



MAY 16, 2021 | PASTOR WOOHYUN JUNG

“Divine Intervention” (Acts 8:26-40)

²⁶ Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” ²⁷ So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of the Kandake (which means “queen of the Ethiopians”). This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, ²⁸ and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the Book of Isaiah the prophet. ²⁹ The Spirit told Philip, “Go to that chariot and stay near it.”

³⁰ Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. “Do you understand what you are reading?” Philip asked.

³¹ “How can I,” he said, “unless someone explains it to me?” So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

³² This is the passage of Scripture the eunuch was reading:

“He was led like a sheep to the slaughter,
and as a lamb before its shearer is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.

³³ In his humiliation he was deprived of justice.
Who can speak of his descendants?
For his life was taken from the earth.”

³⁴ The eunuch asked Philip, “Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?” ³⁵ Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.

³⁶ As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, “Look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptized?” ³⁸ And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. ³⁹ When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing. ⁴⁰ Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and traveled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea.

Core Idea: God providentially orchestrates our lives in order to bring someone to life because it brings Him joy. God’s gracious invitation to the lost will be offered through us, His people, who are called to point them to Jesus.



INTRODUCTION

Good afternoon church. Hope you're all doing well. We'll take a short break from our series on Philippians and venture back into the book of Acts. The book of Acts is important because it reminds the believers that God's desire is to dwell among us and intentionally work in and through us. Acts 1:1 says, "*In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day He was taken up to heaven.*" The former book refers to the Gospel of Luke, where he recorded all that Jesus did during His earthly ministry. Now, Luke says that these things were only what Jesus *began* to do and teach. Then the book of Acts recounts what Jesus *continues* to do and teach – no longer through His physical body, but through His Spirit through the church. In other words, it's not that *Jesus* worked while He was here and now *the church* works in His absence. Rather it's that *Jesus* worked then, and *Jesus* still works now through the church as the Holy Spirit empowers it. The book of Acts narrates how the Spirit propelled Jesus' followers into the whole world and shows how nothing was able to stop the advancement of the Gospel. Let me remind you how this true in the stories told so far. So, if you have your Bibles, open them up and follow along.

In chapters 3-4, the Jewish leaders, in fear of losing their status and power, locked up Peter and John so that they would stop talking about Jesus. But that led the believers to pray for boldness as they continued to speak the Word of God more earnestly. **In chapter 5**, Ananias and Sapphira sinned against the church which could've destroyed the authenticity of their ministry. But that led to God's holiness being displayed as the church was sanctified to preach the Word with even greater power. **In chapter 6**, Greek widows in the church were being neglected which could've distracted the church from its mission. But this tension led to the choosing of the seven men so that the apostles were able to fully give their attention to prayer and the ministry of the Word. **In chapter 7**, Stephen became the first Christian martyr as he was stoned to death for preaching the Gospel. That signalled a great persecution to break out against the church as many believers were forced to be scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. But this too didn't stop the Gospel from advancing. In fact, *because of* the persecution and scattering of the people, the Gospel was no longer contained in Jerusalem. It moved beyond as those who scattered preached the Word wherever they went, including Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth, which was exactly what Jesus commanded the disciples to do in Acts 1:8.

The Gospel moved out. Nothing stopped the advancement of the Gospel. No matter the challenges the church faced, God used it all for His glory. And do you know what the most exciting truth is? It's that God is not done saving His people. Persecution, our sins, fears, worldly distractions, even COVID – nothing will put a stop to this movement. Brothers and sisters, He's still mighty to save, and He's still at work. What Jesus began to do and teach on earth, and continued to do in the apostles, He *continues* to do in us, our church. We have the same Holy Spirit who turned the world upside down then and He is inviting us to join Him today so that the Gospel will continue to advance. Of course, the Gospel will not be embraced by everyone as we were reminded a few weeks ago when Pastor Tim taught us the danger of false conversion through the story of Simon the sorcerer – that there is a way to hear this life-giving, life-transforming Gospel truth yet remain lifeless. Today, we'll read about someone who *did* experience true conversion. And Luke will show us how God works in our lives to bring someone to life. So, if you have your Bibles, please turn to Acts 8:26-40.

