

still sounds clearly modern. The demand of faith seems to mock the basic premise of the pride of man's reasoning capacity. And still they who declare this have to say, "That which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you" (I John 1:1-4).

"But others said, 'We want to hear more about this later'" — so there were others! And there still are "others." We can never treat them as merely people who want to avoid the issue of commitment and faith. They wanted to hear again because they were eager that this message should be true. To them there were no other options worthwhile. They had not found the answers in them. It is this thinking group that we encounter as a fruitful possibility in modern times. They are inquisitive. They refuse to be made to conform to the popular patterns of thoughts around them. Could this be the effect of the "God-shaped vacuum in man"? Could these who refuse to be conformed to a pattern of thinking, be the "true" intellectuals? How often one meets these in ancient cultures that have resisted the Christian faith until recent times, when, due to irresistible desire to look beyond what they have known they are willing to look even at Jesus Christ! Could there be a fear of the unanswered questions about the future? Jesus Christ himself never turned away from the honest "doubter" and the real "quester."

"But a few joined him and became believers" (vs. 34). And there are always these few. For them the quest has ended. Perhaps the Holy Spirit will use these "new creation(s)" to mock the mockers! Perhaps when man has calculated in terms of numbers God had accomplished his goal! After all, did he not lead Paul and Silas to the prison to gather to himself the family of a jailer? Praise be to his Name!!

GOD AT WORK IN CIRCUMSTANCES: PERSONAL MEETINGS (ACTS 8:26-40)

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This passage tells us about a meeting between two persons. The encounter would have been impossible had not God intervened to reduce the gap existing between the two people in question.

The first person was the minister of the Queen of Ethiopia. He came from a far country and seemed to have been traveling alone. He was not a Jew, but a Gentile. He was, meanwhile, a eunuch; and (according to Ex. 29:33, Lev. 26:20, Lev. 22:10-16, and Deut. 23:1) he was not allowed to have anything to do with the God of Israel. He could not offer actual worship as he was not able to come near any altar nor present any offering. And yet he was a pious man and was even reading the Old Testament in the Septuagint (LXX) translation, understood by the learned people of his time.

The second person was Philip, a Jew of good reputation, full of the Spirit of God and wisdom. He was chosen to serve in material things (to feed the widows and look after them). But God sent him to Samaria, and his ministry started a real revival among the people — where, in the midst of his great work, sinners were saved in great numbers, a multitude of sick people were healed, and where many Jews possessed by demons were delivered. And so there was much joy in that city (Acts 8:5-8).

In the middle of this great success and rewarding revival, the angel of the Lord said to Philip (v. 26): "Rise and go toward the *south* . . . to Gaza. This is a *desert* road . . ." The original text says: "This is a desert," probably referring to Gaza itself also. Philip obeyed, putting aside immediately all his plans and the revival in which he was ministering. He changed his direction from northbound to southbound, from a fertile and densely populated country to a desert and lonely area. He followed the guidance of the Lord.

No wonder that God was, under these conditions, able to plan such an encounter to take place between Philip and this "very important official" and to make this encounter bring forth eternal fruit. The high position of this official should have prevented him from having anything to do with a modest man such as Philip. On the other hand, it would have been very normal also for Philip, as a Jew, to shrink from having anything to do with a stranger — especially when he discovered that he was a eunuch (as this was considered taboo by the religious people of his time).

The tool of the contact in this important encounter was the Scripture from which Philip built up his conversation that led his newly-met friend to accept Christ as his personal Savior and to be baptized in his Name.

Do things happen in this same way today? In similar situations, the results should always be similar . . . where the Lord's servant is guided by him; when he is ready to change his plans in order to obey his Lord's

guidance, and as long as he takes the Word of God as his sure and infallible tool — God's Word shall not return unto him void.

Is this true also in hard places and impossible lands where everything seems so tightly closed and where so many precious lives and so much money have been wasted for so many years, and where it seems that no results (or very little) have been achieved?

