

Jesus' Mission and Our Part

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[0 : 00] So to begin with, I wonder who enjoys shopping at Ikea here? A few people. My family has gone there a few times. We've bought a few things from Ikea in the past.

And I always like when we go, it's like going on a holiday. My favorite part is the meatballs. And then when you see all of the fake rooms and kitchens and you try sitting on the couches, it's always really fun.

Until you get home and you've got those boxes of things you have to build yourself, do it all yourself. Now every time that happens, or every now and then, not every time, very rarely, something very strange will happen instead.

Everything will just work. So the instructions are there. All the parts are there. The key, the element key you need is there. You follow the instructions and everything fits together properly.

And there's no bits left over. Sometimes everything just works. But unfortunately, it's not like that every time, is it? And this can be how often we feel in life.

[1 : 15] Often we expect things to go well and they don't. Even small things. A quick trip to the shops. I just need to pick up that one thing. It can turn into a right mess.

The traffic is bad. We have trouble finding a spot to park. We start to get impatient and anxious. And by the time we get into the shops, we forget what we came for.

We have trouble finding it. And I think especially we feel this way when it comes to evangelism. Most of the time, it never feels like it's going smoothly or like it just works, does it?

It often feels instead like trying to build something from Ikea without instructions or with missing pieces or when they won't just fit. You might see an opportunity, but then you get nervous.

You open your mouth and nothing comes out. And you end up standing there with your mouth open like feeling silly. Or you do say something. You say something, but when you walk away, you think to yourself, Oh, I wish I'd remembered to say this as well.

[2 : 26] Or I really made a mess of explaining that. Or I'm worried, I think my friend might hate me now. And sometimes, often, it just doesn't seem to work. Well, in today's passage, we have seen an evangelism story with Philip where everything just works, doesn't it?

And because it does, it gives us some tips about evangelism as well. That doesn't mean it will always work this good for us. Since for one, we're not Philip.

We're not an apostle as he is. But even so, our passage should encourage us with how we think about God's mission. And how we think about our part in it.

So last week, we saw from verse 1 in chapter 8, we saw the persecution in Jerusalem caused the believers to be scattered. We saw Philip traveling into Samaria as a result.

Last week, he was performing signs and miracles. But remember, it was the preaching of the good news that converted the people. The people believed the gospel and were baptized.

[3 : 32] Then we saw also the apostles came up to Samaria. And they confirmed that the good news really is for everyone. Even for the Samaritans, since they were given the Holy Spirit.

And then today, we're going to see the continued fulfillment of our summary verse. It's up there, Acts 1.8. You'll be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

From Samaria last time, as the gospel this time is preached to someone who is literally from the end of the earth. It's a short passage, so let's start by going through the whole thing.

And we'll notice a few things as we go. If you've got your outlines, we're on point 1. And we're starting at verse 26 in the Bibles. 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 his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch. An important official in charge of all the treasury of the Kandake. Which means the queen of the Ethiopians.

[4 : 40] 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 spoke to Philip, Go to that chariot and stay near it.

So notice immediately it's different from last time. Last time back in verse 5, Philip sets out for Samaria on his own. But this time an angel of the Lord tells him where to go.

God is directing him. The other thing we notice here is about the Ethiopian eunuch himself. Luke in particular tells us two things about him.

The first one is how important he is. No, sorry. The first one we see is how interested he is in the true God.

So he's travelled a super long way to Jerusalem to worship God. It might have taken up all of his annual leave. I don't know. And he's got even his own copy of Isaiah.

[5 : 42] Actually remember this would not have been very common back then. You couldn't just download a Bible app on your phone. Or buy a \$20 paperback. Owning his own copy of the scriptures is a big deal.

And he's actually reading it too. On his way home from the temple, he's reading the scriptures. This is like you bring your friend to church. And then as you go home in the car, they're still reading the Bible.

So we can see this guy is very interested in God already. But the second thing we see is how important the man is. Luke tries to really point that out.

