

The Good News About Jesus, For All

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Preacher: Paul Brennan

[0 : 0 0] Well, we turn now to God's Word, and we are in the book of Acts, and Acts chapter 8, I'm reading from verse 26. If you're using one of the blue Bibles there in the seats, it's number 917, page 917.

Now, if you were here last week, we were in the first half of chapter 8, as the gospel went beyond the bounds of Jerusalem and Judea and into Samaria.

And it was Philip, one of the six appointed by the apostles in chapter 6. He goes out into Samaria and starts to proclaim the gospel in Samaria.

And we pick up the story, he's still in Samaria, in verse 26. Now, an angel of the Lord said to Philip, rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.

This is a desert place. And he rose and went. And there was an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure.

[1 : 1 6] He had come to Jerusalem to worship and was returning, seated in his chariot, and he was reading the prophet Isaiah. And the spirit said to Philip, go over and join the chariot.

So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, do you understand what you're reading? And he said, how can I unless someone guides me?

And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. Now, the passage of scripture that he was reading was this. Like a sheep, he was led to the slaughter.

And like a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he opens not his mouth. In his humiliation, justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation?

For his life is taken away from the earth. And the eunuch said to Philip, about whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this?

[2 : 1 5] About himself or about someone else? Then Philip opened his mouth. And beginning with this scripture, he told him the good news about Jesus.

And as they were going along the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, see, here is water. What prevents me from being baptized? Baptized. And he commanded the chariot to stop.

And they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch. And he baptized him. And when they came up out of the water, the spirit of the Lord carried Philip away.

And the eunuch saw him no more. And he went on his way rejoicing. But Philip found himself at Azotus. And as he passed through, he preached the gospel to all the towns.

And he came to Caesarea. Amen. It's the word of the Lord. Well, please do turn back to Acts chapter 8.

[3 : 1 7] And we'll spend a few moments thinking about these verses that we read from verse 26. Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch. How does someone become a Christian?

How does someone become a Christian? Think about your own conversion if you're a Christian here this evening. How was it that your life has been so transformed?

How is it that you've gone from living for your own dreams and your own desires to living for Christ and his glory? I suppose that most of us, as we reflect back, as we think back to the time when we became a Christian, it will be a combination of things.

A person, maybe a friend or a family member, a colleague. They spoke to you about Jesus. They invited you to church, perhaps. And as you heard more about Jesus, as you perhaps read the Bible, you came to see that the gospel, the announcement of Christ's victory on the cross, his vindication, his resurrection, his reign over all now that he's ascended.

You came to realize that there was a choice to be made. To follow Jesus, to seek the forgiveness of your sin and submit to his rule over your life, or to walk away, to believe or to reject.

[4 : 42] And as we look back, as time goes on, as we reflect, we see how, through it all, God was leading. He was directing all the time. And it is thrilling, isn't it, as we think about our own conversion, but also as we see others coming to faith.

Nothing brings greater joy, does it, than seeing new life in the church. Perhaps a friend of yours, or a colleague, a child, maybe a parent. To see a life transformed for Christ, it's thrilling.

To see God at work in the life of individuals. And God loves to see individuals, to see people brought into his family. God loves to save.

And that is what we see in our passage this evening. It's astonishing, isn't it, that God would take Philip in the midst of great fruitfulness there in Samaria, and send him to the middle of the desert to speak to just one man.

But you see, God delights to save sinners. He delights to save one man. He delights to save individuals. And so, as the gospel, the unstoppable gospel, makes continued advances beyond Jerusalem, into Judea, Samaria, and beyond, it is real people that are being brought to salvation.

[6 : 06] Real people are hearing the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Real people are repenting and being baptized. That's what we see here in Acts.

It's not just numbers. It's people. Individuals. So let's listen to God's message to us today from this passage. Four things to learn and let sink into our hearts about the God who delights to convert.

Four things about his great gospel of salvation. Four things that bring us great certainty and confidence in our own evangelism. But more importantly, certainty and confidence in God's purposes to bring many to salvation in him.

So four things. Number one, God's gospel advances at God's direction and drive. God is the one who takes the initiative in the progress of the gospel.

God is the one who is directing and driving all that we read in this account. It's clear all the way through. Look at verse 26. Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, rise and go towards the south, to the road that goes from Jerusalem to Gaza.

