

Spending Time with Others

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[0 : 0 0] How many chariots are you chasing? You see, this road, let's get this picture. There is this road, it led from Jerusalem down to Gaza. And here is this person, this Ethiopian. He's fascinating, this guy, because when you read into this scripture, this Ethiopian was no ordinary Ethiopian. In fact, he had status. You knew he had status, one, because he had a chariot.

Now, you've got to be pretty posh to have a chariot to be traveling along. And I don't know whatever picture that sort of gives in your mind of what that chariot might look like with this Ethiopian lounging as he travels down this road. We are told that he was an influential official of Candice, to the queen of the Ethiopians. Now, that is a pretty good title, isn't it? You've got to have arrived and be pretty posh to have a title like that. Now, this man obviously knew his scripture.

He had gone to Jerusalem to worship in the temple, which again is unusual, because Ethiopians had a raft of different gods. And clearly, this man had found something within the Jewish faith, to have traveled to Jerusalem and be on his way back home. So much so that maybe, like we've all done when we go to New Wine and Spring Harvest, he's bought himself something to read on the way home.

And we're told he's picked up this scroll. And so here he is reading from the scroll of Isaiah, as he journeys back to meet the queen of Candice, for whom he is the chancellor of the Exchequer.

Enter Philip. Here we go. Now, you see, I don't know about you, but Philip has a track record of bringing people to meet with Jesus. He just is, he can't help himself. And the more you read through about Philip, often described as an evangelist, but he seems to get this pointing from God, from the Holy Spirit, to go and do what he's told to do. And today is no different. He's minding his own business, maybe just doing what he did, when he gets this prompting that says, Philip, I want you to go into the desert. Now, I don't know about you and I, if I get this prompting to go and do something, I'm thinking, there's got to be a pretty good reason for this. Let's look at the diary and see whether I can fit you in, Lord. But no, Philip is free. He's done this before. He knows that if the Lord asks him to do something, there's going to be a good reason for it. And so, off he goes. And God says, once you're there, I want you to just go over there because you see that chariot moving along there?

[3 : 2 4] I'd just like you to pop over there and chat to the person in it. Now, if you're listening on the podcast, the congregation here is a fully honed and really shaped physically congregation that wouldn't think twice about getting on their trainers and running towards that chariot with a huge ease and enthusiasm, as people have nodded back at me. I can see you're totally ready for that.

Now, I don't know actually what that feels for you. For me, I think it equates to something like this. Clive, do you mind getting on your trainers and your shorts? And you see that Porsche 911?

There's just passing by with that person in it. I'd just like you to trot along the side of it, keep up and mention to the person inside that I want to have a word with them.

Now, amazingly, Philip does this. He must have been some sort of fit bloke because you're reading in here and off he goes like a long dog. Obviously, he's a bit nifty and Philip hears the Ethiopian. He obviously gets quite close and he hears the Ethiopian reading from the scroll of Isaiah.

Can you imagine this? Philip thinks, do you know what, God? Here I am. You've told me to go here and this bloke is actually reading about you. It's a gift. And he comes up alongside him and says, I see you're reading the scriptures. Now, if that was me, I think it would go something like this.

[5 : 07] I just, what are you reading? He obviously is a lot more eloquent and a lot fitter than I am.

He gets over and the Ethiopian basically says, I'm reading this, but I need somebody to tell me what this is all about. You know, it must be. Philip must stand there and think, my goodness, what a gift this is. You've told me to go from here into the desert. You've told me there's going to be somebody I need to go and speak to. And lo and behold, this person's reading from the scroll of Isaiah. And even better, it's all about you, Jesus. What a gift. The scroll he's reading and somewhere in the conversation, Philip, as you just imagine this conversation as they're going along together. What are you reading there, mate? Oh, I'm reading from the book of Isaiah. What's all that about? Oh, well, it's all about this bloke. And he says, really? That's a, do you know what? Funny enough, I know that that's all about Jesus. Really? Tell me more about it. And with that, they're jogging along, having this great conversation. And obviously, in amongst this conversation, there's been some conversation about baptism. He's obviously slipped it in there, as we would if we were chatting to somebody. Do you know what? Have you thought about giving your life to Jesus? How do I do that?

Well, you can go and get baptized. All of a sudden, what happens? My goodness, look at that. There's some water over there. And we're in the desert. You know? I think if I was Philip, I think I'd stand there and say, do you know what, God? Now you're really showing off. And so he says, well, do you know what? I think, the Ethiopian says to Philip, do you know what? I think I'll, could I be baptized?

