

Nehemiah 3:3

Sunday 7/6/2003

This is the Old Path Baptist Church Sunday morning, July 6th. We got a sound system this week so we'd have something we can start with and then add to as we grow. Certainly, we're planning on growing as the Lord gives us. If you have your Bibles this morning, I'd like you to turn to Nehemiah chapter 3. If that's too loud in the back or whatever, just tell Jason up there and he can adjust it until we get it all ready to go here.

As you know, we have been studying the book of Nehemiah. We saw in our first week how Nehemiah is a picture of how to really build a church today. Those nine gates that they are setting up on the walls, they are getting ready to put those gates back on as Nehemiah surveyed Jerusalem, laying in ruin. We are reminded by that of the state of the church today. These gates represent, as I've said week after week, the openings that a church has to have, the ministries the church has to have, or the functions of a church. There are nine of them, nine being a number of fruit bearing. We talked about that last week also.

Last week we talked about the Sheep Gate. The Sheep Gate, we talked about the aspect of sacrifice. The most important thing every Christian needs to learn and the most important thing that this church needs to come to in its spiritual growth is understanding the concept of sacrifice and being part of it. One time David, in one of the greatest stories in the Bible, wins a great battle. He wants to give a sacrifice to the Lord and he goes to a guy that has a threshing floor. In fact, this threshing floor, believe it or not, is the exact place where the temple is going to be built down the line. It's a tremendous analogy when you put it all together.

David goes in there to a guy, I think his name was Araunah or something like that. I forget his name. Anyway, David goes in there and he says, "I want to buy this threshing floor because I want to give a sacrifice to God." This man said, "Well, David, you're the king and you won a great victory. You don't have to pay for this. Just take it. It's yours. You can do whatever you want to do." David says, "No." He says, "I want to pay for it. I want to make a sacrifice to the Lord." He says, "David, King, you don't have to do that. It's yours. You take it." David made one of the greatest statements in the Bible that is true then and it's true today. You know what he said? He says, "I can't do that because a sacrifice has to cost me something."

By making that statement, he showed us for time and eternity that the sacrifice is something that is over and above. This church needs to go over and above in what it does and what it gives and in all aspects of ministry. It starts with individuals realizing that their reasonable service is to make their bodies a living sacrifice as Christ died for us on the cross. So that was the Sheep Gate.

I. The Fish Gate and Soul Winning

Now, today we come to Nehemiah 3:3, and he says this:

Nehemiah 3:3

But the fish gate did the sons of Hassenah build, who also laid the beams thereof, and set up the doors thereof, the locks thereof, and the bars thereof.

Now, Father, we thank you and praise you for the Lord Jesus. We ask you, Lord, to give us wisdom and insight into all that we do today and all that we look at. We thank you for those that are here. We thank you for those that you brought back with us today, Lord, that are here today. And Lord, we pray for those that are not here today, whether for sickness or out of town, whatever the case, that you'll watch over them, take care of them, and bring them back with us next week. We look forward to having Pastor Weyland here to challenge our hearts, to give us some insights through the years that he's taken to build a church. And Lord, we'll thank you and praise you for all you do now in Jesus' name, for His sake we ask it. Amen.

Now, today we're going to look at the Fish Gate. The Fish Gate is the gate that represents for us the aspect of soul winning. Jesus said in Mark 1:17, when he was calling out his disciples, he says, "I'm going to make you fishers of men." For time and eternity, fish in the Bible has been likened to men, and us as soul winners has been likened to fishermen. In the New Testament times, they caught them in nets. They didn't fish necessarily like we do with a pole. I mean, I guess they did, but commercial fishermen used nets. Time and time again, Jesus made the analogy that reaching out there and getting all those fish in the net is a picture of what we ought to be doing as winning people to Christ. Soul winning. Winning people to Christ. Just like this church has to learn the aspect of sacrifice, it has to learn the aspect and the proper technique for winning people to Christ.

Proverbs 11:30

The fruit of the righteous is as a tree of life; and he that winneth souls is wise.

This church can never lose the concept or the vision of winning people to Christ.

II. The Nature of Soul Winning

Maybe you're here this morning and you've never won anybody to Christ, and the thought of it terrifies you. That's okay. In fact, that's probably where you need to be. Everybody has to be in that position at some time in your life. You don't start out being a soul winner. I'd rather have you be that way and learn the process and in actuality, learn how easy soul winning really is.

Churches today, and for the last 20, 30, 40 years, ever since I've been in them, soul winning has always been the emphasis of everything that they do. Now, I'm not saying that soul winning isn't important. I'm not saying that this church should not emphasize soul winning. But they get so focused on getting people to come to church. They get so focused on trying to get everybody they can. Soul winning is the tool that they use. Soul winning is the technique that they use. They step way outside the guidelines of the Bible and they start using soul winning as the only tool that they have, and they start making it everything that it isn't, and try to put pressure on their people to win people to Christ.

I will never, never, never beat you over the head to be a soul winner because that won't work. I'll never beat you over the head to do anything. My only job as pastor of this church, first and

foremost, is to love you. I love you unconditionally. I love you, brother. You love me or you don't, but I know you all do. I love you no matter what. I love you when you do what's right. I love you when you do what's wrong. I don't care. My job is to love you unconditionally and then to preach to you the Bible the best I can, that you will take the Word of God and the Holy Spirit of God will help you get where you need to be.

