

14. Real Power Evangelism

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Date: 05 April 2009

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[0 : 00] with me, if you would, to Acts chapter 8 and to the passage that we read together. That's page 917 in our Vista's Bibles. A passage which teaches us all about real power evangelism.

It's often a crisis that reveals the truth, and we saw last week that the crisis of persecution that erupted in the church after Stephen's martyrdom revealed the church very clear about its true priorities and purpose and power.

They were clearly in step with the Spirit of God, because as verse 4 says, and it begins with the word therefore, that's missing in our versions, therefore, that is because of the scattering, those who were scattered went about preaching the word, preaching the gospel of Jesus.

Not really formal preaching, but sharing the message of Jesus. And just as one example of that, Luke, the writer, focuses in on Philip, one of the seven that we were introduced to in Acts chapter 6. And really the whole chapter is about his experience. It begins and ends with him, verse 5 and verse 40. It's rather like a bracket. And first of all, we saw last time in Samaria, what went on there, when our other credulous and superstitious people who were formerly taken up with magic and mesmerized by Simon the sorcerer, when they're struck by the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[1 : 29] Verse 12, he preached to them the good news about the kingdom of God in the name of Jesus. And en masse, they believed, and they found real salvation, full salvation, just as the believing Jews had done.

And at verse 26 now, the camera focuses in, in a kind of close-up shot, in a rather different situation altogether. Out in the desert, and just with one man.

This time it's a man of rank. He's a thinker, he's a reader, he's a serious seeker. But once again, it's the power of the gospel of Jesus, as verse 35 tells us, that turns his whole life around and fills him with the joy of the Holy Spirit.

And Luke is recording all this for us so that we also might be sure, that we might have certainty. Remember, that's what he says in the first few verses of volume one of his book, Luke's gospel. That we might have certainty.

Certainty about what's still true about the church's true priority. And certainty about what is the church's true power. Our priority is not preservation of ourselves in the face of opposition, nor promotion of ourselves, as it was with Simon, seeking power and gifts for himself.

[2 : 53] No, our priority is the proclamation of the good news about Jesus Christ. He wants us to be certain of that. And also, he wants us to be confident. That we would have confidence in the real power of the church for that mission.

And for all progress in our own Christian mission, and in our own Christian lives and growth. And that power is not the power of magic, or of mighty works, as Simon was so taken up with.

But rather, it's the power of the message. The message of Christ in all the scriptures. So, if we are to be Christians, and indeed churches, who are walking in step with the Spirit of God, as these believers were, we need to pay heed to what Luke is teaching us about the certainty of our true priorities, and the confidence that we can have in the true power that God has given to the church. And that's what this story today hammers home to us. It's all about real power evangelism. I want to look at it under three headings that really split the three sections that you'll see here that all begin with God's initiative.

Verse 26, the angel, God coming to Philip with the angel. Verse 29, the Spirit guiding Philip. And verse 39, the Spirit once again taking Philip away.

[4 : 12] It really begins very unexpectedly, doesn't it? And that's our first heading, a strange command. Verses 26 and 27. A strange command that reveals the priority of God's Spirit in seeking man, but also the problem for the human spirit who is seeking God.

Think first what Luke is telling us about the priority of God's Spirit. The great persecution scatters God's people, and Philip finds himself in the midst of this mighty revival in Samaria. Must have been a wonderful experience for him too, mustn't it, as well as for them. But what a strange command suddenly to get from the Spirit of God. Apparently this time through an encounter with an angel, however that happened, but telling him to leave all of that behind and go away down into the southern desert.

And in the blistering heat of day, you'll see the footnote there in verse 26, tells us that the south, the word there translated south literally means to go at noon.

It's because at noon the sun was directly in the south, and therefore that's what the word came to mean. Go off to the desert at noon. Well, surely only mad dogs and Englishmen go in the desert at noon in the midday sun.

[5 : 29] Well, why on earth would God want Philip to go and do that? Well, God's ways are not our ways, and there is a reason. Not an Englishman, but an African. An Ethiopian, in fact.

Well, actually what we would call modern-day Sudan, most likely. Now, Philip didn't know that he was going to be there, did he? But God did. And here's the thing that we're to notice in all of this. People matter to God. Individual people, I mean, not just numbers. It's not just a fact of multitudes being saved in some area that matters to God.

