

The Good News about Jesus

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 20 September 2026

Preacher: James Ross

[0:00] Please have a seat. And in just a moment, I'm going to read from Acts chapter 8, and you'll find it on page 1101.

! We're going to read from verse 26 to verse number 40. But before we do that, in Psalm 109 and at verse 10, we're reminded that God's Word is where we can seek God. So using verse 10 by way of a prayer for us all, we want to seek you with all of our hearts. Do not let us stray from your commands. Amen.

So Acts chapter 8 and at verse 26, and let's again hear God's Word together. Now, an angel of the Lord said to Philip, Philip goes south to the road, the desert road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.

So he started out, and on his way, he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of the Kandake, which means Queen of the Ethiopians. This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the book of Isaiah the prophet. The spirit told Philip, go to that chariot and stay near it. Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. Do you understand what you're reading?

Philip asked. How can I? He said, unless someone explains it to me. So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. This is the passage of scripture the eunuch was reading. He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he did not open his mouth. In his humiliation, he was deprived of justice. Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth. The eunuch asked Philip, tell me please, who's the prophet talking about? Himself or someone else? Then Philip began with that very passage of scripture and told him the good news about Jesus. As they traveled along the road, they came to some water, and the eunuch said, look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptized? And he gave orders to stop the chariot.

[2:23] Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and Philip baptized him. When they came up out of the water, the spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing. Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and traveled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea. Amen. So this morning, we're thinking about the good news about Jesus, and learning to see our story within God's story. So I'm going to imagine that at first glance, as we read this story, it has some aspects that seem really foreign to us, or strange to us. There is an Ethiopian man, and he's a eunuch, and they're in a wilderness desert, and there's chariots, and they're actually reading from a scroll. You know, so we're in a really ancient story, but as we keep looking, it absolutely is going to connect with our stories, and it's going to show us, actually, how God often chooses to work, and how God works to make the good news of Jesus known to people. So think about it in this way as we begin. If you're here today, and as you look back on your story, and you think, God brought someone into my life to share Jesus with me, you can relate to this story. If you're here today, and you're searching for truth, you'll find a point of connection within this story. If you have ever felt a strange compulsion to explore Christianity, or if, on the other hand, you've ever opened your Bible with a friend and said, let me tell you about Jesus, then this is part of your story. What we're going to see is this is a story of God's providence.

God is bringing a person seeking answers together with Philip, who has those answers, because he knows Jesus. We're going to see that this is a story that teaches us about personal evangelism, where one man is not preaching this time, but he's answering questions and explaining what the Bible teaches.

And it's also a story of the prompting of God's Spirit, because the Spirit of God wants to make sure that Jesus' mission is a success, so that people get to know the good news of Jesus.

This week, I came across a story by a chap called Leighton Ford. He was telling the story of a prisoner who was converted in jail, and he was sitting there with a pastor. He'd just become a follower of Jesus, and he turned to that pastor and said, remember, don't get a big head. You are just the 25th man. An interesting phrase. And what he meant was that God had patiently and deliberately been working through multiple people, links in the chain, because God wanted that prisoner to meet Jesus and be saved by him. And I hope that this story encourages us when we see that God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, they are working together. They're working in one man, Philip, for one man, this guy we meet from Ethiopia. And the story is showing us God's pattern of Christians placed in other people's lives, so that people can see and hear the good news about Jesus.

So let's get into our story. We're going to think about the search, we're going to think about the servant, and we're going to think about the Spirit together. But let's begin with the search, which is also telling us this is a story of God's providence. Just to read verse 26 again, now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, go south to the road, the desert road that goes down from Jerusalem. So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch. Okay, in 1865, a little bit of history for you, the famous Scottish missionary and adventurer David Livingston disappeared. He was on a mission to find the source of the Nile, and he disappeared without trace for six years, until eventually a chap called Henry Stanley, a journalist, led a search party. And after six years of Livingston being missing, and after eight months of Stanley and his team searching, David Livingston was found in a small town in western Tanzania, and that led to that famous greeting. We've all heard it maybe in history, Dr. Livingston, I presume. That story is a story of two searching people brought together in one dramatic moment. That's a scene that's played out before. It's a scene that plays out in Acts chapter eight. Let me show you the two people who are seeking. On the one hand, there is an Ethiopian who is seeking God. So who is he? Well, he's a chap from not actually the country of Ethiopia. It's a region of northern Sudan and South Egypt, which was known as Ethiopia back then. He was a chancellor or the treasurer to the queen mother, the Kandake. And at some point in his life, he has become a convert to