There will be times in your life that I'll have to help you. You'll struggle with something in life that you'll say, "Bob, I want to come in and talk to you about this," and we'll work it out. Or maybe you'll want to study the Bible and learn some more things. That's fine. That's part of my job too. But I'm never going to belittle you into doing anything for God because that doesn't work. And I don't want to do that. You will come and you will grow naturally if you just do what's right. You don't need anybody prodding you along.

Some of my messages may get under your skin a little bit and I may say something, but you can't blame me for that. I give this to God when we start. You have to take that up with Him. I mean, that's what preaching is for. But I'm never going to get up here and say, "You know what? You're a dirty rotten scoundrel if you don't win people to Christ." I'm not going to put you on the spot. I've known preachers that have done all kinds of things to put people on the spot in soul winning or to give money or whatever the case, whatever they want to manipulate their people to do. I don't want to manipulate you to do anything. I want this church to be a natural process by which you can grow to be everything God wants you to be. My job is just to help you. And I know how to do that. I know how to take the Bible and teach you and challenge you and admonish you.

I'll tell you something else. You'll get more out of somebody by encouraging them and telling them what a good job they're doing than you will by telling them what a rotten job they're doing. There are people in this church that have never won anybody to Christ. And that's fine. I don't care if you've never won anybody to Christ as long as you have a desire someday to win somebody to Christ. That's all I'm looking for. And there are people here who don't know a lot about the Bible. I don't care as long as you have a desire to know about the Bible.

Because I've learned over the years that soul winning is not a technique. Soul winning is not a gift. I've heard churches get up where they say that soul winning is a gift, and they encourage everybody to unlock that spiritually. Let me tell you something. Soul winning is not a gift. Soul winning is not a technique. I've heard guys say that soul winning is the way you build a church. I want to tell you something. Soul winning was never given to build a church. It's not given to build a church. That's not the way you build a church.

I'll tell you what soul winning is. You see in the book of Ephesians, and Marion asked this question Thursday night. He asked about Ephesians chapter 5. He's getting ready to get married. I want you to know that. He's getting married. He's taking this thing seriously. We got another couple right behind him getting married too. Jason, he's taking it serious. But he asked the question in Ephesians. We talked about the husband and wife relationship being parallel to the Christian and Christ relationship. We know that that's the process that God chose to show us. In the book of Ephesians, he says, "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ loved the church," and the wife, "she reverences her husband in all things." We went down all through that.

As you study it and you see it and you realize it, you realize that when a husband and wife get married, they're incomplete. Because we know now that in the Bible that three is the number of completion. We know that they'll never be what we call a family until the baby shows up. Now they're complete as far as, I mean, there's nothing wrong in their life. Some couples go all their lives and don't have any kids. That doesn't mean that there's something wrong or sin in their life, or whatever. That may be what they choose to do. But as far as the completeness of things, through the process of intimacy in a husband and wife relationship under the lines of the Word of God, you know what happens in time? They bear fruit. Unless something is taking place to stop that, if something is taking place to not let that pregnancy happen, through the natural process, there's nothing wrong with that, if that's what you decide to do. I'm just showing you here how the process goes. Through the natural process of intimacy between a husband and wife, in time, they will bear fruit. Maybe not the first month, maybe not the second month, maybe not the first year, maybe not the second year. Sooner or later, through the process of the natural events that God has put and enacted in marriage, you're going to bear fruit.

You know what? It comes through an intimacy. You know how that happens? Soul winning happens. Soul winning is called the new birth. It's a spiritual birth. It's somebody being born again, John chapter 3. You know how it happens? It happens when a Christian gets saved, starts doing what's right with God, starts loving God, and as he builds that intimacy with God in a spiritual sense, he produces spiritual children, winning people to Christ, just like the husband and wife in a physical sense. It's based on your intimacy. You can't make it a program. You can't make it a gift. You can't make it a technique. You can't make it for something that is, "that's how the church is built." No, the church is built by Jesus said, "If I be lifted up, I'll draw all men unto me." The church is lifted up by the preaching of the cross and the preaching of Christ. That's how you build a church.

Soul winning comes as a process of intimacy between a man, a woman, and Christ, whatever their case, whatever their gender is. As they build that intimate relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ, they will win people to Christ. It's just a process that comes in time. I'd much rather just wait on that process. You're going to see as we study soul winning this morning, a little bit later on, you'll see how the process works. My job is to help you understand. I don't ever want anybody to feel guilty here. I don't want anybody ever to go out of here thinking, "Well, I ought to be more than I should be." Well, maybe you should, but you know what? As long as you're on the road and the path to get where God wants you to go, you'll get there. And we'll get there in God's time.

It's like our building. I want a building. I don't like cramming you all in here like a can of sardines right now. But you know what? We've got to be patient on God. God will do it in His own time. The last thing we want to do is to get ahead of God and to get something that God doesn't want us to have or do something stupid because we're in a panic mode. Hey, you know what? All things considered, this is a pretty nice place. It'll work. You know what? We've got two bathrooms. We've got a place to shuttle down. We don't have to walk 10 miles. You know what? It's not the most comfortable place in the world, but you know what? It'll get us by right now.

