

“Proclaiming the Word” (Acts 8:4-40)

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Brian Watson

Acts 8:4–8 (ESV)

⁴Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word. ⁵Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ. ⁶And the crowds with one accord paid attention to what was being said by Philip when they heard him and saw the signs that he did. ⁷For unclean spirits, crying out with a loud voice, came out of many who had them, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. ⁸So there was much joy in that city.¹

Many people want stuff from God. They want to go to heaven; they want good health; they want a good job and good relationships. But do they really want God? Do they want a relationship with their Maker? The way to know if someone really wants a relationship with God is to see how they respond to God’s word. Ultimately, people need to respond to Jesus, the Word of God who became flesh. But the way that people respond to Jesus is by responding to the Bible, God’s written word. The Bible is how we know who Jesus is. It’s all about Jesus. So we can say it’s his word.

Jesus said that our lives depend upon how we respond to his word. He said, “if you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:31-32). When Jesus said “abide,” he meant to believe and to follow. He promised that those who believed in his word and lived out his word would know the truth and would be free. But he said much more than that. He said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death” (John 8:51). He promised that those who lived by his words would never die. Of course, he meant an eternal death. Those people would never be cast out of God’s presence, away from anything good and pleasant, forever.

Jesus also gave warnings to those who didn’t respond positively to his word. He said to the Pharisees, a group of Jewish religious leaders who were so often his opponents, “you seek to kill me because my word finds no place in you” (John 8:38). And he said, “Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God” (John 8:47). God’s people respond to God’s word. They listen and they obey, however imperfectly.

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from the English Standard Version (ESV).

Jesus also told his disciples this: “The one who hears you hears me, and the one who rejects you rejects me, and the one who rejects me rejects him who sent me” (Luke 10:16; see also 1 John 4:6). The way that people hear about Jesus now is often through Christians who share the gospel, the good news concerning Jesus. If people reject preachers and their Christian friends who are telling them about Jesus, they are rejecting Jesus himself.

Today, as we look again at the book of Acts, we are going to see right and wrong responses to Jesus. We see people who believe the word and respond in faith. And we see people who don’t respond to God’s word, but who want “stuff” from God and think that God can be manipulated.

So let’s turn to the eighth chapter of the book of Acts. As you’re turning there, let me remind you of what we’ve seen so far in this book. The book is written by Luke, and it picks up where his Gospel left off. The Gospel of Luke tells about Jesus’ birth, his ministry on earth, and his death and resurrection. Acts begins with Jesus instructing his followers about the kingdom of God. He told them that they were supposed to be his “witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Jesus said this in Jerusalem, where he died and rose from the grave. That’s where the message about Jesus was first preached. “Judea and Samaria” were the regions that originally constituted the kingdom of Israel before it was split in two. Samaria is basically the northern kingdom of Israel, and Judea is the same area as the southern kingdom of Judah. So Jesus was saying that the true Israel, the people of God, would be reunited through the preaching of the gospel. And this message was supposed to reach all kinds of people, even to the ends of the earth.

In the first several chapters of Acts, the gospel is preached in Jerusalem, right at the temple. Apostles like Peter preached that the hope of Israel, the Messiah, had come and he had died for the sins of his people. He also rose from the grave, showing that his payment for sin was accepted by the father, and that God was beginning to make all things new. One day, all of Jesus’ followers will be resurrected to eternal life in a resurrected world, a place where there is no more decay and death. This message created some tension, because the Jewish leaders of the temple didn’t believe it. Peter and the other followers of Jesus were implying that Jesus was greater than the temple, and this angered the Jewish leaders. They killed Stephen, which we saw last week, and this caused a number of disciples to flee Jerusalem and go into Judea and Samaria. Today, we’ll see what happens in Samaria.

So let's now look at Acts 8, verses 4-8:

⁴Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word. ⁵Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ. ⁶And the crowds with one accord paid attention to what was being said by Philip when they heard him and saw the signs that he did. ⁷For unclean spirits, crying out with a loud voice, came out of many who had them, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. ⁸So there was much joy in that city.

