

Philip: the Touch of God: Acts 8:26-40

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Preacher: Jayson Turner

[0 : 00] We'll go ahead and open to turn or turn open to Acts chapter 8. We're going to be looking at verses 26 to 40 this morning as we continue in our narrative through acts.

And so let me pray for us and then we'll just dive in. So join me. Father, it is good to be here this morning.

Lord, I want to thank you for your mercy and your grace that is upon my life and many that are here and there's any that have not trusted in Christ we pray today would be the day of their salvation.

Lord, I want to pray a blessing on those that are present, those that are joining us via online. Would you speak to us?

Would you open our eyes that we would behold wonderful things from your law? Remove the scales from our eyes, from our hearts.

[1 : 15] Might we hear your voice? And we'll give you thanks for what you accomplished this morning. It's in your name, Jesus, that we pray. Amen.

Well, as we continue in our study, we actually get a chance to examine a moment in the life of an individual by the name of Philip.

He's referred to as an evangelist in Acts 21, Philip the Evangelist. I don't think that is a title. I think that is a descriptor of who this man was.

And what we're going to find is that Philip was incredibly useful in the hands of God. And when any time a person is used greatly of the Lord, there is a commensurate amount of joy that they experience.

Amen. When the Lord uses you in the life of somebody else, there's nothing better. So there is a formula here that as usefulness increases, hence joy as well.

[2 : 36] And so as we walk through this passage, what I'd like to do is make three observations from this portion of the narrative. And I want to seek to answer the question, why was it that Philip was so useful to his God?

And perhaps there's something that we might learn, receive and respond with. So to bring us up kind of to speed in our narrative, we know that the church in Jerusalem has scattered as a result of persecution.

Persecution under the fury of Saul the Pharisee. We saw that in Acts 7, Stephen is executed for identifying with Jesus Christ.

And Christians have been scattered. And we find that the individual we're looking at this morning, Philip, he is relocated up to Samaria, some 35 miles north. And we learned that in the first part of chapter 8. Perfect place to leave Jerusalem if you're trying to avoid Pharisees, Jewish leaders.

One place they're probably not going to go check is Samaria, a place they typically would avoid. But what I want us to note here is that as the Christians have scattered and left Jerusalem, they haven't gone into hiding.

[4 : 09] In fact, it says in Acts chapter 8, verse 4, it says, now those who were scattered went about preaching the Word.

So even though the church has scattered under some dire circumstances, some trials, some persecution, believers are sharing their faith.

And Christians, folks are coming to Christ everywhere. In fact, in Samaria, it said that there was such revival that great joy filled that city.

So incredible ministry is happening around the towns of Jerusalem. But here in Samaria, great ministry is happening and it's happening as a result of persecution, as a result of suffering.

And I think that's important for us just to be reminded of that God often uses suffering to do great works.

[5 : 13] We were reminded of that Wednesday night at our prayer and praise. Andrew Keating shared about how he has increased in his boldness for Christ as a result of the cancer.

And so he's having a chance to share his faith in the workplace. I had a meeting earlier in the week with Geradette in another gal, she's training in grief share.

And these ladies are able to evangelize because of the suffering that they've experienced in their own lives. And so I think it's important for us to note that this notion of prosperity gospel, it's not biblical.

It's not in the Bible. What Scripture says is, well, what Jesus says is, you're going to have tribulation. Peter says, don't be surprised. When the trial comes upon you, don't be surprised. And we see that God is orchestrating. He's the God of all providence using suffering to see his kingdom advance. And that's where we pick up the narrative this morning.

[6 : 19] Beginning here in verse 26, Luke writes, Now, an angel of the Lord said to Philip, rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.

This is a desert place. So as we catch up with Philip, we don't actually know where he's at at this moment. He could still be in some area. He may have returned to Jerusalem with Peter and John. Luke doesn't tell us it's not germane to the story, apparently. But what we do find out is he receives a new assignment. Go down towards Gaza.