One thing I learned in life over the years, wait on God. Don't get in a hurry. God will do what He wants to do in His own time. That's true of the church. That's true of where we're at right now. It's also true of your life as a Christian. Just take it one day at a time. Learn everything you can from God that day. Ask God to help you grow. Ask God to make you what He wants you to be. It's through that natural process God will get you where He wants you to go.

Right now there are some natural things that we can do. You've all got friends that you can invite to come to church. Do you know people that aren't going anywhere? Do you know people that are just floating around someplace or people that you work with or friends or your family or whatever? You start with that. Right now we're just all building a base. That's all we're doing. Right now as a church, we're young. We're only about a month old. We're just finding out where we're at. We're finding out who can do what. We're finding out what God wants us to do right now. We're just taking our time building a base. But there'll come a day when God will open up these gates. As these gates get put into this church, you'll see it happen. I understand how in time we can really impact this community to really win people to Christ and really build a work for God. We ain't ready yet. But it'll come in time.

Right now we just need to work on the basics. Right now we just need to focus on loving each other, working through some things, building some things, getting a base, finding out where we're at, and bringing in the natural people that are out there that are just hanging there. People that you know that you could say, "Why don't you come to Bible study?" Marion was telling me the other night about how he was reading his Bible at work and some gal asked him about it. That's how you do it. You just let God use you in a way where you just let God use you.

III. The Example of Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch

I think the greatest story of that in the Bible, and that's where we want to go, I want you to turn over to Acts chapter 8. Acts chapter 8. Because the greatest example that I know of, and I could encourage you about putting in the soul winning gate and the sheep gate or the fish gate and talk about that. But let's go to the Bible. Let's look at the greatest example anywhere I know of in the Word of God that shows you the aspects of where we need to be in time of putting up this Fish Gate. Getting to the place where we understand the concept of soul winning.

Right now you have friends, you have couples, maybe if you're a young couple that aren't going anywhere or aren't happy where they're at, you can invite. You've got people you work with, people you run into, people you know that are just floating out there that need a stable church and a stable Word of God in their life.

Now Acts chapter 8. Start down here at verse 26.

Acts 8:26-39

And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert.

And he arose and went: and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship,

Was returning, and sitting in his chariot reading Esaias the prophet.

Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot.

And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest?

And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him.

The place of the scripture which he read was this,

He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth:

In his humiliation his judgment was taken away: and who shall declare his generation? for his life is taken from the earth.

And the eunuch answered Philip, and said, I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man?

Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus.

And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?

And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him.

And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing.

But Philip was found at Azotus: and passing through he preached in all the cities, till he came to Caesarea.

That is one of the first places in the Bible where you really get the complete picture from beginning to end, and everything in the middle of how a man gets saved. Now I know that there are other people saved in the Bible, and I know that there are examples of it all through the New Testament. But this is the only place that I know of where every event is covered that shows you everything you and I need to know about soul winning.

IV. Three Aspects of Soul Winning

I told you that three was a number of completion, and you're going to find when it comes to soul winning there are three aspects to it. Most people never figure this out, and that's why they make a mess of it.

1. There's a sowing aspect. There are times when God just wants you to put the word out. You've got to be very sensitive to the Holy Spirit of God when it comes to soul winning. That's why I encourage you to grow in the Lord and let your soul winning come naturally and just use the natural things that God puts in your life right now. Sowing means you just put out the word. You just put it out, and God takes it and uses it.
2. Then there's a watering part of soul winning, where you pray for what you put out.
3. And then there's a reaping part of soul winning. You reap.

Most Christians in the world today, all they know is reaping. They try to reap, reap, reap, reap, and put the pressure on people to get saved. They don't understand that there are times where God just wants you to sow the Word of God. There are times that God wants you to pray for somebody, and then there are times where God wants you to reap the fruit of what you've done or maybe what somebody else has done. You have all three examples here in this chapter. That's why this chapter is so important.

You know what you have here? You have three things in here you need to see. Three things in this chapter to sow it.

4. You have a prepared spirit.
5. You have a prepared sinner.
6. You have a prepared servant.

Those three things have to be in our lives when we win somebody to Christ. Now, I'm going to show them to you clearly.

V. The Prepared Servant

The first thing I want you to see is that we have a prepared servant. Philip is a guy that when the Spirit of God tells him what to do, he doesn't question it. That's why I encourage you to grow in the Lord. That's why I encourage you to study your Bible. That's why I'm willing to spend time with you helping you learn the Bible, whatever it takes. You know why? Because we have to prepare ourselves for the leading of the Holy Spirit of God.

I want you to notice some things down here. First of all, it says, "And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert." The first thing I want you to see is this: He goes from Jerusalem and Gaza down to the desert. If you were to read this whole chapter before we started, you would find out there's a great revival going on in Jerusalem. Thousands of people are getting saved. There is a great revival, and Philip is part of it.

