

THREE INGREDIENTS OF A GOD OPPORTUNITY

ORIGINS SERIES PART 2 - GOING VIRAL

Ben Rudolph

Good morning Life Fellowship. It is good to see you here this morning. Let's turn in our Bibles to Acts Chapter 8 as that is where we are going to be. We are going to read a story about the life of Philip. I know Pastor Dan did a great job last week of talking about how Philip was doing missionary work in Samaria, and we are going to pick up in the narrative right after that.

A few weeks ago my family and I, as well as another family friend, were able to go to the Charlotte Symphony. Now we don't do that very often but this one was playing the sound track for Star Wars while we watched the movie. It was really cool and amazing because you already know that I am a huge Star Wars fan. I was a little curious on how this was going to work because this orchestra plays all these different instruments, with the strings and the brass and everything, and it looked like there were about sixty different individuals up there. So I wondered how they could make it all work and how it could all be synced together with the playing of the movie.

Because here is the thing that I know, I am 43 years old and I have seen Star Wars probably about a hundred times. And so I know how that movie goes. I know the way the music is supposed to sync up at just the right moment in the movie. So as I am experiencing this I realized it was the best possible way to watch a movie. Next year when *The Empire Strikes Back* is on I am going there to experience it again, because it was just so unbelievable with the sound, and they did it so perfectly. The way they were able to sync it exactly the way it should be with every instrument and with the scenes on the screen was just incredible.

And I thought about how they did that. Now there was one guy who had his face toward the orchestra and he was the conductor. And the conductor was making sure that everybody was doing exactly what they needed to do. And really when I think about the orchestration of events of pulling that off I also think about how that is a lot of how God uses us in our lives. God is a God who is always orchestrating and many times we think, *'All right God, make my life work.'* And God is going to make your life work, but God never works in your life without trying to connect you to somebody else. Amen?

And I believe that some of the things we miss is because we have this tunnel vision of God's work in our own lives, and not realizing that He is always working not just in our lives but so that we can have an impact in other people's lives. And as we read this narrative in Acts today, we will see how the gospel is continuing to progress. We are going to see how the gospel has expanded from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria.

Jesus' teaching to make disciples to be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth is happening. And I think we have to confront our hearts about something, because I am not sure how many of us today who call ourselves

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Christians, how many of us that are a part of the church, really believe that Christ is still working today to do these kind of things in our area, in our neighborhood, in our culture and in our nation.

And I believe that for most of us when it comes to our expectations of God working and moving - we don't have any. We almost have a bunker mentality because of what we choose to see in the world. And instead of looking to reach out, instead of thinking that God wants to see a movement amongst His people and amongst this nation, we simply retreat and build walls to protect ourselves from the world. And if we do that we are going to miss the God opportunities that are all around us. And I really believe that there are God opportunities around us every single day. There are opportunities for us every single day to see God work, to see God move.

And we see this as a perfect example in Acts Chapter 8. So let's look at our Scripture this morning beginning in verse 26 through verse 40. *"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. And he arose 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 and was returning, seated in his chariot, and he was reading the prophet Isaiah. And the Spirit said to Philip, 'Go over and join this chariot.' So Philip ran to him 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."

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

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

"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. But Philip

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found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through he preached the gospel to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.”

Here was another story of how God is working, another story of how God is getting His gospel to people who do not know Him. Again, we have to ask ourselves, ‘Does God still want that today? Does God still want the gospel proclaimed to people in our work environment? Does God still want the gospel proclaimed in our neighborhood? Does God still want the gospel proclaimed in our school?’ And I would say, ‘Yes!’ Because God is no different today than He was back then.

And when we see the orchestration of Philip with this eunuch and all these people hearing about the gospel, we have to ask ourselves, ‘How does this happen?’ If we believe that God wants to do this, and we see in our lives that He is not doing this, or what we see is a lack of movement, there is not something wrong with God; it is that there is something wrong with us. We are missing something.

What I see in this passage today are three ingredients to a God opportunity. Three ingredients to a God opportunity, and we are going to look at these ingredients, because I believe these ingredients are confrontational to our own hearts. And we need to ask ourselves if we are preparing ourselves so that we can see how God is working around us to put these pieces together.

