

The Road To Gaza

Fairview Missionary Church | Angola, IN

Scripture: Acts 8:26-40

Speaker: Joel Greenwood

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Why is it so hard for us to share our faith? I've talked with a lot of people about this idea of evangelism, sharing our faith. Why do we believe what we believe and then sharing that in a logical and in a comprehensive way with others? And I've written down some of the excuses that maybe I have used in my own life or some of the reasons that other people have shared with me, why sharing our faith is so difficult today. Maybe we were rejected as a teenager.

Maybe you were in junior high or high school and you came to know Jesus, and you were excited about it, and you thought that your friends would be excited about it as well until you started to share your faith with them and you were rejected and kind of pushed off to the side. Maybe for you, evangelism is hard and sharing your faith is hard because in your immediate family, you grew up maybe in a home where they weren't followers of Jesus. And again, you were excited about your faith.

And so you began to share with your immediate family, what you had come to believe and know, and maybe some of them were offended or even spoke harsh words against you and maybe to this day, your relationship has never been the same. Maybe sharing your faith is hard because of the society that we live in. And of course, the future generations, they're becoming less and less tolerant of the Christian faith. They view us as the crazy ones that they can't make sense of what we believe and why we believe it.

And so they certainly are less tolerant. Maybe it's because we are afraid that we won't have all the answers. That if we do share our faith that somebody is going to ask us a question, and we're not going to know how to respond. And so we don't even want to step out on that limb because we don't feel that we know the Bible enough or maybe we haven't been a follower of Jesus for long enough. And so that is for somebody else. Maybe we won't know how to respond if someone actually says yes, that they would like to receive Jesus.

And so we say, well, I don't want to share my faith because if I do and they say, yes, I don't really even know what the next step is or how to help them. Or maybe I don't want to be responsible for them. I'm already busy enough. And so you don't share your faith for that reason. Maybe you don't share your faith because you don't want to ruin your friendships and your relationships that you already have. And so you don't want to make it awkward. Things are going well now. And you've made some great friends and you think, okay, but if I begin to share my faith, they're going to kind of label me as some Christian lunatic.

And so now it's going to be awkward and weird. And so I don't want to do that with my neighbors or my friends or other people that I have in my life. Maybe because we live in what many call the Bible belt in the Midwest. We've come to the conclusion that everybody's already heard about Jesus. They've already made their decision. They know who Jesus is. There's a church on every corner. If they want to go, they're welcome to attend. So why would I push that upon them? That's up to them. Or maybe we say to ourselves, you know what?

It's just not my gift. This gift of evangelism. Every spiritual test I've ever taken. Evangelism is not high on the list. So God must have just passed me over on that one, right? And so it's not my responsibility. It's everybody else who is supposed to share your faith. And as I think through all of these reasons, why we

struggle with sharing our faith, the irony is that every single one of us is here today, because somebody broke through their fear, maybe their shame of their uncertainty, if you will, they broke through all of those, and they gained the courage to share the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ with us.

Whether it was a family member or a friend or a neighbor or a coworker, and I can't imagine where I would be right now without the courage of somebody who worked with my dad many years ago and decided to share his faith in Jesus Christ with my dad. Let me share with you a little bit about my family, just so you know where I come from, my background. I have four uncles. I only have four uncles. I don't have any biological aunts. So my dad has two brothers and my mom has two brothers.

And of my four uncles, only one of them is married. And so I have one aunt, but probably over the last 20 years, I've maybe seen her three times because she's either angry at the family and not talking to us or ignoring us or whatever else. And so we don't really see her much. And that's the one family where I actually have cousins. And so I only have three cousins. My family is very small. So if we had a family reunion, we can just go to McDonald's if we want to, right?

Of my three cousins, just so you know, I don't see them ever either, but I do hear about them and I know through Facebook and other things that over the last 20 years, two of my three cousins have been in and out of jail for whatever reason. Varying reasons. And so I don't see them much of my four uncles and my three cousins. None of them attend church regularly. We have had conversations in the past and some of them say they believe in God and some don't and some have different faith or a different religion.

