

Acts 8:26-40

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: 09 February 2024

Preacher: Paul Levy

[0 : 00] Turn, if you will, to Acts chapter 8. Acts chapter 8. If you've got a Black Church Bible, it's on page 917. It can be noisy, can't it?

And so, I want to speak just for a couple of minutes to parents and to all of us. We believe that the Bible teaches that children should be part of corporate worship. They belong. We want them to be with us, seeing mum and dad, seeing uncles and aunts, seeing others, growing up, worshipping and learning, seeing that for our children, this is for them.

They belong as much as we do. The children of the people of God in the New Testament, they're addressed. It's just assumed that they would be there. And so, we love having children with us. It's one of the great joys, isn't it, to see a generation of kids grow up into young people and adulthood still following the Lord. And we're also aware that for children to be part of public worship, that takes training, to learn, to sit and to listen.

And so, we want to say that we have great sympathy with the parents of little ones. We know it's not easy. As Ruben said earlier, there is a supervised crash for babies.

[1 : 37] And there is a room in the church lounge has the service beamed into it. And so, if your child is getting a little bit scratchy and a little bit too noisy, please feel totally free to take them out into that room.

We recognise that a number of you are training your children. And we want to really encourage you in that. And we know that it's easy. Well, we know it's easy to be frustrated with noise.

And we want to bear with one another in this. It demands, doesn't it, us as a church family, a high degree of patience. And so, let me give you a couple of tips to the congregation.

Turning around and glaring is probably not a good thing. Tutting under your breath isn't particularly helpful. Above all, pray for our parents.

Pray for our children. Love our children. We've got to bear with one another on this, haven't we?

And so, if you want to understand a little bit more of our approach to children in this church, there's a book on the bookstall written by Jason Halepoulis, Let the Children Worship.

[2 : 44] It's really, really terrific. It's helpful for parents, but helpful for all of us. Let's pray for each other. Let's pray for our children. Our Father, we thank you for the great blessing and privilege of corporate worship.

There are brothers and sisters in parts of the world that are forbidden from meeting together. There are people, our brothers and sisters, who meet in fear of their lives today. And so, we are a privileged people.

And we thank you so much for our children. We thank you for our little ones. We thank you for the promises of the covenant for them, that you will be our God and the God of our children. We pray that our children will grow up knowing and enjoying their God, following him, enjoying being with the people of God, hearing your voice in worship.

And so, we pray that as your word is preached now, by the power of your Holy Spirit, you would speak to us. For we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. There are times out there when people open up their hearts to us.

We're talking with them. And suddenly, they tell us something we didn't know before. Or we knew it, but we didn't know how deeply. And they felt it. And they pour out their heart to us.

[4 : 00] And we leave knowing that person a little bit more. Having greater affection for them. And we understand what makes them tick.

We understand what they're about. And Acts chapter 8 is a passage where the living God shows us his heart. He shows us what makes them tick.

He shows us what he's about. He shows us his heart for people like you and people like me. And you'll know that the plot line of Acts unfolds from Acts chapter 1 and verse 8.

And the risen Lord Jesus says to his apostles, you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you. And you will be my witnesses. And here's the stages in Jerusalem and Judea. And then in Samaria.

And then to the ends of all the earth. And that is the story of Acts. Do you see the picture? The Father has sent the Son. And the Son is now sending his apostles.

[5 : 00] He's sending them out in the power of the Holy Spirit to be his witnesses. In Jerusalem and in Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth. And the Jerusalem crowds, they hear this.

And thousands of them become Christians. And then we saw the next stage of the gospel going to Samaria. The good news of the Lord Jesus. Chapter 8 verse 1.

Can you see it? There arose on that day a great persecution. Against the church in Jerusalem. And they are scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria.

And remember what happened. You go further on in the chapter. And those that were scattered. Verse 8. They go about preaching the word. And crowds become Christians.

