

Guest Preacher - Rev. Donald M Macleod

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Preacher: Rev. Donald M. Macleod

[0 : 00] That's just for a short time to turn back to the chapter we have there, Acts chapter 8, and the account we have from verse 26 to the end there. Perhaps an account we have some of us heard before, and perhaps some of us many times.

But again, just because we've heard it before, there's still God's word, Acts chapter 8, verse 26. We're taking in the whole account of Philip as he interacts with the Ethiopian eunuch.

At the start today, I made a passing comment, and I'll make it again just now. And perhaps it sounds a bit controversial, but I hope when we go into this time tonight, you'll find it's hopefully not, and it's certainly not.

I said this morning that the gospel cause to flourish, or the gospel cause to spread, the gospel to spread, in Barvis, you don't need a minister.

You don't need a minister. We actually don't need a church building either. And that sounds controversial, and of course we all want a minister.

[1 : 11] I'm very careful saying that to a congregation that has lost its minister. I'm not trying to be insensitive, but I'm being realistic. Brothers and sisters, there are many around the world who would be thankful for a percentage, a tiny percentage, of what we have in terms of ministry, or infrastructure, or buildings.

What does God use to share the gospel? Yes, he uses ministers and elders, and he uses his church in terms of the structure he's given us. It's his structure.

It's good. It's biblical. But day by day, what or who does God use? Brothers and sisters, he uses us. He uses us as friends, as neighbors, as family members.

We spent some time this evening with Philip and this gentleman he encounters. I want to look very generally at five lessons, we could say.

Five lessons from evangelism we learn from Philip. Five ways we can at least grow in our understanding of how do we share the gospel to those around us.

[2 : 22] Now, in many ways, ourselves and Philip and the gentleman he's speaking to, we are worlds apart. This conversation this evening we see here in God's word took place about 2,000, give or take, years ago.

About 2,000, give or take, miles away. Different culture, different language, different skin color. And yet we see similarities that make sense for us here this evening, even in Barvis.

Why? So if you look back past the story, past the details, what is taking place here? This account is quite simply someone who knows and who loves the Lord.

Someone who's been saved by Jesus. Telling someone else all about Jesus. This is someone sharing the gospel.

Brothers and sisters, that unites us here this evening with Philip and the eunuch all these thousands of years ago. What Philip did is what we seek to do still is to not unbarvice, to share the good news about Jesus to anyone and everyone who will listen to us.

[3 : 38] So five, perhaps, lessons on evangelism. First of all, just taking it bit by bit as we have it. First of all, verse 26 down to the first half of verse 27.

Where we see often evangelism takes us in an unexpected direction. That's our first point. An unexpected direction.

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.

Now we read quite a chunk of chapter 8 there. To give us a context, before this, Philip is there. He's sharing the gospel. He's going from town to town in Samaria.

This is an area that really, apart from the Samaritan woman, but this area of Samaria, the gospel is brand new. The Lord is working mightily. It's spreading from town to town.

[4 : 38] There are believers after believers being made. The Lord is saving his people. It's exciting. It's active. But now, Philip, who has done so much work in the busy towns and villages of Samaria, we now see he receives a very specific instruction in verse 26.

He isn't with the rest. We see at the end of verse 25 that the apostles return home and they go home. And away there, they preach to all these towns and villages. That is not what's ahead of poor Philip.

They're going kind of north that way, northeast of sorts. Philip instead is now being told to do what? To head south. Perhaps that means nothing to us, but Luke, as he wrote the book of Acts, he helps us.

He tells us what's south. What does he say? South towards Gaza. Gaza. This is a desert place. What is south? Absolutely nothing.

There's no villages. There's no towns. There's no cities. Not until you reach Gaza. Even today, if you look at a map today, and Google Maps helps a wee bit here.

[5 : 53] If you look at a map today, as you go south from Jerusalem, even today, for all the towns and modern cities we have and everything else, that area, just south of Jerusalem, towards Gaza, even before anything that happened recently, it's a desert place.

Yes, there's a road there now, a large tarmac road, all the barriers and everything, but there's nothing there. There's miles upon miles of desert, dryness, arid landscape.

