

26.11.23 pm

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Date: 26 November 2023

Preacher: Phil Picket

[0 : 00] Good evening and warm welcome to the service this evening and it's good to see the visitors from Scallordale here again tonight. There's a fellowship after this service tonight and so if you're able to stay behind please do so. There'll be tea, there'll be coffee, there'll be testimony and so please stay if you can. Phil's going to be preaching, he's going to be leading the service in just a moment. Helen, Phil's wife, will be giving testimony this evening and she's probably broken her wrist at ice skating yesterday so we can pray for the pain in her wrist and please stay behind. She's willing to come and share testimony even though she's carrying this injury just now. I'm not going to go through the intimations but I am going to just give you a reminder about the day of prayer on Wednesday. The sheet's been out at the vestibule and there's a few names on here. At the moment we're still looking for people to pray between 12 midnight and 1am, 3am and 4am, so it's first come first served, 5am and 6am and then we have people going all the way up then to 1pm and then from 1pm right through till 10pm actually, from 1pm till 10pm there isn't anybody on the list so if you're able to do that it would be good for us to pray through the day, Wednesday the 30th. So I'll leave the sheets out the door and please sign up if you're able to do so. Let's worship God now and let's sing to his praise. We're going to sing from Psalm 108 and we're going to sing the first two stanzas of the psalm.

The first two stanzas of the psalm. My heart is fixed Lord, I will sing and with my glory praise, awake up psaltery and harp, myself I'll early raise. I'll praise thee among the people Lord, among nations sing will I, for above heaven thy mercy's great, thy truth doth reach the sky.

We'll sing these two stanzas of Psalm 108 and Gaelic, we'll remain seated to sing and then after we've sung John McSween will lead us in prayer in Gaelic and after that Phil will come up and lead us in the rest of the service please.

1st fill in prayer. 1st divination ployfore Lord, 1st fill in prayer in prayer to speak, 3ms and 8th of prayer to speak at last age.

Verse 1 Thank you.

[3 : 35] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

[7 : 41] Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

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[11 : 40] wires equal to strangers just speaking into a house By cenauon plaything Oh, it's a conference.

Sponsor on that night's birthday Low of the radio from God King Paul Melody Tianna He called thousands of people, giving me a■ of filmed and filmed.

training He changed our community.

Jhknow Platinum F■t■i shares a situation.

He was strictly under thembil of a■■■■■ savior and Erfahr Johver wie days napkinson came up when he came into a human life.

[13 : 36] Amen. Amen.

Well, if I can add my welcome to David's, it's wonderful to be here. For those of you who don't know me or who didn't hear David's introduction this morning or just now, my name is Phil.

And I serve as a minister in training at Carlway Free Church with Thomas Davis. And I'm here as one of the leaders on the Presbytery Youth Camp. And that's happening this weekend with all these lovely individuals.

They are great. It's been a really encouraging time. Just to encourage you all. Thank you for your support. And it's wonderful that we can have the resources and the place to go and meet to think about God's word together.

So thank you for your support for that and for feeding them this afternoon. The theme of our time this evening. I also want to thank David for asking me to preach this evening. But the theme of our time this evening is that Jesus is the Lamb of God.

[14 : 48] Let me read these verses from John chapter 1, verse 29. John sees, John the Baptist as it is, sees Jesus coming towards him.

John the Baptist sees Jesus coming towards him and he says, Behold, look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

And we're going to be focusing our time on Jesus, the Lamb of God, and pointing to him. And thinking about how to point others to him. To say, look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

And because Jesus is the one who takes away the sin of the world, he's the one that does everything. Whether in bringing us to Christ or helping us in our Christian walk. And so we're going to be, our next item we're going to sing is Yet Not I.

Which is a wonderful hymn that pulls all that together and says that it's Jesus who is driving us forward. Helping us in the Christian walk from start to finish. Let's stand and sing as the music begins.

[15 : 57] Yet Not I, what gift of grace is Jesus my Redeemer. What gift of grace is Jesus my Redeemer.

There is no more for heaven now to give. He is my joy, my righteousness and freedom. My steadfast love, my deep and boundless peace. To this I hold, my hope is only Jesus. For my life is wholly bound to His. Oh, how strange and divine I can sing.

All is mine, yet not I, but through Christ in me. To this dark, but I am not forsaken.

