

Philip, an Ethiopian and the Gospel

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[0 : 00] This is the AM service on July 19th 1998. The preacher is Phil Muleman.

His sermon is entitled Philip, an Ethiopian and the Gospel and is from Acts chapter 8 verses 26 to 40.

You may like to, if you've got a Bible near you, turn it to page 892 for Acts chapter 8 verses 26 through to 40.

Before we go on any further, let us also pray. Our gracious God, we thank you for your word to us. We thank you that it feeds us.

And Lord, we pray now that you would open our hearts and minds to what it has to say to us now. May we live it in our lives. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Well, how often do we give thought about where God wants us to serve him?

[1 : 09] Have we ever had the strong sense of call to work in a certain area because God has called us to it? And I wonder, I wonder if we are willing to go where God has called us to go.

When I was in my job as a retail store manager in Sydney, I was also doing a considerable amount of work in the church that I attended at the time. And it was mainly in the area of youth.

Soon I was looking at full-time ministry and exploring the options which were lying before me. You know, what does God want me to do? Where does God want me to go?

And all those sorts of things. It was quite a frustrating and confusing time. Well, I had to sit back and remind myself that God is in control of all situations and that if there were a place for me in ministry, then he would provide the place for me and my family to go to work.

Well, after a lot of prayer, reading of the scriptures and seeking wise counsel, I think, from godly people, it seemed that God was telling us to go south, to go to Melbourne.

[2 : 23] I'm not nodding my head to say, I can't believe you're talking about to go to Melbourne. I'm nodding my head daily here. Well, we didn't know what for. We didn't know what for, but it became very clear to us that God did want us in Melbourne and that I do nod my head for.

First, to study the Bible at Theological College and to do some work in parishes in just a small situation and now to be ministering in the capacity that we are.

And we never know what God has got planned for us, but I speak on behalf of Barb here, but Barb and I both know that our priority is to serve God wherever he calls us to.

Well, last week, we heard about how the church in Jerusalem is scattered following the stoning of Stephen and we see how Jesus' words in Acts 1, chapter 1, verse 8, you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth, now begin to become a reality. And it first becomes a reality in the place of Samaria. Philip preaches the gospel of Jesus Christ in the city of Samaria.

[3 : 38] Half-breed Jews, if you like, Samaritans. He preaches to Samaritans, takes the gospel to half-breeds. But the gospel, as we discovered last week, is for them as well.

And we see that by the Apostle Peter and John confirming that the good news of Jesus Christ is for them so that they too, and they come down to Samaria and they pray for these Samaritans by praying for them, laying hands on them, so that they too may receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Acts, chapter 8, verse 17. The coming of the Holy Spirit is what has drawn these two opposing peoples, the Samaritans and the Jews, well documented, they hated each other.

And it is the gospel of Jesus Christ which has drawn these two opposing peoples into a oneness because of Jesus Christ. So what human hands were unable to do for hundreds of years, if you read the history of Israel, God has done in just a moment.

It seems then that with the coming of the gospel and the Holy Spirit in Samaria, you would think that Philip has got a lot of work to do, doesn't he? I mean, he's just gone down and he's preached the

gospel as a whole stack of brand new Christians, so there's going to be a load of discipling to do, there's Bible studies and prayer groups to organise, there's worship to organise, there's vestry meetings to run, there's financial things to consider, and not to mention the organisation of his social life as well, very important.

[5 : 21] Well, whilst these are all important things in themselves, and having a social life is important, friends, there is nothing more important than doing the will of the Lord.

We read in verse 26, thanks Hayley, that an angel of the Lord tells him to go south on a wilderness road that goes to Gaza.

Now, if I was told to go south after witnessing and being involved in all these exciting things, then I think that I would want to say, now hold on God, I have all these people here to look after, I mean, after all, they're only young believers, and now you want me to believe them?

You want me to leave them? Can't it wait a few years? Let me get myself established here in Samaria. After all, the road that you're telling me to go on is only a wilderness road.

I'll be lucky to meet anyone on the way. If you wait a few years, if you just wait a few years, God, then maybe the road that you want me to go on will be busier, and that there will be people there to preach the gospel along the way, and so on.