God's not interested in that. He's not the God of statistics. He's the God of real people with names and families and life stories and with living futures. And that's a very wonderful thing.

Our God is not, as seems to be the God of some religions, He's not a distant, unknowable despot that we're to fear. He's not a God who we can only vaguely hope that on the last day we might possibly share in a degree of His mercy.

[6 : 34] No! He's the God who tells us He is the good shepherd who goes and seeks for His sheep. He knows His sheep by name.

And He's the shepherd who, if he loses even one lost sheep, will lay aside all other concerns until he goes out and finds that lost sheep and leads him home. Remember Jesus' parable about that in Luke 15?

If you've never read it, read it this afternoon when you go home. And you see, Philip, the evangelist, is in step with this God. He shares the heart of God and therefore he shares the priorities of this God.

And he realizes that God must have a purpose in this call because he knows that God gave His Spirit for witness. Remember Acts 1.8? You will receive power, says Jesus, when the Holy Spirit comes upon you and you will be my witnesses here in Jerusalem, in Judea and Samaria, and indeed into all the world.

And so because he knows God's priorities, he trusts God's call. And so verse 27, he arose and went. He knows the Spirit is carrying him and encouraging him and equipping him and empowering him for God's purpose of witness.

[7 : 54] It's very different from an email that I received this week inviting me to go to have an encounter with the Holy Spirit at a particular meeting in Glasgow. And it was full of all the experiences for me as a Christian that this was going to give me.

But there was not a word anywhere about the real priority and purpose of why the Holy Spirit was given. To seek and to save the lost. To preach the good news of Jesus Christ to those who have never heard of Him.

But that is the priority of Jesus and His Spirit. And of course, Jesus not only spoke like that, but He lived like that too, didn't He? Do you remember John chapter 4 when Jesus said, I must go through Samaria.

Why? Because He must meet that one woman with all her problems in the middle of the day. at the well. Luke in particular in his first volume, his gospel, he tells us so often of those that Jesus went out to seek.

Individuals with all sorts of problems. And right from the start of His ministry, we read that He's reaching out to lepers, to Levi the tax collector, to Zacchaeus, another crooked tax man, to people with demons, to a sinful woman, even at the very end, to the thief on the cross beside Him as He's being crucified.

[9 : 14] You see, our God is not a God who says, well, I don't have any time for obscure places. I'm not interested in small people, unimportant people, difficult people, people with problems.

Now, He said to the Pharisees who weren't interested in such, He said, I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. And that's the priority of God's Spirit in seeking man.

But you see, these verses also show us, don't they, the problem for the human spirit in search of God. Verse 27 makes plain for us that this man is a serious seeker.

He's come all the way from Africa, from Sudan, over a thousand miles in a carriage. Not a Ben-Hur chariot, but an ox wagon that just goes at walking pace.

That would have taken him weeks and weeks, probably months, to get to Jerusalem. He was a serious seeker, wasn't he? And he was a real thinker, it seems. He was a reader. He's investigating seriously the things of God in reading the Scriptures.

[10:18] I think we have to assume, probably, he's investigated many other religions before he would come all that way to Jerusalem to seek the truth there. He's been unsatisfied, no doubt, with all the things he's found in his own land and in the pagan lands round about.

It's not as if he's a needy man in a material sense. He's a chancellor of Ethiopia. He's the lord of the treasury, for goodness sake, in charge of all the treasure of the queen. He's an intelligent man, articulate, able, a great man, a noble man.

But like that other great noble man we read of in the Scripture, Naaman, the leper, there's a great but, isn't there? He was a eunuch, we're told.

And that was a real problem. Not so much for the obvious reasons that he could have no family in the normal way, but because it was a real and impossible impediment to him seeking the real God that he had come all that way to find.

How's that? Well, the Old Testament law was very clear. No eunuch could ever enter the assembly of the Lord. It's there in black and white in Deuteronomy 23, verse 1.

[11:33] And Luke tells us quite deliberately, before he tells us of his high position, that he was a eunuch. And I think we can be absolutely sure that this man knew that. He's a reader, avidly, of the Scriptures.

