

Christianity Explored

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[0 : 0 0] If we could, this morning with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling, if we could turn back to that portion of scripture that we read in the book of Acts, Acts chapter 8, Acts chapter 8, and I'd like us to consider that whole passage, but if we just read again at verse 30, Acts chapter 8 at verse 30.

So Philip ran to meet him, that is the Ethiopian eunuch, and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, do you understand what you are reading? And he said, how can I, unless someone guides me?

And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. Do you understand what you are reading? How can I, unless someone guides me?

You know, I love this passage in the book of Acts, because what we see here is the first century version of Christianity explored. Philip the evangelist is sitting down with someone, explaining what it means to be a Christian.

It's the first century version of Christianity explored. Now, most of you here have heard about the 21st century version of Christianity explored. You've heard me banging on about it for years on end.

[1 : 3 3] And some of you have attended Christianity explored. Some of you have been converted and are now a committed Christian. Some of you have attended Christianity explored and are still not converted.

And that's not because Christianity explored didn't work on you. That's because simply you still refuse to commit your life to Jesus Christ. Because Christianity explored, as those who have attended, know.

Christianity explored plainly teaches you. You're a hellbound sinner. And you need this saviour Jesus Christ. So some of you have attended Christianity explored.

Some of you have been invited to come. And sadly, you refused. And you never came. Nevertheless, most of you have heard about the 21st century version of Christianity explored.

That Christianity explored, it's just a Bible study. It walks through the Gospel of Mark. And it asks three very simple questions. Who is Jesus? Why did Jesus come?

[2 : 3 3] What does Jesus want from me? And as you know, it follows the format of watching a DVD and answering questions and discussing topics about Christianity. And you're there.

You can ask questions or you can just sit and listen. That's the 21st century version of Christianity explored. But this morning we're going to witness the 1st century version of Christianity explored.

And of course, well, there was no DVD. There was no handbook. And there was no Gospel of Mark. But the reality is there's no difference. There's no difference between the 1st century version and the 21st century version of Christianity explored.

Because as we'll see, Philip the Evangelist, he still explains to this Ethiopian eunuch who Jesus is, why Jesus came, and what Jesus wants from him.

It's the 1st century version of Christianity explored. And I just want to consider this passage. I want us to look at this passage in Acts chapter 8 under three headings.

[3 : 33] Concern about the soul, clarity from the Scriptures, and commitment to the Saviour.
Concern about the soul, clarity from the Scriptures, and commitment to the Saviour.

So if we look first of all at concern about the soul. Concern about the soul. Look again at verse 26 of Acts 8. We're told there, 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. Now as we know in our study of the book of Acts, Acts chapter 8, it begins with the early church experiencing fierce persecution from the Jewish authorities.

And as a result, the church was scattered. It was being scattered throughout the regions of Judea and also out into Samaria. But as the church has been scattered, so is the seed of the gospel.

Because the gospel is beginning to spread. It's spreading from its beginnings in Jerusalem out into Judea, out into Samaria and beyond. And as we saw last week with Simon the Magician, the gospel spread into the region of Samaria.

[4 : 47] And it spread there through the preaching of this man called Philip. And as we saw last week, many people were converted and they committed their life to Jesus Christ.

Despite the onslaught of persecution, the early church was still growing. And it was still spreading. But what we see in this passage, near the end of chapter 8, is that the church is still growing.

It's continuing to grow. And the gospel is continuing to spread, just as Jesus promised. You'll remember that Jesus promised at the very beginning of the book of Acts, that when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, you will be my witnesses from Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria to the uttermost parts of the earth.

And that's what's happening here. As persecution rages against the church, the gospel is spreading. And it's spreading far and wide. And now it's spreading even into Africa.

And particularly, we're told here, Ethiopia. And this came about by an angel of the Lord, we're told in verse 26, calling, commissioning, and commanding Philip to arise and go.

[6 : 02] Arise and go. That's what it says in verse 26. 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. Do you know, my friend, when Philip heard the call to go, he responded immediately.

He responded immediately by following the Lord's call, commission, and command upon his life. But you know, we look at ourselves. And is it not the case, my Christian friend here today, that far too often when we experience the Lord's call, commission, and command upon our lives, we respond by saying, I'm not ready.

I'm not equipped for this. I'm not gifted in this area. I feel completely inadequate for this. But you know, the thing is, no matter how weak we may feel, or how insignificant we think we are, or how anxious we get, which is how I am every Lord's Day morning, terrified, when the Lord lays something or someone upon our heart, when the Lord calls, commissions, and commands us to serve him, we must respond.