Through working for nearly forty-two years in such a barren and difficult field, I can testify to the faithfulness of God to scores of people I have met and whose situations are similar to that of this Ethiopian — and could be typified by the following incident (which I select from many similar ones because it took place just recently):

A few months ago, I was visiting a small but very rich place in the Arabian Peninsula with a missionary friend. The guiding angel of the Lord spoke also to my heart about the ex-ruler of this place, whom I had known for several years and with whom I had visited quite often, but had never brought him to face a decision for Christ. I had asked the friends with whom I was staying to join with me in a time of prayer for guidance and boldness in my visit to him the next day. In the morning two friends, the missionary who was with me and the native secretary of the hospital there, came with me for a visit. His Highness received us in a very friendly way, as usual; and, as he sat beside me, I immediately started to talk to him about the things I had on my heart for him — namely, the salvation of his soul through Christ's atoning sacrifice and death on the Cross for him.

At this point his Highness opened his heart and told us how his late father believed in Christ and in his sacrifice to save him. "Moreover," he said, "my father used to tell our mother in front of us all that he hoped to be still alive when Christ returns to this world, as he would then never die but would be in Christ's kingdom where peace would be paramount, the deserts would flourish and be full of water, and the people would live happily together without wars, sufferings, diseases, hunger, etc., according to the Bible." Then he added, "Father did not see the fulfillment of these prophecies, as we did not have — then — the present revenue from the oil to change the desert; but now everything is changed and I wish that my father was still living to see it."

As I asked him how his father got a copy of the Bible and how he learned about Christ, he answered, "Every time my father was sick, he went to a Mission Hospital near us. There the doctor gave him a copy of the Bible and the missionaries visited him quite often during his stay in the hospital and also later, here in our home, in order to explain these things to him. This is how he became a faithful believer in Christ."

"Allow me a question, your Highness," I said, "What about you? Are you also a believer like your Father?"

"Inshallah" [as God wills], he answered.

"No," said I, "this will never do because you do not have two souls, so that you can gamble with one of them. You have only one soul, and you cannot afford to lose it by not taking utmost care of it."

"What shall I do, then?" asked his Highness.

"Exactly as your father did," I answered. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved."

"How can I do this?" asked he.

"Just by trusting in the Lord's love for you and in his willingness to save you from your sins; and by asking him in prayer to be with you henceforth and always, by his Holy Spirit," was my answer.

"Yes, I want to do this," said his Highness, "but I do not know how to pray for it. Will you do it for me?"

"Yes," said I, "on the condition that you join with me with all your heart in the prayer and by saying 'Amen' to my request for you."

This we immediately did. His Highness stood in the midst of his large sitting room and before all his astonished visitors put his hands into mine as I prayed for him. He also said, "Amen" several times; and as I finished my prayer, I noticed that his face was wet with tears.

I visited his Highness two months ago with the secretary of the Mission Hospital who had accompanied me on the previous visit and whose name is George. His Highness' vast sitting room, where he received us again, was full of people. Several of them were bankers, others religious leaders, and some of them were reading to him from some religious books they had brought with them. But he left them all and took us into one side of the sitting room where again we had a long talk with him about the Bible and its message. He then looked at my companion saying, "George, you tell the doctor in your hospital (and he mentioned the doctor's name) that when Accad visits us the next time he is to live with me here in the palace as I have many things to study with him." This he repeated several times as he accompanied us to the car to bid us goodbye.

As I have already said, this is only one case among scores of other similar cases. It is a person-to-person meeting guided by the Spirit of God and based on his Holy Word. There all prejudices disappear and the Word of God accomplishes its blessed purpose in saving the souls of lost people.

I would like to close with the following striking statement from Dr. Samuel Zwemer's many sayings during his long ministry in the Muslim world, "At Christ's return, we shall be astonished at the huge number of people who will rise from all the Muslim cemeteries of the world to welcome him as their friend and Savior." May all the people hear soon his voice!