Philip is one of the seven men who were selected to take care of the widows in Acts 6. He goes into Samaria, and tells these people about Jesus, the Messiah, or the Christ. This is significant because Samaritans were considered by Jewish people to be foreigners, or, literally, people of another race (Luke 17:18). They were related to Israel, but over centuries they had intermarried with people from other nations. So Jewish people viewed Samaritans not as Jews, and not as Gentiles, but as half-breeds. John, in his Gospel, tells us that "Jews have no dealings with Samaritans" (John 4:9).

So it's remarkable that a Jewish man would go to Samaria at all. But Philip knew that Jesus had told his disciples to make more followers of Christ from all nations and places, including Samaria. So Philip preached to them about Jesus.

Samaritans didn't believe everything Jewish people believed. They had their own temple on Mount Gerazim, so they didn't go to Jerusalem to worship. They had their own version of the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible. But they did believe the promise that Moses made in Deuteronomy 18, that a prophet would one day come. They called him the Taheb, or the "restorer." Philip was able to tell them that this one had come. Jesus, the true restorer, had come.

The people in Samaria respond to what Philip said. They pay attention to his words, in part because they see his miracles, which validated his message. The miracles pointed to what Jesus can and will ultimately do for anyone who follows him. Jesus makes them whole. He drives out the evil from within them, and when all is said and done, Jesus will finally and definitively heal his people. And notice that the people respond with joy. This is one mark of a Christian: When they realize that they can be reconciled to God and forgiven of everything they've ever done wrong, they are full of joy. When they realize they have eternal life, there is joy.

Let's see what happens next. We'll read verses 9-13:

⁹ But there was a man named Simon, who had previously practiced magic in the city and amazed the people of Samaria, saying that he himself was somebody great. ¹⁰ They all paid attention to him, from the least to the greatest, saying, “This man is the power of God that is called Great.” ¹¹ And they paid attention to him because for a long time he had amazed them with his magic. ¹² But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. ¹³ Even Simon himself believed, and after being baptized he continued with Philip. And seeing signs and great miracles performed, he was amazed.

A man named Simon, who had practiced magic, was also in this city. Many people were amazed by his works. We’re not told what his “magic” is, but Justin Martyr, a second-century Christian writer, said that Simon “did mighty acts of magic, by virtue of the art of the devils operating in him.”² This shows that not everything that appears to be miraculous comes from God. If you remember the book of Exodus, Pharaoh’s magicians were able to perform some magical works (Exod. 7:11, 12, 22; 8:7). We need to be discerning, because not everything that’s impressive comes from God.

Whatever Simon is doing, the people pay attention to him, just as people paid attention to Philip. I think Luke wants us to see this parallel (between verses 6 and 10-11). It seems that these people *used to* pay attention to Simon because of his magic, and they *used to* think he was “the power of God,” but when they heard Philip preaching about Jesus and the kingdom of God, they start paying attention to Philip. They respond to his words about Jesus in faith, and they are baptized.

We’re also told that Simon believed. But notice that in verse 13, we’re not told *what* he believed. There’s no object of his faith mentioned. Did he believe in Philip’s message? Or did he believe that Philip had an even greater power that he was using to perform miracles? We’re not told. But we are told that Simon was baptized, too. Baptism is an outward sign of an inward change in a person. It represents cleansing of sin and also a change in a person’s life: the old person has died, buried, as it were, in the waters of baptism; and that person rises from the water as sign that they have newness of life. But baptism in and of itself doesn’t save anyone. People who claim to believe in Jesus but who haven’t been transformed by the true power of God, the Holy Spirit, can be submerged in water. But that doesn’t mean someone is actually a Christian.

² Justin Martyr, “The First Apology of Justin,” 26, in *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, vol. 1, The Ante-Nicene Fathers (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 171.

People make false professions of faith all the time. We'll have to wait and see if Simon proves himself to be a follower of Christ or not.

In the next few verses, we see that the apostles in Jerusalem here about what is happening in Samaria, and two of them, Peter and John, come to see what happened. Let's read verses 14-17:

¹⁴ Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, ¹⁵ who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, ¹⁶ for he had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ¹⁷ Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit.