Now, what do we know about Gaza? Gaza is one of the five Philistine cities that kingdom was ruled by a pentapolis.

Learn that word this week. Thought I'd share it. The thing that's interesting though about Gaza is it was destroyed in the first century BC.

[7 : 30] And a new city was built about a mile closer to the coast. So there's new Gaza by the coast and then about mile inland, you have old Gaza.

And yet there is this road that still ran between the ruins of old Gaza and Jerusalem and Egypt. And it appears that Philip is instructed to go to old Gaza. It's a road in disuse. In fact, it's defined as this is a desert place.

This is very strange. So essentially God is sending Philip out in the middle of where? Nowhere. And you have to be wondering what's going through Philip's mind at this point, right? Philip. Deacon Philip serving the widows in Jerusalem.

[8 : 33] And then we meet up with him as he's in Samaria and great ministry is happening in Samaria. He's casting out demons, performing miracles. And you're wondering man, he's been faithful with the ministry God has called him to.

And so you wonder is he thinking I should be getting a promotion. I should be given an audience. Like God send me to Ephesus or send me to Rome.

And what does God say? Philip, I'm sending you to Chouila. And it's interesting because God doesn't give Philip anything beyond go towards Gaza.

Nothing. There's no rationale. And yet this is what God asked of this man. You ever been there? Like God, this doesn't make sense.

Why are you asking this of me? I certainly did. When God laid it on Julie's heart that we should adopt and it took me two years to say yes.

[9 : 41] Because I'm thinking that makes no sense. We have like our quiver is already it's we're trying to rent out children at this point.

And yet what you have for Philip is it says in the first part of the next verse 27 it says and he rose and went. And I love this image of Philip because this is a man that obeys immediately.

And so if you want to become more useful to the living God in this life. Be like Philip.

Philip was a man that obeyed God. Walk in the fear of the Lord. Obey the Lord.

If God says it. Then I'm going to be on it. The posture is yes.

[10 : 42] And I want us to understand and recognize here that that obedience for Philip occurred when it didn't make sense at all.

Go to the desert. And by the way, news on the planet we live on called Earth.

It doesn't make any sense to obey God in 2022. To most of you to most that live around you.

It makes no sense. Even as well can much of life. Revolves around sex and power and money and influence and entertainment and indulgence.

I know this for a fact. Because I'm an Uber driver.

[11:50] It's a very strange thing to be a pastor and to know where every pot dispensary is located in Spokane. That's on my resume.

Because I drive folks. And I'll tell you what when the sun sets the veneer of moderation professionalism. It's gone. It's just gone.

I drove three women complaining about eating too much as they were heading to a party. Because they thought man it's going to take us a lot longer to get drunk.

I drove another young couple in their 30s. Hid in their third bar of the evening bragging about man how they had basically spent their 20s intoxicated.

And here's the thing. We sort of expect this to be the posture of the world. They don't know the living God. They don't care what he thinks.

[12:50] But this is the tragedy. That obeying God, that walking in the fear of the Lord is increasingly out of fashion in the church.

Amongst Christians. See if you regard God as holy you will often stand alone.

Over the past six years I have driven many a professing Christian single heading out for a tinder date. And for those that don't know it's just an online dating app that's basically used for hookups.

And I'm not going to define that. And I was speaking with one young gal professing Christian.

And I'm trying to understand why you're going out on this sort of a date. And my response was, man you need to find some different fun.

[13:59] Because Satan, he's a liar. We know that Scripture defines him as the one that steals, that kills and destroys.

And he's been pushing these lesser joys since the garden. That this is where life is. This is where joy is.

And he's whispering. He's like that character in the Lord of the Rings film, Wormwood, whispering to the king. And you see death that has just sort of come over.

Life being sapped from that individual. He listens to these lies. Scripture is not hazy on this point. Obedience. The fear of the Lord. It leads to blessing.

[14:59] Disobedience leads to consequence, leads to misery. Let me give you a few passages, Proverbs 19-23.