[17 : 12] For by my side, the Savior, He will stay. I labor on, in weakness and rejoicing.

For in my need, His power is displayed. To this I hold, my shepherd will defend me.

Through the deepest valley, He will lead. Oh, the night has been won, and I shall overcome.

Yet not I, but through Christ in me. No fate I dread, I know I am forgiven.

The future's sure, the price it has been paid. For Jesus fled and suffered for my pardon.

[18 : 15] And He was raised to overthrow the grave. To this I hold, my sin has been defeated.

Jesus now and ever is my plea. Oh, the chains are released. I can sing, I am free.

Yet not I, but through Christ in me. With every breath, I long to follow Jesus.

For He has said that He will bring me home. And day by day, I know He will renew me.

Until I stand with joy before the throne. To this I hold, my hope is only Jesus.

[19 : 27] All the glory evermore to Him. When the grace is complete, Still my lips shall repeat.

Yet not I, but through Christ in me. When the grace is complete, Still my lips shall repeat.

Yet not I, but through Christ in me. Well, we just sung that Jesus bled and suffered for our pardon.

We're now going to turn to Isaiah chapter 52. Isaiah 52 and 53. So Isaiah chapter 52 from verse 13.

And we're going to read this famous passage that looks forward to, that speaks of the suffering servant.

Looks forward to Jesus who bled and suffered for our pardon. So Isaiah chapter 52, reading from verse 13 to the end of chapter, Isaiah 52 from 13 to the end of chapter 53.

[20 : 40] See, my servant will act wisely. He'll be raised and lifted up and highly exalted. Just as there were many who were appalled at him. His appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any man, and his form marred beyond human likeness.

So he will sprinkle many nations, and kings will shut their mouths because of him. For what they see, for what they were not told, they will see. And what they have not heard, they will understand.

Who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him.

Nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men. A man of sorrows and familiar with suffering, like one from whom men hide their faces.

He was despised that we esteemed him not. Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows. Yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted.

[21 : 44] But he was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. The punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.

We all, like sheep, have gone astray. Each of us has turned to his own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth.

He was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away. And who can speak of his descendants?

For he was cut off from the land of the living. For the transgression of my people he was stricken.

He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with a rich man in his death. Though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth.

Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him, and cause him to suffer. And though the Lord makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand.

[22 : 48] After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life and be satisfied. By his knowledge, my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities.

Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

Amen. May God bless the reading of his word. Well that's going to be a helpful context in the passage in Acts chapter 8 we're going to look at in just a moment. But first we're going to sing once more.

We're going to sing from Psalm 67, and sing Psalms. Psalm 67, and sing Psalms. It's a wonderful psalm that is a prayer really, that the news about Jesus, and the news that he died, and shed his blood for us, that that will be known to everyone.

That God's mercy and blessing will go on all peoples, that all nations would know of God's saving grace. So let's stand and sing Psalm 67 in Sing Psalms.

[23 : 58] Lord, be merciful and bless us, that the earth may know your actions, and all lands your saving grace.

O God, may the peoples praise you, may all peoples sing your praise, for you judge the nations justly, ruling over every race.

May they sing with joy and gladness, may they all rejoice as one.

O God, may the peoples praise you, as they all unite in song.

Then the land will yield its harvest, God will pour his gifts abroad, God, our God, will surely bless us, all the earth will fear our God.

[26 : 02] Amen. Well, if you could turn over in your Bibles, from Isaiah 52 to Acts chapter 8.

Acts chapter 8. We're reading from verses 26, to the end of the chapter, to verse 40. Acts chapter 8, verses 26 to 14.

While we find our place, let me ask God to help us as we look at his word. Heavenly Father, we recognize that we can understand nothing in your word unless you reveal it to us.

We thank you that you are a living and speaking God, that you don't leave us trying to make sense of this world on our own, but rather you do show us yourself in your word. And so we pray that you would do that tonight, as you have promised, that you would open our eyes, open our ears, open our hearts to hear and receive your word.

And Lord, we pray that you would change our hearts by your spirit, that you would grow us in knowing Jesus, if we are following him, and you'd bring us to know him, if we don't know him yet.

[27 : 17] We pray all this in Jesus name. Amen. Excuse me. Acts chapter 8, from verse 26. Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, Rise and go towards 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. He was reading the prophet Isaiah. And the spirit said to Philip, go over and join this chariot.

