

Gospel Breakthrough to Questioning Seekers

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Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at Christchurcheastbay.org. Good morning.

My name is August Fern and I am a member of, I think we call it the Berkeley El Cerrito Richmond Kensington Community Group. Maybe we'll work on that. But I'm also one of your deacons and I'm here today happy to read the scripture.

Today's scripture reading is from the Acts of the Apostles, chapter 8, verses 1 to 8 and 26 to 40 as printed in your liturgy. A reading from the Acts of the Apostles.

On that day, a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him.

[1:09] But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison. Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went.

Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Messiah there. When the crowds heard Philip and saw the signs he performed, they all paid close attention to what he said.

For with shrieks, impure spirits came out of many, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. So there was great joy in that city. Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, go south to the road, the desert road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.

So he started out, and on the way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of the Kandik, 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 are reading?

[2:21] 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 was 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.

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.

[3:26] Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and traveled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Well, we're continuing today in one of the most exciting books of all time. It begins with an amazing statement from Jesus.

Jesus, having been raised from the dead, he says in Acts chapter 1, verse 8, speaking to his disciple community, speaking to his church, he says, you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in Judea, and Samaria, and even to

the ends of the earth.

And what's really cool about Acts chapter 8 is we see that very thing happening. The gospel's moving out. It's moving out from Jerusalem to Judea, to Samaria, and now through this man from Ethiopia going out to the ends of the earth.

And this is the first non-Jew to come to faith and to be baptized in the story of Acts. It's the first evangelist who will take the joy of the gospel to his native country, and he's from Africa.

[4:46] And if you know much about the recent story of global Christianity, you may know that in the year 1900, there were in Africa about 10 million Christians.

Fast forward to the year 2000, there were 360 million Christians. That's half the population of Africa. And so Africa is again today really the heartland of the Christian faith.

There are more Presbyterians in Ghana than in all of the United States and the United Kingdom.

There are more Anglicans in Nigeria than in all of the United States and United Kingdom. And what we want to focus on today is the fact that God is still working in our world the same way that he was working with this Ethiopian.

And the question is how? How is he at work? And so I want to think about three things with you this morning. I want to talk about the God who seeks us, the God who saves us, and the God who substitutes for us.

The God who seeks us, the God who saves us, and the God who substitutes for us. And let's begin with the God who seeks us. And let's look at verse 26 where it says, Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, Go south to the road, the desert road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.

[6:05] And then down in verse 29 it says, The Spirit told Philip, Go to that chariot and stay near it. We're going to come back to this, but it's clear up front that God by his angel and by his spirit is seeking out this Ethiopian man.

And we can also see that God has put into this man's heart a dissatisfaction with his life. He's put into his heart a sense that there must be more to life than what I have.

He's given him a desire to seek something better, a better God, a better worldview. Where do I get that? Well, look at verse 27. So he, Philip, started out on his way and he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of the Kandake, which means the 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. So this guy holds a high position in government.

He works closely with the royal family in Ethiopia. He's riding in this chariot, which is a royal carriage, and he's surrounded by an entourage of carriages, a whole fleet of black suburbans, if you will.

[7:20] He has VIP status. And you do not get in this kind of position unless you have great ability and extraordinary gifts. And it's clear to us that he's an intelligent person.

He's an educated person. He knows how to read in a world without Amazon, a world where books are rare and expensive and books are held in libraries. He has purchased his own copy of a book, the book of Isaiah.

So he's an intelligent man. He's also a moral man and a person of good character. And we know that because no one puts you into a position of handling great wealth unless you are presumably trustworthy and reliable, unless you have wisdom and judgment and honesty.

So how do we know that he's dissatisfied and he's unhappy with his life? Well, because he went all the way to Jerusalem to worship. He'd been there living his life in the court of Ethiopia with its culture and its philosophy.

And all of its attempts to ask the big questions of life. Where are we? Who are we? What is wrong with this world?

[8:31] Why is it so messed up? What is the solution to our problems? And he's intellectually dissatisfied with all the ways the great intellects of his day and his time are grappling with those questions.

And he's also presumably looking on to the life of this court in Ethiopia with all of its feasts and all of its interests and all of its daily news. And we imagine he's morally dissatisfied because it's superficial and it's self-interested.

And he's tired of that. And we also assume that he's looking around at the gods of his pagan pantheon and what his culture says is ultimate reality.

And he's religiously dissatisfied clearly because he's gone in search of another god. He's gone in search of a god who's worthy of his worship and a god who's worthy of his life.

