

Baptizing
July 28, 2024
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Acts 8:26-39

Opening: A work colleague recently posted with pride on social media pictures from her daughter's "White Coat" ceremony. What IS a "white coat" ceremony? What are some other examples of ceremonies like that in other professions, education, and the military?

These ceremonies are called "rites of passage," described in the dictionary as, "*a ritual, event, or experience that marks...a major milestone or change in a person's life.*" We know that putting on a white coat or pinning on wings doesn't make you qualified to practice medicine or fly a plane. These ceremonies are symbolic of what has been accomplished.

In the New Testament church, we have a similar event after someone trusts Christ as Savior and Lord: the ordinance of baptism by emersion. It's not just a rite of passage, it is obedience to a commandment Jesus gave us. In recent years in our church those being baptized are often wearing a t-shirt with the words, "I have decided." I LIKE THAT! What a concise, elegant way to proclaim that new follower's faith in Christ.

The point: Our text this morning ends with the baptism of a brand-new Gentile believer. If we are Baptists, we should understand and be able to explain the importance of baptism. These fourteen verses are more than a reminder about baptism. They display a wonderful pattern of how we are to share our faith in Christ with those who don't yet know Him as Lord. They also speak to obedience to the prompting of the Holy Spirit for both the person sharing the gospel and the person receiving the gift of salvation.

In Acts chapter six, seven deacons were chosen to serve those in need in the church. One of the seven was a man named Philip. This is not the same Philip who was one of the twelve Apostles. This Philip was not only a deacon serving in the church; he was an evangelist sharing the good news of Jesus to those outside the church. In Acts chapter eight we find Philip the Evangelist sharing the gospel in the city of Samaria. Verse eight tells us his message was received with "great joy." With God greatly blessing Philip's ministry it would have been logical for him to stay put, but Philip was not only passionate about evangelism, he was obedient when God changed the plans.

(ESV) — 26 Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." This is a desert place. **27** And he rose and went. And there was an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure. He had come to Jerusalem to worship **28** and was returning, seated in his chariot, and he was reading the prophet Isaiah. **29** And the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over and join this chariot." **30** So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?"

- Jerusalem to Gaza would have been between 50 and 100 miles on foot in the desert. This was not a quick evangelistic errand; it was days of hard travel.
- Look at verses 26 and 27. What did the angel of the Lord NOT give Philip in verse 26? What does that fact plus the first words of verse 27 tell us about Philip? What does verse 29 tell us about Philip? What is the lesson for us?
- Back to verse 27: What was significant about the man in the chariot? Though he was not a Jew, why had he been in Jerusalem? What was he reading?
- With nothing more than observation Philip could see this man was a foreigner, he was rich, he was important, he was educated, and he was reading scripture. If we saw someone in that situation, what mistaken assumptions might we make?
- So far we've seen that Philip was obedient to God's direction (with no specifics), willing to be inconvenienced, listening to the Holy Spirit, and not intimidated.
- Verse 30: How did Philip engage the man in conversation? Why might we be hesitant to ask the same question? How can we overcome that hesitation?
- So, Philip asked, *"Do you understand what you are reading?"*

31 And he [the eunuch] said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. **32** Now the passage of the Scripture that he was reading was this: "Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter and like a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he opens not his mouth. **33** In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth." **34** And the eunuch said to Philip, "About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?" **35** Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus.

- The Holy Spirit had prepared the heart of this important foreign official. He was a seeker who was eager to understand the good news about Jesus.
- He was reading from Isaiah 53 "one of the clearest prophecies about Jesus's atoning work on the cross."ⁱⁱ What an opening to share the good news!
- Verse 35: Philip did what most of us are afraid to do, he "opened his mouth."
- Importantly, Philip "began with that scripture" and told him about the good news.
- Look at the progression: Philip found common ground (do you understand what you're reading?); he met the man where he was (seeking); he pointed the man to the scripture (because Philip had a knowledge of scripture.)
- One of the fears about sharing our faith is that we might say the wrong thing.
- Our Lifeway writer states: *"Relying on Scripture ensures that we are sharing truth, while also demonstrating that our beliefs do not come from our own imaginations."*ⁱⁱⁱ We don't need a seminary degree, just a knowledge of the basics of salvation from scripture and faith in the Holy Spirit's work in the person's heart.
- Verses 36-39 seem to indicate that Philip's message might have mirrored what Peter said in his first sermon at Pentecost in Acts 2:38: **38** *And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."*
- It's clear that this new believer understood his next step should be baptism.

36 And as they were going along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, “See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?” **38** And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. **39** And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing.

- As Baptists, we need to know how to explain the basics of baptism.
- Just as wearing a white coat doesn’t make you a doctor or nurse, being baptized doesn’t save us – it is a public, symbolic statement of our faith in Christ.
- Some denominations see baptism as a “sacrament” or the way we receive salvation (grace) from God. Most protestant evangelicals see baptism as an “ordinance” which simply means a rite of passage symbolizing a profession of faith in Christ.
- Why do we see it that way? Titus 3:4-5 tell us: *“when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, ⁵ he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit...”*^{iv}
- We call it “believer’s baptism” because the believing (in Christ) comes first.
- Baptism symbolizes what Christ did for humanity: He died (to pay for all sin), was buried, and rose from the dead. Baptism is a public picture of the believer dying to a lifestyle of sin, burying our old sinful life, and being raised to a new life.
- **Romans 6:4 (ESV) — 4** 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.
- Baptism was commanded by Christ in His Great Commission (Matt. 28:19-20)

So, What’s the Takeaway?

- In this text Philip the evangelist displayed for us the basics of sharing our faith:
 - Ask the Holy Spirit to lead us to people He has prepared to hear the gospel, then be obedient to His leading.
 - Meet them where they are and be prepared to share what Jesus has done for us. Don’t just share our story, be sure to share the gospel from scripture. That’s an important reason we need to study our Bible, especially the basics of the plan of salvation.
 - Ask the Holy Spirit to remove any feelings of intimidation in sharing.
 - Trust the Holy Spirit to do what only He can do. We do the sharing, and the Spirit speaks to the heart of that individual about their need for Christ.
- I would add two more important points:
 - If we have followed Christ as Savior and Lord and never followed His command for baptism after salvation – it’s not too late to make that public display of our decision to receive His free gift of mercy and grace.
 - If have followed Him into the waters of baptism, we should live in a way that keeps that public profession apparent to those around us.

- Here's what I mean: If you've ever been to a hotel with a pool or an amusement park with a water ride you can always spot who has been in the water. Even if they dried off with a towel, the wet hair is a giveaway.
- As followers of Christ, we should live in such a way that people can still sense we are a little "damp" from the waters of baptism.
- Jesus put it this way in Matthew 5:16: *"...let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."*^v
- Though none of us are perfect, this week let's strive to live in a way that our faith in Christ is as obvious as if we are wearing one of those t-shirts that says, *"I have DECIDED to follow Jesus."*

ⁱ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/rite%20of%20passage#:~:text=plural%20rites%20of%20passage,individual%20and%20to%20the%20community>.

ⁱⁱ Explore the Bible Leader Guide – Lifeway 2024

ⁱⁱⁱ ibid

^{iv} [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Tt 3:4–5). (2016). Crossway Bibles.

^v [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Mt 5:16). (2016). Crossway Bibles.