

377-6\*-82\*\* is a very important number to me. Can you guess what significance there is in those numbers? It's not a phone number...it's what Uncle Sam calls me. You see, there are a lot of Mark Schulz's living in the US, and so when I fill out official documents like tax forms and wage statements, the government identifies me by calling me not Mark Schulz, instead I have the privilege of being named 377-6\*-82\*\*, my Social Security Number. Nothing makes you feel more important than having a 9-digit number assigned to you.

Actually this world does a good job of making us all feel like just another number, going through the rat-race called life. At the convenience store on 301 in Oxford, the manager, says to everyone who buys something, "Have a wonderful day!" At first I felt really special when she said it to me. But then I realized, that she says that to every customer who buys something. In fact it is said so many times that it really doesn't mean much. Maybe, it's happened to you, when you have bought something, and they say, Have a nice day, it's said, like, here is your order, now get out of here. Our world has a way of making us not feel very important, we are all just numbers. In the old days, when the phone rang, you were excited, family and friends are calling us. But today, you have to screen your calls, because there are so many robo sales calls that get our number and are trying to sell us something. Those telemarketers don't want to be our friend, they are calling to in some way separate you from your money. Do you ever feel that you are 377-6\*-82\*\* and many of the people who show interest in are really more interested in what they can get out of you?

And maybe sometimes in a bigger Village church, you don't feel all that important either. You might think that nobody even notices if you are there or not. Recently, we have had people join our congregation, because we are smaller, people know people, and the pastor even comes to see you in the hospital. God wants you to know today that you are precious to him. The Lord doesn't see you as just another number to he has to deal with. He doesn't pester or flatter you because he wants to get something out of you. God has an interest in you, not because he wants to take your goods but because wants to give you eternal treasures. God used a man named Philip to show a lonely foreigner how precious he was to God. And the Lord Jesus uses you to show other people just how important they are to God. "More Than A Number To God!"

When you take a stone and throw it into a lake, what happens to the water? There's kind of a gulp as the stone plops in, but then the waves begin to go out in a perfect circle Then those circles get bigger and bigger, spreading farther and farther away from the center. That's what was going on in Philip's day. At Pentecost, all of Jesus' believers were in Jerusalem. In not too long a time, persecution happened, and the believers were scattered. But that wasn't a bad thing, because they went out like ever expanding circles. The first mission field after the Jews were the Samaritans. Philip got a congregation going in Antioch in Syria. The Holy Spirit blessed Philip's work, the church in Samaria was just going bananas. Kind of like the Villages. A new church starts and before long it doubles in size. There were so many new Christians there that the Apostles Peter and John came from Jerusalem to help Philip with this huge successful Samaritan church. A mega church in Antioch. However, the Lord knew that it was time for that expanding circle to get even bigger. The Jews had the Word, the Samaritans had the Word, and now it was going to be given to other races as well. And so we see the first verse of our text, "Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, 'Go south to the road – the desert road – that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.'" I don't know what Philip was thinking when he received this

command.\, but I would have thought something like this: “Things are going great here. I’ve got tons of people to work with and share the Gospel and help them grow in faith. And now God wants me to go hang out in the desert?” But you see, God doesn’t view people as just an insignificant number. Each soul is precious to him. And there was one struggling soul that needed Philip’s attention. He was the Ethiopian eunuch.

Do you know what a eunuch is? A guy who was fixed, who wouldn’t be having any kids. And you might wonder what on earth is going on here. Why does the Bible make a point to 6 times in this text refer to him as a eunuch? In the ancient world which was ruled by royal families, sometimes high officials in government were required to be eunuchs before they could hold high positions. That seems really weird to us, but it gave the royal family peace of mind, because the king knew that he wouldn’t have to worry about one of these fixed officials murdering him and taking over the throne and setting up his own royal family. So there was a little logic to this strange practice. It was kind of a mixed blessing.. Yes, there would have been a lot of power and money and honor, he had the good job and the big house, but it would have been a very lonely life, with no family to come home to each evening. There would be no Mothers Days celebrated at his house, no Fathers Days, and any birthdays he would have celebrated by himself.

