

Jesus' Mission and Our Part

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[0 : 0 0] I wonder how many of you enjoy going to Ikea, shopping there. My family has bought a lot of things from Ikea.

We've gone a few times, I guess, and it's always a lot of fun. My favorite is eating the meatballs. But when you get home, when you've bought a few things, you bring them home in those flat packs.

You have to build them yourself. And when we do, sometimes, not every time, in fact, very rarely, something very strange happens. Everything just works.

The instructions are in the box. All the parts are in the box. The Allen key as well that you need. We follow the instructions and everything fits together.

And there's no extra bits left over. It all just works. And unfortunately, this doesn't happen every time, does it?

[1 : 0 1] Now, in life, it can often feel the same way with many things. Even just thinking a quick trip to the shops can suddenly become a right mess.

We can't find somewhere to park. We begin to get stressed and anxious. And then by the time we get into the shops, we forget what we've come for. Or we spend so long looking for it and we can't find it.

And then we do. And there's ten different varieties. It's sometimes quite messy. Well, I think we often think the same way in evangelism.

It feels the same way a lot of the time. Most of the time, it never feels like it's just going smoothly. Or it just works, does it? It often feels like trying to build something from Ikea when pieces are missing.

Or when they don't fit together. We might see an opportunity. Then we get nervous. You open your mouth and nothing comes out. And you just end up standing there with your mouth hanging open.

[2 : 0 7] Or when we say something and then we walk away from the conversation thinking, I wish I'd remembered to say this important thing as well. Or I really made a mess of explaining that.

Or perhaps I think my friend might hate me now. It often just doesn't seem to work. Well, in today's passage, we've seen an evangelism story where everything does just work.

And because it does, this story can give us some tips about evangelism. Now, it doesn't mean that it will always work exactly like this. Since, for one thing, we're not Philip.

And we don't live back in the early church as he did. But even so, our passage should encourage us with how we think about God's mission. And our part in it.

So, last week, we saw from verse 1 of chapter 8. Have a look in your Bibles at the top of the page. The persecution in Jerusalem caused all the believers to be scattered.

[3 : 1 1] And we saw Philip. He traveled into Samaria. When he was there, he performed signs. And he healed people. But remember, it was the preaching of the good news that converted the people.

The people believed the gospel and were baptized. Then today, we will see the continued fulfillment of the summary verse for Acts, chapter 1, verse 8, which is on the screen.

You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth, as the gospel is preached to someone today who is literally from the end of the earth.

Now, it's a short passage. So, I thought we'd begin by going through the whole thing and noticing a few things as we go. So, now we're at point 1 on your outlines.

And we're going to take a look from verse 26. Let's read. Now, an angel of the Lord said to Philip, Go south to the road, the desert road, that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.

[4 : 19] So, he started out, and on his way, he made an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of the Kandaki, which means queen of the Ethiopians.

This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, and on his way, a home, was sitting in his chariot, reading the book of Isaiah the prophet. The Spirit told Philip, Go to that chariot and stay near it.

So, last time, notice, compared to last time, it starts quite differently. Last time, Philip set out, back in verse 5, for Samaria all on his own.

But this time, in verse 26, an angel of the Lord tells him to go. So, God is directing him. And then we have the eunuch.

I think Luke, in particular, tells us two things about the eunuch. The first one is Luke tries to show us how interested that he is in the true God.

[5 : 20] So, he's just traveled a long way from Jerusalem to worship, which is at the end there of verse 27. He might have taken all of his annual leave to go on that journey.

He even has his own copy of Isaiah in verse 28. Remember, it would not have been common back then to have their own copy of the Bible. You couldn't just download a Bible app on your phone or buy a \$20 paperback.

Owning his own copy is kind of a big deal. And he's even reading it on his way home from the temple. That's like you bring a friend to church, and then afterwards, as you're driving home, they're reading the Bible in the car on the way.

So, we can see this guy is very interested in God already. But the second thing Luke shows us is how important he is. So, back in verse 27, we see he's the chief financial officer of the queen.

And he's even got his own chariot. Where is Ethiopia? Well, I find it helpful to have a look at a map. So, we have one here. You can see Samaria at the top, where he begins.

[6 : 36] And then in the bottom left-hand side is Gaza, which is on the way to Egypt. Now, we don't know exactly where the desert road is that he mentions, or that the angel mentions.

But it might be where that red line is, and they meet somewhere along the way. And actually, Ethiopia is not on that map. It didn't fit. It's way down past Egypt, a long way away.

It's on the very edge of the Roman Empire. So, it is literally the end of the earth. So, this Ethiopian, here we have, he's not only interested in God's word already, but he's an important person and a person of influence.

He's in the perfect position to proclaim the gospel to his country. So, we have the perfect person to proclaim the gospel to the ends of the earth.

And then the final thing we notice in this section, in verse 29, once again, God, through his spirit, directs Philip to go near the chariot. And now let's look at their conversation, which is verses 30 to 35.

