

Acts 8:26-40

Philip on the Fringes

Introduction: This week we are continuing the short account of Philip the evangelist. Remember Acts is the story of the earliest Christians showing us how the gospel spread throughout the whole known world, and where the Christians got their power to live and preach the way that they did. Last week we saw how the early church did evangelism with the whole of their lives it wasn't a task but a new way of living. Even in this passage we see some great practical examples of what it looks like to share the good news of Jesus:

Philip displays faithful obedience to the Spirit of God.

He is ready to cross cultural lines.

He is sensitive to a heart prepared by God.

He listens and allows the seeker to ask questions.

He is rooted in the scripture and has Jesus as the main theme of the message.

But there is more to this story.

We see here the continuing outline of the Gospel going to the ends of the earth. We talked about Philip following the teaching of Jesus in last week's study. Jesus said, **“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.”** And that's exactly what we see in this chapter for the ancient world considered Ethiopia - the ends of the earth. These were people outside of the boundaries of the Roman Empire, and were considered barbarians (those who were not Greek cultured and did not speak the Greek language)

So in this short story we see that outline of Acts continuing - the Gospel is going to Samaria and to the uttermost parts of the earth... But still there is more to this story- we could call this story - Philip on the Fringes.

What happens?

1. The Inclusivity of the Gospel

1. Philip is directed by the angel of the Lord to Go down to a desert road - Gaza this is near the south western point of Palestine. This

road was a highway used for trade that lead all the way to Africa. The strange thing is though that the angel directs him not to the city on the road, but the wilderness. -the text says this is desert. So Philip goes.

2. **What does he encounter?** - There is an Ethiopian man traveling back from Jerusalem. He is a high court official for the queen of Ethiopia. He oversees all of her treasury. We are told he was a eunuch. He had come to Jerusalem to worship and was on his way back home. (Jerusalem was over a thousand miles from Ethiopia)
3. Ok so whats the deal? Well this man can not be more opposite than Philip. He is a black man from North Africa (barbarian outskirts) who has been sexually altered. We are told he was a eunuch. Back in ancient times high court officials (those who worked closely to the king and the queen were castrated males - this was not only for sexual protection for the royal family but also for an assurance of devotion to their work.)
4. Another interesting fact is that ancient cultures considered family, family heritage and future, of highest importance..those who didn't marry and had no children were looked down on socially. It was seen as dishonorable to the family to not continue the family name or heritage. Yet this man has sacrificed all that in order to have one of the highest places of authority in his nation. But why is he in Jerusalem? It's says he was there to worship... apparently not only the gods of his nation but his own aspirations - what he had sacrificed everything for -has left some sort of emptiness in him. So much so that he is traveling, one thousand miles each way, to worship in Jerusalem.... You know what the saddest part of this story is though.. when he got to Jerusalem he was most assuredly barred from the temple and temple worship. The very thing he came to do. Why is that?
 1. **Deuteronomy 23:1 states -“No one whose testicles are crushed or whose male organ is cut off shall enter the assembly of the Lord.”** Sounds pretty harsh huh? Actually there were a myriad of laws in Judaism that barred people from worshipping in the temple. Like not being able to worship or even come near if you had touched a dead body or handled animal dung.. and the list goes on and trust me, it's long. The point of all of this was that God was trying to get it into his people's heads

and hearts that they can't just walk into the presence of God, they can't just waltz in. Why not? God is absolutely holy, perfect in love, truth, and judgment. God's holiness and perfection would burn us up because humans are broken and sinful, defied and bent...to come before God we need to be cleaned and washed, we need to be made right.. and so God provided various ceremonies, through the Law of Moses, for cleansing and worship..for his people to draw near.

2. But there was not cleansing for a eunuch. It obviously isn't something that could be undone. His being a eunuch put him permanently on the fringes of the religion he was most drawn to, probably wondering what it all mean, mostly likely saddened and disillusioned. Along comes Philip who's out on a Spirit walk. ... Philip sees the chariot coming from Jerusalem with this black Ethiopian official who has been sexually altered and the Spirit says -"**Go over and join yourself to this chariot**"...
3. Philip by contrast is a conservative Jewish man who was taught to wake up each day and pray, "God I thank you that I am not a woman, a slave or a gentile" (I am not making that up), he was taught don't go near people that are different from you because it will defile you. It will make you unclean. **But the Spirit says, run up to that racially different, sexually altered person you would normally have nothing to do with, go join yourself to that chariot!**
5. Look what we're seeing here - the inclusivity of the Gospel.. it is an angel of the Lord and the Spirit of God that are orchestrating this whole event...sending Philip out on this mission, guiding his steps..telling him, "Join that chariot!!" Not to mention the drawing of the Ethiopian to faith (Come to Jerusalem to worship, reading the scroll of Isaiah..)
6. **What does this tell us??** The Gospel is for all people. It does not have a preferred people group or location, but is for all people, at all times and in all places..Many people have referred to Christianity as a European religion.. I'm sorry but that is just plain willful ignorance. Christianity's leader and founder is a Middle eastern Jew with a Galilean accent. And yet Jerusalem, or Israel is not the center of Christianity..there is no central location... (by considering christian populations around the world you can see this fact that Christianity

doesn't belong to one culture or people.) In Isaiah the Prophet, in the Servant's song, which we will look at again, it says this: **“And he said to me, “You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified.” But I said, “I have labored in vain; I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity yet surely my right is with the Lord, and my recompense with my God.” And now the Lord says, he who formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob back to him; and that Israel might be gathered to him—for I am honored in the eyes of the Lord, and my God has become my strength—he says: “It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel, I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.”**