And we must respond immediately and obediently. We must do as Philip did, arise and go. And we must go wherever the Lord is sending us, and do whatever the Lord wants us to do.

[7 : 30] Because it's the thing I've always taken to heart. The wonderful thing is, the Lord doesn't call the equipped. He equips those whom he called. The Lord doesn't call the equipped.

He equips those whom he calls. And that was certainly Philip's experience, because the Lord called, commissioned, and commanded Philip to go to a road between Jerusalem and Gaza.

Now, the thing about this particular road was that it's a road that you would probably make a detour to avoid completely. And you'd make a detour because, not only because it was a difficult road to travel on, very uneven surfaces, but it was also a very dangerous road to travel on.

It's the road that led to Gaza. And Gaza was Philistine territory. The Philistines, historically, as even Goliath the Philistine, he was one of the enemies of Israel.

And yet when Philip was called, commissioned, and commanded by the Lord, he didn't do a Jonah and run in the opposite direction. Philip, we're told, he responded in faith and obedience.

[8 : 42] Philip trusted the Lord, and he obeyed his word. And you know, my friend, we'll do well to follow such an example. Because when we truly embrace the gospel, when we truly follow the call, commission, and command of Jesus Christ, we'll find ourselves going where we thought we'd never go.

We'll find ourselves doing things we thought we'd never do. We'd find ourselves speaking to people we thought we'd never speak to. And we'd find ourselves serving in ways that we never thought possible.

And you know, that's what we see here in the life of Philip. When Philip was called, commissioned, and commanded to arise and go, he went. He went in faith and obedience.

He took God at his word, and the Lord gave Philip a concern for a soul. And that's what we need to pray for at the beginning of every day. Do you know that?

We need to begin our day as Christians. praying for opportunities to serve the Lord and speak for the Lord. We need to pray that the Lord would give us a burden for people.

[9 : 56] A burden for lost souls. A burden for people to have a concern about their soul. And even to pray that they would have a concern about their soul themselves. My friend, we need to pray that we'll always be ready.

Always be ready to give an answer for the reason for the hope that is within us. Because from one day to the next, this is the wonderful thing about the Lord's providence. From one day to the next, we never know who the Lord is going to put in our path.

And that's certainly what Philip discovered. Because the Lord put this Ethiopian eunuch in the path of Philip. And we're given a description of who Philip was going to encounter.

We see that in verse 27. We're told that he rose and went and there was an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure.

He had come to Jerusalem to worship. So we're told that the person whom the Lord had put in Philip's path, he wasn't a Jew. And living in Israel, you might expect a Jew.

[11 : 02] He wasn't a Roman. He wasn't a Samaritan. He wasn't even a Philistine. He was an Ethiopian. He was an African. He was from a different continent. And he was of a different race.

He would have had a different skin color to Philip. But more than that, we're told that this man, he was a eunuch. He was dedicated to his queen. In fact, the Ethiopian eunuch, he was a court official, we're told.

A court official of Queen Candace of the Ethiopians. He was in charge of her treasury. He was the equivalent of the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Probably not such a prestigious job at the moment with all that's going on in the British government. But in the first century, it was a highly sought after job. But you know what's key about this description that we're giving here is that we're told at the end of verse 27, he had come to Jerusalem to worship and was returning.

He had come to Jerusalem to worship and was returning. And this description, it's so important because this Ethiopian eunuch, he wouldn't have been allowed to go to Jerusalem and worship.

[12 : 14] Because as a Gentile, as an outsider, as someone who wasn't a Jew, he would have been excluded from worshipping at the temple just for being a Gentile, but even more so for being a eunuch.

Jewish law didn't permit eunuchs to worship at the temple in Jerusalem. And so in short, this Ethiopian eunuch, he was unwanted and unwelcome to gather and worship God.

That's why Philip met him returning from Jerusalem. The Ethiopian eunuch, he had gone up to Jerusalem because he had a concern about his soul and he had a desire to worship God.

But when he got into the place of worship, he was unwanted and he was unwelcome to come in. When he got to the place of worship, he was unwanted and unwelcome to come in.

And you know, my friend, I hope and pray that as a congregation, we never make anyone feel unwanted or unwelcome in the worship of God.

[13 : 21] And that when anyone, anyone in our community or even beyond, when they come in with a concern for their soul and a desire to worship God, and when they come in to church, I hope and pray that we're not speaking about them but speaking to them.

