

SEVEN SAVED SINNERS

Or How God Saves Men

A study of God's Varieties of Religious Experiences in the Book of Acts

by

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CHAPTER ONE

THE CONVERSION OF THE ETHIOPIAN EUNUCH

THE STUDY

Acts 8:26-39

The Occasion

We have here an apparently incidental meeting of Philip the Evangelist and this Eunuch of Ethiopia. Yet study reveals that there was a divine preparation made with both individuals of this important meeting. *There are no coincidences with God.* God is a God of plan and of purpose. In the study of the experience the unusualness of the situation must be kept in mind to appreciate the results. The prominence and dignity of the Eunuch is contrasted with the obscurity and boldness of the messenger, Philip. The story is so well known as not to need further comment.

The Subject

The Eunuch was the Secretary of the Treasury of Queen Candace of Ethiopia; a man of renown and influence, a man who evidently often visited Jerusalem, and appears to have been a proselyte to the Jewish faith *but is not born again through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.* He is an earnest seeker after truth.

The Agent

Philip, the evangelist, was one of the seven deacons of the primitive Church of Jerusalem (Acts 6:1-6). When the Christians, except the apostles, were driven from Jerusalem by the persecution after Stephen's death, Philip went to Samaria, where he preached the Gospel with great success and wrought many miracles. You will remember his conflict with Simon, recorded in Acts 8:1-13.

From the busy revival of the populous Samaritan city, Philip was divinely led into a lonely spot, and on one of the roads between Jerusalem and Gaza he finds this Ethiopian Eunuch.

Now he is rather a peculiar agent for such a task, ordinarily we deem it best for personal work to be done by “like with like”; and Philip would appear, humanly speaking, to be the most unlikely agent for such a task; but God does not always follow human rules and here at least He has done a most remarkable thing with individuals who are contrasts in personality.

The Accompaniments

As we look at this conversion we discover that the whole process here is a quiet, undisturbed one.

There is no apparent opposition of man or devil. Philip, in some unexplained way, is able to approach the chariot, mount it and, sitting beside the great Treasurer from Ethiopia, is able to explain the Scriptures to a heart that is seeking truth, and then there is the quiet acceptance of it followed by the baptism of the convert.

Here we have a type of “intellectual” conversion, if we may use such a term; but as is true with every conversion of this type, the heart is touched and the life changed. We find a hungry heart. We find a Biblically awakened conscience. The reason we call this an intellectual conversion is because there is no apparent conviction for individual sin but rather an awakening of the mind and heart to the need of a Saviour, and a troubled mind over inability to understand the Scripture concerning the prophecy of the Messiah. The student of conversion processes will do well to note the thoroughness of Philip and to use this same thoroughness in committing inquirers to the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Result

Briefly, Philip’s mission resulted in a saved, baptized and rejoicing convert. Tradition also has it that he led his queen, Candace, to a saving knowledge of the Gospel and started a church in Ethiopia. This, of course, is not verified in reliable history.

Significant Lessons

Two important modes of procedure stand out for the personal soul winner in this event.

First, *Obedience*, which has as its prerequisite soul-contact with God, in order that His will may be known, and His directive purposes understood and followed. The true soul winner is an obedient servant of God, spiritually sensitive to the promptings of the Spirit.

Second, *Tact*. Philip’s approach is made relatively easy by the Eunuch’s condition. Yet he should be commended for beginning his conversation with a challenging question, “**Understandest thou what thou readest?**”

By that question he probed the very heart of the Eunuch’s spiritual difficulty. His reply shows this very definitely.

It is apparent that Philip did not belong to the modern school of critics who attribute the meaning of the prophecy of Isaiah 53 to Israel's suffering as a nation, and take away its Messianic character. Without theological argument, without explanation, Philip did the commendable thing, he began at the same Scripture and preached unto the Ethiopian Eunuch, Jesus. This Christocentric attitude is necessary for all successful soulwinners. Taboo all arguments. Exalt Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord.

THE SERMON

“WHO IS A CHRISTIAN?”

Acts 8:26-39

As we have already noted, there are just seven individual conversions recorded in the Book of Acts. These, as we have noted also, are seven types of conversions. Each portrays a distinctly different human condition and the ability of an all-wise and all-powerful God to meet human needs.

The eighth chapter of the book records the conversion of the Ethiopian Eunuch who was a puzzled reader of the Scriptures, and to whom the Lord sent Philip, evangelist, in order that he might begin at the same Scripture and preach unto him, Jesus. Now Philip was not a minister in the commonly accepted understanding of the term; that is to say, he was not an ordained man, but a layman. We learn from the text that he was on speaking terms with angels and therefore could be used of God in this mighty task. Oh, for more laymen in our own day who are on speaking terms with angels, and in such spiritual condition as makes it possible for God to use them in the saving of souls!

However, some of our outstanding soulwinners have been laymen and D. L. Moody is the supreme example of this truth.

A tendency to leave this matter to the clergy, so called, has been one of the most detrimental attitudes of the Church in our day. God's program is for the entire Church to be active in the business of soulwinning and for the minister to be the one who edifies the Church to this ministry.

In an issue of *The Sunday School Times* some years ago, William Ridgeway tells of a common steel worker—a roller in the mills in a Pennsylvania town—who was so proficient in the Word of God and in prayer that he astounded a great minister from the East who came to Mr. Ridgeway's little Sunday School to speak. Yet no one should be astounded. God is no respecter of persons. A steel worker may be endued with the Spirit and he may know the Word and be proficient in it.

God cares nothing for religious orders, the clergy are nothing to him as an order, He deals with men as individuals.

There had been persecution in Jerusalem and the disciples had been scattered abroad and had gone from Judaea to Samaria, where a great revival was started.

In the midst of this revival God called Philip to go down to Gaza, a desert place. Now you talk about faith and obedience. Well, you have it manifested here. It is easy to get a sinner away from a revival, but think of getting a preacher away from such a stir-up, such an outpouring of God's Spirit. But Philip's chief characteristic is obedience and obedience is an essential virtue of the minister of God.

When you stop and think of it you will realize that only those who are obedient to God are those whom God can lead and use. *Do today's plain duty and tomorrow's duty will be made plain when it becomes today's.* God's will is not known very far in advance in most instances. We sail down the river of life and we do not see around the bend until we get around it; but if we follow the will of God there are blessed vistas of service, purpose and joy for us in the following.

Philip was obedient. Down there in the desert place was a hungry heart of an important man in the eyes of the world, a man in whom God was interested and Philip found him riding in his chariot, reading the scroll of the prophet Isaiah, and the dramatic story of whose conversion will now occupy our attention. This first conversion is worthy of study in the light of the answer to the question, "Who is a Christian?"

We note, therefore, the following facts:

I. THAT RESPECTABILITY DOES NOT MAKE ONE A CHRISTIAN

Who was this man? He was an Ethiopian—that race which has come so much into prominence in our day because of the conquering of its country by the Italians. Ethiopia is one of the oldest of nations.

He was the Secretary of the Treasury of Queen Candace; but above all was an earnest seeker after truth, and his case is a pitiful one when we realize that he had been down to Jerusalem to worship, and was on his way back without peace, without hope and without satisfaction.

The name Jerusalem means "*foundation of peace*" and this Ethiopian Eunuch (probably a Jewish proselyte) had been down there, seeking peace for his own soul. He discovered that they had religion, a plenty.

They had the Temple, the priesthood, the gorgeous ceremonies, the processions, the trappings and all the other outward accoutrements of ceremonial religion; but sad to relate, they had no power to help this man to know God. Remember that this was the Jerusalem that had recently crucified the Son of God, nailing Him to a shameful tree, in utter rejection of both His message and His person. Jesus, the Saviour had condemned them for their lack of spirituality, calling them blind guides and whited sepulchres.

Similar conditions are found in many places, today. Oh, the froth of so many church services! What pomp and ceremony, show and pageantry—soft lights, lilting music, earthly glory—but where is God? Hungry souls are entertained, harangued, or taught the latest man-made philosophies, but the sheep look up and are not fed!

My mail is filled with pathetic letters of people who tell me that in their communities no one preaches the Gospel and were it not for the fact that the message of our church went winging through the air into their homes, they would live without any preaching of the message of Jesus Christ.

How unfavorably poor Philip, dusty with travel, must have appeared, when compared with the immaculate and cultured priests and religious leaders of Jerusalem! Yet for all that, Philip had the message of God.

A few weeks ago, riding on a Saturday night from the home of one of my parishioners, I passed two great cathedrals. Knowing the type of service, the pomp and the ceremonies of each, I knew that the multitudes could come and go and not know of God in any experimental way. Then, the Sunday following, while passing through Columbus Circle, I heard a simple, rather illiterate individual, telling in the open air to a crowd gathered about him the story of Jesus and His love, and I couldn't help but realize that God must reject the pompous and the pretentious and turn to such men as this for the proclamation of His truth.