And so I share this with you because first you need to know me, you need to know my family, you need to know where I come from so that you recognize I am just like you. We have weird, we have crazy. We have dysfunction in our family, just like you have in your family. And this is just my side of the family. You don't even want to hear about my wife's side of the family. I'm just kidding, kind of, but yes. Just kidding. You just need to know.

I share my heritage with you because you need to know that I am only here because I have been saved by grace. That's the only reason I'm here today. I would be in the same exact spot as my uncles and my cousins without Jesus. But by God's grace, a gentleman, many years ago, who was working with my dad in a factory, had the courage to boldly share the gospel of Jesus Christ with him.

And again, by God's grace, my dad had been watching this gentleman, recognizing that he was different, that there was something different so that when he shared his faith, my dad said, you know what? What you have is what I want. And so my dad received Jesus Christ as his personal savior, and he brought that home to his family. And so I am here today because of the courage of a man that I probably will never meet. This is how important sharing our faith is. Now, your story is just like mine.

Everyone has a story. Maybe you're a first-generation follower of Jesus Christ. Maybe you're here today and your parents don't believe in Jesus. They have some other faith or whatever. And so you are a first generation believer because maybe you had a friend when you were growing up that shared their faith or invited you to church or maybe you had another family member that shared their faith with you. It's possible that some of you are here today that you can go back multiple generations and all of them have been Jesus followers.

And so you just have this beautiful heritage of those that have followed Jesus, but no matter what boat you are in, first generation, multiple generations, you and I are here because someone was bold enough at one point and loving enough to introduce either you or a family member or somebody else to Jesus. And so I can't help but ask the question, where would you and where would I be if that didn't happen? It's actually scary for me to think about that.

Where would I be heading? If somebody didn't have the courage, the boldness, the love, to share Jesus, this is what gives me the courage to recognize that I might be that person for somebody else. That God might be calling me to share my faith and who knows how many people that is going to affect.

Today, as we continue in our story in the book of acts, we're going to see about and read about the obedience of one man that would change the eternity of an Ethiopian eunuch for all of eternity. And probably not just him, but family members and other people. And if you don't know what an Ethiopian unit is, I'll explain that very briefly as well, okay? Very briefly. I'll explain what a eunuch is. But we're going to read about the testimony of this man named Philip.

And so if you haven't already, you can open your bibles to acts chapter 8 26. That's where we left off last time. Acts chapter 8 26. And we're going to read about a man named Philip and how God uses him to impact the eternity of an Ethiopian eunuch. Let me pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for your grace. We thank you for your mercy. Those of us that are here and those that are watching online and listening on the radio, father, we are not better than anybody else.

We are simply sinners that have been saved by grace. And so we thank you for that grace. Lord, it is our desire that we would continue to walk towards you, to take our next step towards you. And father that in the midst of doing that, that because of the people you have placed around us that we would be willing to share why we believe what we believe. And in to invite others into a loving and saving relationship with you.

So speak to us today, we ask this in Jesus name, amen. Acts chapter 8 26. We jump back into the story. If you remember last week, we left off with Philip, and he was in Samaria, and he was witnessing to the Samaritans there and God was doing miraculous things, amazing things. People were coming to know Jesus, and now Luke tells us something happens to Philip. Now, an angel of the lord said to Philip, go south to the road, the desert road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.

These are the only directions that Philip receives. The angel tells him just go down to this road. And he didn't know what to expect when he got there. He didn't know how long he was going to be on the road or exactly if he was supposed to travel all the way to Gaza. This road was about 50 miles long. It took him from Jerusalem and go all the way to the coast of the Mediterranean Sea to the city of Gaza. And God doesn't give Philip any details. And I'm a detailed person. So this would have been very hard for me.

