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Aha
Acts 8:26-40
Kyle Henderson, PhD
First Baptist Church, Athens, TX

Part of a series “Jesus Changes Everything”

Aha

On Easter morning, people grappled with a series of observations. A group of women came to the tomb of Jesus and found that it was empty. They were confused and at first assumed the someone was up to no good. Then, in a single ah-ha moment they were convinced that Jesus was alive. That he had overcome death. That his promises and words were true.¹

The Roman soldiers saw the same, empty tomb, rolled away stone, and decided in a flash that they would tell the story of overwhelmed guards, thieves in the night and a plot to hoodwink the people.

Two sets of people same facts, two different conclusions, two different responses.

We are reading the book of Acts have come to a series of passages that describe people’s ah-ha moments with Jesus. There is Stephen² who sees the risen Christ in glory, there is The Ethiopian Eunuch³ and then Saul of Tarsus who become the great evangelist Paul⁴.

They all share the same structure. We find an individual living an ordinary life and then in a dramatic moment the individual is transformed by a thought, by an insight. This is the real meaning of Easter.

You can have a new life. You can have a different life⁵. You can change. You are not the sum of the experiences in your life, you are not in bondage to the hurtful things that have happened in your life, you do not have to hold on to old grudges. You can rewrite the narrative of your life. You can experience real resurrection.

The history of Jesus followers is a history of people who have been transformed in an instant. Augustine⁶ the father of western philosophy and theology described the moment of his transformation as if a small child told him to read and he picked up a bible and read a random verse that summarized the waste of his life to that point and he took it as a moment of revelation and dramatic change. St. Francis⁷ grew up in privilege, went to war and came back deeply disillusioned. In frustration he renounced his wealth and sought an intimate relationship with God. He spend time alone in prayer in for a time in a cave. There he met Jesus. He had an aha moment. He said when he came out of that cave, he saw the world, upside down. His life was overturned in an

instant. And he is known as one of the most loving and kind people that has ever lived. Martin Luther was a solitary monk. He was struggling with the excess of the church and he began to read the book of Romans and in an instant he came to the conclusion that he was saved by Grace alone and not by works⁸. This washed over him and he launched the Protestant reformation. John Wesley after failing as a missionary in his own power listened as someone read Luther talk about the book of Romans and in that moment on a back street in London he said he felt his heart strangely warmed⁹ and he was never the same. For me it was a single moment when Billy Graham offered life in Christ to me and I stood up out of a stadium seat and went forward knowing that to do anything else would rend my heart from my chest. ¹⁰.

I want to ask you three questions today.
Do you recognize when God is speaking to you?
Have you searched diligently for God?
Have you had an aha moment with God, and how has it changed you?

Because
Everyone needs an ah-ha moment.
Everyone needs to know that God has transformed them and ushered them from death to life.
Every needs and Easter morning.

The apostles were stretched thin and they needed help. Philip was one of the 7 people picked to be a serve.
He was selected to feed the poor.
And then God picked him to do something revolutionary.

I love that he was picked for this mission, after he had taken up the quieter, simpler more humble task of the daily distribution of bread. Because that is how God works. He gives us a task, he watches us serve and then if we have been responsive to his Spirit, he trusts us with more.

He wants to know if we are listening. He is waiting for you to have an aha moment.

God picked Philip to be the one to begin the mission to the Gentiles.

He was the one that first invited everyone to the table of God.

What we know best about Philip, is that he listened to God.

The Bible says, Acts chapter 8 verse 26

“an angel of the Lord said to Philip,”

I love this. Philip hears from an angel. I wonder if he was frightened because so many people in the bible are, when they hear from God.

And then he gets this message,

“Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.

Its not a complicated message. It’s a direction. It’s not a heroic act, it a path. It’s not very specific.

Too often we want God to give us everything at once, when God is trying to train us to listen to his voice and to trust his voice one step at a time.

Then the verse concludes, “So he started”

With elegant simplicity, we learn about a man who listened and responded to God.

He starts down the road leading south. This is the famous road.

The spirit says walk that road and nothing else. Just walk that way. The Spirit does not say go and do something, go and say something. It says go and be. Head that direction. So often the words of God are whispers and nudges to get us in the right place at the right time.

Like Samuel we so often ignore the voice of God, we don’t recognize it. We just don’t hear it, but occasionally we wake from our slumber and realize that the coincidences of our lives, the slight urgings, the tiny pricks to our consciences are the sign posts of God indicating what we must do.

We recognize God’s voice in each of these and it is beautiful and we have ah-ha moments.

Philip heads south. Its the main road to Egypt and there must have been lots of people on the road as he looked and waited and headed south.

He met people on the way, one in particular an Ethiopian, but at first it did not seem like anything out of the ordinary, they were both just going south. The Ethiopian was fascinating. He was so responsible-he was in charge of the Treasury for a whole country. He was headed home. He had been to Jerusalem to worship.

Philip must have felt the twinge when the Ethiopian said he had been to worship. He was a eunuch and that meant he would never be accepted at the temple. He would never be allowed. He would be judged and rejected. Philip did not say anything. He was still waiting for God to speak.