And that didn't mean, of course, that no eunuch could ever be saved, but it did mean that in this world, no eunuch could ever participate fully in the family of God. He could never really be part of God's church, a fully-fledged member of the family.

So he could be a God-fearer, but he couldn't be a real convert to Judaism. He couldn't have been a true proselyte. He could never have gone into that inner court of the temple where only the Jews could go.

And that's a real problem, isn't it? Especially for a man of rank. He could walk into the treasury of Ethiopia. He could walk in to have an audience with the queen anytime he wanted, no doubt.

But he couldn't get near the real presence of the one true and living God. He's disqualified and excluded. And what's more, he's ignorant, you see.

[12:40] For all his intelligence, as we'll see, he can't understand properly the message of God's great salvation. Even though he's read the Bible many times, no doubt. In a sense, what we have here is a picture, isn't it, of all human beings, even those who are in search of God, genuinely.

Because the Bible says all have fallen short. We're excluded. We're therefore disqualified from God's presence. We're all blind to the truth, too, because God has given people over to futility in their thinking because of their sin and rebellion.

God is a holy God, as we sang in that psalm. He cannot open his doors to sin and to defilement. And that's why there was this rule about eunuchs. It wasn't random discrimination.

It was to serve as a picture, really, to show that God requires purity and wholeness, that nothing unnatural, nothing marred by sin could come into his presence.

And that kind of ritual castration was a pagan thing. It was forbidden by God. So here's a serious seeker doing all that he can to find God and he can't do anything by himself at all to really get in to where God really is.

[14:02] And yet, he who is seeking is already being sought. The great shepherd has already found his lost sheep, hasn't he? He's lost, he's disqualified, he's ignorant, he's empty.

And that's the irony, isn't it? He's been all that way, months of travel to come to Jerusalem, to the temple, and yet he's going away empty, having found nothing. He hasn't found God there.

And that's because religion that's without the presence of the living God is empty and barren. And God had abandoned his temple because in Jesus Christ the temple was now obsolete. Because Jesus himself is now the living temple, the only place where you can meet with the presence of the

living God.

But here, the living God himself is out in the desert seeking his lost sheep. And Philip, in step with the Spirit of God, recognizes that priority. And so he leaves behind, as it were, the ninety and nine, the revival in Samaria.

And off he goes into the desert to seek the one that Christ has set his eyes upon. Now just a pause for a second. Isn't there enough even in that just to leave us rejoicing this morning?

[15:18] What a revelation of the personal love of God for real people, for individuals. That's what ministry is all about, you know. I often say to folk who are talking about and considering full-time ministry, if you're not lit up by people, by real people, individual people, then it's not for you.

Ministry is not about the pulpit, it's about people. It's only about the pulpit in so far as it relates to real people and has something to say to them. That's why I find the very best times of the year are the times when we're interviewing those who are joining us as new members of the fellowship. Listening to real people, hearing their stories of what God's done in their life, hearing what the Spirit of God has been doing. That's what it's all about. And what a wonderful message, you see, because if you're somebody who's seeking God, regardless of what problems, regardless of what real barriers there may be in your life, in the past, and even in the present, then here's the thing. God is already seeking you. He's seeking even those who are totally disqualified from coming to Him.

It must have been very painful for that eunuch, don't you think? To know that he could have everything and yet he could not have that one thing he was seeking. The intimate presence of the true and living God.

[16:47] And it's so for all of us, isn't it? Especially when we start reading the Bible for ourselves like he was doing, we find there are so many things that would exclude us from God, don't we?

For example, 1 Corinthians 6, when Paul says, Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Don't be deceived. Neither the sexually immoral, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, none of these will inherit the kingdom of God.

Pretty sobering, isn't it? But, said Jesus, those who are well don't need a physician. And I came not to seek for the righteous, but to call sinners to repentance.

The good shepherd is out seeking the lost sheep. But what's he seeking them for? Well, verses 39 and 40 tell us he's seeking them to transform them in order to call them to belong fully and completely to the family of God, to enter a new life with the joy of the Holy Spirit, the thing that belongs to all of those who are in God's true family.

Because that strange command from God's Spirit leads to nothing less than a sincere conversion by God's Spirit. A sincere conversion that reveals the purpose of God's Spirit and mission, but also the plan of God for his people and calling them also into his mission and to join it.