[6 : 33] Well, now, if you're telling, if you're anything like me, you might like to be in control of things rather than letting God be the one who is in control. We need to be in touch with God and willing to go as he calls us.

And that means reading, understanding, and praying the scriptures, listening to what God is saying to us, and then most of all, be willing to do what he requires us.

Philip was certainly like that. He was obedient to God. He didn't argue. He didn't complain. And here, in Acts chapter 8, is a picture of a man who is in touch with God and willing to do what God asks of him.

We may not know what God has in store for each one of us, but God does. And isn't it worth following the one who knows everything about us?

Isn't it worth following that God? Now, Haley's going to put up a map for us. This is the same map we had last week, and she's going to draw around the area for us and lift it up a little bit, please.

[7 : 53] Yeah, keep going, keep going, keep going, keep going. All right. So Philip is called away for an exciting ministry on a desert road, and the Samaritans are left in the hands of the Holy Spirit.

Now, Philip's up in the region of Samaria, up in the city of Samaria, and he travels some 40 miles back down to Jerusalem. Then he goes westward, over to the coast, toward the Mediterranean Sea, another 30 miles or so.

And somewhere in that area, he's walking along a desert road, and he meets a chariot with an Ethiopian eunuch in it. Okay, thanks.

And this man was coming back from worshipping God in Jerusalem. He has come, this man has come from Ethiopia, all the way along the Nile, up through Egypt, along the Mediterranean, through Gaza, and through the hills of Jerusalem, some 1,500 miles.

He's come that way to Jerusalem, and now he's returning home another 1,500 miles. And this eunuch, if you like, has a powerful position as treasurer for Candace, queen of the Ethiopians.

[9 : 10] Now we know something about this eunuch. We know that he wasn't a true Jew because of the fact that he was a eunuch. And I think that Sue read that passage very well when we got to the eunuch's bits.

And Deuteronomy 23, verse 1, says this about eunuchs. I'm reading from the NIV version because I think it's a bit more tame in what it has to say.

The NIRSV is very graphic. No one who has been... Deuteronomy 23. No one who has been emasculated by crushing or cutting may enter the assembly of the Lord.

We don't know why this particular Ethiopian eunuch was castrated, but we do know that there were all kinds of political reasons for doing this in those days.

But here is this eunuch worshiping the Lord. He's worshiping the Lord and he's reading Isaiah. And little did he know that one prophecy in Isaiah chapter 56, verses 1 to 5, was about to be fulfilled.

[10 : 25] Let me read this to you. It's titled in the NIRSV, The Covenant Extended to All Who Obey. Isaiah 56, verses 1 to 5. Remember this eunuch is not really allowed to enter the assembly of the Lord because he's a eunuch.

Thus says the Lord, Maintain justice and do what is right for soon my salvation will come and my deliverance be revealed. Happy is the mortal who does this, the one who holds it fast, who keeps the Sabbath, not profaning it, and refrains from doing any evil.

Do not let the foreigner join to the Lord say, The Lord will separate me from his people. And do not let the eunuch say, I am just a dry tree.

For thus says the Lord, to the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose the things that please me and hold fast my covenant, I will give in my house and within my walls a monument and a name better than sons and daughters.

I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off. Philip is standing here on the road and he sees a chariot coming by now.

[11:46] The Spirit says to him, See that chariot? Philip said, Yes, how could I miss it? I am on a desert road and there is not a lot of traffic around. Well the Spirit says to him, Well go up and talk to him.

The Spirit says, Go up and talk to him. Probably not in that same sort of tone but he says, Go and talk. Now I don't quite understand how the Spirit talks to us. I'm speaking personally here but Scripture tells us that God's Spirit bears witness with our gifts, with our spirits, that we are children of God so that spiritual men and women hear his voice and respond.

The Spirit speaks through spiritual people and they hear his voice and they respond. Philip did just that, didn't he?

He left Samaria, goes to where God tells him to go and the Spirit now speaks to Philip, tells him to speak to this Ethiopian and so Philip goes up to the Ethiopian eunuch and he says, Do you understand what you're reading to this eunuch?

And the humble response is, Well how could I unless someone guides me? How can I know unless someone interprets for me? Unless someone can make sense out of what I'm reading?