7. The argument has been made by many theologians that the Gospel is not only a religion for every culture and nation but it is the most inclusive religion in the world even more than secularism, even though secularism constantly boasts of its inclusiveness. For example Africans strongly believe in the spirit world, that the world is a supernatural place - both good and bad, angels and demons..this is a huge part of what it means to be African. Yet the secular west, and any major western university says we love other cultures, we are so inclusive but what they mean is we like your food, dress and music, but your view of the world is regressive and ancient, don't you know that everything has a scientific explanation in order to be accepted by us, for us to see you as an equal you need to get rid of this spiritual view of the world.... it takes the heart out of what it means to be African... But Christianity comes along and affirms the spirit world yet claims that there is the high God who has come into the world to over throw the dark and evil spirits and through him you don't have to be afraid. **The Gospel affirms an African's African-ness - it doesn't make him into a Western European. The Gospel doesn't squash our different cultural differences but celebrates them and brings them under the authority of Jesus, his kingdom and the direction of the Spirit.**
8. In the book of Revelation - before the throne of God, worshipping the lamb we see an innumerable multitude of every tribe, tongue, nation

and people... -ethnic and cultural diversity all worshipping Jesus, Lamb of God.

2. The Exclusivity of the Gospel

1. But we also see that Christianity is exclusive at the same time -
2. When Philip approaches the chariot he hears the man reading the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. Philip responds to his reading. Do you understand what you are reading? The man answers how can I unless I have a guide.. so Philip climbs up and they read the text again together which prompts the man to ask about who the passage is referring to—Philip doesn't say in response to his question, well you have to interpret the text for yourself, find your own truth and your own way or the text means whatever you want it to mean and whatever works best for you; there are many ways to God and the prophet is speaking about just one of those ways....
3. Were' told that starting from this place he preached Jesus to him... the good news about Jesus. At the end of this explanation the man is baptized into Jesus. He believes the truth about Jesus, he wants to identify himself with Jesus, he wants to follow after Jesus. Christianity while so inclusive is also very exclusive - we believe that Jesus is the way the truth and the life and that no one has eternal life, access to the kingdom of God, fellowship with God the Father, human wholeness, except through him. Some see this as so exclusive and bigoted that they simply cannot except it -but just you try to get high up in an organization like Green Peace all the while denying global warming and only wearing clothes made from animals.... see how inclusive those people are then. Every religion and philosophy is exclusive to some degree.
4. We considered this a few months ago but the Gospel is the most exclusive inclusive none oppressive truth in the world.
 1. Let's look at why that is and then we will be done.

3. The Servant

1. 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. 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, about himself or about someone else?”** Then

Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus.

2. No doubt the Ethiopian was being drawn to Jesus through this passage by the Spirit, which prompted him to ask -who is this speaking about?? But why? This text is from what is called the Servant Song of Isaiah. It's a passage that speaks of God's anointed servant that has been sent with the Good news of God's coming salvation and kingdom and whose service to Yahweh will make atonement for the people of Israel, for the whole world and will usher in a whole new way of relating to God.
3. But this Servant must suffer greatly, and be cut off - Killed. It describes him as being one whose generation is cut off. Could it be that this stands out to the Eunuch ?- this anointed servant is cut off, his life is taken from him, he has no descendants, no heritage... he can radically relate. Who is this speaking of; what does it mean?... at that moment Philip comes to explain to him how Jesus is God's anointed servant to do what we could never do - he lives perfectly, for us, and suffers humiliation, misery, injustice, and death for the sin we had committed. - By his stripes we are healed. Philip no doubt explained how Jesus was cut off so we could be grafted in, he was bruised for our iniquities so our sin, our disease can be healed... So Philip explains that God has offered us a cosmic cleansing of our sin and uncleanness so we can now have fellowship with him... so what does that mean for this Ethiopian Eunuch???
4. Well, If you continue in the Servant song of Isaiah, which there is no doubt in my mind that Philip did, they would come to this passage - **"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." - Isaiah 56:3-5**
5. Those who were once a far off, those who were cut off, and barred from the presence of God, the eunuch who was like a tree that could produce no fruit is now given a name better than sons and daughters!!!! And an everlasting legacy and heritage that will never

be cut off - hope, a future, a bright, and glorious future all because of the one who was cut off for our sake and rose again for our justification.. The Ethiopian asks Philip - What prevents me from being baptized from sharing in this blessing, and in the community of God's people?? The answer - nothing... there is nothing that Jesus did not suffer and die for, cover and redeem by his blood - do we believe this will we receive this??

6. How can Christianity, how can the Gospel be so inclusive and exclusive at the same time - Because only one man was made sin (the God-man), that we might become the righteousness of God in him. Only one Son was given because of God's great love for the world. There is only one substitute for our sin - Jesus Christ the righteous one - John says, **“But if anyone does sin (that is all of us), we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.”** Look there is only one way, one propitiation, one payment, but it is for all!! Again, John says, **“But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.”**
1. May this most exclusive inclusive none oppressive truth in the world. That one man died for his enemies, so they could be forgiven and eternally blessed - drive us towards those who are ethnically, culturally different, sexually altered, those who we would never go near without the incredible grace of God working in and through our lives.