I would hate for anyone to come in here with a concern for their soul and a desire to worship God and find the people in our congregation to be cold towards them.

Because there's no excuse for that. We should be warm and welcoming as we gather together to worship God. But this Ethiopian eunuch, he didn't have that.

He was returning home unwanted, unwelcome, in the worship of God. But he still had a concern about his soul. He still had a desire to worship God.

That's why we find him reading his Bible. We're told that he's reading from the book of Isaiah. And this is important to note because when this man had a concern about his soul, he wanted to be in the worship of God.

[14 : 28] That's why he went to Jerusalem. But he also wanted to be in the word of God. When this man had a concern about his soul, he wanted to be in the worship of God and in the word of God.

And you know, my unconverted friend, I cannot stress this to you enough. I can't stress this to you enough. If you have a concern about your soul at all, if you have a concern about your sin, if you have a concern about your lost condition, if you have a concern that you're not saved right here, right now, if you have a concern that you're going to go to hell if you're not saved, then you need to follow the example of this man.

Because when he had a concern about his soul, he wanted to be in the worship of God and he wanted to be in the word of God. My friend, if you have a concern about your soul, then you need to be in the worship of God and you need to be in the word of God.

You need to be in church and you need to be in church both ends on the Lord's Day. Faith comes by hearing. So you need to be in church both morning and evening.

You need to be in the worship of God but you also need to be in the word of God. You need to be reading your Bible because the word of God as the Bible says itself, it's the only rule to direct us.

[15 : 48] It's the lamp unto our feet and the light unto our path. We need to be in the word of God and in the worship of God. But this also applies to the Christian because sadly, some of you don't even bother coming to church in the evening.

Some of you are professing Christians. You're members in the congregation yet you don't come to church in the evening. And I look at the unconverted and I think, well, what example is that to them?

My friend, if we have a concern for our soul that God has made, then we will be in the worship of God and we will be in the word of God.

If we have a concern for our soul, we will be in the worship of God and in the word of God. That's the first thing we see here. Concern for the soul.

But then secondly, we see clarity from the scripture. Clarity from the scripture. I read in verse 29, the spirit said to Philip, go over and join this chariot.

[16 : 56] So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, do you understand what you're reading? And he said, how can I unless someone guides me? And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

And so, as Philip, he's now on this road between Jerusalem and Gaza and the Lord has put someone in his path. He's waiting on the roadside in the desert between Jerusalem and Gaza and all of a sudden a chariot arrives.

And the spirit of the Lord, we're told, prompts Philip to go over and speak to this Ethiopian eunuch. And maybe you've had that experience before where you feel the Lord is prompting you to speak to someone personally.

The Lord puts someone in your path. He puts them upon your heart and he urges you to go and speak to them. And even though it's far easier to say nothing and just ignore it because you're terrified as to what you'd say and how to say it or even how to strike up a conversation.

And yet the reality is it's when you step out in faith, when you obey the Lord, the Lord, by his grace and help, he will give you something to say. And even what you're saying, it's always in the hope that it will lead to speak about Jesus.

[18 : 14] And you know, I love the way Philip begins this conversation with this man. He hears him reading from the book of Isaiah because in the ancient world they always did reading out loud. It was never silent.

So he's reading out loud and as Philip hears the Ethiopian eunuch reading, he strikes up a conversation with him. He just asks him the simple question. He says, do you understand what you're reading?

And the Ethiopian response says, well, how can I? How can I unless someone guides me? And, you know, my friend, this man, the Ethiopian eunuch, he had a concern for his soul, but he needed clarity from the scriptures.

He needed, in many ways, the first century version of Christianity explored. And with that, we're told, well, the Ethiopian eunuch, he invites him up into his chariot to sit and give clarity from the scriptures.

And we're told, we're told in verse 32, Luke tells us, now the passage of scripture that he was reading was this, like a sheep he was led to the slaughter, like a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he opened not his mouth.

[19 : 26] In his humiliation, justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth. Of course, the passage that the Ethiopian eunuch was reading from was Isaiah 53, a passage that I'm sure many of us are familiar with.

Some of you maybe learnt this passage in school or Sunday school, you learnt it off by heart, because Isaiah 53, it's one of the clearest Old Testament passages that describes the suffering and death of Jesus Christ.

And what's remarkable about Isaiah 53 is that it was prophesied with such detail, at least 700 years before Jesus died upon a cross.