[18:23] Notice the similarity of verse 39 to verse 26. It's the leading of God's Spirit that begins this encounter and ends it, isn't it? There's absolutely nothing arbitrary about what happens here.

There's no chance encounter. Everything here has a plan and a purpose. And that's true, you know, about every single encounter that you and I have with other people when we have an opportunity to share the gospel with them.

And that also goes for you if you just chanced in this morning to this church. You thought you chanced in, but God has a plan for you. He brought you here. And the purpose of God's Spirit here, as it always is, is that people's ignorance about the message of the gospel should be dispelled. And that things that exclude and disqualify from the presence of God should be removed completely and forever. And that's what happened to this African man. Verse 38 tells us he was baptized.

That symbolizes a death. A death to his whole previous existence. Death to the old Ethiopian eunuch excluded, ignorant about the truth.

[19:30] And into a new birth. And a whole new life filled with the Spirit of God united intimately with the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. Nothing could separate him anymore.

And that's the point of his question in verse 37. What prevents me from being baptized, he says. Well, as we'll see in a minute, he'd been reading Isaiah chapter 53.

And Philip started there and explained to him the gospel, the good news of Jesus. And the Lord could hardly have arranged a better passage of Scripture for him to be reading, could he? The

message of the servant who saves God's people by his own sacrifice.

It could hardly be a better place for anyone, but especially for this particular man. Because just a little bit further down that scroll in Isaiah, where we read about the wonderful salvation that's ushered in by the triumph of God's servant.

Just a little bit down the scroll, we read these wonderful promises for those who are in need, for those who are in disgrace, for those who are excluded. Listen. Sing, O barren one.

[20 : 35] Break forth into song those who have not been in labor. Or this. Come, you who have no money. Come, buy and eat. Wine and milk. Rich food without price.

And then this. Let not the foreigner say, the Lord will separate me from his people. Let not the eunuch say, behold, I am a dry tree.

For thus says the Lord, I will give them a monument and a name better than sons and daughters. I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off. These I will make joyful in my house of prayer, says the Lord, who gathers the outcasts of Israel.

That's why God sends out his workers for the lost sheep. Even for the disgraced, the excluded, the sickest of the sick. Yes, it's true.

As Paul says, the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God. Read that list again in 1 Corinthians 6. It's devastating to all of us. And yet he goes on, and such were some of you, but you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

[21 : 54] And that's what happened here in this man's experience. That's why God sent Philip to find him in the desert. Listen to how Paul summarizes his experience in Titus chapter 3.

When the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us. Not by works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and the renewal of the Holy Spirit whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior. So that being justified by his grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. A new beginning, you see, and a new belonging as a true heir of God.

And that's why verse 39 is full of joy, isn't it? It's a new beginning. It's the rejoicing that is the true mark of a sincere conversion by the Holy Spirit.

Notice too, the contrast between him and Simon the sorcerer that we read of last time. There's no joy in his experience that we read of. He follows Philip around everywhere. He wants to get hold of the secret of power so that he can have it and abuse it and use it to influence others.

[23 : 07] But this man isn't obsessed with that. Philip's taken away from his sight. That doesn't affect him one bit. He goes on his way rejoicing, we're told. No doubt, to join in the mission of God by sharing that wonderful news with others in his homeland.

And that is God's plan for his people. That's his purpose. It's that we should be transformed and that we should join in and be taken up in his great plan of the proclamation of that great gospel all through the world.

And Philip, too, doesn't stop. Verse 40 says, he goes on proclaiming the gospel wherever he goes. He knows that he's just a link in the chain and when the Spirit removes him to Azotus, whether that's naturally, he finds himself in the next town or whether there's something supernatural, it doesn't matter.

He's just going on the same way, in step, with the gospeling priority of the Holy Spirit. And friends, that's still the plan and purpose of God.

His Spirit is given that people might be sincerely and soundly converted and join in that great mission to others also. And it's happening today as never before, isn't it?

[24 : 20] Not just ox carts now that take people around the world, but jumbo jets and super jumbos. And all over the world people are being brought to places where they will hear the message of the Lord Jesus. Even here to Glasgow, to our own city.

