Living on Mission

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: 30 May 2018

Preacher: Mike Scrivani

[0:00] Amen. Verses 26-40 is where we're at, what we'll cover tonight.

! And a false convert and why that is or how that happens.
And now we're going to, we've come to Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch and we're going to see an example of a true conversion right here. And so if you have your Bible and you're in Acts chapter 8, we're going to begin in verse 26 and read to verse 40.
Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza. This is a desert place. And he rose and went. And there was an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure.
He had come to Jerusalem to worship and was returning, seated in his chariot and was reading the prophet Isaiah. And the spirit said to Philip, go over and join this chariot.
[1:21] So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, do you understand what you are reading? And he said, how can I unless someone guides me? And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

Now the passage of scripture which he was reading was this, like a sheep he was led to the slaughter and like a lamb before its shearer is silent. So he opens not his mouth and his humiliation. Justice was denied him who can describe his generation for his life is taken away from the earth. And the eunuch said to Philip, about whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?
Then Philip opened his mouth and beginning with this scripture, he told them the good news about Jesus. And as they were going along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, see here is water.
What prevents me from being baptized? And he commanded the chariot to stop and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch and he baptized him. And when they came up out of the water, the spirit of the Lord carried Philip away and the eunuch saw him no more and went on his way rejoicing.
[2:26] But Philip found himself at Azotus and as he passed through, he preached the gospel to all the towns until he came to Caesarea. Have you ever heard anybody talk about a divine appointment?

You probably heard that before. You probably understand what that means. They can happen at any time. It's an appointment scheduled by God that you weren't planning for that day.
It can happen while you're shopping at Walmart or while you're visiting a coffee shop, even while you're coaching your kids or your grandkids in Little League or talking to the person next to you on an airplane or just walking in your neighborhood and striking up a conversation with one of your neighbors.
We should be prepared for these kinds of divine appointments, these kinds of evangelistic opportunities. And so we see here from our text that the Lord uses ordinary people and ordinary conversations to save sinners.
No doubt you were saved because someone shared the gospel with you.
[3:38] We see from Scripture that God desires to use each of us to lead many to Him. In this passage, we see God saving grace at work among the nations.

As here, Philip helps an Ethiopian man understand the gospel, the good news about Jesus Christ from the Scriptures. He uses an ordinary man in an ordinary conversation.
John Stott comments on this story about the double goodness of God. He says, The fact is that God has given us two gifts, first the Scriptures, and secondly, teachers to open up, explain, expound,

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

and apply the Scriptures.
It is wonderful to note God's providence in the Ethiopian's life, first enabling him to obtain a copy of the Isaiah scroll and then sending Philip to teach him out of it.
This story also reminds us of Luke chapter 24, where there, if you remember, Jesus, after His resurrection, He walks along with two travelers on the road to Emmaus.
[4:43] And they're, again, using from the Old Testament. They don't know it's Him until afterwards when He leaves them. But they're going through the Old Testament using the Scriptures. He reveals to them that they point to the reality that He is the Messiah, that He is the Son of God.

And so here in Acts chapter 8, God provides the Ethiopian eunuch with the Scripture, and then He orchestrates the arrival of a teacher who can explain to him what he is reading.
The passage also illustrates the beginning of the fulfillment of the Great Commission. The church has already been advancing across ethnic and social lines. Philip has gone to the Samaritans, these people who were despised and hated by the Jews, and now he is going to share the gospel with another man from another ethnicity, an Ethiopian, which at the time, Ethiopia, was considered by the Greeks and the Romans to be the end of the earth.
And so the gospel is advancing. If you remember, Philip was not one of the twelve disciples. He was first introduced to us back in Acts chapter 6 as one of the seven who were assigned to serve the widows, serve their tables.
And so God now is using this humble servant, this humble man, He's equipping this ordinary man, and He is turning into an extraordinary evangelist.
[6:10] God continues to do that very same thing today. Many of our best evangelists in the church are lay people. They're lay men and they're lay women in the church, and yet they are great at sharing the gospel, and they are unafraid of having these kinds of conversations.