[7 : 47] Verse 30, Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. Do you understand what you're reading? Philip asked. How can I? He said, unless someone explains it to me.

So, he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. This is the passage of scripture the eunuch was reading. He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he did not open his mouth.

In his humiliation, he was deprived of justice. Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth. The eunuch asked Philip, tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?

Then Philip began with that very passage of scripture and told him the good news about Jesus. So, Philip speaks up in verse 30. And actually, this is the only time in our passage Luke records Philip's words as he speaks.

And when he does, I notice Philip's not aggressive. He speaks with grace. He only, he just asks a question. Do you understand what you're reading? But that question, it leads to more questions, doesn't it?

[9 : 03] And the eunuch ends up leading their conversation for the rest of it. And now, as for the passage he's reading, could there even be a better Old Testament passage to point to Jesus than this one?

The verses from the servant song, Isaiah 53, which we had in our first reading, is one of the most clear prophecies about Jesus' death, isn't it?

And while there's only two verses quoted here in our passage, remember he had his own copy, so they probably read through the whole thing.

It really is, it's the passage to begin starting to talk about Jesus. As the eunuch is directing the conversation, he then even asks, who is Isaiah talking about?

So Philip can answer him, telling him in verse 35, the good news about Jesus. It's pretty amazing, right? It would be like, your friend comes up to you and they say, I've been reading through John 3.16.

[10 : 12] Can you explain that to me, please? How good would that be? Now, our last scene, quickly, is from verse 36. So let's read from there.

As they traveled along the road, they came to some water, and the eunuch said, Look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptized? And he gave orders to stop the chariot.

Then Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and Philip baptized him. When he 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 around, preaching the gospel in all the towns, until he reached Caesarea. The eunuch believes the gospel, and now he's ready to be baptized, and there just happens to be some water, even though, remember, it's called the Desert Road.

Well, the eunuch, he continues to direct things as well. He asks Philip to baptize him. He even stops the chariot. Then also, we see for the third time, by the Spirit, God directs Philip.

[11 : 24] The Spirit of the Lord just, ooooh, Star Trek teleports him, or something, over to Azotus. And he continues to preach the gospel as he goes. And then for the eunuch, well, he leaves rejoicing.

When I was young, I thought, maybe he's rejoicing because he understands Isaiah, because Isaiah is really hard to understand. No, but really, he's rejoicing because he now understands the gospel, isn't it?

The good news about Jesus' atoning and sacrificial death on the cross for the forgiveness of sins for all who believe. Now, isn't that worth rejoicing about?

So, what does this mean for us and our evangelism? Well, we're at point two on your outlines now. That is, that God is in control of his mission.

So, we've seen this in many ways in our passage. Three times, verse 26, 29, 39, God directs Philip with an angel or by his Spirit.

[12 : 30] Then we have these amazing God coincidences. Well, they're not coincidences, are they? What do you call them? God incidences. Some people do.

The first, we have the Ethiopian. He's an important and powerful man. And he's from the end of the earth. He's the perfect person to take the gospel there. Second, he just happens to be reading Isaiah 53.

The perfect passage to begin talking about Jesus and the gospel. And third, there just happens to be water on the desert road. And it was just when the eunuch was ready to be baptized.

We also see that God's at work in the eunuch's life. He's been preparing him for this. As he's interested in the God of the Bible, he's visiting the temple and he's reading scripture.

The point is clear, isn't it? God is in control of his mission no matter what. I mean, Philip, he just simply does what he's told, doesn't he? The only time he took the initiative was when he asked that one question.

[13 : 34] Yeah, Philip does things. He shares the gospel. He baptized the man. But all those things, he was following instructions. He was just doing what God or what the eunuch asked him to do.

They all depend on the work that God had done, preparing everything. And so we might think, well, isn't this an extreme example? It's like it looks too good to be true.

Does this kind of opportunity doesn't really happen normally? Well, I want to share with you two examples in my own experience. They're recent. The first one, when I lived in Brisbane a couple of years ago, I used to carpool with a friend once a week.

And he knew I was a Christian and he didn't mind that. So sometimes, every now and then, he would ask me about what do Christians believe? Or why is that important to me?

Why do I care about that? And I think the first time I had the chance to explain the gospel to him, I couldn't believe it. I felt it was a mixture of joy and confusion.

[14 : 41] Like, is he really just going to let me explain it? I thought people didn't really want us to talk about that. And the great thing about being in the car is he couldn't run away.

Especially because he was the one driving. The second example is more recent. It comes from the AFES ministry, the university Christian group, with the international students, as it's called, focus.

So at Melbourne Uni, I've been there for the last two years. And every year, the beginning of the year, new students will come from all over the world to study in Melbourne.

And we run Bible studies for non-Christians to learn about the gospel. And at the start of the year, as people introduce themselves, almost always someone, maybe two people, a couple of people, they would say something like, I really want to learn about Jesus or about the Bible because I can't do that in my country.

