

Acts 8:26-40

Identity Reset

Image Church // Study Through Acts #7

MPT: Philip responds to the gospel through the power and direction of the Holy Spirit. He fulfills the mission to which God has called this member of the church.

The result is the expansion of the gospel to a new ethnic group.

MPS: God uses ordinary people transformed by the gospel and empowered by Holy Spirit to continue the message and ministry of Jesus across ethnic/cultural lines.

Introduction

Alright, welcome to Image Church, my name is Mike McKee and I am one of the Pastors here. If you are a guest with us we are so excited that you decided to join us tonight, I hope that you feel welcomed by our family here!

Well we are in a very exciting season right now as a new church-startup, we're currently in what we call the "Soft Launch Phase" building toward our official launch. And as we do that we're offering Preview Services along the way. Like the one today, as an intentional opportunity to invite you to come test the waters and see what we're all about here at Image Church.

I do want you to know that we do meet every week at the same time and at the same place, here, at a partner church of ours that has given us the privilege of using their space until December when we will be moving to Life University a few miles north of here right off of Hwy 75.

So, we would love to invite you to join us again next week as you continue to see who we are and how we gather and how we live life together.

Well, for the past several weeks we have been walking through the book of Acts and looking at key characteristics from the very first

Church. I have said this before, but the book of Acts is like the scrapbook of the early church.

It gives us the opportunity to see how things started, why things started, and how it all continued to the point that we're sitting here tonight.

We believe in the Bible is God's Word and it's perfect and powerful, and that is was given to point us to the glory of God and to show us how to experience the fullness of life in Him.

So, each week we walk through Gods word together, and it only made sense that we started here in Acts, and hold up the early church as a model for us as we begin our journey that was set in motion by them 2000 years ago.

Lead-in Story: *When I was in Raleigh before we moved here, I was leading a community group and 3 of my best friends were in there, 2 out of the 3 were brothers. Well one of them had recently admitted a pretty substantial problem that he was wrestling with... reading out loud...*

*There was a **pause**...you idiot, I was reading from a different version than you!!*

- *That's a true story...*

See my buddy made a quick assumption about his roommates reading problem... and as funny as that story is, it points to a true reality and that we have a tendency to make quick assumptions about things. One place I see this happen most often is the assumptions that are made about Christianity...

Every one of you here today has a preset assumption of what you think Christianity's about, what you think it is... my question is, are the assumptions that you have actually true- are they legit??

Maybe you're in a situation where your assumptions came through bad church experiences, maybe your assumptions came through friends... maybe your assumptions came through family, or heritage or traditions. Maybe your assumptions are right, I don't know...

But, tonight, my hope is that if you don't walk out of here with anything else, you walk out with a clear understanding of the good news of Christianity, what it means for you and how it can have incredible implications on your life.

We're going to be looking at an account of 2 men, and we'll see, what I believe to be, one of the clearest pictures of what Christianity is and how it works and what it means for your life.

If you have your Bibles go ahead and turn to Acts 8... If you don't have a Bible it will be up on the screen behind me so that you can follow along with me as I read.

Acts 8 verse 26:

26 An angel of the Lord spoke to Philip: "Get up and go south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." (This is the desert road.) Think about Gaza kinda like that last stop before a long stretch of nothing on your way down to Panama City... with a gas station, a dollar general connected to a Piggly Wiggly where the speed limit is 25 and there's a speed trap in about 3 places including the parking lot of Hardee's...

That's Gaza, a small town right on the edge of the desert- and worse than that it is full of Philistines... a group of people at odds with Philip's people... oh and he had to walk about 50 miles to get there...

Bottom line, this whole deal is super inconvenient and super uncomfortable for Philip- there is nothing for him to gain in this trip... but he went anyway.

Verse 27:

27 So he got up and went. There was an Ethiopian man, a eunuch and high official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of her entire treasury. He had come to worship in Jerusalem **28** and was sitting in his chariot on his way home, reading the prophet Isaiah aloud. This Ethiopian man is a big deal, he is a powerful guy in high standing in the office of the queen of Ethiopia (which was a region much larger then than it is now) so he's the real deal.

