

## A Man Saved On The Way Home From Worship

The treasurer of Ethiopia was returning from worship in Jerusalem, when a wonderful thing happened. As he read from Isaiah (ch. 53), a man came running up and asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" A conversation followed that ultimately resulted in the treasurer's being saved.

The full story of this man's salvation is told in Acts 8:26-39. The story is factual in every detail, because it is told by one inspired of God. It can be divided into three significant events:

1. THE BRINGING TOGETHER OF THE PREACHER AND THE SINNER. Phillip, the evangelist, was one of the select few who had direct supernatural guidance and power. In the early days of the church while God's word was still being revealed, certain ones were given special miraculous powers by the Holy Spirit. The apostles (Acts 2) received this power directly from heaven. Others received it by the laying on of the apostles' hands. (Acts 8:17,18). The purpose was to reveal God's will through these people and give them the means to perform signs, so that they could convince folks that they indeed were receiving direct revelation from heaven (cf. Mk. 16:20; Heb. 2:3,4). We, today, have the complete results of their work in the written word - the New Testament. The age of direct revelation and the accompanying confirming miracles ceased after the New Testament was made perfect or complete (cf. 1 Cor. 13:8-13).

Phillip was the one instructed directly from heaven and not the Ethiopian. It pleased God to save sinners by the preaching of the gospel through human instruments and not by direct messages of guidance and assurance from heaven (1 Cor. 1:25; Gal. 1:8,9). Everything I know about my salvation came through human instrumentality. Every line of the New Testament was written by the

inspiration of God through specially chosen "earthen vessels" - the inspired men who wrote the New Testament. When I believed and obeyed their message, I was saved. If you are waiting for God to directly speak "sweet peace to your soul", you are destined to be either disappointed or convince yourself - against all the New Testament says - that such has happened. You may misinterpret a perfectly natural experience to be a supernatural experience - a divine message of salvation - because you desire and expect such an experience. Our feelings sometimes play deceptive tricks on us -- but the Bible is always right.

2. THE PREACHING OF JESUS TO THE TREASURER. Phillip was eager to preach and the treasurer was eager to learn (vs. 30,31). Many of us might have considered him and unlikely prospect for the gospel - a prominent man strong in his religious convictions. At that very moment he was on his way home from a long journey to worship God. But, without obedience to the gospel, every man is lost regardless to earthly position or religious piety.

Too many, in the treasurer's position, would have had no time for a religious conversation. Besides, why should he talk with a preacher, especially one of a "different faith"? He was already an active member of a religion that could boast of members by the multitudes and enjoyed political power. But this man wanted truth.

Phillip "preached Jesus" unto him. The text does not give all the details of the message. Since the man was reading from Isaiah 53, it would seem that as a starter he pointed out that Jesus fulfilled that passage. Enough was said to convince the man of the deity of Jesus and that he needed water baptism (v. 36,37). It is incredible to think that one could preach Jesus in His fullness

without the necessity of baptism. Jesus was not only baptized himself, but commanded it for "every creature" or the "whole creation" (Mt. 28:18-20, Mk. 16:15-16).

3. THE REACTION OF THE TREASURER TO THE PREACHING. He asked, "What hinders me from being baptized?" There was no hassle over it's necessity. No bringing up of cases of probable salvation without baptism from the old order of things, like the "thief on the cross" or maybe Isaiah or maybe his own loved ones. There was no suggestion that he needed to go before the church, tell his experience, receive their vote before baptism. He had learned what God wanted HIM to do under the gospel of Christ and wanted to attend to the matter right then. He immediately confessed his faith and was baptized in water (vs. 37-39). He was immersed or else why would both he and Phillip go down into the water. Some have objected that he could not have been immersed, since the place was called "desert". But "desert", in the Bible, does not necessarily mean a dry place void of water. It was merely a deserted area. In fact, Jesus fed a multitude in a "desert" as they sat on GREEN grass (Mk. 6:35,36).