Ordinary men and women, but God uses them in extraordinary ways. And I was going to say this not realizing that she was going to be here tonight, but my wife is one person such as this.
Now she's probably going to be embarrassed, but she is. She's one of the best evangelists I know. She's great at taking ordinary conversations and steering them towards gospel conversations.
I've seen her do it enough now that I almost kind of know her strategy. I'm like, oh, she's about to lay it down on this person right now. But she's extraordinary.
She's not ordinary, right? So anyhow, why? Yeah, thank you. The passage of Scripture shows Christians what it means to be living on mission.
[7:16] God wants us to be disciple makers. He wants that for all of us. He wants his disciples to be disciple makers. So let's consider three applications from this text that will help us be better disciple makers.

The first is that we must love people like Jesus. And this comes from that entire portion of Scripture that we read. Jesus loved in a radical way, and he calls those of us who follow him to love in the same way, to love radically.
Matthew 5, verse 43 through 47, if you want to turn in your Bible there, Jesus talks about this kind of radical love. There in the Sermon on the Mount, he says, You have heard that it was said, You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.
But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his son to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.
For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, do not even the Gentiles do the same? And so here we see Philip, his heart reflects the heart of the Lord.
[8:36] He loves people like the Lord loved people. He cared for the widows back in Acts chapter 6, just as God cares for them. And now in Acts chapter 8, he displays Christ-like love first for the Samaritans, who again were despised and hated by the Jews.

And he continues to show that love, reaching out to the nations and reaching out to this Ethiopian man. To be a good missionary, you must love people.
And you must be willing to reach people whom the rest of the world has rejected or wants nothing to do with. So we can contrast Philip, who is a good example of a good missionary, with Jonah, who is a good example of a bad missionary.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

Remember, we weren't there that long ago on Sunday mornings. Jonah expressed prejudice and hatred towards the Ninevites. He didn't want to go to them.
He didn't want them to be saved. He didn't love them. He couldn't rationalize how God could love people like them. Again, he didn't want them to be saved. But Philip here, and again, God changed his attitude.
[9:43] But here, Philip doesn't have that issue. He loves people like the Lord loves people. So now the question is, well, how can we grow in our love for others?

How can we be more like Philip? How can we develop that kind of Christ-like love towards people who are different from us, people who are even our enemies?
Well, primarily by pondering over the cross. Thinking about what Jesus has done for you and how he died for you in your place for your sins.
And then also with that, walking by the Spirit. So the more that we're contemplating the cross and what it is that Jesus did for us there, and the tremendous amount of love that he displayed for us by dying in our place, and then walking by the Spirit, the more we do that, the more we will love people like Jesus loves people.
Remember, Christ loved us when we were unlovable. Not one of us deserves salvation. Not one of us deserves to be saved. And so the more we contemplate what Christ has done for us, the more we will love people as Philip loved people.
[10:54] And then when that happens, we can love the least, we can love the last, and even love our enemies, as difficult as that might seem to be.

So again, spend time with the Lord daily. The more you do that, the more you walk with the Spirit. This means spending time in prayer. This means that you're reading His Word.
This means that you're thinking about His Word. This means that you're thinking about the things of God. One thing I suggest that people do every day, if possible, is think about heaven. Think about the glory that awaits those who are in Christ.
And the more you think about heaven, right? Have those heavenly thoughts go through your mind. The more you're looking forward to that, and the more it puts into perspective what's going on here, you know?
That we weren't made for this world. That we have a heavenly glory that awaits us. And truly, the best is yet to happen.
[11:54] So even as we're suffering and going through difficulties, we know that as bad as things could get here, ultimately, for those who are in Christ, it's going to get better. The best is always yet to come for the believer.

So love people like Jesus. Secondly, yield to the Spirit's guidance. In verses 26 through 31, this is what we see Philip doing.
He yields to the Spirit's guidance. When you walk by the Spirit, you will be sensitive to God's leading.
God's initiative in this story is unquestionable, right? He initiates all of what's going on. An angel of the Lord first visits Philip.
Man, I'm messing up. God's initiative in this story. God's initiative in this story. God's initiative in this story. And then, in a vision, right, he calls him to witness to the most unlikely of people and the most unlikely of places.
[12:55] So God is directing all of this. He directs Philip to go out to the wilderness, to leave where he's at, where he's having success, to go down to this desert place.

