

The Ethiopian Eunuch

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[0:00] Let me tell you just briefly about a lady called Nora. She's now with the Lord, but I knew her when I was up at the church up in Hurstbury Point where I grew up.

! She was a single lady who knew Jesus as her Savior. She prayed regularly for our family. And even in years, diagnosed with really bad health, particularly had really bad breathing problems. She still taught us of the Lord Jesus in Sunday school for as long as she could. And even after that, we could see her great love for Jesus as she, in her frailty, could sing songs of praises so gladly to Him.

God used her to tell me of Jesus. God also used my mum, who told us of the Lord Jesus, who would sit and read and pray with my brother and I as we grew up.

Through their witness, God used them to tell me of the Lord Jesus and to bring me to Himself. I wonder who told you first of the Lord Jesus?

[1:23] Who explained the gospel to you? Who has God used in your life? Maybe it was a friend, a parent, a grandparent.

Maybe it was someone knocking at your door, a youth leader, a pastor. Who told you of the gospel? Who can you thank God for this morning?

Because whoever it was, it was no accident. As we see in this passage, God divinely arranges things.

God works sovereignly by His grace to bring His chosen people to faith in Him. And we see that in this passage.

We see a situation that, humanly speaking, shouldn't have happened. These two men shouldn't have met each other. But God is orchestrating the events.

[2:22] If you were directing a film, you would have the power to tell people where to stand, where to go, how to walk, how to say things.

And in this passage, it's like God is working as the divine director to put people in the right place at the right time to be reading and saying the right things.

In order to achieve His salvation purposes. And this salvation, this wasn't for someone we would expect.

This was salvation for really an unwelcome man. Someone who couldn't really go and freely worship God with His people in the temple.

But like last week, we see that God's salvation purposes are being worked out.

[3:21] As God built up a church in Jerusalem, but it's now reaching into Samaria as it did last week. And Judea. Jews and Samaritans, they hated each other.

But God, by His Spirit, is breaking down barriers. And now, this week, as we look at this chapter, we're seeing the very, very beginning of God saving Gentiles.

People who were previously seen as outsiders. And that's exactly the mission of the Lord Jesus.

We keep coming back to this key verse in Acts.

Acts chapter 1, verse 8. Where Jesus said to His disciples, You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you. And you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

And we're really seeing this being worked out before our eyes in these pages of the book of Acts.

This morning, we're going to see two big things from this passage.

[4:32] And then we're going to hear three lessons that we can learn. So, two big things. Firstly, an unwelcome man. There are two characters in

this passage.

The Ethiopian eunuch and Philip. Let's look, firstly, at the Ethiopian eunuch. In many ways, a very important and well-respected man.

Verse 27. We hear this of the Ethiopian eunuch. He was 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. So, this man, the Ethiopian eunuch, he is serving in an official capacity for the royal family in Ethiopia as a treasurer.

An important job. He's clearly a trusted man, well-respected among his people. A man who's clearly been well-educated.

[5:44] Because, as we'll see, he is reading the scriptures. And he had gone to Jerusalem. Gone to Jerusalem to worship God.

But upon arriving in Jerusalem, as a non-Jewish man, he would have found that he wouldn't have been very welcome to worship God.

He could stand in the court of Gentiles and look upon the Jewish people worshipping God. But he couldn't go any further. Couldn't get any closer.

And there was another thing. He was a eunuch. He's been castrated as a child, most likely. And Deuteronomy 23, verse 1 says this.

No one who has been emasculated by crushing or cutting may enter the assembly of the Lord. So, this man is doubly unwelcome. As a foreigner and as a eunuch.

[6:50] But he still wants to worship God. He wanted to get close to God. He wanted to read the scriptures.

And yet, he must have been thinking, I feel unwelcome. But it's fascinating him, the scriptures. He's sitting and reading them.

And yet, because of his situation, there is nobody who's going to help him to read them and understand them. It's not nice to feel unwelcome, is it?

About 10 years ago, there was a church that I walked into a couple of times. A church similar to here. Walked in, really good service.

