

Acts 8:26-40

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Preacher: Nathan Raynor

[0:00] All right. This morning's Bible study text is Acts chapter 8, verses 26 through 40. So please join us there as we turn our attention to the study of God's word. This morning I'm going to do something that I rarely do.

And I'm just going to add some commentary to the text as I'm reading it. I think that'll help us as we work on the main point of the text, just to fill in some of the details about the particular narrative. So I try to do that in a way that's not distracting from the reading of the text. But Acts chapter 8, beginning 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. Gaza was a ruined city of Babylon. The road was the road that ran from Jerusalem to Egypt. So it had a further destination.

And this would have seemed like an especially strange command, as this was the least traveled of the roads that left from Jerusalem. It was a desolate road and not very many people traveled it.

[1:11] The verse 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.

Now Ethiopia was a large kingdom, much larger than modern Ethiopia. And it was just south of Egypt. So a significant nation that he's traveling to.

And Candace here should not be understood to be a proper name, but rather a title like Caesar or Pharaoh. And Luke is simply explaining who this person is, the official of Candace.

And he's clarifying the queen is what he's trying to help us to understand. So what we need to know is that this was a powerful position. And the Ethiopian eunuch also served in a very powerful position.

We'll reread on. 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 this chariot.

[2:14] So Philip ran to him and heard him reading. And it was customary to read aloud. We do much less of that in our day, but it was customary in this day. And he was reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, Do you understand what you are 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 the scripture that he was reading was this. Like a sheep he was led to slaughter, and like a lamb before its shear 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 that is Isaiah chapter 53, verses 7 and 8.

Verse 34. And the eunuch said to Philip, About whom, I ask, does the prophet say this? About himself or about someone else? Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with the 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? And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him.

[3:29] 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. But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through, he preached the gospel to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

And Philip either made his home in Caesarea at this point, or it was already his home. And you can see in Acts chapter 21 and verse 8 that they go to the home of Philip.

Now, the structure for our study this morning will be as follows. Number one, the means of God's saving grace. Number two, the recipient of God's saving grace.

And number three, the signs, or you could think evidences, of God's saving grace. So means, recipient, and signs of God's saving grace.

This morning, we have the privilege of observing the ethnic diversity of God's saving grace. Early in the heavenly ministry of Jesus Christ, this ministry that he is carrying out by the power of the Spirit, the gospel takes hold of a man traveling home to Africa.

[4:39] What a wonderful thing. The gospel goes to Africa very early in the life of the church. And he is not just any man, but a man of position and of influence.

And we don't have time for it this morning, but there is a really rich church history of the early Christian church in Ethiopia. And so, history tells us that this man returned to Ethiopia and started a church there.

God has always had a gracious purpose for all of mankind, as all of mankind is created imago Dei, or in the image of God.

He has never intended to only have a saving relationship with ethnic Israel. We can begin to understand this reality in Genesis, beginning with Abrahamic covenant.

Genesis chapter 12, I'll read verses 1 through 3. How did God intend to bless all the families of the earth in Abraham?

[5:56] So, allow me to present to you a sweeping summary of Acts up to this point.

In chapter 1, Jesus is ascended and he leaves a command with the disciples to wait in Jerusalem until they receive the Holy Spirit. Chapter 2, 10 days later on the day of Pentecost, they receive the Spirit.

They preach in various known languages. So, they're preaching to people who, as their primary language, do not speak Hebrew. Peter preaches, many are saved.

The fellowship of the church and favor with all people is expressed. Chapter 3, God orchestrates another stage for Peter through the healing of a lame beggar. Peter preaches and more people believe in Jesus.

Chapters 4 and 5, persecution begins. First, the arrest of Peter and John. Then, later, the arrest of all of the apostles.

[6:58] In chapter 6, we see deacons selected, one of whom is Stephen. And then, also in chapter 6, we see Stephen arrested. Chapter 7 records Stephen's speech.

This wonderful, beautiful speech in front of the religious elite of the day. And then, at the end of chapter 7, his martyrdom. And this is a hinging moment in Luke's narrative of the early church. So, chapter 8, we see there's a broader scope. It's broadened for the persecution. At the beginning of chapter 8, the gospel goes to the Samaritans.

As the church is scattered, we see the gospel go to the Samaritans. So, we are observing the fulfillment in part of Jesus' words in Acts 1, verse 8, where he said, 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.

So, already, we see the gospel going to Samaria, to the Samaritans. And then, just a few verses later, we come to our text and see the beginning of the fulfillment of Jesus' witness being witnessed to the ends of the earth.

[8:12] And I just think it's astounding that God brought to Jerusalem an Ethiopian man, and catches him on his way out of town, that the gospel could go by this man to the continent of Africa.