[13:11] Philip will go on to interpret what he is reading as we will see in just a moment by preaching Jesus to him. Now, if you're told by the Spirit to leave Melbourne and go, for instance, to Philip Island and along the way you stop at McDonald's out at Cranbourne Way or something and you see a black Mercedes Benz there with the man sitting in the back reading Isaiah and you stick your head in the window and you say, What are you doing?

And the man says, Well, I just bought this new Bible at the Bible Sunday thing last week but I don't understand what it means. you should tell him just what Philip here tells the Ethiopian eunuch and listen, this is my second point, Philip preaches Jesus in Acts verses 32 to 35 we see that Philip preaches Jesus and he uses the scriptures to preach Jesus and this is, the scriptures we read here is from Isaiah chapter 53 verses 7 to 8 and the passage of scripture that he is reading is this, Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter and like a lamb silent before its shearer so he does not open 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 asked Philip, About whom, may I ask you, does the prophet say this?

About himself? Or about someone else? Then Philip began to speak and starting from this scripture he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus.

Philip preaches Jesus. The eunuch here is reading from the Old Testament scriptures and was in the form of a scroll which he perhaps had bought in Jerusalem and he comes up with this amazing question about whom does the prophet say this?

[15:17] About himself or someone else? And Philip probably answers along these lines, Sir, the prophet is speaking of the servant of God, the suffering and bruised but triumphant one who conquered death and who is going to appear one day on the stage of history.

Now this passage from Isaiah 53 has been a real problem to many and especially to Jewish people looking for the Messiah, looking for the anointed one of God because most of the Old Testament messianic passages is what we call them speak of the Jewish Messiah appearing on the stage of human history in glory, in power and victory over Israel's enemies and he appears as the great king and the peacemaker.

The idea of the suffering Messiah which is what Isaiah 53 is about was foreign and unable to be understood by the Jewish mind and this Ethiopian is now having that same problem.

He can't figure out, he can't understand this passage but even the disciples did not understand the scriptures and the suffering servant until Jesus in his resurrected body until Jesus after he had risen

from the dead spoke to them and we pick up a story in Luke chapter 24 when they're walking on the road to Emmaus the disciples not knowing that they're speaking to Jesus they're all bewildered and a bit downtrodden and so on and Jesus says to them oh how foolish you are and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory then beginning with Moses and all the prophets Jesus interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures Philip teaches the Ethiopian here that the he in these verses 35 to 37 the he in Isaiah's words like a sheep he was led to the slaughter and like a lamb silent before its shearer so he does not open his mouth

Philip is teaching the Ethiopian here that the he was Jesus he is Jesus the man whom John the Baptist later called the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world which we just sang a little while ago Philip probably goes on he says Jesus is your Passover Lamb God laid upon him all our sins and he voluntarily died in our place when Jesus was arrested on false charges he remained silent before his shearers the Sanhedrin as the Gospels tell us refusing to defend himself in his humiliation justice was denied him wrote Isaiah Jesus judgment was erased by his death following his unjust trial who can describe this generation generation none of

[18:56] Jesus' race stepped in to protest that his trial was a miscarriage of justice did they for his life is taken away from the earth Jesus died on the cross but God raised him from the dead Philip told the Ethiopian and to those who confess their sins and repent of them Jesus would give them eternal life and the gift of the Holy Spirit well Philip here witnesses to the Ethiopian he preaches Jesus and part of our witnessing is to know the scriptures as it says up there Philip was only a waiter he was he served that was his job in the original place to be a waiter in Jerusalem but Philip knew the scriptures the disciples were only fishermen but they knew the scriptures part of our witnessing is to understand the scriptures the Old

