

# Unstoppable...Divine Appointments

7/14/19 – Pastor Randy

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My message title today is “Divine Appointments”. We will be looking at two “divine appointments” from Acts today. We begin with the divine appointment between Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch.

## Acts 8: -15

*As for Philip, an angel of the Lord said to him, “Go south down the desert road that runs from Jerusalem to Gaza.” So he started out, and he met the treasurer of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under the Kandake, the queen of Ethiopia. The eunuch had gone to Jerusalem to worship, and he was now returning. Seated in his carriage, he was reading aloud from the book of the prophet Isaiah. The Holy Spirit said to Philip, “Go over and walk along beside the carriage.” Philip ran over and heard the man reading from the prophet Isaiah. Philip asked, “Do you understand what you are reading?” The man replied, “How can I, unless someone instructs me?” And he urged Philip to come up into the carriage and sit with him. The passage of Scripture he had been reading was this:*

*“He was led like a sheep to the slaughter. And as a lamb is silent before the shearers, he did not open his mouth. He was humiliated and received no justice. Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth.”*

*The eunuch asked Philip, “Tell me, was the prophet talking about himself or someone else?” So beginning with this same Scripture, Philip told him the Good News about Jesus.*

*As they rode along, they came to some water, and the eunuch said, “Look! There’s some water! Why can’t I be baptized?” He ordered the carriage to stop, and they went down into the water, and Philip baptized him.*

### **A. What Happened?**

The Lord told Philip to head south from Jerusalem on a desert road towards Gaza. This was a strange request. Philip was being told to leave from the city of Samaria, where he has been able to reach large crowds with his preaching and healing ministry, and go to a remote road where he is unlikely to encounter anyone! Philip obeyed, and as he was walking on this road he saw a chariot. The Spirit told him to go after the chariot. Philip ran to the chariot, and as he approached he heard the man in the chariot reading Isaiah 53 from a scroll. Luke tells us that the man was the treasurer for the queen of

## Unstoppable...Divine Appointments

7/14/19 – Pastor Randy

---

Ethiopia, a eunuch, who was heading back to Ethiopia following a visit to Jerusalem where he spent time worshipping in the Temple. The “Ethiopia” named in our text should not be confused with modern day Ethiopia. In the first century, Ethiopia referred to the land of Africa south of Egypt, which would be modern day Sudan. The title, “Kandake”, ascribed to the Queen, strongly suggests that he was the treasurer for the Queen of the ancient prosperous African Nubian Kingdom of Meroe. Luke also stresses the fact that this royal official was a eunuch. What’s a eunuch? A eunuch was a castrated male. He was reading Isaiah 53 which prophesies that God’s righteous servant would suffer and die for the sins of the people. Philip asked him if he understood what he was reading and he said, “No, but I wish I had someone to explain it to me. Can you explain it to me?” He invited Philip into the chariot and Philip explained that Jesus was the person Isaiah was prophesying about. I love the way Luke expressed it: “...beginning with this same Scripture, Philip told him the Good News about Jesus”. Philip must have included an explanation of the meaning of water baptism because when they came upon some water the eunuch asked Peter to baptize him.

There are a few significant facts about this man. He was from a pagan nation that worshipped false gods. He had heard about the God of Israel and had developed a desire to know Him and worship Him. His social status was mixed. On the one hand he was a man of wealth and prominence in his own nation, but within Judaism, his status as a eunuch placed him in a socially marginalized position. I will mention the significance of this later, but for now I want to look at another divine appointment in Acts 10.