I would want to know, okay, after I get there, what's the next step? What do you want me to do? The best way to understand this kind of in today's world. Again, Philip couldn't just, you know, jump in an SUV and drive there, right? 50 miles is a long way to travel. It would be like, you know, an angel appearing to me and saying, Joel, I need you to get in your car and drive to Indianapolis. Okay, and then what, you know? Like, I kind of won an itinerary. Tell me what I'm going to do when I get there and whatever else. And of course, I would think that Indianapolis is my goal.

I wouldn't be expecting to run into somebody on the way to Indianapolis, all right? But Philip is obedient to this one step that God is giving him. And so he follows the path. Here we are in verse 27. So, Phillips started out, and on his way, he met an Ethiopian eunuch an important official in charge of all the treasury of the candidate, which means queen of the Ethiopians. So Philip goes to the road and he's traveling to Gaza.

And before he gets there, we don't know how long he's been traveling. He runs into this Ethiopian eunuch. This is an important person. He works for the king and queen of Ethiopia. And we're not given much more detail about him. He was probably made a eunuch just so you understand. Those very common practice in that day that if you were working for the king for the palace that you would be castrated by the king so that you wouldn't have the temptation of the king's harem.

I guess if you want to solve that problem, that's a good way, but I don't know about that, right? But that's what they did. So he was a eunuch. He worked for the king. And the queen, and so here he is traveling and Philip runs into this man. And what's he supposed to do? You know, is he supposed to talk with him? Is he not supposed to talk with him? What is the plan? Is this the meeting that God was setting up? 'cause that'd be my question. Or am I meeting somebody in Gaza?

Philip didn't know, but what we will see is that Philip takes one step at a time and often in our lives, God only gives us one step at a time. And for somebody like me, this is very hard. I want to plan. I want to look into the future and make decisions now based on 5 years from now. I want to know what's going to happen, but God often just gives us one step at a time. And you will see this as we continue to go through the story of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch.

It's just one step at a time, and are you going to be obedient? So as we think about our own lives, has God given you your next step, whatever that is, God's asked you to do something, but you're like me and you think to yourself, okay, I'll be obedient, but can you tell me the next two or three steps? Because I'm not sure what's going to happen if I take this first one, and we'll see that Philip is always willing, eager to take that next step, even though he doesn't know what's coming.

We go on and verse 27. This man, the Ethiopian eunuch, had gone to Jerusalem to worship. And on his way home, was sitting in his chariot, reading the book of Isaiah, the prophet. Luke tells us that this man was not some crazy guy that didn't know anything about God. He obviously had knowledge of God. He had access to scriptures, which not many people would have had. So obviously, he is wealthy. He works for the king and the queen.

He had gone to Jerusalem to worship. And so he had heard about this God that was in Jerusalem. He had made his way there, the travel. Again, not an easy road to travel. But we need to recognize there is a huge difference between a head knowledge of God and a personal relationship with God. It's very easy for us to know in our head, yes, there's a God. Yes, I understand. He created everything. And there has to be a God because how else are we here?

There's a huge difference between that person and the person that says, no, Jesus is my lord. I'm submitting my life to him. I have a personal relationship with him. So we go on in verse 29. The spirit told Philip, go to that chariot and stay near it. Here's the next step that he is given. Then Philip, obedient again, runs up to the chariot, and he heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. And so Philip asked him, do you understand what you are reading?

Again, one step at a time, Philip, are you going to be obedient? Go up to the chariot. Okay, I'll go to the chariot. An interesting note here is that even before Philip is obedient to what God has commanded him, Philip was prepared before God asked him. He knew the scriptures, Philip studied the scriptures. He knew how to teach the scriptures. And so you'll see that as we continue in the story that Philip was prepared for what God had asked him to do.

God was preparing him for this event, just like he prepares you and I, so we go to verse 31. The Ethiopian Eunuch said, how can I understand this? Unless someone explains it to me. So the eunuch invited Philip to come up and to sit with him in his chariots. I want you to notice how this whole interaction happened. It started with a question. It started with him simply asking a question. He's walking by this charity. Here's this guy reading something. He says, hey, do you understand what you're reading?