But nobody spoke to me. I then went a few weeks later and it was the same again. It's not nice to feel unwelcome. You feel ignored and isolated and rejected.

[7:51] We pray that that's not the case for those visiting us this morning. But certainly, that's not how God wants people to feel.

Because God is going to make it clear to this man who may feel unwelcome that there is a divine welcome for him. Look at what God, the great director, does in verse 26.

Now, an angel of the Lord said to Philip, go south to the road, the desert road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza. Philip is told to go.

Go south. And he responds by going. Verse 27, he started out. He went. He was obedient to God's words. And then, again, in verse 29, he's told to go.

The spirit told Philip, go to that chariot and stay near it. And not only does he go to it, we're told in verse 30 that he runs to it.

[8:59] He goes with cheerful obedience, running to the chariot. God's directing things here. And what does he find as he approaches the chariot?

He finds a man reading scripture. And look at what he's reading. Verse 32. 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 shearers 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. He is reading Isaiah 53. A great passage of scripture spoken hundreds of years before Jesus went to die on a cross.

And yet speaks so vividly of what Jesus did. It shows us the lamb of God walking quietly and submissively to be sacrificed in our place.

[10:10] But the man doesn't know that. Verse 34. The eunuch asked Philip, tell me please, who is the prophet talking about?

Himself or someone else? He's got questions. What a gift for Philip to have been taken to this place, to go to the chariot and find a man reading scripture and saying, Who is this talking about?

That would be lovely if that happened to us in evangelism most of the time. A few weeks ago, I came out of the door here at the end of the day.

And there was a man looking at the information outside the church. And I said to him, what interests you here? And he said, I've got lots of questions about life and faith.

My brother's just died. And I spoke to him for a few minutes, gave him my contact details and said, do you get in touch if you want to come back?

[11:15] And I was sort of hoping and praying it would be a situation like this. I haven't heard from him since, but pray that God might direct his paths towards me or someone else, a Christian.

And that God would work in a wonderful way like this. Well, this is a great opportunity here for Philip. And so how does Philip take it?

Verse 35. Then Philip began with that very passage of scripture and told him the good news about Jesus. It's all about Jesus, Philip can say.

From the scriptures, he can say, it's all about Jesus of Nazareth. Have you heard of him? Let me tell you about him. Let me tell you what he's done. Philip could tell him about Jesus.

About the one who was willing to humble himself to death, even death on a cross. Who was willing to be punished by God. Stricken by God and afflicted.

[12:16] Not for his own sins, but pierced for our transgressions. Crushed for our iniquities.

Punished for us to bring us peace. And by his wounds, we are healed. And this wasn't just for the sin of Jewish people in Jerusalem.

This was for the sin of the whole world. So that no foreigner or eunuch could say, I'm excluded.

Or I'm only a dry tree, as that passage in Isaiah 56 says. Rather, for the eunuch, God says, I will give within my temple and its walls a memorial and a name.

Better than sons and daughters. I will give them an everlasting name that will endure forever.

Words spoken to people like this man, the Ethiopian eunuch.

[13:25] A man who can't have children. It's an impossibility for him. And yet God says, I'm going to give you something even more precious than that.

I'm going to give you a name. An everlasting name. Everlasting salvation. And maybe this morning, that's your situation.

Maybe you can't have children for whatever reason and would long to. God gives you something even more precious than his son Jesus. He gives you an everlasting name.

An everlasting life. And a family. A whole worldwide family of believers. And that's precious. And that's precious for this man.

He is welcome. And as a foreigner. Don't forget, he's doubly excluded. A foreigner and a eunuch. As a foreigner, God says this to him.

[14:24] These I will bring to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar. For my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations.

Not just Jewish people, but people from across the world can come close to God. Can worship God. And he continued.

The sovereign Lord declares, he who gathers the exiles of Jerusalem. I will gather still others to them. Others from the nations. Besides those already gathered. The Lord gives a divine welcome.

And so this man, an outsider, a foreigner, a eunuch, who may have felt unwelcome there in Jerusalem. Hears from Philip.