This passage is a bit odd, because we're told that the Samaritans who came to faith in Jesus and who were baptized had not yet received the Holy Spirit. Normally, when someone comes to faith, they receive the Holy Spirit. In fact, in Paul's letter to the Ephesians, he writes,

¹³ In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴ who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

So it seems that normally, when someone hears the gospel and believes, they have the Holy Spirit at that same time. But something unique is happening here. Just as the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples at Pentecost, the Holy Spirit is coming upon these believers in Samaria. It's likely that this happened in this unique way to show that these Samaritan believers belonged to the same people of God as Philip and the apostles. Perhaps it also shows that they had to come under the authority of the apostles and their leadership. At any rate, it's a sign to both the Samaritans and the apostles that these people now belonged to Jesus, just as the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem belonged to Jesus. James Hamilton, who wrote a great book on the Holy Spirit, says, "In Acts 8 the Samaritans are shown that there will be no Samaritan Christianity as there has been Samaritan Judaism, and the apostles are shown that God accepts the Samaritans."³ There is one people of God, and it includes Jews, Samaritans, and, as we'll see later, Gentiles.

To understand how big a deal this is, you can just go back to Luke's Gospel. There, he writes of a time when Jesus' disciples went to a village in Samaria to tell them about Jesus. The people in Samaria didn't receive Jesus, so James and John—this same John who comes to

³ James M. Hamilton, Jr., *God's Indwelling Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Old and New Testaments*, NAC Studies in Bible and Theology (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2006), 193.

Samaria with Peter—asked Jesus, “Lord, do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them?” But Jesus rebuked them (Luke 9:54-55). It seems that James and John wanted to go all Elijah on the Samaritans (2 Kgs. 1), but Jesus was letting them know that it was a new day in God’s kingdom.⁴

How does Simon respond to the Holy Spirit coming upon these Samaritans? Let’s see in verses 18-19:

¹⁸ Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles’ hands, he offered them money, ¹⁹ saying, “Give me this power also, so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.”

Earlier, I wondered if Simon was really a believer in Jesus. We should observe that he didn’t receive the Holy Spirit when Peter and John came. But Simon sees that the Spirit had come upon the believers. He recognizes that a greater power had come upon them, and he wants this power. So he does what any reasonable person would do: He offers the apostles money! This man doesn’t even have the Holy Spirit, but he wants to be able to give this power to others. We’ll later see in Acts that magicians had books of spells (19:19). Perhaps Simon thought that a certain set of words could be used to force the Holy Spirit to show up. How does that go over with the apostles? Let’s read verses 20-24 and see:

²⁰ But Peter said to him, “May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! ²¹ You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. ²² Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. ²³ For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity.” ²⁴ And Simon answered, “Pray for me to the Lord, that nothing of what you have said may come upon me.”

Peter tells Simon that the gift of God cannot be bought. The Holy Spirit is a gift. Salvation is a gift. No human being can buy anything from God. Any blessing from God is given freely. And God cannot be manipulated. He shows no partiality and doesn’t respond to bribes.⁵ God isn’t forced to do things by a special set of words. He’s not obligated to answer our prayers the way we want him to because we say, “In Jesus’ name” at the end of our prayers. If he did that, we would be the ones in charge, and not God.

⁴ The parable of the good Samaritan is also relevant here (Luke 10:25-37).

⁵ “Be careful what you do, for there is no injustice with the LORD our God, or partiality or taking bribes” (2Chron. 19:7; cf. Deut. 10:17).

Peter uses harsh words that show that Simon is not, at least at this point, a believer. He says Simon's heart isn't right before God, that he is wicked, that he needs forgiveness, that he is "in the bond of iniquity."

What's odd is that Simon doesn't really repent. He asks that Peter pray to the Lord on his behalf. He apparently thinks that Peter has the power to make him right with God. But Peter doesn't. He has the power to proclaim the truth, and he could recognize a believer when he saw one, but he couldn't give faith and repentance to Simon. Only God can do that. And Simon could have prayed to God himself, but he doesn't. I think this shows that Simon wasn't a believer. It looks like he doesn't want to receive the punishment for his lack of faith, not that he wants a relationship with God. This is just the opposite side of the same coin he's been clutching this whole time. He didn't want a relationship with God; he wanted the power of God; he didn't want to repent in order to have a relationship with God; he wanted to avoid God's wrath.

