

Sermon – Acts 8:26-40 – Leroy Coote 27/6/2021

Before we look at this very 'eunuch' passage, let's pray.

Heavenly father, I thank you for your word and ask that you would give us listening hearts to what you have to say through me. Lord, I ask that you would give me clarity of thought and speech as I encourage my fellow brothers and sisters in Christ in their call to pointing people to Jesus. Amen.

Everyone here has their favourite recipe that they like either to make *or* to eat, regardless of the reason. In each recipe there is always one ingredient that brings the recipe together to give it that stunning flavour that makes you salivate and think of paradise every time you think about it or make it. Usually, it's the essential ingredient for that dish. For example: To make bread dough you basically need flour and yeast. On their own they are just flour and yeast. But if you add a certain amount of water and knead it, you can make yourself, bread dough. Another example; in any supremely flavoured hot, spicy curry: you need a good handful of finely diced red chillies to bring that exquisite flavour to this masterful blend of spices. However, you also need something to bind those ingredients together. The best suggestion for this is either natural yoghurt or coconut milk because after you stir through all the ingredients, it creates a sweet-smelling curry paste and after it is cooked with meat and vegetables, a superb curry results. And I'm sure we have many more favourite recipes that has one ingredient that binds everything together.

But today, I've got a recipe that is so explosive, that it makes the hottest curry taste as plain as bread and butter. It's a recipe that is sooo... delicious; we want to share it with the whole world. And when combined, its ingredients are so potent that no matter where we are, everyone will get a taste. But like any good recipe, let's look at its ingredients first: Our first ingredient is the evangelist or one that points people to Jesus. In our passage today, his name is Philip. Philip is a very prominent character in the Book of Acts. We first meet him as one of the 'seven' in Acts 6. The 'seven' as you may recall were chosen because of the Greeks complaining against the Hebrews. The complaint was that their widows were being overlooked in daily food distribution. To put this right, the disciples asked the people gathered to choose seven men (in other words, converts) from among themselves (all of whom were under the apostles' teaching). They were to be full of the spirit and wisdom. These men then became the food distributors. Philip was one of these men. Then at the beginning of Acts 8, the great scattering occurs and all except the apostles ended up in Judea and Samaria which partially fulfils Acts 1:8. It is in Samaria, with the help of the Holy Spirit that Philip does his best work: preaching to many people and the many coming to Christ because of the gospel message. And that's all prior to the passage we are in. Philip is an evangelist, one who proclaims the gospel to point people towards accepting Jesus as Lord and Saviour.

But in keeping with our recipe, let's look at this ingredient, evangelist or proclaimer of good news which is something this area needs at this time. What are its qualities? We know from Acts that our evangelist has been taught by the Apostles. He has become a follower of the Lord Jesus. We know that our evangelist is full of the Spirit and wisdom; we also know about his obedience in that he proclaims Christ. This obedience is exemplified at the start of verse 27 when we are told that he obeys the Spirit's instruction to walk down the wilderness road from Jerusalem to Gaza which if he goes the whole way is a 60 km walk ... in desert conditions. Friends, the characteristics of the evangelist aren't dissimilar to ones possessed by all Christians. We're taught the apostles' teaching here in our services. Assuming that we are all Christians, we're filled with the Spirit, and as a result, we're obedient to Him and we all desire to proclaim Christ. And in this recipe, all qualities mentioned are essential for this ingredient to be at its most effective. Our second

ingredient is one who is not in a right relationship with Jesus Christ. These can come in many varieties. But the variety we have here is the Ethiopian Eunuch. Ethiopia was considered the ends of the earth back in the 1st century. As a result of this passage, we see the fulfilment here of the rest of Acts 1:8 when the witness of the apostles reaches the ends of the earth.

The eunuch had certain qualities about him which we find in verses 27-28. He was a court official for the queen. He was her treasurer, therefore a responsible man. He had come to Jerusalem to worship. Worshipping was an interesting thing to do because of the eunuch's status in Jewish eyes. Let me explain. In Deut 23:1 we are told that eunuchs should not be admitted to the assembly of the Lord. However, in Isaiah 56:3-5, tells us if eunuchs please the Lord, they shall not be cut off from him. In our passage from Acts, we clearly see Isaiah 56 being fulfilled. And coincidentally, we see the eunuch reading Isaiah whilst on the way back to Ethiopia in his chariot. Most scholars either describe him as a God-fearer or a gentile worshipper of the God of Israel. The eunuch is our second ingredient. The last, but certainly not the least ingredient is the Spirit who in verse 26 is called the angel of the Lord. The Spirit initiated this fantastic narrative we have here in Acts and put our recipe together. For the Greek scholars amongst us, the Greek word for angel also means messenger. However, the role of the Spirit in this recipe does not stop with message delivery. As we now enter the instructions for our recipe, we will see the enormous effect the Spirit has on our other ingredients. The Spirit acts as a binding agent between our evangelist and our non-believer in verse 29 when Philip is asked to go to the Ethiopian's chariot and join it. This Philip does in verse 30 in his typically obedient fashion. So, the Spirit in his role here as the binder has taken hold of his evangelist, used his characteristic of obedience and placed him somewhere where he can share God's message. Once placed, Philip hears the eunuch reading Isaiah and engages with him by asking, "Do you understand what you are reading". The eunuch replies in verse 31, "How can I, unless someone guides me." And then Philip gets into the chariot and sits beside him. Our evangelist and non-believer have now been bound due to the Holy Spirit. So what? Big deal! They're bound. Yes. The Spirit does bring Christians and non-Christians together. But what impact does it have? What happens when these ingredients are put together?

