

Acts 8:26-40 (PM)

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[0 : 00] So our text tonight is about the center of the Christian faith. It's about what we call the gospel. So this is a perfect text if you are exploring the Christian faith and if you want to know what it's all about.

Acts 8 is a great place to start. But that's not all our text is about. Our text tonight is also about how Christians ought to share that gospel.

So it's a perfect text if you're a follower of Jesus and you want to know how God can use you to lead another person to faith. If you feel terrified or ill-equipped to share your faith with others, Acts 8 gives you a model.

It shows us how to share the gospel. So Acts 8 is about the gospel, the evangel, and it's about evangelism, sharing.

That gospel. Our narrative follows an ordinary Christian man named Philip as God calls him to lead a one-on-one Bible study to a wealthy African official.

[1 : 13] Our story starts in Acts 8, verse 26, where Philip hears a message from God. He receives an angelic message to rise and go toward the south, to go to a road that leads from Jerusalem to Gaza in the middle of the desert and to approach a chariot that he finds there.

Philip has been on the run. He's been a bit of a fugitive away from Jerusalem to avoid the violent persecution that's just begun against all the followers of Jesus.

If you look in your Bible at chapter 7 of Acts, that's the story of the first martyr, where Stephen is murdered by a Jewish mob for sharing the gospel in Jerusalem.

And that event causes the Christians to scatter. They flee Jerusalem and go out in every direction.

And Philip flees Jerusalem, and initially he goes north to Samaria, a hundred kilometers north.

And like the other Christians on the run, Philip starts sharing the gospel wherever he goes. Keep in mind, this is the generation that was alive when Jesus rose from the dead.

[2 : 25] So these people, many of them, have seen a man killed on a Roman cross, and then three days later, risen again. And more than that, once they believe, they have now experienced being filled with God's Holy Spirit.

This isn't news you could just keep to yourself. If you saw a man die and rise again, if you experienced God alive within you, you would tell people about it, even if you were threatened by death and imprisonment.

So the Christians talk, and they talk, and they talk about what happened. Every direction they go.

So Philip leaves Jerusalem to escape oppression and arrest, and he goes to Samaria.

This is the beginning of Acts 8, chapter 5. And incredibly, the Samaritan crowd is fascinated. These are enemies of the Jewish faith, and yet they hang on Philip's every word.

God's Holy Spirit enters even God's enemies, heretics, people who have fallen away from God, people who have been seduced by the world.

[3 : 34] Enemies of God and his people hear the gospel. They believe it, and they are saved. Acts 8 shows us that God does not discriminate in who he saves, and so neither should we.

God sends his gospel out to Samaritans. These are lapsed, apostate, faithless people, and he saves them through the gospel being shared with them.

And now, immediately following that story, God sends Philip not to the masses in Samaria, but now to a single African man in the middle of the desert, 100 kilometers south of Jerusalem.

Seems like a really silly plan. Philip is doing so well in Samaria. He's got his own, like, Billy Graham crusade going on there. Everyone's coming to faith. And God takes him out of this context to go tell the gospel to a single person.

It's remarkable. God cares that all hear his gospel. What's also interesting is Philip fled Jerusalem. Remember, he went north.

[4 : 44] Well, the place God tells him to go is now 100 kilometers south of Jerusalem. So Philip has to go right back to where it's most dangerous and then walk through it to go where the Lord is sending him.

I wonder if you would walk 200 kilometers and share the gospel with one person in the middle of a desert through a region where you are in mortal danger for your faith.

I would send Aaron. Philip goes. In the chariot sits an important official of the Ethiopian queen, who's also a eunuch, which means he's single, he's celibate, and he can't have children.

So Philip has gone from towns and cities full of Samaritans, now a single African man with no family and no prospects. The official, we're told, is reading from the prophet Isaiah, and he's confused about what the prophet's talking about.

And this is the passage from Isaiah that the Ethiopian was reading. It's from Isaiah 53. It's in verse 32 of Acts 8. Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter, like a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he opens not his mouth.

[6 : 00] In his humiliation, justice was denied him. Who can describe this generation? For his life is taken away from the earth. The Ethiopian doesn't understand what the passage is talking about.