Into our own lives, even into our own church building. Ethiopians, Africans, people from all over the world. Sometimes they're coming from places where there's only ignorance and no understanding at all of the things of Jesus Christ.

But lives are being transformed by just the same encounter with the Holy Spirit of God, according to God's plan. And people are going back to their own lands, the places they come from.

And God is doing that today, whether it's people from Charing Cross or China, whether it's from Newlands or people from Nigeria. He's doing it. And he's doing it every day. And you never know

when God will be doing things like that, but you can know that he will be doing it. It's the purpose of his Spirit to be at work through us like that. And it's his plan that those who are touched like that should also be taken up and used in the same way. Even in apparent chance encounters.

[25 : 33] Even if that encounter is apparently very unpromising like it was here right in the desert with very unpromising material, just like that eunuch. Never forget reading about Charles Simeon, the great Anglican preacher of former days who was once touring around and preaching in Scotland.

And he went to a very small unimportant village in Perthshire and he gave what he said afterwards was a very uninspiring sermon. He went home that night and was utterly depressed. But a bit later on he heard that that night a young engaged couple who were contemplating marriage were both touched by the message and converted.

And they covenanted together that any child that they would have would be dedicated to the service of the Lord Jesus Christ. And who was their first born son to be? One another than Alexander Duff, one of the greatest missionaries from Scotland to the land of India whose influence and whose fruitfulness was immense.

God is the God of individuals, unimportant seemingly individuals in obscure and apparently unimportant places. And he changes and transforms lives.

But how does that transition come about? Well that really is the heart of the story, isn't it? From verses 29 to 39 again beginning with the prompting of the Spirit.

[26 : 57] It's all about a strategic conversation, isn't it? A strategic conversation that reveals the real power of God's Spirit and also shows us the process of spiritual awakening.

It's an illustration really of what the Bible teaches us so plainly but what we find so difficult to really believe that it is the simplicity of proclaiming the Lord Jesus Christ from all the Scriptures that is the power of God for salvation to them that believe.

That transforms people and changes their lives forever. What an amazing providence. Here's a man that comes into Philip's view in the most unlikely place in the middle of the desert.

And what's he doing? He's reading the Bible. And God is often doing preparatory work, isn't he? In the encounters that we have with people. God is at work all the time providentially ordering the whole universe so that people are prepared to receive the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Sometimes God does it here in Glasgow by arranging the Scotrail timetable just so that people have just enough time between trains to wander out of Queen Street and see our church and think, well, maybe I'll nip in there for the next hour while I'm waiting for my train.

[28 : 13] Sometimes he does it because he arranges the bell in our church to be ringing just when somebody happens to be coming past the door and they think, well, maybe I'll just pop in and see what goes on there. And so here, God has arranged for this man to be reading the Bible.

But he can't understand what he's reading. That's not because the Bible is a hard book to understand, but it is because it's a spiritual book. And so you need spiritual sight in order to grasp what it's speaking about.

You need to have the key. And the key to the Bible is the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. And unless you come to the Bible seeking the Lord Jesus Christ, well, you're going to be baffled because you need to have the eyes of your heart open.

That's why you can have clever professors teaching all sorts of things about the Bible and apparently knowing it inside out, but not having the faintest clue about the real message of the Bible. You can have people teaching biblical studies who are utterly spiritually blind.

And Paul tells us, you see, that there is a veil over the message unless Jesus removes it. He also tells us that the devil blinds the eyes of those who disbelieve to the plainness of the truth.

[29 : 26] So a teacher is needed. God himself, by his Spirit, must unblind the eyes of our hearts. Now he can do that in a flash as we'll see in chapter 9 on the Damascus Road, but normally, here's the great joy, the privilege, normally he involves us in that process.

And here Luke is showing us that to remind us that the priority and the purpose of the Spirit's work is to do exactly this and to remind us that that is the task that we share in. There's a great similarity here in this story, isn't there, with another story that Luke tells us.

Do you remember? In the very last chapter of his Gospel, Luke chapter 24, when two disciples are despondently walking down the road and a stranger appears. And remember?

He interpreted to them, says Luke, in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. It was the risen Jesus. And the lights came on and the disciples said later on, did not our hearts burn within us as he opened to us the Scriptures?