We have reached the day when men must leave the pomp and show of our great churches and get back to the Word of God and to the simplicity of faith.

We believe in a respectable religion, but we do not believe in a religion of respectability.

Respectability is an admirable quality, a desirable thing, but it cannot save your soul. As the poet has said:

“The boast of heraldry, the pomp of power,
And all that beauty, all that wealth e'er gave,
Await alike the inevitable hour,
The path of glory leads but to the grave.”

Here, in the Treasurer of Ethiopia, we have a man in possession of all that one could ask—money, position, pomp and power. Yet his soul was starving for God. Ah, Jesus knew the truth when He said, **“What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?”**

And what about you, my friend? You may be a good citizen. You may be a good husband, a good wife, a good father, you may occupy an honest place in your community, but without Jesus Christ you're lost; for respectability will never gain heaven for you.

The story has oft been told of Charlotte Elliot, who was a church member and a highly respectable young woman. When in an evangelistic campaign someone spoke to her about her need of Jesus Christ, she was highly indignant. Was she not a moral person? Was she not a respected young lady? What need had she of this gospel which she felt applied only to the down and out; those in the lower stratum of society? But, one day, God took hold of her soul; one day, she realized that with all her goodness she was lost without Christ, and that day she allowed the Lord Jesus to come into her heart and to set up His throne there. It is then, we are told, that she wrote that beautiful hymn, which has been a blessing to millions:

“Just as I am without one plea,
But that thy blood was shed for me,
And that thou biddest me come to thee,
Oh, Lamb of God, I come.”

II. READING THE BIBLE DOES NOT MAKE ONE A CHRISTIAN

Thank God for the Book. It has blessed the world. Its message has leaped the seven seas and, today, it can be read in almost every language and dialect “from Greenland’s icy mountains to India’s coral strand,” from Tibet to Timbuktu. It has been the comfort and sustenance of the great and the small, until many can say from their hearts as Sir Walter Scott said in his dying hour, “Bring me the Book.”

“What book?” asked Lockhart.

“There is but one Book!” Scott replied.

And truly the master of Abbotsford was right. There is but one Book for our needy souls.

The Bible has occupied a unique place in the life and thought of the nations, especially of the English-speaking race. The other day I read that General Gordon’s Bible is enshrined in a costly casket of solid crystal in the jewel room of Windsor Castle.

The hero of the Sudan was so faithful to his God and so devout that during the great campaigns in Africa, when a handkerchief was seen fluttering outside of his tent, all of the servants and soldiers knew that he was waiting upon his God and must not be disturbed for anything. He gave his Bible to Queen Victoria and she had it enshrined.

Now the Bible is able to make you wise unto salvation. It contains the message of salvation. Yet mere reading of it will not save you. The Bible is not an end, it is means to an end.

- The Jews read it, and are not saved.
- Christian Scientists read it, and are entangled in a maze.
- Many infidels and skeptics read it for the sake of argument. They, too, fail to find salvation.

In one of my former pastorates I knew a man who was a good Bible student. He knew more about the Bible than most preachers, but he was not saved and had no desire to be saved. He read the Bible, night and day, for the sake of picking flaws in it and for the sake of using it in arguments against those who believed the truth as it is in Jesus. During my pastorate in that city the man died—died without God, and without a knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ; yet he knew his Bible.

Here was this Ethiopian Eunuch, riding along in his chariot and reading a scroll of the prophet Isaiah, troubled in heart, earnest in spirit, eager yet ignorant —and not saved.

John gives us the answer in his Epistle as to the place of the Bible in our salvation. Says he, **“These are written that ye might believe and that believing ye might have life through his name.”** You may be saved by the belief of the Bible, but you can never be saved by merely reading it.

III. HEARING SERMONS DOES NOT MAKE ONE A CHRISTIAN

Philip **“began at the same scripture and preached unto him Jesus.”**

I remember reading some time ago how Charles Haddon Spurgeon was accused of sameness in his message. When the accusation came to him, he did not deny it, he said, “Perhaps they are right. It is true that no matter where I take my text, whether it be in the Old Testament or the New, I immediately hit across country to Jesus Christ, and preach Him and His saving grace.”