Now, that's a tremendous thing, because God is pulling him out of that revival to send him all the way down to the desert for one guy. I've known preachers, and they're still around today. I can tell you who they are. Some of them are in this city, and I wouldn't do it. But I know preachers

that won't go to preach anywhere unless you can guarantee them a crowd of at least 5,000 people. I mean, I know preachers that say that their ministry is so valuable that they're not going to take the time to speak to any crowd of 100 people, 200 people, 20 people, 30 people, that their ministry is so ordained and so valuable and so important that they cannot spend their message on less than 5,000, and you have to guarantee them that. That's ridiculous.

Here's a revival. Thousands of people, and the evangelist, the guy that is leading it, Philip, is called out, and God sends him down the road to a desert place where one guy is. You know what the difference is? The difference is the leading of the Holy Spirit of God. You're in pretty sad shape if you think a revival depends on your preaching. I mean, when you're in a place where you think that you're so important and what you've got to say is so important, and your ministry is so important that you can't go down to the place and preach to one guy instead of 5,000, there's something wrong. Somebody says, "Well, God..." No, no, no, here's an example. Don't give me this God stuff. Here's the example in the Bible where God pulled the head evangelist out of the meeting and sent him down to the desert for one guy.

You know what that tells me? Be listening to the Holy Spirit of God. Don't get caught up. Don't read your own press releases. Don't get caught up in your own popularity. Recognize that God may pull you out and send you to one guy. You know what I like about Philip? He didn't even question God. He didn't stop and say, "Well, Lord, are you sure now? You know, I'm the head guy up here and I got 10,000 people coming tonight, and you know what, we're getting thousands of people saved. Have you prayed about this, Lord? Are you sure you want me to go down here and leave all this great thing that's going down here?" He didn't even question God. It has to come a time in your life and my life when you learn about the leading of the Holy Spirit of God. When you learn and you understand about God's leading, you understand what it is important to just do what God wants you to do in spite of the circumstances. Soul winning is never based on circumstances. Never. Never. When God tells you to go, you go.

When you look down here, Acts 8:27 says, "And he arose and went." He goes. Look at Acts 8:29. He sees this guy sitting there in the chariot. "The Spirit said unto Philip, Go near and join thyself to this chariot." You know what? Look at the next verse. The Bible says, "And Philip ran." He's following the leading of the Holy Spirit of God. He is not concerned about circumstances. He's not concerned about how many people are there. He's simply concerned that the Spirit of God had a job for him to do and he wants to do it. That is the number one thing that we have to get in our minds in this church. God has a job for us to do. We'll probably never run a thousand people. We'll probably never come to the place where we'll ever have the great things that most churches have today. You know what? That's fine. I don't want them. All I need is the Bible and you. And we need God. And the rest will take care of itself. But we have to come to the place where we learn to be attentive to what the Spirit of God says. The greatest commodities we have as a church today is the Word of God and the Spirit of God and God's people. You put those three together and balance them out right and do with them what God wants you to do and there'll be no stopping you in what you're going to do for the Lord. I have no doubt in my mind that God has a job for us to do. God has a job for every individual in this room. And God wants to take your life and use it. You're all in different stages. You're in various places of spiritual

growth. That's fine. We'll all get to that point at some point sooner or later. So I begin to see that we have a prepared servant.

VI. The Prepared Sinner

Now the problem today is this. I believe that God prepares sinners. I believe right now while we're here, and I'm going to show you the example. I believe that right now while we're here, there are people in your life that God has prepared for you to have a part in helping them find out what God wants them to do with their life. Maybe they're saved. Maybe they're lost. You know, there was a time when we could preach this message just about lost people. And soul winning is about lost people. But you know what? There are a lot of God's people out there that are lost. And I don't mean lost without Christ, not saved. I mean just lost in the concept of what God wants them to do. And those people are easy people to reach. Those are people when you give them a taste, a dangling of the Word of God, and it's real. They'll grab it, man, and you won't, you don't have to, they don't cost you anything. They're just hanging out there. All you got to do is be attentive to the Spirit to recognize them. Recognize people in your life, people you work with, your friends, your acquaintances that maybe aren't going anywhere, aren't growing, that are looking for something else. Grab them, man. Grab them. Grab them and bring them in and give them a taste of the Word of God. And then they help build that base. And then in time God's going to put people into your life that are lost. Somebody at work, somebody that you run into, some old friend shows up. And you have a chance to tell them the story of Christ.

But you know what the problem is? I'm telling you right now, as we're sitting here, God is preparing sinners. The problem is God's got more prepared sinners than He's got more prepared servants. That's the problem. Because God's people aren't focused today. God's people aren't focused on what God wants them to do. They're focused on what they want to do. And see, that's the problem. So we see here that Philip, he doesn't even question God. And he goes exactly where God wants to go, down to a desert. And when God says, "Go join yourself to this man's chariot," he runs. That shows me he's anticipating what God wants to do.

Now let's look at, for a moment here, let's look at the prepared sinner. Oh, what a study this is. Acts 8:27, "And he arose and went and behold a man of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority, under Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship, and was returning sitting in his chariot, and read Esaias the prophet."

Now, down here, Acts 8:32:

Acts 8:32-33

The place of the scripture which he read was this,

He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth:

In his humiliation his judgment was taken away: and who shall declare his generation? for his life is taken from the earth.