He's the chief financial officer of the queen. We can see in verse 27. And he's even got his own chariot. He's from Ethiopia.

Where is it? I think it can be really helpful to look at a map with this passage. So I've got one here. We can see up in the corner is Samaria where Philip begins. And down the bottom left is Gaza.

[6 : 46] We don't know exactly where the desert road is. But it might be where that red line is. And they met somewhere along the way. Where is Ethiopia? It didn't actually fit on the map.

But it's past Gaza is Egypt. And then further south than Egypt, you'll find Ethiopia. It is on the very edge of the Roman Empire. And so back then, it was literally the end of the earth.

So this Ethiopian we have, he's not only interested in God already, but he's an important person, a person of influence. He's in the perfect position to proclaim the gospel to his country.

So we have the perfect person to proclaim the gospel to the ends of the earth. And then finally notice in 29 in this section, God again directs Philip through the spirit, directs him to go up to the chariot.

Well, now let's look at their conversation in verse 30 to 35. Read with me. Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. Do you understand what you're reading?

[7 : 55] 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 is the prophet talking about himself or someone else?

Then Philip began with this very passage of scripture and told him the good news about Jesus. So Philip speaks up in verse 30.

And actually, this is the only time that Luke records Philip's words, Philip speaking up. And when he does, also notice he's not aggressive.

[8 : 51] He speaks with grace. He just asks a question. Do you understand what you're reading? But that question, it leads to more questions, doesn't it? The eunuch actually ends up taking over, leading their conversation for the rest of it.

And what about the passage that he's reading? Could there even be a better Old Testament passage to point to Jesus than this one? So as we heard in our first reading, these verses are from the servant song from Isaiah 53.

It's one of the most clear prophecies in the Old Testament about Jesus' death. And the two verses that are quoted here, they're about the way Jesus goes silently and goes unjustly to the cross.

But remember, he's got his own copy of Isaiah. They probably read through the whole passage. And it's the verse just before this one. This is 7. The verse just before is verse 6.

The one that we were singing with Michelle. The Baba Dubaba. The Lord has laid on him, Jesus, the iniquity of us all.

[10:04] This is the passage to start preaching about Jesus. So the eunuch is directing the conversation and he asks also, who is Isaiah talking about?

And now Philip can answer him and tell him. See in verse 35, he answers and he preaches the good news about Jesus. It's pretty amazing, right?

It would be like, I guess for us, your friend comes up to you and says, I've been reading John 3.16. Can you please explain that to me? How good would that be?

Let's keep going. The last scene in our passage is from verse 36. Let's take a look. 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.

[11:08] And the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing. Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and traveled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea.

So the eunuch believes the gospel and he's ready to be baptized. And notice there just happens to be water, even though they're on the desert road. The eunuch continues directing things as well. It's the eunuch who asks Philip to baptize him. It's the eunuch who stops the chariot. And then finally, for the third time, it's by the spirit that God directs Philip.

Philip, down in verse 39. He just, star trek teleports him or something like that over to Azotus. We're not sure. And then Philip goes and continues to preach the gospel. And the eunuch, he's rejoicing. When I was young, I used to think he's rejoicing because now he understands Isaiah.

[12:09] Because I found Isaiah hard to understand. But it's not that, is it? Really, he's rejoicing because he understands the gospel, the good news.

About Jesus' atoning and sacrificial death. And for the forgiveness of sins for all who believe. Now isn't that worth rejoicing about? So what does it mean for us then?

What about our evangelism? We're at point two on the outlines. And point two, it's very clear from this that God is in control of his mission.

We've seen it in multiple ways, haven't we? Three times, verse 26, verse 29 and verse 39. God directs Philip by an angel or by the spirit.

And then there's these amazing God coincidences. They're not coincidences, are they? What could you call them? God incidences, some say. First, the Ethiopian.

[13:10] He's an important and powerful man. And he's from the end of the earth. The perfect person to take the gospel there. Second, we saw that he just happens to be reading Isaiah 53.