And verse 8. What's the result? Much joy in that city. Do you see what's happening? The living God is reaching out to the world. Jerusalem. Judea.

[6 : 02] Samaria. Samaria. The ends of the earth. And you might think, well that's very impressive. But it's a little bit impersonal. Don't you want to know a little bit about the people?

Who were they? What happened to them? How did meeting Jesus change them? It's a really thrilling thing, isn't it? To hear how people became Christians.

I hope you do that over the lunch table. I hope when you meet someone new. And over the lunch table. You say, why don't you do it maybe after Judea? How did you come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ?

For many of us it'll be, well I can never remember a time when I didn't know and love the Lord Jesus. But for many others it's not like that, isn't it? And there are some amazing stories in this room. Thrilling stories of how people have come to know the Lord Jesus.

And it turns out that these people that we meet in Acts are a little bit, well, are a lot like you and me. I'm going to break the section into three scenes. The first is a divine appointment.

[7 : 10] A divine appointment. Look at verse 25. Can you look at that? Now when they testified and spoke in the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem. Back to HQ. Preaching the gospel to many villages in Samaria.

Peter and John, they go back to Jerusalem via Samaria. That's where the action is. Where the crowds are being converted. But verse 26, look what happens.

An angel of the Lord said to Philip, rise. And go towards the south to the town that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza. And you need to know that angels are very rare in the Bible.

And usually when angels appear, they appear to signify that this is a key moment. An angel appears to say, hang on a minute, something significant is going to happen. It's a signal to everyone that you need to pay attention.

Everyone is going back to where the crowds were. Back to Jerusalem. But God wants Philip to do something he would never have thought of by himself doing.

[8 : 18] He's told to go south. To go into the desert. Why? It doesn't sound very strategic, does it? People are always talking about strategic church planting.

Well, Philip doesn't seem to buy into that. Who is in the desert? Verse 27. He rose and he went. There was an Ethiopian there. A eunuch.

A court official of Candace. Queen of the Ethiopians. He was in charge of all her treasure. He'd come to Jerusalem to worship. Ancient Ethiopia is that part of Africa that we now know as Sudan.

And the Romans said that it was the ends of the earth. What did Jesus say? Jesus said, you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the ends of the earth.

And so the living God sends Philip to go after this man. Of course he does. We're told he was a eunuch.

[9 : 21] He's unable to have children. He's unmarried. And in the ancient world what often happened is that people who were in high government, those who were in high government had important roles.

Because their servants were often castrated for various reasons. This guy we read, he's been put in charge of the treasury. The treasury of the Ethiopian queen.

Actually the queen mother. And we see, don't we, that this guy is really different to Philip. Philip is an ordinary Jew. Here is a high-ranking African who is very different.

But in verse 29 the Holy Spirit says to Philip, go over and join this chariot. You can imagine, can't you, Philip looking at this guy saying, are you sure you want me to do that?

It seems very unlikely that a man from the ends of the earth, this high-ranking African, would be interested in the Lord God of Israel. But here is the thing.

[10 : 24] There is a good chance that this man from the ends of the earth, this high-ranking African sitting in this chariot, well, it's very unlikely, isn't it, that he would be, that God would be interested in him, we might think.

Look what's happened so far. He's been to Jerusalem. It would have been a very, very long journey, wouldn't it, from Sudan. It's about 4,000 kilometers. Can you look in verse 27, he's gone to Jerusalem. Why?

What's the reason? To worship. We don't know what led him to worship in Jerusalem. And we don't know what he'd shared of the God of Israel, the God of the Jews that had drawn him.

But most commentators agree that his journey to worship at the Temple of Jerusalem would have left him feeling very disappointed. This Ethiopian eunuch would have come away from Jerusalem feeling marginalized.

If you went to the temple in Jerusalem and you were not a Jew, you had to stay in the outer courts of the temple.