In order to be right with God, you don't need to go to me and ask me to pray to God on your behalf. You don't have to go to a priest to have your sins absolved. If you believe that Jesus is the Son of God, the true King, the one who can make all things right, the only one who has lived a perfectly righteous life, and the only one who can die for your sins, you can speak directly to God. Ask him for forgiveness. John says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). God doesn't care what country you're from, what you look like, how much money you have, or what particular sins you've done in the past. Jesus is able to cleanse anyone who turns to him from all their unrighteousness.

After this happened, the apostles continued to preach the gospel in Samaria, as we see in verse 25:

²⁵ Now when they had testified and spoken the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans.

But Philip was instructed to go to elsewhere. He's told to go down to Gaza, which was a city that used to be controlled by the Philistines, way back in the history of Israel. Philip is directed by God to a very specific individual. Let's first read verses 26-28:

²⁶ Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." This is a desert place. ²⁷ And 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 ²⁸ and was returning, seated in his chariot, and he was reading the prophet Isaiah.

Philip is directed to head toward Gaza, and on the way he meets an Ethiopian eunuch. The Ethiopia of this time doesn't correspond to modern-day Ethiopia. It corresponds to the Nubian kingdom, which was south of Egypt, a place that is today part of Sudan. Ancient Greeks thought that Ethiopians lived at the edge of the world. This man had come from a long way to worship in Jerusalem, which means that he was a God-fearer, a Gentile who believed in the God of Israel. He was surely a black man. And he was a eunuch, which means he was castrated. In this period in this part of Africa, court officials who worked closely with females were usually castrated. That practice kept them from taking advantage of the king's harem of the queen. But it also would have kept them from becoming an Israelite. Apparently this man may have been partially dismembered, which would have made circumcision impossible. And to be a Jew, a man needed to be circumcised.

Now, before you say, "Brian, you can't talk about such things in church," you might want to remember that the Bible discusses these things. In Deuteronomy 23:1, it says, "No one whose testicles are crushed or whose male organ is cut off shall enter the assembly of the LORD." This may have been written to the Israelites to keep them from adopting the practices of other nations around them. So that means that under the law of the old covenant, this eunuch could not have been part of Israel. Still, this man believed in the God of Israel, he had worshipped in Jerusalem, and now he was reading the prophet Isaiah.

Now let's see what happens next. Let's read verses 29-35.

²⁹And the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over and join this chariot." ³⁰So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" ³¹And he said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. ³²Now the passage of the Scripture that he was reading was this:

"Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter
and like a lamb before its shearer is silent,
so he opens not his mouth.

³³ In his humiliation justice was denied him.
Who can describe his generation?
For his life is taken away from the earth."

³⁴ And the eunuch said to Philip, “About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?” ³⁵ Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus.

The Holy Spirit himself tells Philip to go to eunuch’s chariot. The point is that God wanted Philip to meet this one particular man. This is no accident. So Philip goes. He hears the man reading Isaiah aloud. Apparently literate people read aloud at this time, probably words were written without spaces between them, which means it would be more difficult to tell when one word ended and another began. Spelling words out loud made it easier to understand. Philip hears the eunuch reading a portion of Isaiah 53, a passage about a servant of the Lord who would die for the sins of his people so that they could be counted righteous in God’s sight. Philip asks the eunuch if he understands what he is reading, but the eunuch admits that he needs help. He wonders if Isaiah was writing about himself or someone else. In other words, he didn’t know who this person was who was led to the slaughter like a sheep. He thought it might have been Isaiah himself. So Philip tells him all about Jesus, beginning with this Scripture, as they rode in the eunuch’s chariot.

What’s interesting is that this man from Ethiopia was a powerful man. He was in charge of the queen’s treasury.⁶ But he didn’t act like Simon. He didn’t use his power or wealth to try to manipulate Philip. Instead, he is humble. He admits that he doesn’t quite understand what he’s reading.

