

Philip, An Ethiopian, and Isaiah, Part 3—Acts 8:26-40—11/16/25
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Open your Bibles to Acts 8 as we finish our 3-part look at Philip's evangelistic encounter with an Ethiopian eunuch.

To recall this section, let's read Acts 8:25-40 to begin. [READ]

We've been learning from this example of when evangelism happens, from what was taking place in this model of evangelism.

Think of it—when does evangelism happen?

When do we know that solidly biblical proclaiming of the Good News of Jesus the Christ is taking place?

What characterizes & promotes true Gospel ministry?

We said **1st, that evangelism happens when Christians obey**, when followers of Jesus Christ obey His commands to testify of Him.

We observed that in Philip's example—he was told to get up and go and he got up and went.

Making disciples is commanded by Jesus in Matthew 28:19-20 & other passages as part of every believer's purpose in 1st Peter 2:9.

We can eagerly obey that when we know that God is sovereign over the details of our lives & the lives of those we encounter.

So we noted 2ndly that we can be encouraged in knowing that **evangelism happens when God orchestrates**.

We know God is moving in lives today as He was in Philip & this Ethiopian to prepare those whom He puts in our paths.

Apostolic miracles ceased, but God's power & providence did not.

So we can trust God has put us where we are for a good purpose & we can praise Him for His grace in all our days.

Then 3rdly, we said that **evangelism happens when Scripture is opened**, when the word of God is opened & explained.

In verses 30-31, Philip asked the Ethiopian if he understood what he was reading & the Ethiopian said he needed a guide.

We can be that guide like Philip if we know the Scriptures well enough to explain their truths & recount God's wondrous story.

We must know that God is our Creator & yet the first man sinned & cursed us all to be born sinners who live out our sin.

We are not born neutral or inherently good—we are selfish & proud & we act out of hearts that do not naturally trust & worship & obey God.

But God is merciful & has promised from the beginning that He would send a Savior, a Conqueror who would crush evil.

We know that, right?—& we need to know it from Scripture to lead others to the forgiveness of sin in Jesus Christ who is that Savior.

Jesus came as God to be a man & live perfectly & died sacrificially to pay sin's penalty & to rise in victory.

Jesus is the King who will bring perfect justice & yet He has also offered Himself to pay that justice for all who trust Him.

His death paid sin's punishment & He rose to prove it.

You know that is the message of Scripture & you need to know it from Scripture for evangelism to happen through you.

The evangel—the Good News—is that message of eternal life in Jesus Christ because He is the provider & pinnacle of it all.

That's why we said as a 4th overall point—that **evangelism happens when Jesus is preached**.

That's why Acts 8:35 more literally could be translated that Philip *preached the good news of Jesus to him*.

Verses 31-35 showed how evangelism happens when Jesus is preached with **historic promises, historic fulfillments & present applications**.

The Ethiopian eunuch was reading the historic promises of Isaiah 53 that followed themes from prior Scriptures.

Philip explained the historic fulfillment of those promises in the coming of Jesus as the Expected Deliverer.

But Philip did not merely convey this information—he proclaimed it persuasively with its present applications.

Philip did not present Jesus like any other religious option that the Ethiopian could add to his individualistic pantheon of influences.

He preached to the Ethiopian, calling for a response.

He announced that Jesus truly is Good News to trust & follow.

If you know Jesus, you know that—you know He is good & you want to share Him with others.

We have the joy & privilege of reporting Good News, of telling & announcing & proclaiming & sharing Jesus.

We want to do that faithfully, with accuracy & love as we pray for God to use His Word to transform others' lives.

So now today we'll outline 2 more points about when evangelism happens from verses 36-40 as we walk through the rest of chapter 8.

These last two points can help us refine our evangelism.

If you wonder how you can improve in sharing the Gospel, the principles we discover in Philip's example in this passage can help.

The 1st principle we find is implicit in the Ethiopian's response in verse 36 that reveals more that Philip must have said.

Read Acts 8:36 again & let's think about it. [READ]

How did they get from Isaiah 53 to baptism?