He told him to leave this revival that was taking place in Samaria and to head for the desert. Now, put yourself in Philip's shoes, right? You're in Samaria.
You're seeing people coming to faith in Jesus Christ. This great, tremendous revival is taking place. And now God says, yeah, this is good, but I got somewhere else I want you to go.
And he doesn't give them a lot of details. He just tells them where to go. And so Philip goes. He's yielding to the Spirit. Again, Ethiopia in those days corresponded to what is known today as the Upper Nile region.
But there's no doubt that what is being talked about here is Africa. That's where he is being sent to go. That's where the gospel is going to continue to spread.
[13:55] This man was an Ethiopian. He was also a eunuch. The term in Greek literally means one who is in charge of a bed.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

That's what the word eunuch in Greek means. It's a reference to the practice that many eunuchs had, which was to be keepers of the harems. You guys know what a harem is?
So the king or the prince or whomever was in charge, they had a harem. And so the eunuch would be in charge of that place. And you understand why they would want a eunuch to be in charge of a place like that.
I don't think I really need to get into many more details, right? So eunuchs also could refer to court officials. And so since Luke uses both terms, it's likely that this man served in both ways, at least at some point in time in the first way.
And now certainly he was an important man who was in charge of the treasury of the queen. He had been emasculated. He literally was a eunuch. He was also a court official who held a position of great authority within the queen's court.
[14:59] So this is an important man to the Ethiopians. This man had made a great journey. He had gone all the way to Jerusalem. And we see that the purpose for his going was to worship, indicating that he was a God-fearing man who, like Cornelius, who we'll meet in Acts chapter 10, believed in the God of Israel.

However, like Cornelius, he couldn't experience full membership in the Jewish community because of the fact that he himself was a eunuch. And as prescribed by Deuteronomy 23.1, you can look that up later, he was not allowed to enter into the temple.
He could visit, but he could not go in because of the fact that he was a eunuch. And so it's interesting here that as he's heading back from, no doubt what was a really disappointing experience for him, he's reading in Isaiah.
Eunuchs would have a great interest in Isaiah because in it the prophet describes the future and it makes promises to eunuchs. So if you have your Bible and you want to turn to Isaiah 56.3-8, we'll read these verses that this man was probably very intrigued by and most certainly was reading because they contained promises for God-fearing eunuchs such as himself.
And there in Isaiah 56, verses 3-8, it says, Let not the foreigner who has joined himself to the Lord say, The Lord will surely separate me from his people.
[16:37] And let not the eunuchs say, Behold, I am a dry tree. For thus says the Lord, To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths and choose the things that please me and hold fast to my covenant, I will give in my house and within my walls a monument and a name better than the sons and daughters.

I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off. And the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord, to minister to him, to love the name of the Lord and to be his servants, everyone who keeps the Sabbath and does not profane it and holds fast my covenant, these I will bring to my holy mountain and make them joyful in my house of prayer.
Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar. For my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples. The Lord God who gathers the outcast of Israel declares, I will gather yet others to him besides those who are already gathered.
So this passage states that those individuals who were excluded by the law, such as the eunuch was, that they will find in the coming of the messianic kingdom the removal of such exclusions.
So he definitely would have been interested in this passage and understanding what it meant and when these things would happen. Little did the eunuch know that when he began his mourning, he would personally experience the fulfillment of these promises.
[18:07] And Philip had the privilege of being the one to share the gospel with him. And so Philip is told by the Lord, he's led by the Spirit to go to this eunuch. And as he runs to him, he hears this man in his chariot reading the book of Isaiah.