In fact, Isaiah 53 was written centuries before the Romans had even invented crucifixion as a form of capital punishment. But you know, as this Ethiopian sits with Philip, he has this concern about his soul, he has a desire for clarity from the Scriptures, and he's sitting there enjoying Christianity as they read the Bible together, and the Ethiopian is allowed to ask questions.

He wasn't allowed to do anything when he went to Jerusalem. He was unwanted and unwelcome, but with Philip, he's allowed to ask whatever he likes. And in relation to Isaiah 53, the Ethiopian asks, he says, who is Isaiah speaking about?

[20 : 58] Is it himself or someone else? And then we're told in verse 35, Philip opened his mouth and beginning with this Scripture, he told him the good news about Jesus.

Do you know, as they sat together in this chariot, you can almost imagine it, they sat together in the chariot, they read the Bible together, and the Ethiopian, he starts asking questions about the Scriptures, and Philip, he gives clarity from the Scriptures.

It was just the first century version of Christianity explored. Because when Philip spoke, he explains the good news, he explains the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

And like Christianity explored, Philip would have told this man who Jesus is. He would have told the Ethiopian eunuch that Jesus is the Messiah, he's God's chosen king, he's the Son of God, he's the promised saviour of sinners.

He would have told him that Jesus proved his identity again and again by displaying his authority, by the way he taught, by the way he performed miracles, by healing the sick, by calming storms, by raising the dead.

[22 : 14] He would have told him who Jesus is. But more than that, Philip would have explained why Jesus came, that Jesus came to seek and to save the lost, that Jesus came and entered into our world because we've lost favour with God and we've lost fellowship with God.

In fact, our catechism tells us how bad it really is. The catechism says to us, all mankind, by their fall, are under the wrath and curse.

They've lost communion with God, they're under all the miseries that this life brings upon us, even death itself, and the pains of hell forever. That's how bad it is.

And yet, we're told Jesus came to deal with our ruin of sin by his remedy of salvation. And the remedy was that he came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

And that's what Isaiah described so vividly, that he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities, his chastisement brought us peace, by his stripes we are healed, like a lamb that is led to the slaughter like a sheep before its shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth.

[23 : 31] But you know, that's not where Philip would have left it. Philip would have explained to this Ethiopian eunuch, he would have explained who Jesus is, he would have explained why Jesus came, but Philip would have also challenged him and explained to him what Jesus wants from him.

Because what Jesus wants from every sinner, including you, what Jesus wants from you is that you repent and believe in the gospel.

What Jesus wants from you is that you turn from your life of sin to a life of salvation. What Jesus wants from you today is that you'll come to him.

What Jesus wants from you is that you'll deny self, take up your cross, and follow him. What Jesus wants from you is that you'll confess him as Lord and King over your life, over every area of your life.

My friend, what Jesus wants from you today is wholehearted commitment to the Savior. Wholehearted commitment to the Savior.

[24 : 44] That's what Jesus wants from you. And that's what happened with this Ethiopian eunuch. There was commitment to the Savior. That's what we see lastly and briefly.

Concern about the soul, clarity from the scriptures, and commitment to the Savior. Commitment to the Savior. Look at verse 36.

And as they were going along the road, they came to some water, and the eunuch said, See, here is water. What prevents me from being baptized?

And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. Now, if you're reading from the authorized version, or from the New King James version, you'll see that the ESV has missed out, verse 37, and the ESV even says that.

It goes from verse 36 to verse 38. And this is because different Bible versions have translated from different Greek manuscripts that are hundreds of years old. But, you know, to have verse 37 missing from this passage is, in my mind, very disappointing.

[26 : 00] Because I believe it's the key verse in the whole passage. Because the Ethiopian eunuch, he has this concern about his soul, as we've said.

And he has this concern about his soul explained by clarity from the scriptures through a first century version of Christianity explored. And now we see that the Ethiopian eunuch, he's ready.

He's ready to make a commitment to the Savior. And he says to Philip, here's water, what prevents me from being baptized? And of course, the Ethiopian eunuch, he was from Africa, he'd never been baptized.

He wasn't baptized as a child, he wasn't brought up to go to Sunday school, he wasn't brought up to go to church, he was never in the worship of God or under the word of God, he didn't have many privileges that everyone in here would have, but without all these privileges, he still wanted to make a commitment to the Savior.

God And so Philip says to him in verse 37, the missing verse, if you believe with all your heart, you may. If you believe in Jesus Christ with all your heart, you can make a commitment to the Savior.