Well, you can only imagine 2,000 years ago, there was no tarmac then. Poor Peter, poor Philip, sorry, has been told to head, just walk south into the desert.

Now, Philip's been clearly directed, but he's been directed to nothing. He's been directed away from the people, away from the towns, to where at least initially it looks like there's nothing to see, there's no one to meet.

There's no clear way forward, there's no clear understanding why he's been told to walk into the desert. Now, of course, the Lord has a plan, but that plan, we know what happens next.

[7 : 07] We know he meets with this man, but poor Philip doesn't know that yet. He's just walking in the desert. You wonder what's passing through his mind as he began to walk south towards Gaza, this desolate place, this desert place, this hopeless place.

We can't say for sure. Was Philip thinking to himself, why am I being directed to go to this place? There is no gospel work to be done here. There is no gospel blessing to be found here.

Dear brother, dear sister, I know some faces, but Myrtle shared personally and in terms of presbytery work.

We'd hear a bit about Barvis. Personally, I would talk to Myrtle about Barvis, but I don't know what the gospel situation is, not really, in this area.

I just don't. I don't know what the gospel temperature is, you could say, for this community. How many opportunities you're getting to share the good news to your family, friends, and neighbors.

[8 : 19] I don't know what it looks like to be a Christian in this community. Do you see the Lord working, or does it seem that for now He's working elsewhere?

I don't know. Perhaps you might feel somewhat like Philip here. You're thinking, there is nothing here but dry ground.

Perhaps thinking of a loved one. You share the gospel year after year after year. You think there's nothing here but dry ground. There's a desert place. There's no use working hard here because there's nothing happening.

The church isn't growing. If that person isn't showing any more interest than the Lord, whatever your mind might be going to just now. The Lord is working.

And Philip follows the command. And he walks down to the desert place. And here he finds the second lesson of evangelism. The Lord will often lead us, not just in unexpected directions, but also He will lead us to unexpected people.

[9 : 24] Let's carry on following Philip. The second half of verse 27 and verse 28. He goes off. He goes off down towards Gaza. He rose and went.

Verse 27. As Philip follows the instruction of the Lord, he comes across perhaps the last person he would think he'd have to interact with.

This is a person who is so far away from their home, who is now having a rest, having a break in the desert. I didn't look and I should have done how far away Ethiopia is from Jerusalem.

But it's far. We all know it's far. And he's taking one of, I'm sure, many rests. Now we might think it's just one person, a chariot here. And perhaps in Sunday school, I remember a Sunday school book.

It had the Ethiopian man, just a wee old man on his own in a chariot. But this is a king, a court official, I should say. This is a man who has, we see, direct access to the treasury of the Queen of Ethiopia.

[10 : 36] This is a high-level government official. He's not there as a wee old man. He's there, we are sure, in all his finery. We're there, probably he's there being driven, or at least his carriage driven for him, his chariot driven for him.

This is a man of wealth, of great standing. And Philip is there and he sees this man. Now, in all ways possible, and we'll watch how we word things here just this evening, but those who know, you know what I'm trying to say here.

This is a man whose life looked completely different to that of Philip. At a young age, he'd encountered a situation that has left him different to many of those around him.

He's been made different so he would serve in the royal palaces. He's a eunuch. He's a man who has, although he has maybe been deformed, and perhaps the chances are made that way by human hands, unfortunately, as was often the story.

He is a man who, no doubt, had great power. He is, we could say, perhaps the Chancellor of the Shekhar, of Ethiopia. He has the keys. He has the access to the public purse.

[11 : 47] He has the access to the funds, the treasure of the Queen of Ethiopia. Candace, just for a second here, Candace. Now, that's not her name. Candace, Queen of Ethiopia.

Candace is just a title. We know that because there's a lot of Candaces. They're all called Candaces. It's like Your Majesty or like an Egypt pharaoh. You know, every king, every ruler have a title pharaoh given to.

Every queen of Ethiopia have a title Candace given. But here she is, Queen of Ethiopia, all the wealth of that great nation at this time, an incredibly rich nation as we know.

