

**Text: Acts 8:26-40**

**Title: “Unstoppable in the Face of Barriers”**

It's great to be back from our trip to India. I'm excited about the partnership we have with the Indian Baptist Society. We trained over 100 of their leaders in two different conferences. Last year more than 1560 were baptized in the churches of the IBS. They started more than 300 new house churches. And through our giving and going we are partners with them in that. I also spoke at the leadership retreat for the Bangalore Baptist Hospital, another important partner with us in India. They are doing a great work.

Open your Bibles to Acts 8:26. We're studying the book of Acts which is the message of God's unstoppable quest to change the world through the Gospel of His Son Jesus Christ. We see in that Acts 8 persecution can't stop the Gospel. Believers just go somewhere else to proclaim the message of Jesus. Ethnic barriers can't stop it. A guy named Philip takes the Gospel to the most unlikely place ... Samaria. And here in the last part of Acts 8 another cultural barrier collapses in the face of the Gospel. A man from Ethiopia in Africa hears the Gospel and is saved. This is the business of God, and it must be our business as well.

**ILLUSTRATION** – A few weeks ago Nan and I had dinner with some friends from the UK who were visiting in Fort Worth. The husband, named Graham, came to Christ when they lived in here a few years ago before returning back to the UK. I remember the first Sunday Graham and Martha came to our church. After the worship service Graham came up to me and with his thick British accent, said: “My wife is a believer, but honestly I have struggled with believing in God. I wonder if you would have time to speak with someone like me.” Well, of course I did and over the next few weeks we met and talked about the Gospel. He was an aeronautical engineer and so he was trying to understand everything through the mind of an engineer. But God was powerfully moving in his life. One day we were having lunch at a BBQ joint and when we finished our meal I said to Graham, “We've talked a lot about the Gospel. Are you ready to put your trust in Jesus?” With a voice filled with sincerity Graham said, “Yes, I am!” And there in that crowded, noisy BBQ joint Graham prayed to receive Christ. This is God's business, and it must be ours as well.

Now let me just walk us through these verses starting with Acts 8:26, telling the story again of how an African man of high standing comes to meet Jesus literally in the middle of nowhere. At the end I'll close with a few challenges for us by way of application. There are three persons involved in this event: Philip, an Ethiopian man and the Lord. But the Lord is the hero of the story. God zeroes in on a man and draws Him to Himself. What a gracious God who comes after sinners!

**Acts 8:26 - Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.”**

Notice that Philip is not told at this point to whom He is to speak. He is simply told to “go south to ... the desert road,” a road through the middle of nowhere. And v.27 says that “he

started out.” I'm impressed with Philip's raw availability to God. When God said, “Go,” Philip “started out.”

**Acts 8:27 - So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship,**

**Acts 8:28 - and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the book of Isaiah the prophet.**

God had His eye on the Ethiopian man long before Philip met him. God knew his nationality. He's an Ethiopian, from northeastern Africa. God knew his profession. He is an important official in charge of the treasury of the queen of the Ethiopians. God knew his spiritual condition. This Ethiopian man had gone a long distance to Jerusalem to worship at the temple there. He's either a Jew or at the very least a seeker of the God of the Jews. He's acquired a part of the Bible (the book of Isaiah) and he's reading it. And God is working in all of this to draw the man to Himself.

**Acts 8:29 - The Spirit told Philip, “Go to that chariot and stay near it.”**

**Acts 8:30 - Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. “Do you understand what you are reading?” Philip asked.**

So the Holy Spirit prompts Philip to go and make a connection with the man riding in the chariot. I can just see Philip. He just sort of hangs around the guy, watching for an opportunity to talk with him. The Ethiopian is reading his Bible and Philip asks, “Hey, do you understand what you're reading?” The Ethiopian invites Philip into his chariot.

Philip does this so skillfully. He simply asks a question, “Do you understand what you're reading?” One common misconception about sharing Christ with others is that believers think they have to do all the talking. Actually, one of the greatest ways to demonstrate love is to simply listen to them. This is the premise behind the “Explore God” initiative that we have coming up. People need to be able to honestly talk about their questions as we share the Good News with them.

**Acts 8:31- “How can I,” he said, “unless someone explains it to me?” So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.**

God has so orchestrated things that at that very moment the man was reading part of the Old Testament where the prophet Isaiah spoke about the coming of the Christ found in Isaiah 53.

**Acts 8:32 - The eunuch was reading this passage of Scripture: “He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before the shearer is silent, so he did not open his mouth.**

**Acts 8:33 - In his humiliation he was deprived of justice. Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth.”**

**Acts 8:34 - The eunuch asked Philip, “Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?”**

I read this and it causes me to praise God for the power of His Word. God uses His Word to create a hunger in this man’s heart. How awesome is that!

**Acts 8:35 - Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.**

You see, the whole Bible is ultimately about Jesus and the Good News of God bringing sinners to Himself through Christ. No matter what else is involved, ultimately we must tell them the good news about Jesus. The power to save is the message of the Gospel. And apparently something huge happens between v.35 and v.36 because...