The perfect passage to talk about Jesus and preach the gospel. And then third, when there just happens to be water on the desert road. And just when the eunuch was ready to be baptized as well.

And then we also see that God is at work in the eunuch's life. God is preparing him for this. As the eunuch's interested in God of the Bible, as the eunuch's visiting the temple and he's reading scripture.

In all these things, the point is clear, isn't it? God is in control of his mission no matter what. I mean, Philip, all he does is he just asks that one question, doesn't he?

It's the only time he took the initiative and did anything. Obviously, Philip does other things. He baptized the man. He preached the gospel. But all of those things, he was following instructions from God or from the eunuch.

[14:17] And they all depended on the work that God had already done preparing everything. But isn't this an extreme example? I mean, like Tony said before, that kind of opportunity doesn't always happen or doesn't normally happen, right?

But there are still opportunities that come up. As an example, I want to share two examples from my experience. The first one was when I was living in Brisbane a couple of years ago.

I would carpool with a friend once a week. So over time, he knew I was a Christian and he still didn't mind. And over time, sometimes, as we talked, every now and then, he might ask something about what I believed, what Christians believed, or why I cared about that stuff.

And I think the first time the chance came up to preach the gospel, or to explain the gospel, I couldn't even believe it. It was a mix of joy and also confusion.

I thought, is he really just letting me explain it? I thought most people weren't interested in that or didn't want it. And the great thing, too, about being in the car is he couldn't leave.

[15 : 35] Especially because he was the one driving. The second example is from, more recently, from the University Christian Group for International Students.

With APS, you might know them as Focus. So I've been at Melbourne Uni with them in the last couple of years. And every year, many students come from all over the world to Melbourne to study. And we get to run Bible studies for non-Christians. And at the start of the year, every year almost, someone, maybe two people, would introduce themselves saying something like, I really want to learn about Jesus or about the Bible in Australia because I don't have the chance to do that in my country.

Or other times I've heard someone says, I want to learn about Jesus because I think I want to become a Christian. I think the first time I heard that, again, I was really amazed.

I probably felt a bit like how Philip did when the eunuch asked him to explain. So God is absolutely still at work in people's lives today. And that's good news.

[16 : 44] If God is in control of his mission, it's a great comfort to us. When sharing the gospel feels like assembling IKEA furniture, like something called Arkelstorp, without any instructions, it's a desk if you're wondering, it gives us confidence to know that God is in control, that God can still use us and also use others to preach the gospel.

When we're struggling, when we're fumbling and panicking with our words, or as we try to answer a question, it's a great relief to know that God is more powerful than our failure.

When people pray for others to hear the gospel and to believe in Jesus, we can know that God is still at work in the world and in people's lives.

And as more and more there are attempts to limit our religious freedom, we know that God will continue to ensure that his gospel keeps going to the ends of the earth.

And no matter what, God is in control and he will keep directing his mission. But like Philip, we also have a part to play, don't we?

[17 : 59] Now this is our third point on the outline. And I think the first thing to say, though, is we're not Philip. We're not an apostle like him. So for instance, God doesn't teleport us around the place.

But even so, God has a part for us to be playing in sharing the gospel. So last week, Andrew was talking about how holy living might get people interested, giving us opportunities to preach the good news.

And it's just like as Philip made the Samaritans pay attention with his miracles. Or like this week, we can ask questions to provoke conversation.

Again, like Philip does, his question to the Ethiopian leads him to ask more questions and then to direct the conversation. It reminds us of Colossians chapter 4, verse 5 and 6, which is up on the screen.

Be wise in the way you act towards outsiders. Make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

[19 : 10] So we might find opportunities from what we say or how we live as people ask us about it. For example, like the eunuch, it might be someone who asks, what are you reading?

If they come to your home, see a Bible on your table, or if they see you reading the Bible on the bus, they might ask. Of course, when someone does ask, it helps if you've been reading something and you've got something to share.