And here Philip finds the man of access to all of his wealth and all of his power. This is a man who is, in many ways, completely different to Philip.

But one thing in common you'll note. Why is this man all the way from Ethiopia? Why is he here? Well, the scripture tells us, in the end of verse 27, he had come to Jerusalem to worship.

[13 : 04] This man, although culturally different, different society, different in terms of his wealth and power and influence, this is a man who believed in God. Now, we know historically, and it's even true to today, it's a fascinating study.

There is a very healthy, strong, culturally Jewish population in Ethiopia and in that area. It's a whole history lesson we won't go into this evening.

I'm sure Miss Macaulay of your own congregation would love to tell you the whole history there, and he would have a far better job than I can. But there's a strong Jewish heritage in Ethiopia. An amazing story of trial and of journey in their own history.

And this is a man who believes in God. He's a Jewish believer. And he's come to do his pilgrimage, you could say, to the temple, to Jerusalem, to worship.

A different colour, different culture, different language, different social class, definitely. And Philip could easily have said, as he was directed by the Spirit, as he saw this man, Philip said, how do I begin to talk to this man?

[14 : 15] No chance. He's a man of power. A different culture to me. A different language to me, mostly. A different understanding of the world to me. A different background to me.

I can't begin to share the gospel. I can't begin to interact with this man. But here we see a gospel truth about to be played out for us.

Those whom the Lord leads us to, we are asking the Lord, Lord, give us gospel sharing opportunities. The ones the Lord then leads us to.

He doesn't just prepare us to share the gospel with them. The Lord, more often than not, prepares them to hear the gospel from us. We see that being played out so clearly for us here, don't we?

We find out in a second. He has been reading. He has big questions. I don't know again about the statistics of Barvis, but in South Lochs, and Tolstah is definitely the same, but in South Lochs, which I probably know statistics exactly a bit better than even Tolstah, the number of those in our villages who have come from outside our island, it's probably just over half now.

[15 : 43] Don't quote me on that. Tolstah is probably a third, if not more now. Now, culturally and socially, there are discussions and debates about that.

That's not our concern this evening. What is our concern this evening? What are we here for? We're here for the gospel. We're here for the gospel. The Lord, in his wisdom, has moved so many people to our island and to our villages from different cultures, different backgrounds.

Perhaps they're not quite as different as Philip and the eunuch. Perhaps they are. And we might think to ourselves, well, how do you begin to share the gospel? How do you begin to interact with my neighbor, or this person or that person in the village?

She's so different to me. They don't see the world the same way I do. Perhaps a different language to me. A different culture, certainly to me. A different outlook on the world to me. How do I begin to share the gospel with them?

At the same time, we forget that every single person, like we once were, brothers and sisters, whether they think it or not, or admit it or not, behind the scenes, in the back of their minds, they are asking all the big questions of life.

[17 : 11] Questions about the Lord. Questions about belief. Questions about their loved ones. Questions about themselves. Questions about their eternity. And if we let those who come to our villages, if we don't engage with them with the gospel, and engage with them as God's people, we are wasting gospel sharing chances the Lord is clearly giving to us.

Philip does not ignore the chance the Lord has given him. Indeed, Philip is prompted by the Spirit, and Philip walks up, verse 29 down to verse 31, he walks up to the carriage. Verse 30, Philip ran up to him, he runs up to him, and Philip hears, overhears the eunuch, reading Isaiah the prophet, and Philip asks, do you understand what you're reading?

That might sound a bit rude to us, but the context doesn't make it rude. It's just a genuine question. Philip says, hello, I'm here, you're reading Isaiah. Do you know what that's about?

Philip simply begins a conversation. Simple conversation. He strikes up, you could say, a gospel conversation, and the eunuch replies, which is an equally honest answer, no.

What does eunuch say? How can I? How can I understand? Unless someone guides me. And there we have immediately Philip's opportunity to share the gospel with this man.

[18 : 38] Philip asks a simple question. Brothers and sisters, how much gospel work has been done from believers asking a simple question to our friends, family, neighbours?

We're so scared about having the right answers. We're so scared about saying the wrong thing. And we're so scared to get things wrong that the chances pass us by. And they pass us by.

