

## **Sermon for July 23, 2017**

### **A Summer of Heroes: "The Power of Love"**

**1 John 4:7-21**  
**Acts 8:26-40**

All this month we have been looking at heroes in the Bible. We started with Daniel who had to courage to do the right thing even when he knew he might be killed. Next we looked at Jonah who in reality is an anti-hero but he showed us the great power of God's love for even the Ninevites. We can learn from his story to love even our sworn enemies. Then we heard about some women who had the power to misbehave when righteousness and justice called for it.

That brings us to today's hero: Philip. His power is that he does just what the Spirit tells him to do. He may not be able to leap tall buildings with a single bound, but in our story today he leaps a barrier that separated Jews from Gentiles. He does it by the power of love.

Let's look at his story:

First of all the man was an Ethiopian Eunuch! And the fact that Philip baptized him into the church was grounds for much discussion. Now, you or I would notice first that this man was black, but to Philip, or any other Jew of his day, the problem was that he was a eunuch. The Laws of Moses were clear about such people. Eunuchs could not be a part of God's people. Yet this eunuch, knowing that, sought to worship God. He was a God fearing Gentile. In fact he was on his way back from a pilgrimage to Jerusalem where as he would have worshipped in the outermost part of the temple, the court of the Gentiles. He was also reading and studying the prophets.

As if being a eunuch was not enough, he was also a Gentile. Up to this point all the converts to Christianity had been Jews first. Consider the precedent that was being set here. If you let in this Ethiopian, next you have to let in Medes and Persians and Greeks; even Romans. Where will it all end? I mean, you wouldn't want to sit next to a Gentiles in church, would you? Even Samaritans will be joining the church! Before long there will be more Gentiles than Jews in Jesus' church! They'll have to move church headquarters from Jerusalem to Greece or Rome or who knows where.

But this Ethiopian Eunuch was a man thirsting for God. To not baptize him would be like... like... like denying water to one dying of thirst. Anyway it was God who led Philip to this place. An angel that led Philip to him. It was the Holy Spirit that told him to run up to the Chariot. Now understand, he couldn't just walk up to this chariot. He had to run up to a moving chariot to talk to this man. So Philip did as God told him to and he explained the Scriptures to the Ethiopian. He offered a spiritually thirsty man the water of life. Philip told him about Jesus. And that Eunuch believed in Jesus and was baptized. Philip accepted and loved a man that others would have rejected, and he did it just because the Spirit told him to.

One of the defining characteristics of a Christian is love. A true Christian accepts others as they are, because that is how we all came to Christ. Each of us came to Christ with nothing. No wealth, no prestige, no beauty, no love. Because any earthly wealth, prestige, beauty or affection that we had was nothing next to Christ. In fact we came in a fallen state as sinners. But Christ accepted us and made us fellow heirs with him in God's kingdom. So Christians should accept others with the same kind of love God showed us.

Paul says in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians that without love all our works are nothing.(13:1-3) John writes, "Beloved, love one another for love is of God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God."(4:7) "God is love" and if God dwells in us, our actions are motivated by that love. If we are motivated by anything other than love, then God is not in us.

Love is so important to being a child of God, but too often we fail to love. We ought to love and accept people who are different from us: people with long hair and strange clothes, people who don't dress good enough or who dress too good, black people, brown people, red people, yellow people, pink people and even those who we are not sure what color they are. People whose lifestyles, cultures or even religions are different from our own. We ought to love them, and accept them. We are called even to love sinners. We shouldn't condone their sin, but we can love the sinner while hating the sin. After all Jesus loved us while we were still sinners. We should even love bothersome preachers who steps on our toes.

There is a spiritual goes like this: "I'm gonna sing when the Spirit says sing." The Holy Spirit gives us the power to sing and to love. We ought to love when the Spirit says "Love." That's exactly what Philip did. When the Spirit said, "run up to that chariot and reach out to that Eunuch with God's love," Philip did it. He didn't worry about what people would think when they saw him running up to that chariot. And when the Ethiopian Eunuch asked to be baptized, Philip didn't worry about what the others in Jerusalem would say.

Like Philip, we should let love rule our lives too. If you say "I love God" and you don't love your neighbor, you're a liar. (1 John 4:20) I didn't make that up. It's in the Bible. If you can't love your neighbor whom you can see, how can you love God whom you can't see? (1 John 4:20)

If you have given your life to Christ, then God lives in you and God is love. (1 John 4:15-16) Let that love motivate your actions. When God's Spirit says, "Love that unwanted unrighteous person who may be another color or from the wrong side of the tracks or a different country," then love them. Don't worry about what your friends will say if they see you with them. What they say doesn't matter anyway. You should be concerned about what your Father in Heaven will say on judgement day. Show them God's love with your actions and tell them of God's love with your words. Don't be afraid to introduce them to your friends; especially Jesus. And don't be afraid to bring them to church and introduce them to God's people no matter who they are. Don't be afraid to stand up for them when they are being persecuted. We might end up with a church full of Midianites and Persians and even a few Ethiopian Eunuchs, but we'll be sharing God's love and that is always wonderful.