

Monday Week 46 Early Church Ministry

Bible Reading: Acts 8:22-40

Q 181 What did Philip preach to the Ethiopian?

A. Philip preached about Jesus from the writings of the prophet Isaiah.

David Denton was a preacher who wrote a book about a spy. The book was called *The Reverend Spy*. The spy was a young preacher who was able to help the government fight communist spies. Some things in the book caused people to wonder if David Denton himself was really the spy or was he writing about someone else. Who was the spy? It was a mystery.

Philip found the Ethiopian reading the book of Isaiah. The Ethiopian didn't know if Isaiah was writing about himself or about someone else. Philip told him that Isaiah was writing about Jesus. He showed him that what Isaiah wrote about a lamb being led to the slaughter and not making any noise was what happened to Jesus when he was taken to be crucified. When the Ethiopian heard the Bible explained, he was convinced that Jesus was the Savior of all men. He was baptized and became a happy follower of Jesus.

Thinking Deeper

A Christian worker was having a Bible study with a man from a sect-like denomination. When he brought up some of Jesus' teachings from the Sermon on the Mount, the man objected. He only accepted the Bible's instructions from the New Testament which were written after the Gospels. According to him, all pre-Calvary Scriptures were no longer in force. The time that Jesus completed the work of redemption on the cross marked the beginning of the dispensation of grace. The teaching before that is not to be applied. Was the man in the Bible study right?

Philip preached to the Ethiopian about Jesus from the Scriptures. Those Scriptures were from the Old Testament. During the early days of the Christian church the New Testament had not yet been written. Philip depended on the prophetic passages that described the Messiah as the foundation for his message. Later, when the New Testament writers mentioned the scriptures, they were talking about the Old Testament. The Old Testament is foundational to the New Testament. When Paul said "all Scripture...is profitable for doctrine, for reproof..." he was speaking about the Old Testament. Of course, that applies to the New Testament as well. What we can be assured of is that the Biblical account of Philip shows that all scripture is to be used and applied. We are to study so that we can "rightly divide the word of truth," not reject it. The man in the Bible study was wrong.

Tuesday Week 46 Early Church Ministry

Bible Reading: Acts 9:1-20

Q 182 Who convinced Saul of Tarsus that Jesus was the Lord?

A. Jesus himself appeared to Saul and spoke to him.

Johnny Depp is an actor who played a character named Jack Sparrow. Some boys saw a flier posted announcing that Jack Sparrow would come to a local store. They really wanted to go and see Jack Sparrow so they got someone to take them. They were excited when they got to see Jack Sparrow. They got their picture taken with him. But something wasn't quite right. When they got home they looked at the picture of Jack Sparrow and the picture they had on a poster, and it wasn't the same person. They had been tricked by a look-alike.

Saul didn't want to follow someone who wasn't true. He didn't think Jesus was the Messiah. But Jesus appeared to Saul. Saul realized that Jesus was alive! That meant he was the Son of God. Saul was convinced. So Saul decided to follow Jesus.

Thinking Deeper

A college student was sitting on a wall, just ready to light up a cigarette when a youth worker approached, pointed at him, and asked, "Are you a Christian?" The student slowly dropped the cigarette to his side and said, "Sit down." During the conversation, the student indicated that he was searching, and was ready to try a cult. "If that doesn't work, maybe I'll try Jesus." That student illustrates a problem that Christians face in telling others about Jesus. The problem is the diversity of truth claims. There are many claiming to have the truth. When one says "I am the way" and another says "No, I am the way," and that is repeated by numerous voices, it certainly creates confusion for any seeker for truth. How is one to know?

Saul of Tarsus thought he knew the truth. He was so convinced that he punished those who didn't agree with his traditional views. But Saul changed. He had an encounter with Jesus, who he thought was dead. The encounter with the living, resurrected Christ convinced Saul of the truth. People today need to have that same kind of encounter. We can trust that God, who is no respecter of persons, offers all men an opportunity to respond to the truth.

Wednesday Week 46 Early Church Ministry

Bible Reading: Acts 10:1-6, 25-28, 34-36, 43-44

Q 183 What did Peter learn at the conversion of Cornelius?

A. Peter learned that the Gospel was for Gentiles as well as Jews.

Places where people play golf are often owned by clubs. Some of these clubs only let certain people play. Even if you have a lot of money, you cannot play unless you are invited by a club member. Of all places to play, Augusta, Georgia, may be the hardest to get into. It is a very exclusive club. Most people can never play golf at Augusta. That's how the first followers of Jesus thought of the Gospel.

The first followers of Jesus were Jewish people. They thought the Gospel was only for them. People who were not Jews were called Gentiles. The Jewish believers in Jesus didn't think much about the Gentiles. But God thought about them. In fact the Old Testament writers talked about how the Messiah would be a light to the Gentiles. God gave Peter a vision about how the Gentiles needed the Gospel, too. Because of the vision Peter went to a Gentile home. It was the house of Cornelius. When the Gospel was preached to Cornelius, his household and their friends believed. Peter saw that God cared for all people, both Jews and Gentiles.