And that is why he's gone to Jerusalem to worship because he's a serious man who's concerned about his existence, his life, the meaning of it all.

[9 : 37] He's asking himself, how am I going to meet death? And what lies beyond that? And am I ready to meet that? And so he forsook his worldview at considerable risk in order to take up this worldview of Jerusalem's worship and Israel's prophets.

And what did he discover in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? Well, he went from believing in a multiplicity of gods to believing in the one true and living God.

And he began to see that all the gods that he previously revered were counterfeits and were idols. And he had a more exalted view of God.

But he also came to discover that he was made as all people are made in the image of the creator God. And so he gained a more exalted view of humanity. And then as he read Israel's scriptures, he learned that God is in control of history.

That he has a plan and he has a purpose to redeem his good but fallen creation. He came across those promises to Abraham and to the offspring of Abraham.

[10 : 41] That God would bless all the nations of the earth through this one person and this one family. And then he learned as he continued to read that this gracious and righteous God had given his law.

He'd given his ten commandments that God alone was to be loved with all of our heart. That we're to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. And that this God demands our faithfulness.

And that anyone who fails in one detail of God's moral law has failed in it all. And so he went on to learn that the only way to approach this holy God is through his temple.

And through his priests. And through the substitutionary sacrifice of lambs. And the blood that was shed and sprinkled in the presence of God to atone for all of our failures to love as we were made to love.

And so this man, he's left his pagan worldview behind. And he's upgraded. He's upgraded to the Jewish worldview. And he's gone up to Jerusalem.

[11 : 42] And he's made this hard and hazardous journey. It's a thousand miles. It would have taken him months along the Nile River. Just to get to the temple of Yahweh to worship there.

And after he worshiped, he was going to seek out the rabbis. He was going to seek out the teachers. He was going to see if he could resolve the restlessness of his heart.

If he could find satisfaction and peace. He's got way better beliefs than he had before. But he still doesn't have rest. And he's still not at peace. And so he's gone to the Jerusalem temple.

And when he got there, he realized that Gentiles and eunuchs like himself were kept at a distance. And that they could not even enter in to the assembly of the Lord.

And so he goes out and he makes this vital step of buying a rare and expensive copy of the Bible. Of the scriptures. The book of the prophet Isaiah. So that he could study it for himself.

[12 : 41] And he could find answers to his questions. And yet, as he reads, this man is troubled in his soul. He's terribly burdened because he's looking for something that he has not yet found.

He wants to understand what he's reading. But there's no one to explain it to him. And the thing is that something has actually already happened. Recently in Jerusalem that had the full and complete answer to his every question and to his every need.

But he had not heard of it. He knew nothing about it. No one had told him what had happened. If only someone cared enough about him to explain the scriptures and tell him the thing that his heart was seeking.

But there was a man. There's this man just around the corner. A simple man named Philip. He's not a great man. Like the Ethiopian.

He's not someone holding a high and exalted position. But he is a simple Christian who has the answer. And so we read again back in verse 26.

[13 : 49] Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, Go south to the road, the desert road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza. We're going to have a class today and a class next week after the service on worldviews.

And this verse makes no sense in the materialist worldview that assumes that this visible material world is all that there is.

And that we live in a self-contained world with nothing beyond it. But the biblical worldview is different. The biblical worldview says that beyond and above and around this world there's another realm.

It's the true realm. It's the real realm that determines what happens in this world. And there are two roads that go south from Jerusalem to Gaza.

And God happens to know which road this man is on. And he knew the exact time that this man is traveling down that particular road.

[14 : 56] And if Philip had gone down an hour earlier or an hour later he would have completely missed this Ethiopian man. But God told Philip to go at the precise moment that this man needed his help.

And in verse 29 it says that the spirit told Philip go to that chariot and stay near it. This meeting between this Philip and the Ethiopian did not take place by chance.

It was not an accident. It was not a coincidence. There are no maverick molecules in this universe. Because God is in complete control of everyone and everything.

And the God who knows everything and everyone. He sent this Christian Philip because he's not turned his back on this world that he loves so much. He's very concerned about individual people whose names he knows.

And he has a plan for their redemption and their restoration. And so God intervenes. God interferes. God enters into the world.

[16 : 05] He comes down from his very high place. And he sees this man in need and in trouble. And so God has an errand. He has a message that he wants to send.

And he knows that there's this man. This one man. This man from Ethiopia. Whom God has caused to feel dissatisfied. And that this man is going to keep being restless.