Or people would say, I think I really want to learn about Jesus because I'm planning to become a Christian. Or I think I'll become a Christian. The first time I heard that, I was very surprised.

[15 : 55] I think I felt like Philip when the eunuch asked him to explain about Jesus. God is absolutely still at work in people's lives today. And if God is in control of his mission, then that's a great comfort for us.

When sharing the gospel feels like assembling furniture from Ikea, something like Arkelstorp, without any instructions, it's a desk if you're wondering, it gives us confidence to know that God is in control.

That God can still use us and will use others to keep preaching the gospel. When we're struggling and fumbling and panicking about how to answer a question, it's a great relief for us to know that God is more powerful than our failure.

When we pray for people to hear the gospel and to believe in Jesus, we can know that God is at work in the world and in people's lives. And when, as there are more and more attempts in our country to limit religious freedom, we can know that God will continue to ensure that his gospel keeps going to the ends of the earth.

No matter what, God is in control and he will keep directing his mission. But like Philip, we still have our part to play, don't we? So this is our third point on our outlines.

[17 : 21] The first thing to say, of course, is we're not Philip. So for instance, God doesn't tend to teleport us around different places to preach the gospel.

But even so, as ourselves, God has a part for us to play in sharing the gospel. Last week, Andrew was talking about how holy living might get people interested, giving us opportunities to preach the good news.

Just like Philip's miracles made the Samaritans pay attention to him. Or we could ask a question to prompt a conversation, like Philip does today.

Philip's question then led to the eunuch asking other questions and directing the conversation. It reminds us of Colossians chapter 4, verse 5 and 6, which is up on the screen.

Be wise in the way you act towards outsiders. Make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

[18 : 28] So we might find opportunities from what we say or from how we live as people ask us about it. And we have a chance to answer. For example, like the eunuch, someone might be asking you, what are you reading?

If they see your Bible on your table at home or if they see you reading it, maybe on the bus. I also know people who like to memorize Bible stories and then when they get the opportunity, they can share them.

Of course, if somebody does ask, it helps to have been reading something in the Bible. My grandma also used to share Bible stories with my sister and I when we were young.

And I still remember a lot of them, which is amazing because her English wasn't very good. For another example, even when life is tough, when there's difficulties, if we go into hospital, for example, we have opportunities there.

I know of people who have boldly said to the doctor that they trust in God no matter what happens or that they look to eternal life with peace and with assurance because of Jesus.

[19 : 40] Or for another one, what about talking about what we've heard at church when people ask us? When we're with family or friends, if we're picking up grandkids or if some of you are spending time at community clubs, inevitably people will ask, what did you do on the weekend?

And this is a great chance to go right ahead, isn't it? Sharing the most encouraging thing we've heard or something gospel-centered that we've heard last Sunday. And if people really don't want to hear it, well, the worst they can do is they can make sure to not ask us next week.

So it doesn't have to be someone who asks us, oh, can you explain the whole book of Isaiah or the whole book of Romans? There are chances to share the gospel as people ask us what we've been reading, what we've heard, or even how we are going.

But it takes boldness to answer with, I'm worried about this, but I'm trusting God in it, rather than just saying, I'm fine, how are you?

Nice weather today. It takes boldness, doesn't it? Finally, I think our passage shows us some helpful things that we can do to be ready to make the most of those opportunities.

[21 : 00] So for one, being willing to talk about Jesus, as Philip was with the eunuch. He didn't just talk about Isaiah the whole time and then get stuck there, but he pointed to Jesus.

Since as we saw last week, the good news about Jesus is what saves. The best place to practice talking about Jesus and about Christian things is here at church after the service with our Christian brothers and sisters.

So I encourage you, ask people what have they been reading, what's been encouraging them, so that it won't be daunting to talk about Jesus with other people.

Second, we should know the gospel and be able to explain it, like Philip was, being able to preach it. This is not just beneficial for preaching to others.

It's good for ourselves to preach the gospel to ourselves, to think about God's word, chewing on it, meditating on it, maybe to memorize parts of the Bible and being ready to share those, or have your testimony ready to share.

[22 : 05] Andrew is actually running a testimony workshop today. It's at 12 o'clock. So I encourage you to come and that will help you with that as well.

And the third thing is to pray. After all, we've seen in our passage that God is the one in control of his mission. We have confidence that God is sovereign over all people.

No matter what our world does, we can take comfort in knowing that he will grow his church no matter how well we play our part. So let's go and play our part.

Now let's pray that God would be at work in the lives of our friends and family and the people that we know and bring about opportunities for us to share. Let's pray.

Lord God, I thank you for your word. I thank you that you are in control of your mission, that you are the one who directs the preaching of the gospel to the ends of the earth.

[23 : 08] I thank you that you use us, that you give us opportunities to be part of it. Please help us, God, to be bold and to be ready. Help us to make the most of every opportunity.

Help us to answer those who ask with grace and to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.