Who the passage is talking about. So he asks Philip. And in verse 35, Philip then leads this man in a one-on-one Bible study, pointing the man to Jesus and sharing how this passage of Isaiah is fulfilled by Jesus' death and resurrection, which has happened just a short time ago.

The man is amazed. He receives the gospel, and he is baptized right there and then in a pool by the road. And as soon as he's baptized, Philip leaves, snatched by the Spirit to go back north again.

And the Ethiopian, we're told, returns home rejoicing. The gospel brings great joy to everybody who receives it.

In Acts 8, at the beginning, we're told how it can save Samaritans, people who have forsaken the faith to join the ways of the world. By the end of the chapter, we're told how the gospel brings great joy to a childless, single, celibate, infertile African man traveling through a desert.

[7 : 22] So maybe you once believed the gospel, but you've turned from it, and now you follow the ways of the world. Well, if you are a fallen Christian, this gospel is for you.

Or maybe you feel like you're living your life in the desert right now. Maybe it's a spiritual desert where you're confused about God, and you can't find the right answers, like the Ethiopian.

Or maybe you're enduring a sexual desert where your longings for life-giving intimacy and companionship are unattainable. Whatever your desert, the gospel is for you.

Maybe you can't have children, but you long to. Well, this gospel's for you. Maybe you're an immigrant, a refugee.

Maybe your ethnicity makes you feel like an outsider where you're currently living. Well, this gospel's for you. Maybe you feel super intimidated coming here because everyone seems so smart, and you feel stupid because you don't understand the Bible whenever you open it, and you have no idea what any of it means.

[8 : 41] This gospel is for you. Irrespective of the mistakes you have committed or the pain you currently carry, the gospel is the power of God for the salvation of everyone, even you.

The gospel is good news of great joy for all types of people, including you. The gospel has the power to transform your tears of sorrow into unending joy, irrespective of your circumstance or your identity.

The gospel is for you. So let's go back to our questions from the beginning. According to the passage, what is the gospel, and how do we share it?

So first, what's the gospel? The word gospel appears in Acts 8 as a verb. If your Bible's open and you're looking, you may notice the word gospel isn't really in our text.

What it is is just hidden. It's hidden in the verb preaching. Now, if you have an English Bible open, circle that word preaching and cross it out. It's wrong. Because the word literally is gosseling, sharing the gospel.

[9 : 55] The original Greek word is evangelizing. So whenever you see the word preaching in Acts 8, it's actually the word evangelizing or sharing the gospel. And if you look at where the word preaching pops up in Acts 8, it reveals what the gospel is in our passage.

There's three different times we're told what the Christians are preaching, what the gospel is they're sharing in Acts chapter 8. In verse 4, we're told they're preaching the word.

It's the gospel of the word. In verse 12, we're told they're preaching the kingdom and it's king. It's the gospel of the kingdom. And finally, in verse 35, we're told they're preaching Jesus.

It's the gospel of Jesus. I want to look at each briefly. First, the gospel is the word. This is from Acts 8, chapter 4.

The word means the good news that God has spoken. The good news for us, all of us, is that there is a God.

[11 : 05] And we know he exists because he speaks. God is not silent. He has spoken into human history. He speaks to us today, tonight, right now, through his word.

This book, the book, narrates the history of God at work in the world. It is his word. So, the gospel is, the good news that the God of the universe is speaking.

He reveals himself to us through his word, through his words. God is not silent. He speaks. You may feel God is silent right now in your life.

You may have felt, I've never heard God speak. What's this guy talking about? Well, I have good news. He speaks. This is the word of the Lord. God wants you to know him.

And so, he speaks to tell us the story of how he is at work to save and bless the world. When you read the Bible, you see God's word unfolds like a narrative.

[12 : 20] There are different acts and scenes that bring into focus for us who God is, who we are, why the world is the way it is, why we are sinful and broken and capable of such good and such evil.

And it shows to what lengths God is willing to go to extend his blessing and mercy and to save us and his world, to bring his kingdom and recreate this fallen world.