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 that he was reading was this. Like a sheep, he was led to the slaughter, and like a lamb before its shearers is silent, so he opens not his mouth. In his humiliation, justice was denied him, who can describe his generation, for his life is taken away from the earth.

[28 : 29] And the eunuch said to Philip, about whom I ask, does this prophet say this? About himself or someone else? Then Philip began with that very passage of scripture, and told him the good news about Jesus.

As they traveled along the road, they came to some water, and the eunuch said, look, here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptized? And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down to the water, and Philip baptized him.

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 Azotus, and traveled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns, until he reached Caesarea.

Well, over this weekend, in the Scaladel Youth Camp, we've been thinking about priorities in the Christian life. I won't test the teenagers in front of all of you what they are, but on Friday, we were thinking about the priority of listening to Jesus.

On Saturday, the priority of loving like Jesus. And tonight, we're going to think about the priority of speaking about Jesus. And now, after hearing David's talk in the morning, you might think that we had been plotting to give you the same kind of themes, but that's not the case.

[29 : 48] And in some ways, it's just a wonderful example of how actually these are genuine themes and priorities that do run right through Scripture. And whether you choose to cut through Scripture in 1 John chapter 4, or in the places we've been looking at this weekend, we see these same themes of listening to God and loving him and loving his people and in speaking about him.

And tonight, we're thinking about that priority then of speaking about Jesus in one of my favorite passages in the Bible. And I don't know whether you noticed the question that the unit asks in verse 36.

He says, look, here's some water. Why shouldn't I be baptized? Or some translations render it. What prevents me from being baptized? I think those are really striking words.

Those words really stuck with me as I was reading and preparing this. What prevents me from being baptized? Why shouldn't I receive this mark of being, this sign that marks me out as part of God's people?

You might even say, he's saying, well, is there anything that stops me from being a Christian? Is there anything else that prevents me from being part of God's people, from being a Christian? I wonder how people would answer if we asked that question tomorrow in a survey in town or maybe outside your workplace or something?

[31 : 10] What prevents you from being a Christian? Maybe someone might say, well, I'm not religious. I don't have a church background. This, that kind of thing isn't for me. Or someone might say, well, I just, I just, there's lots of ways to God.

I just, I wouldn't want to commit to one thing. Maybe some people say they're too busy or they're too bad. I'm too busy. I don't need God. Too bad. God doesn't need me or want me.

Or maybe it's, they just think it's all too boring. There's just a few I thought of. I wonder how your friends and your neighbors would answer that question. What prevents me from being a Christian? Or maybe you're sitting here and you maybe wouldn't call yourself a follower of Jesus. You're still thinking these things through. You don't feel ready to say I'm a Christian. Well, can I ask you, what prevents you? What do you feel prevents you from being part of God's family?

Maybe you spent your whole life comparing yourself to a member of your family, a godly relative who was a great example of what it looks like to live a Christian life.

[32 : 12] But you think, I can't call myself a Christian. I'm nothing like them. Or maybe you hear about dramatic experiences in people's lives and their testimonies and you think, I haven't had those kind of experiences.

I couldn't call myself a Christian. You feel prevented in that way. Or maybe you're afraid of missing out. Maybe you see life ahead of you and you think that actually the biggest barrier to joining God's people is thinking that you're going to miss out on all this fun that's over there.

That being a Christian is actually just going to lead to a worse life not a better life. Or maybe you're afraid of people talking about you. That if you join God's people you're afraid that you're going to be the topic in the conversation as people phone each other.

Guess who took communion this weekend? Guess who's calling themselves a Christian? I imagine though many of you have made that commitment to follow Jesus. You probably can remember yourselves though how times when you felt prevented from coming to church maybe you thought man why on earth would God want anything to do with me?

I'm too bad. Maybe you thought there's no way I want to spend time more time with those people who are Christians. Maybe you felt prevented just by because you thought other Christians were so odd or something.

[33 : 25] What prevents you from being a Christian? that's a question we need to think about maybe for ourselves or we need to think about for our loved ones who don't know Jesus. And in our passage this evening we meet this eunuch.

He's a man on a journey literally from Jerusalem all the way back to Ethiopia but he's also on a spiritual journey and he starts the journey with a big list of reasons why he can't be part of God's people.

