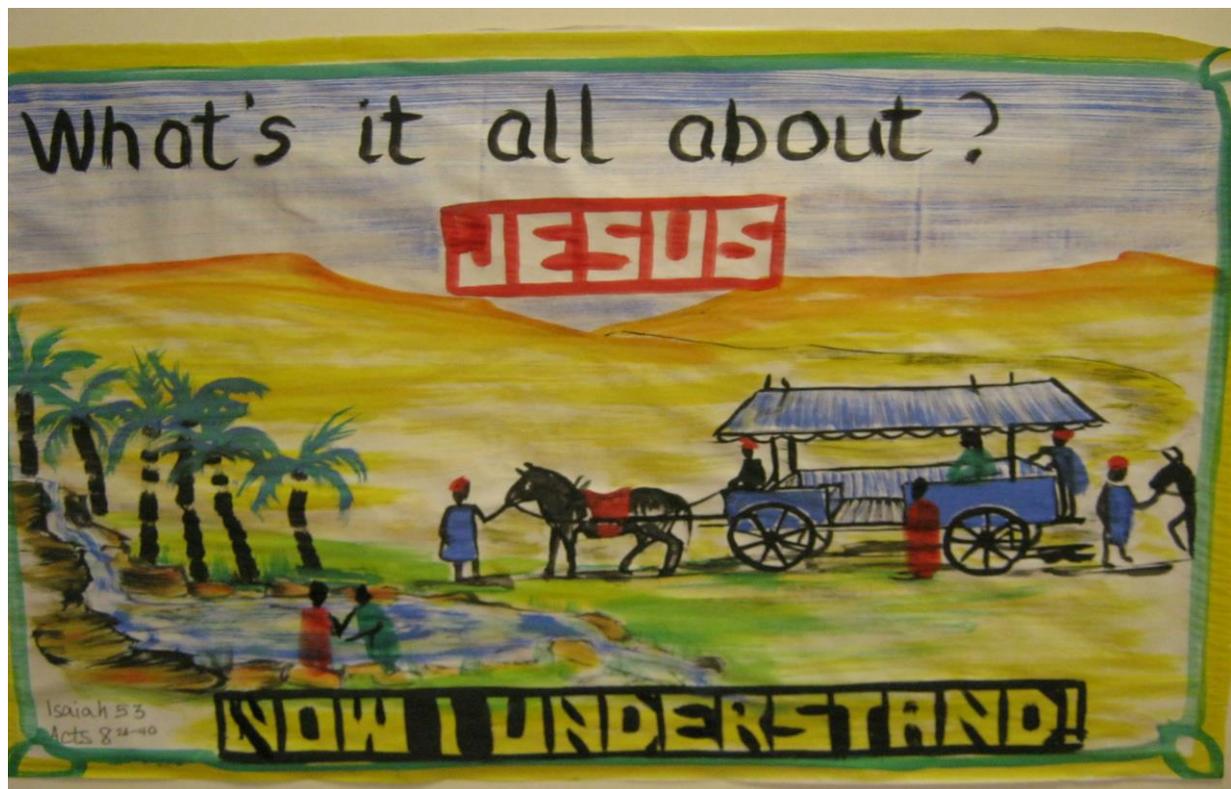


PHILIP AND THE ETHIOPIAN
Acts 8 v 26-40 (cf Isaiah 53)



Props: A globe or large Atlas, a scroll, a book.

Introduction: Have you ever looked at a book or something on screen and thought this>
(*Paint in top headline*) **What's it all about?** I know I have.... I've thought "I just don't GET it!
It doesn't make sense! What are they talking about?...."

I left school about 50 years ago. I didn't say "Well, that's it! I don't ever have to learn anything ever again!" That would have been a bit silly, wouldn't it? There is so much yet to discover – and there still is, all these years later! Korky has been learning all that time, too, and has written a couple of books about it all! It was like that for this very important official from Ethiopia: he was REALLY important, he was Chief of the Treasury for Queen Candace of Ethiopia, so he was a very trustworthy and well-educated person. He had come all the way from Ethiopia (*If you have a globe or an Atlas, point out where it is*) to Jerusalem, in order to worship God. That's a huge journey even today. While he was in Jerusalem he'd got hold of a scroll. Our books today are like this special New Testament of mine, aren't they? (*Show book*) They have pages, and Chapters, and as we learn to read we can begin to understand what's in them. He had a scroll – all written in Hebrew! A scroll was rolled up, a bit like this bit of paper here, (*show scroll of paper*) so you had to unroll a bit at a time as you read it. If someone gave me some Hebrew writing, I couldn't read it.... I can read English, but I can't read other scripts.... Hebrew's written from right to left, not the way we write... and he was stuck. He was a very clever man, but he couldn't work out what it was about at all.