Remember—the eunuch was reading Isaiah 53 about the Suffering Servant & Philip preached Jesus as that Suffering Servant & Savior.

They were traveling along the road—get that picture—they were both in the chariot or ox-drawn carriage or wagon.

In God's sovereign design, they came to some water, as the road must have passed a body of water that was large enough to wade into.

By God's grace—with nothing by coincidence—the immediate thought of the eunuch was that he should be baptized.

So Philip must have taught the Ethiopian eunuch enough about Jesus that the eunuch knew how Jesus commanded disciples to be baptized.

Right?—we have to assume that, right?

Why else be baptized unless Philip had taught him about baptism?

Jesus said in Matthew 28:19 to make disciples—& baptizing them was the first step of obedience in following Jesus.

As Peter had preached in Acts 2:38, “*Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.*”

Philip must have preached that response of baptism as the first step after trusting Jesus to learn from Him as a disciple.

And the eunuch must have understood so clearly that as soon as he saw enough water for a baptism, he wanted to obey immediately.

He had been studying Scripture before this & he understood now how Jesus fulfilled Scripture & was committed to Him.

So he did not want to delay his obedience at all.

He was eager & zealous—he did not wait for Philip to initiate the conversation with him about the basic first step Jesus gave.

He initiated this—he is the one who spoke first when they saw water.

So before we talk about what this teaches regarding baptism, let's note a 1st point today about evangelism.

This is a 1st point today & 5th overall observation about when evangelism happens from our three-part look at this encounter.

This point is that evangelism happens when clarity is pursued—when clarity is pursued & prioritized.

Think about how Philip must have pursued & prioritized clarity in his evangelism with the Ethiopian eunuch to get this kind of response.

And again, this is an observation from this narrative that more generally is recounting the history of the spread of the Gospel.

But it is an unmistakable observation that Philip must have been as clear as Peter's first sermon was about how to respond to Jesus.

Once the eunuch knew Jesus was the One that Isaiah 53 spoke of, he had to respond to Jesus.

It was clear that he had to trust & follow Jesus.

That was not fuzzy or in question or something he could delay.

Philip had made clear the urgency that the author of Hebrews had in warning not to harden hearts but to see today as the day of salvation.

He must have preached the Word like Paul said in 2nd Timothy 4, not tickling ears but with reproof, rebuke, & exhortation.

Philip was clear so that when they came to some water, the eunuch made an exclamation, an excited discovery that he had to point out.

He called attention to some water—he said, “Look! Water!”

This was obviously not just a jug of water to dip into to get a drink out of or to pour or sprinkle water—it was a visible body of water.

The right response of faith in Jesus was obvious to him.

He had understood that when you believe, then you obey.

And the first step of that obedience is to be baptized.

Since he had clearly embraced Jesus as Lord & Christ, he did not merely ask about baptism—he asked what could prevent his baptism.

It was a question of submission & earnest humility, an appeal & request whether anything could forbid or hinder it.

He fervently wanted to identify with Jesus in this way & was asking if he was missing any barriers to his immediate public testimony.

Isn't that amazing?—isn't that precious & powerful?

Isn't that how we want people to respond to Jesus?—to be so ready to do whatever He says immediately & to proclaim their faith publicly?

If we want that kind of response to evangelism, we probably need to step back & take a lesson or reminder here.

Look—you do not likely get this kind of response if you are not clear.

If you are trying to get someone to like you & you are vague about truths that may offend, then you are forfeiting clarity.

If you are simply trying to get someone to agree with you & make a superficial decision to profess faith in Jesus or pray with you, then you will likely be tempted to minimize the cost of following Christ.

So don't do that—do not try to formulate the mixture of truths that you think people will like to get their buy-in.

You are not a salesman—we are not selling a product.

We are reporters, telling Good News, announcing who Jesus is & what He has done & why that matters.

Of course, we must do that persuasively.

But we do so with clarity, not cloudiness.

We seek to speak with precision & accuracy & boldness, not with omissions or minimizations or bait-and-switch tactics.