[7:54] Judaism. And that has led him to go to Jerusalem in order to worship. So we're going Africa, North Africa to Jerusalem. That's a long journey. And when he's in Jerusalem, he buys himself a scroll.

So he knows he's wealthy. We know he's wealthy. And he's sitting in his chariot, and somebody else is driving it for him, we presume. And so he is reading it on this desert road on the way home. One other thing that we know about this Ethiopian, he is a eunuch. It's a very uncomfortable thing to talk about. He has had his private parts removed, which according to the Old Testament, banned him from worshipping in the temple. But part of the good news of the Bible is there was a promise in Isaiah 56. So we read in Isaiah 53. Three chapters later, Isaiah 56, there is a promise given to eunuchs, there is a day coming when they'll be given a place and an everlasting name in God's temple in the kingdom of God. And that for this Ethiopian is about to come true. But here is this man, and he's clearly, isn't he, he's seeking God. And I wonder if that basic level, can you relate to that this morning? It's why you're here in church. Maybe it's why you picked up a Bible. It's why maybe you've been asking some questions. Maybe even it's because you've journeyed to a new country.

It's given you the chance and the reason to explore questions of faith. So that's one side of the story. We've got an Ethiopian who's seeking God, but there is another search, another searcher here. God is seeking the Ethiopian. So it begins in verse 26 with the angel directing Philip, go south to the desert road.

So he gets his direction. So he's maybe got to go 50 or 60 miles into the desert. And then in verse 29, we have the spirit working. The spirit told Philip, go to that chariot and stay near it.

[9:51] So God is working to direct Philip so that this desert road encounter, which we could easily read as random, is actually directed entirely by God. He is in control and he's in control for a particular purpose because he wants this man to hear the good news about Jesus. And again, think about that in your own story. I was thinking about it in my own story. I became a Christian because a preacher from Northern Ireland came to visit the Isle of Skye. And it was at that point as he preached the gospel, I heard and I believe. Then I thought about going to university for the first time. And there was in my small local church, a guy who just recently started working and he was like super kind and hospitable to me and helped me to plug in as a student. And that was so

important to my spiritual growth.

Then I was thinking about my church ministries. I've been here for a number of years, been in Glasgow for a number of years. And I was thinking about people from Spain and people from China and people from Malaysia brought across our paths so that they could discover Jesus and be saved. Because that's how God works.

So this is the story of God's providence, controlling and directing the movements of people, directing conversations, directing the reading of a Bible for the sake of his mission.

And you know, that means that I can say today that not one of us is here by accident. You might not know why you're here, but God knows. For some of us, this may become a day of salvation. This may be the day that you trust in Jesus for the very first time, or it may become a day of mobilization. You might sense the spirit directing you in this building or from this building into a conversation, into a friendship so that someone else can learn about Jesus. One thing I'd love for us to take away from this as Christians is that we would celebrate God's providence. I was sharing this with our community group, Kevin DeYoung, had a great little phrase. He said, the people who love God's sovereignty should be the happiest people on earth because we understand that whatever comes to us comes from our Father's hand. We sang about it. No gift is an accident. No good thing comes by chance.

The family you've been given, the friends that are around you, the good food that we share, the place that we live, the chance to hear about Jesus, they all come to us from God. He's always wrapping up fresh gifts of his mercy for us to enjoy, like he did with the Ethiopian. And so when we read our stories, we need to read our stories in light of God's story, God's mission, God's providence.

