

ONE WHO SOUGHT AND FOUND

A SERMON

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By Mister JAMES WELLS

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“Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus.” Acts 8:35

ABOUT one thousand years before the coming of the Savior, the queen of Sheba, from this same country, came, as recorded in the Kings and Chronicles, to Jerusalem; and it is more than probable that she would take back with her, among other things, so much of the Holy Scriptures as was then written, and became, it appears, a worshipper of the God of the Hebrews. So that during the whole of that thousand years there seemed to have been kept up more or less, in the same country of Abyssinia, or thereabouts, a knowledge of the true God; and here we have, in the case of this Ethiopian eunuch, one of the fruits of the same. He came to Jerusalem to worship; that knowledge of the Lord which the Scriptures give must always be a good thing. But without detaining you by way of introduction, I will at once come to the subject before us. There are four things I should like to note. First, *here was a true seeker of God*. Secondly, *that he found what he sought*. Thirdly, *the effect which it had upon him*. Fourthly, *the ground this is for constant and unbounded gratitude*.

First, then, *he was a seeker after God*. He had a concern in his mind for God; but evidently was in a state of great ignorance as to what the gospel was, as to the way of salvation, as to the grace and mercy of God. Now perhaps I may be speaking to some this morning who are where the Ethiopian was. I feel in this first part a great desire to say a word to the humble seekers; for there are so many among the people of God in our day that seem to be seekers, indeed are seekers, but hardly anything more; it is not their lot to expatiate much, perhaps, in the broad and shining mysteries of the everlasting gospel, nor perhaps to realize with much assurance and power their interest in eternal things. We must therefore nurse them along by what they are, by what grace has made them, and not by what we might wish them to be; for after all, the matter lies entirely with the Lord. Let us then trace out the feeling of the humble seeker very carefully.

In the first place, here was a reverence for God; and that reverence for God, we see, brought the man a long way, how many hundreds of miles it is not for me to say; that is mere speculation. It brought him a long way, up to Jerusalem, of course, with such offerings as were prescribed. According to the law of that dispensation, when the distance was great, they were to bring money,

and they could at Jerusalem obtain sacrifices, by which they would do homage to the God of the Hebrews. He had then a feeling towards God, a sincere seeking after God, and he would desire to know something about the way of salvation. And I for myself do not mind, if I can see the fear of God, a concern to know him, to find him, and to be one of his people I do not mind how ignorant such people may be of Jesus Christ, or of the way of salvation. Such persons at present may be utterly blind as to the wonders of the new and everlasting covenant. I will not mind that, if they are not settled down in that blindness. There are thousands in our day that make a kind of profession of Christianity, but they are settled down: the poor Catholic is settled down, and fancies that he has in his religion are all he needs; and so of other sects and parties, which perhaps it would not be profitable to name; suffice it to speak in general terms, that there are many that profess to be Christians, and think they have by their religion all that is needed: they are settled down, and contented. It was not so with this Ethiopian, he was reading the Scriptures diligently when Philip met with him, and we cannot suppose that this was the first time he had read them carefully. But while he had a desire to be found among the Lord's people, he felt as though there was something in the Scriptures that he had not yet understood and realized: he felt, as it were, an aching void the world could never fill. Satan might have come to him and said, What is the good of your going to Jerusalem? What is the good of your seeking? You are not an Israelite, you are a foreigner, a stranger. What is the good of troubling yourself? You had better stay at home and be content; for no such person as you are, ever was or will be received. No doubt Satan would thus seek to discourage him. Just the same with some of you humble seekers: you will sometimes have very discouraging thoughts and feelings; and you may think it is no use for you to seek. You can hardly explain it, but there seems to be something about you which indicates that you are one of those people the Lord will never look upon, never receive, and that you will not be saved. Now we will suppose the Ethiopian was thus tried, where would be his remedy? I know what he would do; for he had the Scriptures in his hand and was reading the Old Testament when Philip met him. The Ethiopian would say, Well, if this be the case, that because I am a stranger and a foreigner, and not an Israelite, there is no hope for me, my better way is to see what the Scriptures say. He turns to 2 Chronicles 6, and begins to read Solomon's prayer: he says, This is a beautiful prayer, this is a wonderful concentration of things; but then Solomon here speaks only of Israel, it is only about Israel, when the heavens are shut up against Israel, and when Israel is put to the worst before the enemy it is all about Israel. He reads on, and presently to his astonishment he comes to those words: "Moreover concerning the stranger." Ah, what is this divinely inspired man going to say concerning the stranger? "Moreover, concerning the stranger, which is not of your people Israel, but is come from a far country for your great name's sake." Well, the God of the Hebrews has a greatness of name by the greatness of the things that he has done for his people. See how he brought them out of Egypt, sustained them through the wilderness, brought them into the land; see what great things he has done And, O Lord, you know that it is the greatness of your name, a name that, like its Author, surpasses in greatness, grandeur, and glory, every other name that has drawn a sinner like me from a far country to seek your favor. "And your mighty hand." Ah, Lord, he would say, I do believe your hand is a mighty hand, that there is not anything too mighty for it to manage; and your stretched out arm; if they come and pray in this house ah, what then? "Then hear you from the heavens, even from your dwelling place, and do according to all that the stranger calls to you for." Ah, Lord, I know not what to call for I am a poor, blind, and ignorant creature. And thus, he would realize the authority; this is the encouragement that he had. Just so now. Have we not every encouragement? Does not the Savior say, "Come unto me, all you that are weary"? And if there be something, we need which can be had only by Jesus Christ, are not the Scriptures full ever

