

## Decision for Destiny

I would like to read from Acts 8:35-39, "Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told them the good news about Jesus. As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, 'Look, here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptized.' And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing."

He rejoiced because he had made life's supreme decision for destiny!

### *A Treasure Hunt*

I understand that every year in New York City the people of that great metropolis enjoy a treasure hunt. The treasure hunt is conducted by the newspapers. The papers carry the names of all the people in New York who have dormant bank accounts. It is an amazing thing that several thousand people, every year, turn up in New York with dormant bank accounts. Around the first

of September, when the newspapers list all of these names, the people of New York will be seen scanning the columns of the paper trying to find their name to see if perchance they might have one of these dormant bank accounts.

Again, it is amazing that every year several hundred people will come in and claim their money. Recently a fellow came in and claimed more than \$8,000 that had been listed in a dormant bank account. It was such an unusually large amount of money that newspaper reporters were there to question him. After he had proven that he was the valid owner of these funds and had received them, a reporter stepped up and said, "Sir, why did you have that money in the bank all of these years and just now come to claim it after your name appeared in the papers?" Then this fellow got a little red in the face as he said, "Well you may find it hard to believe, but the truth is I had just forgotten that I had this money in the bank."

When I read that I was dumbfounded! I can't imagine it! If I had \$8,000 in the bank I know that I wouldn't forget about it, in fact I would probably be telephoning that bank every morning, noon, and night just to be sure that it was still there, safe and sound. But this same thing is happening all across our country.

I was holding a meeting in Louisville, Kentucky and I noticed this article in the *Louisville Courier Journal*. It read, "Come and get it," and it told about hundreds of unclaimed dollars in Louisville banks, insurance companies and race tracks. They were advertising to try to get these people to pick up their money. In most cases the people don't know the money is there. "They have forgotten about it," says William J. Clark, Vice President and controller of Citizens Fidelity Bank and Trust Company of Louisville.

The largest amount of money in Louisville unclaimed was \$1,317 held by Citizens Fidelity for a Mrs A.S. Coleman whose address was not known. The money had been in a savings account for 25 years and according to Mr Clark, she had not been in the bank once in that 25 years. In Kentucky, savings accounts

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are dormant when there has been no activity for 25 years. Checking accounts are dormant when there has been no activity for 10 years.

As amazing as it is to think that there are people who have money in the bank and they forgot about it, I am here this morning to tell you of something more astounding. I am here to tell you about men and women and boys and girls who claim they believe the Bible is the Word of God. They claim to believe that there really is a Heaven and there really is a Hell and they say that they believe that Jesus Christ is the only one who can save them from Hell and take them safely to Heaven, and yet these same people who say they believe all of this, do nothing about it. They have allowed the claims of the Lord Jesus to lie dormant within their hearts. I want to say over and over again in everyway that God can give me the words to say it, God wants a decision. It is time to make your decision.

### *Everyday Decisions*

We make decisions everyday that we live. In fact decisions far outnumber anything else that we do in our life. You have already made a number of decisions this very Lord's Day. You had to decide to get up this morning. I'm sure you didn't just automatically fall out of bed. Then you had to decide what to have for breakfast, if anything, and you had to decide to come to this church service. You had to decide what to wear. You had to decide how to get here; were you going to walk, drive your car, ride with a neighbor, come in a taxi cab, or ride your Honda, or roller skates, or something like that. A decision had to be made.

### *Education*

Some decisions are far more important than others. Every

young person must decide about education, are you going on to school and graduate and then go to college and prepare your mind for the future years, or are you going to be a dropout so that you can obtain some of this easy money that is available right now. Whatever you do about education is an important decision, but it is not life's supreme decision for destiny.

### *Vocation*

Every person must decide about a vocation. Just as an architect will draw plans and specifications before a lovely building can be constructed; even so, our lives need a blueprint if they are going to be entirely satisfactory. A misfit in any vocation is tragic, but as important decision as vocation is, it is not life's supreme decision for destiny.

### *Marriage*

When two young people come walking down the aisle of a church building like this to recite the marriage vows, a decision is being made. A tremendously important decision, two lives will be blessed or else two lives will be tragically ruined. As important a decision as marriage is, even that is not life's supreme decision for destiny.