Now, he's reading Isaiah chapter 53. And Isaiah chapter 53 is a prophecy about Christ coming and dying on the cross. Now, there are some things I want you to notice here. The Bible says he's from Africa, Ethiopia, under Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. And he's coming to Jerusalem to worship. You know what he's doing? He's following exactly what I told you on Thursday night Bible study. I think we even talked about it one of our Sunday mornings. He's doing exactly what they were doing under Solomon. He's going to Jerusalem to worship. He's following what he knows in the Old Testament to be, because he hasn't heard anything about Christ dying yet.

Here's a man that wants to do what's right. He's following the life that God gave him up to this point. He knows nothing about Christ dying on the cross. He knows nothing about Jesus. He knows nothing about the fact that the church is now into effect. He's going to Jerusalem, just like his forefathers did, just like his great-grandfather did, just like thousands of people have done. He's going to Jerusalem just like his great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great queen, Queen of Sheba did when she went in to see Solomon, and she saw all the glory of the kingdom. They had been going there for years, but now something's changed.

I've often looked at this, and I thought to myself, here's a guy, and if God doesn't do this to show you something, it's incredible. Here's a situation where God has the physical circumstances. He's in a desert. He's a Gentile. He's a long way from anywhere. He doesn't know anything, and he's sitting out in a desert on the bumper of a chariot, reading a copy of Isaiah 53. How much further could you get from anything? There are no churches around. There are no preachers around. There isn't anybody around within, I don't know how many miles, but probably quite a few miles. He's out in the desert. How much desolate could you get? And yet, that's exactly where God wanted him to be, and God brought somebody to him.

You know what that tells me? That tells me that circumstances do not matter. They do not matter. God put this guy in the most unlikely, the most impossible, the most unbelievable situation that if you and I were going to orchestrate somebody getting saved, we'd have them walk in, get hit by lightning, walk into a church someplace, or somebody'd pass a tract out to him, or somebody's not going to do it. God put this guy in the most abstruse, unbelievable, distant place, separated from everything and everybody, to show you and I that circumstances don't matter. When the Spirit of God is involved, God will get somebody to that person. God has a prepared spirit. God has a prepared sinner, and God has prepared servants. It shows me that God will get the message to the God. I don't care where He is.

That tells me that God is busy right now while we're sitting here, taking the Word of God and growing in the Lord, and then we go home and we go to work tomorrow, and then we think about the Lord and we continue to grow in our own personal studies. While we're doing all that in your life, God is preparing somebody right now for you to have an influence. No man liveth to himself, no man dieth to himself. Somebody is always watching your life. And God is working on it right now. Don't look at the circumstances and say, "Well, it's impossible." How many times I've heard somebody say, "Well, you know," and we look at the desert here, we think of it in the physical sense. How many times I've heard somebody say, "Well, you don't understand my father, you don't understand my uncle, you don't understand my grandmother, you don't understand my mother. They are so far that we'll never reach them." You know what that's

saying? That's limiting God and limiting the circumstances. All that you're telling me is they are in a spiritual desert, just like this guy was in a physical desert. And God can reach them both. God can reach them both. But God not only has to have prepared sinners, He has to have prepared servants. And what our job is, is to prepare ourselves to be the servant of God that when the Spirit calls us, we can run. We can run. We can run.

Wow, what a story. I've often wondered this thing. I've often wondered, I wonder who gave this guy Isaiah chapter 53. You'll never know till we get home to the Devil's Sea of Christ. But what a beautiful thing that is. You know what that shows me? That shows me the three aspects. Somebody watered. Excuse me, somebody sowed. Somebody sowed. I don't know how he got it. Maybe it was at a 7-Eleven where he pulled in to get gas in the chariot to feed the horses. I don't know. It happens. I mean, maybe he stopped to get something to eat. Maybe out there, he's back there in Ethiopia someplace and he found a copy of the Old Testament. He's sitting down there saying he's flipping through it. I know it's specific. I know that God led him to Isaiah 53 because God's getting ready to tell him this story about a wonderful Savior that came and died for him. And where else could you go better than Isaiah 53? We're talking about he was like a lamb led before the slaughter, dumb, opened not his mouth. Talked about him taking the iniquity of us all. What an incredible passage. Somebody, somebody sowed. Somebody, now, Philip's going to reap, but somebody sowed. And I promise you, whoever sowed was also watering. And I promise you, they've been praying for this guy. Maybe he didn't know his name. Maybe he's praying for that old Lord, "Pray for that old black Ethiopian eunuch we met down there at the 7-Eleven, when I gave that gospel tract to you. I don't know his name, but you know who he is, Lord. I pray for him. I pray for him. God bless him. Use him. Lord, he's a servant of servants, Lord, but that's what you're looking for, a servant of servants." So Lord, use him. And I'm sure the guy that sowed was watering.

Boy, here he is, driving down through there on his way to Jerusalem and he pulls up there in the desert. And I don't know what they're doing, man. Maybe they're changing the tires. Maybe they're putting some water in the radiator. I don't know what they're doing. Maybe they're packing over here. I don't know what they're doing. I know what he's doing. He got a few minutes, so he sits down in the back of that thing and he opens up that thing and he's reading Isaiah 53. And you know what he's saying to himself? He's saying, "I wonder what this means." You see, the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God. Neither can he know them because they are spiritually discerned. He can't figure it out. God prepared him to a point, but then God has to bring in a prepared servant to the prepared sinner that the prepared spirit has gotten ready. And he's sitting there and he's reading this thing. God sees the whole panoramic view.