Oftentimes, the pathway to sharing our faith is not coming with boldness in the Bible and ready to hit somebody over the head. It's simply being inquisitive. Asking questions, getting to know other people, getting to know about them. What is their story? What is their life? How have they been raised? What kind

of questions do they have? And so Philip does that. He simply just asks a question. Because at that moment, God was preparing his heart.

God was preparing the Ethiopian's heart, and he was preparing Philip's heart for what was going to happen. And so we go on to verse 32. Luke tells us that this is the passage of scripture that the eunuch was reading from Isaiah. He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before it is sheared is silent, so he did not open his mouth. In his humiliation, he was deprived of justice. So who can speak of his descendants for his life was taken from the earth.

The eunuch then asked Philip. Tell me, please. Who is the prophet talking about himself or somebody else? I love reading this story about the Ethiopian eunuch because God couldn't have teed it up any better for Philip, right? I mean, is this all a coincidence that Philip happens to be on the same road as the Ethiopian eunuch? He just happens to be reading scripture, like you go, okay, God, if you tee it up that easy for me, I'm ready to go, right? But often it's not that easy. It's more difficult.

It's hard, but in this situation, God was working in his heart. It was ripe. His heart was ripe for receiving Jesus repenting of his sins. I don't think it's convenient at all. God is working behind the scenes and we will see that in this story, and many of us have that same experience in our own lives, as God is working in us, first 35. So then Philip began with that very passage of scripture, and he told him the good news about Jesus.

So Philip opens the word of God, and he begins to share about who Jesus is as God is working in both of their hearts and putting this all together. And I want you to notice in the story that nothing is forced. It's not scripted. It's not something that Philip had memorized. Okay, I got to do step one and step two and step three. No, he was just natural. It was organic as he was having this relationship. It just happened naturally. Because God's timing was perfect.

He was just being obedient to what God had asked him to do. One step at a time and only God can make it happen. I think sometimes we put too much pressure on ourselves. And we believe that if I do the right thing, then somebody's going to be saved. But if I say the wrong thing, then I've just messed up that person's spiritual life for all of eternity, and that's not the way that it works. God is in charge of that person's heart and their life. I can only be obedient to what God has asked me to do.

And so when we look at the story, really, I see three parts of evangelism, three things that are taking place all at the same time. The first one is God's sovereignty. Knowing that God is in control of all of this, God had to be working in the heart of the Ethiopian eunuch. God had to make him inquisitive and ask questions and wonder as he was reading from Isaiah the prophets, God had to work in the heart of Philip. This has only God's sovereignty that got them together at this exact time.

The second part of this is God's word. Hebrews chapter four verse 12 says for the word of God is living and active. It's alive. The word of God is alive. And so when we are sharing about who Jesus is, the word is part of that. We often are sharing scripture and saying, this is what I believe to be true. And read this with me. And then the third part is my obedience. It's me being obedient to what God has asked me to do and trying to be obedient to what the spirit is speaking to me.

But in order to be obedient, I have to be able to hear the spirit. And God works all of this together like only he can. It's God who does the work. He has given us all that is necessary to know him and to share him with others. And so as Philip was obedient, one step at a time, God was working in ways that only he could. And so we see this beautiful dichotomy between understanding that it's only God.

It's only by his grace. It's only because of his work, but yet he allows us to play a part in it. But he doesn't need us. He could do it all on his own. He allows us to be a part of that story. So that our faith can grow,

and our trust can grow in the midst of this. We move on to verse 36. Luke tells us that as they continue to travel 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 so he gave orders to stop the chariot, and then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. I love this. I've heard of many services, often during the Easter season where a pastor will just have an impromptu baptism call. You know, he gives a message and invites people to come to know Jesus, and they have the baptism of filled up. And of course, nobody's prepared. They don't have bathing suits and robes and whatever else you need.

