

What Keeps Me From Being Baptized?

Scripture Text: Acts 8:26-40

Introduction

Years ago, I was a member in another church where the pastor had recently left. While the church was searching for their next pastor, we had several young people desire to be baptized. We had no pastor. What were we to do? Did we need to wait until we had a pastor? I discussed this situation with another pastor, and he directed me to this passage about Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch. After discussing this and praying about it, I decided to meet with the young candidates for baptism. I talked with them about their Christian faith and ascertained their understanding of being saved as best as I could. I can hear those young people say just what the Ethiopian eunuch said to Philip, “What keeps me from being baptized?” I think this passage gives us a clear picture of a person believing in Christ and then obeying Christ through baptism. I think it also shows us some things about who, what, where and how one should be baptized.

Baptism Involves Obedience

Throughout scripture we see a natural progression of faith. One hears the Gospel of Jesus Christ. One repents of sin and confesses Jesus as Lord and Savior. Then, that new believer obeys Jesus’ command to be baptized. Baptism is, therefore, an act of obedience. When I asked one of our recent candidates for baptism why he wanted to be baptized, he simply said, “Because Jesus said so.” Can there be any better reason to be baptized? But, there is more to obeying the Lord than just a new believer obeying Him. What about the one who baptizes a new believer? In this passage, the angel of the Lord told Philip to “rise and go”, so Philip rose and went. Along the way, Philip met an Ethiopian eunuch. The Spirit then told Philip to “go over and join him”. So, Philip went over to the eunuch. Look at the following verses.

Acts 8:29–30 ²⁹ *The Spirit told Philip, “Go and join that chariot.”* ³⁰ *When Philip ran up to it, he heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, “Do you understand what you’re reading?”*

Philip listened to the Spirit and then he obeyed the Spirit. He then ran to the eunuch. Notice, there was obedience and a sense of urgency! He did not take his time getting there, but he ran to the eunuch. Philip was being a good disciple of Jesus. He was a follower of Christ and he obeyed the Spirit. Are we listening to the Spirit to tell us what to do? Are we obeying the Spirit? Are we *running* to those who are lost and need Jesus?

Baptism Involves Explanation

After obeying God by running to the eunuch, what did Philip do then? Did he just have a good time with him? Did they talk sports and politics or just play games? Perhaps they did those things, but that is not what Luke tells us. Philip ran to the eunuch with a mission, and with a message of eternal significance. Look at the following verses.

Acts 8:30–31 ³⁰ *When Philip ran up to it, he heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, “Do you understand what you’re reading?”* ³¹ *“How can I,” he said, “unless someone guides me?” So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.*

Philip heard the eunuch reading Isaiah 53 about God’s Suffering Servant, one of the clearest prophecies in the Old Testament about Jesus. Philip asked the eunuch, “Do you understand what you are reading?” That is an important question, as it reveals an important truth the eunuch already knew. The eunuch answered, “How can I understand unless someone guides me?” Is that not a true statement? How can anyone understand the Gospel and know about Jesus Christ without someone else *explaining* it to that person? Thus, the eunuch invited Philip to sit with him and Philip explained the Gospel.

Acts 8:34–35 ³⁴ *The eunuch replied to Philip, “I ask you, who is the prophet saying this about—himself or another person?”* ³⁵ *So Philip proceeded to tell him the good news about Jesus, beginning from that Scripture.*

This passage says Philip proceeded to tell the eunuch, which literally means Philip *opened* his mouth. He told this traveling unbeliever about Jesus. For those of you who believe in Jesus, how did you come to know about Him? How did you come to believe in Jesus as Lord? Did someone (or many people) tell you about Him? Did someone lead you through the Gospel and explain to you how to be saved? I expect that is true for everyone. One or more people tells us about Jesus and explains the Gospel to us. Now, how we go about telling others about Christ is very important. We can obey Christ by telling others about Him, but disobey Him *in the way* we do it. Look at how Philip did this. He obeyed the Spirit, and he took advantage of a situation, the eunuch reading a prophecy about Jesus. The Spirit gave Philip a perfect introduction to share the Gospel! Therefore, Philip seized upon this opportunity to share Christ with this eunuch.