But by the time we get to the end of our passage he's wondering is there anything that can prevent me? It's a rhetorical question. He's all of those reasons have been blown out of the water.

So whether you call yourself a Christian tonight or not we're going to join this eunuch on his journey and find out what changed. Find out what he learned that made him go from everything preventing him to what can prevent me now.

We've got two points and then two implications. First point excluded by nature. In this passage you'll see we meet a man called Philip and that's not the reason I chose this passage or it's one of my favourite passages but he's one of the first members of the early church.

[34 : 32] He was something like a deacon in the early church in Jerusalem or something like that. And Philip had been sharing the gospel in Samaria that's the northern part of Israel. And then God directs him to go down to the road to the south where that's the road that will go down from Jerusalem all the way down to Egypt and carry on carry on down.

And in verse 27 Philip meets this Ethiopian eunuch and this eunuch would have been instantly recognisable to a Jewish reader as an outsider. Someone who is naturally excluded from being part of God's family.

I don't know whether you've ever found yourself being excluded feeling excluded. I mean maybe you've maybe in school you've felt you're definitely excluded from some kind of friendship groups or some kind of crowd of people.

Since being in Lewis I found that Gaelic speakers are always very considerate in speaking English to me as a non-Gaelic speaker. But there are times when I'll maybe go into a shop and people will be speaking Gaelic or I'll or I don't know someone welcomes me at the door and I have a few words of Gaelic I can say Hagamah or something back.

And at that point I remember yes I'm definitely an outsider. Or maybe you've visited another country and you might have you know you try using your French and German or something like that to buy something at the shop and very quickly the person realizes you don't speak the language and they swap to English but they're fluent flawless English and remind you once again that you're an outsider.

[36 : 04] Well this Ethiopian man was obviously an outsider. Ethiopia was a five month journey so he came from the ends of the earth as far as people were concerned about 4,000 kilometers away from Jerusalem.

But what excluded him was more than just the color of his skin but he was excluded because he was a eunuch. He was a man who had been castrated and whether that was obvious to the past rabbi or not they knew whether they knew that or not looking at him that would have been a thing of terrible shame.

It would have been a mark of slavery probably happened could have happened when he was very young could have happened later on. But most significantly for him in his in these past few months for him was that that excluded him from being part of God's people.

So in Deuteronomy chapter 23 God tells Israel that no one who's been castrated can join God's people because God's people were meant to be a kingdom of priests.

They were meant to be symbolically without blemish and so that was one of the markers that God said that no one who's been castrated could join God's people. So while this man had traveled thousands of miles to worship God it's likely it's almost certain that he would have never even been allowed in the temple.

[37 : 22] He'd have had to stand outside or stand in the most outer courts. 4,000 kilometers. If you just think about that that would have been like you I looked it up that would have been like you traveling all the way to Florida and not being allowed into Disney World or I don't know whatever the equivalent thing that you want to be at 4,000 kilometers away.

But it's also really man it's a sad situation. He was a man whose life had been permanently and irreversibly changed by something in the past.

You know everything had been affected by this event by the fact that he was a eunuch. And as an aside maybe that's true for some of you.

You might not be a eunuch but you feel marked by your past. You feel your past hanging over you like a shadow. And it affects your relationships, your career, your family.

Maybe it even affects your view of God in the church. And maybe when I said what stops you from being a Christian you immediately thought back to something in your past.

[38 : 31] I can't be part of the church because of this event, this person, this experience. This eunuch was a man who had been scarred by his past literally and in his heart.

And it affected him every day. If there was anyone ever who could give a big list of reasons why he couldn't be part of God's people, this was the guy. But the surprise in the story is that the biggest thing that stopped this man being friends with God wasn't actually that he was a eunuch.

It wasn't actually anything to do with the outside at all or with what the man looked like. The reason he couldn't be friends with God is that he had a sin problem in his heart.

Like me, like you, like everyone around us. And sin is that rejection of God, rejection of who he is, rejection that he is king, wanting to follow our own way instead of God's way.

And we know that this sin was the biggest thing that stands between this eunuch and being part of God's family because the passage he's reading in the chariot is not Isaiah 56 which talks all about eunuchs being part of God's family.

[39 : 41] We'll come on to that. It's a passage that's all about sin. It's the passage that we just read, Isaiah 53. We'll come back to it in a second. But in many ways, I just want to say, in many ways, his state of being a eunuch is actually a really good picture for us to understand sin and to understand our state as sinners.