And before we know it, we've never shared the gospel in years and years. If we're not sharing the gospel, then we are severely misunderstanding what it is we're called to be and do as Christians.

Simple as that. It is not about having all the facts and figures and knowing all the right answers exactly. Not one of us here this evening has all the facts and figures and right answers.

And there's some individuals, yes, who are so talented with sharing the gospel. They can think of Bible verses and Bible chapters like that. They can give answers to all the questions. Most of us, myself included, can't think fast enough to be good like that.

[19 : 47] What does Philip do? He asks a simple question. Do you understand what you're reading? Do you understand? Do you understand? I wonder if you were to ask that neighbor you haven't spoken to yet or that individual in the village who's moved in recently, if you were to invite them along to this congregation, invite them to church, if you were to ask them what they think or where they stand with the Lord, ask them carefully, use your own words, ask them in an appropriate way, I think you'd be surprised how many of them would gladly come along to this place.

We've seen it recently. The Lord in His wisdom has done that well. In Graver, we saw it years ago. And in Tolstet, an individual asked a couple along recently to our services, and that couple have been waiting.

What for? Have been waiting for an invite. They're waiting to be invited, this individual invited them, and then they come to church every week.

It doesn't require a theology degree. It doesn't require a great level of understanding. What does it require? To follow the prompting of the Lord requires a simple faith like Philip has here towards the eunuch.

Look what happens. Philip asks a question, a simple question. He receives an answer, and he then gets invited to sit beside the eunuch in his chariot. Engage with your family, engage with your neighbors in the gospel, and be surprised as you see them, quite literally, like the eunuch here, and invite you along beside them.

[21 : 34] Look what Philip does. He takes a simple answer he receives, and look how scripture words it. It's so beautiful. Verse 35. Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with the passage of the scripture, he told him, the eunuch, the good news about Jesus.

He uses the opportunity the Lord has given him. Dear brothers and sisters, it's as simple as that. Look at the passage the eunuch was reading, that glorious passage of Isaiah, that horrifying passage of Isaiah, that summary of the gospel written all those years before, and in God's providence, the eunuch is sitting there trying to understand who Isaiah is talking about.

Who is the servant? Who is the lamb that's being killed for the sake of his people? Who is it? Who is it? And from that question, from that wondering in the mind and heart of the Ethiopian eunuch, Philip then takes this text and says quite simply, if I put words into his mouth, let me tell you about the one this text speaks about.

Let me tell you about Jesus. There's no secret, there's no great trick, there's no secret method you can learn if you go for four years to Edinburgh.

It is coming alongside those who desperately need to hear the gospel and saying to them, I can tell you, or saying to them, let me tell you about Jesus.

[23 : 15] You wonder what goes on after we die. You wonder and worry about your own soul, your own sin, and so on. Can I tell you about Jesus? Can I tell you about what he means to me?

And in your own words, in your own way, follow the example of Philip and bring that friend, bring that neighbour on a journey that shows them the beauty of who Jesus is.

We pray that everyone we share the gospel to would respond like the eunuch. Look what happens. He starts talking and it seems to be that they start going along the road. He's still beside him in the chariot, verse 36, and they start going along down the way Philip is heading.

And at some point on that journey, we're not even told when, at some point on that journey, the eunuch obviously fully believes what he's being told. He believes it so much that straight away he says, right, you're saying I can be baptised, then there's some water here, why not be baptised right here and right now?

That is our desire, isn't it? That those we share the gospel with would be so infused by the gospel message we share that they would want to just move on things that quickly. And Philip, of course, has no reason not to do so.

[24 : 34] He goes down and he baptises the eunuch. Now, we perhaps may get distracted here by what happens to Philip and some try and explain this away. I don't think we have to explain it away.

Remember, the book of Acts is in many ways extraordinary. The Lord is doing extraordinary things in this book as a start of this New Testament church. Philip baptises eunuch.

They come up out of the water and God's word says what God's word says. Verse 39. Immediately, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away. He's gone. Philip is now gone.

