

Text: Acts 8:26-40

Title: “Unstoppable in the Face of Barriers”

Open your Bibles to Acts 8:26. As you're turning let me let me say I'm excited about our great family fellowship time together. We'll have some baptisms and share in a delicious meal of tamales and homemade ice cream. Tonight I'll have available copies of my new book *Envision the Life*. Our mission here at Travis is to join God in developing passionate followers of Jesus Christ. This book will show you God's vision for your life in Jesus. Tonight you will have a chance to purchase your copy.

We're studying the book of Acts in the NT. It's the message of how God is unstoppable in His quest to change the world through the Gospel of His Son Jesus Christ. It's also the message of how we are unstoppable as we live in the irrepressible power of the Holy Spirit. The Gospel is unstoppable, no matter what ethnic, cultural or language barriers may exist. In Acts 8 persecution can't stop the Gospel. Believers just go somewhere else to proclaim the message of Jesus. Ethnic barriers can't stop it. A guy named Philip takes the Gospel to the most unlikely place ... Samaria. And here in the last part of Acts 8 another cultural barrier collapses in the face of the Gospel. A man from Ethiopia in Africa hears the Gospel and is saved. Jesus told His disciples, "You'll be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth" And God's unstoppable quest is marching on, even to this day.

The Lord has laid something on my heart this morning so I probably won't get past the first few verses, but then I'll get to the rest of it in a couple of weeks. Let's read Acts 8:26-29.

There are three persons involved in this event: Philip, an Ethiopian man and the Lord. But the Lord is the hero of the story. As I read these verses I'm intrigued by how God is able to move Philip around so freely. God is up to something ... He has His eye on this Ethiopian man on a desert road ... He's drawing him to Himself. And God intends to use another human being ... Philip. I'm fascinated by this process of God directing our paths to involve us in what He is doing.

ILLUSTRATION – Two incidences this past week cause me to want to just camp here in these first verses today. I got an email from a young man who grew up in our church and is now in the Marines as a chopper pilot. He's done very well, but he senses that God may be calling him to change the whole course of his life ... to leave his career as a Marine chopper pilot to go preach the Gospel. On one hand he looks at his successful career that will only get more successful. Can he turn loose of that? Or should he step out on faith, follow what he feels God is telling him to do and trust God to provide for his needs? How do we discern God's will so that we can be exactly where God wants us to be for His purposes?

The other incident involves a good friend who was pursuing what he felt to be God's will for his life in the pastorate. After months of seeking the Lord and discussions with this church the door suddenly closed. As he texted me about the closed door I could feel the ache and disappointment in his heart. I called my friend and said, "Listen, God has not

abandoned you just because this door closed. He's either saving you from something or He's saving you for something else ... or both.

So all weekend I've meditated upon how God positioned Philip here in Acts 8. So how did Philip discern that God was moving him to leave Samaria where there was a great awakening happening and go to a place in the middle of nowhere? We don't have the benefit of knowing what Philip was thinking as he made the decision, but what we do see from our vantage point is a man so perfectly yielded to God that God could move him easily.

How do we discern the will of God for our lives? How do we know if God is calling us to leave our career plans to devote ourselves entirely to the Kingdom of God? How can we be sure that we've followed God even when it led to a closed door? Maybe you're wrestling with a decision about your marriage. Is God leading me to leave my mate? What do I do when there seems to be no clear direction?

Well let's just see what we can learn from the Word this morning about how this extraordinary servant of God allowed God to direct the course of his life. Maybe you can find room on your worship folder to scribble some notes.

I notice that the angel of the Lord, the Holy Spirit and the command of Christ all line up and are saying the same thing. In v.26 I see the angel of the Lord say to Philip...

Acts 8:26 - "Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza."

And the Holy Spirit said to Philip...

Acts 8:29 - The Spirit told Philip, "Go to that chariot and stay near it."

So the angel and the Spirit are saying the same thing. But let's remember that Philip is doing what he's doing because he's already heard the command of the Lord Jesus (which we have recorded in the Scriptures) to go and make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19).

