

Acts 8:26-40
A Gospel for Outcasts
Ryan Perz – February 16, 2020

If we walk into a situation where someone tells us that they have good news and bad news, what do we usually want to hear first? The bad news. Acts 8:9-40 is really a unit—it focuses on two particular people: Simon the Sorcerer and the Ethiopian Eunuch. First, bad news. Simon the Sorcerer just didn't get it. Even after baptism, money and power seemed to seduce him again.

But there is good news, and that's the story for this week. It is helpful to see how the Bible will put two characters back to back to show complete contrast.

Simon is a picture of defective belief. The Eunuch pictures true belief with repentance. This scene is short and action-packed, and filled with good news.

We will spend our time this morning looking at how the good news comes.

1. Through a servant who rises and runs (26-30)

- Phillip is divinely dispatched. Rise and Go. Get up and go.
- He went south in the territory of Judea; then over to Gaza, up the coast to Ceserea—where he stayed for some time until we see him in 21:8.
- Let's consider the fact that God called Phillip away from successful and thriving ministry to the wilderness.

Principle: Sometimes what God calls us to, or away from, will not always make sense on the surface and at the moment. But that does not mean it's irrational. Success does not mean God wants us to stay there.

Notice that the Angel of the Lord does not spell out every detail, only enough to get him moving on the right road. That's how God often works. As we pray about his will and guidance, we don't get it all laid out. But he does guide in the *next steps*.

Phillip is a great model of faithful witness. It begins by rising. Getting up.

- It's not just that Phillip rises to the occasion, he also *runs* at the Spirit's command (29-30a).
- Now running in biblical times was not a hobby as far as I can see. People walked everywhere so they had not need to burn extra calories.
- Running indicates *urgency*.
- E.g., the Father in the prodigal son runs (Lk 15:20); Peter and John run to the empty tomb (Jn 20:4). Running means we are urgent about what is happening. We mean business.

Running can indicate what we love the most.

E.g., if you hear someone say “fire”, you run to save your life, or the lives of others.

Our family was at an outdoor concert called Rise Fest. It was a humid June day and thousands of people were in an alfalfa field turned amphitheater. Almost without warning, tornadic speed winds came and we had to all get to our vehicles. Everyone ran. I’m not a runner, but I ran. If we love God, we will be urgent about his mission. Are you a runner? Is there something of an urgency with this lost world? Some believe this story is placed here to show the need for *personal evangelism*.

There is a tendency for Christians to become ingrown. I really enjoy spending all my time with other Christians who share my values. Here is a reminder where the Lord Jesus wants us to be. He calls his people to rise and run to the lost and outcast.

2. To an outcast who is spiritually restored and resurrected (30-38)

- The main character in this section is by all measures an outcast.
- He is a foreigner first off; works for a pagan queen.
- Secondly, he is a eunuch—could not enter the temple (Dt 23:1)

Ethiopia: Not modern day Ethiopia, but what the Bible calls Cush, around modern day Sudan. He fits the unconventional person from an unconventional place

- Yet note the grace of God that has been working (v27)—he had come to Jerusalem to worship. He would be a non-Jewish God-fearing man.
- On his travels back, he is reading the Scripture. Just to be aware, copies of Scripture were expensive and hard to own.
- (v29ff) Now this is where the story really gets fun. As he is reading the Bible out loud, Phillip recognizes this is his assignment—so he intercepts the chariot, and asks: Do you understand?

This man is reading from Is 53—and he does not understand. He needs someone to *guide*.

Guide—this is a helpful way to see what our role should be.

We do not need an earth-shattering testimony, nor be the next Ravi Zacharis. We are simply called to guide people in the Word that guides them to Christ.

- Let’s look at the specific passage under scrutiny.

(v 32-33; Is 53: 7-8)

- The question is both sincere and legit (v34).
- Then, Philip does something essential—he teaches the man to read the Bible the way Jesus wants everyone to.