From this passage. And maybe Philip turned him to Isaiah 56 and said, you are welcome. You are welcome. For God says, my son has died for you. And this morning, for us here, whether you're poor or rich, uneducated or educated, single or married, young or old.

[15:41] Those with disabilities and those who seem to lead the most normal of lives. Male and female. For all nationalities. You are welcome here.

But even more, you are welcome into the kingdom of God. Peter said in his sermon in Acts chapter 2, everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

That's not just the rich. Not just men. Not just British people. That's everyone. Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. We have to call on the name of Jesus.

Repent. Turn around from our sinful lives and believe in him as savior. And that's on offer for all people.

There was nothing that this Ethiopian man could do to make himself right with God. He was a complete outsider. Doubly cut off.

[16:46] But nor is there anything we can do. We cannot obey the law of God. Reach sinful human beings. We've offended God.

There is nothing that can save us in ourselves. But that's why God spoke to his people through Isaiah the prophet to tell them that there is a servant for his disobedient and unfaithful people.

A servant who is his son. A servant who is his son. Who would have all our sin laid on him. To set us free from the power of sin. Praise God for his glorious grace.

Praise him for his grace to you this morning. And for this man. He responded in faith. Verse 36. Now verse 37.

[17:55] May well not be printed in your Bible. That's because it probably wasn't part of the original text that Luke wrote. After all he's shown already in Acts.

In Peter's sermon in Acts chapter 2. What it means to be baptized. That you must repent and believe in Jesus Christ as your savior. And so that's an unnecessary detail here.

The eunuch is baptized because Philip has seen that he has come to faith in the Lord Jesus. And so verse 38. And he gave orders to stop the chariot.

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 he went on his way rejoicing. He's rejoicing because he's a believer in Christ. And he's just been baptized.

[18:57] It's a blessing for us to follow Christ in obedience in that way. Now baptism is normally a practice for the local church. Normally elders of a church would lead the way in someone being baptized.

This man wasn't part of a local church. And he was heading back to Ethiopia as the only Christian. It wasn't going to be a possibility for him.

This was a real exception. But I think we certainly can learn from this. That the qualification for baptism is simply being a Christian.

That's the only reason. We want to check. People understand. They know what they're doing as they're baptized. But baptism doesn't save us.

It's responding in obedience. It's showing outwardly what Christ has done for us. But the only qualification is that you're a Christian. That you're trusting in Jesus as your only Savior.

[20:01] And so if that's you this morning and you haven't yet been baptized, please do come and chat with me or one of the other elders here. We'd love to begin that process with you.

So here is a man. He's been baptized. He may have felt unwelcome in Jerusalem. But he's received a divine welcome from the Lord.

And I think there's three lessons for us from this passage. First of all, that outsiders are welcome. Outsiders are welcome.

We see that here. Do we believe that? I have to confess. I think I have the ideal picture in my mind of someone who would come to faith.

Or someone who might come and join our church. But sadly, I don't think that picture involves those who we would see as outsiders. The homeless man down the road.

[21:07] The girl with autism. The single mom with three children with different dads. Or even the Ethiopian eunuch.

And I have to confess to the Lord that I'm sorry. God welcomes outsiders into his kingdom. And praise God that he does that.

Because all of us will once outsiders. All of us are sinners. Praise be to his glorious grace for welcoming us in.

And there is no limit to who God might save. God can save outsiders. Even those we wouldn't even expect to come in.

And so let's pray that God would bring more outsiders into his kingdom. Let's pray God would use us as a church to bring more in.

[22:15] Secondly, the power of God's word. We've noted this time and time again in Acts. The power of God's word. God does his work in the world through his words.

And he does that again here. What's the man reading? He's reading scripture. And what does Philip use to show him Jesus? He uses scripture. Verse 35.

Then Philip began with that very passage of scripture. And told him the good news about Jesus. God's word is doing its work once again.

To speak into someone's life. And to open their eyes to see Jesus as savior. And so we see again the power of God's words.