Then the whisper came again. ‘Go stand near that chariot’. It must have been awkward. They had been talking for a while as they went along the road. He headed over to a stranger’s chariot and then to tries to look nonchalant and then to wait without seeming awkward.

Sometimes God just needs you to get near someone else and listen. It’s time to really listen.

Philip hears the the Ethiopian. He was reading Isaiah, about a suffering servant. It was a prophetic passage that Philip now knew was about Jesus.

Then the tumblers all fell into place. The man was was struggling, the worry lines on his face told the story. And then a grin crossed Philips face and he plunged into his enthusiastic explanation of Jesus.

Philip knew in that moment, “This is what I was made for”. This, this is Philip’s big moment and he teaches us that sometimes the Spirit of God gives us ah-ha moments if we are listening and that we need to act on them immediately.

In 1665, another young man had an incredible eureka moment. He was a student and he was frustrated because he had been sent home from Cambridge Univeristy. He had not been expelled, but the school had been closed and all the students sent home due to the outbreak of a serious pandemic-the plague, it was closed for 2 years and the plague claimed more than a quarter of the inhabitants of London.

His name was Isaac Newton

He was practicing social distancing. They did not know about germs yet, they did not know about rats and fleas and transmission. All they knew is that distance between people saved lives.

Newton, went out to the orchard near his house. He must have been thinking about school and friends and the reality of the things that bind us together and the things that keep us apart.

It was a lazy afternoon. His mind was relaxed as he considered those questions.

Then it happened, he described it years later, an apple fell from the tree. He played it back in slow motion. Apple, release, falling and then landing. And then in a flash of insight Newton grasped something. All objects are attracted to each other and have an effect on each other.

He began to work on this insight eventually formulated the ideas we call the laws of gravity. His discoveries were the foundation of physics for 400 years. Until Einstein’s aha moment. Newton saw what no one else has seen and he set about describing the complicated intricacies of the work of God in ordering the world and drawing things together.

His mind and his faith intersected. He said of his calculations of the ordering of the universe and the laws of motion and attraction.

“This most beautiful system of the sun, planets, and comets, could only proceed from the counsel and dominion of an intelligent Being.”

Isaac Newton, Scholium Generale, 1713

He saw in the attraction, the hand of God.

In that year horrible year Newton thrived. He outlined the field of optics, he helped articulate calculus. He called it his miracle year.

Most of us have been struggling with being distant from others. Our friends are feeling sad and lonely. People are feeling forgotten and alone. Some are wondering, “What am I supposed to be doing while all alone?”

I wonder if we are supposed to be open and learning and placing ourselves in a position to learn from God that which we cannot learn any other way than to be silent and listen. I think I’m learning again the power of our individual connections.

Philip and Newton both saw that we are connected together and need each other and are drawn in love together. It is God’s great scheme of attraction.

In their quite aloneness with God they heard and then acted.

We certainly need an Easter encounter of resurrection. We need a new birth of our society where people matter most of all, where love and the common good is better than selfish advantage, where we tend fiercely to our friendships. We also need a Newton miracle year as we pray for our scientists that they will hear from God and in the intricacies of chemical and biological reactions they find life giving medicine.

And more than ever I’m praying that you will hear from God today and you will have an Easter aha moment.

“Have you searched diligently for God?”

The Ethiopian traveled 1300 miles to go to worship (that’s like going from here to New York) Many of us will barely get out of bed to go to worship.

He was a eunuch. This special designation signified more than just he would not be able to father children, it primarily meant that he had not lineage to protect, no inheritance to pass along, so he could be trusted. He himself served the queen of the Ethiopians. and was likely on a mission to bring tribute to the Temple.

According to the Bible he was not welcomed.

“No eunuch is to enter the congregation of GOD.” It was final. It was decided. He could want God all he wanted, but he would not be allowed.

Deuteronomy 23:1

Still he was a student of the word. He searched the words trying to find the God behind the words, but he was confused and frustrated. He ended up at the same dead end over and over again. His head kept telling him the words were true, but his spirit kept telling him that he was missing something. He did not concentrate on the victory of God or the power of God, but on the meaning of suffering.

Lots of people are trying to make sense of the world of this nearly invisible virus. Some are concluding that God has left the building. Others that it is some kind of plot, Some have decided it is punishment.

I'm wondering if you might feel like the Ethiopian today? Confused, left out, abandoned?

So many of the early followers of Jesus were that sort of people. They were the people that heard the news of Jesus and knew it was Good news because Jesus wanted women, he wanted children, he wanted Gentiles and he wanted the damaged. He wanted the sinners and the sick and he wanted them all.

Finally, one faithful day all that study, all that work, all the struggle, fell into place when he met a man standing by the side of the road who explained it all to him. His search led him to find God. Are you searching?

In 1849, another man stood along a road called Broad street in London, England. The community was gripped with fear. Six hundred had died from Cholera in 3 days. People had begun to talk-they said this end of London deserved the death. Many made their living from some of the oldest professions in the world, and people looked down their noses at them. They watched them die and were glad it was in someone else's neighborhood.