Wow, what a thing. What a God we serve, man. I mean, He's up there in heaven. He sees Philip over here preaching at a great meeting. And Philip goes back after the meeting that night, and he's all fired up and ready to go. And he's saying, "Man, this is great. Tomorrow morning, I'm going to preach to another 10,000 and we're going to get more to the Lord." He's thanking God for the revival down here. And God is seeing that revival and seeing them all out saved and all those thousands of people coming to Christ and finding the gospel and all that. But yet, all that

busyness. God has His eye on an Ethiopian eunuch over in the desert. Wow, what a God. He didn't miss nothing. He didn't miss a trick. You know, one of the all-ubiquitous world, He sees every individual out there, and that one guy in the desert was just as important to God as that 10,000 down there in Jerusalem. And you better learn that. You better learn that. And God took the head of angels out and took him right down there, and there he was. And he's sitting on the backside, and he's looking at this thing, and God had a prepared spirit. God had a prepared sinner, and God had a prepared servant.

Let's look what he says down here. Acts 8:32, "And the place of the Scripture which he read was this. He was led as a sheep to the slaughter, and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so he opened not his mouth." Philip runs over here in Acts 8:30. He hears him reading it. He hears him reading it. And he asks the classic statement, "Hey, you understand what you're reading?" And the guy answers with a classic statement. "How can I, except some man should guide me?" There's our job right there. There's the job. Mark that. Put a circle around that. Mark that in red, yellow, black, and blue, yak and white when they're all precious to his side. Mark it in something. That's a great concept right there. "How can I, how can I, how can I, how can I, how can I, how can I, how can I, how can I, except some man guide me?" That's our job. My job is to guide you. Your job as a father and son to your children is to guide them. Your job as a Christian to lost people is to guide them.

He asks the question, "You understand what you're reading?" He heard him reading it. How many guys are reading it out loud? That's incredible. He's reading. He says, "How can I except some man should guide me?" And then he desires Philip to come up and sit with him. Woo. Talk about the Lord setting things up. Ever been in a situation like that? Well, I have been in my life. I've been into them. I can tell you stories, man. I mean, I know you all have to a certain degree if you've been around and saved for a while, but wow, there ain't no greater thing in life to see God use you like that. I mean, God does some phenomenal things.

Years ago, I was flying to someplace up in Massachusetts or someplace up there to preach, and it was on a Wednesday afternoon. I had to preach that Wednesday night. Traveling through the airlines, you know it always goes the way it always goes. And I got to someplace, and my flight was canceled to where I was supposed to go. And I was supposed to be up there to preach. And all kinds of people were trying to get to where they wanted to go. Everybody was hot and everybody was mad. I learned one thing in life. It does not do you any good to get mad at the airlines. It doesn't. You can cuss the clerk out all day long and take it to the pile, whatever the case may be. You know what? It ain't going to help you at all. They're not going to say, "Okay, that fixed the problem. Get on the plane." It ain't going to happen. You just make them mad, and whatever slack they may have wanted to cut you, they're not going to cut you now because you didn't deal with them right. Everybody was up there beating on the thing and oh, and they were just mad.

And I told the Lord. I said, "Lord, you know what? You called me. You wanted me to go up here. I didn't orchestrate this. The plane's broke. They say they're going to try to get some of us on out of places. You know I got to be there by 5 o'clock. I don't know. What can I do?" I know I'm going to do it. I'm going to go get me a hot dog with sauerkraut on it because I'm really hungry. It

ain't my job. It's not my job. There were guys down there yelling and screaming, beating on the thing. And I went down there and got me a big old hot dog. It was a red block was what it was. And then the sauerkraut on it, you know, a little ketchup, a little mustard. In fact, I had two of them. I'll confess it to you. Got me a Coke, come back up there, sat down there, ate my hot dogs. They were really good, for airport food. They were really good. It cost me \$30, but it was good.

I'm sitting down there and I'm eating my hot dog. And the lady up there at the thing, she says, "We've got another plane." She says, "We're not going to get all you on it." She says, "It's already got some people on it." But she says, "We're going to get, we're going to get like half of you on this one." She says, "Now the next plane is not going to go till later on tonight." She says, "Oh, you're just going to have to, you know, I'm sorry." And I thought, "Well, you know what, I'll be there going to get on this one or I ain't going to go." It doesn't do me good to go tonight at nine o'clock. I mean, I'll just, well, I'll just get there in time to eat. I mean, I won't, you know, I won't get a chance to preach. So I, you know, just sat down there and they're figuring all things out up there. And they got everybody on the plane up there, didn't call my name. And the plane was calling people up and this lady went on and she said, she was the last one called. And she said, she said, "Well, I have my daughter here." She said, "My daughter needs to go. I can't leave my daughter." She said, "Well, we don't have any room." She said, "For your daughter." So I don't, she said, "Well, then I'll just take the nine o'clock plane." So boom. So the lady up there figured out that thing in there. I'll just finish my hot dog. He's had my Coke. She gets up in the microphone. She says, "Is there a Mr. Alexander here? We have a, what you and this lady's place." And I just got up, walked in that thing, said, "Thank you, Lord." Got there, preached, did my thing. You know what? Of course, God had a plan. It wouldn't have done me good to get upset. No, and I don't want to paint the picture that, "Oh, stable Bob loves the Lord. Never gets upset." Oh, no, I can get upset like anybody else. But I choose what I get upset about. I can't, I mean, I've learned over the years. There's something I can't get upset about. You just got to say, "Lord, this is yours." But I do this. When God puts something in motion for you to do, it's God's job to get you there. It is. It's God's job to get you there. All I have to do is just be willing and ready to go like Philip and God will take care of it.