Let's have a look at verse 31 again. After Philip says to the Ethiopian eunuch. Do you understand what you are reading? The eunuch says in verse 31.

[23:19] How can I? He said. Unless someone explains it to me. And so he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. And I think this is an illustration of some verses in Romans.

If you can. Can we just turn to Romans. The next book in the Bible. Romans chapter 10. Romans chapter 10.

Verse 14 and 15. How then can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard?

And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written.

How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news. We have an illustration of that in chapter 8 of Acts.

[24:23] The Ethiopian eunuch. He is reading scripture. He doesn't understand it. And so how can he? Unless someone comes and preaches to him. And God provides Philip to preach to him.

What a wonderful illustration of those verses. Because that's the normal way God works to bring someone to faith in him.

Showing them in his word through people explaining his words. Preaching the good news to them. And God doing his work by his spirit. Opening people's eyes.

And this can be done through a preacher like this morning. Preaching to a crowd of people. It can be done by ordinary Christians.

Just reading some verses from the Bible. And saying this points us to Jesus. He's my savior. He can be yours. I'm so thankful to God for using Nora and others.

[25:27] The church I grew up in. To teach us in Sunday school. So thankful for my mom getting the Bible out. And reading it with us. Who can we thank God for?

For showing us the Lord Jesus and his words. And let's pray. Let's pray for opportunities to share it. Pray for opportunities to say. Would you like to read the Bible with me? And let's keep praying for the preaching of God's word on a Sunday. Of all the churches I've been part of.

I think this might be the best church. At praying for the preaching of God's word. Not just on a Sunday morning. But in the week. In our prayer meetings. Almost every week we say. And let's make sure we pray for Sunday.

Let's not stop doing that. I don't think we can pray for the preaching of God's word enough. Final lesson from this. We prepared to go.

[26:27] Verse 26. The command to Philip is go. And verse 29. The command to Philip is go. And as we noted. He even ran up to the chariot.

He went obediently. And Jesus of course. Tells his people to go. Go into all the world. Question is. Are we willing to go?

Are we willing to go? And tell people of the Lord Jesus? I want to tell you about some people that were prepared to go. I think I've mentioned in a fairly recent sermon.

Jim Elliott. A missionary. Along with four other missionaries. Who were sent to Ecuador. And had a real heart for this tribe. Called the Alka tribe. And they went after lots of planning. And prayer. And just a few days later. They died. Jim left behind a wife. Called Elizabeth. And their daughter Valerie.

[27:28] And one of the other widows. Rachel. And. They still wanted to reach that tribe. They still had a heart for them.

Even though they'd killed their husbands. And so they got to know in time. Some Alka women. Who then went back to their tribe.

However. After a few weeks. The women returned to the mission compounds. Bringing along seven other women from that tribe with them. Plus an invitation to Elizabeth and Rachel.

To go and join that tribe. And Elizabeth said. Well as long as this is what the Lord requires of me.

Then all else is irrelevant. Elizabeth and Rachel lost no time.

In taking up this unprecedented offer. However. Elizabeth did admit. That taking her three-year-old daughter. Strapped to her back. Was the biggest test of faith ever.

[28:29] It was risky for her to go through jungle terrain. But even more risky. Because she knew. That like her husband. They might be put to death.

They lived among that tribe for two years. And saw people come to faith. If Jim and Elizabeth Elliot. Didn't respond to the Lord's command to go. Then maybe. There wouldn't be Christians yet from that tribe. And yet we can look forward to standing alongside Jim.

And Elizabeth Elliot. And the others. And people from that little tribe in Ecuador. The question is. What about us? Are we willing to go?

Maybe for some of us. It is. Going abroad. And giving our lives to mission work abroad. But for most of us. God's placed us here.

[29:28] In this city. At this time. Perhaps it just means. We need to. Get up off the sofa a bit more. And go to. Maybe a coffee shop. At the same time.

Once a week. And just get to know people that go there. Or maybe it means. We need to go. And knock on our neighbor's door a bit more. And get to know them. Are we willing to go?