[12 : 36] So we have the search. But let's move on now to the middle of the story to think about the servant. And at the same time, we're going to think about personal evangelism. So, so far in the story, God in his providence has brought together two men. Perfect timing. Just as the Ethiopian eunuch is reading his Bible, he's asking questions for understanding. And the bit that he is on, what comes from Isaiah 53. So look with me at the question that Philip asks in verse 30. Do you understand what you're reading? How can I, unless someone explains it to me? So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. And this is the passage. He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.

He is reading at that precise moment what I think is the clearest Old Testament prediction of the work of Jesus, of his death and of his resurrection as God's suffering servant.

And again, just stop and think, how encouraging is this? How encouraging is it? There was Philip. So last time we met Philip, he was in Samaria and he was preaching to whole towns and cities. But God so loves to save people that he redirects Philip into the middle of nowhere so that he can share good news, not with a whole community, but with one African man. Because God knows us and cares for us individually. It's something that I've had the privilege of in ministry. I remember, maybe it's just because it's been Freshers Week. So I worked with international students in Glasgow, and I vividly remember maybe my second year working in Glasgow, walking into the hub building in Glasgow Uni, and seeing this young Chinese man by himself, and he was reading a book. And as it got closer, it turns out he was reading the Bible. And this conversation ended up being very like Philip's conversation with the Ethiopian unit, because he was really interested, but he didn't know anything.

He'd never read a Bible before, and he didn't know anything about Jesus. And so patiently over weeks and months, we would meet and we'd read through the Gospel of Luke, and he began coming to church and coming to Bible studies. And eventually, God brought him to saving faith. It's what God does.

As people get to discover who Jesus is for themselves. And so on the desert road for this Ethiopian, he's reading about the suffering servant of God. He's reading about this figure who faces humiliation.

[15 : 13] And he suffers injustice. And he is killed. It's as if he is a lamb led silently to the slaughter.

He's a very humble guy. This eunuch, verse 34. He expresses his lack of knowledge. Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about? Himself or someone else? And notice this. Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus. The whole Bible is good news about Jesus. What does Isaiah 53 tell us about Jesus? Why is it good news? Well, it's good news when we discover that this servant who is suffering and who is dying. He is

doing so as a substitute.

He is taking the place and bearing the guilt of others. And this is a willing exchange. This is the bodyguard gladly diving in front of a bullet to save a king or a president. This is a mother sacrificing herself to save her child. This is a willing substitution.

And this servant that we read of, this sacrifice that is being made, it makes atonement. It makes to one. It means that we as sinful people and God who is holy, we can be at peace because of the work of the servant. Because he has come to deal with the sin that separates, the sin that would condemn us.

He has made peace by his own blood shed on the cross. So that when faith turns to this servant, who we know is Jesus, the Son of God, the record of debt that is rightfully ours, it passes to Jesus. [17:09] He pays the price in full. So he's a substitute who makes atonement. And as we read, Isaiah 53 continues that yes, the servant dies and it was the Lord's will to crush him. God the Father gladly, willingly, lovingly gave his Son to be our substitute and our sacrifice. But that servant who dies, he rises again.

He is vindicated and victorious. And Isaiah 53 tells us of the effect of this. It says that this servant, this Jesus, he is satisfied. It's as if Jesus can look back on the cross and then the empty tomb and he can say, that's my life's work accomplished. I have accomplished salvation. And he's satisfied. Isaiah says, this servant, he justifies many. It is through Jesus that we can have a right standing before God. By ourselves, we cannot come near to God. By ourselves, we deserve nothing but judgment.

But when we're trusting in Jesus, we're justified, right standing. Isaiah 53 reminds us that he bore sin and made intercession. It is Jesus who grants forgiveness and life and eternal reward to all those he came to save. And we know this is about Jesus because Jesus tells us as much. He identified himself as the suffering servant. So he'll use the language that Isaiah 53 uses. In Mark 10 45, for example, Jesus will say that he came to give his life as a ransom for many. His own life is the payment price for our freedom and our forgiveness. And then in Luke 22, Jesus will say shortly before his arrest, it is written, he was numbered with the transgressors. That's the text from Isaiah 53.