[read text]

I want to point out three truths from this passage:

- **GOD PROVIDENTIALLY ORCHESTRATES OUR LIVES**
- **WE ARE CALLED TO POINT PEOPLE TO JESUS**
- **YOU MUST RECEIVE THE GOOD NEWS**

1) GOD PROVIDENTIALLY ORCHESTRATES OUR LIVES (V. 26-31)

Let's read verse 26: "*Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip.*" We clearly see that God initiated the process. It was God who chose to directly intervene in Philip's life by speaking to him. Nowhere in the Bible do we find a picture of God who sets everything in motion and sits back to see how things play out. Instead, **we see a God who is actively involved in the lives of His people.** This of course doesn't mean that the Christian life is a series of supernatural experiences. Walking by faith often means staying the course when we can't see or feel anything, to suffer through times of dryness and pain when we have nothing to cling to but the promises of God. But this is not the same thing as saying that God is *absent* during those times. **In the Holy Spirit, God is with us until the end of the age.** Now it's easy to miss this but something incredible was happening here. We must remember that Philip wasn't one of the apostles. He was appointed as one of the leaders to distribute food to the widows; he was an ordinary Christian, loving God and living faithfully wherever he was. Yet God was speaking to *this* Philip – an ordinary Christian – and God was ready to work through him in extraordinary ways.

So, what did God say? Verse 26: "*Go south to the road – the desert road – that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.*" Now, I wonder if some of you're thinking, "Well, it's easy for Philip to obey. If I heard the voice of God, if I had specific instructions like that, of course, I would obey." But what if the instruction didn't really make sense to you – the kind of command that would make you wonder, "Why would God ask me to do *this*?" Would you still obey without question? I ask this because that's what Philip must have wrestled with. Remember that Philip was witnessing the first revival in Samaria. These people who were racially and religiously different from the Israelites – hence, discriminated – were now coming to faith. And God was using *him*, Philip, to proclaim the Word of God and many were repenting. Something good was happening. And in the middle of that, an angel of the Lord says, "Get up and go to this *desert* road." I wonder if Philip in his heart said, "But Lord, look at the fruit of this ministry here. There's something exciting happening here. There's a need. I want to be part of this. Wouldn't it be better for me to be here? Maybe you could send someone else." But the Lord still said, "Get up and go." Why was God calling him out to this *desert* road? Philip had no idea, but he obeyed.

Brothers and sisters, **our God is not distant – God is involved in our lives.** God *will* speak. He *will* direct us. And He *will* at times lead and convict us to do things that do not make sense to us, that make us feel uncomfortable, that seem unreasonable as if we're being led to the desert road. In fact, He may be speaking to you right now – convicting you to do something that you've been putting it off for many different reasons. Then how do we obey joyfully? **It's by finding our ultimate contentment in God.** It's to be delighted by the simple fact that *He* wants to use us, involve us in *His* plans. Our contentment in life, work, or ministry shouldn't come from *where* we serve, *how* we serve, or *what* we can be, but from simply knowing *who* we serve. Then is your contentment in the Lord today? This reminded me of an old hymn called *Since Christ My Soul from Sin Set Free*. The chorus goes like this: "It is Christ that I enjoy! On land or sea, what matters where? Where Jesus is, my joy is there." **Where Jesus is, my joy is there.** Is this the song of your hearts? It's no coincidence that you are where you are today – the neighborhood you're in, the job you have, the family you're born into, these are not a set of random circumstances. God has specifically placed you there, not by chance, but to speak through you, to work through you to impact the lives around you. I pray that your joy is in the Lord today because *this* is how we can obey joyfully when He calls.