So the first ingredient that I see here is a listening posture. We see in this passage that Philip is listening. We know that Philip has already been having a successful ministry. He had been in Samaria already and he had seen lots of people being saved and baptized. And it was an amazing type of thing that very few of us have ever had the opportunity to see.

I don’t know about you but when you are in an environment or in a location where there seems to be a lot of great activity, what are you going to do? You are going to stay right there, right? You are not going to want to move, you are not going to want to do other things because you sense God is at work here. And yet what does God tell Philip to do? He sends an angel of the Lord and tells him to go to this road from Jerusalem to Gaza “***and this is a desert place.***”

Now that doesn’t sound very exciting, does it? I don’t know about you but if God ever tells us to go to the desert I am not sure how many of us are going to be real excited to do that. I mean here is Philip and he has been experiencing all these great things and now God is telling him to go to the desert. Now if you are Philip what would you have said? ‘*But God, there is all this stuff happening here. And you want to send me to a place where there is no one?*’

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But what does Philip do? He goes. See, Philip knew that God was truly Lord of his life. He had witnessed God using him to work in Samaria. And he believed that if he was going to see God do something again, he just had to keep listening to Him. And that is what you and I have to confront every single day, and that is are we truly listening to the Lord? Are we listening to Him speaking to our lives?

Here is something that I think is so interesting, and that is the word that God gave Philip didn't make sense. One commentator said that it seemed absurd what God was asking Philip to do. Has God ever asked you to do something that seemed absurd, and you thought that it didn't make sense?

I will say this though, if God tells you to do something that doesn't make sense, it is okay, because God is working. And God tells Philip to go to this desert place where he sees this chariot. It is called a chariot, but it is probably really more of an official vehicle because this person was a very important person. And Philip goes over to this chariot where he can hear the Bible being read. He hears Isaiah the prophet being read. Again this was God's orchestration of events, but Philip would not have been there in that moment to meet this Ethiopian eunuch reading Scripture if he had not been obedient, if he had not been listening.

So what you and I need to do is wrestle with how many voices we hear all the time, because there are opportunities that we miss. I think of a story that happened in my life a few years ago when I was praying for God to use me. Have you ever asked God to use you and then He tells you how He wants to use you and you are like, *'But I don't want to be used that way.'*

But I was asking God to use me and later in that day I was running errands. I was at this shopping plaza and I was busy doing my own thing. And there was this couple sitting on a bench and they looked a little rough and like they were not doing very well. And the Holy Spirit said, *'Ben, I want you to go talk to them. Go tell them about me.'* Now what do you think I did? *'God, I don't know if I can relate. I don't know what to say to them. They look like they may be in trouble. I am in a hurry.'*

And I think about that moment when I kept silent and I did not talk to them. There may be some times where we feel God is moving and when God says to do something and we just don't do it, and I will always remember that moment. And when I think back to that day I wish so badly that I had responded to God and talked to them.

Now God probably brought someone else there to have that opportunity that day to share the good news of Jesus with them, but I missed it. I missed it because I was listening to another voice. And I think there are a lot of voices that we can hear when it

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comes to the posture of life. Because the voices we listen to, who we listen to, is going to influence how we behave and how we live. One of my favorite cartoons I loved to watch when I was a kid was Tom and Jerry. Any Tom and Jerry fans here this morning? I don't think it is even legal to show that cartoon anymore because it is so violent. (*Laughter.*) I mean they throw axes at each other, and they are blowing each other up so it would not pass the Nickelodeon test today.

But I remember watching Tom and Jerry and one of my favorite episodes of that cartoon was when Tom the cat, who always wanted to catch Jerry, had a little angel cat and a little devil cat on his shoulder talking to him. The angel cat was saying, '*Do the good thing,*' while the devil cat was saying, '*Do the bad thing.*' But I think that most of us when it comes to the voices that we hear, it is so much more than just a good voice and a bad voice. There are multi-layered voices that we hear that can distract and disrupt what God is trying to do through us.

