

# Acts

*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.*  
(Acts 1:8 ESV)

*All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations shall worship before you. For kingship belongs to the Lord, and he rules over the nations.*  
(Psalm 22:27-28 ESV)

## **A Picture of Gospel Mission**

**February 12<sup>th</sup>, 2023**

**Acts 8:26-40**

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Please open your Bibles to Acts 8:26-40. The past few weeks, we followed Philip into Samaria, and we saw how God showed up with signs and wonders and how the gospel broke ground in many Samaritan cities. Last week we saw how, when the Gospel showed up, it displaced powers, it created community, and overcame old hostilities. Well, in a sudden turn of events, however, Philip leaves Samaria. When all this great gospel work is happening and Samaritans are hearing the gospel, and signs and wonders are being done, Philip packs up and leaves. In our text this morning, Philip has this incredible encounter with a man whom God has singled out to hear the Gospel.

Much of the book of Acts functions as great benchmark for how the church, mission and evangelism ought to work today. We always want to get too prescriptive beyond what the text intends and says, but at the same time we see many healthy patterns and norms throughout Acts on how Mission and Evangelism happens. As we seek to share the gospel with others, as we seek to see those we love and know come to a saving knowledge of Jesus, there are some helpful observations here in this story that can encourage and equip us.

Hear now the inspired, inerrant, and authoritative word of the Lord,

<sup>26</sup>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. <sup>27</sup>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. He had come to Jerusalem to worship <sup>28</sup>and was returning, seated in his chariot, and he was reading the prophet Isaiah. <sup>29</sup>And the Spirit said to Philip, ‘Go over and join this chariot.’ <sup>30</sup>So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, ‘Do you understand what you are reading?’ <sup>31</sup>And he said, ‘How can I, unless someone guides me?’ And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. <sup>32</sup>Now the passage of the 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.  
<sup>33</sup> In his humiliation justice was denied him.  
Who can describe his generation?  
For his life is taken away from the earth.’

<sup>34</sup> And the eunuch said to Philip, ‘About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?’ <sup>35</sup> Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus. <sup>36</sup> 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?’ <sup>38</sup> And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. <sup>39</sup> 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 went on his way rejoicing. <sup>40</sup> But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through he preached the gospel to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.” (Acts 8:26-40)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

So, what can we draw from this story as we seek to share Christ with those we encounter?

### What Do We See In This Picture of Gospel Mission?

The first thing we see is:

#### 1. Outsiders Are Included

In our text, Philip is instructed by an angel of the Lord to travel south towards Gaza. On this road, Philip encounters a man. It is important to see that Luke makes a big deal of who this man was. In vs. 27-28, Luke tells us several important details about the man.

We see he was an Ethiopian – this would be modern day Sudan.<sup>1</sup> This man would have been considered a foreigner, and most scholars agree he would have probably been black. We see he was a Eunuch. Luke tells us that the man was, “a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure.” It was common practice, in those days, for those who oversaw the King’s harem or those who were often in close proximity to the Queen to be castrated.<sup>2</sup> Finally, we see he had an interest in

<sup>1</sup> Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, ( ), pg. 295.

<sup>2</sup> Bock, *Acts*, pg. 341.

Judaism. Luke makes note to tell us that the man had come to Jerusalem to worship. Not only this, but he was also reading from the scroll of Isaiah.

However, there was a significant roadblock for a man like this – eunuchs were not allowed to be part of the covenant community. Deuteronomy 23:1 specifically forbade any man who was castrated from entering the assembly of God.

Ben Witherington III is helpful here in his commentary,

“The fact is that Luke has carefully presented this story so that the eunuch is portrayed as someone on the fringes of Judaism, as the eunuch’s reading of Isaiah shows.”<sup>3</sup>

Not only is this man on the outside of Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria (he is coming from Ethiopia), but he is on the outside of Judaism. This was a man who did not belong in the covenant community. And yet, God specifically, intentionally, and with great care sends Philip to bring the light of the Gospel of Jesus to him.

See, in the OT, there was a prophesy that one day, men like this Ethiopian Eunuch (a man on the outside of Judaism) would not be merely tolerated on the outside of the covenant community, but be fully grafted in. Ironically, the man is reading from Isaiah 53 about the Messiah, but just 3 chapters later look at what Isaiah says the Messiah will accomplish,

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.”