Let's go back to the story. When Philip went to this desert road, he saw an Ethiopian eunuch who was traveling back home from Jerusalem where he went to worship God. Now, we must recognize how different these two people were. Philip was a middle-class Jewish man. In contrast, this man was racially different (most likely black), from a different culture, of different status, and sexually altered. So, it would've been very odd to see these two men interact. But the Spirit prompted Philip to go near the chariot. Again, no other instruction. He doesn't tell Philip what for. Nor who is in the chariot. Nor what to say. Just be near him.



So, Philip went; in fact, he had to run to catch up since the chariot was moving. But when he got there, Philip realized that the eunuch was reading the book of Isaiah. And not only that, the place where he was reading was from Isaiah 53, which includes a specific reference to the Messiah. So, Philip asked, “*Do you understand what you are reading?*” The man responded, “***How can I unless someone explains it to me? And the man invited Philip to come up and sit with him.***”

Now, let’s think this story from the eunuch’s point of view. He was an important official in charge of all the treasury of the queen. He has reached the top. He had power and success. Then why would a man who had everything take a long (around 1000 km), hard journey leaving his culture, position, and safety? To make matters worse, there was a huge chance that the temple may not have let him in because there was a law that permanently excluded people like him. Deuteronomy 23:1 says, “*No one who has been emasculated by crushing or cutting may enter the assembly of the LORD.*” So, he may have went through all this trouble just to be excluded, to be left outside. Then why did he take that chance and visit Jerusalem? We don’t know because Luke doesn’t tell us. Maybe he was a devout Jew or maybe he was struggling with emptiness, loneliness that this was his way of looking for a solution. We just don’t know. But whatever the case was, one thing was for sure: **the eunuch was earnest**. Look how far he travelled. Also, he had the scroll of Isaiah which was the measure of his enthusiasm knowing how expensive these scrolls were. Usually, each synagogue was able to afford one scroll for the whole village. But the more he read, he just could not understand. More questions arose. His thirst was not quenched until God sent exactly the person he needed to explain the text.

God was orchestrating their lives. As God was working in Philip’s life, He was working in the life of this eunuch – and He brought their lives together in a perfect way. We think we have a plan for our lives. But that plan is also part of God’s plan – which is why at times it may feel like God is messing up our plans. But when things don’t go the way we desired, it’s not that God is messing up our plans; it’s that God is keeping us in His plan – eternal plans to save you, sanctify you and save others, sanctify others through you. Brothers and sisters, do you believe that God is already working in the lives of the people that we will encounter this week as He is in your life? God will always lead us to join where the Spirit is already at work – which means that you may be the exact person that God has divinely appointed to be sent at that exact point in their lives so that you may minister to them and share the Gospel. Then let me ask you, “Are you aware of His providence today?”

2) WE ARE CALLED TO POINT PEOPLE TO JESUS (V. 32-35)

The eunuch was reading a portion of Isaiah 53, which speaks of the death of Messiah and salvation through His sacrificial atonement. In light of what he read, the eunuch asked Philip, “*Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?*” Verse 35, “*Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.*” Of course, we can only imagine what their conversation was like; but Luke is clear on one thing: **Philip began with that very passage of Scripture (Isaiah 53) and told him the good news about Jesus**. Philip didn’t point him to another passage. He was able to explain that very passage and use it to introduce Jesus. This is incredible for three reasons. First, because it shows that even before the NT was written, the believers clearly understood and firmly believed that Jesus was the Messiah that they had been waiting for. Second, because Philip had an in-depth understanding of the Scripture that he was able to explain the very passage that the eunuch was wrestling with. And lastly, because Philip listened and shared the Gospel from where the eunuch was. Let me dwell on that last point.