Invariably when I disciple guys there will be a time in our meetings where they will be wrestling with some kind of issue. So one of the exercises I use with them is an exercise called 'The Voices.' I usually ask them what are the voices they listen to the most? And so they will write down all the voices they listen to, and those are the voices that I think are predominant with most of the men that I disciple. Some of them are good voices, but they always put 'self' as the number one voice what it comes down to who is the person who talks to us the most, because that is invariably ourselves. We hear our own voice the most.

So we have self, we have spouse, we have family, we have media like Fox News or CNN or MSNBC or whatever it might be, and we have social media like Facebook. It might not be speaking to you but it is sending you a message, it is saying something to you about the values of life. Then you have friends' voices, and you obviously have the spiritual darkness that surround us that is trying to speak to us. You have the culture, you have books, and you have God, and they all are voices speaking to us every single day.

Here is the question that I wrestle with, and I hope you will wrestle with too - how do we get God to be the number one voice on that list? I know that Satan, that demonic voice, never shows up as himself. He never shows up and say, '*Hey I am the enemy.*' Do you know what the enemy loves to do? He loves to clothe himself in other voices, or he will show up as your voice. Or the enemy will show up as God's voice. Or the enemy will show up as the voice of your friends or your culture or whatever it might be. He will do anything to keep you from listening to God.

Listen, it might not be a little devil telling you to do something bad. It just could be a little less good than what God wants for your life. And when you listen to those

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voices, do you know what you miss? You miss an opportunity to be obedient to God, and you miss an opportunity to see God work. I think the reason why Philip was able to say, ‘*Okay, I will go to the desert,*’ is because he already had a track record of listening to God’s voice and then doing it. He was already hearing from God.

And I don’t want us to be a church that misses what God wants to do in our lives. So many times when we think about our Christian life we come in here and we say to ourselves, ‘*I hope God does something today while I am in church. I hope people are moved and I hope God does something great.*’ Listen, do I want God to work in a room like this? Absolutely. But we limit our expectations and we do not see what God is doing if we simply say, ‘*God, work here and now,*’ instead of asking God to work out there and everywhere we go. God wants to share His good news with people.

So we need to ask ourselves if we are listening all the time and not just when we are in church. Is the voice that we are following and obeying our voice or is it God’s voice? This is something that I was confronted with in my personal time. I want to share with you a verse that I was reading the other day in Amos. I was going through the book of Amos and I came across this one verse where the Holy Spirit just smacked me upside of the head.

Amos Chapter 8 and verse 11 says this: “***Behold, the days are coming declares the Lord God when I will send a famine on the land - a famine not of bread, nor of thirst for water, but of hearing the word of the Lord.***” When I read that it was so convicting to my life, because I had to confront how many times I don’t want to hear God, how many times I do what I want to do, and I only listen to the voices that I want to hear that are going to affirm what I have already decided to do. And when I realized that this famine in the land was of hearing the voice of God that scared me, because I don’t ever want to get to the point where I stop hearing Him. I don’t ever want to get to the point where I no longer hear His voice.

So we have to understand that God’s Spirit and God’s Word is there every single day when we wake up. Right now the Spirit of God is working to speak to us, working to move in our heart, and if we are not listening we are going to miss the opportunities. So the first ingredient is a listening posture.

The second ingredient is a prepared heart. Let’s look again at Acts Chapter 8 and verse 27 where Luke is explaining a little bit about who this person is. We have Philip who is listening, obeying and following God so he is able to be there at the right moment. But here is what we also see - it is not just Philip in that time where he is in the desert. God had been preparing someone to hear what Philip had to say. So we have this Ethiopian eunuch introduced to us in verse 27. It says, “***And he arose and went. And***

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there was an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure.”

Now let's just stop right there. You first have an Ethiopian, who was someone from the kingdom of Nubia, a kingdom just south of Egypt. It was where the current modern day Sudan is. And Nubia including the city of Meroe was one of the most powerful kingdoms of the ancient world, especially one of the most powerful kingdoms in Africa. They had treasuries, they had armies, they were just an unbelievably powerful kingdom.

