



## Sermon

29/4/18

### What was Jesus' Post-Resurrection Teaching?

**Acts 8:26-40; Luke 24:36b-48**

© 2018 The Revd Ian Hardcastle

We have heard about the conversion of the Ethiopian. Philip (the deacon not the apostle) has just been in Samaria where he preached to the Samaritans and very many came to believe in Jesus. But now, God had other plans for him and he was instructed to walk along a certain road. He was not given an explanation – but he obeyed and went. It would not have been easy. He was leading a wonderful evangelistic campaign and he was told to leave it. But when God speaks one should obey. Would we – or would we rationalise it away?

On the road he came across the Ethiopian. This man was in charge of the treasury of that Kingdom - the minister of finance – a very important man.

There has been a Jewish community in Ethiopia from much earlier times than the first century. Indeed Ethiopians Jews were officially welcomed to Israel in the twentieth century based on their history and keeping the Torah. So that minister of finance could have been a Jew or if not a proselyte. He was certainly committed to make that long journey and to have bought a scroll of Isaiah.

Philip was told by the Holy Spirit to go close to the chariot and he heard the Ethiopian reading aloud as everyone did in those times. He was reading was from Isaiah 53, the fourth of the Suffering Servant passages.

Over the centuries there has been much debate about who is referred to in those Servants Songs. Jewish scholars struggle because it doesn't fit an individual who would have to be priest, sacrifice, servant and king. Who could fulfil all those roles? Even some Christian scholars struggle to interpret especially those who don't believe in prophecy. So Philips' question was almost rhetoric – it was very likely the man would not know how to interpret the passage. Sure enough, he needed help and invited Philip into the chariot to explain it to him.

We are told the particular verses:

"He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before the shearer is silent, so he did not open his mouth. <sup>33</sup> In his humiliation he was deprived of justice. Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth."

And so Philip started from there and preached salvation through Jesus to him. Jesus is the one who fulfils the prophecy: who was unjustly accused, who did not defend himself and was killed. That passage includes a remarkable description of the crucifixion all the more so since crucifixion had not been invented when Isaiah wrote. It tells of the one dying, bearing the sins, the sicknesses and the grief of mankind. It points beyond his death to a life afterwards.

Philip did well and the man wanted to follow Jesus. Possibly, Philip had told him about his work in Samaria and how many were baptised – certainly he knew that was needed and was quick to seek baptism when they came across some water. And he went on his way rejoicing.

How did Philip know the answer to the riddle of that section of Isaiah? It was not known to the best minds of the Rabbinical schools of his day. Let me backtrack a few weeks.

When Tony preached on Easter Day, he took us through the scriptures from Genesis leading up to the death and resurrection of Christ. Two weeks later, we had the Gospel passage from the end of Luke where Jesus appeared to his disciples. He demonstrated that he was alive with a real body by showing them his wounded hands, feet and side and by eating some fish.

Then Jesus said something very significant which I have been pondering since:

**Luke 24:44-48** "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms." <sup>45</sup> Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. <sup>46</sup> He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, <sup>47</sup> and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. <sup>48</sup> You are witnesses of these things."

He did three things here:

1. He gave them revelation of the scriptures to be able to see the prophecies of the Messiah were fulfilled in him.
2. He established the gospel of repentance and forgiveness would be preached in his name to all nations.
3. He commissioned them as his witnesses.

I used to long to know what Jesus had explained to the disciples that day and through the forty days to the Ascension. Then I realised that the answer is before us. When the disciples point out fulfilments in the gospels, Acts and the Epistles, they are quoting Jesus. When Philip unpacked Isaiah 53, he was repeating what Jesus had revealed to the disciples. We can be sure that Isaiah 53 was one of those scriptures Jesus opened to them because he quoted from it after the Last Supper, saying:

It is written: 'And he was numbered with the transgressors'; and I tell you that this must be fulfilled in me. Yes, what is written about me is reaching its fulfillment." (Luke 22:37)

So in Philip's ministry we see a fragment of Jesus' teaching about his fulfilment of scripture being passed on.

What else do we see?

Through the Easter season until Pentecost, a strand of our readings is drawn from Acts and we follow some of the events of the early church (as we have today). Looking through those accounts we find multiple references to scriptures fulfilled in Jesus' death and resurrection and statements that the apostles are witnesses.

They were drawing on Jesus' teaching. They were starting to fulfil their commission to be his witnesses.