So, just a few verses later, we begin to see that, and we still live in that time, right, where the gospel's going to the very ends of the earth. And, beloved, we ought to marvel at our great God for his saving work amongst all peoples.

If you are not ethnically Jewish, which I believe accounts for everyone in my hearing. I could be wrong, but I think that's all of us. None of us are ethnically Jewish that I know of, right?

Then we ought to be especially grateful this morning. These stories ought to just touch our hearts, that the gospel has come to us. And we ought to be spurred on for a continual love for all peoples, because our God loves diversity in his kingdom.

There is not a people outside of his saving grace. So, let's look first, number one, at the means of God's saving grace.

[9:20] So, how is it that God works his purpose in the world to bring about the salvation of his people from all peoples? He uses means, and we can see all of those at play in this text.

So, first, the spirit. We can see in this text God's divine orchestration in the saving of the Ethiopian eunuch, right? The Lord intends to save this man, and he is going to work means to see this come to pass.

We see in verse 28 that Philip is sent by the spirit to an odd place, right? He's sent out to a road, a desolate road. It's called a desert place to catch this man as he goes passing by, right?

Just astoundingly unlikely of a place to go. God has Philip catch up to the strategic individual as he is headed home. And I kind of picture him running up.

Hey, what is it that you're reading? Do you understand that? And he invites them on board, and they travel together, and he shares the gospel. God is the grand orchestrator of the saving work, and he does this work in part, one of the means, by the spirit, right?

[10:31] He works direction, guidance, and, of course, the power to believe in people by his spirit. So, our part in seeing God's saving grace come to pass is not to plot and plan but to obey.

And so, we see, secondly, as a means of God's saving grace, a servant. God employs the obedience of his servants in the salvation of his people, right?

He does this because he loves us. He invites us into his saving work for our joy and experience in him. I love Luke's record of Philip's obedience, the very beginning of verse 27, right?

Again, think of it as an audacious thing for this angel to ask him to go do. It's a strange request. And Luke records the beginning of verse 27, and he rose and went.

I want to be obedient like that. Luke doesn't record that he asks any questions. He doesn't go, why in the world would you have me go there? He rose and he went.

[11:35] I want the record of my life to record. God asked Nathan to do such and such, and he did it. No caveats, no passing of time, just and he did it.

He rose and he went. We witness this immediate obedience again in verse 30, when Philip is told by the Spirit to go over and join this chariot.

So Philip ran to him. That's what Luke tells us at the beginning of verse 30, and then has this response to a hearing of him reading the book of Isaiah.

So Philip ran to him, right? Note that Philip doesn't waste a breath, but he gets right to the point, right? He's reading from Isaiah, and Philip asks him, do you understand what you are reading?

Again, I picture it. There's a little bit of imagination here, but that he's yelling that out as this chariot goes rumbling by. He gets straight to the point.

[12:34] He sees opportunity to engage in the things of God with this man who is reading the Scripture, and he snatches it. He takes every advantage of it. Notice further that when Philip is taken away from the eunuch, he continues in obedience.

Verse 40 records, but Philip found himself at Azotus. I think he's transported, right, magically by the Spirit. And as he passed through, what's he doing?

He preached the gospel to all the towns until he came to Caesarea. And I don't think that Luke means he stopped preaching the gospel in Caesarea. I think he means his traveling preaching ceased when he stopped in that particular place.

I want to be used of God like Philip is used of God in his saving work, and I hope that you do too. So we see a servant, and now in our day, servants as means of God's saving grace.

The third mean of God's saving grace, the Scripture. We see that the eunuch is reading the Scripture, and it is the Scripture that Philip employs in sharing the gospel with his man.

[13:42] So verse 35, Luke records, then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture, that text in Isaiah, he told him the good

news about Jesus.

The eunuch asks him the question, to whom does this text speak of? Who is he talking about? And Philip uses it as a wonderful opportunity to say it's talking about the Christ.

Paul says in Romans chapter 10 and verse 17, so faith comes from hearing and hearing through the word of Christ. In your gospel proclamation, you have the upper hand because God employs his word as a means of saving grace.

And, beloved, I think we are too often shy with God's word. We don't believe that it's powerful to work the way we ought to believe that it's powerful to work, right?

A story like this ought to encourage us to go, yes, God's word works, and we just have to proclaim it. We are just messengers.

[14:47] I think this should encourage us on Paul writes Romans 1.16, So we see these means of God's saving grace at work.

The spirit, a servant in the Scripture. Second, let's observe the recipient of God's saving grace. So the last part of verse 27, again, 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. And the eunuch said, verse 34, to Philip, About whom I ask, does the prophet say this? About himself or about someone else?