So this man that is called an Ethiopian was not from the country of Ethiopia; that was just a title and it was really the kingdom of Nubia. It says that he was, “*a eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians,*” So what does that mean? Well, I think we know what a eunuch is, but why was this man a eunuch? It was because men who worked in the government, or worked in the kingdom as an official, who worked with females, had the requirement that all males had to be eunuchs, which is a pretty costly affair. And that was because what that would do is require you to say something like this: *‘I am not living for myself, I am living for them. I am not going to have a family of my own, so therefore my entire life is to give to the service of this individual.’*

Now it says he was a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. And what we know is there was no woman named Candace that was queen of Nubia, but the word ‘kandake’ was the title that they gave to the queen or the queen mother of that kingdom. It was a word very equivalent to when we say ‘pharaoh’ and we would know a pharaoh meant the king of Egypt. And so a kandake was just a title that was given to this woman who was the queen.

So this man was a eunuch and he worked with the queen. And what was his job working with the queen? It says that he was in charge of all her treasure. Now I don't know about you, but I would want to make sure that the person I put in charge of my finances was a really good guy, that he was a trustworthy person. We don't know this man's name, but he was someone who was incredibly powerful, probably incredibly wealthy, and had incredible influence in his life. He had reached a pinnacle of his career that was unbelievable.

Yet we see here that he gone to Jerusalem to worship. But here is what we don't know - how did this person hear about Yahweh, the God of the Hebrews? We don't know that, but we know that somehow in his life's journey he had heard about a god in the region of Judea that had captivated his heart. So he goes to Jerusalem at great cost to find out who this god was. And while he was there he purchases an Isaiah scroll which was incredibly expensive. No one walked around with their Bibles back then. If you

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wanted your own copy of the Scriptures you had to shell out big bucks. But this man obviously had the money to buy the scroll of Isaiah.

And again, I want to paint the picture of what is God doing behind the scenes here. He is getting this Ethiopian guy ready. Why did he buy the scroll of Isaiah? Why was he reading it? Now if you are reading the Bible, one of the great things you can do to start understanding it better, is to ask the Bible questions. Don't just read this like, *'Okay, so he is reading Isaiah.'* Here is the question that I had - why Isaiah? Why was it a big deal that this man was reading the book of Isaiah?

And after doing some research I think it was because the book of Isaiah has something to say about foreign eunuchs. Now I know that sounds odd, but I think he had heard that 700 years ago someone had mentioned a prophesy, and a promise to men who were foreign born and eunuchs. And if you want to look at this, please turn in your Bible to Isaiah Chapter 56 and verse 3 through 5.

“Let not the foreigner who has joined himself to the Lord say, ‘The Lord will surely separate me from his people;’ and let not the eunuch say, ‘Behold, I am a dry tree.’ For thus says the Lord; to the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose the things that please me and hold fast my covenant, 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.”

Who knew that there was a promise in Scripture to foreign eunuchs? This man had heard about it. And I believe he purchased this scroll because he wanted to find out, he wanted to know what this God had to say to him. I believe this man was really struggling with a sense of purpose. I believe he was struggling with the question - *'who am I?'* He had the title, he had wealth, he had position and he had influence but he was really struggling with why he was here.

One of the great lessons I have learned in my life I learned from Robbie Zacharias. I have listened to him a lot and I have read a lot of his books. And I am not sure if he was the only one who said this, but I believe it is and that is this statement: *'Every single human being wrestles with four existential questions.'* And when it comes to you asking people about where they are at, every single person wrestles with one of these questions.

Here are the four basic questions that every human being wrestles with:

- ORIGIN: How did we get here?

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- MORALITY: How do I define what is good and evil and who decides that?
- PURPOSE: Why am I here, why do I exist, what is my purpose, my meaning, my identity in life?
- WHERE AM I GOING AFTER DEATH: What happens when I leave this place?

I believe this Ethiopian gentleman was wrestling with this issue of purpose. He is reading through the scroll of Isaiah. Now this man was literate and it would have taken him about four hours to read through Isaiah. If he was traveling from Jerusalem to Gaza on a slow chariot or wagon road he would probably only get to about Isaiah Chapter 53 which would have been right at the point where he meets Philip at this desert place. And he was searching and trying to find where this prophesy was that is for him. Now it is not like they had chapters and verses back then. He would have had to get through the whole book to find this particular prophesy.

