

I. Introduction

- A. Today is a special day at Pathway. Today is baptism Sunday. We are actually going to have the biggest planned baptism service ever in our history. Thirty-seven people will be baptized today and all our services. I think that's something to celebrate.
- B. The amazing thing is that no matter how much we cheer and celebrate here on earth, in heaven the celebration is literally out of this world.
- C. So we are doing things a little bit out of order and here I am.
- D. I picked a talk today based on a famous story in the Bible. The story in the Bible actually involves a baptism. And the title of my talk is ...

1. **Flipping the Switch on Grace**

- E. This is part three of our summer series. We are looking at the topic of Grace Powered Living. Everybody who is even halfway religious talks about grace. Everybody assumes grace.
 - 1. But not everybody has actually done what it takes to activate the grace of God in their lives.
 - 2. So I want to talk about that. I want to show you how to flip the grace switch to the "on position."
- F. But I want to do more than that.
- G. I don't just want to show you how. I want to talk you through it.
- H. So that at the end of my talk if you have never activated God's grace in your life, I want to talk you through the steps to do that.
- I. This is called being saved.
- J. It won't be awkward. I won't embarrass you. I won't single you out.
- K. So let's get into the Bible today.

II. Philip and the Official

- A. *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 did, and he met the treasurer of Ethiopia, an official of great authority under the queen of Ethiopia. The official had gone to Jerusalem to worship, and he was now returning. (Acts 8:26, 27, NLT).*

1. **Design**

- 2. The first character is named Philip. Philip is one of the leaders of early Christianity. God tells him to head south on a desert road. He says yessir.
- 3. The second character is a high ranking official from the mighty Empire of Ethiopia, under queen Candace. We're never told his name.
- 4. Basically, you have these two guys, in the middle of nowhere, meeting by "accident." At least that's what it looks like. But it is no accident, because God had designed this meeting long ago.
- 5. Our world is not random. Our world has a shepherd. He guides each of our lives to the best possible outcome, but always with respect for our free will.
 - a) Before any of us ever took a step toward God, he took a giant step toward us.
 - b) This is God's love. This is God's design.
- 6. You being here today is no accident. It's all part of God's design for you. Please be open to that design.
 - a) So Philip comes across the Ethiopian official.
- B. *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; so he asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" The man replied, "How can I, when there is no one to instruct me?" And he begged Philip to come up into the carriage and sit with him. (Acts 8:28-31, NLT).*

1. **Desire.**

- 2. What a coincidence! He's reading the Bible. Right as Philip shows up, he's reading the Bible. What does this mean?
- 3. The second step in activating grace is desire. Here was a man who knew there was something missing in his life. He made a difficult journey from Ethiopia to Jerusalem for the holiday of Passover. Now, he's heading home, reading the Bible. He was looking for truth. He's on a quest for answers.
- 4. You might be like him today. It could be that you are missing puzzle pieces in your life that gnaw at you. There are some profound questions that need to be answered.
- 5. So you're on a quest. You try videos, books, debates with friends, and today you're at church. All of these things express a desire in your heart to connect with a transcendent reality you just know has to be out there.
- 6. I respect anyone with the intellectual honesty to honor their desire for truth, which is ultimately a desire for God.
- 7. The good news is that you can actually find what you're looking for. I want to help you do that in just a couple of minutes.
- 8. So the palace official asks Philip to explain what he's reading. What happens next?
- C. *The passage of Scripture he had been reading was this: "He was led as 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. What can we say about such an evil generation? For his life was taken from the earth." The official asked Philip, "Was Isaiah talking about himself or someone else?" So Philip began with this same Scripture and then used many others to tell him the Good News about Jesus. (Acts 8:32-35, NLT).*

1. **Data.**

- 2. In order for you to flip the switch and activate God's grace and power in your life, you need truth. Specific truth. A specific doctrine. Teachings. A specific set of Data.
- 3. That data has a name in the Bible. It is called the Gospel.
- 4. The place in the Bible the Ethiopian was reading was actually giving that gospel. The very core of it. In that core, the prophet wrote about the humiliation and the slaughter of the Savior.
 - a) Eight hundred years before it happened, the Cross of Christ was prophesied in writing.