### **On Easter Day this year, we heard of Peter preaching to Cornelius' household:**

**Acts 10:39-43** "We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a tree, but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen-- by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."

Do you hear how he is moving in the commission he was given? To be a witness, to preach the gospel of repentance and forgiveness.

## **On Easter 2: Speaking of the early Christian community:**

**Acts 4:33** With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

## **Easter 3: The Healing of the lame beggar:**

Peter spoke to the crowd which had gathered and told them it was the power of Jesus that had healed the man. He gave testimony of the wrongful conviction, execution and death of Jesus. But also that he had risen from the dead and been glorified by God. "We are witnesses of this," he said. (Acts 3:15)

Jesus had said, "You are witnesses of these things;" Peter later said, "We are witnesses of this." There is a striking similarity there, surely it is reasonable to infer Peter was thinking of Jesus' words.

The role of a witness is important. It is the normal way we know of distant events or events from an earlier time. Jesus gave his disciples good evidence so they could testify to the truth of his resurrection.

## **Easter 4 (Last week): Peter's defense before the Sanhedrin:**

Jesus is "the stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone." (Acts 4:11 quoting from Ps 118:22) Much later, Peter would develop that text in his epistle.

## **The Testimony of the Old Testament**

What scriptures might Jesus have opened to them?

Surely the many scriptures explicitly about the Messiah. Isaiah is surely full of prophecies of the Messiah especially Ch 42, 49, 50, 52-53 –which we have already discussed.

Jesus probably referred to Psalm 22 which we used so heavily the Tenebrae service which again predicts the betrayal and crucifixion of someone. Psalm 69 again recounts someone's suffering with elements clearly fulfilled at Calvary:

**Psalm 69:20-21** Scorn has broken my heart and has left me helpless; I looked for sympathy, but there was none, for comforters, but I found none. <sup>21</sup> They put gall in my food and gave me vinegar for my thirst.

The resurrection is prophesied in Psalm 16:8-11 and 110:1:

**Psalm 16:8-11** <sup>8</sup> I have set the LORD always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. <sup>9</sup> Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure, <sup>10</sup> because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay. <sup>11</sup> You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.

Before the crucifixion Jesus told the disciples that the account of Jonah being 3 days in the fish was type of what would happen to him:

**Matthew 12:40** <sup>40</sup> For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

The Old Testament also lays out the idea that there will be preaching to the nations, e.g.:

**Isaiah 2:3** Many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths." The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

## **Repentance and Forgiveness will be preached to all nations**

Here is the gospel commission. **Luke 24:47** "...repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem."

Repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached. That is the basic gospel message: We are called to repent (to change our mind and direction) and then we are offered forgiven in his name. That is the message

the Ethiopian heard and believed. It is not cheap grace – forgiveness without repentance. If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.<sup>1</sup>

Paul of course writes it large for us through his epistles. Without Paul's explanation we would have only a hazy idea of the gospel. But there is the early mandate we read in Luke 24. What Jesus went through – the crucifixion and resurrection – enables this gospel. It couldn't be explained before because it had not happened.

When Jesus tried to warn his disciples that he would die and rise again they could not accept it or comprehend it. Only after the resurrection could the message be preached.

The gospel more than ever needs to be preached in NZ. The gospel needs always to be preached because each generation needs to hear it anew. The gospel needs to be preached in the remote villages of Tanzania – as we have helped to enable. We sent your gifts of support for the ten evangelists this week and heard back from Given:

*Thank you very much to St Stephen's for sharing their financial resources with our evangelists who work in a very difficult environment. This support is a great source of encouragement to their mission work in the villages where they are placed to work. We highly appreciate this partnership which enormously promotes and encourages the work of God in this diocese.*

*We praise and thank God for bringing the good people of St Stephen into the life of this diocese.*

All Christians are called to be witnesses – to tell of our personal experience of Christ. We are not all called to preach or to be evangelists, but we are called to be witnesses.

You haven't seen the risen Christ physically, but if you are Christian you have an experience of Christ. Let people know there is a living God who hears you and answers your prayers, so they too have an opportunity to respond as Peter described, repenting and turning to God, so their sins may be wiped out and times of refreshing may come from the Lord.<sup>2</sup>

All scriptural quotations are taken from the *Holy Bible: New International Version*® ©1972, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Societies. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House. All rights reserved.

---

<sup>1</sup> 1 John 1:9 paraphrased

<sup>2</sup> Acts 3:19