where of very kind encouragements to everyone that would seek the face of the Lord? “He that seeks finds.” And is there such a thing to be found that any poor sinner, let his state be what it may, is forbidden to seek the Lord? Thus, you see that he was ignorant of the way of salvation; but, nevertheless, he went on seeking, and would be found where the Lord was, in his temple, Thus the eunuch would read those words in Solomon’s prayer for his encouragement. For there is no class of Christians that meet with more discouragements than seekers. Satan is sure to stand with terrible malice and opposition at the right hand of the seeker. If Joshua be a true seeker and begins to have some little idea of the angel of the everlasting covenant, why, says Satan, I am afraid this seeker, if he goes on, will find; I am afraid he will by and by get possession of the pearl of great price, and I might lose him. Therefore, Satan stands at his right hand. But, for all I know, this seeker might also have gone to the 56th of Isaiah. Why, he would say, here is a beautiful scripture; Lord, give me the fulfilment of it. “Thus says the Lord unto the eunuchs that keep my sabbaths, and choose the things that please me, and take hold of my covenant.” There is no question, I think, but that the eunuch would view the sabbaths literally, and he would view the choosing of the things that pleased God literally, ceremonially, or Jewishly, according to the Jewish dispensation; and the covenant he would take to be the Jewish covenant. This was as far as he had got to; but let us, who have gotten, through grace, a little further, not than he was ultimately brought, as we shall presently see, but farther than he was as yet, let us take that scripture, and see how beautiful it is, “That keep my sabbaths.” There were three sabbaths in the Old Testament dispensation, and they are all anti-typed in Christ; he is the antitypical sabbath of all the sabbaths. The first sabbath was founded upon the completeness of creation; and so, in receiving Jesus Christ, we keep that rest that remains to the people of God he is that rest; and we are to hold the testimony thereof. Then the seventh year sabbath was to release the slave from his slavery. So, Jesus Christ is the end of the law for righteousness, relieves us from all slavery, brings in his accomplished work, and gives us rest. “Now to him that works not, but believes on him that justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.” Then the fifty years’ sabbath did two things especially, took away all debts, and gave possession of the inheritance. So, Jesus Christ has paid the mighty debt we owed, and gives us possession of that eternal inheritance which can never be moved. “And that takes hold of my covenant;” that is, believes in the covenant ordered in all things and sure. The eunuch would say, Here is something written for me, very encouraging. Just so, in reading the Scriptures, when you come to a certain part and say, That just describes me; that looks as though it was put there for me. And when the minister is led by the Lord and enabled so to preach as to describe just what you are, and where you are, and to bring forward that part of the Lord’s word that suits you, you say, Why, that sermon is for me, that verse is written for me, that chapter is written for me! And so, it goes on, “Even unto them will I give in my house, and within my walls, a place,” Let us take the house there to mean the church of God. Ah, Lord, if I am in your house, in your church, there I shall behold the beauty of the Lord, there I shall enquire in his temple, and there in time of trouble he will hide me in his pavilion, in the secret of his tabernacle he will hide me; he will set me upon a rock; my head shall be lifted up above my enemies round about me, and I will sing, yes, I will sing praises unto the Lord. He would take encouragement from this scripture: “And within my walls” the walls of salvation; so that he should be both a child and a citizen; as says the apostle, “You are fellow-citizens of the saints, and of the household.” Here are the two combined. “I will give them within my walls a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters; I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off.” And that better name would be, to be named after Christ; that they should be named after what Jesus Christ is; and as Jesus Christ’s name can never be cut off, so their name can never be cut off while the Savior’s name stands good. This he