The man standing by the road was a doctor. His name was John Snow. He had a hunch. It was an ah-ha insight, but the other doctors laughed at him. He believed that something was in the water that was killing people. The medical community dismissed his ideas. The water looked clean and pure. Hand pumps drew water up for the community. This was a sophisticated town don't you know.

Snow decided to study the problem. He took notes and began interviewing people. He went door to door and made notations on a map of where every person died. Day after day he gathered data and made marks on his map until eventually it all came into focus. It jumped off the page.

He decided to recheck the work. This time he walked every road and measured from their front door the journey that every person took to one of the hand pumps. This map

confirmed his initial findings. People that lived closest to the Broad Street Water Pump were the most likely to die from Cholera.

His map was crystal clear, yet people did not believe him. He finally convinced one man at the water department. They begged people to stop using the water to no avail and then in another flash of insight they decided what to do.

They removed the pump handle and the cholera deaths stopped.

It was not until years later that Snow's effort was honored and he was recognized as the father of epidemiology. That happened largely when a citizen scientist named Henry Whitehead, a local preacher set out to prove Snow wrong. It could not be the water the theory went, but the bad smelling air that caused the illness. Whitehead reviewed Snow's notes. His presence in the community gave him even more access to people and he interviewed numerous people. He set out to prove Snow to be mistaken and instead became Snow's champion.

Many people struggle to make sense of God, Jesus, the resurrection and reality. They look at it from the point of view of the average person, and even in the light of the highly educated and they dismiss that Jesus was the messiah and savior of the world. They recite the arguments of the refined and assume that people who follow the way of Christ are uninformed or unintelligent. Occasionally, they set out to prove that God does not exist and that Jesus was a fraud.

I have been deeply influenced by the works of Josh McDowell, Lee Stroble, and C.S Lewis all individuals who took up the task of disproving God only to come to the conclusion that Jesus is who he says he is and that salvation is in his name.

Maybe today you are new to the journey and you have begun to consider the claims of Jesus. Maybe you have been on the path for a long time and you have studied, but still feel far away from any decision for Jesus.

This eunuch can be your guide. He teaches us that the pathway to God is study, discipline and time. He shows us that holding your mind open to possibility is the pathway to great discovery. And he reminds us that God sometimes puts people in our lives to open us to a new world.

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The Ethiopian met Philip for just a day, for just a few hours at most and then it was over, but the Ethiopian was completely changed because of that brief encounter.

Philip had done the one thing the Ethiopian needed. He had given him good news.

As it says in Acts 8 Verse 35.

Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.

If there was one conversation I would love to overhear, this might be the one. What did he say that was so clear that faith and response was the result.

God is speaking to all the people that know him and yearning for us to be as responsive as Philip was, to be willing to care for someone just as they are, just where they are and to the best of our ability tell them about Jesus.

On my first Easter service as a pastor I was fretting over my message and God arranged for me to see my pastor, Charles Wade. I told him I was struggling with the message. He listened attentively and then he looked me in the eye and said, "Kyle you are not the miracle. All you have to do is tell people about the miracle. It has already happened."

That is all Philip did. He told him about the miracle.

If you don't know about the miracle, it is very simple. Jesus came to show us about the love of God. His teachings and actions were filled with power like no other. His life was filled with such goodness that people were drawn to him. The religious establishment was so threatened by him that they put him to death.

His death was undeserved yet Jesus chose it willingly. He fulfilled the ancient words that form the foundation of all life, that all life is a trade. The death of plants and animals make our lives possible. He struck at the core of the world that broken things can be healed, but only by great effort and sacrifice. Jesus' death was a purposeful attempt to put an end to sacrificial systems that had us giving our best to God. Instead God gave his best for us.

When Jesus rose from the grave three days after he died he validated every one of his truth claims. He validated the power of his teachings. He made real the depth of the love of God and made possible that we might be reunited with God for all of this life and the next.

The Eunuch upon hearing these words had his ah-ha moment. He took those words and connected them to the years he had been studying to Torah and when all the tumblers fell into place he took the leap of faith to choose the way of Jesus.

Just past Gaza on the road to Egypt was a formidable empty wasteland for 150 miles. He sees the last stream, the last water, at the end of the promised land and stops to claim it.

Baptize me here and now in this water.

I want to follow Jesus. I want to do it now.

I will not wait another second.

What had dawned on him is that the way of Jesus was different than anything that had ever happened in the world.

Jesus changed all of the rejection, all of the judgment, all of the hurt. He chose outsiders, he chose the rejects. He gave profound value to each life.

And the Ethiopian got down in the water and emerged whole and loved. He was the first of his kind and the first of our kind. He was the first gentile brought into the family and it all happened because he had a eureka moment and he embraced it.

That is the invitation of Easter morning.

Are you ready for a new life?

Are you ready for a life of adventure where God interrupts you and sends out each day to spread the news of love and grace?

Are you ready for the searching to end?

Are you ready to begin a new life with Jesus, because he got up on Easter morning looking for you.

Right where you are you can start the journey.

For some it begins with a prayer-

Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

For some it's a line drawn in the sand.

For others it's the renouncing of sin and embracing of a new way of life.

We would love to help you follow Jesus today.