[11 : 34] You weren't allowed into the temple. If you were a non-Jew, you were allowed into the outer courts. But this man is not only a non-Jew, he's not only a Gentile, he's a eunuch.

Which meant he was not allowed to gather in the assembly of God's people. He'd gone all that way, 4,000 kilometers, in a chariot, pulled by oxen, to not be allowed to gather with the assembled people of God.

He'd gone all that way, hungry to worship God. And what had happened? He'd been shut out. How do you think that would have made him feel?

But amazingly, he is not put off. Verse 28, he's on his way home. He's sitting in his chariot, reading the book of Isaiah the prophet. Which had been written about 700 years before Jesus.

What that means is he's taken the trouble to go to waterstones. He's taken the trouble to go to a physical bookshop. He managed to find one.

[12 : 41] Back in those days, there were real, proper bookshops. He bought a scroll of the Bible for himself. It's an expensive thing to buy. There's something in him that wants to know more of this God.

He'd heard about it. And so he might be sitting there thinking, Of course, this God, he's not very interested in me. But he starts reading the Bible.

He starts with Genesis. And that means that the God of the Bible is the God who made the world. Not just the God of the Jews. You get to the book of Psalms.

All nations would worship him. There was a psalm, actually. We don't know whether the Ethiopian read it. But it says, The Cushites, those who are from Ethiopia, One day they would worship the Lord God.

The heart of God, the God of the Bible, is a heart for all nations. And of course, he sees Philip. Into the desert.

[13 : 44] He sends Philip into the desert to go after this Egyptian. And maybe, just maybe this morning, You have come to church, come to this church, And you get how the Ethiopian feels.

And maybe you're curious about God. And you wish that you had some kind of relationship with him That other people seem to have. You look at other people in this church, And maybe you're a little bit wistful About the relationship with God that they seem to have.

But perhaps, Perhaps, Maybe people have made you feel unwelcome. They've made you feel unwelcome because you're different. Maybe you look different.

Maybe you sound different. Maybe you feel different. Maybe you dress differently. And it's left you thinking, That this is just not for me. It's not for people like me.

Do you see God's heart? This is the God who sends Philip after Ethiopian eunuchs. And so if you're here today, And you're not someone that would call themselves a Christian, It may just be that

there's someone who's come into your life.

[15:04] Who is a Christian? And there's something about them that is drawing them to you.

Or it may be this morning that you are a believer in the Lord Jesus. You are a follower of the Lord Jesus. And as you think about your week ahead, You think about people who you interact with, And you think that you just happen to work with a load of people.

Or you think you happen to live on the same street as a load of people. But what if God has sent you to them? Because they're on his heart.

Because he wants to reach out to them. Have you thought of that? Maybe you're here this morning and thinking, Where do I fit in with God's plan? Maybe you're thinking, Where am I supposed to go? Who am I to speak to? God never sends me an angel. Angels are very rare. We are not promised angels, are we? But we see God's heart. We see that God wants his people to go after people who feel shut out.

[16:17] And so maybe it's someone in your class. In your school. Maybe it's the guy in the shop. Maybe it's someone at work you share a desk with.

And you say, Well she is so different to me. And you just assume that she's not interested in God. She's not that kind of person. But do you see what God is doing in Acts chapter 8?

What if God has begun to work in their heart, and given them a hunger to know him? What if he's sent you to reach them? And so through Acts chapter 8, is he speaking to us this morning?

He is saying to you and I, that I am in control. God is in control by his spirit. And I am at work sending Philip.

And by my spirit, I am at work in the Ethiopian preparing him. It's not an accident. It's not a coincidence. I've brought these two together.

[17:22] And so what that means for us, in 2025 in Ealing, he's saying, wherever you are, whoever you are, you are not there by accident.

And you are not here this morning by accident. God is the great missionary God. Can you see God's heart? And so as we think about the week ahead as a church, that person who sits at your desk, they're not someone that you just share a desk with.

