

The Gospel on the Move: God's Mission Through Scattered People

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 01 February 2026

Preacher: Craig Dowling

[0 : 00] If you don't have a Bible, either physically or on your device, there's Bibles at the end of the pews. If you don't have a Bible, take it home with you. Keep it. It's free.

We want to put Bibles in as many hands as possible to be read. Okay, Acts 8. We're splitting this into two sections.

I'll tell you when we jump. So Acts 8. And Saul was there, giving approval to his death. That was Stephen.

On that day, a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.

Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison.

[1 : 14] Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Christ there.

When the crowds heard Philip and saw the miraculous signs he did, they all paid close attention to what he said. With shrieks, evil spirits came out of many, and many paralytics and cripples were healed.

So there was great joy in that city. Let's jump to 26 now. Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, Go south to the road, the desert road, desert road, sorry, 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 Candace, queen of the Ethiopians.

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 told Philip, Go to that chariot and stay near it.

[2 : 27] Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. Do you understand what you're reading? Philip asked. How can I? He said, unless someone explains it to me.

So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. The eunuch was reading this passage of scripture. He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before the shearer is silent, so he did not open his mind.

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 that very passage of scripture, and told him the good news about Jesus. As he travelled along the road, they came to some water, and the eunuch said, Look, here is the water.

Why shouldn't I be baptised? Amen. May God bless the reading to us. Amen. Thank you guys.

[3 : 55] Thank you all. Lord, we thank you that you've heard us this morning. You've heard our prayers, received our worship.

And thank you for those words in the Bible, Lord. Thank you for what they mean, and help us as we continue to learn and journey and grow with you. In your name, Jesus.

Amen. Amen. And so, so it goes global. Worldwide.

It stretches from the east to the west. North to south. to all nations.

To all nations. It's the church, of course. Beyond this point in Acts, it will stretch from Jerusalem to Africa, Jerusalem to Europe, eventually the Americas to Asia, and down under to Australia.

[5 : 20] But, be sure to take note that it all began with one simple verse.

There at the very beginning of Acts chapter 8, just after Stephen's murder and Saul's approval of the murder, we read on that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem. And all except the apostles were scattered throughout. Throughout the lands. Throughout the world. Then, then we read all about Philip the Evangelist. But before we do, we get a little detail of what exactly and how exactly the Christian church indeed came to be a worldwide movement.

movement. And not just any worldwide movement, but the single biggest movement on earth. [7 : 01] With a presence on and in every place on the earth. Sure, by registration with governments, we cover one third of the globe, still making us the biggest religion.

But to add to that, even those parts which claim to have banished us, Christians are in those countries too. We are the only truly worldwide universal movement.

and take note of our actions these last 2,000 years. The orphanages, the rehabs, the peace processes, the hospitals, the schools, the food banks, the charities.

World leaders agree the Christian church has been the backbone to the formation of the modern ages charitable work.

It's the backbone to the nation's work on rehabilitation and addictions work. The backbone to poverty stricken, malnourished and hungry folk being fed.

[8 : 34] The statistics clearly show that if you removed Christians from the voluntary sector, the nation's charities would collapse overnight.

The church's work of sending workers all over the world is still to this day accredited for so much peace.

there is millions and millions of us all over the globe with services, projects, youth events and all sorts being held every day.

! The church is definitely the biggest movement on the globe and it all got going in that direction it all got going in that direction because a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem and so the Christians went scattered all over the world.

This Jerusalem based organisation which at this point in our journey through Acts up to sort of chapter seven or so had about 5,000 folk.

[10 : 10] It had now become a universal organisation with millions upon millions. Didn't Jesus say that's how it would go?

Matthew 13 verse 31 Didn't Jesus say that's how it would go? Because in Matthew 13 he says the kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed which a man took and planted in his field.

Though it is the smallest of all seeds yet when it grows it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree so that the birds come and perch in its branches.

there within first century Israel Jesus kingdom began with just him just him and so ratio wise it was nothing more than a single mustard seed lingering in the soil of a garden it was just him and as Jesus preached and as Jesus taught and healed and commanded twelve joined him then seventy two on the day of his ascension about a hundred and twenty who were fearful that one hundred and twenty based themselves in Jerusalem attracting three thousand to join then that five thousand and so like the mustard seed growing spouting branches leaves stemming gaining a noticeable!

noticeable presence in the garden so by this point five thousand folk centrally in one city had become noticed and their presence was taken note off and so bang here it is chapter eight off they go and just like the mustard seed growing out out and across the field as well as up here is the kingdom growing well and truly out and across the lands across the nations across the countries across the continents gaining thousands gaining millions and finally just like the mustard tree it's now the biggest single movement on earth once again as usual Jesus words come to be fulfilled the enemy the enemy really thought he had this his strategy was turn the religious on the