Knowing that we have the power of God's word with us. And his spirit living in us. God's word with us. I'm encouraged by so many of you that do. That get involved in society.

By the conversations that are regularly happening with your family and with your colleagues. Let's pray that God. The great director. The great director. By his sovereign grace. Would be working in that.

And opening eyes to see. To people. So that they can see Jesus as their savior. So that more outsiders can be gathered into the kingdom.

[30:25] And why don't we pray for that now. Father God. Thank you so much for this chapter of Acts.

Thank you so much that we see outsiders coming into your kingdom. Thank you so much. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you particularly for the Ethiopian eunuch. And the encouragement it is to see your work there.

In welcoming him. An outsider into your kingdom. Father we thank you. And Lord we pray that you'd help us.

And use us to go. Thank you for people who have gone to us. Thank you for people who have told us of Jesus. Lord help us to do the same. For others. And we ask this in Jesus name.

Amen. We're going to sing a hymn. A hymn based on words from Isaiah 53.

[31:29] And during this hymn. The children will come back in and join us. Jerome will go and make sure that happens.

They'll come back in and join us for communion. So we'll stand and sing this. And then we'll come to the table. Amen.

Hallelujah, what a Savior. Mocked by himself, arch and crew, In my place condemned he stood, Sealed by burden with his blood, Hallelujah, what a Savior.

Guilty by a helpless wing, Spotless Lamb of God was he, Full atonement can it be, Hallelujah, what a Savior.

Lifted up was he to die, It is finished was his cry, Now in heaven exalted I, Hallelujah, what a Savior.

[34:27] Hallelujah, when he comes, Our glorious King, All is ransomed home to bring, Then anew this song will sing, Hallelujah, what a Savior.

Do you have a seat? The children will probably come in and join us in a moment, But we'll turn to Isaiah 53, We heard a few words from there in our reading in Acts 8, We've turned to Isaiah quite a lot already this morning, Welcome back children, Good to see you, Come and find a seat.

Isaiah 53, As we heard, Speaking so clearly of the Lord Jesus, Hundreds of years before he came, I'm just going to read from verses 1 to 9, And then say one thing, Before we go through the rest of the communion service, Who has believed our message, And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed, He grew up before him like a tender shoot, And like a root out of dry ground, He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, Nothing in his appearance that we should desire him, He was despised and rejected by mankind, A man of suffering,

And familiar with pain, Like one from whom people hide their faces, He was despised and we held him in low esteem, Surely he took up our pain, And bore our suffering, Yet we considered him punished by God, Stricken by him and afflicted, But he was pierced for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities, The punishment that brought us, Peace was on him, And by his wounds we are healed, We all like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to our own way, And the Lord has laid on him, The iniquity of us all, He was oppressed and afflicted, Yet he did not open his mouth, He was led like a lamb to the slaughter, And as a sheep before his shearers is silent, So he did not open his mouth, By oppression and judgment he was taken away, Yet who of his generation protested? For he was cut off from the land of the living, For the transgression of my people he was punished, He was assigned a grave with the wicked, And with the rich in his death, Though he had done no violence, Nor was any deceit in his mouth, It's humbling to think that this speaks of the Lord Jesus, God himself, Who left his throne, Came to this earth, Had no particular beauty or majesty to attract us to him, And himself felt unwelcome, He was despised and rejected by others, And yet there was no sin in him, He was a sinless one, And yet he would go to the cross,

[38:38] Verses 4 to 5, Show us what he took up of ours, He took up our pain, Our suffering, Our punishment, Our transgressions, Our iniquities, But all to bring us peace with God, Also that our sins can be forgiven, And as we look at the bread, And the wine, And remember his body, And his blood shed for us, We remember this, That this is true for us, That Jesus hung on the cross, And was punished in our place, The Lord's Supper, Is a meal for those who are trusting, In the Lord Jesus, As their only saviour, If that's not true for you, You're so welcome to be here, And observe what's going on this morning,

As the bread and wine are passed round, But it wouldn't be appropriate, For you to take the bread and wine this morning, Amen.