The fear of the Lord leads to life. Psalm 32-10 says, Many are the sorrows of the wicked.

And then Proverbs 20-17 I think is so illustrative where it says, His bread gained by deceit is sweet to the man, but afterward his mouth will be full of gravel.

Gravel. You ever wept with a couple that essentially just fornicated their way through their singleness?

I have. I've done that premarital counseling. You ever wept with a woman who aborted a child?

[16:04] And now she's choking on the gravel of that decision? Scott has. This last month he performed two memorial services, or one memorial service for two different gals.

Gals that had an abortion. One of these gals was 60 years old.

And she'd been coming to terms with this thing for 40 years. You ever experienced the consequences of your sin, the discipline of the Lord?

I have. See, God tells the truth. Let me give you a promise.

It's from Joel 2 verse 13, and this was a verse that was a daily meditation for me.

[17:09] Because I went through the discipline of the Lord. It reads, return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding instead fast love.

This is my favorite part. And he relents over disaster. So good. So good.

You want to be useful to the Lord? Obey the Lord. Maybe you will be useful, but you will experience a greater measure of joy that he will share.

We'll continue on. Let's look at verses 27 and 28. Philip received this direction from the Lord, and it says, and he rose and went.

And there was an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a court official of Candice. That's not a proper name. That is a title. The queens of Ethiopia were called Candice, queen of the Ethiopians who was in charge of all her treasure.

[18:19] He had come to Jerusalem to worship and was returning, seated in his chariot, and he was reading the prophet Isaiah. So Philip obeys the Lord.

He heads south. He overtakes an individual on this very abandoned road, a very rare thing.

Maybe the dots are starting to connect for Philip. Okay, okay, okay, God. He comes across this Ethiopian man.

It's cushioned in the Old Testament. In the Greek, it's kind of a cool word, Ethiopian. It's two words combined.

First word is to scorch, and the second one is eye or face. And so the Ethiopians were those scorched-faced people, burnt-faced people.

[19 : 23] In the ancient world, Ethiopia was understood to be at the ends of the earth. In fact, Homer describes the 8th century B.C. Poseidon's trip to the Ethiopians as they lived, quote, at the world's end, end quote.

And this is so cool. What's the blueprint of Acts? Acts 1.8, right? That you'll be my witnesses, and the Gospel is going to go forth Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria to the ends of the earth.

Philip, in his obedience is the tip of the spear, in seeing the Gospel move to the end of the earth. He said, yes, God. And it looked like this small little ministry, go out to this little desert road. So cool. This traveler here that Philip comes upon, he's returning from Jerusalem. There to worship has a copy of Isaiah with him, something that would not be easy to obtain.

[20 : 39] And it suggests that this man is a God-fearer, and he has resources. He'd made a lengthy trip. It could have been 500, it could have been 1,000 miles that he journeyed to head to Jerusalem for some occasion.

And he's now returning home. He's described as a eunuch, and that's just code for an individual that really, really, really wants the job.

They're committed. No threat to watch over the king's ladies, and these individuals, they were trusted. They could rise to important positions in the royal house.

Since he's a court official of the queen of the Ethiopians, and he's in charge of all her treasure.

So here's an influencer. Here is a man connected to his land. The church father, Irenaeus, in the second century, writes that this Ethiopian became a missionary amongst his people.

[22 : 02] And I want us to see something here related to Philip's obedience. Philip didn't get demoted. Philip got promoted.

Philip was the one to influence a man who would bring the gospel to a nation. I mean, God's a genius.

And Philip got to be a part of that. Let's look at verse 29. It says, And the spirit said to Philip, Go over and join his chariot.

So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah, the prophet, and asked, Do you understand what you're reading? And he said, How can I, unless someone guides me?

And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. Now the passage of the scripture that he was reading was this. Like a sheep, he was led to the slaughter and like a lamb before its shear is silent.

[23 : 07] So he opens not his mouth. In his humiliation, justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation for his life is taken away from the earth?