would recognize to be something better than his literal name being perpetuated on earth; that would be a mere nothing, a little bit of posthumous, as it were, gratulation, which would soon pass away; but the name he should have in oneness with Christ, would be an everlasting name, entitling him to all the Lord could bestow. Thus, he was a sincere seeker, but as yet ignorant of the way of salvation. So, I say to some of you here this morning, if I am speaking to any such, if hitherto you have felt, while you fear God, and seek him, and wish to know and serve him, feeling the emptiness and uncertainty of everything under the sun, and your fellow-creatures, one dying today, another tomorrow; all these things around you teach you more emphatically so to number your days as to apply your hearts to this heavenly wisdom. And yet you may be ignorant of the way of salvation. May the Lord, by what I have to say this morning, throw a little light into your mind. Do not give up; do not go back; still search the Scriptures; still seek.

“The Lord whom you seek will not tarry long,
And to him the weakest is dear as the strong.”

If you do desire thus to know the Lord, this is nothing else but the grace of God in your heart; it is because you are born of God. I care not how blind nor how ignorant you are at present; if you are dissatisfied, if you are brought into the spirit of the eunuch, a humble and teachable spirit. He felt his ignorance, his need of something he had not yet realized. Such is the humble seeker, and such are the encouragements of the Scriptures; though I have not mentioned yet the substantial encouragements, I merely name the words. And if we have never sought the Lord yet, if we have grace to begin now, that will be better than not beginning at all; and if we have sought the Lord and never yet found him, cannot call him ours, the word never having been sealed home with power, yet the Scriptures assure us that it shall be so in his own time, for we read that there is a set time to favor Zion, and that our times are in his hands. I know it is a hard struggle to keep up good thoughts of godliness, and longing desires after godliness, and to determine to seek after godliness. There are so many things within us, and so many difficulties to encounter, that I sometimes wonder these humble seekers get on as far as they do. But then there is the encouragement, “Fear not”, as though the angel should say, I understand better than you do what you seek, “Fear not, for I know that you seek Jesus.”

Let me now see how Philip dealt with this matter. See how the Lord watched over this man! Now the Lord could have gone to the man himself or could have unfolded to him the way of salvation without sending Philip. But the Lord is pleased to use one as a means of blessing another. And there is a great deal of wisdom in this. In the first place the Lord intends that his people shall know one another, and in the next place he intends that they shall assemble together from time to time, and that he may come and see a good branch of his family at once; for he loves to see them assemble together, “not forsaking the assembling of yourselves together, as the manner of some is.” And besides, by thus assembling together, and by the truth of God being thus proclaimed by one saved sinner to other poor sinners, by this foolishness of preaching the Lord is pleased to save them that believe. Now we see, then, how the Lord ordered it; for the Lord saw what the poor man wanted; so, he said to Philip, “Go near and join yourself to this chariot.” The eunuch, in Oriental fashion, was reading, not as you and I should do, quietly to ourselves, but reading out loud. That continues, they tell us, to be the custom to the present day; if a man be riding or walking along, or even indoors, he reads out loud. So it was with the eunuch, he was reading aloud; and therefore, Philip could hear what he was reading, and asked him a very nice question indeed, a question