The external scarring of castration, you might say it's a good picture of how we're deformed and we're scarred by sin. The wrong things that we do, the wrong things other people do, they leave marks on us.

They leave us, I mean, the Bible talks about they leave us blemished. They don't leave us holy and pure and spotless and worthy. We're all scarred, we're blemished and broken and left the eunuch permanently excluded from the temple, just like sin leaves us permanently cut off from God.

And the eunuch was powerless to change his state, just as we're powerless to change our state as sinners. We can live as morally upright as we want, but that blemish of sin remains.

Sin is worse though as well. We're not powerless victims to sin like the eunuch was a victim of his past. We're active participants, we're born in sin and we remain in sin through all the decisions we made, through all the choices we make.

[41 : 04] The biggest thing that stopped this man being a Christian wasn't what he was like on the outside, but it was his heart. And I wonder, do we realize that when we think of ourselves, do we realize that the biggest thing that naturally stops us being friends with God is in the inside, is on our hearts?

Do we look at the outside? Do we look at a community around us here in Tarbot, or those of you coming from different places, me from Carlway, do we look at our friends and neighbors and family, and do we realize that the biggest thing that stops them being a part of God's family is their hearts, and their sin in their hearts, or do we think it's something else?

Take two people who aren't Christians, who aren't trusting in Jesus. Take the person who's out drinking every night, who's buying alcohol as soon as it's available in the shop.

People might stereotypically think, they've got something that stops them from being part of God's family. I make it a stereotype for a reason.

But you know what? Their biggest problem is the same as the person who's the most respectable neighbor, the most hardworking person, the most morally upright person you can think of. It doesn't matter what they look at on the outside in some ways.

[42 : 18] If they're not trusting in Jesus, their hearts are still dirty. Their hearts still need to be clean. They both have sinful hearts. While it might not have looked like it on the outside, like us the eunuch's biggest problem was his sin.

And that means that he was reading the best passage possible. We're on to our second point. We looked at excluded by nature, we're now thinking about included by Christ's death.

death. The passage the eunuch was reading is Isaiah 53. It's that famous, one of those famous servant songs in Isaiah and we read it. It speaks of God's servant who while exalted above kings suffers like an outcast.

And the climax comes when he bears the sins of his people, when he is killed, when he's killed like a sacrificial lamb in place of his people. And then at the end somehow his life is vindicated by God. It's this ark from exalted to destroyed to victorious. Let me just read again the part that the eunuch quotes, those first few of those verses.

[43 : 27] If you want, you can turn back again if you had a finger in Isaiah chapter 53. Let's read the bit that the eunuch quotes. Isaiah 53, Enoch's reading from verse 4.

Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions.

He was crushed for our iniquities. The punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all like sheep have gone astray.

Each of us has turned to his own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. You know, I wonder how much the eunuch understood as he read that. As he was going along in the chariot, he wouldn't have been reading while driving, don't worry, someone else would have been doing the chariot tearing.

I wonder how much he understood. As he stood outside the temple courts for those days he was in Jerusalem, as he saw tens of animals, hundreds of animals even going and being sacrificed, as he read and thought, wait, this person, there's not been talking about an animal sacrifice here, this is talking about a person being sacrificed, and there's not many sacrifices here.

[44 : 46] Isaiah is talking about just one sacrifice. Maybe he read verse 5, upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and thought this is different.

This is different. This sacrifice really works. This peace, this forgiveness of sins, it really works.

Maybe he read that line, we all like sheep have gone astray, each one of us to turn to his own way, and he thought, that's me.

I've wandered away, I'm like that sheep. Maybe he read that last line, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. A suffering servant takes the sin of everyone, of anyone, and he thought, even someone like me.

We don't know exactly what he thought as he read Isaiah 53, but he knew it was important, and he knew it all hinged on this person, this servant figure, but he just didn't know who it was.

Who was he? Who is this exalted one who becomes nothing, who is crushed, and then is victorious? Who is he? And then verse 35, Philip opens his mouth, Philip runs beside the chariot.

[46 : 01] Talk about timing, it's God's timing, isn't it? Philip runs beside the chariot, verse 35, and beginning with that very passage, he told him the good news about Jesus.