We observe this from the fact that Philip must have taught this man a lot about Jesus & what it looks like to follow Jesus.

So we learn to pursue & prioritize clarity in what we say—and kids, clarity means it's clear, it's completely understandable.

Some people might say, “Oh, don't bother people with baptism because they might get it confused as a work to gain salvation.”

Of course, it's true they need to know that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone & not by any works of our own.

They need to understand that baptism is a symbol of spiritual washing away of sins & dying with Christ & rising to new life.

Of course, we need to guard against errors & get such truths right.

But the way to do so is by pursuing clarity, by seeking to explain the Gospel comprehensively, not superficially.

We need to value being clear even if we feel the risk of some truths being questioned or misunderstood or rejected.

We do not want to promote false professions by saying too little or by not allowing questions to make sure people get it.

So we want conversations that probe whether people understand & how they are processing & responding to truths we share.

That's what verse 37 illustrates even though it does not appear in some translations & appears in brackets in other translations.

The issue is that verse 37 does not appear in the oldest & most reliable manuscripts, the copies closest to the time of original writing.

And when verse 37 appears in later writings, it makes sense that it was likely inserted as a baptism confession formula that would be expected of anyone before they were baptized.

Read the question of genuine faith & the answer in Acts 8:37. [READ]

Again, manuscript evidence shows this was not in the original writing of Acts, but it was an early baptism confession.

So it's what Philip would have been looking for in the response of someone who truly committed to Christ & was ready to be baptized.

Baptism is a public proclamation of faith modeled after the washing ceremonies that preceded entry into the Temple area.

The presence of mikvehs, like wading pools for ceremonial cleansing by the Temple, was how crowds could have been baptized in Acts 2.

And that's the amount of water that Philip & the Ethiopian must have seen because they both went down into the water.

Read verse 38 again to see that. [READ]

Again, note the urgency of the Ethiopian eunuch.

He did not need anyone to poke or prod or question or cajole him.

He had true faith that he wanted to demonstrate immediately.

And remember, this would have been witnessed by a larger caravan of travelers that would have accompanied a ranking official like him.

In his eagerness to make this public to those journeying with him, he issued a command to stop the wagon.

He & Philip got out of the chariot & went down into the water, meaning the water was deep enough for them both to wade into.

When in the water, Philip baptized him, which means he dunked him—that's what the word for baptize means.

It means he immersed him, dipped him fully under the water.

All of him was cleansed spiritually & all of him was washed ceremonially—that's the meaning of the word & the picture.

Those who practice sprinkling note that both Philip & the eunuch went down into the water in verse 38 & came up out of it in verse 39.

That's true, but it's not a reason to change the meaning of the word baptize—which means to submerge fully, to immerse.

Rather, it's a reason to recognize that an amount of water large enough for them both to go down into was required to fully immerse the man.

We already studied baptism further in Acts 2:38 before, but for today simply note again that it was after faith & by immersion.

Baptism came after faith in Jesus, after Philip had preached Jesus to him & he was responding to what Philip had taught him.

Then based on the Ethiopian's profession of faith, Philip baptized him, meaning he immersed him under water that was enough for both of them to have gone down into it.

And Philip was a representative of the church at Jerusalem that was spreading under persecution.

He had been commissioned for a deacon-type task in Acts 6 & the Spirit had sent him on this evangelistic errand.

So Philip's baptism was not an example of isolated, self-appointed leaders conducting their own baptismal services.

This is not a proof-text for separating baptism from church leadership or from church membership.

Such ideas are foreign to the context here & would not have been in the mind of Luke based on what he had already written.

The pattern was already established that baptisms were part of repenting & being added to the local church.

So we dare not think the lack of details here opens a door for baptisms whenever and wherever anyone sees water & asks for baptism.

Rather, we discern that Philip taught far more than Luke recounted & we know that's proven by the eunuch's response.

The eunuch's response also shows us that Philip must have been clear.

So again, we note that this section models for us how evangelism happens when clarity is pursued.