And I tell you that this must be fulfilled in me. So Philip in that chariot can turn to the Ethiopian and say, I have good news. Isaiah wasn't talking about himself. He was talking about Jesus. He's the son of God and God's appointed savior. And what we have from Philip is a wonderful example of what we call personal evangelism, personally sharing good news. So think about some lessons that we can draw together. The first really important thing is to recognize that this is a normal way that God builds his church. When Christians like us, if you're a Christian, when you share Jesus with the people around you, that's God's normal way. That's why he places us where we live in our families, in our jobs, in our schools and universities, that we might live for Jesus and make him known. That's a normal part of Christian lifestyle, talking with others about Jesus. I also recognize that with personal evangelism, it allows our witness to take place across cultures. Back in Acts chapter one, Jesus said to his disciples, you'll be my witnesses in Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria, we've got there so far, and to the ends of the earth. And do you know that for a first century Jewish person, Africa, Ethiopian region represented the ends of the earth. So in God's providence, Philip is brought to share the good news to the ends of the earth. Witness takes place across cultures. And it's one of the great things about where we are as a church that we get to see the nations come to us. And so we have lots of opportunities to share the good news of Jesus with people from very many different nations. We have an English conversation class that meets on a Monday. There is a CU International Cafe that meets here on a Thursday.

[21:06] And so there are chances for people from here to tell people from all over the place about the God who loves them and sent Jesus to save them. So let's pray for those ministries as we think about the truth that witness takes place across cultures. Here's another thing that's true when it comes to personal evangelism. God is already preparing hearts. So on the one side of that, God creates openness and longing and curiosity. And maybe again, as you're thinking of your own story, you can sense some of those.

And we need to know that is not natural. Naturally, we are blind to spiritual reality. Naturally, we want nothing to do with God. Actually, we deliberately walk away from God and His truth. So openness and longing is a God-given thing. But on the other side, it's God who creates willingness in the hearts of His people and gives words to His people, the words of good news, so

that we might become a link in the chain, that we might become somebody who would share the good news about Jesus with others. When we used to live in north of Inverness in Dingwall, there was a Spanish friend who moved to Dingwall to work. No Christian background whatsoever. It saw a Christianity Explored advert on the front of the church. And she came from week one. And I think before the course finished, she had committed her life to Jesus and still walks with Jesus. And God was at work in that.

And it's always amazing to see that God prepares hearts. And He's still at work because He wants people to know the good news about Jesus. Some other things about personal evangelism. It's a witness that's based on Scripture. What people need to hear, what we need to share, is the good news of salvation that we find in the pages of the Bible. They need to hear the good news of Jesus. That's what Philip does beginning in Isaiah 53. I wonder if there is somebody, a friend perhaps, or a family member, we could say to him, would you like to read the Bible with me? It doesn't have to be with a Bible open perhaps. We might share the stories that we find in the Bible with somebody. Bring the truths of God's Word into our conversations. Or even we trust that God's Word does its work. Have you ever read the Bible before? No. Why don't you take a gospel and read it? And then we can talk about it later. God wants to speak and He speaks through His Word.

And as God speaks through His Word, here's another thing about personal evangelism. Jesus is and always is our theme. It's the old story of Charles Spurgeon, the famous preacher. He said that just as every road in England eventually leads to London, so every story of the Bible will lead in one way or another to Jesus. And I want to take people there. So we share the message of the gospel, this history-shaping, life-transforming message that God sent His Son. And His Son became one of us in order to suffer and die for us, to then rise again for us, so that if we repent, if we turn away from our sin, and if we believe in Jesus as Lord and Savior, we will be saved. We will be restored to the life with God that we were made for. So we've seen the search, and we've seen the servant, and now briefly we need to talk about the Spirit and the Spirit's prompting, which we find in verses 36 to 40. But before we get there, just to take you back for a moment to the story of Henry Stanley finding

[24:56] Dr. Livingston. And that was an adventure story all of its own. So Stanley was age 28. He really wanted to be somebody in the world. He was a journalist, but he wanted fame. He wanted his place in history.