Does your conversion experience correspond to this one? Did you hear Christ preached -- either orally or written? Did you believe it? Did you repent? Did you confess your faith in Christ? Were you baptized in water - not to because your sins had already been washed away - but to wash your sins (See Acts 22:16)? The treasurer considered baptism an urgent matter. He waited for no church to pass judgment on him. He waited for no one else to be baptized with him so they could have a "big baptizing day". He did not even wait until he got home. He is not said to have rejoiced until after his baptism. Baptism was urgent for him because his salvation was at stake. Bible baptism is "for the remission of sins" (Acts 2:38) or to "wash away sins" (Acts 22:16). I had rather have what I read in the Bible about my salvation than a stack of human "testimonies" about unusual experiences ten feet tall! Hadn't you?  
-- Editor.

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## Mistaking One's Wish For God's Will

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Balaam, the prophet, had a big problem (Numbers 22). There was a conflict between what God said and what Balaam wished God had said - between what God wanted Balaam to do and what Balaam wanted to do! Balak, king of Moab, went messengers to Balaam bearing "the diviners fee in their hand" to entice him to curse the Israelites, (v.7), but God told Balaam not to do it (vs. 12,13). But Balak was a persistent fellow. He sent a second time saying, "Please let nothing hinder you from coming to me; for I will certainly honor you greatly, and I will do whatever you say to me. Therefore please come, curse this people for me" (vs.17,18). Now, hold on just a minute, this puts the whole issue in a different light. Maybe it was time to re-study the issue. In spite of the strong statement about his desire to do the will of God, Balaam still showed that he really wanted to go with Balak's men (vs. 18-19). He said, "Now therefore, please, you also stay here tonight, that I may know what more the Lord will say to me." (v. 19). He said this in spite of the fact that God had already told him what His will was in the matter. Finally God permitted him to go, but very forcefully showed His displeasure at his going. (v. 22)

There is a valuable lesson to be learned from Balaam's case: If we persist in wanting to do what WE want to do - even while we are seeking God's ratification of our wish - we will probably be given the justification (?) to go ahead. Truth is for those who love truth. God has promised a "strong delusion" to certain ones "who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness." (2 Thess. 2:10-12). If you and I insist "having it our way", it just may be that God will allow us to go ahead thinking that we are really doing GOD's will for our lives, as a judgment against us for our not loving the truth in the first place. A wish can be so

strong that OBJECTIVE EVIDENCE to the contrary can have little effect on our thoughts and actions.

#### WISHING TO GET THAT "SAVED FEELING"

One may become convinced, for whatever reason, that he should expect some kind of mystical feeling as evidence that God has saved him. He thinks when you get it you will know it! This is how he WANTS to be saved. He begins to wait anxiously for that feeling. He may not know what the feeling is to be like, but he is convinced that it must come if he is to be saved. The fact that God has already told him in the Bible what he must do to be saved (Acts 2:38; 22:16; Mark 16:16) has little effect on his thinking. He continues to wait, earnestly desiring and expecting "that feeling" until one day, bingo, he has an experience that must be that saving experience -- an indescribable feeling like he had never had before! Point him to Bible passages that clearly show that he cannot be saved, in spite of his feeling, because he had not done what the Bible says do to be saved -- he still has that feeling and no one is going to tell him that he is not saved! The fact that the Bible connects the remission of sins (Acts 2:38) or the washing away of sins (Acts 22:16) with baptism just cannot be so to him because he got that feeling that he cannot describe (and he knows others who have had a similar experience, though they are unable to describe it to him) - all of this before and without baptism. He rules out even the POSSIBILITY that he might have been wishing for that feeling so badly that he he have had some kind of natural reaction for one in his state of mind at the time and that he may have misinterpreted it for that long sought after "saved feeling".

My friend, what one feels in his heart is not sufficient evidence of salvation. True, when one is saved, he will have the feeling that he is saved. (cf. Acts 16: 34) But a feeling, of itself, is not proof that one is, in fact, saved. The heart can be deceitful, even above all things (Jer.17:9). "There

is a way that seems right to a man, but the end is the way of death". (Prov. 16:25). I am glad that the assurance of my salvation is based on how I feel, which is subject to many influences, but on what I can read from God's word! If God says it - it is so! My heart may deceive me, but God will not! If I feel a certain way in my heart and the Bible reads another way - then I can mark it down that my feelings are playing a cruel trick on me! Truth the word of God as evidence that you are saved. It will not deceive you nor will it change with your varying states of mind -- but your feelings may do both! "And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments (I John 2:3). You can count on that!