I had a friend from elsewhere visit this week & he said he used that as a mantra for conversations.

In his business & in spiritual things, he said **he prefers clarity over agreement**—think about that—clarity over agreement.

In other words, he prefers to be so completely clear about something that it may even highlight any points of disagreement.

That may seem uncomfortable, but it's better to know areas of disagreement than to find out later about what was not clear.

That's often the reason for business contracts to spell out what is expected rather than allowing false assumptions to cause trouble.

Far more with salvation, you don't want nice agreement that feels safe while leaving people unclear how to truly be saved.

To put it theologically as John MacArthur used to say, you need to preach the Gospel clear enough for the non-elect to reject it.

That is, if God is not working in someone's heart to save them, you do not want to be so vague that they think they are saved.

That would not be loving or helpful for their eternal souls.

You want clarity so they understand exactly what Scripture calls them to do to respond to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

That's what the Ethiopian eunuch received from Phillip.

Be clear that Jesus is the Promised Savior who died to pay sin's penalty for all who trust Him & He rose to prove His victory.

He is the forgiving Lord of who turn from self & sin to faith in Him.

He said to identify with Him by being baptized into His church.

If you hear that & want to trust & obey Jesus, please let us know & we'll pursue clarity in the truths Philip must have communicated.

The response of the Ethiopian eunuch proves that Philip was clear in how to respond to his preaching of Jesus.

So we note, 1st, that evangelism happens when clarity is pursued.

Then next we see what happened when these men both came up out of the water—read verses 39-40. [READ]

Verse 39 pictures both of them coming up out of the water parallel to how they both went down into the water.

So this was not immediately when the eunuch came up from being immersed in baptism.

This was after his baptism as they both had walked up out of the body of water that they had waded into.

Philip finished that task & the Spirit had a new assignment.

It's not clear if the Spirit snatched Philip in a miraculous confirmation of his message or He just snatched him to head in another direction.

It's not a huge deal either way, the point is that the Spirit was directing him in this spread of the Gospel.

Either way, it was immediate because the eunuch no longer saw him.

Yet the eunuch was not sad—he was rejoicing.

The eunuch was continuing to go along the road in his journey & he was characterized by ongoing rejoicing.

He was glad in the Gospel as he went as he had testified to those in his traveling caravan through baptism.

And Philip also was full of Gospel truth as he went elsewhere.

Philip was found next at Azotus—the translation could be that he found himself there or that he was found there.

The Spirit was leading & Philip was following to this next city 20 miles north called Ashdod in the OT that was now called Azotus.

It was one of the 5 cities of the Philistines in that coastal plain along the Mediterranean Sea.

The verbs picture Philip traveling, passing through cities on the route, which is one reason the Spirit's snatching maybe was not miraculous.

But however the Spirit started his travels, he was going through these cities northward 55 miles more until he came to Caesarea, the Romans capital of Judea.

The eunuch continued southward toward Ethiopia & Philip headed north toward Caesarea, which Acts 21 later says was Philip's home.

That travel route sets the scene, but the main verb in the middle of verse 40 is what Philip was continually doing along the way.

What was Philip doing?—he was preaching the Gospel—evangelizing.

That's what he was doing as he went.

And he was doing it in every city along the way, in all the cities he passed through.

That was his focus & habit, his ongoing purpose & practice.

So the example of both of these men—but especially of Philip—gives us a 2nd point for today & a final point of when evangelism happens.

Evangelism happens when evangelism is practiced.

That may seem redundant or strange to make as a point, but it's important to notice & I find it experientially very powerful.

Evangelism happens when evangelism is practiced.

In other words, the more you do it, the better you grow in doing it.

The more you practice, the better you get & the more normal it becomes & the more motivated you can be to keep trying.

The more you practice, the more aware you are how important the truths of the Gospel are & how grateful you are for God to save you.

As Philip traveled from Azotus, he kept on preaching because that's simply what he did as a part of life conversation.

Philip did not keep on preaching the Gospel because he held any official church office as elder or pastor or overseer.