Hang on to your seats friends, the real cooking is about to begin. We are told what the eunuch was reading in verses 32-33. A great passage on its own Verses 32-33 are part of the fourth and final servant song in Isaiah. They describe the persecution that the servant will undertake. Though in Isaiah we don't see the identity of the servant, what we know is that the prophecy contained in these verses is fulfilled in the death of Jesus on the cross. Philip goes onto explain this fact in response to the eunuch's question of verse 34 in verse 35. **A point of interest.** When Philip began to speak to the eunuch, where did he start? He started at the common point for both of them, which was the passage of Scripture that the eunuch had. Philip, with the help of the Holy Spirit, then led the conversation to the point that the eunuch had heard the gospel. From this, we see two principles for evangelism or pointing people to a relationship with Jesus. Firstly, the evangelist found a mutual starting point which could only happen because of the Holy Spirit. And secondly, the evangelist, with the Help of the Holy Spirit, led the conversation to the point of proclaiming Jesus. We don't know the length of time from one step to the next, but it is the principles portrayed that are crucial in our recipe. Not only is the Spirit playing a binding role, it maximises the characteristics and gifts of our Evangelist.

We earlier discovered that Philip was well versed in the Scriptures. He didn't lock the apostles' teaching into his brain. In fact, his knowledge of the apostles' teaching was unlocked in his discussion with the Eunuch. In learning about the word of God, we are not to lock it into our

brains but to use it to proclaim Jesus. It's our responsibility, as mentioned in Matthew 28 with the command of "Go and make disciples." So far in our recipe we've seen How the Spirit brings the evangelist and non-Christian together. We've also seen how the Spirit has used the knowledge that Philip has been given to proclaim Jesus. But what effect, if any, does this have on our non-believer, the eunuch? Something has obviously happened to the eunuch in his discussion with Philip because in verse 36 he wants to get baptised. Not to become a Baptist but get baptised! But why does he want to get baptised? We have a precedent for this in 8:12 which reads, "But when they believed Philip, who was proclaiming the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptised, both men and women." The eunuch wanted to get baptised as an expression of his new belief in Christ. This leads me to the absence of verse 37. In most of the early biblical manuscripts, it is missing and ... only appears in the Western Text, which adds the following, "And Philip said, 'if you believe with all your heart, you may.' And the eunuch replied, 'I believe that Jesus Christ is the son of God.'"

This proves that the eunuch genuinely placed his trust in Jesus and was converted. But this doesn't answer the question of why it is never in the main text. One commentator I read suggests that Philip must have been genuinely satisfied with the fact that the Ethiopian believed, so there was no point in adding it in. I think it's fair to say given previous events in Acts 8, Philip was a pretty good judge of whether the Ethiopian believed or not. Also, I think it would be fair to say that throughout the Book of Acts that being baptised was a sign that you have become a believer in Christ or one who has placed their trust in Christ. And the eunuch's baptism occurred in verse 38. So, we see another part of the Spirit's work in bringing the eunuch to belief in Christ, proving that he is a very, very essential, and effective ingredient in our recipe. But does the work of the Spirit stop there? Does this recipe finish here? No! Look at verse 39. When they came out of the water, The Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away. Philip's work with the eunuch was complete at the water. But did the Spirit give him a break? No! The Spirit whisked him away to Azotus in verse 40. But why? To proclaim the good news to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

The Spirit continued to use Philip to proclaim the great gospel message we have. Philip didn't lock the gospel into his brain and take it easy. He had no choice because the Spirit directed him to continue the great work, that He had planned for him. But what about the eunuch? What happened to him? All we know is that he went on rejoicing in verse 39. He rejoiced because of his new-found joy – all due to the Holy Spirit. We don't know what became of him, but I would guess that his Spirit based joy would have resulted in many coming to Christ. Did you rejoice when you became a Christian? Do you remember back to when you first became a Christian? The excitement you felt, the joy of the occasion? I vividly remember that time. In my teenage years which occurred last century, I had been explained the gospel very clearly just like the eunuch and experienced it in action. I wanted to be a part of God's kingdom and on the Saturday night of the church camp that year, I became a believer. I was extremely excited by this. Friends of mine celebrated with me. It was fantastic. What's even more exciting about sharing this story is that the person who shared the gospel with me is still sharing the gospel with people in Canberra, with the help of the Holy Spirit.

I said earlier that this recipe could have worldwide impact. This evangelism recipe certainly has that. The combination of our three ingredients: The Spirit, an Evangelist (Philip) and a non-believer (the Eunuch). We've all been the non-believer at one time. But through the Spirit sending us someone to tell us the gospel and compelling us to respond, we have become a part of this recipe. but now, we have become the evangelist and not the non-believer. But this recipe's cooking time isn't over yet. There is a suburb of non-believers in our suburbs dying to get their

hands on this recipe. There's a world of believers wanting to share this recipe. We're not to lock it in our brains. We're to ask for the Spirit's help in finding non-believers to be the third part of this recipe. Whether we like it or not, we're part of this recipe until the end of our lives. But don't fret, because we have that great God-given ingredient to help us as part of our evangelistic recipe in the Holy Spirit. As we continue living in the post-Christian era, Let me encourage you not to be shy in sharing this recipe which should be top billing in any Christian Cookbook. After all, how else can people hear about Jesus if it is not shared? Let me encourage all of you to ask God's Holy Spirit to give you the opportunity to have conversations that point people to Jesus with all those who are in your network of contacts so that God's kingdom grows, and more people accept Jesus as their Lord and Saviour – just like the Eunuch did.