I also know people who like to memorize Bible verses or Bible stories and to share them when they have the chance. My grandmother used to share many Bible stories with myself and my sister when we were young, and I've still remembered a lot of them, which is really amazing because her English isn't very good.

For another example, when there's difficulties, if we need to go into hospital, we still have opportunities. I know people who have boldly said to their doctor, I trust that God is with me in whatever happens, or that they look to eternal life with peace and with assurance because of Jesus Christ.

Or for another one, what about talking? Talking about and sharing about what we've heard or read at church, if people ask. So when we're with family or friends, when we're picking up the kids, or if you are at community things like sports or whatever, over time people inevitably ask, what did you do on the weekend or something like that?

[20 : 52] And this might be a great chance to go ahead, depending on the person, and share the most encouraging thing you've heard or share something about the gospel that was shared last Sunday at church.

If people really don't want to hear it, well, they'll just have to remember to not ask you again next week. Or, as Tony and, as they were sharing, making friends with people, with our colleagues, caring for people, inviting them to lunch or to our home, so that in time we have chances to share about how we've been encouraged, again, from the gospel or from church.

It doesn't have to be someone who asks us, oh, can you explain to me the whole book of Isaiah or the whole book of Romans? You see, we have chances all over the place to share the gospel.

As people ask us, what have you read or how are you going? But it will take boldness to reply and say something like, well, I'm worried about this, but I'm trusting God in it, rather than just saying, I'm going fine, how are you?

Lovely weather today. It takes boldness, doesn't it? Finally, in our passage today, oh, I've got this too. Christmas, inviting people to Christmas, it's a huge opportunity, isn't it?

[22 : 23] As Vijay said, it's probably the freest opportunity we have, the easiest chance to invite people to church. So I encourage you to do that, and perhaps more conversations and questions will come from it as well.

Finally, in our passage, I think there's some useful things we can do to make sure that we're ready to make the most of these opportunities. For one, being willing to talk about Jesus.

So as Philip did with the eunuch, he didn't just talk about Isaiah, on and on and get stuck in Isaiah, but he pointed him to Jesus. Since, again, as we saw last week, it's the good news about Jesus that saves.

The best place to practice talking about Jesus and about Christian things is here at church. So after the service, with our Christian brothers and sisters, I encourage you, ask someone, what have they been reading, or how have they been encouraged this week, so that in time, it won't be so daunting to talk about Jesus with other people.

Second, we should know the gospel, so we're able to explain it, like Philip did, and to be able to preach it. And this isn't only beneficial for preaching to others.

[23 : 39] It's good for us, too. Preaching the gospel to ourselves, thinking about God's word, reminding us ourselves of it, chewing on it, meditating on it, and to even memorize parts of the Bible so that we're ready to share them.

Or having our testimony ready, as another one. Andrew's actually running a testimony workshop today, at 12 o'clock, after the service. So let me encourage you to all come to that, so that he can help you, we can help each other in having a testimony that's ready to share, and to encourage people about what God's doing.

And the third one is to pray. After all, we've seen in our passage, God is the one in control of his mission. We have confidence that God is sovereign over all people, no matter what our world does. And we take comfort in knowing that he will grow his church no matter how we play our part. So let's do that.

Let's play our part. And let's pray that God would be at work in the lives of our friends and family and the people we know to bring about opportunities for us to share.

[24 : 59] Let's pray now. Our Lord Jesus, our Lord God, our Father, we just thank you for your word. We thank you that you have spoken to us, that you have given us the gospel and the death and the resurrection of your son, Jesus.

Our Lord God, we just thank you that you are the one in control of your mission, that you are directing it, that you are powerful over it and sovereign. And we also thank you for the chance that you give us to play our part.

So God, please help us to do that. Help us to be bold and help us to be ready so that we might be speaking with grace and seasoned with salt, that we might be able to answer people and preach the gospel of your son, Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray.

Amen.