I often wondered who gave this guy a copy of Isaiah. He's sitting down there reading that thing, can't figure it out. And Philip said, "You understand what you're reading?" He said, "How can I, except some man should guide me?" And there is the great secret. God uses men to guide other men to understand about God. Then he goes up, he reads down through there, and then look what happens. Acts 8:34, "And the eunuch answered Philip, and said, I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man?" He has no idea what's going on. Acts 8:35, "Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus."

Now that verse says a lot of things. First of all, it says this. It said, "Then Philip opened his mouth and began at the same scripture." He didn't have some gigantic soul winning plan that he had tucked away inside of his Bible that he did. You know what he did? He just took where the guy was at and started right there. And the Bible says he preached unto him Jesus. Now that is the greatest verse in the Bible that defines preaching for you and for me. Preaching is nothing more. I mean, he didn't run around and get a pulpit and get a soapbox and get it all there. No, he

just started the scripture and preached. Preaching is nothing more than telling somebody else what God has done for you and what God has done. He preached unto him Jesus. He preached unto him Jesus.

And as they went on their way, they came, now he's talking about, they're driving now, Philip not only has got the opportunity to preach to him, he's getting a free ride someplace. And when they went on their way, they came unto certain water and the eunuch said, "See here is water, what doth hinder me to be baptized?" Now at this point I learned what Philip has said to him without even seeing it. I know now Philip has talked about the fact that Christ has come and died on the cross. He shed his blood. He's probably explained the difference between the Old Testament and going to Jerusalem and now you don't go anymore. And he's laid this whole thing out. And he's also talked about once you get saved, you need to be baptized. Because this guy starts saying, "Okay, they're driving along and just happened to be along the road to be a big body of water. Well, my, my, my, where did that come from?" And he says, "Okay, you've been talking about baptism. Here's baptism. I want to do what's right. What does hinder me to be baptized?"

At the same time, this statement that he answers him defines baptism. Because we've got places where you can go that say that babies need to be baptized. I mean, he says this. Qualification for being baptized. He says, "What does hinder me to be baptized?" Philip said, "Qualification, definition. If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest." Somebody said, "Would you baptize babies in your church?" No. "Why don't you?" Because they didn't believe with all of their heart. That's the qualification. When a man or a woman can believe what I just said with all of their heart and they believe it, then we baptize them. That's the bottom line.

And it doesn't stop there. And he said, "With all my heart thou mayest." Then he answered, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." There's a statement. He got saved someplace in the process here. He's now a believer. That's a statement that I know we use it very lightly because everybody would say, "Well, yeah, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." But that statement right there in a biblical sense is much different than in a United States of America sense where we just say, "Well, yeah, I believe in God. I believe in Jesus Christ." That means I have trusted Jesus Christ as my own personal savior. And that's what it means. For in the New Testament, if you believe that Jesus Christ was the Son of God, you believe that he was God. That's why the scribes and Pharisees got so upset when Jesus said, "I'm the Son of God," because he was claiming to be God. But you got to, you know, the definitions of things then are different than the world we live in today. That's where you got to go with the Bible definitions.

And he says, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." And he commanded the chariot to stand still. Now, not only does he give you the definition of baptism, he even shows you the mode of baptism and they and they and they went down both. Look at this thing, "into the water." One sprinkling by, I mean, you know, they're in the desert. They got canteens. If it was sprinkling, he'd have just got some water out of the canteen and hit him in the face with it. No, no, they had to have a body of water and they both go down into the water. And just in case you missed it, "both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him." In case you missed it, slowly learned the class. "And when they were come up out of the water," see that thing? They're in the water. They're up to their necks and then he puts him under the water and brings him back up. He

not only shows you the mode of baptism, he shows you the definition of baptism. He gives you the mode of baptism. Everything is here. You don't need anything else. This greatest chapter in the Bible on setting up the Fish Gate shows you what soul winning is. Shows you how God sees it.

VII. The Prepared Spirit and Sinner

You see, you got a prepared spirit, prepared spirit. The Bible says over there in 2 Peter chapter 3, it says that God is not willing that any should perish. The spirit is always ready, always ready. It's always prepared. The Bible says he's a true light that lighteth every man that come into the world. There's never a time in this world. You don't have to worry about the spirit being prepared, but it is. He said, "I'm not coming in this world to judge the world, but to the world by me might be saved." The spirit was prepared to save. We ain't worried about the spirit. It's always prepared.