What we learn from Philip is that we need to listen to the ones we want to reach. We need to understand their fears, struggles, desires, questions, and context. And from *where* they are, move them to the Gospel – point them to Jesus. This is possible because “the Gospel is like a diamond – it’s multi-faceted.” Let me explain. Let’s say you have a car that you want to sell. But the person is reluctant to take the car. How would you promote the car to that person? The way you do this may change according to the context.



If he was **an architect**, you may emphasize the form and beauty of the car. If he was **a race car driver**, you may tell him about the car's performance. If he was **a parent**, you may tell him about the safety features of the car. If he was **a college student**, you may emphasize the car's economy. It's the same car. But you have different ways of promoting it to different people. In none of the cases are you being deceitful. Instead, you're emphasizing an aspect of the car that the person you're talking to will immediately understand and will engage at emotional levels. This is also true when we present the Gospel. It's the same story – God's story – true for all people, at all times, in all places. But the Bible gives us different ways of explaining it to different audiences and different people. Each audience will have different entry points and find a different aspect of the Gospel that connects emotionally with them. But the amazing thing is that it will all point to the whole person of Jesus Christ. In fact, that's exactly what Jesus did too – sharing the same truth differently according to the context. **The expert in the law** needed to love like the Samaritan, while **the rich young ruler** needed to give up his love of riches. To Nicodemus, **a Pharisee**, Jesus said, "*You must be born again,*" while saying to **a Samaritan woman** at a well, "*Whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst,*" while saying to **a man born blind**, "*I am the light of the world.*"

Every Gospel presentation in the Bible essentially says **something about Jesus**: who He is, what He has done, and what He will do. **This is why crafting a Gospel presentation is best if it begins with listening.** Yes, there are essential components of the good news that you must communicate, namely, God, sin, Jesus, and repentance. You also need to study and know the Scripture like Philip so you can explain when an opportunity arises. But instead of first worrying about what we'll say, let them begin the conversation. Listen to their worldviews. Listen to their stories. The better you know the person, the better you'll be able to contextualize, or bring out the side of the Gospel that will connect most with them. For example, **to the person who's never been loved**, we may focus on the love of God displayed through what Christ has done for us. **To the person who believes that she's a good person**, we may need to show her how holy our God is and the weightiness of our sins. **To the person who feels unworthy**, we may start by sharing that we have worth simply because we're created in the image of God – and how our sin marred that image, yet Jesus came to restore that for us. **The way we tell the Gospel may change; but this doesn't have to compromise the message of the Gospel.** So, think about the person you want to reach. Have you taken some time to get to know his/her story; to listen to their worldviews; to hear what's on their mind? If you haven't, invest your time to do that. Try to feel what they're feeling. See the world from their point of view. Listen to love them. Listen to really get to know them. Then ask God for wisdom as to how you can share the Gospel – and point them to Jesus.

3) YOU MUST RECEIVE THE GOOD NEWS (V. 36-39)

Luke tells us that the eunuch believed in Jesus and immediately expressed his faith through baptism. Verse 36, "*As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, 'Look, here is water. **What can stand in the way of my being baptized?**'*" Before meeting Philip, the eunuch must have thought that so many things stood in his way of becoming a Christian. "Can a black man be baptized as a Christian? Can a eunuch, who was previously excluded from worship, be included? Will a non-Jew be accepted? Is there something else I need to do?" Whatever his questions were, at this moment, he knew the answer to all of them: nothing – there was nothing that prevented him from receiving this good news, which is why in verse 38, "*He gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him.*" The eunuch believed and didn't hesitate. This is what it means to receive the good news: **the possession of faith leads to the profession of faith.**



Now, how do we know if the eunuch really believed – that he wasn't just going through the motion? How do we know he wasn't like Simon the sorcerer who was falsely converted? Verse 39, "*When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing.*" We know the Ethiopian eunuch was truly converted because there was joy.

Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians 1:6, "*You became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit.*" **Joy here is something that transcends circumstances – joy means being delighted, being glad, being satisfied not because of the situation you're in but because of what you know to be true.** Let's consider the eunuch's life. He had no faith community in Ethiopia. He wasn't sure if he'll be accepted by other Christians. He had one Christian friend, Philip, and no assurance that he would ever see him again. He was alone. He would likely not be remembered as he would have no children or grandchildren to tell his story. And yet he now knew things that would totally transform his outlook on life. He knew that he had union with God through the person of Jesus Christ. He knew that he had a future and an inheritance that will never spoil or fade. He knew that he belonged to a family and that he will never be cut off from them. He knew that his joy and hope would only increase day by day knowing that his future was secure in his relationship with Jesus Christ – and *that's* what would've changed him forever. The knowledge expressed in his joy – this was a mark of the truly converted soul.

So, let me ask you, "What stands in *your* way of being baptized? What prevents *you* from receiving Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior?" Before you answer, let me remind you that earlier in this message, I asked, "Why did God direct Philip to leave that first revival in Samaria?" Let me answer by reading from Luke 15:4. Jesus says, "*Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn't he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.'* **I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.**" Friends, the reason why God called Philip to leave *many* Samaritans to go to a desert road was solely for that *single* Ethiopian eunuch. He's that kind of God. And He still works the same way today. He has orchestrated all things so that *you* would hear this message today – so that this message would point you to Christ. Then, I plead with you, do not reject this good news. Don't wait for another opportunity. Don't wait for supernatural experiences. Hearing the Word of God was enough for this eunuch. Let the truth of the Gospel minister to you – namely, that Christ came to pay for your sins with His blood on the cross. He suffered the death you and I deserved so that we could be made right before God. You might be hesitant to receive this good news because you think you're unworthy or undesirable. But know that Jesus died for you because He loves you – not because you're more lovable than others, but simply because He chooses to love you. Jesus left everything, emptied Himself, to find you, to save you, to bring you joy because *your* joy is *His* joy. If you're not yet a follower of Jesus Christ, I invite you to turn and trust Him today, because you will find no greater joy.

APPLICATION (V. 40)

One application for the believers. Look at where the Spirit takes Philip after the eunuch was baptized in verse 40. Now, I don't know if it was some kind of spiritual teleporting or Luke just meant that the Spirit suddenly convicted him to go. All we know is that the Spirit took Philip away. Then the focus shouldn't be on *how* the Spirit took him but *where* the Spirit took him. Philip appeared at Azotus, which was a city of the Philistines, the enemy of the Jews. But even there, Philip continued to preach the Gospel. **If you're a follower of Christ**, no matter what difficulty you may be going through, no matter what news you may receive this week, God can be trusted. You can build your life on that foundation. He is good and He is working for the good of those who love Him. And wherever He has placed you, faithfully preach the Word. It's no coincidence that He has placed right where you are. It's no coincidence that you interact with people you interact with and remember that the Gospel is even for our enemies.



God worked to bring this joy to “unworthy” Samaritans, an “unreachable” Ethiopian eunuch, and “undesirable” enemies, the Philistines. Are you considering someone unworthy, unreachable, or undesirable? Have you ever thought, “*He* can’t possibly follow Christ. God can’t reach *her*. Do you know how lost they are?” I pray that this story would remind you of this great truth: **God is mighty to save anyone**. So, let us not give up inviting people to receive the greatest news that anyone can hear.

CONCLUSION

Brothers and sisters, God providentially orchestrates our lives in order to bring someone to life because He wants to share the joy of this good news. Yet God’s gracious invitation to the lost will be offered through us, His people, who are called to point them to Jesus. What’s amazing is that the same Spirit who worked in Christ now dwells in us. Then let us be in tune with the Spirit. Let us listen to the lost. And let us preach the Gospel faithfully, clearly, and passionately knowing that this news not only brings life and joy to the hearers, but even greater joy to the Giver of this news.

Let’s pray.