I have heard people say that we do not need to tell others about Christ, that just living a Christian life is enough? Is that true? I have read the New Testament many times and the normal way a person believes in Christ involves someone else explaining the Gospel to that person. However, maybe the question is not whether a believer *needs* to tell others about Christ. Maybe the real question is this, “Why would we not tell others about Christ?” It is like do I need to tell others about my wife, or is it enough to show them my wedding ring? Does my ring tell anyone about my love for her? Is Jesus your first love? Is Jesus the one who died for you? Is Jesus your Savior, your King, and your Lord? If He is, then should not our sheer love for Him compel us to tell others about Him, to tell the unbeliever traveling alongside us so he can know Jesus, too? Also, think about this, Jesus is the cure to death. If you know the cure for a deadly disease, would you keep it to yourself? Would you just hope others find out or someone else tell them?

Baptism Involves Water

The eunuch had travelled to Jerusalem to worship, but had not become a full convert to Judaism. We assume the eunuch believed in Christ and confessed Jesus as Lord. Throughout scripture, the order of becoming a follower of Christ is to believe, repent and

be baptized. For instance, Jesus told His disciples that “whoever believes and is baptized will be saved” (Mark 16:16). At Peter’s first sermon, the crowd asked what they should do. Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins” (Acts 2:38). Thus, after Philip explained the Gospel, and the eunuch believed in Christ, Philip then baptized the eunuch.

Acts 8:36–38 ³⁶ *As they were traveling down the road, they came to some water. The eunuch said, “Look, there’s water! What would keep me from being baptized?”* ³⁷ *[And Philip said, “If you believe with all your heart you may.” And he replied, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.”]* ³⁸ *Then he ordered the chariot to stop, and both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him.*

Being a eunuch may have prevented him from becoming a full convert to Judaism. He could not enter the Temple. That makes his question about what keeps him from being baptized meaningful. The Gospel removes barriers to people becoming God’s people. A eunuch and a Gentile was baptized and received full membership with the Church. I notice a few things about this baptism. There is something about Philip that may not be obvious. He was a deacon in the church, one of the seven chosen to be a “servant” in Acts 6. Here is a deacon telling someone about Christ and baptizing him. Also, I notice that Philip and the eunuch went *into the water* and they came *out of the water*. Could it be they did this to get as wet as possible? Also, notice when and where the baptism occurred. It was right after the eunuch believed and it occurred on the side of a road. It was not in a church building and it was not with the whole church gathering. Does that mean we should do it that way? Not really. Celebrating baptisms with the church can be very encouraging. But, we do not need to make baptisms complicated. There needs to be belief, repentance and a confession in Christ. A disciple of Christ needs to administer the baptism. And, there needs to be water. Those are the essentials to baptism.

Baptism Involves Celebration

Lastly, we see the eunuch’s response to being baptized. He rejoiced.

Acts 8:39 *When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him any longer. But he went on his way rejoicing.*

Baptism does not save a person. The grace of God and faith in Christ are what saves a person, not baptism. However, baptism is symbol of what God has already done in a believer’s life and a public confession of one’s faith in Christ. Our merciful and gracious Savior has died for us and has saved us from the eternal consequences of sin. A prisoner has been set free and the shackles of death and sin are forever broken. Why would one not rejoice because of that? Too many Christians, though, forget the joy of their salvation. They forget how they were when they first believed and trusted in Christ, and that should not be. All of us should be like the Ethiopian eunuch, who left his baptism rejoicing in the new life he had in Christ. All of us should live each day in the joy and peace that our Savior has bought with His blood. Our new life in Christ is a cause for celebration. Have you lost the joy of your salvation? Are you rejoicing in Christ?

Conclusion

In closing, what prevents one from being baptized? Unbelief would prevent it. One must believe in and confess that Jesus is his or her Savior. Disobedience would prevent baptism. Not obeying Jesus to either tell others about Him or obeying His command to be baptized after believing in Him would prevent it. The good news of the Gospel is that our Lord and Savior came to save the world and to remove barriers to lost people becoming His people. God draws all kinds of people to Himself, Jew, Gentile, eunuch, whatever. Who are we to keep baptism from someone who believes in Christ, surrenders to Him, and wants to join with the Church? Jesus told us to make disciples of all nations. We do that by telling others about Christ, baptizing them, and teaching them to obey all that Jesus commanded (Matthew 28:19-20). So, let us obey our Lord and make more disciples. This is good news. Thanks be to God. Amen!