And then he asks him a very simple question. He says, do you understand what you're reading?
And the eunuch's response is, well, how can I, right?
How could anybody understand unless somebody guides me? And so here we see that this is a divine appointment. The eunuch can't understand what he's reading, but he has a desire to understand what he is reading.
And God sends to him a man who's not only capable to explain to him and to give him understanding, but who is willing, who wants to offer that explanation.
The Lord divinely arranged this conversation, and he continues to do that to this very day. I had a seminary teacher, and I remember him sharing a story with us.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

[19:13] He would go places and to churches or to conferences, and he would teach or he would preach. And he told us a story about a time where he was just exhausted.

He'd been on the road a lot, and he got in the plane, and he usually looks to use those opportunities to share the gospel with somebody. They said at this point in time, he just really was drained, and he just wanted to get on the airplane, and he wanted to go to sleep.
And a man came and sat right next to him, pulled out a Bible, and said, I don't understand what this means. And there's a specific scripture.
Somebody had given him a Bible. I can't remember if he picked it up in his hotel, but he wasn't a believer, but he had somehow gotten a Bible, and he said, I don't understand this. And so my teacher, you know, lo and behold, what better person for this man than a seminary teacher, a teacher in theology of all things, who could explain to him very clearly and very thoroughly what the Word of God means.
This still happens today. Not always exactly in this way, but it still happens. God still arranges these divine appointments. And so these conversations happen.
[20:29] Sometimes it's instantaneous, such as the case with my teacher. Other times they come over time, as you develop a relationship with somebody, as you talk with your neighbor, as you talk with your co-worker, or as you talk to a family member.

The more they see you living out your Christian faith, the more they're interested, and the more they'll bring their questions to you. Or when they experience some kind of difficulty, or they have some kind of a question, or they want somebody to pray for them, you're the person who they will seek out.
So sometimes these conversations develop over time. But the Lord will direct us, and we must be willing to obey when those conversations present themselves.
That's why we do engage. That's one of the primary purposes, right? We want to go out. We want to meet a physical need for our community.
But we're doing that so that we can have a conversation. That's really what we're trying to have happen. As we're there, and we're providing a need, we're at the soccer field or wherever, where we've been, and the things that we're going to do, and they're there, and they're done so that we can have conversations.
[21:41] So people will ask us, why are you doing this? Why are you out here? Why are you guys taking the time to do this? And then we can go into a conversation with them about the gospel, and we can explain to them why we are here, and why we are doing this.

We're sharing the love of Christ by showing the love of Christ. And we can be honest too. Sometimes we are scared to talk about being guided by the Holy Spirit, especially in churches like ours, because we're leery of people who talk to us and say things like, well, God told me this, or God led me to do this.
And we're leery of them, and there's reason why that is. I'll never forget a conversation I had with a lady from my previous church. She was excited to tell me that she was driving in her van, and this was Sunday, the week before she was driving her van, and God told her to pull over to a store, and when she went inside, she found the purse that she really wanted for sale.
And so she was convinced that the Lord had guided her to get that purse for sale. And I thought, well, that sounds like a great excuse to tell your husband when you get home, right?
I had to buy it. God told me to, you know? Don't get any ideas. All right. This will probably be Danny's last time coming to Bible study, so I'll leave her alone.
[23:13] But you know what I'm saying? There are times where people say things like you, and you think, you know, I think that God's got more important things on His mind than making sure that His children find sales on purses.

But anyhow, we still need to be sensitive to the fact that God does guide us, that we need to be sensitive to His Spirit when the Spirit prompts us.
Martin Lloyd-Jones was a famous English pastor. He was not a charismatic, but he had this to say about what it means to be guided by the Spirit.
I want to read this quote to you. It's pretty long. He says, There are many examples of this in Scriptures, and I take one at random.
You remember the story of Acts 8, verse 26, of how Philip the Evangelist was told by the angel of the Lord, Arise and go forward to the south and to the way that goes down from Jerusalem unto

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

Gaza, which is the desert.
[24:27] Now, there are leadings such as that, he says. If you read the history of the saints, God's people throughout the centuries, and especially the history of revivals, you will find that this is something which is perfectly clear and definite.