Until he finds his rest. In Jesus. And in the gospel. Friends. Did you know that the everlasting and all-powerful God is concerned about you?

And that even right now he's seeking you? And that if you're a Christian. Did you know that God wants to send you?

And he wants to deploy you as a messenger. With the news that people's hearts are longing to hear. The apostle Paul says in Colossians 1.13.

[17 : 05] For God the Father has rescued us from the dominion of darkness. And brought us into the kingdom of the Son that he loves. And that's what God is doing with this man.

And that's what God wants to continue to do in our world time and time again. This Ethiopian man is traveling down this road expecting nothing.

But he goes home redeemed. He goes home rejoicing. Because there's a God who's seeking him out. Does that make sense? Okay.

The God who seeks. The God who seeks. But I also want to talk about the God who saves. The God who saves us. Because remember.

This man fits perfectly in the Bay Area. He's culturally elite. He's smart. He's the CFO of his nation. He is rich.

[18 : 02] He's successful. He's powerful. He's made it to the top. And yet he's enormously empty. Right? None of the money.

None of the power. None of the success that he has. Has yet fulfilled the longings of his soul. And so he's going all the way to Jerusalem. All the way back.

And how does he change? What happens that he somehow goes on his way home. Rejoicing at the end of the story. Well look at verse 30.

It says. Then Philip ran up to the chariot. Heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. Do you understand what you're reading? Philip asked. And he said. How can I? Unless someone explains it to me. So he invited Philip to come up.

And sit with him. Friends. No matter. How put together and smart people look. They have questions. They're not satisfied with their answers.

[19 : 00] You just need to believe that. If you're a Christian. And you pursue someone with curiosity. And you initiate a conversation.

And you ask good questions like Philip. And you say. Hey what are you reading? Hey what do you think about that? And if you're just a loving presence. And a good listener. People of peace.

That God has prepared. Will begin to open up their hearts to you. They will begin to respond to your questions. They will begin to engage in your conversations. And they will invite you to come sit up in my chariot.

Come enter into my life. The Holy Spirit prepares this man. He prepares this moment. And God has led him to the Bible. And not just to the Bible. To one of the most important texts in the whole Bible. He's led a Christian to this man. And we read in verse 34. That the eunuch asked Philip. Tell me please. Who is the prophet talking about? Himself or someone else? And then Philip began.

[19 : 56] With that very passage of scripture. And told him the good news. About Jesus. Here's a man. Who's.

Looking at the very message he needs. He's holding it in his hands. He's reading it out loud. But he cannot understand it. He can't understand it.

Because somebody needs to explain it. And God has to reveal it. And again. Philip did not have the educational advantages. Of this treasure. At the court of the Ethiopian queen.

But we're struck at once. That he. Who went to community college. Maybe he just went to high school. We don't know. But Philip's just an ordinary person.

And we're struck at once. That he's a Christian. Who knows how to explain the passage. He's a Christian. Who knows how to expound the verses. He's a Christian. Who can give.

[20 : 53] The definite message. Of the gospel. Friends. What if every Christian. Were prepared to do that. He knew the Bible.

He knew the gospel. He was able to explain it. A Christian is a person. Who knows. Their scriptures. And the propositional truths. Of the Bible. They know their creed. And the articles of their faith.

They're able to tell somebody. About it. To state it. Simply. And directly. In terms that people can follow. And understand. And the gospel. Is just this well-defined.

Body of truth. That can be explained. In simple terms. And the question is. Are we able to do that? Philip. When the moment comes.

He's not uncertain. He's not hesitant. He's not afraid. He just steps right into the opportunity. And notice that he's not exchanging. Views.

[21 : 48] Right. He's not speculating. About life. And its meaning. Nor is he. Relating his own experience. And saying. Hey man. I was troubled too.

I was just. I was just as unhappy as you are. But then something amazing happened to me. And my life has been totally different. No. He's not doing that. What. What Philip is doing. Is he's speaking. The truth of God's word. He's speaking with the authority. Of God's word. It says he began with that. Very passage. Of scripture. Why did he do that? Because all scripture.

Is breathed out by God. All scripture has the life of God in it. It has the presence. And the power. And the authority of God. In it. And so that's where he began.

No. No prophet of Israel. Comes along. And ever says. Hey guys. Let me tell you. I've had a brilliant idea today. No. What do prophets say? Prophets say.

[22 : 42] The word of the Lord. Came to me. And I'm passing it on. To you. And because it's the Lord's word. You can start wherever you like. In this whole book.