I thought it was fitting, this text for this week, and I'm really grateful that our reading plan covered over it. As we find ourselves in the midst of great ethnic fracture in our country, I believe it's really good for us to consider God's loving kindness to all peoples and to remember that the gospel shatters all divides, real or imagined.

It tears down dividing walls of ethnicity, culture, gender, and skin color. It has accomplished this, and I think that's a thing that we miss. Like, it's going to accomplish it.

[16:16] No, it has accomplished this work. And we just have to pick up the reality of what is as we work within the diversity of the church.

What a time this is to see the gospel at work. Beloved, we need to be so much more than salt and light on social media.

Make your posts. That's fine. But that is not enough. You're not really letting your voice be heard by blacking out your screen. It's something, but it is not enough.

We need to see that God has made the church for a time such as this to be voices of clarity and voices of reconciliation. And first and foremost, reconciliation with our God.

We want to be concerned about gospel implications, but we have to be firstly concerned with the gospel itself. We want to be such clarion voices in a time such as this.

[17:20] I'm not sure we can do that on social media. You may pick that up in my tone as I make comments about it. I don't know that it's the place to make that happen, but rather the place is loving relationship with others.

There are people desperately seeking for some truth to hang on to right now. The world is so topsy-turvy and upside down. Will we be people standing by a desert roadside to speak to them words of life?

Will we be people who are going to run alongside somebody on a journey and say to them, do you understand and then to help them to understand? I hope so.

I believe that's true of people in our church. Notice that the Ethiopian was a seeker, and he's an overt seeker. I mean, we can see these signs. He's very concerned about the things of God.

And so this should be an encouragement to us, but also we find a lot of people in our day that are not overt seekers. And I just want to say that people are seeking for God whether or not they know they're seeking for God.

[18:26] So we see him. The evidence is that he's reading the scripture. He's got a scroll of Isaiah with him that he's reading from, and he has made a thousand-plus-mile journey.

It would have taken more than a week to travel from Ethiopia to Jerusalem, the text tells us, in order to worship. And we also notice of him that he was a eunuch, which means that his male genitalia were removed due to an accident or intentionally.

Did you notice that Luke repeatedly calls the Ethiopian the eunuch? Why not call him the Ethiopian? That seems like a significant identifier in the text.

But rather, he calls him again and again and again the eunuch. He repeats this word in verse 27, 34, 36, 38, and 39.

Why? Why do you suppose that he did that? This is another one of those places. If we were more familiar with our Bibles, this story would leap, or this detail of the story would leap off of the page to us.

[19:32] It would be so significant in our thinking that this man was a eunuch. Luke, Philip, and this eunuch would have been familiar with the Old Testament law concerning eunuchs.

Deuteronomy 23 in verse 1 says, No one whose testicles are crushed or whose male organ is cut off shall enter the assembly of the Lord. So he's a seeker who would have believed himself outside the graces of God.

He would have seen himself as an outsider. Yet all the same, he's reading the scripture. He's traveling to Jerusalem in order to worship. But he would have seen himself outside the assembly of God's people.

However, he's reading significantly from Isaiah chapter 53. Luke records him reading Isaiah 53 verse 7 and 8, but the context here matters greatly.

If you're looking in your Bibles at Isaiah chapter 53, your subtitle will say something like salvation for the nations. Let me read to you a little bit more of Isaiah chapter 53.

[20:41] This is 56, excuse me. Man, Isaiah 56. Boy, I confused that. Isaiah 56. My apologies. Isaiah 56 verses 3 through 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. 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 not be cut off. And the text in Isaiah goes on to talk about the Christ and how it is that this will be accomplished.

And so this is why Luke continues to say the eunuch, the eunuch, the eunuch, the eunuch, one who saw himself outside of God's covenant people, reading a text that seemed to say there's a way, There's a way for me to be inside of God's covenant people, to be restored to him.

Who is this prophet talking about? Is it about himself or someone else? Philip was able to say it's Jesus, the Christ, that he's talking about.

[21:58] So Luke is working to draw our attention to God's saving grace, His saving of a man who thought that he could not be saved, but was saved all the same.

It's astounding little detail found in this text. So that's the recipient of God's saving grace. So the means of God's saving grace, the recipient of God's saving grace.

This man who thought he could not be saved, but was saved all the same. Thirdly, we can observe some signs of God's saving grace. So then what is the response to God saving this man?

First, there is a response to the gospel. We read in verse 36, And the eunuch said, See, here is water. What prevents me from being baptized?

Now, if you were awake enough to be astute this morning, you may have noticed an oddity in our text that verse 37 is omitted from the main text in your Bible.

[23:01] Or at least it should be, I would argue. There is no verse 37. It jumps from 36 to 38. And you may have further employed your astuteness by consulting your footnotes.