Men have been told by the Holy Spirit to do something. They knew it was the Holy Spirit who was speaking to them, and it transpired that it obviously was His leading. It seems clear to me that if we deny such a possibility, we are guilty of quenching the Spirit, he says.
So, you don't need to also, we need to understand, you don't need to be felt, you don't need to feel led, I should say, to share the gospel with people before you actually do it, because the Lord has given us the Great Commission.
We are called to share the gospel with people, and so we must obey that. So, that gives us license to go and to share the gospel with people every day.
Nevertheless, we should pray for divine opportunities and remain open and sensitive to the Spirit's promptings and when He prompts us, we must act.
[25:39] Have you ever felt prompted by the Holy Spirit like that before? It's a strange, it's just something you know. It's that still small voice that says, you know what?

You need to pray for this person right now. You need to go, and if somebody's pouring out their heart to you or telling something, pray for them, intercede for them. There's just certain things where you know clearly that it's the Holy Spirit who is directing you to go to that person, pray for that person, do something for that person, whatever the case may be.
And so, if you're feeling that prompting, you need to be obedient to what the Holy Spirit is wanting you to do. And in my experience, when that's happened, there has been clear actions that have resulted from that where it was just reaffirming that, yeah, in fact, that was what God was calling or leading me to do.
So, yield to the Holy Spirit. And then third, know and be able to teach and explain the gospel. Know and be able to teach and explain the gospel.
The eunuch reveals to Philip that this passage of Scripture that had him stumped was Isaiah 53, verse 7 through 8. And this, of course, is the passage about the great suffering servant of God.
[26:57] For centuries, Jews had debated over this passage. Their debate was over who it was that was depicted as suffering. Some people thought it was Isaiah.

Some people thought it was referring to the nation of Israel collectively. And others thought that it was referring to the Messiah. A great book that I'm reading right now is the Gospel According to God.
And that's authored by John MacArthur. And I encourage you, if you are looking for a book to read, that's a great one. And it's all about Isaiah 53. In fact, Tom was one of the ones who recommended it.
It's a great book. And so I want to read to you an excerpt from that book about this passage of Scripture and about the Jewish people today. So John MacArthur says, Isaiah 53 is so replete with gospel truth that those who see the passage for the first time might well think they are reading the New Testament.
Jewish people whose exposure to the Scripture is limited to texts that are read aloud in their synagogues each week will be completely unfamiliar with Isaiah 53. The entire passage is always omitted from the scheduled public readings.
[28:10] Every Sabbath in every synagogue worldwide, two portions of Scripture are prescribed to be read aloud. One is from the Pentateuch, the Torah, and the other is from the Haftarah, a selection of texts drawn from the prophets.

The same schedule of reading is followed in all synagogues year after year. Over a year's time, the rotation covers every verse of the Torah in canonical order.
But the Haftarah reading are more selective. One of the featured Haftarah excerpts is Isaiah 51.12 through 52.12. The next reading in the cycle is Isaiah 54.1-10.
Isaiah 52.12 through 53.12, which is that passage about the suffering servant. Therefore, he says, is never read in the synagogues today.
Philip explained that some 750 years before the crucifixion, Isaiah described the suffering and the exaltation of Jesus Christ.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

[29:19] At the heart of Jesus' mission, he shared is Christ's substitutionary work for sinners. And so, Philip used the Isaiah passage to explain to this man the good news that he was eager to hear.

He knew that Christ is the key to Isaiah 53, and so, he knew that he must be saved by believing in Jesus as his Lord and Savior.
And so, Philip explained this to him. He explained that Jesus not only is the focal point of that passage of Scripture, but that he's the focal point of all of Scripture.
And the eyes of the eunuch were open to receive that. Though the Ethiopian eunuch probably felt rejected because of his condition, Philip was able to tell him that he was loved and that he was welcomed by the Messiah.
And so, we need to be prepared spiritually and theologically for the work that God intends us to do.
[30:24] We need to be prepared spiritually and theologically for the work that God intends for us to do. We need to be faithful witnesses by walking with the Spirit, and we need to have a firm grasp on God's Word.