And then later on, Luke tells us the same thing happened with all the disciples. He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. And Luke's showing us that's what he's doing here too.

[30 : 39] Jesus still is in the business of opening minds to understand the truth. And he does it by his Spirit as his people open up the Scriptures to others.

And that's just what Philip does here. It's so simple, isn't it? Verse 35, beginning with this Scripture, he told him the good news about Jesus. Not the Jesus of popular imagination, notice, nor the Jesus without the Scriptures, nor the Scriptures without Jesus.

But Jesus, the true historical Jesus, as the Christ whom the Scriptures promised. And that's what changed this man's life forever. And if ever there were a strategic conversation, this is it, surely. Imagine if that conversation had never happened. Imagine if Philip had heard some idiot saying that stupid thing that's apparently quoted from Francis of Assisi.

Oh, preach the gospel always, but only use words if it's really necessary. Imagine if Philip had just smiled at that man and said, oh, can I share some of my food with you?

[31 : 49] Or, can I sympathize with you? Can I just share your pain as we sit along together in silence? Well, that man might have had a nice time with Philip, but he would have gone back to Africa with total fog in his mind, total ignorance, and still under the curse of God.

Isn't that so? Or imagine if he'd just seen the man in the distance and said, oh, there's a pagan man. I wonder if he knows anything about Jesus. I know, I'll just pray for him that God would open his eyes.

Well, same thing. But he didn't. I'm sure he did pray, but he spoke, didn't he? And he asked that crucial question in verse 30, do you understand what you're reading?

He said to this total stranger, has anyone ever really explained to you the gospel of Jesus? And when he did, God opened his eyes and he was born again forever.

And friends, that is the power of God's Spirit at work, doing the greatest miracle that you or I will ever see in this world, bringing somebody from death to life eternal, bringing somebody from under the curse and the wrath of God to belong as a child of God forever.

[33 : 06] And look at how Luke shows us this process of spiritual awakening as it unfolds. This is a view into the delivery room of the new birth, as it were. You see, it all hinges around these three questions.

First, verse 31, how can I understand, he says, without someone to guide me? You see, the gospel is, first of all, isn't it, an appeal to the mind. It's a truth that has to be grasped.

It's our minds that must be opened so that we can understand the message of Jesus, the gospel. And that's why all the evangelism that you will find in the New Testament is teaching evangelism. Real power evangelism isn't magic.

It's not the mighty works that change people and convert them, even when those signs of the apostles did accompany their message to authenticate it. We saw it in Samaria, and it's the same here.

It's when minds were opened to the truth of the gospel that hearts were changed. The gospel is an appeal to the mind. But it's not just an intellectual thing, not at all, and that's clear here.

[34 : 11] Hearts must be changed. And the gospel grips a man's mind in order that it may change his heart. And you can see that in the second question of verse 34. About whom does the prophet speak, he says.

You see, that's not just an intellectual question, is it? He doesn't just say, well, tell me more about this philosophy, this religion. No, what he's saying is, who is this wonderful person that I'm reading about?

I want to find him. I want to know him. I'm drawn to this man. I must have this man. You see, his heart is arrested about the truth, about the Messiah. Well, of course, you see, because the heart of the Christian gospel is about a relationship with the living God.

It's about knowing the Savior. It's not about dry religious dogma. It's about a real living experience of God in Christ. Simon, you see, Simon had wanted to exercise power.

But this man wants to know the Savior, Jesus Christ. Because the Christ of the Scriptures was gripping his heart. And as the message came home to his mind, his heart was aroused and stirred.

[35 : 23] But then, you see, as Philip opened the Scriptures to him and as the Spirit opened his mind and his heart to the Savior, so also the appeal of the gospel has a grip on his whole life and being. His will is being bent to the Lordship of Jesus.

That's why he says this third question in verse 37. What prevents me from being baptized? I want to respond, he's saying, by showing that I'm repenting. I want to show that I'm giving my whole life to Jesus, my Savior, but he is also my Lord, my ruler, my commander.

It's what the New Testament calls the obedience of faith. And this is the process, it's the anatomy of real, genuine spiritual awakening.