And he just says, okay, if you want to be baptized as a public proclamation of you receiving Jesus Christ, come on up and we'll baptize you. And it's just neat to see and they come up and they get baptized in their clothes and they go home wet 'cause they don't have a change of clothes, right? That's what happens here with Philip. And the Ethiopian eunuch. He says, listen, why should I not be baptized? I want to be baptized. And so this shows us that the next logical step of receiving Christ is a baptism.

If you remember a couple of months ago, we did a message on baptism, and so I just want to remind you, real quickly, what we said about baptism, we said that baptism is a proclamation. It is the person being baptized proclaiming that they believe Jesus is lord. They believe that God has raised him from the dead, and they are putting their faith in him. And so they personally are making that public proclamation. We also said that baptism is a celebration.

At the time where we gather together as fellow believers in Jesus Christ and we celebrate with these new believers that they are proclaiming Jesus as their lord. And so we celebrate. We also said that baptism is a confirmation. The person being baptized is confirming that they're all in. Yes, I have repented of my sins. I have turned towards God. Yes, I believe I am confirming that by this baptism. It's like the final stamp. I'm in. I'm in, I'm in.

But we also said baptism is not for Salvation. It is simply a visual reminder of what is taking place. You don't need to be baptized to be saved, but it is the next logical step. And even the Ethiopian eunuch recognized that. Should I not be baptized? Let's do this. I mean, I believe that's the next step. So we talk about baptism. Let's finish off the story and verse 39 and 40.

When they came up out of the water, the spirit of the lord suddenly took Philip away and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing. Philip, however, appeared at us and traveled about preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached caesarea. And this is caesarea maritime on the coast of the Mediterranean, not caesarea philippi to the north, because later in acts will find Phillips still there. And maritime.

It's important to notice as we wrap up this story that Philip has taken from this eunuch, and yet Luke still tells us that the eunuch went away rejoicing. Philip went in a bizarre way, and it would have been easy for this unit to be upset. And to say something like, God, why would you take this man from me? He's just explained who you are. I have a lot more questions. I have a lot more things I want to know. I'm confused a little bit. Could you at least have allowed him to stay here and help me?

But instead, Luke tells us he went away rejoicing. Now this is a point that often is not brought up in acts chapter 8 when you hear other people teach about this or whatever else, but I find this to be extremely important, especially in our culture today. Here is a truth that I am pulling from acts chapter 8. Our Salvation and spiritual journey should not be dependent on any one person or ministry. It is only dependent on the person of Jesus Christ. He is the foundation.

Now let me share with you why I think that is so, so important in our culture. All too often, we buy into a person, a particular preacher, or an author, or somebody that we look up to or maybe it's an entire group

of people. Maybe it's a ministry or it's an organization or a particular church and we are all in and we love sitting under that person's teaching and we love learning from them and they've built into us so much.

We're taking all of these steps in our spiritual life, but then all too often we hear the stories of these leaders or these churches or these organizations that fall and collapse and all of a sudden I'm hearing about people that are deconstructing their faith because how can I believe that this is true now that that person's done this? Their foundation was in the wrong spots. Our foundation needs to be in the person of Jesus Christ. So why do I share that with you today?

Because I'm telling you that if your faith, if your entire spiritual journey is based on what's happening here at the church or it's based on me, I am just here to tell you now, I am going to let you down at some point. It's not my goal. It's not my intention, and I don't want to, but I'm telling you, it's going to happen. And if your faith is based on everything that happens up here, based just on this church and it's not on the foundation of Jesus Christ, when or if that day comes, I don't want you to deconstruct your entire face because of another human being.

You're not putting your faith in a human. You're putting your faith in Jesus Christ. He is the foundation. And all too often in our world and in our culture, even the Christian culture, we've just bought into this whole celebrity thing. We just make people celebrities because they are so good at speaking, or they are so good at whatever they do and God is blessed them, and that's amazing. But then people really begin to put that person above Jesus.