This whole passage in Acts turns on a question. You notice it's Philip's question that he asked the Ethiopian.
In fact, he asked him a few questions. And so, we need to borrow this technique from Philip. You want to share the gospel with somebody, we'll ask them questions, simple questions.
Do you go to church somewhere? What do you believe about God? as you hopefully are developing a relationship with them, and that first moment they talk to you about something that's difficult that's going on with them, do you mind if I pray for you?
Do you mind if I pray for you right now? And then you go back to them afterwards, after you have prayed for them, and you check up on them. How is everything going? And you just keep that up.
[31:28] Simple questions that produce gospel conversations. And so, again, if we are going to be spiritually and theologically prepared for the work that God has called us to do, then that means that we must know our Bible.

And so, I recommend that people get a good study Bible. I have the one that I use on a daily basis. This is a John MacArthur study Bible. There are other good ones. Don't spend all your time in the notes, right?
Read. Make sure you're actually reading what the Bible says. But just immerse yourself in it. You come to those difficult passages of scriptures, you have somebody here with some notes that can help you understand better what God's Word says.
And so, that's a good way to better understand the Bible, but the best way to understand the Bible is to read it. To read it, and to read it, and to keep on reading it.
See your Bible study time as evangelism training. Ask questions as you're reading through the Bible. And again, I encourage people, I love to hear their questions about scripture.
[32:38] I love to have these conversations, and I would welcome that. If you have a passage of scripture that you're struggling with or you don't quite fully understand, you can shoot me an email, you can call me on the phone, or just talk to me while we're here at church.

I would love to be able to have those conversations with you. And I know that others would love to do the same. And so, we need to help each other have a better, firmer grasp on God's Word so that when we have these conversations, we're able to have productive conversations that help people have a better understanding of Jesus Christ.
And so, the Ethiopian eunuch asked, about whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this is about? Himself or someone else? Again, back in verse 34. This is a reminder that people opening the Bible for the first time will find parts of it confusing.
He was confused. He had the scripture, but he didn't understand what he was reading. And so, some people wonder, well, where should I even begin reading? A lot of people will begin in Genesis, where we might say, recommend to a new believer, start reading in the Gospel of John. In fact, that's what I would recommend. So, people have questions. They see this big giant book and they're intimidated by it. And so, we are there to help them put the pieces of the puzzle together.
[33:53] That they see that all of these books speak to Jesus, the Christ, who came to save sinners from their sin.

And so, then finally, the Ethiopian asks, what would keep me from being baptized? In verse 36. And so, as the chariot passes by a pool of water, the Ethiopian expresses his desire to identify with

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

Jesus Christ through baptism.
So, the Gospel has been explained to him. He's believed it. And now, he wants to be baptized. And Philip has this great privilege of being involved in all of this.
Sharing the Gospel with him. Explaining scriptures to him. And now, being the one who baptized him. We don't know how much, we don't know much about what happened to this convert after this scene.
Only that he journeyed on and that he was rejoicing. The church fathers claim that he became a missionary to Ethiopia. And that's certainly very believable.
[34:58] And while their accounts can't be proven, he surely went home rejoicing and telling the good news of Jesus Christ to the people in his home country.

And then, after disappearing from the eunuch, Philip continues preaching the Gospel. He continues working his way back north. And there he arrives in Caesarea, where we will later read in chapter 21, verse 8, that he made a home for himself there and had four daughters.
And there, Luke refers to him simply as Philip the Evangelist, who was one of the seven. We have much to learn from this ordinary man who became a great evangelist.
He yielded to the Spirit and explained the Gospel to those whom the Lord put him in contact with. And so, may God grant us the grace to do the very same thing.
To do what Paul called Timothy to do in 2 Timothy chapter 4, verse 5, to do the work of an evangelist. And so, I'll end with a quote from Charles Spurgeon.
[36:03] He says, If sinners be damned, at least let them leap to hell over our dead bodies. And if they perish, let them perish with our arms wrapped around their knees, imploring them to stay.

If hell must be filled, let it be filled in the teeth of our exertions, and let no one go unwarned and unprayed for.
Thank you.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host