

Searching for Satisfaction

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Preacher: Steve Abbott

[0 : 00] This is the morning service at Holy Trinity on the 29th of May 2005.

The preacher is Steve Abbott. His sermon is entitled Searching for Satisfaction and is based on Acts chapter 8 verses 26 to 40.

Great privilege to be back here with you and I'm going to be speaking from the passage. It was on the green sheet that you have with you.

I'm going to pray first and ask that God would speak to us. So let's just bow for prayer. Heavenly Father, we thank you that your word has been given to us and that your great concern is that we understand who you are.

Please speak to us this morning. Help me to explain your word clearly and simply. And may we come with a readiness and an openness to have you speak into our lives.

[1 : 04] Please help us to find our genuine and deep-seated need for satisfaction as human beings in your Son, Jesus. Reveal that to us this morning in new and fresh ways.

We ask it in Christ's name. Amen. Amen. The story goes of a lady who was working in Christian ministry in a very depressed part of an inner city of a large town in the United States.

And she is always giving all of her money away and there were occasions when she became quite down in the mouth and wished she just had a few extra dollars to buy some things for herself.

And one morning as she opened the mail, there fell out a \$50 note, which was a gift from someone, anonymous gift. And she thought, finally, I'll be able to go and buy myself some nice items, some fresh soap and some new deodorant and just feel a little brighter about myself.

And as she was pondering the joy at the kitchen window and making herself a cup of coffee, she looked out and there was one of the regular street people foraging in the garbage and trash cans.

[2 : 13] And she was just moved as always by compassion. So she got a plain envelope out and put the \$50 note in the envelope and wrote on the outside, don't despair, knocked on the window to get the attention of the man and called him over and threw the envelope down to him.

He opened the envelope, saw the note on the outside and waved her with glee and took off. It was a great shock to her the next morning to find this man knocking on her door with a large brown paper bag.

She invited him inside and he poured out \$250 onto the table and said to her, our horse, don't despair, came in at 10 to 1. This is your heart. Now, not all of our pursuits for joy and satisfaction always turn up so well.

But in fact, a lot of the places that we might seek for joy and satisfaction, a bit like our friend Jeff's this morning, maybe seeking it in football, don't always turn out the way we'd like them to, do they?

They aren't always as satisfying as we'd like them to be. We look for joy and satisfaction in this life and so often we do not find it. Where do people seek for satisfaction in life?

- [3 : 33] Well, it isn't just football, as Jeff mentioned. There are other things we've done. People have sought for it in a marriage. Others in having children. Some, sadly, in an affair. Others in their career. Some in travel. Some in possessions, a new car, a new stereo system. Some in religious pilgrimage. It's like our man in the story from Acts that we'll turn to momentarily.

But so often the things we pursue do not bring us satisfaction and joy because we can't just search for one thing and have it all work out. Like the person who gives their energies to sealing the business deal and being the best salesperson.

If they give all their energies and efforts to that, they might seal the business deal but they've still got to go home to an abandoned family where things are not as happy because they spend all their time at work.

We may have a wonderful trip overseas in our retirement and we've got great memories and wonderful photographs but it's not long after we're back that the fact that we're ageing and that the pains and the aches of life and the failing eyesight become part of who we are and we're reminded again that the trip really wasn't all that satisfying.

- [4 : 44] It came and went. We watch Hollywood love scenes where the orchestra always seems to play but in our bedrooms it sounds more like a five-year-old playing the violin or doing scales at times.

We search for inner peace but our inner life is sometimes in pieces. We long to be content but we're still confused. We look for answers but we seem to end up sometimes with more questions than answers.

In our search too often we leave out the key player and we leave out the key dimension of our lives.

The key player is the Lord Jesus Christ the living God and the key aspect of our life is our soul. The spiritual dimension of our life. But things are changing in our culture in that era are they not?

I read an editorial recently where the editor of this magazine Michael Tan had discovered this statement posted on the web. It reads I have no religion but somehow I've become spiritual.

- [5 : 51] I know deep down that there is a divine presence in this universe and that we are all put on this planet to carry out some special purpose. I don't know what that purpose is for me yet but I'm on a journey to discover it.

Is anyone in the same situation as me? So one would be able to respond to that. People searching for spiritual significance.