And it will take you. To the same message. Because it's got one message. And Peter begins. Expounding that message. He begins bringing that message out.

He starts to show what that message. Means. And this passage. Led to another passage. And that passage. Led to another passage. And he showed him. The golden thread. That runs through the scriptures.

From start to finish. And how it all centers upon. And climaxes with. Jesus. Who's just recently lived. And died. And rose again from the dead.

Philip says. This Ethiopian. Basically. The Bible's a book. About how God saves sinners.

[23 : 41] Basically. The story of the Bible. Is creation. Fall. Redemption. In the beginning. God. I'm sure is where. Philip. Started.

Started. The world belongs. To the creator God. It's God's. World. And it was. It was. Meant to be something. Other than it is now. It's gone so wrong.

It's gone so far. Astray. It cannot put itself. Back right again. And in the garden of Eden. In paradise. Humanity. That was made. In the image of God.

Rebelled against God. Listen. Not to the voice of God. But to the voice of the devil. And turned. It's back on God. And sin. And fell. From a very high place. Into a very. Low place. And brought chaos. Down on the human race. But God. Is still concerned. God.

[24 : 36] Had a plan. And had a purpose. To redeem. And to save. His fallen creation. And so. In the garden of Eden. It says. God came down. And God spoke. And God.

In his justice. Condemned. Humanity. For its rebellion. And its folly. And its sin. But. He didn't stop there. He gave a promise. He told Adam and Eve.

That. Life was going to be. What you and I. Know it to be. Strife. Conflict. It's going to be a war. Between. The seed of the woman. And the seed of the serpent.

But God said. The seed of the woman. Genesis 15. The 315. The seed of the woman. Will be stricken. He'll be wounded. And yet.

He will crush. The serpent's. Head. And from that. First promise. Of a coming savior. I'm sure. That Philip. Continued. To just. Unfold.

[25 : 30] The story. Of this God. Who saves. With these. Words. God is preparing. His people. For the way. That he's just going to keep. Unfolding. His plan.

In parts. And portions. Bringing it to pass. In installment. After installment. With increasing. Momentum. Until it comes to his climax. Until God gets to the purpose.

Of his redemption. And his deliverance. And his salvation. Of this world. And misery. And despair. Because of our sin. Philip.

Is not telling. This man. Here's what you need to do. To pick yourself up. Here's all you got to do. To save yourself. And put yourself right. With God. No. He's telling him. About the God. Who does everything. To save you. The creator God. The God of the Bible.

[26 : 25] The God who saves. He sent his son. Jesus. Is what Philip says. He's the seed of the woman. Who would crush the serpent's head. He's the offspring of Abraham. That would bless all the nations.

Of the earth. And he. Is the light that you seek. He's the one. Who can give you abundant. And eternal life. He's the one. Who can assure you.

Of forgiveness. Of your sins. He's the one. Who can reconcile you to God. He's the one. Who can make you a child of God. He's the one. Who can give you the new nature.

And the new outlook. And the new beginning. And the new strength. And the new power. And the new hope. That your heart. Is so desperately. Longing for. He's the one.

Who can take you. From being. The miserable seeker. That you are now. To being a confident disciple. That goes on his way home. Rejoicing. This all happened.

[27 : 24] Because there was a Christian. A Christian. Who knew his Bible. A Christian. Who was not afraid. To talk about the God. Who saves a Christian.

Who knew how to explain. To somebody. The good news. Of Jesus. But I want to end. Not just with the God.

Who seeks us. And the God who saves us. But I want to end. Right at the very heart. Of this passage. With the God. Who substitutes for us. Because. What passage. Was this Ethiopian reading?

Well I'm glad. You finally asked. It says in verse 32. This. This is the passage. Of scripture. The eunuch. Was reading. Isaiah 53. 7.

He was led like a sheep. To the slaughter. And as a lamb. Before it shears. Is silence. So he did not. Open his mouth. In his humiliation. He was deprived. Of justice.

[28 : 17] Who can speak. Of his descendants. For his life. Was taken. From the earth. This is the song. Of the suffering servant. It's one of the greatest.

Portions. In the whole Bible. And this man. Is sitting in his carriage. His royal carriage. And he's saying. Who is this slaughtered lamb? Who is this man.

Who's being so terribly humiliated? Who is this man. Who's innocent as a lamb. And yet he's undergoing.

Such terrible. Injustice. And suffering. Is it the prophet Isaiah? Is it the nation of Israel. As a whole? Is this an accident?

Is this a tragedy? Can someone explain it to me? And I'm confident. That Philip. Borrowed his scroll. And turned a few.