When one knows the Lord Jesus Christ, he is able to open his Bible almost anywhere and find a message concerning Him. His face and His grace shine out from every page of the Sacred Record and the preacher is able to do as did Philip of old, to **“begin at the same scripture”** and preach unto his hearers the Lord Jesus Christ.

Ah, preaching is a great vocation! Nothing is more disgusting to me than to see how modern churches and modernistic preachers are turning aside from the Gospel, substituting almost everything else for the message of the pulpit—movies, plays, pageants, oratorios, and in some cases dances and girl-shows—esthetic capers of lewd women.

Angels would like the job of preaching the unsearchable riches of Jesus Christ, and, wonder of wonders, God has turned this task and privilege over to men! In some instances, they are neglecting their opportunity, turning to the entertainment of people.

When a certain preacher died in a western town, his friend and brother in the ministry preached the funeral sermon. He told of the man’s faithfulness to the Gospel. He reminded the people how, day after day, and oftentimes well into the night, this faithful servant of God had gone in and out among the people, warning them, comforting them, calling attention to their need of the Lord Jesus Christ, calling upon them to repent of their evil ways and to return to God for salvation.

Said he to the throng assembled, “My friends, the greatest obstacle on your road to hell has been removed.”

Ah, what a tribute! The faithful minister of God is not only a stumblingblock to the devil, but he is a veritable dam that stops the flowing of lost souls into perdition.

I make no apology for being a preacher. Preaching is worth something to the community. It is worth something to society. It makes its contribution’ to social welfare, moral growth, the very preservation of society and civilization, and I declare that I covet as a preacher a similar tribute to that paid this pioneer of the west.

But for all that, listening to preaching will not save you.

I know that many of you like me, know that you like my message but, sad to say, some of you refuse to conform to the truth which I present to you by the help of God.

In every pastorate I have served, there have been a number who, although they listened to the truth as it was preached, Sunday after Sunday, nevertheless allowed their hearts to become sermon-hardened and, like a man who sleeps while the alarm clock rings, soon came to the place where there was no awakening their conscience or stirring their souls. They slept the sleep of death, and oh, the terribleness of going to sleep under the preaching of the truth as it is in Jesus!

And the preacher is not always to blame; some went to sleep under Paul's preaching, and Jesus preached the best sermons this old world has ever heard. They commended Him for His preaching and yet many of them are in hell for all that, because hearing sermons never saved a man. Jesus was forced to say in desperation to his generation: "**You are like children in the market place. I have piped and you have not danced.**"

In other words, He said, "You listen to me but you heed not my message." And I have pleaded with you and still many of you are yet in your sins.

Oh, wake up, friends! You can go away from a service with a religious feeling and a real desire to do good and to be better, and yet go with that feeling straight to perdition. For listening to sermons will not save you; but heeding the message of the Gospel will.

IV. BELIEVING AND RECEIVING THE GOSPEL DOES MAKE ONE A CHRISTIAN

The Eunuch asked two questions:

First, "**Of whom speaketh this man, of himself or of some other man?**"

The second, "**What doth hinder me to be baptized?**"

Philip's answer to the first question was that the prophet was speaking about Jesus—the Suffering Redeemer, the man who paid the penalty of the world's sins in His own body on the tree, and then when the Ethiopian believed and asked baptism at the hands of Philip, the reply to the second question was this: "**If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest.**"

The Eunuch replied very solemnly and clearly: "**I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.**"

Here is the crux of the whole matter. "**If thou believest; if thou believest!**"

Take your Bible and see how many times, especially in the New Testament, the Word of God makes this demand of the sinner. "**Whosoever believeth,**" "**He that believeth,**" "**If thou shalt believe.**"

This is the Word of God. In the world, "seeing is believing." In the realm of the Spirit, "believing is seeing."

The story is told of the conversion of Lady Somerset, a rich and fashionable woman of England. She had read a great many infidel books and her faith had been shattered. Nevertheless, she was heavy-hearted, seeking to get back to her faith and to an uncompromising knowledge of God in Jesus Christ.

She read and prayed and studied and yet she said she had no rest. One evening, in awful turmoil of soul while walking amid the beauty of her garden, she thought she heard a voice say, "Act as if I were, and thou shalt know that I am."

Lady Somerset acted upon that suggestion, and faith came to her heart. She performed an act of trust in the simple commitment of her life to Jesus Christ and became one of England's great Christians. This, after all, is the message by which anyone becomes a Christian. "**Said I not if thou shouldst believe, thou shouldst see the glory of God,**" is the Word of Jesus.

Oh, my friend, tonight do you believe that God can save you? Do you believe that Jesus Christ died for you? Do you believe that He cares? Hear this bit of poetry:

"Among so many can He care?
Can special love be everywhere?
A myriad homes, a myriad ways—
God's eye be over every place?
I asked my soul; bethought of this—
In just the very place of His
Where He has put and keepeth you—
God hath no other thing to do."

Some years ago, out in the West, Tod Sloane, a famous jockey, died. A former friend of his, later converted and a minister of the gospel, heard that his old friend was in the County Hospital, penniless and said to be dying. This young man lifted his heart to God and asked for an open door of opportunity to speak to Tod about his relationship to Jesus Christ. They had both been riders for Lord Carnarvon and King George V, when he was Prince of Wales, so early the next morning this young minister went to the hospital and asked the head nurse if he could see Mr. Sloane for a moment.

"I'm sorry," she answered, "but I'm afraid that you will not be able to see him. The publicity given him in the papers has made it very hard for us here at the hospital. Hundreds have called, wanting to see him, all saying that they knew him."

"Well, nurse," replied the pastor, "please go and tell him that a pastor of a Los Angeles church would like to speak with him just a minute."

Promptly the word came back that Sloane did not want to see any minister. Refusing to be discouraged, this faithful pastor said, "Go back and tell him that an old boy he knows, who rode for Lord Carnarvon and the Prince of Wales, would like to see him."

This broke down the barrier. Tod sent back word, “Tell him to wait. I want to see him.”

Then, by Sloane’s bedside the faithful minister chatted with him, and they reminisced together about old times. A little later, Tod asked the minister if he had anything to drink. “No, Tod,” was the reply, “not the kind of drink you are looking for. I don’t drink that stuff any more. I have had a drink of the Living Water that really satisfies those who drink.”

The dying jockey stared at his former friend. “What do you mean?” he asked.

“I mean,” said the pastor, “that I was saved twenty years ago in Paterson, New Jersey, in a Billy Sunday meeting, after having lived a life somewhat like that which you have lived.”

The minister spoke to him of the woman at the well, of Nicodemus, and of the dying thief on the cross, and then told him how he could come to the Lord Jesus Christ just as he was, weary and worn and sad, and find in Him a resting place, and that He would make him glad.

“Tod, old boy, this is the reason Jesus left his home in glory, so that you and I might drink of the water of life,” said the preacher.

The jockey looked up at his former friend with new interest in his face. “Billy Sunday came into my pool hall on Forty-second Street and Broadway, in New York, years ago, and told me I needed religion, and I said I didn’t want any religion.”

“Tod,” said the preacher, “don’t you believe that Jesus is the Son of God? Don’t you believe that He not only died for the sins of the world but He hung on the Cross for your sins?”

The dissipated, tired and worn out little jockey hung his head and soberly replied, “Yes, I believe it.”

Then the preacher quoted Romans 10:9-10. “Don’t you want to take this Saviour as your Saviour, Tod—One that sticketh closer than a brother—One Who would go even unto the end, and not like the old gang that leaves and forsakes?”

That morning Tod Sloane confessed Jesus Christ as his personal Saviour, and there was joy in the presence of the angels.

It was only a few weeks later that Tod Sloane began to ride for the King of kings and Lord of lords. Said this pastor, “I was with him once or twice a day after that, and also on the last day of his life—just an hour and a half before he went home. The last words he said to me were these: “I am riding my last race; it won’t be long before I will be standing in front of the Judge’s stand, weighing in.”

“Yes, Tod,” I said, “you are riding a winning race and when you stand with saddle and whip in hand, ready to be weighed in, you will tip the scales and the Great Judge will not disqualify you.”

“We prayed together,” continued the preacher, “and then I said ‘goodbye,’ but before leaving him for the last time I asked him: ‘Do you really know Him as your personal Saviour?’ ‘Yes, sir,’ answered Tod Sloane, ‘and He is precious to me.’”

Who is a Christian?

This—one who believes on the Lord Jesus Christ.

- Respectability does not save,
- Religiousness does not save,
- Good works cannot save;
- But, praise be to God, simple faith can.

“**To him that worketh not, but believeth**”—this is the Word of God. Our faith is accounted for righteousness. May God help every one of you to have this faith.

~ end of chapter 1 ~

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