Searching for real joy and satisfaction for some meaning that makes more sense than the life they presently got. Well we're told in this story from Acts if you get the green sheet if you haven't got it in front of you can I urge you to take it in your hands because I will be referring to it constantly.

Notice how this story ends at the very bottom of the page and the eunuch did not see him again but he went on his way rejoicing. This man's day finished with joy.

And it's worth pondering this event because I think we see some things that can be very helpful. Make connections with the story. We find his search we find a solution to his search and we find his surrender.

- [6 : 58] Let's look at each of those in turn. Let me read for you again the opening few verses from halfway through 27. He met an Ethiopian eunuch an important official in charge of all the treasure of Candace queen of the Ethiopians.

This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship and on his way home was sitting in the chariot reading the book of Isaiah the prophet reading a part of the Bible the word of God. And the spirit told Philip go to that chariot and stay near it.

And Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. Do you understand what you are reading? He asked. How can I? He said unless someone explains it to me.

So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. Here is a man on a spiritual pilgrimage and this is some spiritual pilgrimage. You may have been invited here this morning and this morning is part of a spiritual pilgrimage for you.

But he didn't travel as far as this guy and it didn't take as long. And he knows a little bit of geography you know that Ethiopia in North Africa is a long way away from Israel where he traveled with his entourage.

[8 : 07] Here is a man seeking seeking for God. Clearly the faith of his own nation Ethiopia had not satisfied him. He was searching for something more something about the God of Israel.

God had captivated him so much so that he spent probably an inordinate amount of money to buy a copy of a portion of the scriptures. Not a cheap thing in those days.

Maybe you're seeking for God. Maybe you've been coming to this church for a long while or maybe you're here for the first or second or third time searching for God trying to work it out make sense of life and what is spirituality all about anyway.

We know something else about him. I've already indicated one of the things that he was educated. He could clearly read the Hebrew scriptures. He was wealthy.

He was riding a chariot that was driven by a chauffeur and can I say a trip a spiritual journey from Ethiopia to Jerusalem was no inexpensive item.

[9 : 11] He was a wealthy man. He had an influence. He was a man of power and influence in Ethiopia. But riches and power and education had not brought any satisfaction to his life.

He still made this long pilgrimage maybe annually to Jerusalem and he pondered the scriptures to try and understand them and he hadn't got it yet. The futility of human pursuits for wealth, power and intellectual prowess is well illustrated by the terrible tragedy of the very wealthy but somewhat eccentric Howard Hughes who has been brought back to our attention through the Hollywood movie The Aviator.

Howard Hughes' life ended in tragedy. He was found in a fairly ordinary hotel deceased in his underpants with a note with one word written on it nothing.

Incredible wealth incredible influence incredible intellect but at the end of his life all of these things meant nothing. And we know don't we?

We suspect that while we may be the top of the evolutionary scale we know there must be more to life than simply life. As one person questioned, am I just here on earth to breathe so many cubic metres of oxygen eat so many cows and kilos of potatoes in my lifetime and then die?

[10 : 34] Is that it? No it's not. We are designed for something more. And maybe you've asked similar questions. There's something else about this man that we need to note and the text tells us this for a reason I believe.

It tells us he was a eunuch. Was this caused by an accident? Was it an unfortunate birth defect? Perhaps a career choice as someone suggested?

Probably not. Whatever, we note this because he is like so many of us. He bore the scar of living in an imperfect world. He was broken.

The result, the possibilities for intimacy were closed to him. And in terms of Judaism, not just women. For to be a eunuch was to be on the outer of Judaism.

There were restrictions on your access to God and the temple. He was not whole. Was he lonely? Was he maybe angry or frustrated by his circumstance or maybe even a little bitter?

[11 : 37] Whether he was or not, the text doesn't tell us, but we know that our lives have been marked by those things from time to time because of our physical or emotional circumstances. Because we discover that we ourselves are dysfunctional in various ways, maybe physically, intellectually, emotionally and psychologically.

We live in a broken world and we have broken world experiences and these lead us to be damaged and fragile. we carry baggage from our past or present which impact our daily life.

We may feel inadequate or failure, broken, damaged because of bad choices or of abuse. We may struggle with anger, fears, bitterness, doubts, despair and even loneliness.

I sometimes might come home late at night and I'd like to watch the late news and you can flick it on. And sometimes it's too late and it doesn't take long if you watch late night TV before you find those ads, the 1-900 telephone number ads with scantily clad women telling you to call and talk to me.