The text says that he's a "*eunuch*" – that means that he had been castrated, they did this to people that worked in close proximity to the queen to make sure that they didn't get any frisky ideas... Interesting approach right???

(If you have more question about this, Pastor Aaron will be down front after we get done today, he will be happy to explain this to you in more detail.)

29 The Spirit told Philip, "Go and join that chariot."

30 When Philip ran up to it, he heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, "Do you understand what you're reading?"

31 "How can I," he said, "unless someone guides me?" So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

I have always wondered what this scene looked like?!? Philip running, did the chariot stop? Was Philip fast? He must have been in good shape... Regardless, he is able to get up in the chariot and he is able to see what the Ethiopian man is reading in Isaiah...

32 Now the Scripture passage he was reading was this:

He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb is silent before its shearer, so he does not open his mouth.

33 In his humiliation justice was denied him.

Who will describe his generation?

For his life is taken from the earth.

This is from Isaiah 53:7-8 written about 800 years before the birth of Jesus...

34 The eunuch said to Philip, "I ask you, who is the prophet saying this about—himself or someone else?" **35** Philip proceeded to tell him the good news about Jesus, beginning with that Scripture. **36** As they were traveling down the road, they came to some water. The eunuch said, "Look, there's water. What would keep me from being baptized?" **38** So he ordered the chariot to stop, and both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him. **39** When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him any longer but went on his way rejoicing. **40** Philip appeared in Azotus, and he was traveling and preaching the gospel in all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

I want us to take a look at these 2 men and see how God is working in both of their lives... because at the end of the day, whether you've been a Christian for 25 years or this is your first time in church, there is something here for you.

The first guy that I want us to look at is Philip...

1. Philip was an ordinary guy that was obedient to what God told him to do

At the end of Acts 7 Stephen was killed for proclaiming the message of Jesus. And at the beginning of Acts 8 we see the result is all the Christ-followers scattered throughout Judea and Samaria, *all except for the Apostles...*

The message of Jesus goes out from Jerusalem for the first time on through the mouths of lay people [like you], not the through the Apostles (the professionals). Philip is one of the guys that ends up in Samaria where he's sharing the gospel there for the first time.

- *Do you see what God is doing here?!?*

If not, God makes it even more clear when He sends an Angel to Philip and tells him to go to Gaza, where no Christ-follower has ever been. God didn't send an angel to the Apostles and tell them to head down there, he sent an Angel to Philip...

The point is this: God uses an ordinary guy to go on the first international mission trip... the fact that God uses a layperson to do this, and the fact that Luke (the author of Acts) goes out of his way time after time to show that the gospel spreads faster through laymen that the Apostles has to be an indicator to us of how God is going to spread the news of Jesus to the world...

Philip's a normal guy, there was nothing super special about him, he wasn't some gifted speaker, or writer, or singer, he wasn't a leader of anything, he wasn't an apostle... but you know what he was?

Obedient.

- Philip was told to go and so he went... it didn't matter that it was a rival city, it didn't matter that it was a rough place, it didn't matter that he had to walk some 50 miles, and it didn't matter that he didn't know the guy!
- He was told to go and he went!

*"No one has ever come to Christ without an obedient messenger – Never."*¹

Apply:

Is that true for you? Are you being obedient to the call to "go"?

- At this point we know it isn't about talent, skill set, or religious hierarchy... It just boils down to obedience...

Some of you are like, yeah but if I had an Angel come and tell me go like he did I would do it too... Well, here's the deal, you don't need an angel to tell you because you have God's Word of God telling you!

¹ James McDonald: *A Simple Salvation Message*

The same call that Philip knew Jesus gave, is the same call Jesus is giving you: Matthew 28:19-20 – Go share the message of Jesus!

Apply:

- Where is God telling you to go?
- What is God telling you to do?
- What co-worker, neighbor, friend, classmate has God put on your heart?

Listen here is where the rubber meets the road, Christianity isn't a one-time prayer that you pray and check the box and you're done. It is a call to go and tell people about the very message of Jesus that you've experienced!

- Christianity is a movement and movements move!

We're in a culture plagued with nominal Christianity where people claim to be affiliates, but few are actually followers.

Listen, Jesus said to "follow him", that means you take on the same message and mission that he had... and the reality is, that was God's plan all along!