So he decided in 1870 that he would lead this search. And so he gathered 2,000 men with him. And in this eight-month search through the interior of Africa, he got a whole range of illnesses. There was dysentery and smallpox and malaria. He covered, they don't know how many thousands of miles until he arrived in the town and saw a slightly taller man with a gray beard, leading him to say, Dr. Livingston, I presume. Now in that story of search and discovery, what prompted Stanley was absolutely fame, fortune, and adventure? Dr. Luke, who's writing the book of Acts, is asking us to consider what is it that's prompting this story? And what's prompting over and over again throughout the book of Acts, the one who prompts the ongoing mission of Jesus is none other than God, the Holy Spirit. So we saw it in verse 29. Then Philip ran up to the chariot.

Oh, sorry, verse 28. The Spirit told Philip, go to that chariot and stay near it. So the Spirit causes Philip to draw near so that he can explain the truths of Isaiah 53. And as he begins to explain clearly, God does his saving work in the Ethiopian man's life. So we get to verse 36.

As they traveled along the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptized? And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. So there's this great scene in the middle of the desert where there's a pool of water. This Ethiopian, he now believes that God has sent his Messiah King, God's promised Savior, is the suffering servant. And he is Jesus, the Son of God.

And because he believes he wants to be baptized, it's a sign that his sins have been washed away by Jesus. And it's a sign that he has received the Spirit. It's a sign that he has a new heart and he has a new identity. He has a new loyalty to Jesus. And now he also has a new joy. Did you notice that in verse 39? The eunuch went on his way rejoicing. Joy in Jesus is what God wants to produce in us by his Spirit. And meanwhile, the Spirit is also prompting Philip. So verse 39, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away. And Philip, we discover, was traveling around preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea. So the Spirit decides it's time to move Philip on. There are more people to share Jesus with in more places. And so he is doing his mission prompted by

the work of the Spirit. So the Holy Spirit is prompting and it leads to God's church moving into the continent of

[28 : 14] Africa. It leads to one man finding Jesus as the answer to the questions that he had. And it led Philip to keep spreading the message of Jesus. What is it that God the Holy Spirit does in a person's life?

Think about this image of baptism that we have here. You know, like water that is poured on us, God the Spirit is poured out on us. And when the Spirit comes, we have this personal experience of the love of God. And we receive from the Spirit a felt awareness that we share life with God.

There's a preacher called John Piper in the States. He puts it like this. Speaking of our need for the Spirit, we need an outpouring of his Christ-revealing, heart-awakening, sin-defeating, boldness-producing power. As you're sitting here today, have you had that experience? Do you want that experience? Do you want it again? Then let the Spirit prompt you and ask the Spirit to do this for you? That you would ask to know God and to know his love or to know more of God and to know more of his love because the Spirit loves to do that. The Spirit loves to bring glory to the Lord Jesus. And so as we think about this text, this is as if Luke, as he writes the book of Acts, he wants to highlight and put it in bold and then underline it, God wants people to be saved. God wants people from all places to hear and to accept the good news about Jesus. And so he tells us about God the Father, who's directing providence, who's moving people around to serve his mission of salvation. And he writes about God the Son, who in love gives his life as a ransom to set people free from sin and death to enjoy forgiveness and new life with God. And he writes to highlight God the Spirit who prompts people's hearts, who gives the gift of a new heart, a new birth, as people turn to receive Jesus as Lord.

And as that ongoing story of the mission of God continues, And as we close this morning, where are you in this story today? Let me invite you again to reflect personally. As Jesus calls from his word, from his good news, will you accept him today?

As God wants to direct us, will you follow his lead today? And as the Spirit prompts, will you respond in faith and obedience today? Let's pray together briefly.

[31 : 22] Lord, our God, thank you for this wonderful story, reminding us of your love to save people by helping them to see and to believe that Jesus is your Son, and he is our Savior, and he became the suffering servant on the cross to deal with our sin and to bring us back to life with God. We thank you that this good news is for people from all nations. Thank you that even in this gathering, there are people from many nations here, and we thank you for that. And Lord, we pray that you would be pleased to show each and every one of us the glory and the goodness of Jesus so that we would trust him today.

And we pray that for those who are your people, you would send us from this place full of joy in Jesus, and ready to share that joy with others as you would lead and direct us.

And so we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.