Our daughter, Leanne, once had an over 50 colleague that she worked with whose other job was phone sex. My friends, those televisions, those ads aren't run because they don't work.

[12 : 55] There are many lonely people, fragile people. Who knows? Some of you may have used those no phone numbers. People are broken.

We're all dysfunctional. It's only a matter of degree. But we're broken people. And so we search for joy and contentment. It continues. But it isn't only external things that can be disappointing to us that lead us to be frail and fragile and seek for satisfaction.

We can be a disappointment to ourselves, can we not? We notice a little later in this passage in verses 35 to 36 that this Ethiopian eunuch asked to be baptised, which doesn't immediately indicate there was anything wrong with him unless you understand, as it were, the jargon of baptism.

It's a mark that this man realised that he was guilty before God, that there was stuff in his life he needed to be forgiven for and washed clean from. And is that not true of all of us?

All honest people are aware of moral failure and guilt. Many of us carry garbage around from our past. I've been in ministry since 1978 and I've met several people in the various churches that I've worked in and places I've preached who in a quiet moment have confessed of a teen abortion.

[14 : 18] One woman that no one, not even her parents, knew about. She's managed to hide it and carried with her the brokenness and damage and guilt of that for years and years.

For others it may be an affair. It may be drug or alcohol dependency, physical or emotional abuse, addiction to pornography, dishonesty in business, failed relationships within our children or our marriage that we know we're guilty for, uncontrolled anger, selfishness, pride, bitterness, a vengeful nature, an inability to forgive others who may have hurt us that just eats away at us and destroys relationship and ourselves.

And some of us are unable to forgive ourselves. We have a desire to be cleansed and relieved of blame but guilt hangs over us like a great cloud.

So there are lots of reasons why like this Ethiopian we might be on a spiritual journey. We're searching. Well let's return to the text and discover what is the solution to the search of the human heart and the human soul.

What's interesting in 32 to 35 is that we discover the eunuch looking in the truth of scripture in the Bible but he can't get it. Let's read it again. The eunuch was reading this passage of scripture, the Bible.

[15 : 40] He was led like a sheep to the slaughter. He's reading about a character in the prophecy and he can't fathom it. And this character was like a lamb before the shearer, silence, and so he did not open his mouth.

In his humiliation he was deprived of justice. So this was an unjust action that was taking place. Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth.

I sometimes wondered whether this particular passage was drawn to the eunuch's attention because he was someone who had no descendants because of his circumstance. Tell me, he says to Philip, who is the prophet talking about?

Himself or someone else? He's saying, what's happening here? I want to understand God's word. I want to understand this scripture, but I can't fathom it. And we're told that Philip began with that very passage of scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.

What is happening here is a little bit like what happened to me several years ago. I was preparing a sermon and I had one of these sermon block occasions and I thought, I need a coffee. So I was in the days before all espressos went crazy.

[16 : 51] So I went for a normal instant coffee, went into the pantry where the coffee was kept and looked like only a man can look and I couldn't find it. Stop laughing, ladies.

And so I called out to the wife of my youth, darling, where's the coffee? It's on the shelf where it always is. No, it's not. I've looked. Of course, she believed me. Huh.

So with a dig in my ribs and pushing me to the back of the pantry, she reached beyond me and found the coffee and gave it to me. I immediately protested. This is not coffee, this is international roast.

I was looking for Macona. There'd been an economy drive. How many of us do this in life's pantry?

In the spiritual pantry? You can even do it by coming to church. A place where the truth is preached. But you know what? If you've already got an idea in your head of what you're looking for and what you want, you may not see the truth.

[17 : 56] And you'll even live with a lie rather than face the truth if the truth is asking more of than you're willing to give. So I hope you'll search this morning and listen.

And you'll hear what God really has to say about how you and I get right with him and how we can find deep soul satisfaction in the person of Jesus Christ as Philip explained it to the Ethiopian.

And the wonderful thing about this passage that's before us is that it's not simply man searching for God and trying to understand it.

But what this passage tells is that God is searching for us. It's great news that if you reach out to God, he's already looking for you. He's already done all that's necessary for you to connect with him. A friend of mine tells a delightful story of how a person rang up a little, rang up a family on one occasion.