This is someone that the Lord wants you to reach out to. And maybe that is why you're there in that workplace, in that place, sharing a desk with them. That's why you're on that school run with those mums.

Do you see how this changes everything? It changes Monday morning, doesn't it? That God is reaching out to the world, and he does that through his people. That's why we gathered last week as a church, to pray, for what the Lord is doing.

Because it's not about our plans. We would have gone back, wouldn't we, to Jerusalem where the crowds were? No, Lord, we pray, reach out to the world, and would you use us?

[18:40] Send us to the people you want your gospel to go to. I have a friend who's always got stories about people they've talked to about the Lord Jesus.

They're just one of those people. They're really, really ordinary, but they always seem to naturally talk about the Lord Jesus to people. I'm terribly envious of them.

Takes me all my courage. I'm stammering tongue. But they seem to be able to talk about the Lord Jesus naturally. And I asked my friend, how is it that you seem to have so many stories?

And they said to me this, they start every day with a prayer, Lord, use me to reach out to someone today. Lord, use me to reach out to someone today.

It's a great prayer, isn't it? Lord, use me to reach out to someone today. A divine appointment.

[19:47] Secondly, an open Bible. An open Bible. Can you see that? Verse 28. The Ethiopian is reading away. And in those days, you would read out loud. And Philip runs up to the chariot, which isn't quite as impressive as you might think.

And the chariot is kind of pulled by oxen, so it wouldn't be going very quick. The oxen's trundling along, but he runs up to the side of the chariot and he says, remarkably, do you understand what you're reading?

That is quite bold, isn't it? I just imagine tomorrow, I'm cycling along the Exbridge Road and a car pulls up at the traffic lights. And in the back is Sadiq Khan, London's mayor, and he's reading something.

Would I be bold enough to tap on his car window and say, do you understand what you're reading? I'd probably want to say a couple of other things as well. But it is bold, isn't it, to say that? Do you

understand what you're reading?

Ethiopian says an amazing thing. Do you see that verse 31? How can I? How can I understand unless someone explains it to me? And so he invites Philip to come up and sit with him in the chariot and explain it.

[21 : 03] Sometimes Christians can say something like this, Christianity, the Christian faith, is caught, not taught. And there is something in that. But Christianity is not just a pattern of living for someone to copy.

There is something that needs to be explained. There is someone who needs to be explained. The Ethiopian, he doesn't get what he's reading. So he invites Philip up and we read in verse 32, the eunuch is reading this passage of scripture.

You'll be familiar with it, those of you are regulars. He was led like a sheep to the slaughter. And as a lamb before his shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. In his humiliation, justice was denied him.

Who can describe his generation? for his life is taken away from the earth. We don't know why it's this particular section of Isaiah that the Ethiopian eunuch was reading.

But I wonder if he might have come across Isaiah chapter 56. Will you come with me to Isaiah 56? Isaiah chapter 53.

[22 : 14] And I want you to listen to what Isaiah chapter 56 says. It says in verse 3, Isaiah chapter 56 in verse 3.

It says this, it says, Let not the foreigner who has joined himself to the Lord say, The Lord will surely separate me from his people.

And let not the eunuch say, Behold, I'm a dry tree. For thus says the Lord to the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who 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 sons and daughters.

I will give them an everlasting name. They shall not be cut off. And I suspect that if the Ethiopian eunuch read Isaiah 56, his heart would have burst with joy.

Because here is a man who for his whole life has been shut out. And he's gone to worship God at the temple and he's been shut out.

[23 : 32] But here is a promise. Here is a promise that one day people like him are going to be welcomed in. And here is a promise that people like him are going to be given something better than sons and daughters.

Can you imagine that promise for a eunuch? And you're thinking when? But how? And he flicks back and he comes across this person who we've read about in these verses that are quoted in Acts chapter 8.