Thinking Deeper

During the latter days of apartheid in South Africa a farmer was hosting some Americans. As they traveled around his farm looking for game animals, they were discussing the rights of American Blacks to vote. The Americans indicated that it seemed only right for Blacks as well as Whites to vote. Suddenly a baboon darted across the pathway in front of them. "I suppose you'll want to give that the right to vote next," commented the farmer. The Americans dismissed the idea. Animals are not human.

The problem of discrimination often has a component of evolution imbedded in it. If evolution has occurred, it could be that some humans are less evolved than others. The South African farmer, though he may not have admitted it openly, viewed Blacks as lower on the evolutionary scale than Whites. And to be fair, if evolution is true, then why not view different races on different evolutionary planes? But with no history to identify which race is most evolved, who is to tell? Hitler used the concept of survival of the fittest and wiped out those less evolved.

The Gospel is for **all** people. God made it very clear to Peter that he was to go to the Gentiles with the message of salvation. The Christian Gospel is for people of all "kindred, tribes and nations."

Thursday Week 46 Early Church Ministry

Bible Reading: Acts 11:19-26

Q 184 Where were the disciples first called Christians?

A. The disciples were first called Christians at Antioch.

The word “dinosaur” was never in use until 1841. A man named Sir Richard Owens put two Greek words together which meant “terrible lizard.” Before 1841 if someone had used the word “dinosaur” no one would have known what that person was talking about. Before the word was used, other words described what we now call dinosaurs. People talked about dragons and monsters. The Bible used the words behemoth and leviathan. Now we just call them dinosaurs.

When Jesus called his followers to him, they were called disciples. In the first days of the early church, people who followed Jesus were called believers. After a while, the church was in Antioch. That is where they were first called Christians. Christians are believers who follow Jesus. If you are a believer in Jesus as your Savior, and if you follow Him every day, then you also can be called a Christian.

Thinking Deeper

The 1960s were years of dramatic change in American culture. Traditions of long standing were questioned, then mocked, then discarded. Music changed drastically. The Beatles brought “rock” to the USA, and teens and college students quickly adopted the new style of music. With it came an acceptance of alternative lifestyles, including sexual liberalism, drugs and rebellion against traditional American culture. At the heart of it was a rejection of the Judeo-Christian ethic.

Not to be outdone was a popular form of Christianity that accepted much of the new culture. “Christian rock” followed a few years behind secular rock, adopting not only the music, but also the rebellion against the established Christian way of life. Dancing in the sanctuary and heavy metal were part of the new Christian scene, as well as statistics that showed that Christian teens were little different in almost every way from their non-Christian contemporaries. There is a problem, though. What is a Christian? If a Christian is a disciple of Jesus who follows him every day, how can that person also be a disciple of the Beatles, who mocked Jesus Christ both by word and deed?

Just because people use the word Christian does not make them a Christian. A turkey can pin a sign on itself that reads “eagle” but that doesn’t change it into an eagle. If the word Christian means anything, then some people are walking lies. Be true. Follow Jesus. Really.

Friday Week 46 Early Church Ministry

Review the Week's Questions

- Q 181 What did Philip preach to the Ethiopian?
A. Philip preached about Jesus from the writings of the prophet Isaiah.
- Q 182 Who convinced Saul of Tarsus that Jesus was the Lord?
A. Jesus himself appeared to Saul and spoke to him.
- Q 183 What did Peter learn at the conversion of Cornelius?
A. Peter learned that the Gospel was for Gentiles as well as Jews.
- Q 184 Where were the disciples first called Christians?
A. The disciples were first called Christians at Antioch.

Tim was often grumpy. Things did not suit him. One day his brother John noticed that he was different. He was happy. He didn't complain nearly as much as he did before. He said he had gotten saved and now he was a follower of Jesus. John thought about the difference in Tim. "Maybe there is something to this being a Christian," he thought. Some time passed and John gave his heart to Jesus. His life changed too. John told about the change in his life years after it happened. He was happy to be a Christian.

The Ethiopian became a Christian and was happy. Saul of Tarsus became a Christian and was joyful in following Jesus. His name was changed to Paul and he became a great apostle. Cornelius the Roman became a Christian and was happy. He was among the first Gentile believers. The disciples were so happy about following Jesus that people who saw them called them Christians. Being a follower of Jesus is a wonderful thing!

Thinking Deeper

Rolex watches are among the most expensive and most sought after watches on the market. They are worth thousands of dollars. They are also some of the most copied watches. A genuine Rolex is worth a lot. Copies are not worth very much. There are ways to tell if a watch is a genuine Rolex. Certain tiny marks on the band are a clue if the watch is genuine. Another difference is a very tiny etching of a coronet (crown) below the 6 on the face. Counterfeiters usually get it wrong if they put it on at all. Another major difference is often the weight of the watch. Genuine Rolex watches can include gold and other valuable metals that are heavier than the lighter metals used in cheap imitations. A trained jeweler can spot a fake without much difficulty. Usually the inner workings of a fake watch are a dead give away. The workmanship is so cheap and inferior that it is easily discerned. The genuine Rolex has superior craftsmanship on the outside and the inside.

Some religious people want to pawn themselves off as Christians. But the real thing is hard to duplicate. The inside as well as the outside of a Christian is crafted by God. "By their fruits ye shall know them," said the Lord himself. Don't settle for fake Christianity.