A little boy answered the phone in a very whispered voice. Hello. And the person said, could I speak to your parents please? The little boy said, no, they're busy. He said, well, is there anybody else there that I could speak to?

[19 : 05] He said, the policeman's here. Would you like to, could I speak to the policeman? No, he's busy. Well, could I speak to anybody else there? Well, the ambulance is here. Well, could I speak to the ambulance man?

No, he's busy. What are they busy doing? They're looking for me. Unlike the child, God isn't hiding.

You might have thought he is, but he's not. He's always been there. Always revealed himself in creation, but in particular in his son Jesus.

That's why I've highlighted in this passage, the little bold sections to show you how God was looking for this man. He arranges for Philip to go to the right place. Philip gets directed to go to the chariot.

He then uses the scriptures that God had provided and the story of Jesus that had just taken place in Jerusalem. And all of these things connect together. It's a little bit like Jeff told us.

[20 : 09] He looks back on his life and see how all these various events and pieces of the puzzle. But God was always there. God was always moving him in a direction. But it wasn't until his early 20s that he finally, it all came together.

And Billy Graham crusade where he was able to give his life to Christ. So Philip began with this very passage of scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.

Jesus truly is the key which unlocks the puzzle of true, genuine life and soul satisfaction. He is the answer to all our questions. It's like the four digit code you have at the ATM machine.

Once you get the code right, you get access to all of your accounts. It opens up the banking world for you at the machine. And Jesus opens up the world of genuine spirituality, of a connection with God.

And without him, you cannot have a relationship with God. And so Philip no doubt explained how this image of a sheep led to the slaughter was a picture of Jesus Christ, the sacrificial lamb of the Passover, the great Jewish festival that indeed the Ethiopian might have come for.

[21 : 19] And maybe he was there for several weeks for the various festivals around this season of Jewish worship. He would have explained no doubt the verses just prior to this one that explain the nature of this sacrificial death.

Verses from verses five and six of the same chapter of Isaiah. He was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. The punishment that brought us peace, that brought us satisfaction, 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. That's our problem, you see. Our problem is we can't get God right because we're not willing to confess that we've gone our own way and done our own actions.

We look for satisfaction in all the wrong places. And we need to confess that to God. And no doubt that Philip would have gone to the few verses after the ones he was studying and looking at.

Because they speak, as I've given them to you on the other side of the page. After the suffering of this person's soul, he will see the light of life and be satisfied.

[22 : 27] And then verse 12. Therefore I will give him a portion among the great. This is the picture of Jesus' resurrection. Jesus didn't simply die a sacrificial death, but he rose to life.

Guaranteeing that his death was indeed sufficient to cover the mistakes of our failures and our going our own way.

He bore the sin of many, did Jesus. He substituted for us. He is truly a satisfying solution for our needing to be forgiven.

For being brought into a relationship with God. That the gulf between God and us can be restored. We've recently remembered again the incidents of Anzac.

And in a book called The Sands of Dunkirk, a surgeon, Lieutenant Richard Premry, we are told, wept as he watched a dying soldier strip off his blanket and place it across the shivering body of an ammonia stricken trooper in the next bunk.

[23 : 34] Such actions are heroic and impressive and incredibly brave, are they not? And I have no doubt that Philip explained the courageous actions of Jesus as he paid the huge debt standing against us.

As he stripped off his blanket of righteousness and wrapped it around the world in its sin-sick state. The Son of God took my guilt. He took my place.

He took your place. He gave up the joy and the comfort of his Father's fellowship and love so I could be comforted and share the lasting joy of the Father's company. My identity in Jesus Christ is that of a forgiven child.

One who is fully and utterly restored to relationship with God. Jesus, the solution to my search for a satisfying friendship that would pass from now into eternity.

You see, Philip played the role of Sue in my search for coffee. And a disappointing search suddenly becomes fruitful. Because Philip had already met the one he was searching for.

[24 : 38] And was guided by him to find him. This eunuch in the end doesn't find God. God finds him. And maybe as you look at your experience in life, you know there's been Christian people who've come across your path and you've heard sermons and you've felt touched by them but you still haven't surrendered.

You're still 40 centimetres away from being Christian. Moving from the head to the heart to the will to the control centre of your life. And so we need to move on to the last point that we discover in this passage.

