

Sunday morning June 15th 2014 at CBC
Sermon outline: Acts 8:26-40

It has been noticed by previous students of these verses that the entire conversation between Philip and the man from Ethiopia is reported by means of four questions:

Do you understand what you are reading?

How can I, unless someone explains it to me?

Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?

Here is water, why shouldn't I be baptized?

We are looking at the last question – *here is water, why shouldn't I be baptized?* How did the Ethiopian man get to that point?

[1] HE HAD MADE SOME INITIAL CONNECTIONS

'He had gone to Jerusalem to worship.' He had evidently developed an interest in the worship of the God of Israel and had associated himself with the centre of the worship of God at that time.

Christian baptism is usually carried out within, and by, Christian communities (churches) and so anyone who asks for baptism will have previously made some connection

- You don't become a Christian, and you don't get baptized, without making those initial connections.

[2] HE HAD BEGUN TO DO SOME THINKING

No-one becomes a Christian without thinking about it. We know this man had begun to do some thinking because he had got hold of part of the Bible and he was reading it

The important point to note is that he was beginning to engage with the Bible, as we would call it today. You don't become a Christian without such an engagement. You have to be willing to get to grips with what the Bible says.

- You don't become a Christian, and you don't get baptized, without being willing to do some serious thinking.

[3] HE HAD BEEN WILLING TO ASK FOR HELP

In reading his 'Bible' the Ethiopian had encountered a problem. He had come across Isaiah's description of a special person: *See Isaiah 53*

- Here was someone apparently unremarkable to look at in human terms.
- Here was someone despised and rejected, to whom suffering was a distinct reality.
- Here was someone who appeared to have been abandoned by God, and this same someone was taking the penalty for other people's sins.
- He had not gone astray/away from God, others had. But he was the one paying the penalty.
- He did this without complaint.

- He left no descendants, died in the company of criminals and only the generosity of a rich man enabled him to have a decent burial.

Yet amazingly, all this was part of God's purpose and had happened at God's command.

In spite of having no physical descendants he would have offspring and though his life had seemed a failure in the end, it would turn out that he would be rewarded by God for his faithfulness in his role of sacrifice for sinful people.

Who on earth was Isaiah talking about?
Could it be himself? But if not Isaiah, then who?

This was his question. He did not know the answer and he was not afraid to ask for help. If he was a proud man, he swallowed his pride on this occasion.

- You don't become a Christian, and you don't get baptized, without being willing to do ask for help in your understanding of the Bible.

[4] HE HAD UNDERSTOOD THE ROLE OF JESUS

So, who was Isaiah talking about?

Philip was able to explain that only Jesus fitted Isaiah's description. Amazingly, all this was part of God's purpose and had happened at God's command.

- You don't become a Christian, and you don't get baptized, without understanding the role of Jesus.

[5] HE HAD MADE A PERSONAL RESPONSE

'Here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptized?'

Either he already knew about Christian baptism or Philip explained it to him. The person who gets baptized is acknowledging their personal faith in Jesus Christ as the One who has washed away their sins through his death on the cross. Baptism also represents the burial of an old life and resurrection to a new life.

- You don't become a Christian, and you don't get baptized, without making a personal response.

This meeting between Philip and the Ethiopian was not an accident. The account is opened and closed by two statements which make it very clear that the Lord had arranged this meeting:

See Acts 8:26-27 and Acts 8:39

No opportunity to hear about the Christian message is an accident. The Lord has arranged that we should be here today just as much as he arranged for that meeting between Philip and the Ethiopian. Surely the Lord has purposes for *us* today.