But he comes across Isaiah Chapter 53 which is prophesy about Jesus. Do you see how God is orchestrating all of these events? He was preparing this man who had been wrestling with this question in his life. He comes across this prophesy of Jesus and God was preparing him to meet Philip so that he would hear about Jesus Christ.

Listen, the same thing is happening today. The same thing is happening with people that are around you, people around you that are struggling with these questions. I can't begin to tell you all of the conversations I have had with individuals who ask these same questions. I have two friends right now who do not know Jesus, and I have had the opportunity to share Jesus with them. But here is what I know, when they get to a place where they are vulnerable and open they will share some things and tell you about questions they have.

I remember sitting with one of my friends in a coffee shop a year ago and I asked him to tell me his story. He has a crazy story and at the end of the story I turned to him and I said, *'Here is what I believe. I can hear from your story that there is a moment where God is working and trying to get your attention to follow Him. God is there and He wants you.'* And with tears streaming down his face he said, *'I know. I know.'* Now this friend has not accepted Christ but I pray he will.

And there are people like that all around us if we just have a conversation with them. God is preparing people around us to hear the name of Jesus. Do you believe it? We have to believe that God is preparing people around us. And it is not the people who

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we think it is going to be. It is not necessarily the people who may look like us or the people who vote like we do, because we need to take a wide view from this passage and really see what God is doing.

If we take a wide view from this passage, and we see what Luke is writing, here is what we know. From Chapters 8 through 10 Luke is giving these narratives of people that are coming into the kingdom of God, who are making Jesus their Messiah, their Lord, their King. There are hundreds if not thousands of people that are coming to know Christ. Why then are these four individuals or groups of individuals mentioned?

We see in Chapter 8 the Samaritans and the hurdles they would have to overcome in order to accept Christ. Then we have this Ethiopian eunuch, this African man. In Chapter 9 we have Saul, the person who hated Christians and the church. And then in Chapter 10 we have Cornelius, the Roman government soldier who comes to know Christ. So what is it about these four narratives that I think is interesting? These types of people, the Roman soldier, Saul who hates Christians, the Ethiopian eunuch and Samaritans are all people that most of the church would have looked at and said, *‘Those people are not interested. They are not like us. They don’t have our background.’*

And this confronts what you and I believe, because for most of us when we look at people that are different than us, people in different tribes so to speak, we think that there is no way that they would be interested in hearing the good news of Jesus Christ. And that is a lie from the enemy. We have to believe that God is working to prepare the hearts and minds of people all around us. The question is - are we listening and do we believe that God is working to do that? God was already working so that when Philip met this Ethiopian eunuch an amazing thing happened. And he got to hear the good news of Jesus.

Let’s look at the third ingredient of a God opportunity. We have a listening posture, we have a prepared heart and lastly we have an open mouth. And what you and I have to understand is that unless we open our mouths to declare Jesus and the good news of Jesus they will not hear it. God can do all the preparation, and we can listen, but there comes a step where we have to be obedient and open our mouths.

And Luke is making this point here of an open mouth in this passage. Look again at verse 32 where it says, ***“Now 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.’”*** He is quoting Isaiah Chapter 53 talking about Jesus. It was the prophesy that Isaiah had written 700 years before Christ came. It is one of the most amazing prophesies in all of the Old Testament that pointed to the coming Messiah and what Jesus would have to do.

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Then if we look at verse 35 it says, “*Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus.*” Now that is an odd way of saying that Philip said something. It says that he opened his mouth and beginning with that Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus. Why is Luke saying, “*Philip opened his mouth?*” We are not apt to say to someone who was not at church today when they ask what happened at church today, ‘*Well Pastor Ben opened his mouth and he told us about God.*’ Most of us don’t talk like that, do we? It is an odd way of saying something.

And whenever you hear something, or whenever you are reading Scripture, and you come across something that makes you question how something is said, because it is not how we would ordinarily say something, stop and think about it. Luke is pointing to something else in the text. He is juxtaposing that the Messiah did not open His mouth and yet Philip opened his mouth. What is Luke trying to say with that statement?

