

Church 2.0

*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

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Acts 8:26-40

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Please open your Bibles to **Acts 8:26-40**. Last week, we followed Philip into Samaria, and we saw how God showed up with signs and wonders and how the gospel broke new ground in many Samaritan cities. Well, in a sudden turn of events, 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 - just like that! For most of us, if revival broke out, we would want to stay and continue the work. But instead, Philip leaves Samaria. 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 see all kinds of patterns and norms throughout Acts on how Mission and Evangelism happened in the Early Church. We too, like the early church, are on mission – to go and make disciples of all nations. 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,

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

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

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

So, what can we draw from as we look at this picture, to help equip us in Gospel Mission as we share Christ with those we encounter?

What Do We See In This Picture of Gospel Mission?

The first thing we see is:

1. The Inclusion of Outsiders

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.¹ This man would have been considered a foreigner, and ethnically different from the Jewish people. 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.² Finally, we see he had an interest in Judaism. Luke makes note to tell us that the man had not only come to Jerusalem to worship 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. **Deut. 23:1** specifically forbade any man who was castrated from entering the assembly of God.

Ben Witherington III says 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.*”³

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

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

² Bock, *Acts*, pg. 341.

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

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,

Isaiah 56:3-5

“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.’⁴ For thus says the LORD: ‘To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose the things that please me and hold fast my covenant,⁵ 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 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.

There is something that we learn about Gospel Mission by reflecting on this man; regardless of someone’s religious background, ethnicity, socio-economic background, or even if someone’s sexual or gender identity has been marred and mangled by a cruel cultural practice – they are not too far, or too outside, of the reach of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

We all must ask ourselves – do our lives reflect that we understand the Gospel this way? Does your understanding of who the Gospel is available to, change who you interact with at work, at school, in your friend group? Do you, like Jesus, invite the marginalized, or the outsider, into your circumference so you can share the truth of Jesus with them? Or do you put up boundaries and limitations that the Gospel intended to break down? Are we as, as a church, a welcome place so that fringe outsiders can come IN to hear the good news of Jesus, to be saved and transformed by it?

Now welcoming in the outsider does not mean that, SIN is included or tolerated! Paul makes it very clear in 1 Corinthians 5 that sin left unchecked in the church spreads. Inclusion does not mean that all the sinful mindsets and worldviews that are contradictory to

Christ's gospel are included. No! But those on the fringe, those who might now be living in darkness and who we might consider beyond the scope of the Gospel, are by no means beyond the saving power of Jesus Christ. **Do we live as though we truly, deeply, believe that?**

The gospel brings in outsiders, people who might be considered on the fringe, and this ought to assure us when things look grim that the Gospel will go forward – even to the most unlikely places.

But the second thing we see is this,

2. The Presence of Divine Help

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.”

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.*” 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.*” 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 - **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 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!

So here is the question – 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 the pastors job. That's the elders job. But that's not me! God hasn't called ME to that. I'm just a church member!”

Sadly, in many churches, the work of mission, the work of community outreach, the work of evangelism, is simply relegated to a certain few. “I give money to the church so that someone else can do Mission. So that someone ELSE can go serve the community. But not me! I don't share the gospel with my neighbor, there's someone on staff for that!”

But this denies not only the normative pattern we see but also the 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.*” 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 – regular folks who are filled with the Spirit of God and filled with the wisdom of God.

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.*”⁴

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

This ought to fill us with incredible confidence and boldness!

This ought to radically transform how we pray 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.

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.*”

Pastor Paul referenced this quote a few weeks ago by the **Puritan John Flavel**. He says this, “*The duty is ours though the power is of God. What power we have depends upon the exciting and assisting strength of Christ.*”⁵

It is our duty to share Christ with the outsider, but it is God’s power and Spirit that we trust in.

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

⁴ I. Howard Marshall, *Acts: Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, (InterVarsity Press: Downers Grove, IL, 1980), pg. 171.

⁵ John Flavel, *Keeping the Heart*, ...

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**.

³⁴ 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.”

Notice what it says - 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. His teaching and preaching started and was rooted in the words of Scripture.

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 later in Acts, and we can learn from that. 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!

We open our mouths and then leave the rest to power of the Word and the power of the Spirit!

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.

This story is likely intended to be a typical example of how people generally get saved!

For most of us here, this was how we got saved! For most people, we don't have a Damascus Road experience, that we will hear about next week. Instead of a blinding light it was our parents, our grandparents, our Sunday school teacher, who, like Philip, came along, opened the Bible with us, and used it to preach Jesus to us. Maybe you were 8 years old, maybe you were 18, or 80!

God's Word is powerful! It is enough for life and godliness and yes, evangelism.

We don't need to overcomplicate it, we don't need to be ashamed of it, and we don't need to edit it or redefine it to make it more palatable. This is why Paul will tell us in **Romans 10:17**, "*So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.*"

So Cornerstone, 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?

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.*”

Simply getting through a Bible reading plan does not mean that we understand the Scriptures - we must be able to see Christ IN the Scriptures! We must be able to get to Christ through the Scriptures!

Charles Spurgeon aptly said, commenting 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.*”⁶

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.

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

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

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.”* 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**,

“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?’³⁸ And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip, and the eunuch, and he baptized him.”

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.”⁷*

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.”*

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*

⁷ Acts 2:38

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.”

It’s critical to see that the first act a person takes when they place their faith in Christ is an act of obedience to Christ as a sign of allegiance to Christ.

Paul will teach us in **Rom. 6:4** that *“We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.”* Baptism symbolizes newness of life so that, as Paul will say later in **Rom. 6:12**, *“Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions.”* So, Baptism is a way of saying, “Sin no longer reigns. I no longer obey Sin, I obey Jesus.”

The eunuch believed, and he immediately responded to his faith by being baptized! Did you note the question he asked, in **vs. 36**, *“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 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. Here is the question you must ask yourself, “What reason do I have for not being baptized?”

But for those of us who have been baptized, this text presents us with another question, “What reason do I have for not opening my mouth and sharing Jesus?”

When Philip heard the voice of God, he obeyed and spoke to the eunuch.

When the eunuch heard the command of Jesus, he obeyed and was baptized.

The text ends with the response of their 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.”*

The eunuch rejoiced because He was a child of God.

Philip was led by the Spirit to go on to the next place, to preach the gospel to the next person.

So, brothers and sisters, let’s not let petty reasons stand in our way any longer.

Some of you need to talk to us today about baptism - a baptism service Easter Sunday.

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

There is great rejoicing that comes when we partake in the gospel mission. There is great joy when those we never thought would EVER come to Jesus, hear the word, hear the gospel, and repent. There is great joy when new lives commit themselves to following Jesus. There is great rejoicing when, led by the Spirit, the people of God live in obedience to Jesus.

May that be true of us. **Let us pray.**