That Jesus is the one who fulfills this prophecy, that Jesus is the one who was led to the slaughter, that Jesus is the one who is the lamb without blemish. The eunuch looked at himself, he thought, I'm blemished, I can't go in the temple, but Jesus is the one who is without blemish.

Jesus is the one who stayed silent even as he was falsely accused. The one who willingly gave his life as a sacrifice for sins. But he wasn't left in the grave, just like that suffering servant was victorious.

Jesus was raised from the grave. He was risen, exalted. Jesus wins. He's at God's right hand.

Jesus is the one whose death makes all the difference.

And imagine, I actually just imagine the eunuch as he gradually understood these things. Imagine the smile spreading across his face as Philip told him that if he believed in Jesus, then Jesus took

the punishment for his sins.

[47 : 09] Past, present, future. As Philip explained that although sin once separated him from God, it had been dealt with on the cross and he could be part of God's people.

4,000 kilometers he had gone and he still couldn't go into the temple, but now out in the desert, there he finds, there he hears the good news so that he can be closer to God than he ever knew was possible.

I wonder if the eunuch was still thinking, well maybe there's something else that prevents me. I wonder if he said, well I'm from some kingdom in Africa. I'm not like you guys. I imagine Philip might have even turned, scrolled over to Isaiah chapter 56 where we read, let not the foreigner who has joined himself to the Lord say the Lord will surely separate me from his people.

Or maybe the eunuch replied, but I'm still a eunuch. That hasn't changed. The outside hasn't changed. Well Philip would have kept reading in Isaiah 56 where it says, let not the eunuch say, behold I am like a dry tree.

For thus says the Lord, to the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose the things that please me, who hold fast to my covenant, I will give in my house and within my walls a monument and a name better than sons and daughters.

[48 : 25] I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off. I love that. There's no partial inclusion. You know, okay, you're fine, you've trusted in Jesus but you're still a eunuch.

You can be like, I don't know, you can sit on the back row, you can still be in some separate spot. There's no class B Christian. The eunuch's fully included in God's family.

The point's clear. Jesus' death breaks down every single barrier between us and God. And fundamentally he deals with the sin. That alienates us from God.

The sin that cuts us off from God. So who we are, whoever we are, whatever we look like on the outside, if we have repented and believed in Jesus, then we can say with the eunuch, like he says in verse 36, what prevents me from being baptized?

What prevents me now from being part of God's family? And if we're trusting in Jesus, the answer is nothing. It's nothing. Two implications for us then.

[49 : 33] First of all, so we had two points, now two implications. First implication, believe the good news, there's no one too far. Believe the good news, there's no one too far.

I imagine that's quite obvious now if it wasn't already. Jesus' death is so powerful, it casts that gospel invitation to anyone, whatever their race, whatever their gender, whatever their sexual orientation, or class or profession, whatever the past experiences they've had, whatever rights or wrongs they've done in life, any discriminating boundaries you can think of, Jesus' invitation goes to every single person.

His death is the great leveler. You know, you and I can list probably a hundred different ways in which we're different. We could fill this room with pieces of paper that give the differences between us, but the Bible says the thing that makes us all the same, the first thing that makes us all the same is that we've all got sinful hearts.

They're all sinners in need of salvation. But that's also why no one is too far. That's the great leveler. Philip and the Ethiopian might have looked worlds apart on the surface.

They might have looked like the, well, yeah, Philip was probably some respectable Jewish person. They were from different parts of the world. They looked different on the outside.

[50 : 53] But at the heart of the matter, they both had sinful hearts in need of Jesus. And the good news of the gospel then is that to all of us who call on Jesus' name, who believe in him, he died on our behalf.

I don't know if you've done that. I don't know all of you here. I don't know if you've called on Jesus, if you've asked him, if you trusted in his death on our behalf.

Can I ask, if you haven't done that, what's preventing you? What do you still see as standing in the way of you being part of God's family? Can you actually think of anything that Jesus can't deal with? If he deals with our sin, which is far greater than we can ever even comprehend, anything else is minor in comparison. Why would you hold back?

There's no one too far. And there's no one too different. Look at the Ethiopian. There's no one too sinful. Later on, we'll see in Acts that God saves Saul, the man who was, who watched with satisfaction as Stephen was stoned to death.