Well, Philip turns around and says, well, do you know what? Have you attended an Alpha course? Have I seen you at church for the last three or four months? Do you know what? Maybe I could book you into a baptism course, but, you know, that's not for a few weeks. But also as well, I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll have a look in my diary and see when we're doing baptism next on a Sunday, because we can't quite fit you in, because we're dedicating Mother's Union banners and things on Sundays. And so I can't fit you in for another three or four weeks. Is that okay? No. No, no, no.

You see, the beauty of this is the spontaneity of what God does. Seizing the moment, seizing the appointment. The appointment is there. This is somebody who has found out, who has experienced, who wants to experience God in a very, very real way. And there's no hanging about.

[8 : 15] As I read this, it really, really excites me. Because people, there is a time for every purpose under heaven, it says in Ecclesiastes. And there is a time and purpose for everyone. I have to ask us, because I have to ask myself when I read this scripture, do I trust? Do I trust in the power of the Holy Spirit? And do I trust in God? Because if I do, there are now moments. There are now moments that we all know and experience. And God says, do it now. And this was a moment which was fine.

Yet he is. Tradition has it that the Ethiopian went home and evangelized. It said he went on his way rejoicing. That one moment that shares with somebody, that moment that we don't want to miss to go and do what the Lord is asking of us in the power of the Holy Spirit. Now, I don't know whether you've had those moments. Whether you've had those moments when you're talking with somebody and you think, do I say it now or don't I say it now? Do I step in? What should I do, Lord? Should I play safe or should I say it? And I'd like to tell you that the opportunities that I get it right most of the time. But I can tell you the opportunities that I've missed. And when you've missed an opportunity, and I guess many of us feel as though we may have missed those moments when we walk away and we think, we wish we'd said something. We were on a men's evening out. We had gone kayaking down on the

Huntsville River. It was a glorious evening. And there was, we'd all sort of crewed up in these boats together. And there we were paddling up the river. And I'd happened to crew up, I think that's the term, with a lad who had come to Christchurch for many years. He had been through our youth groups.

But he'd just sort of started coming back to church. And as we're paddling up, we're talking about everything. And then we start talking, strangely enough, as in the story, about baptism. And we're thinking that, and do you know what? There was this pounding in my chest to say, do it now.

Let's get him in the water and, surrounded by water, let's get him in the water and do it now. And I think, no, actually, wouldn't it be lovely if we did it in church? And a nice, warm, clean piece of water. And then the whole of the church could be there. And they could see this. And his mum and dad could come along. And wouldn't that be a lovely morning? And it actually was.

[11 : 28] Because that's what he did. Until I met him a week before his baptism here. And I said, that was a great day we had out down there. And he said, do you know what, Clive? I was going to ask you whether you could baptise me there and then. And I thought, duh. Lord, what a missed opportunity. I think I want to encourage you, and I think the scripture encourages us this morning, that as we move more and more in the power of the Holy Spirit, to really respond to those now moments. Those now moments that God has already put things in place for us and for us to do.

And yet, it's just a matter of us responding. We don't have to hype ourselves into something super spiritual to do this. All Philip did was listened and responded to what the Lord was asking. And it doesn't get much more difficult than that. So I guess this morning, I'm going to ask again, what are the chariots that you're chasing? What do the chariots look like for you? Who are the people in your chariots that maybe you need to catch up with and have a chat with? Maybe it's a chariot that's containing a member of your family. Maybe it's a chariot for somebody at work. Maybe it's a chariot for somebody in the community or somebody you have never, ever met before.

But the possibility is that God is calling you to a chariot, to meet with somebody, to connect with them and to find that glorious opportunity that God's already been there before. And it will say to you, do you know what? I've been waiting for this conversation. I've been waiting for somebody to talk to me. I've been waiting for somebody to raise the subject. I've just been waiting for somebody to say, do you know what? I can help you with this. I guess probably we've all got pictures and faces coming to mind of people that we would long to see there. And in that, the Ethiopian found a new freedom.

And that's what we want for people, a new freedom. So I just want to encourage you this morning, maybe as we come for communion, and there's no better place as a family to come for communion, as we move for prayer. Whatever you may want to go to prayer for, or you may not, but maybe there is the opportunity for you this morning, just to say to the Lord, a fresh anointing, please, Lord. Just maybe give me that courage and new boldness. Maybe show me, help me listen, or maybe to bring to him that person who's in your chariot that you want to reach.