[13 : 33] Christians get get the religious to imprison the Christians even kill them that five thousand or so put them in prison kill them others will then be intimidated to join them result church over kingdom gone but God uses it for good the five thousand or so see all the persecution coming and so on to the guidance of Holy Spirit all except the apostles I mean they call me simple and naive here but if all except the apostles went I'm reading that about four thousand nine hundred and eighty eight disciples of Jesus went out all over the world and wherever they went to they simply evangelized they started churches they disciplined they baptized and so instead the result is not church over and gone as the enemy planned but instead as I've been saying all morning the result is the church the kingdom grows worldwide and scripture gives one example of what they all did

when they scattered all of them went out and did it but we get a good example of

Philip Philip here is a good summarizing example of what the disciples were doing all across the world at this point but there is also a couple of very very important reasons why Holy Spirit chooses to use the example of Philip and so let's look at this a moment this isn't the same Philip from the apostles remember they all stayed put but this is one of our original deacons he was chosen among the seven as a man full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom and he was clearly an incredibly gifted evangelist and like all the others he went out and preached but unlike many others he didn't limit his outreach to only

Jewish communities in fact he went straight to Samaria the very last place that most of the others would have went which is why Holy Spirit is king to tell us about Philip's role Samaria had been of the northern kingdom of Israel in the days of the divided kingdom before it was conquered by Assyria and when Assyria took over Samaria many fled and many stayed and many were taken captive many were too weak and poor to do anything about it and Assyria populated the region with foreigners and those remaining Jews simply got on with life intermarried the foreigners worked and lived as one etc.

And so as we know by the timing of the first century Jews and Samaritans did not get along they were in effect enemies some would go as far to say they hated each other Jewish folk sort of seen Samaritans as half-breeds they therefore they have long ruined and destroyed and outright rejected their status as Jews and it really really angered the likes of the Pharisees and the Sadducees when Samaritans still proclaimed their special place in God's kingdom and called people to worship on the mount and such things but hey Jesus went to Samaria in fact it was one of his most successful evangelistic projects the lady by the well event and the result is the whole town comes out to see Jesus believes in Jesus and that's because our God our God breaks down walls our God does not put walls up he does not put walls up between nations and races our God calls us to welcome to welcome the foreigner the seeker into our homelands and treat them good treat them as simply someone else God created and it's not you're welcome into our lands as long as you live our culture and do what we do it's bring your culture and come in and we'll welcome you with your culture and love you in that our God is the one God of all cultures of all nations of all races and so for Philip he just does what Jesus did and crosses the divide and that's why out of 5,000 possible examples [19 : 36] Holy Spirit gives us Philip's example and as I was saying earlier the church is still doing this today and here we are in 2026 in Britain and we must still love and welcome the seeker and those from all nations and cultures with their culture as part of our church just as Philip did but more importantly as Jesus did as Jesus himself did for in the end of the day every square inch of the globe was created by God and God has gifted it to all of humanity therefore no man owns any of it only God owns it God gets to decide who can live where and when and whatever else so here in Samaria the preaching the peace work the division work the evangelism is so well received that revival breaks out and

Peter and John come along and Holy Spirit is received it's a real incredible incredible time and as the disciples work away and the kingdom grows here's something which you may not have noticed before all the work's going it's buzzing it's really exciting kingdom growth things are happening left right and centre and then the person God used to get all that going Philip Philip is now called by God to go away to move on Philip the fire starter that Holy Spirit used is taken away those of us in church work we we know of this it's what God does many roles many parts one body and so Peter and John went back to headquarters and the new

Samaritan Christians discipled Samaria themselves and Holy Spirit took Philip to now be used as the tool the middle man to now get the good news to Africa and you know what what's really important here and another reason why Holy Spirit is keen to use the example of Philip it's the use of the Old Testament the use of the Old Testament the Old Testament is fully vital fully needed and fully relevant today because it entirely and fully points to Jesus Christ the Old Testament teaches us what the problem is it teaches us why we need punished and it tells us all about

God's plan to redeem to save to set us free without the Old Testament we wouldn't know why we need punished in the first place and we wouldn't know the incredible journeying friendships and works of God all across the history of the world indeed early in his ministry Jesus there in Matthew 5 says in the Sermon on the Mount do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them for truly I tell you until heaven and earth disappear not the smallest letter not the least stroke of a pen will by any means disappear from the law until

everything is accomplished!

the Old Testament points to him and all of the Old Testament is fulfilled by him and so if you don't read or you don't know the Old Testament then you can't fully know Jesus you can't fully know God for we learn so much about Jesus through the Old Testament and so by putting the New alongside the Old you get the full picture the full story there we are in Genesis it kicks off of Jesus creating the world alongside Holy Spirit hovering over the waters and Father God then in chapter 3 after the fall we're told how Jesus and Isaiah will come and save everything and then we're followed through countless prophecies in the Psalms and all the books about the Messiah what to look out for what to look out for what to look out for and then we turn the page into

[24 : 59] Mafia and there he is the Messiah has arrived and then we get his church starting and then we taught how to live with his church and then we're told how it will all end by Jesus the Messiah! Genesis 1 verse 1!

Revelation 21! It all points to Jesus and so as Jesus says here none of it none of it can be abolished you can't remove or add one letter because that would change God's story and so back to Philip here here the Ethiopian is reading Isaiah and Philip gets right on it and using Isaiah he gives the good news we did the same here last Easter and Christmas just gone and Philip using the book of Isaiah gives such a Jesus filled good news message that the guy gets saved born again redeemed baptized there and then Philip tells him the

Old Testament passage he is reading he was led like a sheep to the slaughter and as a lamb before it shears 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 Philip tells him that 500 years before it happened before this passage is explaining the way Jesus will take our punishment for our sins and then he was able to tell him how this prophecy had now been fulfilled and it is still the same good news message for us all today Jesus has indeed taken our punishment he has indeed taken our sins as described as prophesied a good 500 years before he did it and so back to this guy from Ethiopia he is saved by Jesus he's in a relationship with Jesus and takes the message on with him to Africa and so we're naturally back to where we started this morning the church the kingdom was on route to becoming the single biggest movement on the earth and ironically with thanks to persecution some of us from the mission field have little personal accounts of this happening so I'll finish with this I went to do a job in London in 2008 and my job was to evangelize on a massive housing estate called the furrier now the furrier was in effect a drug fueled war zone it was originally built as an urgent response to needed housing after world war two it was big grey tower blocks all enclosed but as society stabilized!

and the economy grew the Londoners moved off into nicer parts leaving this big massive estate getting empty Margaret Thatcher's government had the brainwave idea of filling it up with everyone who comes out of prison or those on probation!

[29 : 10] or coming out of mental health care or on parole! Explosion! Explosion! Gains, gains, gains, gains, gains, drugs, drugs, drugs, crime, crime, murder, murder, everything, the lot!

One day we had our church projectors stolen by one gang and then the good gang they came and held a few of their members hostage until they returned our rejectors to us and many other stories of what happened in those days.

Anyway, Tony Blair's government knew it needed to go and so the council was commissioned to fully decant the estate, move everyone away, knock it all down, build the nice new Kiddburg village as it was called and fill it up with those who could afford to buy their own homes and stay it. saying what the council planned for bad

God will use for good and he quoted Axiot when the church was forced to flee and then it led to many more churches all over the world and so of us forced off the farrier and blocked from Kiddbrook village we took our services and our projects and our people to Kiddbrook to Elton to Woolwich to Middle Park to Plumstead to Abbey Wood to name a few and our church's mission grew to the prisoners to the poor to the addicted to more more more and it flourished we reached so many more people we led so many more people to faith we made many more disciples God conquered God triumphed and the enemy as always lost today in 2026 the Christian church is still officially the single biggest and single most effective movement on the globe and it all started with these guys back in the first seven chapters of

[32 : 55] Acts who in chapter 8 under persecution left Jerusalem and went but more importantly much more importantly when they went they kept hold of the deep truths of the faith they preached

preached and preached Jesus they kept their quiet times up their bible readings their songs of worship their prayer times and the message of Jesus exploded all over the world it's the greatest message on the earth it's the message of how to have life to the full it's the message of how to get into heaven it's the message of your sins forgiven and millions upon millions have since received and accepted therefore millions have been saved forgiven given life to the full and the gift of heaven it's known all over the globe!

And of course even before those guys on Acts it firstly all started when Jesus himself as one turned up in a synagogue saying I am the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy and like the mustard seed he grew his message all over the universe to what it is today let's pray Lord Jesus may we not miss out if we are yet to accept this faith this message may we not miss out may we take hold of it today and for those of us who do follow you who are serving you may we not miss out from our quiet time life during the week for how you want to grow and expand our closeness of you and may we not miss out on the evangelistic work of this kingdom growth may we not miss out of what Philip got to do and the joy he had from that and may we preach wherever we go talk about you wherever we go and see your kingdom continue to grow bless us this in Jesus name amen amen and so by faith and faith alone we go forward so let's stand if you're able please and sing by faith by faith and not by sight until the job is done to him he's able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy to the only God our saviour be glory majesty power and authority through Jesus Christ our Lord before all ages and forever more amen in the name of the father and the son and the holy spirit amen!

! Thank you.

Thank you.

[37 : 02] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.