That leads me to another thing we see about Philip:

2. Philip was aware of the Holy Spirit

Philip was told to go and so he went- no clue what he would find, no clue what to expect, no clue what to do when he got there, he didn't care, why? Because he knew that he had the Holy Spirit!

- **Jesus said in Acts 1:8** *"That they would receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on them and they would be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, **Samaria** and to the ends of the earth..."*

We see that power show up in **Verse 29: The Spirit told Philip, "Go and join that chariot."**

- How did the Spirit communicate this to Philip? Booming voice, smoke in the air, in his Hebrew happy meal? We don't know...

But what we do know is that the Holy Spirit is mentioned 59 times in the book of Acts, and about 40 of those the Spirit is speaking.²

Apply:

- Do you understand that the same Spirit that was working in Philip is the same Spirit that lives in you as a Christian?
- Do you walk in the Spirit like that? Are you aware when He is speaking to you, are you asking for the Holy Spirit to lead you?
- When's the last time you were sensitive to what the Spirit might be leading you to do, or what He has put on your heart? Are you even aware of it? Is it something you are even listening for in your life??

God's plan all along was to use ordinary people like you and me through the power of the Holy Spirit to carry out the message and ministry of Jesus... Jesus left so that the Spirit could come so that you and I could go! Are we listening to the Holy Spirit in our lives?

Pastor JD Greear says: *"God never wanted us to do the Great Commission **for** Him, but **with** Him."*

- Remember Christianity is a movement... it's not just a label.

Let's look at the last thing that we see in Philip:

3. Philip's identity as a Christ-follower impacted how he viewed people who were different

Philip by nature, the old Philip, before trusting in Jesus wouldn't have gone to Gaza and defiantly wouldn't have had anything to do with this Ethiopian Eunuch because of cultural and ethnic lines...

But on this particular day my man is running after this Ethiopian's man's chariot! ... not walking, not jogging, running!!

² JD Greear: *The First Short-term Mission Trip*: Acts SENT #11

Why?!? Because the cross of Jesus gives you a new identity! And a sign of that new identity is how you relate to other people, particularly people that are different than you.

In our culture today, every person feels the need to create an identity for themselves. To discover who they are, and find out how they can leave their mark on society.

Typically, it's all tied back to money, success and power. We want to separate ourselves from the "others" so that we can be identified.

Tim Keller says: *[What happens is], you [begin to] feel superior to other people that can't share your identity trait or culture. We think of "others" or "those people", those being they that do not have our level of education or status in society. What if there was a new way to build an identity? [What's the answer?]*

Grace is what has to change our attitude. Grace is now why you have value. Grace removes the basis and need for feeling superior, in that none of us deserved grace in the first place. How then could we ever feel superior?

Philip recognized the grace that he had been given to him through Christ and that changed everything.

Listen, your social status may be different than others, but our standing before God is all the same, sinner.

It's not about the mark that you can leave on the world, it's about the marks that were left of Jesus when he bled for the world!

And when you realize the grace you've been given, you start to see that there's no "those people" or "others" there's no "superior culture or ethnic group", there is just an incredible Savior.

Philip understood that, and God used him to expand the message of Jesus to a new ethnic group for the very first time!

Acts 1:8 tells us that the message of Jesus is to go to the very ends of the earth, and we're seeing the start of that right here with Philip!

God is making clear that his plan is to see the gospel spread to all people regardless of ethnicity... and in the same way that God used Philip through the power of the Holy Spirit, he is going to use you and I through that same power to take the same message to people that don't look like us!

God brought together 2 men that looked different around the message of the gospel- in this we see a glimpse of gospel unity that breaks down barriers.

To be a Christian means that we understand our identity in Christ and we allow that identity to break down the barrier of ethnic and cultural differences for the sake of the gospel!

It also means that we stand against division. That we recognize when things happen in our country happen creating racial tension it's a big deal because we are witnessing first-hand the enemy attempt to divide something that God has brought together through the death of Jesus!

It means that we like Philip run toward people that are different from us. We want to be a church that looks different because the gospel is for people that are different! We don't want to be unified because we look the same, we want to be unified because we have a God that offers all of us the same thing in him!

Lastly, let's look at the Ethiopian Eunuch...