(Lk 24:47) “And beginning with Moses and the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.”

Knowing that the Bible’s main theme is Jesus Christ, is the key to unlocking an understanding of it. A person can know Greek and Hebrew like the back of their hand, but if they don’t know that the Bible is about Jesus, they don’t know this book well at all.

In Michael Reeves’ excellent book *Delighting in the Trinity*, he gets us away from a narcissistic reading of scripture that is very common.

“Knowing that the Bible is about him (Jesus) and *not me* means that instead of reading the Bible obsessing about me, I can gaze on him...through the pages you get caught up...you find your heart strangely pounding for him in a way you would never have if you had treated the Bible as book about you.”

Phillip tells this guy to *gaze at Jesus*, according to Is 53.

- His work benefits the nations (52:15)
- He is punished for transgressions (53:5)
- He unjustly and innocently suffers (53:7)
- His life as a sin offering...fulfilling all the OT sacrificial system (53:10)
- His work that justifies many (53:11)

As we turn our eyes to scripture, let’s make sure they are turned to Jesus. Gaze at him and have your heart pound more for him. As it pounds more for him, we fade into the background.

Restoration

- V35, Just like Jesus modeled at the end of Luke (24); Phillip uses this as a platform for the gospel.
- But is says “beginning with this Scripture” (v35)
- There is a real good possibility then, that Phillip included Is 56:3-4:

³ 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....
I will give them an everlasting name
that shall not be cut off.

- Now some translations include a v37—not found in the earlier Gk texts, but it’s the proper response: confessing Jesus as Lord.

37 [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.”]

- There is one final picture—in the baptism.
- Baptism symbolizes what’s in a person’s heart, that they believe and repent.

Resurrection

It’s also to symbolize that a reality has happened. The reality is that a person has been brought back to life. They have been *spiritually resurrected*.

(Rom 6:4)

⁴ 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.

(Col 2:12)

¹² having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.

Although this man was physically alive, spiritually he was dead until he heard, believed and responded to the gospel. Baptism is a symbol of spiritual resurrection. God has taken a cold heart and given life!

There is also something to see in v38. Phillip baptizes. It’s significant first because this is the first non-Jew, full blown Gentile outcast. But it also hits on a key theme in mission, perseverance.

Remember, Phillip baptizes Simon—the false convert. Does he get cynical here?

Just like, how would you pray for Saul? What would you do after you've seen false profession? After you spend time investing in someone only to see them take sin so lightly?

There was a guy who I invested years of my life in trying to disciple. By everything on the outside, it looked good. He was getting into the Bible, lifting his hands in praise. But eventually he went right back into the sin he was enslaved to.

What do we do when we spend a lot of energy on someone and there is no fruit? It's the same thing that farmers do even after a failed harvest: persevere—new opportunity to sow. We never know what blessing God may send.

3. With rejoicing (39)

- The final comment is that our new friend in Christ rejoices (v39)
- It's the same reaction when the city of Samara believed (v8)

Luke likes to highlight joy in salvation:

(Lk 2:10-11) Also given to outcast-shepherds. Good news of great joy.

(Lk 10:20) Jesus tells his disciples to find their greatest joy in salvation.

(Lk 15:10) More joy in heaven over one sinner who repents. It's actually the joy of God!

Believing ought to be paired with *repenting* and *rejoicing*.

—Simon showed (negatively) how critical it is to repent.

—The Eunuch shows (positively) how essential joy is.

Joy is essential. It's written 208 times in the ESV Bible; listed second in the fruits of the Spirit. What truly makes you happy? Is your life one "with joy?"

Three invitations to joy

1. A call to Newfound joy. It's the joy of coming to Christ for salvation like this man.
2. Restored joy: (Ps 51:12). It's the joy of repenting of sin. Sin will never make us happy.
3. Sustaining joy: it's the call to keep fighting for joy in Christ (Rom 14:17).

¹⁷ For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.