So here he comes down the old road from Jerusalem to Gaza, on his way home. He's got a special carriage, and probably several more following, and probably some soldiers to protect them all. And as they rumble slowly along, he's trying to make out what the writing says in his scroll. He's thinking (*indicate top headline again*) *Let's read it together....* **"What's it all about?"**

One of the disciples, Philip, was listening to God. God said to him "Go down the old road, the one that goes from Jerusalem to Gaza, there is someone there I need you to talk to....". The old road went through the desert. Off went Philip jogging along, and ahead of him he could see a cloud of dust... as he got nearer he realised it was a caravan of travellers. Not a caravan like you see people on holiday in nowadays, but a group of people with camels and wagons travelling along together. As he got closer still, he found he was jogging alongside the wagon with the Ethiopian Official in it. "Shalom! Hi!" called out Philip: "What are you reading?" "Shalom!" replied the official. "I've got this scroll written by one of the old prophets, Isaiah, but I don't understand it at all...." "Would you like me to explain it to you?" asked Philip... "Well, YES, that would be wonderful.... thank you!". So he stopped the wagon, and Philip climbed in, and as they went along, they looked at the Scriptures together.

(*If time you could read from Isaiah 53*).

"So, said the Ethiopian, (*Indicate top headline again, and get the children to read it out*) **"What's it all about?"** "It's a long story" said Philip "But it's about this person here.... (*fill in JESUS*). Let's read his name together.... JESUS. The story was written a very long time ago, when Isaiah was told by God about his special son who would come to save us all and make it possible for us to be friends with God again...."

You know the story, don't you? About how Jesus was born, and how he grew up, and the wonderful things he did – what kind of things? Healing people, teaching people about his Father God, explaining things.... and then how the Authorities decided to get rid of him and have him killed.... remember? And Christians believe that he came alive again on the third day – that's what Easter time is about, isn't it? That's why Christians get excited about knowing Jesus!

So as Philip explained the Scriptures, the Ethiopian got more and more excited.

When we don't understand something, we need to ask for help – and if we do understand, and we see someone who doesn't quite get it, we can offer to explain, can't we? That's what our teachers love to do, to explain things clearly, so that at last we say this:

(Complete bottom line and get the children to read it out) **Now I understand!** And it feels great, doesn't it, when you suddenly see what it's all about? YES! GOT IT! Now I understand!

The Ethiopian felt just like that. What did he say? Let's read it again together: “**Now I understand!**” And then he said to Philip “Well, what do I do now?”

Philip explained that once somebody has decided to believe in Jesus and follow him, he needs to be baptised. Does anyone know what that is, baptism? *(Explain, filling in details of what a child may have said).*

They could see some green trees in the distance. They were approaching an oasis. What's an oasis? A place in the desert where there is water. It was lovely – a pool of water all fresh and cool. “What's to stop me being baptised here and now?” asked the Ethiopian. “Nothing at all,” replied Philip, “If you are sure you believe in Jesus, in his Father God, and in his Holy Spirit, and want to be a true follower of Jesus from now on, all your days...” “Yes, I do!” said the Ethiopian. So they stopped the wagon again, and he and Philip climbed out, and went into the water. It depends how deep it was – Philip might have dunked him under the water completely, or he might have cupped his hands in the water and poured some over him. It's a picture of being washed clean, not just on the outside, but on the inside, too. Christians talk about it as if they had died and come alive again – to start a new life, as followers of Jesus. They have said sorry about all the wrong things they did, and want to live a new life....But before anyone can do that they need to find out as much as they can about him... which is why I tell you these stories! I keep finding out new things about Jesus even now, and it's still exciting.

So the Ethiopian continued on his journey home. To this day there are Christians in Ethiopia who probably trace their faith back to him. There are amazing churches carved out of the solid rock, deep in the ground, which have been there for two thousand years..... The Ethiopian didn't see Philip again – and Philip found himself somewhere else, telling the good news to someone else he was very good at it!

Prayer: