

Relentless Gospel: Philip and the Outsider
Acts 8:26-40 Patrick Murphy

Reading: Acts 8:29-33

Intro:

We are in Acts 8 this morning, and the chapter is an important pivot point in the Gospel's advance in our world. We began two weeks ago commemorating Stephen's death and Saul's persecution of the church. The Samaritans received the Gospel, and Simon's counterfeit faith contrasted genuine faith. Despite the speed bumps in opposing the Gospel's advance, it has remained relentless. Nothing has stopped the message of Jesus from saving. Today the Gospel again moves out of Samaria and into the Gentile world.

Do we have a sense of ownership when reading the events of Acts? Do we read it with joy knowing the contents of these stories are our lineage? We ought to. The humble begging of the church is our humble beginning as the church. Kelsey and I have a book in our house called "The Thortens and Wheavers" it's a huge book put together on my grandma's side of the family about the entire family tree. Kelsey, Peyson, and I are in there, and although brief, our names are in the book. The events of that family, although distant from me, are still the events of MY family. In the same way Brothers and sisters, the events and happenings recorded in this book are the events and happenings of the family of God. Our family! The story today is no different.

Nothing hinders the Gospel's advance or his children's inclusion in his family. It is God who precedes the message, and it is God who welcomes his children home.

Let's pray

God Calls Personal Evangelists.

Acts 8:26-27a “²⁶ An angel of the Lord spoke to Philip: “Get up and go south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” (This is the desert road.) ²⁷ So he got up and went. There was an Ethiopian man,”

In the last story, Philip was at the heart of a county-wide revival. Can you imagine the excitement and joy of watching persons and families coming to believe in Jesus and baptized in His name? Then in the heart of the revival, God sends an angel and says to Philip, "Its time to go." The God of surprises, surprisingly, surprises Philip again. Get ready and head south to the Desert Road. Two roads lead to Gaza from Jerusalem, the first being the one following the coast, the second being a less traveled road heading south before heading west to Gaza. The angel tells Philip to take the road less traveled, and based on the nuances in Greek, "go south on the road" can mean at midday. This is truly an odd request, given the revival taking place around him, yet he does it. Why?

We can infer Philip's joy is tied instinctively to God's leading more than the results of what God has led him to do. God called him to be an Evangelist like Billy Gramm in Samaria, preaching on hillsides, towns, and villages, but his next task is scaled down. "There was an Ethiopian man" **God wanted Philip to meet with one man.** God calls him to be a personal evangelist.

There have been few “Billy Gramms” in the world, and still few will ever have an opportunity to speak to multiple people about Jesus at once. Instead, God calls personal evangelists. Disciples who share the Gospel one person at a time. God calls Philip to relational evangelism, “I want you to talk with one man.”

This message is not a guilt trip into sharing your faith. I don't need to do that because the Spirit is perfectly capable of convicting you all on his own. Instead, I want to equip you for when you obey the call to go. We'll start by apprehending what the Gospel is capable of doing. The good news about Jesus efficiently bridges social and cultural divides.

The Gospel Bridges Cultural and Social Differences.

Acts 8:27-29 “There was an Ethiopian man, a eunuch and high official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of her entire treasury. He had come to worship in Jerusalem ²⁸ and was sitting in his chariot on his way home, reading the prophet Isaiah aloud. The Spirit told Philip, ‘Go and join that Chariot.’”

The man, an Ethiopian, from the land the Bible often refers to as Cush, and today is Sudan and South Sudan. I know that's not today's Ethiopia, but it's close. Luke tells us a lot about this man through his titles and roles. He is a eunuch, he's a counsel to a queen, he oversees the treasury of a nation, and his wealth affords him a chariot and a personal scroll of Isiah. This man far exceeds the necessary acumen to be considered significant. This man is the ancient definition of large and in charge. All those things aside, what is essential to the story than his titles and roles was his activity.

The Ethiopian was returning from worshiping in Jerusalem. He was a “God-fear,” a term given to converts to the Jewish faith. He even seems pretty devout, being told that he was reading the prophet, Isiah. He wasn't a surface God-fearer; he couldn't get enough of God, it seems. Yet, we have to acknowledge the first trait Luke intends for us to know, he was a eunuch. A man, who at some point in his life, probably early, was emasculated. It is a common practice in the ancient world to ensure faithful service as a servant or slave. Eunuchs were trusted to oversee important government areas because they were no longer tempted physically, and their inability to have a family meant their devotion would be singular to their master.

Although making eunuchs were common in the ancient world, it wasn't practiced in Israel. God forbade the practice and kept the people from it by banned anyone from entering the temple grounds which had been castrated. Their conversion could never be fully realized; they couldn't be circumcised. The Ethiopian had traveled hundreds of miles to worship in Jerusalem, yet no surprise to him, he could only get as far as the temp mount and no further. No matter his wealth or prestige, he was an outsider.

Let's make a mental chart of the Ethiopian and Philip. The Ethiopian is rich, a queen's aid, important, responsible, and an outsider. Philip is a diaspora Jew (insider) and a disciple. Do you see what the Lord tells

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Philip to overcome? Despite the cultural and social divides, the Spirit directs Philip, "go and join that chariot." Today's equivalent would be a private jet taxiing at the airport, and you run-up to the open door and ask if you can share Jesus with them. Why does God send Philip? Because the Gospel transcends the social and cultural differences between a disciple and the one who needs to hear. I know no other message that can contextualize any social or cultural climate like the good news of Jesus.

The facts of this story and Christian history are simple, Christians can share Christ with people who are different from them by simply loving them and being humble and sensitive to their needs. **The differences in rank, race, and nationality disappear when the Ethiopian acknowledges his need.** That is because Philip is not the agent of salvation; instead, he is God's instrument to work out salvation in another.

God Prepares the Heart for Salvation.

Acts 8:30-31 “³⁰ When Philip ran up to it, he heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, “Do you understand what you’re reading?” ³¹ “How can I,” he said, “unless someone guides me?” So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.”

God proceeds our witness, working in the lives of those he's calling to salvation. The Ethiopian is no different. I can imagine, much to Philip's surprise, he hears sentences familiar to him. When I read this, I do get a bit suspicious, I have never been walking by a person, and they are reading Isaiah 53 out loud, wondering what it meant. Talk about a softball scenario. You know why that thought is totally bogus, though. I can't save anyone. I have zero ability or cunning to lead people to accept the message of Jesus. Only God can warm the heart of another to receive Christ's message.

No matter how easy you think Philip might have had it, our interactions are no different. God is at work long before we show up on the scene. Look at what the Lord has said.

Acts 16:14 “¹⁴ A God-fearing woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, was listening. The Lord opened her heart to respond to what Paul was saying.”

John 6:44-45a “⁴⁴ No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up on the last day. ⁴⁵ It is written in the Prophets: **And they will all be taught by God.**

Evangelism begins in the heart of God and takes shape in the hands of God. We are joining what God is already doing. So, where do we start? The same place Philip does. We begin with their questions.

Someone's questions or objections to faith are not obstacles we have to overcome at first; they are stories we try to understand. I remember meeting a man named Jay sitting at the back of our church one Sunday, and he had some questions and objections. (Now, someone coming to church who doesn't already believe is equivalent to reading Isaiah out loud on the street.) We went out later that week; his objections to Christianity stemmed from

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hypocrisy and hurt caused by the church throughout history and today. To make a lengthy story brief, i knew my goal at that moment was not to answer why the church did what it did but discover why he was asking at all. My interest in his journey awarded me the same experience Philip had when the Ethiopian, he "invited Philip to come up and sit with him."

People will invite us into their lives when we genuinely care about what concerns them. After sitting with Jay for an afternoon, he shared with me his story and what was most important to him. Then he revealed his operating system. The philosophical lens he views life through is Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Are you familiar with that? Here's a simplified picture of what Maslow created.

Insert Picture here

Can you recognize why Jay had the objections he did? Maslow believed that the lower tiers needed to precede it for the higher need to be met. I asked Jay if I could flip the pyramid upside down and show him how Christ's message started with self-actualization. What Philip does with Ethiopian, and I did with Jay; we looked at the Book.

Our Message is Jesus.

Acts 8:32-35 “³² Now the Scripture passage he was reading was this: **He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb is silent before its shearer, so he does not open his mouth.** ³³ **In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who will describe his generation? For his life is taken from the earth.** ³⁴ The eunuch said to Philip, “I ask you, who is the prophet saying this about—himself or someone else?” ³⁵ Philip proceeded to tell him the good news about Jesus, beginning with that Scripture.

The man read Isaiah 53, a monumental prophetic passage about the messiah and a golden opportunity for Philip to talk about Jesus. Notice the man's question. He didn't ask what it meant or ponder the nuances of the text. He simply wanted to know WHOM it was referring to. We see God's hand orchestrating the events of Ethiopian's life and Philip's life, to ponder one question; who is Jesus?

If you put yourself in Philip's shoes for a moment, as the scroll of Isaiah is read, you would have heard him say: “**He was a led as a sheep to the slaughter,**” and Philip would have remembered Jesus entering the city surrounded by praise and adoration, with shouts of “Hosana, Hosana in the Highest Heavens.” (Matt. 21:) But Jesus laments over his entry, saying, “**Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her.**” (Matt. 23:37)

When he heard, “**as a lamb silent before its shear, so he does not open his mouth,**” Philip recalled John the Baptist declares, “**Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world.**” (John 1:29) And Christ silence at the kangaroo courts of the Caiaphas and Pilot.

When he heard, “**In his humiliation justice was denied him.**” Philip remembers the crowd responding to Pilot question, “What has he done wrong?” and they kept chanting, “**Crucify him, Crucify him!**” (Matt. 26:23)

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When he heard, “Who will describe his generation? For his life was taken from the Earth.” Philip drew up from his heart the words of Christ, “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.” (John 12:32)

Who is the prophet saying this about? Jesus. The word directs the mind and the heart to Christ and his message. Don't underestimate the power of God's word to save the soul. Hebrews 4:12, “¹² For the word of God is living and effective and sharper than any double-edged sword, penetrating as far as the separation of soul and Spirit, joints and marrow. It is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. The word is living because the one who uttered it is the creator and sustainer of all things. It can do what we can not. It changes the heart. Paul says in Romans 10:17, “¹⁷ So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the message about Christ.”

We must know the word.

Beginning with Isaiah 53 and working through the Old Testament, Philip offered the man Jesus. We don't know how long their journey was, but the man believed. It was long enough for Philip to tell him about the church and baptism, which led him to ask a question.

Offer Acceptance into the Family of God.

Acts 8:26-40 “³⁶ As they were traveling down the road, they came to some water. The eunuch said, “Look, there’s water. What would keep me from being baptized?” ³⁸ So he ordered the chariot to stop, and both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him. ³⁹ When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him any longer but went on his way rejoicing. ⁴⁰ Philip appeared in Azotus, and he was traveling and preaching the Gospel in all the towns until he came to Caesarea.”

Through inference, we know their conversation resulted in the Ethiopian placing his faith in Jesus. Somewhere in the discussion, Philip might have told him of Peter's sermon and the call to repent and be baptized. Notice his question, "What would keep me from being baptized?" Laying underneath his question is the assumption that there is a prerequisite or condition. Remember, he's a eunuch, and he's been cut off from fully participating in Jewish life. Philip's answer is not recorded, but without hesitation, I say to you, there is are no barrier apart from believing in Jesus. “Is there anything keeping me from enjoying and living the Christian life Jesus offered?”

So, he ordered the chariot to stop, and they entered the water. Philip is a great commission completionist. He obeyed the call, crossed cultural and social differences, followed the Lords leading, pointed to Christ, and baptized him in the name of Christ. To be clear, baptism is a sign of life in the family of God, not the work of entering it. That is through faith alone. Yet baptism is an act of first obedience to Christ. A significant step for every believer to publicly demonstrate their faith and hope in Jesus. My baptism and the Ethiopian's baptism did nothing to change our status before God, but it did transform our life here on Earth. We obeyed Christ and dedicated our life to follow him. As a result, I look back on my baptism with fondness, knowing what I believed then, I still believe today. For the Ethiopian, joy upon joy has flowed being a member of this family.

As they came up out of the water, Philip disappeared, but it mattered little to the Ethiopian. He went away rejoicing. He had a savior, he had a family, and the Lord fulfilled his promise:

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Isaiah 56:4-5 “⁴For the Lord says this: “For the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, and choose what pleases me, and hold firmly to my covenant, ⁵I will give them, in my house and within my walls, a memorial and a name better than sons and daughters. I will give each of them an everlasting name that will never be cut off.”

Isn't the Lord and this life amazing? God is good to his word and faithful to his people. This is our family legacy being sent in his power to seek and save the lost.

Application: Simple questions based on the points

Are you being called to go?

Are you confident in the gospel's ability to save someone different than you?

What work of God are you being directed to join?

Do you rely on the word?

What's keeping you from being baptized?

So, I ask you the same question the Ethiopian asked Philip, “What would keep you from being baptized?”

Communion

Pray

1 Cor. 11:23-26 “On the night when he was betrayed, the Lord Jesus took bread, ²⁴ and when he had given thanks, broke it, and said,^[1] “This is my body, which is^[2] for you. Do this in remembrance of me.”

²⁵ In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, and said, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” ²⁶ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Pray