**Acts 8:36 - As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, “Look, here is water. Why shouldn’t I be baptized?”**

So the Ethiopian man has apparently been saved and they’re looking for a place where he can be baptized. Baptism doesn’t save anyone, but Jesus teaches His followers that when we are saved we must confess Him before others through believer’s baptism. That’s why we teach new believers this is important.

**Acts 8:37 – Philip said, “If you believe with all your heart you may.” The eunuch answered, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.”**

Your copy of the Scriptures may leave out v.37 with a note that this verse is not found in the most reliable manuscripts. And that may be true. But we know from elsewhere in the NT that part of the presentation of the Gospel is the call for a person to believe, to put their faith and trust, in Christ as the Son of God.

**Acts 8:38 - And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him.**

So this man confessed his faith in Christ to Philip, but also to his entourage that would have been travelling with him. Again, this is why immediate baptism is important for new believers.

**Acts 8:39 - 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.**

So the man is saved and he experiences great joy. Do you want that for your loved ones and friends who are without Christ? This is an amazing story. So what do we learn from this episode?

## **1. REMEMBER IT ALL STARTS WITH GOD.**

Praise God that He goes after sinners! God is showing mercy to a man whose high rank and professional success had not satisfied his spiritual emptiness. People may appear to have it all together, but inside they're longing for meaning greater than their position or possessions. You will never invest in a non-believer's life that God hasn't already invested in. You will never love someone that God hasn't loved first. God is already working. The very fact that He has brought you into contact with a person is an indication that God is sovereignly reaching into this person's life. It always starts with God.

## **2. WATCH FOR HOW GOD ORCHESTRATES OUR CONNECTION WITH OTHERS.**

Something has to happen for Philip in Samaria to come into contact with this Ethiopian man riding along a deserted road. You never know how God works to cause our paths to cross with people who are far from God. And God often uses adverse circumstances to position us for opportunities to witness.

**ILLUSTRATION** – Some of you know that due to my own carelessness I had a little difficulty getting to India. I had double-checked to make sure my passport was in order, but it wasn't until I was standing in check in line at the airport that I noticed that my Indian visa, which is stamped on a page in my passport, had expired back in March. There was no way they were going to let me on the airplane without the proper visa. Scott Gottreu who was travelling with me went on with the trip. I had to figure out how to get my visa renewed quickly enough to catch up with the rest of our team. I looked online on my phone and found that there was an office in Arlington that specialized in getting international visas renewed in 24 hours. I ran out of the airport and took a taxi to this passport business. When I walked in I was assisted by the owner, an Indian man we'll call Ron. As we were filling out the application I learned that he just happened to be from Bangalore, India, the place I was travelling to. Interesting! As we talked about the fact that I would be staying at the Bangalore Baptist Hospital he told me that he grew up in a neighborhood very near the hospital. Bangalore is a city of 10 million people on the other side of the world. What are the chances of that happening? In fact, when his father-in-law died a few years ago the body was kept at the morgue at the Bangalore Baptist Hospital while they made the funeral arrangements. As this conversation was going on there were several indications that led me to believe that Ron was not a believer. The next morning he called me to let me know that my visa had been approved and that he was emailing me the documents. Before we hung up I said to my new friend, "I don't know where you are spiritually, but I believe God caused our paths to cross for a reason. God used you to help me get to India for an important assignment. It's no coincidence that you happened to be from the very place where I was going." He didn't respond, but just said he was glad to help. And we hung up. I

immediately sat down and wrote an email to him expressing my gratitude, but also I wrote a detailed explanation of the Gospel. I ask you to join me in praying for Ron. God works even in our mistakes. I was able to rebook my flights for the next day. In preparation for the trip I had prayed that God would open doors of witness even on the airplane going to and from India. I didn't know that God would not let me out of the country before opening a door. God orchestrates our connection with others.

### **3. LISTEN FOR PROMPTINGS FROM GOD.**

The first promptings of God always come from the command of Jesus in His Word. He said, "Go and make disciples of all nations." We don't need to wait for an angel to speak to us. We obey by planning for opportunities to talk to people about Christ. But as we go about our life of intentional obedience to Christ, He will give us more direct and personal promptings. You may not think the timing is all that great, but God knows the unique circumstances in the other person's life. Be alert.

### **4. PREPARE WITH THE KNOWLEDGE OF SCRIPTURE.**

Philip had sufficient knowledge of the Bible that he could recognize the passage in Isaiah that the Ethiopian man was reading. Philip knew enough to know that that was a portion of Isaiah that prophesied about the coming Messiah. So Philip was skillful enough to take it from there and proclaim to him the Good News of Jesus Christ. One step of faith is for you to prepare yourself with the knowledge of the Bible and the Gospel.

### **5. BE AVAILABLE.**

Friend, you may never know how God uses you. Philip was whisked away by the Holy Spirit, just as quickly as he was brought to this desert road. He may have never known that the Ethiopian "went on his way rejoicing." Neither did Philip know that this one man's transformation probably touched an entire nation. Early church tradition tells us that this man went back to his homeland and became a powerful evangelist that God used to spark a great spiritual awakening in Ethiopia.

Are you available to God? Is your heart sensitive toward Him today? Is your heart tender toward the people around you who are lost without Jesus Christ?