Here is what I believe Luke was saying. He was trying to get a point across to us as the audience that we are now Jesus’ mouthpiece. We are now the voice of God. We are now able to declare that even though Jesus is not here today to teach anymore, or to tell people that He is the Messiah, it falls on us as part of the body of Christ to be His mouthpiece and to tell people that Jesus is Lord, and by no other name is there salvation under heaven.

That is our privilege now as we have inherited the responsibility to open our mouths and tell people who Jesus is. That is what Philip was doing. He opened his mouth and he declared who Jesus was. I love what Philip does. He doesn’t point to a moral code, he doesn’t ask him what he believes about this sin or that sin, he doesn’t try to get him to clean up his life before he tells him about Jesus. He doesn’t break into a philosophical argument over what he believes, he simply sees a man who is open and he tells him about Jesus.

And the reason why Philip can do that is because he leads with questions. There are so many questions in this passage. It says Philip ran up to him and he heard him reading Isaiah the prophet. And he asks him if he understands what he is reading. That is a great question. One of the questions I asked my friend last week who is far from God was, ‘*What do you think happens when you die?*’ And that led into a fascinating conversation about heaven and about what he hopes is true. And I was able to point him to Jesus and point him to eternal life. Now he is not a follower yet, but he is my friend who is far from God but close to me and he is one of my One Life guys, and I think we are making progress. And it all began with a question.

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Listen, people want to have these conversations, and they can begin with questions. So ask them if they have questions, and as they ask questions you may be able to get to the point with them that Philip did with his question. And after Philip asked the question, and the eunuch answered him, Philip then proceeded to tell him about Jesus.

Don't get sidetracked on conversations about religions, and church, and politics. What we have to do is point people to Jesus, because it is His name that is powerful, it is His name that saves, it is His name that brings life to people's lives. And we can talk all around the gospel, but if we don't get to the name of Jesus we are missing it. We have to open our mouths and declare Jesus.

There is a story about the powerful name of Jesus that I want to share with you this morning. My brother-in-law and a good friend of mine are both CMPD police officers. And a few years ago Charlotte was wracked by some riots because of a young African American man was shot and killed by a police officer. We had seen this happen in other cities and even though most of us lived in Lake Norman many of us still have connections to the City of Charlotte. We have friends and even relatives down there.

When I lived in Denver a few years ago I knew I would have a family member and friends down there on the front lines. My brother-in-law was literally on the front line of the crisis response team of police officers. I had friends down there who were pastors in the inner city of Charlotte and I was calling them and asking them how they were doing. I am not sure how many of you were watching those events transpire at that time, but I was fixed on the television myself and praying.

In that moment the fragility of our culture and our city was on display. But what the news reports did not tell you was something else that was happening down there. And while God was protecting my brother-in-law and my friend from harm, the stories that came out afterwards were truly amazing.

One of the stories that I love is there was a pastor that came down armed only with his Bible. He was an African American pastor and he had a message to share with both groups. And as the angry crowd was walking towards the police officers who were there to protect, you could just see the tension of both parties as a confrontation was about to erupt. And this African American pastor was not the only person, but he was armed with only his Scripture, and he kept walking in between the police officers and the crowd yelling for hours, '*Jesus saves. Jesus saves. Jesus saves.*'

And as he would see places where the crowd would go up against the police officers, he would walk up to the crowd and he would continue to say, '*Jesus saves,*' over and over again all night long. And every time he did that my brother-in-law said that the

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crowd would scream back, ‘*Jesus saves,*’ and there would be a peace where he was in that one area. And he would just go back and forth all night long because he believed that there is power in the name of Jesus Christ. (*Applause.*)

And let me tell you that even in the midst of that pain, that hurt and the tragedy of that day the power of the name of Jesus is just as real today to the people around you as it was during those events. There are people today around you that are hurting. There are people around you that need hope. There are people around you that need joy. And if you do not open your mouth and declare Jesus saves, who will? Who will?

Here was Philip who just simply pointed to Jesus. And as a result this Ethiopian eunuch was ready to get saved and then baptized. I am not sure how many of you noticed this but there is a verse 37 missing in this passage. Did you guys pick up on that? Some of your Bibles probably don’t have verse 37 in them and you never realized it. What happened to verse 37?