Acts 10: 1-6

*In Caesarea there lived a Roman army officer named Cornelius, who was a captain of the Italian Regiment. He was a devout, God-fearing man, as was everyone in his household. He gave generously to the poor and prayed regularly to God. One afternoon about three o'clock, he had a vision in which he saw an angel of God coming toward him. "Cornelius!" the angel said. Cornelius stared at him in terror. "What is it, sir?" he asked the angel. And the angel replied, "Your prayers and gifts to the poor have been received by God as an offering! Now send some men to Joppa,*

## Unstoppable...Divine Appointments

7/14/19 – Pastor Randy

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*and summon a man named Simon Peter. He is staying with Simon, a tanner who lives near the seashore."*

The key characters in this story are Peter and Cornelius. Cornelius was a Roman military officer; a captain in charge of about 600 men. Luke described him as a God-fearer. That term is a technical term for someone who was not a full convert to Judaism but who had been drawn to respect and worship the one true God as He had revealed himself to and through Abraham and the nation of Israel. In this sense he is very similar to the Ethiopian official. They were both Gentiles who were raised in pagan religious cultures but had been drawn to the God of Israel. Cornelius received clear specific supernatural direction through a vision. In the vision an angel told him to send some of his men to a specific home of a specific man in a specific city where they would find a specific man named Peter.

Cornelius' response was to immediately send men to get Peter. The day these men left to find Peter, Peter is on the roof of his house in prayer and he had a vision of a large sheet with all kinds of animals; both animals that were kosher; that fell within the dietary guidelines of the Jewish law, as well as non-kosher animals. Then he heard a voice say, Get up, kill and eat! Peter objected vehemently. I would too! If you read the text reptiles are included!! Peter's reason for objecting was reasonable and pure. He believed that the command was asking him to do something contrary to God's word. But the voice clarified the meaning by saying, "What God has cleaned, do not call unclean!" The vision appeared three times and then it was taken away. While Peter was left puzzled as to what he should make of this vision Cornelius' men arrived at the house. In vs. 19 we read:

*Meanwhile, as Peter was puzzling over the vision, the Holy Spirit said to him, "Three men have come looking for you. Get up, go downstairs, and go with them without hesitation. Don't worry, for I have sent them."*

*So Peter went down and said, "I'm the man you are looking for. Why have you come?" They said, "We were sent by Cornelius, a Roman officer. He is a devout and God-fearing man, well respected by all the Jews. A holy angel instructed him to summon you to his house so that he can hear your message." So Peter invited the men to stay*

## Unstoppable...Divine Appointments

7/14/19 – Pastor Randy

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*for the night. The next day he went with them, accompanied by some of the brothers from Joppa.*

When Peter arrived at Cornelius' house and entered, the first thing Cornelius did was fall at Peter's feet and worship him. Peter immediately rejected his worship, explaining, "I am a man like you". Peter noticed that Cornelius had already assembled his family and many friends in great anticipation of Peter's message. Peter then explained that he had come to understand his vision: *"You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation, but God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean."*

Cornelius shared with Peter the vision he had instructing him to send for Peter and then he said, *"Now we are all here, waiting before God to hear the message the Lord has given you."* Peter's reply revealed that he now understood that God did not play favorites and that, while Jesus was the Jewish Messiah, Jesus was also the Savior for all people and the Lord of all people.

Next week we will come back and look at Peter's message to Cornelius' household but for now let's look at some lessons God has for us.

**B. So What?** What lessons do these divine appointments teach us?

**LESSON #1 – Jesus came to "seek and save" individual "lost" persons.**

So far Luke has focused on preaching which was directed towards groups of people. In these two stories the focus is on the conversion of two specific individuals; The Ethiopian eunuch and Cornelius. Up until Acts 8 we have only read about groups of people being saved. In Acts 8-10 we read about three specific persons that Jesus "seeks to save". The Spirit sent Philip away from the crowds, to a remote area, **for one person!!** Even though a group is saved in Acts 10, God sent Peter to Cornelius – to **one man!**

**"God so loved the world" that He sent Jesus for the individual "whosoever" of the world. Jesus is for "the one".**

**LESSON #2 – Jesus came to "seek and save" EVERY lost person**

Luke's narrative reveals how the Holy Spirit fulfilled Jesus' words in Acts 1:8; that the disciples would be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. The disciples began witnessing for Jesus in Jerusalem but