I want to point out that this shows that people need help reading and understanding the Bible. And that’s why Jesus gave the church pastors and teachers, so that they can be equipped, built up, and mature, so that they can know the Son of God and not, in the words of Paul, be “tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by craftiness in deceitful schemes” (Eph. 4:11-14).

What’s interesting is that the eunuch may have learned from Philip that, just a few chapters later in Isaiah, there’s a promise that eunuchs would one day be part of God’s people. This is what Isaiah 56:3-8 says:

³ Let not the foreigner who has joined himself to the LORD say,
“The LORD will surely separate me from his people”;

⁶ “Candace,” or Kandake, was not the queen’s proper name, but was a title used for queens of Ethiopia, in a similar way that “Caesar” was not the proper name of the Roman Emperor (though it had been Julius Caesar’s name, of course).

- and let not the eunuch say,
 “Behold, I am a dry tree.”
- 4 For thus says the LORD:
 “To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths,
 who choose the things that please me
 and hold fast my covenant,
- 5 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
 that shall not be cut off.
- 6 “And the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD,
 to minister to him, to love the name of the LORD,
 and to be his servants,
 everyone who keeps the Sabbath and does not profane it,
 and holds fast my covenant—
- 7 these I will bring to my holy mountain,
 and make them joyful in my house of prayer;
 their burnt offerings and their sacrifices
 will be accepted on my altar;
 for my house shall be called a house of prayer
 for all peoples.”
- 8 The Lord GOD,
 who gathers the outcasts of Israel, declares,
 “I will gather yet others to him
 besides those already gathered.”

The point is that eunuchs, who previously couldn't be part of God's people, would one day be part of God's people. Eunuchs used to think, “I am a dry tree.” In other words, “I can't produce fruit,” or children. There would surely be shame and feeling of being an outcast. Without children, there might have been a lack of security in their old age. But God says he will give them something better than children: room in his house and an everlasting name. In other words, eunuchs who come to the Lord and find their rest in Jesus⁷ will live forever.

Samaritans and eunuchs were coming to Jesus. That's how God was gathering the outcasts of Israel. And God promised, “I will gather yet others to him besides those already

⁷ The Sabbath was a “shadow of things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ” (Col. 2:17). Jesus is our Sabbath. He bids us to come find rest in (Matt. 11:28).

gathered.” We’ll soon see that God would bring Gentiles, people who had previously not believed in God of Israel, into the fold.⁸

Let’s see how this story ends. We’ll read verses 36-40:

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?” ³⁸ And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. ³⁹ And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing. ⁴⁰ But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through he preached the gospel to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

We know the eunuch came to faith because he wants to be baptized. So Philip baptizes him. As a good Baptist, I’ll point out that we’re told they come “up out of the water,” which implies that the eunuch was baptized by immersion. Then Philip disappears. He was carried away by the Spirit of the Lord.⁹ This reminds me of the prophet Ezekiel. Several times, he is carried by the Holy Spirit to see something new (Ezek. 3:12; 8:3; 11:1, 24; 37:1; 43:5). On one of those occasions, in Ezekiel 37, Ezekiel saw a valley of dry bones coming back to life. God told him, “Prophesy over these bones, and say to them, O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live” (Ezek. 37:4-5). The word translated as “breath” can also mean “spirit.” In other words, God promised he would put his Spirit into people and cause them to live when his word was preached to them. The bones were “the whole house of Israel” (v. 11). God promised he would reunite and revive Israel through the preaching of his word, and that’s what he’s doing here. Samaritans and people from the “ends of the earth” were being reached, in fulfillment of Jesus’ command in Acts 1:8.

So, what does this passage have to do with us?

Well, let’s think through what we’ve learned: Jesus told his disciples to make disciples of people from all nations, and he told them to be witnesses. In this passage, we see Jesus’ purposes

⁸ Here’s another interesting thing: This episode with the eunuch is very similar to what Luke writes about Jesus, when he meets the two disciples on the road to Emmaus after he rose from the grave. That passage is in Luke 24 and I talked about on Easter Sunday. In both cases, Jesus and Philip meet people on the road, ask them pointed questions, show how all the Old Testament is about Jesus, and then both disappear from the scene quickly. As I said on Easter, the point is that people can’t see Jesus until they find him in the Bible. That is still true today. If you aren’t reading the Bible, you’re not pursuing a relationship with Jesus. All throughout this chapter of Acts, there are several references to “the word” or “good news” or “gospel” (vv. 4, 12, 14, 25, 30-35, 40). This shows that in order to know Jesus, one needs to know and trust the message of the Bible.