And the eunuch said to Philip about whom I ask you, Does this prophecy say this? About himself or someone else?

Then Philip opened his mouth and began and beginning with this scripture. He told him the good news about Jesus.

This is the best. There's a prophecy that was made some 700 years prior, recorded about Jesus, and Philip gets to explain it.

Philip opened his mouth. And beginning with the scripture, he told him the good news about Jesus. Church, why was Philip useful to the Lord? Well, number one, he obeyed God.

[24 : 17] But secondly, he was willing to speak. He was willing to open his mouth. And what did he say?

Hey, the passage that you're reading, Isaiah 53, like a sheep led to the slaughter, like a lamb before its shears is silent.

I mean, he's amped like, I can do this. Such a softball, Philip. He's reading Isaiah 53.

And Philip's like, it's about Jesus. That's about Jesus. Jesus is a Messiah. He died as a lamb so that man could live forever.

I had a professor, a seminary professor, would often say it this way about scripture. And the Old Testament concealed and the New Testament revealed.

[25 : 19] Acts 8 unlocks Isaiah 53. Do you see that? It makes it explicit. And I'll tell you what, this is the homework that I give to every Jewish person that gets in my car.

And I've probably done this with 15 to 20 individuals thus far. But I tell them, man, go read Isaiah 53 and figure out who that is.

Because I'm going to tell you, it sounds a lot like Jesus. And you know what, this chapter, surprisingly, it's unfamiliar to at least the Jews that I have interacted with thus far.

It's a passage that skipped in the regular synagogue calendar reading. They read Isaiah 52 and they read Isaiah 54 and they don't read Isaiah 53.

Man, I wish we had time to pour over this entire chapter this morning.

[26 : 33] The book of Isaiah, you guys are familiar with the Dead Sea Scrolls. I'm assuming most of you. Scrolls discovered in late 1946, 1947.

And of these documents, we have a complete copy of Isaiah intact. It's like 24 feet long, it's made of 17 sheets of parchment, sheepskin.

And what is astounding is the discovery of the great Isaiah scroll of the Dead Sea Scrolls is that that document is dated about a thousand years earlier than the oldest document we had in our possession.

And so now, not having the oldest being 900 AD, scholars have dated this document to be around 125-100 BC. So that's 100 years prior to Jesus.

And so the skeptics who have been arguing that those 19 explicit prophecies about the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus from Isaiah, oh, those were written after Jesus lived, that argument's gone because we have a document that predates Christ.

[28 : 05] The document, copy of the scroll, it's on display at the shrine of the book in Israel, it's in a museum, shrine of the book, the actual scroll is in a sealed vault beneath the museum.

Fourth, truth is on our side. Truth is on our side. What do you do with that?

The prophecies have been fulfilled in the life, the death, and resurrection of Jesus, which means that what we actually have given our lives true is true.

That God is. That Jesus was who he claimed to be.

It means that those who have died in Christ, that reunion, it's going to happen. It's fact.

[29 : 17] Isaiah 53, church, is gospel. And Satan knows it.

And Satan blinds the minds of the unbelieving. It's just right there. It's right there. We have the document that predates Christ. The scholars agree.

What do you do with these prophecies? Well, I don't think about that stuff. Well, you need to.

We have got to open our mouth about Jesus. Church. It's not enough to simply use words when necessary, because as Eric was sharing up here with the youth, blessed are the feet.

Blessed are the feet. How does faith come? Faith comes from hearing. Someone has to speak. Someone has to speak. And I get it. Like, culture will punish you for opening your mouth about Jesus.

[30 : 25] You open your mouth and you will be called a hater. Which is why many churches, they've adopted this new apologetic, never offend, and just simply align your mission with the current social issues that are acceptable of the day.

Jesus didn't get the memo. It says in John 7.7, Jesus says, the world hates me.

It's astounding the world that He made, that He created. The world hates me, because I testify about it that its works are evil.

The church today exists in a state of cowardice. We want to fit in.