So, the gospel first is the word. It's the story of God at work in the world. And the story centers on God himself coming to earth to bring his kingdom of life and light and love.

And this leads into the second thing Acts 8 tells us about the gospel. It's in verse 12. The gospel is about the kingdom and about its king. So, the good news for us is not just that God speaks.

It's what God has spoken is that his kingdom has arrived on earth. When Jesus first starts his ministry in Mark chapter 1, he starts by announcing this message.

[13 : 26] The time is fulfilled. The kingdom of God is here. It's at hand. Repent and believe in the gospel. The gospel, according to Jesus, is that God's kingdom has come to earth.

earth. Our world is in the grips of death and darkness. But God has started a rescue mission to take back this world into his kingdom of light.

The kingdom of God is at hand. All the darkness and death and sadness is giving way. It's succumbing to God's glorious eternal reign. Heaven is coming to earth.

And the way the kingdom of heaven is coming to earth is by the king of heaven coming to earth. The Christ, God's chosen king, has come and he brings with him heaven's kingdom.

Jesus enacts for us what the kingdom is like. It's a place where there's no more sickness or sadness. There's no more hunger or thirst. There's no more injustice or selfishness or evil or violence.

[14 : 37] It's a place where death is dead and love and life reigns. And the ultimate picture to describe God's kingdom and God's king is the king's cross.

The Lord of the universe submitted to death on a cross to make a way for all of us to enter his kingdom. Jesus, who had done no wrong, embraced the punishment for our wrongdoing.

He died the death we deserve and in so doing he saved us, he forgave us, he ransomed us and he now adopts us as children of God to reign with him in his kingdom.

It's good news. The gospel is about God's grace extended to us and given freely, undeserved, through his son. And all we need to do is to be welcomed into God's kingdom is to receive and believe this gospel.

In Acts 8, the gospel is the word in verse 4. The gospel is the kingdom and the king in verse 12. And lastly, in our text, the gospel is about Jesus in Acts 8, 35.

[15 : 55] Jesus is the chosen king of God's kingdom. Jesus is God's son. He has come from heaven and brought with him God's kingdom.

He has won the decisive victory over the devil and sin and death. And now the floodgates of God's goodness are open to all of us. The way Jesus was victorious was by laying down his life for us.

The God of the universe took upon his shoulders our brokenness and sin. He received on our behalf all the judgment and wrath of his father.

Like a sheep, he was led to the slaughter. And like a lamb before its shear is silent, so he opened not his mouth. In his humiliation, justice was denied him.

Who can describe this generation? For his life was taken away from the earth. And because Jesus willingly laid down his life, God raised him from the dead.

[17:01] Jesus is alive. He's won. He holds in his hands the keys to death and he offers to throw open the doors of life to all who will follow him.

This is our gospel. This is the good news of the word of God, the kingdom of God, and the king of God. The gospel is a person.

It's the good news of Jesus who is the Christ and is God's son. And in Acts 8, the recipients of the gospel, Samaritans and an Ethiopian eunuch are as far apart as possible in terms of geography and class and education and religion and culture and ethnicity and probably family status.

They are vastly different and they're all vastly different from Philip as well. And yet God's spirit is poured out upon all of them just the same.

All of these diverse people hear the gospel, believe it, and are baptized and receive the Holy Spirit and are filled with joy. Philip has had to leave his home, leave his community to enter a new community as an outsider.

[18:21] But he embraces that Jesus' gospel is for everyone and so he's willing to share it with anyone no matter who they are or how they look. And God works powerfully through Philip.

Philip. The gospel is good news of great joy for all people then and now. One of the treasures of the Anglican church, our church, of which we're a member, is that it's a global church.

And the spiritual center of our global church has shifted within our lifetimes, within the last decade or so. When Aaron started working at St. John's 45 years ago?

45. Yeah. 46 in July. He uncovered a dusty old photo frame thrown in a box in the church office that had a picture of an old Archbishop of Canterbury.

Do you still have this? You don't know where it's gone. You have to give it up. I remember it. And so, old Archbishop of Canterbury, it was an elderly, severe-looking, white guy, horn-rimmed glasses, regaled in fancy gold vestments and frilly cloth, and the Archbishop had signed the photo, like he was Wayne Gretzky or something.