<sup>4</sup>For thus says the LORD:

“To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths,  
who choose the things that please me  
and hold fast my covenant,

<sup>5</sup>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 56:3-5

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<sup>3</sup> Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, ( ), pg. 292-293

Isaiah prophesied about a day where foreigners and eunuchs (people barred by the Law of Moses from the covenant community) would be brought into the house of God and given an everlasting name! And we are seeing the fulfillment of that prophecy right here in this man.

The point is this - the Gospel has no physical, ethnic, social or cultural boundaries. The Apostle Paul makes this explicitly clear in Gal. 3:28,

“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” Galatians 3:28

ALL are welcome to come to Christ, to hear the good news of the Gospel, and to find life eternal in Christ alone.

This fact that God is fulfilling His Word, that He will draw people from all tribes, nations, cultures, and socio-economic backgrounds, should fill us with great confidence and hope. When you think of those in your life who don't know Jesus, or when you think of the unreached nations on the earth that we are called to go and proclaim the Gospel to, we should remind ourselves that God keeps His promises, and the gospel will go forward – even to the most unlikely places.

But the second thing we see is this,

## 2. The Help of the Holy Spirit

I hope you noticed how present the help of God is in this passage!

He's everywhere! Look at vs. 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.” Acts 8:26

There are several times that we see angels appearing throughout the book of Acts to give the early church specific encouragement and direction. Angels are God's messengers, and act on behalf of God. In Acts 5, an angel liberates the apostles from prison, and directs them to go preach the gospel in the temple. In Acts 12, an angel delivers Peter from prison. And here, we see an angel appearing to Philip and instructing him to go down towards Gaza.

But not only this, there are several times in our text that we see the Holy Spirit leading and guiding Philip in his encounter with this man. In vs. 29 the Spirit tells Philip,

“Go over and join the chariot.” Acts 8:29

At the end of our text, in vs. 39, it says that,

“the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more.” Acts 8:39

Whether this is a miraculous event, where Philip is somehow transported, or this is just the Spirit speeding Philip along to his next location, the point is the same – God is intently involved in guiding and directing Philip in his mission and evangelism.

Luke is showing us that God is going with His people to help them gain new ground with the gospel. God is actively involved, guiding, directing, causing certain events to happen, in order that His purposes are accomplished.

It’s interesting - through Acts 6-8, we are tracing two men who did extraordinary things – Stephen and Philip. Acts 6:3 tells us, was they both were “full of the Spirit and wisdom”. But, did you notice who these men were? They weren’t church elders, or apostles – these were regular men! The power of the Spirit, enough to do great signs and wonders, had been working in these ordinary men! The regular folks of the church, who were people of the Holy Spirit and of wisdom, were being used by God to do incredible things!

The Puritan John Flavel will say this,

“The duty is ours though the power is of God. What power we have depends upon the exciting and assisting strength of Christ.”<sup>4</sup>

So here is the question – do you believe this to be true? Do you believe that the Spirit of God living within you is able to guide, direct, and instruct you as you seek to bring the gospel to new places?

Or do you say, “Oh, God can’t use me that way. That’s Pastor Levi’s job. That’s the elders job. But that’s not me! God hasn’t called ME to that. I’m just a church member!”

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<sup>4</sup> John Flavel, *Keeping the Heart*, ...

But this denies the very promises of Christ!

Jesus Himself promised that God would provide help for His people in this task. In John 16:7 Jesus says this,

“it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you.” John 16:7

God had sent the Holy Spirit, and we have seen throughout Acts how the Spirit was working in power – and not only in the Apostles! God worked through regular folks like Stephen and Philip.

I. Howard Marshall helps us here,

“What is important is that in this way Philip’s journey and the subsequent action are seen to have been instigated by God and thus to have been part of his intention. The church did not simply ‘stumble upon’ the idea of evangelizing the Gentiles; it did so in accordance with God’s deliberate purpose.”<sup>5</sup>

It is God’s purpose to reach the nations, to reach the outsider, with the Gospel of Jesus, and He had provided us His Holy Spirit to accomplish that goal.

This ought to fill us with incredible confidence and boldness! This ought to radically transform our prayer life – because daily we should pray that God would help us not quench the Holy Spirit with sin and doubt, but rather God would grant us the strength and the Spirit to share Jesus boldly.