And so we want to talk about things that maybe would be acceptable to the unbeliever. When we talk about that God is love, right?

[31 : 42] That's easy. Who's going to argue? But then we sever other characteristics about God.

In the process, we just want to say, well, He's love. We don't talk about He's holy. We don't want to talk about like that He's a consuming fire, that He's a jealous God, that He dwells in unapproachable light.

We don't want to do any of that. And yet that's who God is. We're talking about God. Isaiah was undone in Isaiah 6 when he was confronted with the majesty of God.

He says, what was me? I am lost. I'm a man of unclean lips. Because God is holy, holy, holy.

And church, we do violence to the character of God when we speak about Him otherwise. And the power and the joy of the gospel is this.

[32 : 49] That holy God would die for sinners. What? Yeah. That's how good God is.

Holy God would die for those in rebellion towards Him. God who knows no sin. And He died for the person practicing homosexuality.

And He died for the adulterer. He died for the fornicator. He died for the drunkard, the thief, the idolater, all of us.

Like that's the goodness and the power and the beauty of the gospel. But, Jay, it's unloving. I don't want to talk about sin. It's not inclusive. It's not kind. I'm not calling this church to be belligerent, okay?

[33 : 58] But the stakes are too high. It's an eternity to avoid the important. You know what's unkind?

It's telling somebody they're okay when they're not. The first doctor that we went to when our sports daughter was injured said, you have a muscle strain.

Like, oh, man, that was such a kind word in the moment. It's just a muscle strain. So good. But it was 10 days later when the truth of the matter was revealed related to her injury.

When doctor number two said, that's not a muscle strain. That's a stress fracture. And that was hard news because that news meant your season's over before it begins.

But those hard words, they were true words. And then we were able to apply the proper remedy to see the injury healed.

[35 : 08] We got to talk about the gospel. And we got to talk about a God that died for sinners. If we tell people that, man, in your sin, like God can redeem sin, no, God forgives sin.

It's not okay in your sin. And if we claim that they're okay, we're frauds. We don't love. We don't have a heart for people.

It's just self-preservation. And it's not new. You know, the priests and the prophets in Jeremiah's day, they were doing the same thing.

I don't want to make waves. I don't want to be unliked. Jeremiah 8.11 says this, God says, they have healed the wound of my people lightly. Saying peace, peace when there is no peace.

We'll put a band-aid on that. God will be okay. Well, Philip was willing to open his mouth with this Ethiopian man.

[36 : 20] And as a result, this man trusted in Jesus. Look at the response. Look at verse 36.

To the end here, it says, And as they were going along the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, see, here is water.

What prevents me from being baptized? Now, you'll notice probably in many of your Bibles, there's no verse 37. Don't freak out.

It's not in the oldest manuscripts. So it's not there. And it doesn't change the course of the narrative. It's simply the eunuch's confession. Believe it to be a later addition.

And if you have, if you're really freaking out, you see Dr. Vreeland after service, and he'll help you. Okay? Verse 38 says, And he commanded the chariot to stop.

[37 : 22] And they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. And when they came up out of the water, the spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more and went on his way rejoicing.

But Philip found himself at Azototh. And as he passed through, he preached the gospel to all the towns until he came to Caesarea. So this new disciple is baptized.

And then God does something miraculous for Philip. Doesn't make him take the lonely trek back north after he fulfills his purpose for the mission.

It's a little snapshot of God's kindness to Philip. But I love this image that we're left with of Philip.

It says in verse 40, But Philip found himself at Azototh, and as he passed through, he preached the gospel to all the towns until he came to Caesarea, which is where he eventually made him, made his home.

[38 : 36] And what we see here in this description of Philip is that Philip's life was really not about Philip. I mean, this story of Philip interacting with the Ethiopian, it's just, it's one in the pattern of his life.

God using Philip in the lives of people. Philip was there to bless and to serve the widows in Jerusalem. When he's up in Samaria, he's sharing the gospel.