[7 : 20] Look on to verse 29. And the spirit said to Philip, go over and join this chariot. Just think about the very passage that the eunuch is reading there in his chariot, Isaiah chapter 53.

He couldn't be reading a better passage. How is it that he ended up reading that passage? Well, the Lord was behind the scenes leading, directing. Look on again to verse 39 at the end of the passage.

And when they had come up out of the water, the spirit of the Lord carried Philip away. And the eunuch saw him no more and went on his way rejoicing. But Philip, he found himself at Azotus.

And as he passed through, he preached the gospel to all the towns until he came to Caesarea. Now none of this happened at Philip's own initiative. This wasn't his idea.

It's all the Lord's leading, all the Lord's direction. He determines the opportunities for gospel growth. Now on the one hand, that's very comforting, isn't it?

[8 : 22] To know that God's in control, he's the one leading and directing. But it's also extremely perplexing. Think about Philip. It would have seemed to him that he was been taken away from where all the action was.

Remember, he was right there in the midst of things in Jerusalem, right there at the hub. Back in chapter 6, we read about him as one of the seven appointed by the apostles to help manage the needs of the church there in Jerusalem, which was literally exploding.

Thousands of converts. Lots and lots going on. Very encouraging. But in the next chapter, Philip finds himself in Samaria of all places. But again, as we saw last week, there's great fruitfulness.

Many are converted. Many brought to Christ. But again, Philip is sent on. This time, he goes to the middle of the desert. He must have thought, mustn't he?

It must have crossed his mind at least in passing. What on earth is going on? Why am I being moved from Jerusalem to Samaria and now to the middle of the desert? What's going on? Why am I being taken from the center of the action?

[9 : 35] Why am I moving to these places I don't really want to go? What have I done wrong to deserve this? First Samaria, now the desert. But the Lord was behind it all.

He was the one orchestrating this extraordinary encounter. This very unexpected encounter between Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch. You see, it's the Lord.

It's the God of Israel who is the great missionary in the book of Acts. It isn't Peter. It's not Paul. It's not Philip. It's the Lord. He's the great missionary.

He's the one directing and pushing things forward. And he sees the big picture. And he puts his people right in the place he needs them to be at the right time.

You see, he has the advantage of seeing all things, of knowing all things. He doesn't have the constraints of being creatures like we do.

[10 : 30] God's plans and purposes seem to us, don't they, at least some of the time, absolutely perplexing. But we don't see the whole picture. Perplexing for this congregation to lose that building six years ago.

But we've seen since. God knew what he was doing. How could God's plans be anything other than perplexing to us?

We're prone to forget, aren't we, that we are just so small and limited. We really are. We are so fooled by our advances in technology. And they have been substantial.

But we are not God. We don't get to see all that he sees. Just think about the parent-child relationship. The decisions I make, the things I make my children do, must absolutely baffle them.

Why do I have to brush my teeth twice a day? Why do you force porridge on me every single morning of my life? Why can't I eat cereals that contain half my body weight and sugar?

[11 : 34] These things baffle them. But they're only children. They have no idea. And I do. But how much more with us and the God who made us?

Between us and the God who grants us our every breath. The God who sees all things, knows all things. So yes, we will be baffled and perplexed by his methods and his directions.

But he sees so much more than we do. He knows so much more than we do. And that is a great comfort. He directs our paths in evangelism.

The place where you live and work is not an accident. The people you're friends with, it's not a mistake. The family you've been brought up with. God knew that.

He's in control. And he may just send us to unexpected places for the sake of one unlikely person. But we can go with confidence knowing his overarching purposes are to bring his gospel to the end of the earth.

[12 : 38] So that many will be saved. That's his plan. That's his purpose. And everything he does is to that end. So perhaps even in this week ahead, we may find ourselves in an unlikely place with an unlikely person.

And I presented with an opportunity to share with them the gospel, to witness to Christ. God's grace. God's grace. So I'm thinking this week, who am I seeing?

Who am I going to encounter? And there are some people I know about, but others I don't. God's in control. He's the one driving and directing his gospel advance.

That's the first thing. Number two, God's gospel is carried by willing Christians. So yes, God's gospel is absolutely directed and driven by the Lord.