You can’t pray with confidence that God will make you rich. God may not answer that prayer! You can’t pray with confidence that God will get rid of that incessant back pain. He may want you to grow in your dependence on Him, in prayer and in endurance.

But you can pray with confidence for God to empower your evangelism because God has PROMISED to do that! Jesus TOLD US to take the Gospel to people from every tribe, tongue, and nation! It is a promise from HIM that God will provide you with the Holy Spirit to help!

That should fill us with an incredibly sense of boldness! The Apostle Paul will remind us of this in 2 Cor. 3:4-6,

“Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God. Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God, who has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit.” 2 Corinthians 3:4-6

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<sup>5</sup> I. Howard Marshall, *Acts: Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, (InterVarsity Press: Downers Grove, IL, 1980), pg. 171.

So far in this story we have seen outsiders being brought in, we have seen how the Holy Spirit helps His people, and thirdly,

### 3. The Power of the Word of God

Philip, having been instructed by the Spirit, approaches the chariot, and hears the man reading from the prophet Isaiah – a portion where it describes the suffering servant, the Messiah of God. Philip asks the man, “Do you know what you are reading?” and the man answers, “How can I know unless someone explains it to me?” The man invites Philip to sit with him and asks him a question about the text.

Look with me at vs. 34.

<sup>34</sup> And the eunuch said to Philip, ‘About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?’ Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus.” Acts 8:34

Philip was able, starting from the text the man was reading, to explain to this man how Jesus Christ was whom the prophet was speaking of, and was able to preach the Gospel to him. Philip was clearly a man of the word, and he was able to take the Scriptures and preach Jesus to this man who was struggling to understand them.

There is something important here that we must understand about the nature of the Scriptures – we can read and study the Scriptures our whole lives, but it is entirely possible to never understand them. Jesus warns the Pharisee’s about this in John 5:39,

“You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.” John 5:39

Eternal life is found through the person of Jesus Christ who is testified to in the Scriptures. Eternal life is found through the gospel found in the Scriptures.

It is all too common today that we often overcomplicate evangelism. We often feel like we need to learn all these new kinds of styles of evangelism – we study presuppositional apologetics, we listen to Apologia Church, we watch YouTube videos of Christians sticking it to unbelievers, and we think that we are equipping ourselves for evangelism.

Now, there is something to say about learning how to contextualize the Gospel. We will see how the Apostle Paul brings the gospel to the Gentiles. But, for most of us, it needs to be no more complicated than building a relationship with someone and then inviting them to read the Bible with you. For most of us, it needs to be no more complicated than inviting that friend over, and praying that the Holy Spirit provides an opportunity for you to open the Bible and share Jesus with them, and doing it. But for most of us, we don't even get there!

Did you see what it says in vs. 34, "Then Philip opened his mouth." For most of us, we might get the friend over, but we can't even get our mouths open, let alone opening the Scriptures!

Listen - we open the Bible, we open our mouths, but God grants understanding!

We faithfully share about Jesus, but God softens the heart!

God does the heavy lifting, we just need to open our mouths and talk about Jesus from the Word. That's it! We leave the rest to power of the Spirit and the power of the Word!

All the eunuch needed was a Holy Spirit-filled, Scripture-saturated, Jesus-loving Christian to preach Jesus to him from the Scriptures so that God could open His eyes and he could understand.

So RCC, could you, like Philip, open the Bible, with a friend, a colleague, a family member, or whoever it is the Holy Spirit directs you to, and use the Scriptures to tell them the good news about Jesus? Do you love the Scriptures? Do you understand the Scriptures? Could you explain them to someone?

Charles Spurgeon aptly said, on this text,

"You may begin anywhere in the Bible, and preach Jesus. You may begin at the first chapter of Genesis, or at the last chapter of Malachi, at the first of Matthew or the last of Revelation, and still preach Jesus, for he is the sum and substance of the whole Scripture."<sup>6</sup>

Like Philip, God has sent us, equipped with His Spirit and the Scriptures, for this very task. But it takes us opening our bibles and our mouths, to share the gospel with those whom God, by His Spirit, leads us to encounter.

The Apostle Paul says this beautifully,

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<sup>6</sup> C. H. Spurgeon, No. 2737-47:349, "Who Should Be Baptized?", A Sermon Delivered In 1859, At New Park Street Chapel, Southwark.