He was not one of the Apostles & his role in feeding widows did not have any requirement to preach or teach.

But he was gripped by the Gospel as the most important message & he knew his purpose in spreading that Good News of Jesus.

His evangelism happened because evangelism was practiced.

Similarly for the Ethiopian eunuch, he went on his way rejoicing, expressing gladness that flowed from all he had found in Jesus.

The eunuch was reading & maybe discussing Scripture with others before, but his discovery of Jesus escalated his joy.

The joy of salvation in Jesus filled his heart & mouth as he went on.

Does that describe you?—does your speech overflow with praise of God & the delight He brings?

Are we marveling & sharing the treasures of His truths in our lives?

If not, why not?—I mean, right?—we need to ask that.

What's clogging the channel? What's corrupting the fountain?

What's distracting from the richest prize & the highest values?

Is the problem that you don't really know Him & so you don't rejoice?

If you don't love to sing of Him, is He not precious to you?

What drives you & governs you & grips you?

Are you scared to speak of Him?—are you timidly silent for fear of what reactions you may face?

Do you not want to seem weird or different from those around you?

Realize that being a Christian is being rescued from being like the worldly people around you, being set apart to be different.

A Christian is a saint, set apart, distinct from the world.

God has always called His people out to be a *peculiar* people, as the old King James of Titus 2 says.

Christians are called to be His own special people, distinct & zealous for good works, eager & passionate for doing what He says.

If you are living like that, you will inevitably talk about the Lord & His Word & make connections to the Gospel to share.

And if that seems like a stretch for you, like you are not sure, then just start praying about it and start trying.

It can increasingly become a pattern of life.

We must pray for our hearts to be awakened to rejoicing more & ready to make evangelism a habit & lifestyle of how we talk in general.

That may seem weird to the world, but it's actually realistic.

It's being most in touch with reality when we recognize and speak of God & Christ in relation to everything.

He created it all & governs it all & He alone gives purpose & hope & we only understand how to live in His light.

We can only be forgiven of our sins in Christ.

We need our Maker's wisdom to function properly.

God's Word & ways & grace in Christ all matter, all the time.

So to practice evangelism, we simply practice reality—practice the presence of God & be thinking of Him in every situation.

And for you mothers & parents of young children who may think you don't evangelize enough with strangers or adults, stop thinking that.

Realize that you are talking to your children who have eternal souls and everything you teach them and say to them should be about the gospel in some way or another.

You can connect the Gospel to their hearts in why you're doing what you're doing & biblical reasons for the way you speak & train them.

All that is clarifying & all of that is your regular practice.

So don't beat yourself up for not doing more if you are continually in the trenches of training children.

You have been given the greatest trust for eternal souls that can be enjoyed and embraced.

That is a gift from God and it is a serious responsibility from God.

So rather than overlooking or ignoring or neglecting that for more exciting or recognized ministry, give yourself what God has given you to do first & most clearly.

Give yourself to parenting with prayer for that regular practice of evangelism with each stage of your children's lives.

Be clear with your children about right & wrong & heaven & hell & be clear about the need to repent & surrender to Christ.

Don't make it fuzzy just because they're young or because you don't want to pressure them one way or the other.

Obviously, you cannot save them & you cannot give them assurance if they pray a prayer or respond positively.

We trust God will save & assure & work by His grace in His time.

But that doesn't mean that you should react against clarity and conviction that there must be a response to the truth.

Every day is a response to the truth and that doesn't mean we have to become high pressure man-centered salesman easy-believism.

It's not we have to get the deal closed—that's God's role.

Our role is simply to be faithful & be clear that there is no neutral response to Jesus.

The Gospel demands action & Philip made that abundantly clear to the Ethiopian eunuch because he eagerly acted.

If you sense the urgency of that action for you to turn from sin to follow Jesus, please do not suppress or ignore that—act today.

Please let us know if we can help you.

I pray that we all live with the urgency that the Gospel deserves.

I pray we take lessons from seeing how evangelism happens when clarity is pursued and when evangelism is practiced.

Pray with me as we close.