Now I don’t want to sidetrack us, but basically in some manuscripts they added a verse to make sure that Philip wasn’t just baptizing someone. So a verse was later added on that says, “***And Philip said, ‘If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest.’ And he answered and said, ‘I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.’***”

And here is what I think is so cool. It is because of Philip’s obedience, of Philip’s willingness to follow the Lord, he saw someone else follow the Lord. It is the domino effect of obedience, the domino effect of listening and being obedient to what God is calling us to do. And from what we understand Philip saw this Ethiopian eunuch, this first African, be saved, baptized and become a follower of Jesus Christ. And he would end up taking the gospel back to his nation.

It is a powerful story. And what is so amazing about this story is if we go back to Isaiah Chapter 56. I am going to read this again, it says: “***Let not the foreigner who has joined himself to the Lord say, ‘The Lord will surely separate me from his people;’ and let not the eunuch say, ‘Behold, I am a dry tree.’ For thus says the Lord; to the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose the things that please me and hold fast my covenant, 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.***” What is that name? It is the name of Jesus.

So many times we read about Isaiah Chapter 53 and the fulfillment of Scripture but we forget that Acts Chapter 8 was also the fulfillment of Isaiah Chapter 56. It is a beautiful picture of how God is always orchestrating opportunities for His glory in this

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world. Are we aware, are we listening, are we obeying? Let's not walk through this week missing the opportunities that God has for us.

I have a few questions I want to leave you with. Number one - what voices do you need to stop listening to in order for God's voice to be primary in your life? What are those voices you need to stop listening to, or that you need to limit, so that God's voice can be the primary voice in your life?

Number two - will you believe that God this week is preparing someone for you to encounter? That there is someone in your life that God is already preparing, He is already orchestrating in someone's heart to be open to the gospel? Do you believe that?

Number three - who is that person? What is that name? Who needs to be pointed to Jesus? Who is that person this week that God is preparing for you and you believe the Holy Spirit is leading you right now to tell them, '*Jesus saves.*' Let's bow our heads and prepare our hearts to respond.

One of the beautiful applications of this passage is that we get to listen to God right now because we are having a listening posture. What is it that God is saying to your heart? What is it that He is asking you to do? I don't know what it is. Maybe for some of you it is that you are wrestling with questions. You may not have all the answers that your soul is wrestling with and you are struggling with it.

Let me just tell you that the answers to all your questions are found in the person of Jesus, and if you don't know what that means, I want to encourage you this morning to talk to someone. I am going to be up here at the front and there will be some other counselors up here ready to talk with you. Please don't leave her today if you have questions. Maybe you don't feel comfortable coming up front, then there is a Next Step Station as well as a prayer room in the lobby where you can talk with someone. Don't leave here today without getting the answers to life's most important question.

Maybe for you it is just a matter of not listening to God in a long time. You have been listening to so many other voices but you want to clear out those other voices that are robbing you of hearing from God. Whether you want to come forward and pray at one of the crosses or you want to sit in your seat and pray, would you give God your heart and your ear and ask Him to speak to you afresh.

Maybe you want to partake of the Lord's Supper to remember how good God is to you, to remember His death, burial and resurrection. Maybe you just need someone to pray with you this morning about something going on in your life. Whatever God is calling for you to do, will you listen, and will you obey? The opportunity is now.

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Father, we come before you right now. God, I pray that as we leave here today that we would not be a people that believes you are only working now, that you are only working here, but that you have something so much greater and bigger in store for us. Not just for us, but to declare your name to those who need it most. God, we want to see a movement of your kingdom spread across Lake Norman and for every man, woman and child to respond to the good news of Jesus Christ. Oh Lord, help us to see that opportunity. Don't let us listen to the voices that rob us of what you are doing. God, work in us now to respond to the way you want us to respond. We pray these things in the name of Jesus. Amen.

The preceding transcript was completed using raw audio recordings. As much as possible, it includes the actual words of the message with minor grammatical changes and editorial clarifications to provide context. Hebrew and Greek words are spelled using Google Translator and the actual spelling may be different in some cases.