which involved that which is of vast importance; a question that would bear applying to a great many things. I hope it will never be our lot, friends, to be careless as to the reading of any one part of God's blessed word, from Genesis to Revelation. "Do you understand what you are reading?" Ah! that just touched him where he needed to be touched. Here is a question that was never put to me before. I have been told it was my duty to come to Jerusalem, that it was my duty to read the Scriptures, that it was my duty to do various things; but this question has never before been put to me. You will observe that formalists and Pharisees pay but little attention to such a question. They go through their forms, read their chapters, say their prayers, and do their duties, and there it ends, while at the same time the soul is not profited because there is no understanding. But Philip said to him, "Do you understand what you are reading?" And he said, "How can I, except some man should guide me?" You see he was still in the land of Canaan, though he had left Jerusalem. Oh. I am so glad that he has asked me such a question; he looks to me as though he was a godly man, as though he loved the book that I am reading, and as though he was a worshipper of the God that I have been to Jerusalem to worship in my way. Who knows what there is in store for me? So, he thought the best way was not to go down out of his chariot, but to make sure of the minister. I will get him up into the chariot with me, that will be the best way, then we can ride along comfortably; and if I am taking him out of his way, I will take him back again into his way afterwards. So, he asked Philip to come up into the chariot, and he went up into the chariot. And as the Lord was pleased to order it, the eunuch was reading in a part just suited to him, the 53rd of Isaiah. "Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus."

Second, *he found what he sought*. "He preached unto him Jesus;" first, in that delightful character upon which my soul with increasing pleasure dwells; namely, the substitutional work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Let us notice a verse or so of that 53rd of Isaiah: "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all." Light shines into the eunuch's mind; away would go all his duties, all his works, all his worth, all his resolutions. Oh, he would say, is this it? Is there a law somewhere so standing against me as a sinner that none but the Son of God could bear my sins, could take my sins, could atone for my sins, could redeem me from my sins, and could be made sin representatively, and made a curse representatively? "The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all." And then to show in what spirit the Savior bore this tremendous load: "he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth." Oh! this would open up the great secret. Ah, then, I see there is but one thing required, and that is, that I should believe in it, that God imputed these sins to Christ, and that Christ bore the penalty of them, that he has put them away, that they are blotted out, forgiven, and gone. And there is no doubt there are many other scriptures that Philip would bring in to illustrate this great matter of substitution. There is nothing Satan so much opposes as he does faith. Do you know of any age in which the true gospel of God has been spoken well of by the world, or the ministers of God or the people of God spoken well of by the world? And yet it is a solemn truth that such is our state that if the Savior's atonement had not made a clean riddance of sin we must be lost, but by his atonement sin is forgiven and forgotten, gone forever. And now let us go to the 43rd of Isaiah, where the Savior evidently is the speaker: "You have made me to serve with your sins, you have wearied me with your iniquities." I who was made to serve God with your sins imputed to me, and I was weary to such an extent as, under the pressure of that weariness, to sweat great drops of blood, falling down to the ground, "I, even I, am he that blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and will not remember your sins." Ah, we may see the soul of the eunuch here leap into the sweet liberty of the gospel, as in the 49th of