We've seen the man's search. We've seen the solution in Jesus. And finally we come to the surrender. I'm one of those sort of people, or used to be at least, that when we went on holidays with the children, we used to live on the south coast of New South Wales.

And a few times we went up to the Gold Coast for holidays. And when you're going to the Gold Coast and live on the south coast, what you do, your goal is to get there as quickly as possible to enjoy the Gold Coast. Forget about it.

The ride is just a pain in the neck to get to where you want to get to. I mean, those garages that are on the opposite side of the road, you were never intended to stop at them. You've got to have a garage on your side of the road because it takes too long to cross the road and get petrol on the other side.

[25 : 49] Those swing sets that you pass going through country towns are not for children to play on. They're to be looked at because we're heading for the holiday. We can't stop. We have to keep moving. And I think sometimes that's what our lives are like.

We don't have time to stop. We're so busy that we give a little squeeze a moment on a Sunday morning or maybe in a Bible study, but he's not the center and focus of our lives. And that's what he claims.

It's interesting in this scene that it's not until Philip has finished explaining the gospel as it were and clearly has talked to him about the importance of surrendering his life through repenting and turning to God and putting his faith in Jesus through a commitment to baptism.

That the man finally sees some water and says, I need to stop. Stop the chariot, he says. Is it time for you to stop? To unburden yourselves of your own agendas, your own attitudes, your own appetites, your own entanglements, your own priorities, your own values, your busyness, your inappropriate attractions.

Is it time to strip yourself naked, to stop covering up your pain, your doubt, your shame and your guilt? Philip had no doubt explained clearly what was the standard response to Jesus if he wanted to surrender.

[27 : 13] It was to turn and to trust, to repent and be baptized. To have this symbolic washing of water as a way of saying, I want to be cleansed and washed and brought into a relationship with God and find forgiveness of sins and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The eunuch had had an aha experience and so he wanted to fully commit and it was a public thing. It wasn't private. He had an entourage, at least someone riding the chariot for him.

There was someone else witnessing his commitment to Christ. In order to change a ride, you have to stop one and get on the other, don't you? Are you ready to stop this morning and get off the ride that you're where you're driving and allow God to drive your life in Jesus?

Is God saying to you this morning, wait a minute, joy and contentment, a sense of belonging and significance. The solution to your search for satisfaction is found in surrendering to my son.

Turn and trust. Jesus died for you. Free forgiveness. Pardon is available. Unconditional love is not a fantasy. It's the real in the gift of my son on the cross. And why should you do it?

[28 : 27] So you can have a new attitude, a new perspective on life. This man went on his way rejoicing. Where did this joy come from? I suggest from what Philip had explained. That forgiveness, a new freedom was available.

And a new gift, a new heart was available in the gift of the Holy Spirit, the joy of a friendship which will never quit, satisfaction for a lifetime. Are you ready to surrender today?

Are you willing to stop your own chariot and to allow God to become the centre and focus of every single nook and cranny of your life? If you are, then the prayer on the other side of the green sheet is a way you can do this.

It's a way of surrendering. Let me read the prayer for you. Dear God, please forgive me for I've followed too many false paths in my search for meaning and joy.

That's the, I'm sorry I've made bad choices part of the prayer. Then there's the thank you part of the prayer. Thank you for sending Jesus, your son, to die in my place so that I may be forgiven and receive the Holy Spirit.

[29 : 34] That's, God, I'm thankful there's a solution that you've provided for a way back. And finally, there's the change me part of the prayer. Please change me so that I may find true and lasting satisfaction in following the risen Lord Jesus.

We don't change overnight. We need help. Just as Jeff also mentioned, it's over a season that our faith grows and deepens. So we need to ask God to be with us and help us in that process.

I'm going to pray this prayer aloud. If that prayer resonates with where you are this morning, if as I've been speaking, God has touched your heart and your soul, the inner spring of your life, and you know you have never had that true deep joy that comes from being forgiven, can I urge you to say this prayer quietly in your own hearts with me?

It's not clever. It's not, it's not magical. It just requires you to be honest in your crying out to him and God will meet you where you're at. So let us pray.

Dear God, please forgive me for I have followed too many false paths in my search for meaning and joy. Thank you for sending Jesus, your son, to die in my place so that I may be forgiven and receive the Holy Spirit.

[30 : 49] Please change me so that I may find true and lasting satisfaction in following the risen Lord Jesus. Amen.