As I said earlier, this guy is a big deal! He has it all, money, power, nice clothes, he's riding in a brand new chariot, rocking a fresh pair of "Air Jesus" and a "Gucci pullover robe" with "Rolex sundial", you name it, he has it...

But the thing is, it's easy to see what he has, and miss what he had to give up. See, he had to be castrated to get to where he was in society.

He had to sacrifice any hope of a family and any hope of companionship in order to pursue his worldly dreams. And he is living in a culture where family and lineage meant everything... so in a lot of ways he gave up the most valuable thing he had to get to where he was.

The irony is that regardless of what he had obtained, he still wasn't satisfied. I would imagine, that he was lonely, that there was a feeling of void in his life that he just couldn't fill. Otherwise, he wouldn't be interested in reading Isaiah, he wouldn't be traveling miles and miles to go to Jerusalem.

He was searching for something, something beyond what the world could offer him in possessions and power... and here's the sad part, he was headed back from the temple in Jerusalem where his problem would have been made worse.³

See, because he was a Eunuch he would have been classified as unclean, meaning he would not be allowed into the main part of the temple, he could just stand on the fringe. He was separated because of the state that he was in.

You can almost feel the hurt and frustrations that he might be experiencing, he came all this way and yet he was labeled as unclean and unable to have access to the temple. So, on his way home he is reading through Isaiah trying to find the answer?!?

And there he sits reading Isaiah 53:

**He was led like a sheep to the slaughter,
and as a lamb is silent before its shearer,
so he does not open his mouth.
33 In his humiliation justice was denied him.**

And then Eunuch asks Philip, who is this talking about??

Conclusion

And Philip goes on to tell him about Jesus... that **Jesus** was the one Isaiah was talking about, **Jesus** was led to be slaughtered, it was **Jesus** who was humiliated, it was **Jesus** who was denied justice...

See, **Jesus** was innocent, he had lived the perfect life, and yet stood silent and received the punishment that for the guilty. **Jesus** took on the sin of the world so that sinners like you and I could be saved and have a restored relationship with God.

As the Eunuch stood, he was separated from God but **not** because of his physical state, but because of his spiritual state... he was a sinner, like me and you. But by trusting in the finished work of Jesus—the innocent one who was slain for the guilty—this Eunuch could be restored, he could have access to God, no longer separated because of his sin!

Some of you need to know that in the same way that the Ethiopian man stood separated from God, you too stand separated from God right now, because of your sin... and there is nothing that you can do to change that.

But listen, Jesus stood silent and pled guilty to your sin, and was slaughtered in your place on the cross so that you could have life through him! But you have to believe, have you done that? Some of you need to do that for the very first time tonight.

³ Tim Keller: *How the Cross Converts us*, Session 1 Acts 8:26-39

Salvation is simple: You need to understand that Jesus took your place, and that He is Lord! Trust in him and what He has done for you and surrender to him the Lordship of your life!

There are some of you here that never trusted in Jesus, you cannot point to a time or season of life when you surrendered to Jesus, that's because you have never really surrendered to Jesus! Do that tonight!

There are others of you, who like this Ethiopian Eunuch, that have given up everything in pursuit of worldly dreams... you have been chasing after money, power, fame, success... and you have sacrificed whatever in order to get there... and you maybe have ***claimed*** Christianity but you have never ***surrendered*** to Christianity.

- The truth be told, you are not fully satisfied, you feel empty... you don't feel complete... Please hear this, the only thing that will fill that void in your life is JESUS!

Some of you need to make your decision to follow Jesus public, you need to be baptized. Baptism doesn't save you, it's a step of obedience to declare to the world who you are... it is like a wedding ring when you get married...

- The Ethiopian Eunuch believed and immediately he asks... "is there anything to stop me from being baptized?" And they stop the Chariot and the and Philip go into the water and he is baptized!

You may have given your life to Christ a while back but have never made it public... you may have given you life to Christ tonight! Take the next step as a Christ follower!

You were given a card when you walked in tonight. On it there are 3 things that the Lord could be doing on your hear. We walk to be able to walk with you, that's what the church is for! As the band continues to play for the next little bit, I want you to take a second and fill out this card... And then we can stand and sing together!