And this eunuch would have felt even more unspecial during his trip to Jerusalem. Yes, he was a wealthy man, but his black skin would have made him stand out. I wonder how many people stared at him, or how many mean comments and jokes he overheard as he walked by. And you’d think, well, at least when he got to church, that sort of thing would go away, but eunuchs were forbidden by the Law or Moses to become full Jews. They could come near the Temple, but they couldn’t go through the gates. Could you imagine how well that would go over here at Open Bible, where we would ask people with certain medical conditions that they were welcome here, but they couldn’t come into the worship sanctuary. They would have to wait in the Welcome Center and catch as much of the service as they could hear through the double doors. So the eunuch had traveled for many miles to learn about the Triune God, but the closest he could get to church was the door. Maybe that’s why he bought a scroll, but it wasn’t doing him much good because he didn’t understand it.

I imagine that it was a frustrating trip to Jerusalem. This eunuch might have felt like he was just another number; maybe the person who sold him the scroll muttered a “have a wonderful day,” but he knew that nobody really cared about him. Whoever showed any concern had probably noticed his nice rich clothes and was just after this money. But the Lord loved this lonely man. So Philip was taken out of a very successful church in order that this one valuable soul would understand God’s plan of salvation.

The Holy Spirit speaks directly to Philip and tells him to go to that chariot and stay there. See him walk up to the chariot. See him walk alongside the chariot as it is traveling south on this desert road from Gaza to Jerusalem. Interspersed with sound of the clip clopping of horses hooves is the voice of the Ethiopian reading from the prophet Isaiah. He was reading these well known words about Jesus. “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. In his humiliation he was deprived of justice. Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth.”

Philip asks him if he understands what he is reading. The Ethiopian says he needs someone to explain what these words mean. Was Isaiah speaking about himself or was he speaking about another person? Can't you hear Philip's heart pounding with joy and excitement?

Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus. He told the Ethiopian that Jesus was led like a sheep to the slaughter. Jesus was like the lamb being sheared that did not protest and open his mouth. Philip had the opportunity to direct this man's attention to the sacrifices he had seen in the temple in Jerusalem. Those sacrifices pointed to the ultimate sacrifice, Jesus. Philip had the opportunity to speak about Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Here is a religious man seriously looking at what he can do to save himself. Philip has the privilege of pointing that the Ethiopian can do nothing to save himself. He is saved only through the death and resurrection of Jesus. That is how his sins are forgiven and he can have peace with God.

This message was totally different from what this man heard from religious leaders in Jerusalem. They told him about rules and regulations of Old Testament law and extra rules and regulations of the rabbis. They told him if he followed these rules he could be accepted by God. Philip told him the truth. Don't you think he had this man read the verses before this in Isaiah 53 that pointed out clearly the need for a Savior? "We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all." Word by careful word he showed him how this place he was reading predicted the death that Jesus would die for the sin of the world including the sin of his past life. This one black, wealthy, eunuch was more important to the Lord, than a number.

You are not just a number to God. The fact that you are sitting here in God's house today proves that. How many things did God do for you to make sure that you would be here today? What Philip did God send into your life to explain Christ's work for you, his death for you, his resurrection for you? Whom did God put into your life to make sure that you were baptized? Who took time to teach you the Scriptures so that you would be ready to take Holy Communion? The world out there is mostly just interested in taking your stuff. God, here in his house, wants you to know that he is interested, not in taking stuff away from you, but in giving things to you. God wants you to know that in Christ, he has given you a seat at his heavenly table. No matter what your sins, they have been taken care of, and so you will be with the Lord forever.

Remember the famous line from the movie Forrest Gump- "Life is like a box of chocolates, you never know what you are going to get." Witnessing to Jesus is like a box of chocolates. You never know what privileges or surprises are going to come to you. Jesus knows. From the right hand of his heavenly Father he is micromanaging your life and mine. He will lead us to people just as he led Philip to the Ethiopian. He will even give us his Holy Spirit to say the right words to people at the right time.

So Christian, Look for the chariots in your life. Keep your eyes open. Every soul around you matters. To God and to us, everyone is more than just a number.