## **Unstoppable...Divine Appointments**

7/14/19 – Pastor Randy

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not until the persecution of the church that started with the killing of Stephen, causing Christians to scatter to Judea and Samaria, was the gospel spread to those areas.” Now, with Philip’s outreach to the Ethiopian and Peter’s outreach to Cornelius, a Roman, the message about Jesus began to spread to the third stage; the “ends of the earth”. Ethiopia is used in the OT to illustrate the “ends of the earth” from which God would gather His people (Ps. 68:31; 87:4; Zeph. 3:9-10). These are the first real occurrences of cross-cultural conversion. Up until this time Jesus was preached as the messiah of the Jews. Now we have the beginning of the fulfillment of God’s ancient promise to Abraham that he would not only make Abraham the father of a great nation but that the whole world would be blessed through Abraham’s seed. It marks the beginning of the understanding among these Jewish disciples of Jesus that He wasn’t just the Savior of the Jewish people, but the savior of the whole world (See Isaiah 19:24-25).

The Holy Spirit had to intervene in a dramatic way to get these Jewish believers to cross the cultural barriers that existed between them and the Gentiles. The Holy Spirit had to nudge them out of their cultural comfort zone and reach out cross-culturally. The eunuch and Cornelius were prominent in their own nations but stigmatized and marginalized among the Jews. But Jesus loves the rich and celebrated as well the poor and marginalized.

### **LESSON #3 – The Holy Spirit orchestrates divine appointments.**

God works in the hearts of people preparing them to believe BUT He also uses His people to be His agents of reconciliation to those who he prepares. Both the eunuch and Cornelius were “God-fearers”; non-Jews who had been exposed to the stories of the God of Israel and had developed a respect and interest to know God. However, they needed to help to understand. God is always at work ahead of us. Our job is to be sensitive to His Spirit so we can be led by Him so we are in the right place at the right time for those in need of becoming right with God. We follow Him, he doesn’t follow us.

### **LESSON #4 – Transformation Belongs to the Teachable**

The Ethiopian court official confessed his lack of understanding, his need of instruction, and then he urged Philip to instruct him. He was hungry to learn!

## Unstoppable...Divine Appointments

7/14/19 – Pastor Randy

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After Cornelius explained to Peter why he sent for him he said, “Now we are all here, waiting before God to hear the message the Lord has given you.”

**C. Now What?** How should these lessons transform our attitudes, affections and actions?

1. If Jesus cares about “the one”, so should we!

2. Be ready to obey when God calls. The Spirit said to Philip, “Get up and go” and Philip “Got up and went”. We are prone to sit and debate God. Philip and Cornelius obeyed when God called, but God’s people don’t always. Jonah ran the other way from his divine appointment. It is an interesting detail that Peter was in Joppa when he received the call to go to the home of Cornelius the Gentile. Joppa was the city Jonah from where Jonah began to run away from God’s call.

Here are a few things that threaten to prevent us from responding to our divine appointments.

a. Our Agendas – Sometimes our problem is we are too busy to allow God to interrupt our plans. Some interruptions and distractions are “holy distractions”.

b. Our Traditions – Without the divine vision, Peter would have not been willing to go to Cornelius’ house, not because God’s law prohibited it, but because rigid man-made traditions prohibited it.

c. Our Prejudices – Don’t hear prejudice only in racial or ethnic terms, although those prejudices can and do exist in us. Sometimes we prejudge people’s response to our outreach to them. We assume they will reject our message or take advantage of us. We prejudge people, thinking to ourselves, “He/she is a “lost cause”.

3. Recognize and appreciate how Jesus came to “seek and to save” you by sending other people into your life. Recognize God’s work in bringing you to faith. You are here today, Sunday morning July 14, 2019 because God has led you here.

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