He is the one who takes the initiative. But he uses willing Christians in that task. And notice again that Luke is emphasizing that it is Christians, ordinary Christians, not the apostles, that are used in that task here in chapter 8.

[13 : 49] We noticed that last week, didn't we? Back at the start of the chapter, following the severe persecution in Jerusalem, it was Christians who were scattered across Judea and Samaria, except for the apostles.

They stayed in Jerusalem. So it is Philip, a non-apostle, an ordinary spirit-filled Christian who heads into Samaritan territory with the gospel on his lips.

He's willing. The angel of the Lord said to him, rise and go towards the south to the road that goes from Jerusalem to Gaza. And what does he do? Verse 27, he rose and went.

He was willing. He was willing to leave the great encouragement of great gospel growth in Samaria and head to the desert. Because he knew, he knew that God's mission priority was sending him there.

He knew that God was at work bringing his gospel to the end of the earth. And this was no trip across town. Philip, at this point, was probably 30 miles north of Jerusalem when he got this instruction.

[14 : 57] So he'd have to walk back to Jerusalem. And then from there, he would take the road out to Gaza, which is over 50 miles away. And that was a good few days journey, I can tell you.

My school had this ridiculous, ridiculous routine every year. Lower six students would have to do a 50-mile walk at the end of their exams. So we'd get dropped off at Brighton and have to walk back to school.

And it took about 14 hours, non-stop. So for Philip to walk from where he is here to the middle of the desert, that was no short task.

It would take him a few days, hard work, to the middle of the desert. But he was willing, willing to run up to this chariot when instructed, willing to engage this man in conversation, willing to explain the scriptures to him, to declare to him the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And it is, Luke is eager to underline, it is the very same gospel. It's the same gospel that's been proclaimed in Jerusalem. The same one that's been proclaimed in Samaria, it was a gospel, a message that was, in the first half of chapter 8, authenticated by the apostles.

[16 : 13] And we saw this last week. We saw that as the gospel broke that significant geographic marker, as it went into Samaria, it brought people, as it had done in Jerusalem, it brought them to repent and to receive forgiveness for their sin.

And to demonstrate in the clearest possible way that it was the very same gospel, the apostles go down from Jerusalem to Samaria, and they lay their hands so that those who believed in the same gospel, as proclaimed by the non-apostle, will receive the very same gift of the Spirit.

So whether by heritage a person was a Jew or a semi-detached Jew, there is only one way of salvation. And it doesn't matter whose lips it comes from. Luke is emphatic on that point.

It is the same gospel. So the gospel doesn't need to come from the lips of an apostle to be the authentic gospel. That is why in chapter 8, verse 4, we read that ordinary Christians, as they're scattered, go about preaching the word.

See, God doesn't need eloquent Christians. He doesn't need good-looking Christians. He needs willing Christians. He needs willing Christians.

[17 : 33] And of course, he can and does use Christians that are eloquent. But the emphasis is on the willing. So for us today, we don't need some special preacher by our side to proclaim Christ.

As Philip didn't need an apostle right by him in that chariot, we also don't need a superstar Christian with us to proclaim the gospel. We don't need Rico Tice sit beside us as we handle our colleagues' questions at work.

We don't need the late John Chapman to sit with our neighbors, chat with them over the fence. Now, it's not to say we can't learn from such people. But the power, the power of the gospel does not rest with them.

The power is in the gospel itself. So it can be taken by willing Christians wherever they go. So the question is, are you willing?

Are you willing to go? Are you willing to speak? Not, are you extremely intelligent? Not, are you super eloquent? No. Are you willing? Willing to go and willing to speak?

[18 : 44] And it does require speaking. God's word. It needs to be explained. That is how God builds his church. You can't understand Christianity without understanding the Bible.

And Philip knew this. And so he unpacks the passage from Isaiah. And he shows how the key to understanding the Bible is the Lord Jesus Christ. So Philip speaks.

He communicated the good news about Jesus through words. Doesn't just let us live to the talking. So when you and I, when we're seeking to communicate the gospel, the good news, we're to use words.

Why not invite somebody to read the Bible with you? Use the word one-to-one notes or whatever you're comfortable with.

Ask them. Have you ever seriously read the Bible as an adult for yourself? Are you willing to? Are you willing to examine the evidence? Just offer them.