This Ethiopian out in the middle of nowhere. Somebody in fact in an original state of impurity didn't matter to Philip. If you were a person, Philip had a word for you.

And this just continued the pattern of his life. And I would say the third final reason that Philip is so useful to the Lord, he obeyed God, he was willing to speak, but he actually loved people. There's a humility about him. He just, he loved people. Philip loved people. Now, this one's for free, and if you think it's dumb, you're dumb.

[39 : 57] No, you're not. The way that I remember, I always have to use mnemonic devices, but the way I remember Philip in the Bible, this is, so if it helps you, great.

His name comes from two words, philos and hippos to love, and hippos, hippodrome, chariots, horse, horses.

So Philip's name means lover of horses. I think my wife's smiling right now. Yeah. It means lover of horses. And so I just imagine a horse like on a beach just running.

You ever seen clips like that where horses just running up and down the beach? And that's Philip, because all these towns where he's ministered, they're all coastal cities.

And that's his life. Philip is the guy that he just ministers there right on the coast of the Mediterranean. All the cities, Gaza, down south on the coast, Azatath or Ashdod, was a Philistine capital, and then Caesarea above that right there on the coast, and that's Philip.

[41 : 09] He's like, so just imagine a horse running on the beach, loving all people, and that's Philip. And what we find then is 20 years later, he's at home and he's pouring into his family.

And we have a little snapshot there in Caesarea where he made his home. It says Philip the Evangelist had four unmarried daughters who prophesied. So they had ministry. So now this was a guy that loved people and he didn't neglect his family for others.

He was ministering to people in the home, outside the home. That's what defined this guy's life. If you had a pulse, you mattered to Philip.

Why? Because grace transformed him. And he wanted that life for others. And I hope that you're there this morning.

I hope that's the beat of your heart. I hope that you have in your heart this desire to just simply be used of the Lord. Because church, it's the best to be used of God.

[42 : 16] Man, it's so good. You see Eric up here sharing about a student and he's getting animated. There's joy. There's joy.

I served for this weekend. I gave of my energies and I see this kid like, you know, zealous for the gospel. And now another student is going to come to faith in Christ perhaps and it's, man, that's what it's about.

This life is so short. To be used of the Lord and Philip is the guy we should emulate. He obeyed his God. He was willing to speak.

And he just, his heart was for people. And that's where I am most days. I want to be used of the Lord.

I've been in a season of life when I wasn't very useful and I know what it's like. And I know the lack of joy. And then to be used of the Lord. Man, it's so good.

[43 : 20] It's so good. I want to serve him as long as I have breath. I want to serve the Lord as long as I have breath. And I want to do it with others. We have such a good staff.

It's a really good team. Really good elders. We have a really good church. We do this together. What a joy that we're not doing this alone.

We're in this together. Father, thank you for the example of this man. Thank you that he really lived well.

And I think Philip was a man that his life confronts ours. And Lord, we want to repent.

If there's anything in our life where we're out of line with your character, where we're walking in disobedience, we don't want to hang on to 3%.

[44 : 29] 2%. We want our lives to be in a posture of surrender to you. So, convict us where we need conviction. Search a spirit of God.

And Lord, I want to pray that we would share courage with one another. Thank you for those that walk in courage in this church.

Lord, I can think of a number of folks and they stir me. They inspire me. Sometimes I borrow courage from them.

I don't tell them, but I borrow it. And Lord, we do that with one another. And I pray that we would be a people that are courageous. Lord, we'd be willing to talk about important things even when maybe we recognize that it's going to cost us something.

And Lord, would you continue to grow in each of us a heart for people? We want to number our days. We want to think in terms of eternity.

[45 : 41] So Lord, do in us what you need to. Might we have conversations about these sorts of things even today?

Father, we want to see you rescue sinners. We've been rescued and we want to be of use to you. So do whatever work you need to in our lives. Make us more useful. And Father, we thank you that you would then share your joy with us. We love you. It's in your name we pray and all God's people said.

Amen.