[52 : 06] Imagine a man like that, who watched with glee as Stephen was killed in a brutal way. Those of you who have trusted in Jesus, I hope you find this passage a reassurance.

Jesus' death pays for your sins. It makes you part of God's family, fully part. Sometimes I think we think we have to turn up to church and feel sorted and look sorted on the outside.

That's nonsense. We don't have to look sorted. Of course, as a result of trusting Jesus, as we thought about this morning, that should overflow in listening to Jesus and loving one another and all these things.

But we're all going to fail constantly. We're all going to struggle. We're all going to be battling sin, even if we've trusted in Jesus. Our sin doesn't disqualify us.

It makes us uniquely qualified to need Jesus' grace, to need his death. What matters is trusting in Christ.

[53 : 10] Listen to this encouragement in 1 Timothy 115. He says, Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. And Paul says, whom I am the foremost. When we recall our sins over the past week, even when you despair and you think of the things that you've done, well, you can come back to this chapter.

I'd encourage you even to go back to Isaiah 53. That's the assurance that Philip offered the Ethiopian. You can say, if you're trusting in Jesus, you can say, Christ was pierced for my transgressions.

He was crushed for my iniquities. Upon Christ was the punishment that brings me peace with God. All of that is true for you. Brothers and sisters, if you have believed in Jesus, nothing stands in the way between you and God.

And we can come to him in belief. We can come to him in prayer. We can come to him with all of our worries and concerns and hopes and dreams because nothing can prevent us coming to Christ. Christ. And that brings us to our second implication briefly.

Proclaim the good news because there's no one too far. We already saw that sin is the great leveler. We're all equally excluded by nature and included by Christ's death.

[54 : 21] But that universality of sin also means that everyone needs to hear the same gospel. There's no, I mean, I imagine again this is obvious, but there's no one gospel for Scotland and one gospel for Asia, for South America, for wherever, whatever a continent or country you want to be in.

There's no one gospel for men, one gospel for women, one gospel for the baby Christian, one gospel for the mature Christian. We need the same Jesus, the same good news at every point in our life, whether at any time.

Everyone needs to hear that same gospel message. And I just want to spend a few minutes focusing on how Philip shares that gospel because I think sometimes we can find that hard. We know that everyone else out there that they need to hear this good news.

We think, well, how do I share it? In just a final few minutes, let me point out that Philip does three simple things to share the good news about Jesus.

He asks questions, he opens the Bible, and he points to Jesus. Let me unpack that briefly. Philip asks questions. He says, do you understand what you're reading?

[55 : 31] Questions can often be better than answers when we're talking to people about Jesus, when we're trying to have a meaningful spiritual conversation. If we're investing in people's lives, if we're asking about them, they're more likely to want to think about, they're more likely to want to think about spiritual things.

They're more likely to think, actually, this person has a genuine interest in me. So when we ask questions, let's also ask them with an interest in people, not just thinking, what can I ask next or how can I respond?

But learning about people, and the more that we learn, the more that we ask questions, there'll be opportunities maybe to say, well, you say you used to go to church. What was that like?

Or you say you grew up in Sunday school. Have you ever read the Bible as an adult? And you can ask those kind of questions. Also, don't be afraid to return a question.

If someone asks you what you believe, why not ask them back? What do you believe? Questions are great. Second, so Philip asks questions. Second, Philip opens the Bible, and this is fundamental.

[56 : 35] Evangelism at its heart, sharing Jesus at its heart, is sharing the words of God. The Bible contains the very words of God, the God who spoke the universe into existence, who brings life

from the dead.

These are words of power, and as we read the Bible, we're hearing God's voice. As we help other people, as we point other people to read God's word, we're helping them to hear his voice.

Now, you're unlikely to get someone to just pull up next to you in a car with a Bible open and say, hey, can you explain this to me? Philip seemed to have, like, the ideal situation when it comes to talking about Jesus.

However, I think we'd be surprised as well that if we actually got to, if we're in a conversation with our friends and we ask them, have you ever read a gospel? Have you ever read one of these eyewitness accounts about Jesus?

Would you like me to read it with you? I think we'd all be surprised how many people would say yes. Some people probably would say no, but don't let that put you off. Some people might say yes, and God's word is powerful.

[57 : 41] Who knows what he'll do through that? And you don't need to be an expert. Just open it up, and you can ask simple questions. You can just point to Jesus. That's the third bit. You can ask questions.

