

Rev. Dr. Niveen Sarras
The Ethiopian Eunuch in Acts 8:26-40
April 29, 2018

My big sister in Belgium called me last week crying because her doctor informed her that she might not have children. She experienced two miscarriages. My sister and her husband are having fertility issues. Both of them are heartbroken.

Infertility is never easy on women and men. It is harder for men because they usually suffer in silence. But women can express themselves and find more help than men.

The Ethiopian official, who met Philip on the road to Gaza, was a eunuch.

"Eunuchs were excluded from participation in Temple rituals and full admittance, as proselytes, into Israel's community."¹ "The Law had proscribed men with crushed, mutilated, or missing genitalia from full participation in Israel's worship (Leviticus 21:20; Deuteronomy 23:1)."²

The Ethiopian official was infertile. He suffered in silence. He struggled emotionally and physically. He grew up without experiencing puberty. He began his work in the Ethiopian Queen royal court. He longed to have his own children, but he was unable. He was sick often and grew fragile because he lacked

testosterone. He also experienced discrimination on the basis of his sexually ambiguous.

The Ethiopian official enjoyed wealth and a high status in his community. He was in charge of all the treasury of the Kandake (which means “queen of the Ethiopians”) (v.27). His position and wealth did not make him happy or comfort his heart. He felt inferior because he was a eunuch, infertile. The Holy Spirit led Philip to meet him while he was reading about the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 53. Philip explained to him that this passage of Isaiah talks about Jesus Christ.

The evangelist Luke, the author of the book of Acts, wrote this story for a purpose. He intentionally talks about Ethiopian black man, and eunuch, who was specifically reading a passage from Isaiah. Luke is telling us that Jesus Christ fulfills the prophecy of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 53 and he also fulfills the prophecy in Isaiah 56:3-5

Do not let the foreigner joined to the LORD say,
“The LORD will surely separate me from his people”;
and do not let the eunuch say,
“I am just a dry tree.”
For thus says the LORD:
To the eunuchs who keep my sabbaths,
who choose the things that please me
and hold fast my covenant,
I will give, in my house and within my walls,
a monument, and a name
better than sons and daughters;

I will give them an everlasting name
that shall not be cut off.

“Isaiah, however, envisioned redemption for the sexually ambiguous. In the eschatological restoration of God’s people, eunuchs would be brought within God’s house and given a name greater than sons and daughters.”³

The story of the Ethiopian eunuch shows that the promised age of restoration has begun. Jesus restores the eunuch and takes his shame on himself. The Ethiopian eunuch was infertile and thus suffered from the stigma of living without a child. Since ancient times, many infertile men feel "stigmatized because they are perceived as being deficient in a specific component of their masculinity."⁴ Sadly, many cultures teach that man's masculinity is strongly connected to his ability to conceive. This teaching leads infertile men to experience emotional stress, anger, and anxiety which affect their marriage.

The narrative of the Ethiopian eunuch invites us to fight the social stigma and culture that undermine infertile men and women. Jesus does not see infertile man as less masculine but fully man with dignity. Jesus honors infertile men and women because they are created according to God’s image. Jesus redeemed them on the cross and took upon himself their stigma. Those who do not have biological

children to carry their names, Jesus will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off.

It is incredible that Philip would baptize a man who is undermined and stigmatized. Baptism is a sign of exclusiveness. All believers are equal in the eyes of God. The Jewish religious leaders prevented the Ethiopian eunuch from worshiping with them in the temple, but through baptism, he became a full member of the church. The evangelist Luke shows us that the barriers have been broken down. A new age has just started. What was considered unclean is now clean. What was despised is now honorable. The grace of God through Jesus is fulfilled in the story of the Ethiopian eunuch. Jesus' grace is available to all who believe in him.

Fertile and infertile men and women are included in Christ family. Jesus honors and loves them equally. Our identity and wholeness are not in our ability to procreate but in our status as children of God who created us according to God's image.

¹ [Mitzi J. Smith](#), "Commentary on Acts 8:26-40" Workingpreacher 2012

² [J.R. Daniel Kirk](#), "Commentary on Acts 8:26-40," Workingpreacher, 2018

³ [J.R. Daniel Kirk](#), "Commentary on Acts 8:26-40," Workingpreacher, 2018

⁴ Esmée Hanna¹ and Brendan Gough, "Experiencing Male Infertility: A Review of the Qualitative Research Literature," *SAGE* (October-December 2015: 1–9),6.