Genesis: "Naphtha is a hind let loose: he gives goodly words;" he would begin then to see what he had found. I have found God in his everlasting love to my soul, in his election of my soul, to eternal life before the world was; I have found God in our nature, God and man in one person; I have found the Holy and Eternal Spirit, that indited the Scriptures, and by whom all the holy prophets spoke; I have found eternal life, eternal salvation, complete sanctification, complete justification, super-abounding grace, that where sin did abound, grace did much more abound. "He preached unto him Jesus." Oh, it is a nice thing for the mind to be kept in a divine persuasion of the all-sufficiency of Christ, rejecting everything else; that we are to reckon our good and our bad as all one, as it were, and the same thing; for all our righteousness's are as filthy rags. The man that is brought to know this does, by faith, creep to this rock for shelter, and none was ever cast out yet that came as a poor and needy sinner, and never will be. And there is no doubt there were also some correlative truths which Philip preached, which I will not now enter into at any length. "In his humiliation," said Philip, "his judgment was taken away." I know what Philip would say here in substance; the judgment wherewith he ought to have been judged was taken from him. He ought to have been judged according to the involuntary testimonies, as it were, of some. He ought to have been judged according to the testimonies borne by Judas, and Pilate's wife, and Pilate, and the thief, and the centurion. Said Judas, "I have betrayed the innocent blood;" and that is how he ought to have been judged, as an innocent person. Pilate's wife said, "Have nothing to do with that just man;" that is how he ought to have been judged; and Pilate said, "I find no fault in him;" that is how he ought to have been judged; and the thief on the cross said, "This man has done nothing amiss;" that is how he ought to have been judged;" and the centurion said, "Truly this was the son of God, truly this was a righteous man;" that is how he ought to have been judged; and is so judged by every one of his people to this day. He looks with pleasure upon them that now are brought to judge righteous judgment concerning him; for he says, "Wisdom is justified of all her children." Why, the eunuch would stand enraptured, and say, "Is it possible that while he was all this, innocent, just, and faultless, having done nothing amiss, a righteous man, the Son of God, is it possible the world was so blind as this? Is human nature so bad as this? Are there such demoniacal qualities and elements in human nature that they should not only crucify him, but prefer a murderer to this wondrous Son of God? But then Philip would say, Well, then, you poor Ethiopian, you know the truth, and you may expect, when you get back to Abyssinia, and begin to speak of these same things, the same treatment. The world will not understand you; there will soon be a prejudice against you; they will judge unrighteous judgment of you; they will slander you; they will lay all sorts of things to your charge; for Satan is the accuser of the brethren. And so, when you get back and begin to testify to sinners around what a dear Savior you have found, and they begin so to treat you, remember, I have told you that they called the Master of the house the devil, he who had no fault; and how much more you, that are compassed with infirmities! They may get some few true charges against you; and whether they get true ones or not, they will take care there shall be some false ones. So, then, as they judged him with unrighteous judgment, they will also judge you with unrighteous judgment; but never mind, the Lord is on your side, and it will be a small matter with you that you should be judged of man, seeing he that judges you is the Lord.

But there is another point also I may just notice which Philip would preach to him. "Who shall declare his generation? Now this would bring another doctrine forward, which would be to the Ethiopian very instructive. "Who shall declare his generation? for his life is taken the earth." I have often lamented that that scripture has been brought in to build up the heathen doctrine of eternal generation. Dr. Watts lived in that error, and died in it, I suppose. All of us shall die in

some error or another, no doubt about that. I don't pretend to be infallible. Well, say you, what in the world is to be done, then? Why, we die in faith, and in the completeness that is in Christ; and whatever error there is in the soul when you die, that perfection that is in Christ takes the whole of it away, and you will enter into heaven by that perfection. That is the remedy. So, that you see I am a very charitable after all. It is not for me to say how far a man may be in error, and yet die in the faith and be saved at last. Most of our old Puritans were duty-faith men, but I should be very sorry to question the reality of their religion, I can tell you that; there was something vital in their religion that I cannot get over. But Watts says, "Your generation who can tell, or count the number of your years?"