[19:46] And Aaron put it on the wall of his office. It was framed and hanging on your wall. And I asked Aaron why, and he said to me, because I never want to become that self-important.

Better luck next time, eh? One of the largest Anglican gatherings in history has just happened. Not in Canterbury, not in England, but in Rwanda.

And the reason it was in Africa is because 75% of Anglicans live in the Global South. There are nearly 70 million Anglicans who live south of the equator.

And only about 15 million who live north of it. They took a picture at this conference of all of the bishops, all the church leaders, and if you look at that photo, 300 bishops all standing on the stage, what you notice is that very few of them look like me.

A lot of them look like they could be related to the Ethiopian eunuch. The diversity in the photograph is amazing, with most of the church leaders coming from the Global South.

[21:05] And so visually, they look like they're from the Global South. The Anglican church is a global church community. We are part of an African church, a South American church, an Asian church.

And for this, we should praise God. Because through our global church family, we are striving to reach all people with the gospel. So that's the gospel.

We've heard the evangel. And now I want to finish by talking about evangelism. That's the good news. How do I now share that good news with the world where God now sends me?

The way the gospel is spread in our story is through evangelism, through a follower of Jesus faithfully sharing and proclaiming God's good news.

The passage is about evangelism. The word evangelism is used five times in this chapter. It's only found once in chapters 1 to 7 in Acts before now.

[22:11] First, Philip preaches to entire towns and cities in Samaria. It's mass evangelism, mass conversion, mass baptisms, revival.

But in our text, he goes to the desert to lead a one-on-one Bible study with a foreign official. And both methods are fruitful. And God's Spirit works through both.

What they have in common is that a follower of Jesus is willing to share God's gospel with the person or with people they encounter. And what Philip speaks about is the Bible.

He's not sharing his hot takes on how to live or his philosophy or what he just read in the newspaper. They're looking at Scripture together. They share God's word, trusting that God will work and speak through it.

For most of you, you will never have to do what I am doing right now. You will never be asked to preach the gospel to a crowd of people.

[23 : 22] But for all of us who follow Jesus, God will call you to be faithful, to share the gospel with someone who is seeking by having a one-on-one conversation about your faith.

Maybe you'll even be asked to explain something about God or about a Bible passage. This can happen anywhere, on the bus, at work, over lunch.

It happened for me last week during my son's baseball practice with the other parents and then yesterday at a birthday party of one of my daughter's friends. You could be asked about the gospel at any time.

Are you prepared? Is it possible that God could use you to share his good news like he used Philip? All of us should be prayerfully expecting the Lord to place us in situations where we will be called upon to give an answer for the hope that is within us.

[24 : 27] All of us should be prepared to share our faith, trusting that God can work through us like he worked through Philip. And the way to share our faith is to share God's word, retelling the story of God at work in the world through his son.

One of our pastors, Jordan, was here a couple weeks ago and he preached on the first half of Acts chapter 8. And he talked about this resource they mentioned at that Global Anglican Conference called the Word One-to-One.

The Word One-to-One is a free app that you can get for your phone. It's incredibly easy to use and you just follow this resource to look at Bible verses walking through John's gospel one-on-one with someone else.

So all of us should download the Bible one-on-one on our phones. And when opportunity arises and when we encounter someone who's interested we should ask them if they want to read what the Bible actually says and talk about it together.

You don't need a PhD in theology. You don't need to be a pastor. Anybody can use this. It's just opening God's word with someone else and talking about it like Philip did with the Ethiopian.

[25 : 45] So when faith next comes up at school or at work or around the kitchen table or the friend at coffee after you've chatted for a bit pull out your phone and ask do you want to read a bit of the Bible with me and hear what it actually says?

The story is the best news I've ever heard. It's changed my life and I'd love to read it with you if you're open to it. Well try that. See what happens.

See how God works. Acts 8 shows us the gospel and it shows us how to share it. And so now it's our turn to join with God full of his power and presence and to take up the mantle of extending his kingdom wherever he sends us.

Thanks be to God.