Philip opens the Bible, and he points to Jesus. You don't need to be an expert. We can just look at Jesus together. Ask simple questions. You can ask, well, what does the Bible tell us about who Jesus is?

Or what does this tell us about why Jesus died? Or what does this tell us about how different people can respond to Jesus? And then you can point to him, and you can look at who Jesus is in each passage.

And a great place to start is one of the Gospels, like Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, but we can begin anywhere. All of Scripture points to Jesus. Sometimes the arrows are bigger than others to get to Jesus, but all Scripture points to Christ.

As we close then, we have a really good news to share with all people. I just want to close, though, with how this passage reminds us that this is ultimately God's work.

[58 : 49] We have a wonderful role to play, and that God uses us. He promises to use us, just like Philip, maybe not in the exact same way, but he uses us to bring that Gospel.

But this is God's work. He is the great evangelist. Later on in that Isaiah 56 passage that talks about eunuchs being included, God says, I, the Lord God, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, declares, I will gather yet others to him besides those who are already gathered.

You know, we proclaim the good news, but it's God ultimately who does the gathering. And I love that God gathers in ways that we don't expect it. You know, if you were to think, where is this Ethiopian eunuch most likely to hear about Jesus?

Well, maybe we would have thought in Jerusalem, where the early church was already meeting. Maybe we would have thought, oh, you know, in a church building or in a temple. But what does God do? God's not bound by walls.

God's not bound by meetings at 11 o'clock and 6 o'clock and whatever. God uses Philip in a desert to share with the Ethiopian eunuch the good news about Jesus.

[59 : 59] God will, in his own way, God will, God will relentlessly pursue people and make sure that they hear the good news about Jesus.

He's the one who sent his son to die. He's the one who arranged this unlikely but life-changing meeting. He's the one who prepared the eunuch's heart. And he's the one who's preparing people's hearts around us that we don't even realize.

Maybe he's even preparing hearts in this room. And the eunuch went on his way rejoicing. Maybe our prayer can be that, well, maybe some people even in this room will go away rejoicing tonight as they realize who Jesus is for them.

As they realize that nothing else prevents them from following him. Maybe our prayer for those around us can be that they'll go on their way rejoicing. That as they come into your homes, as they come into this building, as they hear about Jesus, they will go on their way rejoicing, realizing that nothing can prevent them from being part of God's people.

God's the great evangelist. He's given us a great gospel. Let's pray now and ask that he'll gather his people. Heavenly Father, we thank you that Philip met that Ethiopian eunuch in that desert on that day.

[61 : 17] We thank you that that was all your own doing. We thank you that you sent your son, Jesus Christ, to die for our sins. We thank you that he fulfills those scriptures that you wrote many hundreds of years ago through the prophet Isaiah.

We thank you that you created that unit. You knew him. You loved him. And that you brought him to know you through reading and through Philip's witness.

And Lord, we pray that in the same way, as you know all things, you would use us, even in all our weaknesses, and you'd use us to share that powerful gospel of Jesus with people that you love all around us here.

And that you'd bring them to a saving knowledge of you. That you'd gather your lost sheep into your fold. We pray this in his name, to his glory. Amen. Amen.

We're going to close by singing Be Thou My Vision. It's a wonderful hymn that, well, Christ should be our focus. And he should be the one that is our vision. And we pray that it's the vision of those who don't yet know him.

[62 : 19] So let's stand and sing Be Thou My Vision to God's praise. Be Thou My Vision, O Lord of my heart.

Be Thou My Vision, O Lord of my heart.

Be Thou my true word. Be Thou ever with me, and I live with Thee, Lord.

Thou my great Father, and I Thy true Son. Thou in me dwelling, and I with Thee one.

Be Thou my breastplate, my sword for the fight. Be Thou my armor, be Thou my delight.

[63 : 58] Thou my shoulder, and Thou my strong tower. Thou and Thou only, the first in my heart.

Thou my heart. Thou sovereign of heaven, my treasure Thou art.

Thou King of heaven, Thou heaven's bright sun. Grant me its choice after victory is won.

Thou my heart. Thou my heart, whatever befall. Thou be my vision, O ruler of all.

And now may the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant, brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, the great shepherd of our sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, that he may work in us what is pleasing to him through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever.

[65 : 39] Amen. Amen. Amen.