A mind that's filled with the truth of God in Christ. And then a heart that's thrilled with the love of God in Christ. And then a will that becomes thrilled to the will of God in Christ.

And that's what happened to this man and like so many others all over the world, all through the years, even today, quietly and simply, in the obscurity of that desert road, this man entered the kingdom of God forever.

[36 : 36] And his baptism signals a total change. The old has gone and the new has come. Now friends, that is real power evangelism.

That's what Luke's telling us. That's why the gift of God's Spirit is given to the church. Not to give excitable Christians ecstatic experiences, but to transform the lives of totally lost, excluded pagans forever.

Why is this matter here in our Bibles? Why has Luke written it down for us? Because as I said at the beginning, he wants us to have certainty and he wants us to have confidence.

Certainty that the priority of the risen Jesus in sending his Spirit into the world is that he would seek and save the lost, even the excluded, the disqualified, the ignorant, the misfits.

And people like that can be very high up in the world, as well as very low down in the world. And that's what this story shows us. And you know what that means? That means that if you are somebody who's like that, who is seeking and searching, then it means that he is already searching for you.

[37 : 53] And it's what you need. And above all, what you need is for somebody to open the Bible with you. You need a teacher to open to you the message of the Lord Jesus Christ so that you might find him.

And it means that we as a church, if we're in step with the Spirit of God in our Christian lives, we also will share that priority of God's call to seek and to save the lost. Even if it takes us to strange places and apparently hopeless places, apparently places where nothing is happening.

Even if he takes us away from places which seem to be far more exciting and thrilling. And maybe if God is taking you to a strange place, to a place far away, to a different place that seems very unexciting, well that will be why he's doing it.

But we can have certainty that that is his priority and the priority of his Spirit in the church to seek and to save the lost. Second, he wants us to have confidence.

Confidence that that truly transforming spiritual power lies not in dazzling signs and wonders, which others like Simon the sorcerer can certainly replicate and claim to have.

[39 : 04] Nor is it in strength or knowledge or intellect. No, true power evangelism lies in the simplicity of speaking the truth about Jesus, the speaking about the Christ of the Scriptures and sharing that good news about him with other people.

This Ethiopian was probably very highly educated. He was probably a man full of the knowledge of the arts and literature of the ancient world, full of the culture of the Queen's Court, the world of ancient Greece and Rome with its poets and with its writers.

But he was led to Christ by Philip out in the desert, by a man who very probably had very little experience of any of those things at all. Friends, Luke is saying to us, don't lose your confidence. Don't feel that you couldn't possibly evangelize some impressive figure because they've got more education than you or more knowledge than you or they're more intellectual than you or anything else.

Doesn't matter in that sense if you're not on their wavelength. You can have confidence in the power of God for salvation. Confidence in the power of the Holy Spirit to totally transform lives forever and ever.

[40 : 25] Because you know the Lord Jesus Christ yourself in your life. And because you can speak a living message about the Christ who came to seek and to save the lost. Real power

evangelism, Luke is telling us, begins when you and I ask that question of verse 30.

Do you really understand the Bible? Can I perhaps explain to you the message about Jesus Christ? That's where it all begins.

Who knows what strategic conversations God might open up for you and me this week at work or in the family or in this building when people come in to visit in numbers, particularly during this coming week.

This man, in a chance encounter, so it seemed, a man he'd never seen before and never saw again, this man was asked that question by Philip.

And it transformed his life for eternity. And he went on his way rejoicing. Well, may it be so for many, many more.

[41 : 30] God's life for you and God's life for you and God. Because of our certainty about our God-given purpose and our confidence in our God-given power, the message of Jesus Christ in all the scriptures.

Let's pray. Our Heavenly Father, how we rejoice that you are the God who seeks and saves the lost, who goes out and gives all for the lost sheep that they might be brought home, who has come to seek and to save every one of us.

And if there are any of us this morning, O God, like the Ethiopians, seeking and searching and needing our eyes to be opened to understand the message of Jesus, to find his love, to rejoice in the joy of his family, so would you give every searching soul the light of your grace and an understanding of the message of Christ in scripture.

We might all know the transforming power that is for this life and forever through Jesus Christ, our risen Savior, in whose name we pray.

Amen.