How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!” Romans 10:14-15

If we long to see the gospel breaking new ground in our own context – with those we love who seem hopelessly far from the gospel, and beyond the reach of Christ – we must be able to open and explain the Scriptures, and proclaim the gospel of Jesus from them, and allow the power of God to work powerfully. Philip was prepared, Philip was sensitive to the leading of the Spirit of God, and he simply opened the Word and taught the man about Jesus.

Will you be prepared, when the time comes, to do the same? Well, we have seen the inclusion of outsiders, the help of the Spirit and the power of the Word of God. The final thing we see in this picture of Gospel Mission is this,

#### 4. The Response of Faith

As Philip preached the Scriptures and the Gospel to the eunuch, it is clear that the subject of baptism and obedience to Christ came up. After all, Jesus told His disciples in Matthew 28:19-20,

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.”  
Matthew 28:19-20

Philip would have explained to the man that, “In order to follow Jesus, you must be baptised in obedience to Him.” Look at what happens in vs. 36,

<sup>36</sup> 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?’ <sup>38</sup> And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip, and the eunuch, and he baptized him. Acts 8:36

The eunuch, coming to a saving knowledge of Jesus, is stirred, and moved by the gospel. He sees his need for salvation, and he recognizes Christ’s call for total life surrender. The response to the gospel is immediate – the man decides to obey Christ and asks to be baptized immediately. Philip, seeing no reason to not baptize the man, complies and the man is baptized right there on the side of the road. His obedience is immediate and signifies the authenticity of his conversion.

This pattern of faith and then baptism is prominent throughout the book of Acts.

In Acts 2, on the day of Pentecost, if you remember, after Peter preaches to this multitude, they ask him, “What must we do to be saved?” Do you remember how Peter replied?

“Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” Acts 2:38

Last week, in Acts 8:12, after Philip preached the gospel, it says,

“But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.” Acts 8:12

Later, in Acts 10, when Peter sees the Holy Spirit fall and indwell several Gentiles, listen to what happens in vs. 46-47,

“Then Peter declared, ‘Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?’ And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.” Acts 10:46-47

Faith LEADS to obedience. The first step of that obedience is baptism.

Many of us have perhaps grown up with a gospel presentation that says, “Believe that Jesus died for your sins, and you will be saved,” and we simply understand that as an intellectual affirmation. “Yes, I believe Jesus died for my sins. I understand the idea that there is a God and I must be forgiven for my sin against Him, and His Son died in my place for that forgiveness.” But the true message of the gospel calls not just for a theological confession but for a whole-life submission.

Faith, in the bible, is not just knowledge, it’s action. Jesus taught this repeatedly. In Luke 6:46,

“Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do what I tell you?” Luke 6:46

Or in John 14:23,

“If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.” John 14:23

The Apostle James also will make this clear. James 2:19 says,

“You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!” James 2:19

Or look at James 1:22,

“But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.” James 1:22

If we merely hear the word but fail to obey, we deceive ourselves into thinking our faith is genuine!

The eunuch believed, but he immediately responded in faith obeyed! His baptism was an outward confession that not only did this man believe that Jesus was the Christ, but that he was going to give the rest of his life in obedience to Jesus. Jesus said, “Believe in me and be baptized,” and this man’s reply was swift, “What reason do I have for not being baptized?”

So here is the question we land with today – what reason do you have for not obeying Christ? There are some of us here today who know that we have not responded like this Eunuch in faith, and we keep putting off obedience.

Perhaps you know you ought to be baptized, and you are not being obedient like this man was. You believe in Jesus, but you have yet to obey Him in this first step. Perhaps you are here and your response of faith is not baptism but to be like Philip – to go share Christ with someone! “Tomorrow I will obey” has been the anthem of your life - postponing your obedience.

Listen brothers and sisters - belief in Christ meant obedience TO Christ. There is no faith without obedience. Obedience does not mean perfection, it means submission. So what reason do you have for not obeying?

You must ask yourself the question the eunuch asked himself.

We must ask ourselves; will we obey Jesus today?

That is what real faith looks like.

The text ends with the response of this obedience, vs. 39,

“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 went on his way rejoicing.” Acts 8:39

There is great joy when we obey Christ, when we lay down our lives and follow Him.

So come. Obey Christ. Some of you need to talk to Pastor Levi today about getting into that tank.

Some of you need to go home and finally decide to open your bible and your mouth.

So come, obey Christ. He is gracious, and He has a great mission that He will equip you for.