#### WISHING FOR GOD TO RATIFY OUR PREJUDICE

One may wish the Bible to teach what he already believes and/or practices. He will then search the Scriptures with desire to have his pre-conceived conclusions ratified. It is kind of like the woman who wanted her smoking to be justified. She found her verse: "And Rebekah...lighted off her camel." (Gen. 24:64 KJV). Now who could argue with that plain passage!

If one wants to find something strongly enough in the Bible he can usually find it, at least to his own satisfaction. The danger in such an approach to Bible study should be obvious. If one decides in advance what he wants the Bible to say, chances are pretty good that he will find something that says it to HIM. No amount of evidence to the contrary is likely to convince him that the Bible does not actually mean what he wishes it to say.

One wants the Bible to teach salvation by faith ONLY. Every passage that says that we are saved by faith says faith ALONE to him. None of the verses that show other conditions of salvation nor the one that says it is NOT by faith only (James 2:24) seem to register with him.

One decides that the eternal security of saints is unconditional. He will read unconditional into every verse

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that assures believers that they are  
secure in Christ. All the verses that  
warn those same believers against falling  
and the passages that tell of believers  
(like Simon the Sorcerer, Judas, 23,000  
Israelites) who did fall have little  
effect on his thinking.

One wants baptism of the Holy Spirit  
for all Christians. Every verse that  
mentions baptism reads "baptism in the  
Holy Spirit" in his mind. Or every  
passage that mentions Christians  
receiving the Holy Spirit says they  
received the BAPTISM of the Holy Spirit  
in their mind. No amount of reasoning  
from the Scriptures can change his mind.

One wants the Bible to teach  
instrumental music in worship. He will  
find it in passages that mention it in  
the Old Testament worship. The fact that  
consistency demands that he also use  
animal sacrifices in worship because they  
too were a part of the Old Testament  
worship; or the fact that Old Testament  
law was done away with the death of  
Jesus; has little bearing on his thinking  
because he wants instruments of music but  
not animal sacrifices.

He may find in some passages in  
Revelation that mention some kind of  
musical instrument in heaven. Point out  
that things in heaven may not be fitting  
on earth and vice versa (such as marriage  
- Matt. 22:30) if you will -- he will  
likely still insist that his instrument  
is justified.

He may find it in the word PSALMS  
(Greek - psalmos). He may not know a  
Greek letter from a chicken track but he  
has read some definition somewhere that  
suggests instrumental accompaniment. It  
is admitted that sometimes the word may  
have had such a meaning in classical  
Greek and the the Greek used by New

Testament writers. Thayer and others  
point this out. Yet, Thayer points out  
that in the New Testament that a psalm is  
just a song. J.W. McGarvey pretty well  
sums up our point on this matter:

"If any man who is a preachers  
believes that the apostle teaches the use  
of instrumental music in the church by  
enjoining the singing of psalms, he is  
one of those smatterers in Greek who can  
believe anything that he wishes to  
believe. When the wish is father of the  
thought, correct exegesis is like water  
on a duck's back". (Christian Standard,  
1895, p. 1149).

If the word really means  
instrumental music, the instrument is not  
just permitted - it is DEMANDED. It would  
be wrong to sing a psalm without it!  
Indeed, if that is the meaning of the  
word and one took one of David's psalms  
and sang it without an instrument it  
would cease to be a PSALM. Why? Because  
the essential ingredient for a psalm  
would have been omitted! Who can believe  
that? Not even the most ardent defenders  
of instrumental music in worship that I  
know are ready for that position.

So, the question is: Can one just  
sing a psalm? The Bible says to sing  
psalms. (Col. 3:16; Eph. 5:19; Jas.  
5:13). It does not take a Solomon nor a  
Greek scholar (am I ever glad it doesn't)  
to know the difference between SINGING  
and PLAYING. Incidentally if we accept  
those who make psalms songs with an  
instrument -- only one kind of instrument  
would do (stringed), since such a  
definition is based on the old root word  
from which psalmos and psallo evolved  
meant "to pluck" according to these  
folks. So, out would go wind instruments.

Let us be very careful lest we  
become the victims of our own wishes, let  
we lose our ability to objectively look  
at God's word. If God says a thing, let  
us accept it without trying to force our  
wish upon God -- or we may receive a  
strong delusion and believe a lie and be  
damned!"

--Editor.