Now, some will say, oh, he walked away or he was, no, he's gone. He has, as far as eunuch is concerned, he has just been baptised by him and Philip has now just disappeared.

And you see that there. Philip himself, verse 40, he doesn't know himself where he's going. The Lord takes him and places him somewhere else. But Philip found himself at Azotus.

[25 : 31] He's been moved from here to over here instantly. We shouldn't marvel at that. The Lord is using his people well according to his plan. We might get focused on the Lord miraculously moving Philip from one part to another part and we lose track or lose sight of the last thing we're told here about eunuch, which is much more beautiful and much more important for us to hear.

The eunuch, verse 39, saw him no more and went on his way rejoicing. A simple conversation by a man who is willing to follow the leading of the Lord leads to the most unexpected conversion of the most unexpected person.

Now we can't say for certain but secular sources and as it were church tradition would say that this man went home and that a good section of the Ethiopian church came from this man's witness.

Now we can't say that for sure and we shouldn't say that for sure but we can say that this man went home, this man of great power and influence went home rejoicing in Jesus.

this man is dear brothers and dear sisters our calling is impossible in some ways isn't it?

[26 : 58] It's too big for us. This whole community is too big for us. There's so few of us here. Whose strength do we serve the Lord in as we heard this morning?

It's his power. It's Yahweh we follow, the God who needs no help, the God who is fully independent, the God who is fully self-sufficient, the God who is eternal in all his ways and all his power.

He gives us the energy, he gives us the strength, he leads the way. It is his church and like we see here with Philip and the eunuch, the Lord had eternally in his plan that this eunuch would be saved at this time in this day by Philip, a man who simply followed the simple leading of the Lord.

Dear brother, dear sister, don't worry about your lack of education, perhaps, your lack of great theological depth. What is paramount, what is an imperative for us, every one of us, is we engage with our community in sharing the gospel truth.

And our prayer is we would see results to the Lord's glory just like the Ethiopian unit here. As those around us ask us what it's all about, we guide them to Jesus and we'll hear soon enough of many in Barabus in this area who now go on their lives rejoicing.

[28 : 29] Bow our heads now, a word of prayer. We thank you, Lord, for the gift of your word. We thank you once again for the accounts that we see your gospel truth, the historical proof being shown to us.

We ask you to help us to learn from the interaction of Philip and that eunuch. Help us to understand that it is you who leads and guides your people.

Help us to understand that you care and you love your people far more than we ever will and ever can. We pray just now for the many, even in Barabus, who are asking the big questions, the many in this community who are just waiting for an invite to this place, who are just waiting to be asked what is on your mind, who are willing to ask and waiting to ask someone all about hope and truth and eternal life.

Or do you guide your people here to have these conversations, knowing that you take your people, you lead your people, and where you give your people opportunities, there you will give your people the words, the reminder again and again, it is not the equipped that you call, but you equip the ones you do call.

Help us this congregation once more, we ask this new week to serve you well, privately and publicly, be with them in all that we seek to do, all the glory of the eternal Saviour, in his name and for his sake we ask these things.

[30 : 00] Amen. Well, apologies for us, I've gone back to my Tolstow ways and cut off singing this evening so we can conclude with our third singing, Psalm 98, Psalm 98, verses 4 down to verse 9.

Psalm we had there, sing psalms, Psalm 98, verse 4 to the end, Psalm 98, verse 4 to the end, I claim the Lord, O all the earth, shout loudly and rejoice, make music and be jubilant to him, lift up your voice.

Psalm 98, verses 4 to the end, to God's praise. I claim the Lord, all the earth, shout loudly and rejoice, and rejoice, make music and be jubilant to him, lift up your voice, with harp, make music sing to the Lord, with harp, his praise to sing, with trumpet on, with horn rejoice, before the Lord, thy name.

Let earth, and all in them, and all in them, rejoice triumphantly.

let streams, clap hands, and mountains, sing, together joyfully.

[32 : 24] now let them sing, before the Lord, who comes to judge the earth, he'll judge the world, in righteousness, the people's in history.

the grace of the Lord, Jesus Christ, and the love of God, the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, who are for you now, and forevermore.

Amen.