This person who was humiliated, who was deprived of justice and this person who you see in the middle of verse 33, who can speak of his descendants? What's going to become of his generation? And these people who've been eunuch is thinking this is someone like me. I've been humiliated. I've been made to stand outside and this is someone like me.

Someone with no descendants and he wants to know more. Who is this? Who is it that the prophet is talking about? And verse 34 the eunuch says ask, well who is this person?

[24 : 42] Is this the prophet? Is he speaking about himself? Or is this someone else? And so Philip explains verse 35 Philip opened his mouth and began with this scripture and told him the good news about the Lord Jesus.

Who is this? Who is this that the prophet is speaking about? This is Jesus. This is the Jesus that the apostles have been preaching.

Who's been raised from the dead. Who is Lord of Lords. this is the Son of God who is ascended and sits on the throne of heaven.

The throne of the universe. And you think this morning what possible relevance could the Lord of Lords have for me in my life?

And it turns out doesn't it that the very things I've been through are the very things he's been through. All those things in my life that I think nobody gets it turns out he does.

[25 : 51] Because he's been there. If you've if you come across somebody who has been through what you've been through your heart is automatically drawn to them isn't it?

Aren't you drawn to them? Tell me more. Why did he die? Why was he led like a lamb to the slaughter? What happened? You say it's good news. It doesn't sound like very good news.

Do you see why it needs explaining? And I imagine Philip would have explained the Old Testament system of sacrifices. That God had given his people. He would have explained how our sin our rebellion means that we cannot live with God.

And we think well that just goes to show how mean God is. But no it goes to show how good God is. So good that in his presence there is no sin.

There's no lying. There's no lust. There's no bullying. There's no abuse. There's no promise breaking. There's no war. Isn't that good? A God who will not have sin in his presence.

[26 : 55] That is good. It is good but it's also sobering because when we really understand that he will not have people who lie or bully or abuse in his presence. He will not have us.

But he loves us. And he wants us to be with him. So in his mercy he provides a system of sacrifices and at the heart of that sacrifice the sin of the people is transferred to a lamb.

A lamb that dies. And by his death the lamb the death of the lamb takes away the sin of the people. And Isaiah is saying all that system of sacrifice is pointing forward to somebody who would be the lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world.

And in his death the sins of his people would be dealt with. the Lord Jesus he was cut off. Why?

So that you might come in. And that you might come in not to a temple in Jerusalem. The temple stood for the presence of God.

[28 : 13] The point was to show the people that they were shut out of the temple. It was to show them that they were not only just shut out of a building but they were shut out from the presence of God. And one day God says there will be a lamb who will come who will take away your sin so that you can enter into God's presence.

We who were far away can come near to him. And again and again and again the Lord Jesus has said of himself I am the one that they pointed to.

He was the one who just came to cut off so that you might come in. And you might say today is God really interested in me?

Do you see his heart? This is the God who says eunuchs and bullies and liars and addicts in Jesus I have stepped into your world I have stood in your shoes for all you have done and all that has been done to you I have suffered I have been humiliated for it.

I've died for it I was cut off so that you might come in. In Jesus I became a eunuch so eunuchs could be welcomed in and given something better than sons and daughters.

[29 : 34] Eunuchs could come home could come and live with me forever that is the good news that our God wants the world to hear. and can I say if you're sitting here this morning and you like the Ethiopian you are baffled as to why Jesus died on the cross can I ask you plead with you ask someone to explain it to you ask someone to open up the Bible with you and if you don't know who to ask come and ask me there's nothing we'd love to do more than explain the good news to you but maybe you're not the Ethiopian you get this but you've forgotten it and you think about your life and you think about how things have not been so great recently and you're wondering this morning is God really interested in someone like you?

You're wondering are you really welcome to come into his presence and you keep thinking or you fall back into thinking if I'm good enough then he'll welcome me and that is not the good news that is not the good news because when am I ever good enough?