So what you have is the Scriptures, the Spirit and the angel all saying the same thing ... "go." And Philip obeyed and God did something amazing that we will see when I pick this up in a couple of weeks. Let me just talk about those three important factors in discerning God's will:

1. GOD'S ETERNAL MESSAGE ... HIS WORD

God's Word is the primary way that He gives us counsel. It shows us generally what God's will is for our lives ... to glorify Him ... to put our trust in Christ to the gift of eternal life ... to grow in holiness and humility ... to love and serve Him with every fiber of our being.

Now God's Word may not have a specific answer for every dilemma you face, but there's wisdom in God's Word that can be applied to every area of your life ... who you should date, how you should spend your money, when to change jobs and countless other decisions we have to make. As we read and study our Bibles we find the wisdom we need to make the decisions we have to make in life.

So to make sure you're following God's will for your life, make sure you obey what you've already been told to do by God in His Word. God will never lead you to do something that is contrary to the commands of His Word. He will never lead you to have an affair with another person ... He will never lead you to steal from your employer or cheat on your taxes ... He will never lead you stop serving Him.

Obey the light you already have from God in His Word.

Sometimes I hear people say, "Well I just feel in my heart that this is the right thing to do." No, not if it causes you to disobey the commands and wisdom of God's eternal message in His Word.

But then there's...

2. GOD'S INTERNAL MESSENGER ... THE HOLY SPIRIT

Jesus promised that He would send the Holy Spirit and that the Spirit would guide us into all truth. He helps us understand the general will of God and then gives us the inner strength to obey and to live a holy life devoted to God.

But then there are times when the Holy Spirit will give us promptings about the course of our life. In Philip's case it was a very clear prompting to speak to this Ethiopian man on the road. We're going to see as we move through Acts that God uses His Spirit to guide His people in the great quest to get the Gospel to the nations.

Philip could hear the prompting of the Spirit because He was filled with the Spirit. How do I know that? Well, I remember back in Acts 6 when the church was looking for guys to lead out in the ministry to widows they were to look for men who were known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom (Acts 6:3). Philip was one of those men chosen by the church.

So as you live each day in a state of prayerful reliance upon the Holy Spirit you can trust that He will help you in so many practical ways ... what to say ... what not to say ... when to move ... when not to move.

The Holy Spirit will move in us as we are saturated with the Word and prayer. I've discovered that it is much easier to discern the leading of the Holy Spirit when I'm meditating on Scripture and devoted to prayer. Don't expect the Spirit to lead you if you aren't walking with God.

But as we walk with God we can expect that the Holy Spirit will prompt us in our spirit to give confirmation that we should go one way or another. I can't explain it; I just know when I've heard it and when I've not heard it.

But the third thing to line up is...

3. GOD'S EXTERNAL MESSENGER ... THE ANGEL

This all started for Philip when an angel of the Lord said to him to go south to the desert road (Acts 8:26). So God speaks through supernatural agents called angels? Yes, He does. The Word of God teaches us to expect this kind of supernatural guidance. The Bible illustrates it, advocates it and regulates it.

Now we're not told who this angel was or what he or she looked like. We know that sometimes angels take human forms; we see that throughout the Bible. Maybe it happened in a dream or a vision. So we don't know exactly how the angel communicated to Philip, but it was clear that he or she was a messenger of the Lord. (The word "angel" basically means "messenger.")

Angels are just one form of God's external messaging to us. Sometimes God will speak through external messengers like preachers or teachers. And many times God speaks through external messengers like circumstances that are completely out of our control. It's like my friend who had the door close for him. We have to believe that God is directing his life through that closed door to either save him from something or to save him for something.

So what you have is the Scriptures, the Spirit and the angel all saying the same thing ... "go." And Philip obeyed and God did something amazing that we will see when I pick this up in a couple of weeks. Philip was living out his life in obedience to the commands of the Lord in the Word ... go. Then when God gave Him more specific prompting from the angel, he could follow that because it was in keeping with the command of Jesus ... go to that place. And a little further along the prompting of the Holy Spirit confirmed even more specifically that this was something God was doing. "Go ... go to that place ... go to that person."

Proverbs 3:5-6 - Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.

If you are facing a decision or a dilemma and you just don't know what to do ... there's no word ... then wait. Just keep doing the last thing God told you to do. When he's ready to change the course, He will show you. Believe it or not, God is more eager for you to know His will than you are to know it. He will direct your path.