[27 : 13] And with that, the Ethiopian eunuch says in the second half of verse 37, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

Now, my unconverted friend, what I want you to understand from this, and I want to be as clear as possible to you, just listen to me for a moment, please.

This man made a commitment to the Savior by confessing the Savior. This man made a commitment to the Savior by confessing the Savior.

Because that's how you make a commitment to the Savior. You believe the Savior in your heart and you confess the Savior with your mouth. That's how you make a commitment.

You believe the Savior in your heart, you confess the Savior with your mouth. You make a commitment to the Savior by confessing you're a sinner in need of a Savior. You make a commitment to the Savior by confessing that you want to be a Christian.

[28 : 20] You make a commitment to the the Savior by confessing that you want to be a disciple of Jesus. You want to be a learner. You want to learn more about Jesus and follow Jesus. You make a commitment to the Savior by confessing that Jesus Christ is King and Lord over your life. You make a commitment to the Savior by confessing that you want to be part of the worship of God. You make a commitment to the Savior by confessing that you want to love, follow, and obey the Word of God. My friend, that's how you make a commitment to the Savior. Yes, you're not going to be perfect. You're not going to have it all right. You're still going to be a sinner. Tell me who isn't a sinner here today? But commitment to the Savior, my friend, is believing in your heart, believing the Savior in your heart and confessing the Savior with your mouth. That's commitment to the Savior. And my friend, like this Ethiopian eunuch, it's only, it's only when you make a commitment to the

Savior that you experience joy. Joy unspeakable. The thing is, you don't know joy yet. You might find it in the world for a moment, but you don't know it. You have never experienced true, lasting joy. That's what this Ethiopian found. He went on his way rejoicing because he believed the Savior in his heart and he confessed the Savior with his mouth. He went on his way rejoicing.

And that's how I want you to leave this morning. That's how I want you to leave church this morning. I want you to go on your way rejoicing. I want you to go on your way rejoicing because having come to church this morning, and I know you have it, you have a concern about your soul.

But having come to church this morning, I want you to leave here with clarity from the Scripture and commitment to the Savior. That's how I want you to go from here this morning.

Leave here rejoicing by believing the Savior in your heart and confessing the Savior with your mouth. Lord, our gracious God, we give thanks to thee for the Scriptures and how clear they are and how they present to us Jesus. And they remind us, Lord, of our need to be saved. We thank thee, Lord, that Jesus has a concern about our soul and that he gives to us clarity from the Scriptures.

[31 : 26] But, Lord, enable us, we pray this morning, to be those who confess this Savior as ours. That we would confess that the Lord is my shepherd, that he is my Savior. He is my salvation.

He is my rock. He is my light. He is my fortress. Oh, Lord, that we would claim him as our own, realizing that he is on offer to us, that whosoever comes to me, says Jesus, I will in no wise cast out.

Bless, Lord, thy word to us, we pray. Apply it by thy Spirit, that we would leave as the Ethiopian eunuch left Philip, that we would go on our way rejoicing, rejoicing that we have come to know the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, found in the face of Jesus Christ.

Cleanse us then, we pray. Go before us. For Jesus' sake. Amen. We will bring our service to a conclusion this morning by singing to God's praise in Psalm 40.

Psalm 40 in the Scottish Psalter. A favorite of many.

[32 : 53] But it is the testimony of the Christian. But the question that arises out of Psalm 40 is, is this your testimony? And if it's not your testimony, why is it not your testimony?

I waited for the Lord my God, and patiently did bear. At length to me he did incline my voice and cry to hear. He took me from a fearful pit, and from the miry clay, and on a rock he set my feet, establishing my way.

He put a new song in my mouth, our God to magnify. Many shall see it, and shall fear. And on the Lord rely. O blessed is the man whose trust upon the Lord relies, respecting not the proud nor such, as turn aside to lies.

So these verses of conclusion to Psalm 40, to God's praise. I waited for the Lord my God, and patiently did bear, and then to me he did not find.

My voice and cry to hear. He took me from a fearful pit, And on a rock he set my feet, establishing my way.

[35 : 01] He took me from a custom, and auwareepherdsatively, and distances I need for the Lord — and seeing the Lord as we■- and as weep- and seeing the Lord as I.

And sall fear it, and and and and and and and and and and by, and and and and and so our God to magnify. And he shall see it, yet nand i chemin try to fall.

And he shall see it, shall fear and on the Lord rely O blessed is the man whose trust upon the Lord rely respecting not the proud nor such as turned aside to lies the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ the love of God the Father the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all now and forevermore Amen