### *The All Important Decision*

Well you say, what then is the all important decision? My friends, it is the very same decision that was made so long ago by the Ethiopian eunuch as he rode down the highway reading his scriptures. His decision was made when he said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." In order to get this man to

make the decision for destiny, God provided a copy of His own word, the Holy Scriptures, so that the Ethiopian could read about the Messiah. God also provided an angel, one of His Heavenly messengers who came to put this seeking soul in contact with the searching Savior. But I think best of all, God provided a willing, surrendered, Christian man. A man who was willing to make a personal visit to explain to the seeking soul just exactly what he needed to do to be a Christian.

**I. Was it illness?** Why did this man make his decision? If we can find out why, then perhaps you could make your decision for the very same reason that he made his. As we ask the question, "Why did he do it?", I know that the thought of illness and death comes to your mind. Many times people can be reached for Christ when they are in the hospital, or when they are sick at home, or when they know death is coming soon.

### *A Death Bed Example*

I am thinking right now of a man who was reached in Atlanta, Georgia a few years ago, when I was preaching at the East Point Christian Church. The man's wife made the request of me that I go to the hospital to visit her husband. He was dying, in fact, he was in the last stages of cancer and I fully knew the situation as I walked in the hospital room.

Having been briefed by the wife, I felt no reason to waste any time and so I came right to the point. I said, "Joel, are you ready to die and meet God?" Big tears came in his eyes and his chin quivered with emotion. It must have been five minutes before he could even answer me and finally when he gained control of himself, he looked me right in the eye and he said, "No sir, I am not ready to die, I am afraid to die." His chin began to quiver again and I said, "Joel, would you like to be a Christian?" and he said, "Sure, I would like to be a Christian, but I have waited until it is too late." I said, "Joel, it's not too

late. You are still alive, you can think, you can make your own decision. Do you want to be a Christian?" He said, "Yes, but I tell you it is too late," and I said, "Joel, why do you say it is too late?" He said, "Look at me, I am so weak that I can't even get off this hospital bed. Look at all these tubes and needles that they have stuck in my arms and legs. There is no possible way that I could ever be baptized. I have waited until it is too late and that is all there is to it."

I said, "Joel, if you want to be a Christian, you let me worry about how to baptize you. Give me the name of your doctor." He gave me the name of his doctor and I telephoned him right away. I explained to the doctor what Joel Chastain wanted to do, and it turned out that the doctor, himself, was a Christian and as soon as I explained why I telephoned, the doctor was overjoyed. He said, "You know, I was afraid Joel was not a Christian and I thought of speaking to him myself. I am so glad you are there and that he has made his decision. Certainly, he can be baptized." Then the doctor said, "If you would permit it, I would like to assist in the baptism." Well, I assured the doctor I would be more than glad to have his assistance.

He came right down to the hospital. The tubes and needles were removed and Joel was prepared and a couple of the male nurses in the hospital helped to carry him down to the physical therapy room, where a big pool had been prepared with water. In a few minutes the doctor and I lifted Joel Chastain off of the bed and gently put him down in this pool of water and there he was buried with Christ and raised up in newness of life. He was really happy and I have never seen a man witness any more joyfully than this man witnessed for Christ. He did not neglect to tell his story to a single doctor or nurse or visitor that came into that hospital. Everybody had to go to his room and hear how Joel Chastain had become a Christian.

The immediate result of his conversion was that we baptized six other adults into Christ, they had listened to his testimony and then made their decision. Everybody knew why Joel Chas-

tain became a Christian, he was a dying man and he was afraid to die without Christ. Now, I do not say that fear is the best motive, but I do not say that is an unworthy motive. Why do we have insurance, except that we are afraid of what might happen. Didn't our Lord Jesus Christ teach us to, "fear him, who is able to destroy both soul and body in Hell"?

I tell you the truth, I am afraid of going to Hell, but it was not fear that prompted the eunuch to become a Christian.

It was fear that prompted Joel Chastain, but not this man that we are reading about in Acts chapter 8. This man was not ill, he had made a long journey from his home in Ethiopia all the way to Jerusalem and now was in the process of going back home again in a chariot. This is not the sort of journey that a sick man would ever have attempted. He was not thinking that he was going to die right away, this man was strong and able bodied. So we have to search for another reason why he made his decision.