The good news is not because we make the grade none of us make the grade we are all eunuchs he welcomes me because of the Lord Jesus and so this morning don't look at your life don't think about what you think of yourself don't think about what others think of you fix your eyes on the Lamb of God fix your eyes on the Lord Jesus and if you're thinking about the person that you share a desk with well we must live our lives in a way that adorns the gospel that shows the difference that Jesus has made but it does lead explaining doesn't it?

The Father wants people to get his son to get what he's done and so pray for the Holy Spirit the help of the Holy Spirit to help you to speak of him and why he died and of why his death is good news and pray for that opportunity that is his heart for you a divine appointment an open Bible and then lastly a changed life do you see the Ethiopian's response verse 36 verse 36 and as they were going along they came to a road they were going along the road they came to some water and the eunuch said see here's water it's the middle of a desert what prevents me from being baptised there's a danger isn't there in saying that we need to explain the good news and the danger to that is that the gospel becomes something that we kind of tick a box to you know the terms and conditions it sounds like Christianity becomes assenting to certain truths you've prayed this prayer

hey presto you're a

Christian you've ticked this box you've affirmed that you agree with it please sign here but can you see the Ethiopian he's a changed man the Ethiopian says is there anything to stop me being baptised it's not is there a form it's is there anything to stop me being baptised what we've seen in acts already is that the way to respond to the good news is to get baptised we read in verse 38 that he gave instructions to stop the chariot and Philip and the eunuch get down into the water and Philip baptised him it is pretty amazing there is water in the desert and we do not know how much water there was and we do not know how deep it was the point is this baptism is a visible sign of the washing away of sins and the baptism of the spirit and identifying and joining the people of God it starts by explaining

[34 : 00] Jesus but it doesn't end there becoming a Christian is not just understanding about Jesus it's starting a new life with the Lord Jesus you could sum it up the old life was living for me the new life is living for him and it may be that it's at this point that we begin to shrink back and we think well that doesn't sound like really good news living for him sounds like actually it would spoil my life it sounds like it would cut across all my plans but can you see the end of verse 39 when they came out of the water the spirit suddenly took Philip away and the eunuch didn't see him again but he went on his way rejoicing when the angels announced the birth of Jesus do you remember what good news of great joy for all people chapter 8 verse 8 what happened when the people of Samaria believed there was great rejoicing we live in a culture don't we where more than anything else people want to be happy but happiness is pretty elusive isn't it we try and buy it we try and buy our way to happiness but we never seem to be able to buy quite enough to make us happy we want a relationship to make us happy but most relationships are not that simple we think if I get fit then I'll be happy and that's far more difficult

I'm finding than you saying it and we think of our whole life lived for Jesus that cannot be the way to happiness but the living God is reaching out to us this morning with what will make us truly happy he gives us himself and so you're looking for happiness in all kinds of places all that you long for you will only truly find in him do you long to be loved do you long to be understood do you long to be accepted you will only truly find that in the Lord Jesus do you long for beauty do you long for wisdom do you long for truth for justice only only only will you find that in Jesus do you long for freedom do you long for adventure do you long for a sense of purpose in your life you will only find that in him you long perhaps more than anything else to feel at home at home and it is in him that we come home do you see the

Ethiopian has been on a journey he's looking for something and he goes home rejoicing he says I found it in fact he says I found him I found what I'm looking for or rather he would say he found me and he heads home to the ends of the earth and he doesn't know what the future may hold for him he doesn't know what will happen at work he doesn't know whether his health will hold out he doesn't know how his friends will react but what he knows is this he is not cut off he has come in he's come into life with the living God and he may lose his job and he may get sick and his friends may turn on him but whatever happens God is with him now by his spirit which means whatever happens he has this joy he has what he most longs for and he has what his heart most needs the living

God and he goes home rejoicing and when he gets home do you think he might reach out to his friends let's pray let's pray let's pray let's pray