⁹ I wonder if the mentions of Gaza and Azotus (which is Ashdod, another of the city of the Philistines) are indications that these old enemy strongholds are being “conquered” through the proclamation of the gospel.

being accomplished. That is still true today. Jesus is making a people for himself, a true Israel, from people of all nations. That's why missions throughout the world matters. In the end, people from every tribe, language, people, and nation will be part of the people of God (Rev. 5:9).

We see that God brings people into his kingdom through the preaching of his word. Again, that is why the Bible is so important. It's how we know God. But it's not just about information. God does things with his word. He brings spiritually dead people to life when his word is proclaimed in the power of his Spirit and is received by people in faith. That's why we need to use the Bible when we tell other people about God.

Here's a challenge for us: How many of us are proclaiming the word to others? If you're a Christian and you're not doing that, why not? Do you not feel equipped? If that's the case, I would love to help you. But know this: Every week, I try to explain, even briefly, the gospel. If you don't know the gospel and you come here every week, it's because you're not paying attention. That's on you. Do you feel like you don't have opportunities? Try praying for them regularly. That's a prayer that God will honor.

Here's another challenge: Philip was able to explain the gospel to the eunuch by using the Old Testament. Of course, the New Testament wasn't written yet, so that's what Philip had to work with. But we should all be able to see how Jesus fulfills the Old Testament. And we should know the Bible well enough to be able to explain it to people who are on their way to faith in Jesus. Philip met someone who was primed to become a Christian. We may meet someone like that, too.

Here's another thing we should see: God takes the outcasts of society and brings them into his kingdom. Jesus certainly did this. He reached out to the obvious sinners of his day. He wasn't afraid to spend time with the low people of society. And the outcasts were interested in his message, because he spoke about forgiveness. Of course, he also spoke about sin and the need for repentance, but he told them that God was welcoming all who would turn to him in faith. If you're a Christian, that means that you shouldn't be afraid to reach out to people who are different than you. You shouldn't be afraid of the person you think is a terrible sinner. You shouldn't be afraid to spend time with people who our society disregards.

Now, if you're here today and you don't have a real relationship with Jesus, you should know that you can have that relationship today. You can truly know God. You can become part of his family. You can have the hope of abundant life after death. You can be forgiven of

anything wrong you've ever done. You may be here today with little hope. I think that was the eunuch's case. He was probably made a eunuch by others. And other people might have done bad things to you, things that have made you ashamed. Or you be ashamed by what you have done, or what you've failed to do. Jesus offers us hope of forgiveness and life. He offers us real love and acceptance, a real family. You can be part of that family today by calling out to him.

But you need to know this: God won't be manipulated. No set of "magical" words makes you right with God. No amount of money given to the church makes you right with God. Getting baptized or saying a rote prayer won't make you right with God. The only thing that does is responding in faith to God's word. That means that if you hear this message and you trust in Jesus, you start following him. You will confess your sin to him and you will start to do what he says.

In the end, salvation is not about what you do. It's not about how much power you have, or how much money you have, or what good deeds you've done. It's not about where you're from, how healthy you are, what you look like, what language you speak, or what party you vote for. It's not about how much education you have. It's not about coming from the right family and it's not about having the right friends. Salvation has everything to do with what Jesus did in his perfect life and his death, which pays for the wrongdoing of everyone united to him. If you put your trust in Jesus and follow him, his perfect life is credited to your account, and all your wrongs are credited to him. Your sins were punished when he died on the cross. Faith in Jesus is the only way to be saved. Apart from him, you will perish, in this life and the next. There will be no hope for you.

Fortunately, our God is a God of the outcasts. He reaches out to rich and the poor, the strong and the weak. He may be reaching out to you today. Will you receive his word?