Testament and the New Testament and it's imperative that we continue to bathe ourselves immerse ourselves in these scriptures we need to learn the scriptures so that we too each one of us can be witnesses of Jesus Philip began to preach Jesus from Isaiah 53 but he didn't stay in that passage he probably went on to show how Jesus fulfilled the prophecies of the Old Testament Philip knew his Bible the apostles and the disciples knew the Old Testament scriptures through the Holy Spirit they knew how to apply them to Jesus Christ the Messiah as well as to the basic human needs of men and of women well something happens between verses 35 and 36 because this religious stranger this Ethiopian eunuch becomes a brother let me read to you verses 36 through to 40 as they were going along the road they came to some water and the eunuch said look here is water what is to prevent me from being baptized he commanded the chariot to stop and both of them 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 snatched Philip away the eunuch saw him no more and went on his way rejoicing but Philip found himself at Azotus and as he was passing through the region he proclaimed the good news to all the towns until he came to Caesarea what happened Philip began to preach that Jesus Christ was the Messiah and the Ethiopian the Ethiopian eunuch and an inquirer of Judaism who perhaps knew the Old Testament knew bits of the Old Testament now saw that Christ was the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies so he repented of his view of who Jesus was accepted him by faith as Lord and Savior his sins were forgiven and he was given the gift of the Holy Spirit and the next thing the Ethiopian needed to do according to

Philip's teaching was to show by an outward symbol water baptism the inner reality that by Christ's death burial and resurrection on his behalf he had cut off his old life and entered into his new life with Christ so the Ethiopian needed to be baptized as he and Philip rode along in the chariot they come to some water and the eunuch said look water I ask you have you ever seen a pool of water in the desert let's be realistic about this I traveled through the Stresleki desert some years ago and would love to have seen a pool of water but I didn't I had refreshments in the car fridge but I never ever to my knowledge saw a pool of water well they find water and Philip baptizes this new convert and as they come out of the water the spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away and the word snatched means seized or grabbed with force here we go again the Holy

Spirit is in charge of his church he just wants Philip to be involved in part of this man's story he wants Philip to be where he needs to be Philip wasn't with this Ethiopian eunuch when he was chosen to hold all the honor and responsibility of being treasurer for the queen of Ethiopia God was Philip wasn't around when he was converted to Judaism he wasn't there when the Ethiopian had a hunger for the word he wasn't there when the man bought the scroll of Isaiah either but he was

there on a desert road and did what God wanted him to do and then he was snatched away by the Holy Spirit he doesn't get to see the end of the story and we don't either although we do have some reason to believe that this conversion marked the introduction of the gospel into

[24 : 34] Africa and what about the Ethiopian eunuch he was so excited about what had happened to him that he went driving along by himself rejoicing and friends that is a fruit of the spirit Galatians love and joy peace patience kindness goodness faithfulness gentleness and self control they're all fruits of the spirit and here we have this Ethiopian eunuch rejoicing he is full of joy and no doubt he would have been rejoicing even more by the time he got to Isaiah 56 verses 1 to 5 which is those few verses I read out to you a few minutes ago well what a fantastic passage this is here we have an illustration of how hungry the world is to hear the gospel notice that we've been talking about yet another religious stranger here is a passage about a man who had part of the truth but not the whole truth here was a humble man asking to be taught how many more how many more people are out there seeking and asking that same question what opportunities we have friends we need to use these opportunities that come our way and that might be in the informal situation of our day to day life and it might be in an arranged situation such as a mission context as some of you are aware we're having a mission here in the parish in September and there is a world which is hungry to hear the gospel perhaps people's perceived impressions of the church given to them by the media or family members who were once in the church have caused people to think that the church is boring and irrelevant the mission in September gives us the opportunity to proclaim the gospel in less formal settings in the context that we are now in which may be less threatening as well to non-Christians and we need to use the opportunity that we have to do the best that we can to make the gospel of Jesus Christ known right here in Doncaster and this is a great opportunity for each one of us to be involved as in the call that we all have to be witnesses of the gospel don't let this opportunity slide by without considering how

God wants us each one of us to serve him and to be involved in the proclamation of the gospel be prayerful let me encourage you to be prayerful about what your involvement might be talk to the staff about any ideas which you think may be of God test your ideas and your thinking against scripture God can use each one of us and he will if we are open to his spirit's leading friends we are living in the age of the spirit who has given us power to enable us to witness to a hungry world we're not left on our own God's spirit is there with us helping us God just wants us to be available like Philip was and to show up one day we may be ministering to a whole group of people such as Philip was in Samaria and these people are coming to the Lord in handfuls praise the Lord while another day we may be standing or having a wilderness experience we might be on a freeway fixing a flat tyre and one person shows up let us be ready and let us be available at all times to be witnesses for the Lord Jesus Christ Amen