5. You can picture the story of Jesus as a bull's-eye.
 - a) **His Life > His Miracles > His Teachings > His Love > His Character > His Death & Resurrection**
6. There's a whole lot of stuff about him we can know. But the precise data, the precise part of the story, that will enable you to flip the switch, is specifically his death.
7. Why his death?
8. Because of all the things Jesus did, it was his death on the cross that satisfied God on your behalf.
 - a) It was in his death that he accepted all the guilt and shame of all the world into himself.
 - b) It was by his death that God was punishing Jesus for our failures and sins instead of punishing us.
 - c) It was through his death that a holy God could welcome into his presence sinful people like us.
 - d) It is because of his death that we can be reconciled to God, for now in this life, and for eternity in the life to come.
9. We are talking about grace powered living. And to activate that grace, and to activate that power, and to activate that life, we need to know and respond to the gospel.
10. That is what I want to walk you through today.
 - a) This is the good news. This is what every single person's spiritual quest is all about.
 - (1) You have a Savior who paid an unspeakable price to bring you to God.
11. You are hearing this data today. Just like the Ethiopian did so long ago. And look at what happened next.
- D. *Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, "See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?" Then Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." (Acts 8:36, 37, NKJV).*
 1. **Decision**
 2. He wasn't ready for baptism yet, because he hadn't flipped the switch yet, and that requires a deliberate decision.
 - a) Your decision to receive Jesus as your Savior flips the switch on faith. And faith flips the switch on grace.
 - b) Let's do that today.
 3. God's grace is a gift, not a reward.
 - a) All you have to do is believe.
 4. I know this is the opposite of what you might have heard. But this is what Jesus himself taught, and the apostles after him continued.
 5. This is the same decision of that Ethiopian, and millions like him, and thousands in our church.
 6. If you will believe in him and trust in him and make him your only hope, you will be following the exact same footsteps of that Ethiopian official so long ago.
 - a) You say I'm not ready for this. I gently say, you don't have to be ready. You just have to be willing.
 - b) You say, but I have all these questions! I boldly say that Jesus has all the answers. Won't you come to him today.
 7. He says, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. I believe he did for me all that the son of God had promised to do for me in the Scriptures.
- E. *He ordered the carriage to stop, and they went down into the water, and Philip baptized him. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away. The eunuch never saw him again but went on his way rejoicing. (Acts 8:38, 39, NLT).*
 1. **Declaration**
 2. The decision called faith came first. The declaration called baptism came second. The decision of Faith led to the declaration of that faith through baptism. That's what baptism is.
 3. All 37 people being baptized today are declaring their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.
 - a) I was baptized in the Catholic Church as a baby. I was baptized before my decision of faith. I am grateful for my parents who want to give me a shove in a God-oriented direction.
 4. But that was their choice. Believing on Jesus however was my choice. And being baptized after that was my choice to declare it to all the world.
 5. As the story ends, the Ethiopian is a party waiting to happen. And Philip, well Philip pretty much disappears. And we'll leave it at that.

III. Invitation

- A. So this is the time in my message when I turn to you.
 1. Would you like to flip the switch on grace?
 2. Are you willing to do that?
- B. I actually want to walk you through this moment. So what I will do is to pray a simple prayer out loud, one line at a time. There's no pressure. There's no manipulation. I invite you to repeat this prayer to God if it expresses the intention of your heart. I'll pray out loud. Your profanity. So please let's bow heads and close your eyes and create a quiet space for anyone who is willing to pray this prayer.
- C. Our pattern follows ABC, **admit, believe, choose**.
- D. I won't to single you out. I won't embarrass you.
- E. I'm just inviting you to pray and to express to God your decision of faith.
 1. Dear God, I admit I need you in my life today. And I admit there is distance between us. This is because I have sinned. I feel guilt and shame in my life. And I need you.
 2. God I believe that Jesus died to bring me back to you. He sacrificed his life for me. He was humiliated and a victim of injustice on the cross, for me. God I don't get how all this works. But I'm telling you that I am believing in Jesus as best as I can.
 3. So God right now I choose to believe in him. I declare to you my faith in him. I trust him as my only hope. And I ask you right now because of Jesus, please save me, please forgive me, and please make me your child forever. Amen.