I ain't really worried about the sinners because they really don't have a choice in it. A good old sinner out there, God preparing, God's spirit preparing, he don't have a choice in it. He ain't as smart as a Christian. He ain't learned how to duck God yet. If you're good old fashioned, just garden variety sinner, they don't have a chance. The spirit of God will work on him, work on her, get them ready. Now they may not do what's right, but they may turn their back on it, but they ain't got a say in it. That spirit of God just nails them and gets them ready, puts things in their life, they can go wrong in their life, keeps pushing them, shoving them, bringing them to the point where they're sitting there saying, "Okay, if there's a God out there, what do you want me to do?" And about that time, here comes a Philip. That Philip has the right line to say. In this case, it was, "Hey, you understand what you're reading?" In your case, it may be, "Hey, what are you doing today? How's it going? I haven't seen you here before. What's your name? What's up?" Guy said, "What's up?" You say, "Heaven." "What's new?" "Jerusalem." Have a line, man. I'm lying. I mean, you just, the spirit of God will put those things into your life, put the people into your life, and then you have to be prepared enough to recognize it and then let God take you from there.

Now, you just, you just talk to him. You don't have to have a three-point outline on a poem. He didn't. He just took what the man had and started right in that scripture and preached unto him Jesus. I always look at where the person's at and what they have right there and what they're dealing with. That's where I go. Maybe sometimes they don't have anything and you have to get creative, but most of the time you don't. I mean, if a guy comes to me and he's got a drinking problem, I'm not going to talk to him about the rapture of the church and the second coming of Christ to get him saved. If a guy's coming to me and he's got a marital problem, I'm not going to tell him that the antichrist has warts on his nose and he's got 13, 18 types in the Old Testament. I'm going to take him right where he's at. You see what I'm saying? Be sensitive to where the person's at and whatever they're bringing in their hand is what you normally use. If he says, "Man, I'm really having a tough time figuring out the Bible," then that's where you start. I mean, I'm not going to get on him and say, "Well, you know, the 10 common market over there." I

mean, oh, you go with what you're sensitive to where God has put the guy and you start right there and then you go from there. Follow the Holy Spirit of God's leading.

Prepared spirit, always prepared. And God has a prepared sinner. Right now out there, we're talking right here. I promise you, there are Ethiopian eunuchs out there that somebody has given him something and somebody is, they're reading it, that God has been dealing with them and they're ready in your life that you're to be aware of to bring into our fold. And maybe you say, "Well, Bob, I can't win him to Christ." Then bring him here. We'll win him to Christ. I don't care. Don't say, "Well, I'm going to do this 20 years from now." No, no. The intent, the attitude, wanting to see people plugged into the Word of God, that is the key. The mode, the method is immaterial. You can't do it. You bring them here, I'll do it. Or somebody else will do it. That's what it's all about. It all covers the bases till the person gets up and stands on their own two feet and then does something for the Lord. That's where it's at.

Prepared servant, prepared spirit, and prepared sinner. And I'm telling you, you'll never be complete as a Christian. You'll never be complete as a Christian in your life until the baby shows up. Now, that doesn't mean you have to win them directly. You may invite somebody to come to church and they get saved. Bang. If somebody else here wins them to Christ, if Jeff takes them in the room or John takes them in the room or Phil takes them in the room or Chris takes them in the room or John takes them in the room, somebody wins them to Christ, that's immaterial. They get credit for it, but you know what? Your attitude, heart's wanting to get them here. Bang. You just won someone's heart. The baby just showed up. Simple as that. You bring somebody in here, you know, I've seen people come into churches, you know, they start and they come and they're saved. They think they're saved and they go along and everything. Something in the process of time they get to come to the conclusion, "You know, I don't think I've ever really been saved." Bang. Baby shows up.

But it has to start with a prepared spirit. Don't have to worry about him. Prepared sinner. I don't really worry about him. He's out there where the problem is is prepared servant. That's where the problem is. And that's why this church, through the natural process of just spending time together in the Word of God, right now we have two openings in this church to bring people in, Sunday morning and Thursday night. That's all we got. We'll have more down the line, but you know what? I ain't jumping the gun on this thing. We're taking it one step at a time. We will cover the bases that we can cover with what we got and as God leads us, we'll open up the other gates. We've only been in this thing for a month. We're taking our time. But those two are enough because those introduce people to the Word of God to the place where God can do something in their lives.

So I challenge you and I encourage you to let God be God in your life. You'll never hear me from the pulpit or privately or publicly ever get on anybody about what you do and what you don't do. That ain't my job. Every man rises and falls before his master. I'll get up here and tell you what the Word of God says. I'll show you the alternatives. I'll show you what the Bible says. You have to make up your mind what you're going to do. Your life and my life is filled with choices. You make the right choice, good. You make the wrong choice, bad. I can't make those choices for you. My job as your pastor is to love you unconditionally, whether you make the right choice or

the wrong choice and to always help you and show you what God wants a man to do in his life and then you go from there. That's all. That's all. Soul winning. It's not something that's going to build this church. It's something that happens naturally through your intimacy with your relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ, male or female. Don't ever forget that. Prepared sinner, prepared spirit, prepared servant. And the greatest example in any place in the Bible is Acts chapter 8. Let's pray. Father.