I hope, again, that this exists in the copy that you're looking at this morning. to see a verse 37 in your footnotes that say, And Philip said, If you believe with all your heart, you may.

And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. So this is the kind of response we would expect to see to a gospel proclamation.

So why the omission? Why is it left out there in your copy of God's Word? This is done because the earliest and most reliable transcripts do not include verse 37.

There are some later transcripts that add that detail. And it could be that somewhere in history, someone added that detail because they thought there was a disconnect between gospel proclamation and then the eunuch asking to be baptized.

[24:06] We need to fill in a little detail. It's most likely that something like this. was said. Or maybe somebody did know for a fact that this was the conversation that took place.

Philip may have reported it. However, the earliest and most reliable transcripts do not include verse 37. So a brief aside at this point, it ought not shake your confidence in God's Word that there's an occasional inconsistency in those early transcripts.

They are very, very few. And when they do exist, the translators of good translations make careful note of them. I'm using an ESV. I think most of you are.

But this is a really great spot where the translators, all of the people who do the difficult work have said, look, we can't be sure verse 37 belongs in the text.

So we're going to exclude it and we're going to put it as a note at the bottom. So I hope us have greater confidence that all the things they do include are very consistent in those early manuscripts.

[25:10] So I hope that it then elevates that your confidence that the text you have in your hand this morning is in fact God's Word. Okay. In the side. So verse 37 is omitted, but he must have made some profession of faith, right?

We know of the doctrine of baptism that it is not salvific, right? We come to faith in Christ by grace alone.

Romans chapter 10, verse 9 and 10, Paul says, Paul there mentions nothing about baptism being salvific, right?

It's a sign we'll talk a bit more about in just a moment, right? So there must have been some profession of faith. He must have believed otherwise Philip would not have baptized him.

So we see as a sign of God's saving grace, number one, a response to the gospel, right? Secondly, we see obedience to the gospel, right?

[26:21] A life that is found in Christ, right? Will be a life that not perfectly, right? But in ever increasing degrees is obedient, right? This is the doctrine of sanctification.

We have been set apart for obedience to Christ for his glory, and we grow in this obedience across time. So right here, right? Immediately the eunuch says, right?

What prevents me from being baptized, right? They see water and he says, Hey, I should be obedient in baptism, right? Verse 38 says, And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him.

And they came up out of the water. Philip is transported away. So we see first obedience on Philip's part. Matthew chapter 28, Jesus gives the great commission, verse 18 and following, All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me.

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations. This is what Philip is doing in this moment, making a disciple of the Ethiopian eunuch, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

[27:32] So Philip is obedient as a follower of Christ to make disciples and to baptize them. We also see this obedience on the eunuch's part as well.

Matthew records of Jesus chapter 3, verse 13 through 15, Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him saying, I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?

But Jesus answered him, Let it be so now. For thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness. Then he consented. So Jesus himself modeled this for us, that we are to be baptized.

And I suggest to you, it doesn't have to be a major point of contention, but that they were also obedient to the method. I suggest to you that the Ethiopian was baptized by immersion.

They would have been traveling for quite some time across a desert, and they would have had water with them, right? So he doesn't say, Look, I have here water in the chariot.

[28:39] What prevents me from being baptized? He says, Second sign of God's saving grace, we saw the response to the gospel, obedience to the gospel, and then thirdly, rejoicing in the gospel.

Verse 39, the last part says, And the eunuch saw him no more, Philip saw him no more, and he went on his way rejoicing. Baptism was the outer symbol, picture of an inner reality.

This man's life had been changed fundamentally. This encounter on this road had absolutely transformed him. He and this encounter on the road had gone from being an enemy of God to being called his friend.

He had been an orphan, but now he was called son. The guilt of his sin had been washed away. What wonderful reasons for great rejoicing.

Many of you know that I battle with a fight for joy in my own life. And anytime I take my mind to the gospel of Jesus Christ, remember who I was apart from him and what he has done for me, this becomes the impetus to continue fighting, right?

[30:27] The very reason that I should be able to take hold of joy. I think at times like this, right, the trouble that we experience in this world we should all the more be meditating on the good news of Jesus Christ for us.

If it weren't but for the grace of God, where would I be today? What would I be doing right now? What kind of signs would I be holding up?

I don't know where I would be. Would I be alive at this moment? God has been so incredibly gracious to me and he's been so incredibly gracious to you.

And I just think we should never, ever forget this. Romans chapter six, beginning in verse three, Paul says, do you not know that all of us who've been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?

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.

[31:34] And so you are experiencing that newness of life this morning, recognizing the reality that is yours in Christ. And so in this little story in Acts chapter eight, we can observe, and I hope revel in and appreciate the means of God's saving grace, the recipient here, the eunuch as well as ourselves of God's saving grace and the signs of God's saving grace.