But it does not refer to the generation of the Savior; it refers to his people; that he shall have a people, and who shall declare them, who shall show who they are? Well, it is not impossible that Philip may have taken the eunuch back to the 24th Psalm, and said, I will show you the generation. "Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? or who shall stand in his holy place? He that has clean hands," that is, a pure faith; the hands there represent faith, faith unfeigned; "clean hands and a pure heart," as Nathanael, the true Israelite, had, honest and sincere in his profession; "who has not lifted up his soul unto vanity," as the Pharisee did, but does as the publican; "nor sworn deceitfully," as Judas did, but has sworn truly, as every true saint will, allegiance to the King; "he shall receive the blessing from the Lord, and righteousness from the God of his salvation. This is the generation of them that seek him, that seek your face, O Jacob." Then again, "A seed shall serve him, and it shall be counted to the Lord for a generation." Ah, the eunuch would say, then I am one of that seed, for now I shall serve the Lord with understanding, now I shall serve him by faith, now I shall serve him in the perfection of mediation, now I shall serve him in spirit and in truth; now I shall serve him, not in the literal, but in the spiritual temple. And then again, in the New Testament: "You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people, that you should show forth the praises of him that has called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." Now, in concluding this part, let me ask, Are we seekers after the Lord? Some of you that are feeble and have not yet any very clear understanding, the Lord encourage you to go on seeking him, for you will not seek in vain; and however much you may feel interested in your welfare, if you are a seeker after him he is more concerned even than it is possible for you to be, and he has never said to the seed of Jacob, "Seek you me in vain."

Thirdly, *the effect which Philip's preaching had upon the eunuch*; for I shall not be able to reach the fourth part, as I expected. First, it made him naturally very anxious to show his gratitude to God; just showing to us that Philip had explained to him the New Testament dispensation, and the ordinances thereof. He had no doubt given to him the twofold meaning of baptism or immersion; namely, that it sets forth first the death and resurrection of Christ. Oh, he would say, is there an ordinance intended to set forth that wondrous death, that is the death of all my sin? Is it possible that there is an ordinance to set forth the amazing victory achieved at Calvary's cross, where this mighty Captain of eternal salvation wrought the victory, bruised forever the serpent's head, abolished death, brought life and immortality to light? And is he risen from the dead to all the glories to which his work entitles him, and to which prediction ordains him? Is there an ordinance to set forth this great event? Oh, then, "see, here is water; what does hinder me to be baptized?" Now I am afraid it has not had this effect upon some of you yet: well, perhaps it will before you die; that I must leave. Then he would also set forth the other meaning of baptism, namely, that it meant the death of the soul, by its oneness with Christ, to sin, to the law, to death itself, to the

world. It also represents the soul as rising with Christ; he is our resurrection. Our sins all died with him, but not one of them rose with him; he rose without sin, and therefore will appear the second time without sin unto salvation. It represents thus the soul rising up by regeneration into eternal oneness with Christ, into eternal oneness with the everlasting God; "no separation from the love of God in Christ Jesus." "See, here is water; what does hinder me to be baptized?" Then the second thing, which in reality in order came first; but I thought I would mention baptism first, because it stands in the verse first. "If you believe with all your heart, you may." Come, you little seekers, now, all of you, what do you say to this? Do you partially believe that Christ has put away sin? No, say you, I believe it with all my heart, and soul, and strength. Do you partially believe that that eternal mercy that saves the soul is by Christ Jesus alone, and by faith in him? No, say you, I believe it with all my heart and all my soul. Do you partially believe that the promise is yea and amen, and never was forfeited yet? No, say you, with all my heart I believe it. And do you partially believe that Jesus Christ is what is implied by those two words, namely, the anointed Savior? No, say you, I believe with all my soul that he came into the world, that his name is called Jesus because he should save his people from their sins. And do you partially believe that he is the Son of God? No, say you, that holy thing born of the Virgin Mary I am satisfied, with all my heart and soul I believe him to be the Son of God, as there declared, and I believe that he shall reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there shall be no end. Well, then, "if you believe with all your heart, you may." "And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." He did not say, I believe that I shall be better in time to come; I shall not need this Jesus Christ after a time, not need so much grace, not need so much mercy after a time. If he had talked that nonsense, Philip would not have baptized him. But the eunuch now had nothing but Christ. "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. And they went down both into the water, and he baptized him." These are two good effects, then. We will now alter this arrangement; that that stands first in reality is this, his understanding was so enlightened, and mercy had so rolled in, and the poor man was so happy; oh, he thought, what a wonderful day this is! what a revelation this is! Here am I safe, let me be where I may; I have the blessed God with me by Christ Jesus; when I come to die, I shall be safe; my dust shall sleep in the ground till the last great rising day; and I shall be safe to all eternity.