[19 : 46] Offer to read it with them. And remember, the power does not reside with you. The power is in the gospel. It's in the words itself as the Holy Spirit opens people's minds and hearts to the truth.

The power is in the words. So God's gospel is driven and directed by him. And it's carried by willing Christians. Number three.

God's gospel is about a suffering savior. And we see here in this passage something of the content of the gospel. We, in fact, get to the very heart of the matter.

You see, the eunuch could not have been reading a much more apt passage of scripture. Now, we'll think about him in our final point. But what he's reading here is of such significance.

Notice what it is that Philip speaks to the eunuch about. The eunuch is reading in his chariot. And as Philip runs up, don't imagine he was Usain Bolt.

[20 : 52] This wasn't a chariot been driven by a fleet of white stallion. It wasn't like a scene from Ben-Hur. It was more likely pulled by an ox. So it's tootling along. And Philip runs up to the slow-moving chariot.

And he asked the eunuch, Do you understand what you're reading? And here is what he reads from Isaiah 53. Like a sheep, he was led to the slaughter.

And like a lamb before its shearer is silent. So he opens not his mouth. In his humiliation, justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation?

For his life is taken away from the earth. And the eunuch says to Philip, About whom, I ask you? Whom does the prophet say this? About himself or about someone else?

Who is he talking about, says the eunuch? Who is this suffering servant? Philip then goes on to explain how these words find their fulfillment in the Lord Jesus Christ.

[21 : 55] He told him, verse 35, He told him the good news about Jesus. And Philip's gospel, as we've seen, is the very same gospel that the apostles have proclaimed in Jerusalem.

And so Luke answers for us the question, What kind of Messiah was going to be presented to the non-Jewish world? As the gospel went on beyond Jerusalem, what kind of gospel, what kind of Savior was going to be proclaimed?

And according to Philip, it's the very same Messiah that the apostles spoke about. The one who was crucified in weakness for our sin, like a lamb led to the slaughter.

The one crucified in weakness for our sin. Jesus suffered so that we might be saved. As Peter says in 1 Peter 3, For Christ also suffered once for sin, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the Spirit.

The apostle Paul, in his letters to the Romans, put it this way, For while we were still weak, at the right time, Christ died for the ungodly.

[23 : 17] For one will scarcely die for a righteous person, though perhaps for a good person, one would dare even to die. But God shows his love for us that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

That is the unchanged gospel that you and I, like Philip, are to speak about. It's the gospel of a suffering Savior. So are you clear on the gospel?

Is this the gospel you share with others? of the Son of God come down to earth? A sinless one who died the death that we ought to die.

He died in our place for our sin. Is this the gospel we're clear on? And we can have great confidence in the power of the gospel.

It is the power of God for the salvation of all who will believe. It's the gospel that the eunuch accepts and believes. So I wonder this evening, have you accepted and believed?

[24 : 25] Do you know, like he did, that Christ died for you, for your sins, that you might have everlasting life? Do you know that?

God's gospel message is for everyone. And that is what we see in our final points. God's gospel is for outsiders.

God's gospel is for outsiders. Now the human character at the very center of this story is a real outsider. He's described for us there in verse 27.

An Ethiopian, a eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, and he was in charge of all her treasure. And for the second time in this chapter, and for the second time in Philip's recorded ministry, one individual is honed in on.

In the first half of the chapter last week, it was Simon, the magician. And here it is the Ethiopian eunuch. And both were men of power and influence. Remember Simon?

[25 : 35] All the people paid attention to Simon. He wowed them with his magic. And the eunuch is a man of power too. He's the chancellor of the Exchequer in Ethiopia.

But there are two quite contrasting responses to the same gospel. And this man, the Ethiopian eunuch, he was a real outsider. Not only was he from Ethiopia, but he was a eunuch.

We're not told his name, but we are told repeatedly five times that he was a eunuch. Now a eunuch was a man who had been castrated.

And only eunuchs were allowed to serve in the Ethiopian queen's court. But eunuchs were also disbarred from being priests in the temple.

You can read that in Leviticus chapter 21. They were also barred from being part of the assembly of the temple due to on May 23.

[26 : 35] They couldn't go into the temple. And so, as we read about this particular eunuch, we know from verse 27 that he was returning from a trip to the temple in Jerusalem.

