him is not clear in our translation, but the Greek is exceedingly interesting and there is a play on words, exceedingly neat as a matter of approach to a man. What Philip really said to him was this, "Do you know what you know?" He was reading, and you know when we read something we know it in a way. You may read a phrase here in the Scripture, and while I know that phrase, I can recite the whole of that phrase without looking at it, but do you know what you know? Quite a proper question, and that is exactly what Philip said to this man, "You are reading Scripture and gaining knowledge of the Scripture but - do you know what you know?" And it was proved to be the nail in a sure place, a thrust at the right point, a question of the right kind, dictated by the Holy Spirit, for the Ethiopian plaintively said, "*How can I, except someone guide me?*" He had been up to the headquarters of the Old Testament knowledge, to the seat of scriptural information. He had been to Jerusalem to worship; he was evidently a Jewish proselyte, being a eunuch he would not be admitted into the full benefit of the covenant, in the book of Deuteronomy that is made clear; neither would he have been allowed to enter right into the temple. He would have been kept within a certain range as a proselyte; but he had been up there to the headquarters, had probably bought this portion of Scripture, the prophecy of Isaiah. He was seeking light but the recognised seat of authority had disappointed him and he was going back a man still in the dark although he had the Scripture.

And I say all that beloved, for our own good as well as recognising therein probably the main feature of our friends going to that very country. It is possible for us to be in a kind of association with a very great deal of enlightenment, so-called, it is possible for us to be linked with the whole religious order of things where the Bible is believed, accepted, read. It is possible for us to know the prophets and the epistles and still be in the dark, and the test is after all, are we going to keep on keeping on or going on going on rejoicing in the Lord. Have we become completely enamoured of and engrossed with the Lord Jesus? That is the question that is permissible in every company of the Lord's people. It

is one thing to have the prophets which speak about the Lord Jesus; or the Scripture which contains a great deal about the Lord Jesus, it is another thing to have the Lord Jesus Himself.

I have been impressed tremendously in reading the Lord's Word by the way the Lord had to withdraw from His own historic people with whom were deposited the very oracles of God. I see in Acts 13, Paul and Barnabas at Antioch saying to the Jews, "*Seeing that ye refuse the word and count yourselves unworthy of salvation, we turn to the Gentiles*". On to chapter 28, Paul is at Rome and he calls the Jews to him and speaks to them of the Lord Jesus and they refuse. And he says again exactly the same thing, that which he said in Antioch he now says in Rome, "*Lo, we turn to the Gentiles*". "You are set aside" - a terrible thing. People with whom there were entrusted all the oracles of God, the depository of all prophetic Scriptures, and now the Lord says, "You are set aside, we turn to the Gentiles". A tremendous responsibility is resting upon those who have the Word of God to have something more, that is, to have the living Lord Who is in the Word. You can have the Word of God and not have the Lord Himself, but it is a great day when the very Scriptures you have been reading (and this man was so occupied with this portion of Isaiah 53 he was reading it out loud) which you know in a way, comes to you with the revelation of the Holy Spirit, and you see the Lord Jesus as you have never seen Him before. Then you begin going on going on rejoicing and men disappear from view in the full flood of the glory of the Christ.

Now, simple as this interrogation may be, one ventures to make it. We may have been brought up in the church, all our associations may be there, all our interests may be in the system of things, we may be familiar with all these things, but that may only lead to our condemnation if we have not come to the place where we are absolutely taken up, heart and soul, with the Lord Jesus Himself as the Lord Who died and rose and Who is at the right hand of the Majesty on High, and in a personal relationship to Him, as this man came into by identification in death, burial, and resurrection in entering those waters. Unless we have come there, all our religious system has failed, but once we come there, everything less than that disappears from view; we are taken up with Him. That is the important thing. Are we there? Is the Lord Jesus for us the one all-engaging Object of our hearts? Religion is not enough. It must be the Lord and our union with Him, and then we go on going on rejoicing. Are you going on going on rejoicing on that ground?

And one feels that this ministry of illumination will be especially that for our brother and sister in Ethiopia. This probably was the first African Christian, this Ethiopian. They have got into an awful mess since he was saved. Christianity has come under widespread, deep-dyed superstition in that country, but they still have Christianity, Scriptures, a cross, a Christ, but, oh, the superstition surrounding all this in the Coptic church in that country. It is not just a preaching of the Gospel.

Beloved, if we are going to interpret the inner meaning of things already known, that is a ministry which can only be fulfilled in the illumination and power of the Holy Spirit. It is quite easy for any of us to go out in any part of this world at any time and begin to give out the content of the Book and preach what we call the Gospel. But to bring into religiously darkened hearts - not merely heathen hearts, but hearts darkened in religion, the heart of a Saul of Tarsus steeped in religion - to give the true unveiling of the Lord Jesus necessitates something having been wrought very deeply in the life. There is all the difference between broadcasting New Testament information and bringing the impact of a living Christ to darkened lives. You know today how many men are breaking their hearts because they are preaching themselves to death and are conscious that there is very little happening, no impact. And from our own experience we are able to say that very largely the cause is this: that it is preaching out of a book and not preaching out of a crucified life, the risen life, a life in

mighty union with the exalted Christ. Something has got to be done in the minister in order to make him an instrument of illumination.

Saul of Tarsus after the sledge hammer, after God in Christ from the glory had laid him low, the commission was, "*I send thee to rulers, kings, to the Gentiles to open their eyes, I send thee to open their eyes that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan unto God that they may receive inheritance among those that are sanctified*". All that begins with, "*I send thee to open their eyes*" and the man who was being sent was the man who had just had his eyes opened to see the Lord Jesus. And until that has happened it is no use going out to preach. We have got to have our eyes opened. Philip had his eyes opened, he preached Jesus to the Ethiopian, he brought him to the good tidings of the Lord Jesus. Evangelists are those who bring something into close relationship to another life; he brought him Christ. You can proclaim things about Christ, but it is another thing to bring Christ. Out of Isaiah he brought Christ to this man. You cannot bring Christ unless you have got Him, you cannot open eyes unless your own eyes are opened.

Now, all this is said to stress that something deep has got to be done. And I feel the tragedy of anyone trying to preach who does not know that emancipation in order that the Lord Jesus may become a great deal more, in order that we have more of Christ to give. We are going out to bring Christ, and Christ can only be brought as He is really in possession.

We are on a living theme! We are talking about the Lord Jesus, always. May the Lord open our eyes, deliver from religious darkness, Christian darkness, church darkness, traditional darkness, and may we be brought out into the glories, the rapture of the Lord Jesus Himself, that we may bring that to Ethiopia, in Honor Oak, and everywhere else.