**II. A great sinner?** As we ask that question perhaps some are thinking that he was a terrible prodigal. It is a fact that when a man has become so deeply engulfed in sin, occasionally his conscience will get the best of him and in deep sorrow and remorse he may turn to Christ in order to get rid of a tormenting conscience. But as we search the scriptures we fail to find any indication that this was the reason.

### *A Good Moral Man*

To the contrary, this man was very good. The Bible informs us that he was the queen's treasurer in the 27th verse of Acts 8. So out of all of the citizens of Ethiopia, he must have been the one selected to be most honest and trustworthy of all. Furthermore, we learn that this man was a believer in God. He had made the long journey, all the way to Jerusalem, for one pur-

pose, to worship God. We also learn that this man read his Bible. As he journeyed back home again, he spent his time, not sightseeing, but he spent his time studying God's word. He was reading from the prophet Isaiah. This means he must have been a very prayerful man. I want to ask you this one question; are you as good as this man that we are reading about this morning? I hope that you are, but if you are, you are not good enough because neither was he good enough! He believed in God, he worshipped God, he studied God's word, he prayed. Everyone in the kingdom considered him a good, honest citizen so much so that he was the queen's treasurer. But all of these good points were not enough to take him to Heaven.

### *A Difficult Prospect*

This man represents the hardest type of a prospect to win to Christ. I tell you the truth, I would rather call in the county jail or state penitentiary any day than I would to go calling on a man like this, because you know what happens when we call on these good people. They will swell up with pride and they will say, "I don't know why you are talking to me, I don't know why you think that I need to be converted. I'll have you know that I am a good person, I believe in God, I go to church on Christmas and Easter, I say prayers whenever I am in trouble, once in awhile I donate to charities and I take care of my family and I pay my taxes, I tend to my own business, and I will tell you one thing I am a lot better than that bunch of hypocrites that go up there to that church."

How many times do you hear that story? I hear it everyday. I hear it from people in every town that I preach in. They are good people and I may even be preaching to some of them right now. Have I described you? Oh yes, you are good, you believe in God, you live a good life, but you are not good enough, because you don't have Jesus. This man was not good enough with all of his good points, because he didn't have Jesus.



Why did he make this decision then? It wasn't because he was a bad man. He was good. It wasn't because he was a sick man. He was strong and able bodied. It wasn't that he was afraid to die right away. He wasn't even thinking about death. Why did he make this decision?

**III. A love story.** It seems quite evident that it was because the world's greatest love story had really touched his heart. We all know how love appeals to the hearts of all people, everywhere. Can't you just see this learned man as he rode down the highway reading God's word and the very place of the scripture that he was reading was this, "He was led as the sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearers, 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." He could see that somebody loved somebody else a great deal. But, he didn't really understand just who the scriptures were talking about, and so his mind filled with wonderment.

#### *A True Love Story*

I think that the greatest love story that I have ever heard except for this love story of God in the Bible, occurred in Columbus, Ohio a number of years ago. A large family moved into the south side of the city. They had really known the tough breaks. Mr Paul, the father, had been injured in a mill accident and was unable to find employment. His wife had been an invalid ever since the birth of the last baby. The children had known what it was like to be hungry and to be without clothing and shelter, they had really suffered.

Some of the good Christians in the community found out about this situation and it was reported in church services on Sunday morning, and right away the Christians came to the

rescue. Some brought odds and ends of furniture, others brought clothing, and many brought food. Then somebody in the church used his influence with the city and got Mr Paul a light job that he was able to handle and so things really began to look up for this big family, who had suffered so very much.

In grateful appreciation they all began to attend the services at the church and then one by one began to respond to the invitation of Jesus. Almost every week for about eight straight Sundays, another member of that family would step to the front and confess the name of Jesus and be buried with Him in baptism. Finally every member of that family was a Christian except for the two who were very small and not old enough to understand.

Then one day the telephone rang in the preacher's study, the excited voice of one of the church ladies came from the other end of the line. She cried out, "Oh preacher, come quickly to the Pauls' house there has been an accident, they need you right away!" and so the preacher ran to his car and drove off as fast as he could and went over to the little two room shack where this big family was living. As he came to a halt, he noticed that Mr Paul was standing outside the door waiting on him and as he rushed up to the door breathlessly, Mr Paul grabbed his hands and said, "Thank you for coming, Preacher, we surely do need you today," and he motioned for the preacher to enter the room.