[29:15] Verses. Before those. In Isaiah 53. 3. And he read these words. He was despised. And rejected by mankind. A man of sorrows.

And acquainted with grief. Surely he. Took up our pain. And bore our suffering. And we considered him. Punished. By God. Stricken by him.

Wounded by him. Afflicted. By him. But he was pierced. For our transgressions. And he was crushed. For our. Iniquities. And 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. And then he kept reading. He was led like a sheep. To the slaughter. And then he came to Isaiah.

[30:08] 53. 10. The Lord. Has made his life. An offering. For sin. Who is this? Well friends.

God so loved you. That he gave his only son. Over to death. For you. And as you. And in your place.

And God has laid on this substitute. The penalty. And the punishment. For. Your sin. That you might be forgiven. And that God might forget your sins.

Forever. Forever. And that God. Would smile on you. And that God would put his spirit. In you. And that God would make you his child. And that you might. Be able to go through death. And out into return.

Eternity. Rejoicing. With joy. Forever. This. Philip says.

[31:04] Is the. One and only way of salvation. And I'm sure. He said to the Ethiopian. Like he would say to us. Do you see the depth. And the profundity. Of your problem.

And the problem of this world. Because it took nothing less than God. In your place. And as your substitute. This man. Jesus.

Who is God in the flesh. He did not come. To give you good advice. He did not come. To tell you. How to live. He did not give you a list. Of all the things. That you need to do.

He came with good news. Not good advice. And the news. Is that he came to die. He came to die. In weakness. He came to die. In shame.

He came to die. In degradation. Where all of us. Deserve to die. He was despised. And rejected. All the sorrow. Of our transgressions.

[31:58] All the. The grief. Of our iniquities. All the sins. Of the whole world. That lead. Only to death. All the ways. That we neglect God.

Every day. All the ways. That we rebel. Against God. And we do our own thing. All of that. Was laid on him. Why?

He's just a lamb. He's done nothing wrong. He knew no sin. Why doesn't he defend himself?

Why doesn't he prove his innocence? Why doesn't he get himself out of the situation? Why is he suffering in silence? Why is he not opening his mouth?

And the answer is in Isaiah 53.5. The punishment that brought us peace. Was on him. And by his wounds. We are healed.

[32:53] The reason Jesus. Didn't get out of the situation. Though he very well had all the power to do so. Is because he wanted you.

To have God's peace. And he wanted you. To have God's healing. He wanted God's cosmic shalom. For you.

He wanted God's cosmic salvation. He wanted you to know. What the wholeness of God. And the well-being of God. Is all about. And when this Ethiopian realized.

That Jesus did what he did. That Jesus went out. And he suffered the hell. Of being forsaken by God. So that you wouldn't have to. When he realized that on the cross.

The ultimate insider. Came. To be the ultimate outsider. So that we who are outsiders to God. Could come all the way inside. When he realized.

[33:50] That Jesus resurrection meant. That God absolutely approved. And accepted everything that Jesus was. And everything Jesus did. On his cross. When he recognized that.

Through Jesus. He could be. Reconciled to God. And that his sins. Could be removed. As if they never even happened. And that the righteousness of Christ.

Could be laid on him. As if it were his very own. What did the Ethiopian do? Did he say. I don't know. Let me think about it.

Did he stay undecided? Did he sit on the fence for a while? No. His mind changed. His heart turned. He repented.

He repented and he believed. And he did what we read about. In Romans 10. It says. If you declare with your mouth. That Jesus is Lord. And if you believe in your heart.

[34 : 47] That God raised him from the dead. You will be saved. For it is with your heart. That you believe. And are justified. And is with your mouth. That you profess. Your faith.

And are saved. And that is exactly what he did. and he said Philip is there anything that would prevent me from being baptized today he wanted that water he wanted that water as a sign that I belong to this father who seeks and who saves I belong to this Jesus this suffering servant who took my place I belong to the spirit of God who puts the new life of resurrection in me I want that water and I want to be committed fully to Jesus I want to belong only and wholly to him I want to be devoted to his word I want to obey his commands I want to live a holy life like Jesus from here on out I want to love Jesus church I want to love the mission of Jesus I want to go back and share the joy of Jesus and the joy of knowing Jesus friends that's what a Christian is and the question for us is are we Christians and the question for us is also do we want other people to know the joy of having God the father take you out of the kingdom of darkness and transfer you into the kingdom of the son that he loves in the name of the father son and holy spirit amen