And so I just want to caution all of us as we read the story about Philip in the Ethiopian eunuch, his face, his faith wasn't based on Philip. He was immediately taken from him. And yet he went away rejoicing because he knew it was because of Jesus Christ. That he was saved. So let me give you your challenge. My first challenge to you is just to make sure that you are ready for what God would have you do. There is preparation that God asks us to do to make sure that we're in his word because his word is living and active.

And so we need to make sure that we are investing in that that we're learning it. Donny Reilly was here talking about memorizing it. Not so that we can just spit out scripture to seem older than that because we're all sinners by grace. We've already talked about that. But so that when people ask questions, we have an answer for why we believe what we believe. We can have a logical conversation with family and friends and neighbors when they begin to say, well, why do you go to church? And why do you do this? And why do you read your Bible? And why do you believe in Jesus in the first place? We should be ready to answer those questions.

Those are opportunities where God is teeing it up for us. Saying, okay, here you go. And so we got to be ready for that. So that's just general. Just making sure that we're being obedient, one step at a time, one day at a time. And now a more practical thing, we have Easter coming up. Obviously, it's about 5 weeks away. And Easter is an opportunity for us to invite people to church. It just is. Easter is the number one attended Sunday of every church. And so you need to know that it is our goal.

It is our prayer as a staff as a church that we are going to use Easter as an opportunity to share about the good news of Jesus Christ. We're going to be presenting the gospel, all right? We're going to be talking about who Jesus is and what he has done and why we believe what we believe. And so it is a great opportunity for you to invite a neighbor, a friend, a family member. It's Easter. I mean, it's kind of the past. Everybody knows if you're a Christian, you're probably going to invite them to church, right? They can always say no. And so I encourage you to invite them to church, but more than that, coming up here either next week or the week following.

We're going to just have a visual out in the foyer for us. And we've cut out some picture that looks like the hands of Jesus holding something. And next to that, we're going to have a board with some sticky notes. And I'm just going to ask you in a very practical way as you pray this week. Think about who it is that God

has placed on your heart. Maybe it's a family member, maybe it's a friend or a neighbor, a coworker. And I want you to write their name on that sticky note. Now, it could just be their first name, you can do initials, whatever you want to do. And I want you just to put that back up on the board.

And as part of us joining together in this, then what's going to happen is I also encourage you to go look at that board to grab a name off of that board write it on your journal or in your Bible or on your phone and take that and put that in the hands of Jesus. Symbolizing that you are going to lift them up in prayer. You may not have any idea who they are. You probably aren't going to know who they are, but that you are joining that other person, whoever wrote that name down, praying for that individual. And my goal is that you would invite them to church.

But some of our family members and friends live far away, that's fine. The prayer can be God opened the door for me to share why I believe what I believe with this individual. Because I love them. And I want them to know you. Because of what you have done for me. It's not about jamming it down their throat. It's not about beating them over the head with the Bible. God, would you open up an opportunity? Remember, it was natural. It flowed. They asked a question. God teed it up. God, let me be ready for that when that day comes.

And so that's the practical. Again, maybe next week or maybe it's going to be in a couple of weeks. We still got to paint the hands and you don't want to see it if I was painting it. So I have somebody in the church that's a lot better than I am doing that, all right? And so that'll be out in the foyer maybe next week or the week after. And so I encourage you this week, take time to pray about that. God, who is it that you're laying on my heart that I should write down their name? So what I can pray for them and someone else in the church can pray for them as well. Let me close in prayer. Heavenly Father, thank you for your grace.

Thank you for loving us where we are at. Thank you for sending your son Jesus to die in the cross in our place so that we can have a relationship with you. And help us always to be prepared to give a reason for the hope that we have in Jesus Christ. And as we get ready to enter this Easter season, it truly is one of the most open door seasons for us to share our faith. So may we be ready? And may we be obedient, one step at a time.

We ask this in Jesus name. Amen.