As the preacher stepped inside the little two roomed shack, he noticed at once that the room where he stood was the bedroom, a kitchen, a dining room, a play room, a wash room, an ironing room, a family room. It was just everything all in one. Out in the center of the room was an old rusty cook stove and its four legs rested on four little blocks of wood. Over in one corner was a table and around the table some old chairs and a few boxes and that is where the family sat to eat their meals. Over in the other corner was an old green iron bedstead and lying there upon the bed was little, eleven year old Ellen and she was

wrapped in bandages almost from the top of her head to the soles of her feet.

The preacher was so astonished he said, 'Why Brother Paul, what in the world has happened to our little Ellen?' Everybody in the church loved the little girl, she was the oldest daughter in this big family and ever since her mother had been an invalid, following the birth of the baby, Ellen had taken over the household duties. She cooked, she washed, she ironed, she babysat, she did everything. Nobody could understand how such a frail, fragile, undernourished child of 11 could do so much and be so cheerful about it. Consequently, the whole church loved her to a fault. You can imagine how distressed the preacher was as he asked, "What in the world has happened to our little Ellen?"

Mr Paul said, "Preacher, we are not sure just how it happened. She was getting ready to do the family washing. She had a great big kettle of hot scalding water there on the stove already to pour in the wash tub, but at the last moment for some reason she decided to sweep the floor. While she was sweeping, it happened! We don't know how. We think maybe the baby was crawling around and maybe he was playing with one of those blocks of wood underneath one the legs of the stove and somehow manage to loosen it, we are not sure. Ellen just happened to turn around and as she turned around she saw the stove was tipping to one side and she realized that the big kettle of scalding water was going to fall right on top of the baby and she knew it would scald him to death. There wasn't time to do anything and so she just jumped and fell across the baby and protected his body with hers and the water scalded her flesh to the bone."

### *The Greatest Love Story*

The preacher said, "Brother Paul, without a doubt this is

the greatest love story that I have ever heard except for one and the only one that is greater is that one in the Bible, where God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, Jesus, to save us from our sins. Remember, Brother Paul, how Jesus came from Heaven giving up all the glory that was His and He dwelled among us and suffered like we suffer and was tempted like we are tempted and then finally gave His life willingly upon the cross suffering in great agony so that we might have our sins forgiven and have a home in Heaven. That, Brother Paul, is the greatest love story of all."

Can you picture it, dear friends? That little 11 year old girl's love was supreme in her heart as she instantly made the decision that she would give her own life, if necessary, to save the life of her baby brother, whom she loved. Can you picture it then, this learned man, this Ethiopian riding down the highway in his chariot, studying God's word, but not understanding what he was reading? At that point Philip came and beginning at the very same scripture preached to him Jesus. He told him all about how Jesus had come and how Jesus had lived, about His miracles, about his teachings, about His death, His burial, His resurrection, and about how Jesus wanted us to be His followers, and it was at that point that the Ethiopian said, "Here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?" Philip said, "If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest." He said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." And so they went down into the water, both Philip and the eunuch and he baptized him. 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, because he had made life's supreme decision for destiny.

That very same decision you need to make this Lord's Day morning. "Jesus is standing in Pilate's hall, friendless and forsaken betrayed by all. Hearken what meaneth that sudden call, What will you do with Jesus? What will you do with Jesus? Neutral you cannot be and someday your heart will be asking,

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‘Jesus what will you do with me?’ ”

Let us bow our heads and pray:

Our Father in Heaven, we are thankful for this congregation of Christians, who have been willing to sponsor this evangelistic campaign. We thank Thee for the work that they have done for Thee, for all of the preparations that they have made, for the many calls that they have made in the homes of the people of this community. Now we pray that those who have received the visits and who have listened to their words, have reached the moment when they will be willing to decide and come forward and publicly confess Jesus’ name and be baptized just as this man was that we have read about in Acts 8. We also pray that they might decide today, to place their membership and to continue their service for Jesus through this congregation in this town where they now live. May this be a great moment for many to decide. In Christ’s name we pray, Amen.

Shall we now stand and sing the hymn and will you make your decision by stepping right out and coming to the front even as we sing the very first verse.