Jerusalem. So this Ethiopian, he understands something of the God of Israel. He's willing to travel to Jerusalem to worship there in the temple.

But it would have been a trip for him that would have physically reinforced for him that he was not yet fully a member of God's people. He would only have been able to get so far as he approached the temple, but no further.

He was a foreigner, presently unable to enter the temple. He would have felt like a real outsider to God's people. But he would have been an outsider with hope.

A hope that was now fulfilled with the coming of Jesus. You see, God's gospel of salvation was never merely for Israel. There was also, there was always a wider focus.

[27 : 41] Israel was to be a shining beacon to the watching world so that all who flung themselves upon God's grace would be accepted and welcomed in. And that was the pattern right the way through the Old Testament.

Sinners who sought forgiveness, those who humble themselves and throw their lot in with God's people. They're included. Think about Rahab. Think about Ruth.

And there was even hope for an Ethiopian eunuch. You see, he was reading here in Isaiah 53. And if you flick on just a few chapters, you come to chapter 56.

And in that chapter, you read scriptures that would have been a great source of joy to this Ethiopian eunuch. He would have latched onto these words, hoping, looking forward to their great fulfillment.

So listen to these words, just three chapters on from Isaiah 53. Thus says the Lord, keep justice and do righteousness, for soon my salvation will come and my deliverance will be revealed.

[28 : 51] Blessed is the man who does this and the son of man who holds fast, who keeps the Sabbath, not profaning it, and keeps his hand from doing any evil. Let not the foreigner who has joined himself to the Lord say, the Lord will surely separate me from his people.

And let not the eunuch say, behold, I am 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 never be cut off. And the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord, to minister to him, to love the name of the Lord and to be his servants, everyone who keeps the Sabbath and does not profane it and holds fast my covenant, these I will bring to my holy mountain and make them joyful in my house of prayer.

Wouldn't those have been wonderful words for that eunuch to read and know as Philip sits with them and unpacks the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ to know that that day that Isaiah looked forward to has now with the coming of Jesus begun.

All those hopes and promises in Jesus find their fulfillment. And so this story of the eunuch coming for living faith in Jesus is a clear demonstration that the gospel is indeed for all.

[30 : 26] There is no barrier to anyone coming to Christ. No nationality is off limits. No class of person is beyond salvation. Jesus calls all who by nature are excluded forever and that's all of us but for the grace of God.

Jesus calls all who by nature are excluded to belong to belong to his people and all who respond to that call are made holy through the Lord Jesus Christ.

any sinner who repents any is welcomed in even the pagan outsider even this Ethiopian eunuch.

The only barrier the only barrier to salvation is a stubborn refusal to submit to the call of the gospel. And so the answer to the eunuch's question there in verse 37 what prevents me from being baptized?

the answer is nothing. In his case nothing prevented him. Nothing prevents anyone from coming to Christ. The only thing that does is a refusal to lay aside your own pride.

[31 : 41] A refusal to acknowledge sin and repent. That's the only obstacle. A refusal to submit to him. A refusal to seek forgiveness from him alone.

See God delights to save sinners. That is God's greatest desire that many should know salvation in Jesus.

Even you. Even your next door neighbor. Your colleague. Your family member. The gospel is for all. And it is the gospel that is powerful to salvation.

salvation. So have certainty. Have certainty about that and about the fact that speaking the truth about Jesus is God's chosen method for building his church.

Bringing many to salvation. What Philip does there doesn't look very powerful or important but it was powerful for salvation. Have certainty about that.

[32 : 41] So let's all of us be willing servants with the gospel on our lips. Confidence because God's in control. He's the one leading and directing. And he will use even our weak looking evangelistic efforts.

And have confidence because when Jesus is proclaimed people are saved. Amen.

Let's pray. Father we thank you for your word.

We thank you that it brings us great certainty and confidence about your gospel and about your delight in saving sinners. Today your gate is open and all who enter in shall find a father's welcome and a pardon for their sin.

The past shall be forgotten, a present joy be given, a future grace be promised, a glorious crown in heaven. Lord thank you for the great gospel of your Lord Jesus Christ.

[33 : 57] And Lord would you give us confidence to have it on our lips and to speak it with great confidence. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.