

Sought for by God

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Preacher: Matt Foreman

[0:00] Let's take our Bibles again as we prepare to hear God's Word preached.! Turn in them to Isaiah chapter 53. Who has believed our message, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?

! He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.

He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces, he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows. Yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions.

He was crushed for our iniquities. The punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray.

[1:11] Each of us has turned to his own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth.

He was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent. So he did not open his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away.

And who can speak of his descendants? For he was cut off from the land of the living. For the transgression of my people he was stricken. He was assigned a great with the wicked, and with the rich in his death.

Though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth. Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer.

And though the Lord makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days.

And the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand. After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life and be satisfied.

[2:16] By his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities. Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong.

Because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

I bring you greetings from Faith Reformed Baptist in Media, Pennsylvania. We are outside of Philadelphia. And we are a sister church of yours in Arbka. Very thankful for your fellowship, and very thankful for your pastor.

Pastor John has been one of my favorite guys in our association for a while. I know Pastor Bob had many years where in our association he was a voice that was greatly appreciated.

And I've just been getting to know Pastor Jason this morning, actually. So, I want to bring you a message this morning from the book of Acts, chapter 8.

[3:22] If you would take a Bible and turn with me to Acts, chapter 8. In 2 Corinthians 15, the Apostle Paul tells us that we are to examine ourselves, whether we are of the faith.

He says, test yourselves to see if Christ is in you. And he says that not because he wants a bunch of people walking around who have no assurance.

He says it because he wants Christians walking around having assurance. But not an assurance that is shallow and possibly deceived, but an assurance that is substantial and real.

And because of that, there is probably no personal question more important than, am I a believer or not?

How can I know if I'm a Christian? What does it mean to be converted? Maybe you're here this morning and you know you're not a Christian or not a believer.

[4:26] And you're not even sure what a Christian is. And so, the question for you is, what is a Christian anyway? Now, those are big questions. And I'm not going to be able to answer all the nuances of them this morning.

But I wanted us to consider this morning some lessons on true conversion from the story of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch from Acts chapter 8, starting in verse 26.

I ask you to follow along as I read. 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 rose and went. And there was an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure.

He had come to Jerusalem to worship 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.

[5:42] 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. And 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.

[6:51] 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 found himself at Azotus. And as he passed through, he preached the gospel to all the towns until he came to Caesarea. This is the word of the Lord.

Would you pray with me? Father, as we have this morning sung and heard of the riches that you've given us in your word, yet we know also that, as has already been prayed, our hearts are so often hard.

And we need your spirit to open our hearts and give us ears and minds to understand the things you have revealed to us and the treasures of salvation that you've opened for us in Jesus Christ. So we pray, Father, come again and fill us this morning and speak to us. In Jesus' name, amen. Amen. This passage, I think, has to be one of the most fascinatingly strange stories in the whole Bible.

[8:15] This is a weird story. First of all, God tells Philip, who is carrying on a very successful ministry in Samaria, to actually leave that ministry, to travel about 100 miles down to a desert road that was usually a deserted place, to share the gospel with one man.

There's actually a translation difficulty in verse 26. Most of your Bibles translate verse 26, rise and go toward the south. And the expression there is a little weird and obscure.

And some people think it could be translated, rise and go at about noon. Which would add to the weirdness of it, because on a desert road at noon, you would not expect to find many travelers.

And yet he goes there, and there happens to be this one chariot on the road. And Philip is standing there, and God says to him again, go, join that chariot.

You can kind of imagine what Philip might have been thinking at this point. And the text says Philip ran to him, which tells you that his chariot was still moving.

[9:33] So picture this, you're on a desert road, in the middle of nowhere, and out of the blue, this one man on foot appears running up to your chariot, and says, do you understand what you're reading?

This had to have been really surreal. Then you have the man himself. He's an Ethiopian eunuch that Philip was sent to.

Not a Jew, but a black, African, sexually altered man, whom God has singled out. We're going to talk more about him as we go along.

But this man, you have to think, had a fascinating life story. And a fascinating story of how he got here, of all places. Then you have the fact, this is the first time in the book of Acts, that we have a detailed story of how one particular person was converted and baptized.

This is the first individual conversion account in Acts. And it was completely separated from the rest of the ministry of the church and the normal modes of discipleship, because this guy is just going to go on his way alone and go back to Ethiopia.

[10 : 53] So this is a weird story. It's a passage that you could say has a lot of different lessons. Lessons about one-on-one evangelism, and lessons about racial and social reconciliation.

Lessons about the sovereignty of God in evangelism. But most importantly, I think, this passage gives us some lessons about conversion.

In the passage immediately previous to this one, there's the story of Simon the Magician. And Simon the Magician was somebody who'd given a false profession and false conversion.

And immediately after, we're given a lesson, a contrast with a man who shows true conversion and true faith. And so that's what I want us to focus on this morning.

What is real conversion? What is real faith? And how do you get it? So let's think for a few minutes, if you will, about this man's story.

[11 : 59] He was basically the finance minister. We would call him the secretary of the treasury for Candace, queen of the Ethiopians.

And he was a eunuch, which tells you something about him. It tells you that he was not of noble birth. He was born a peasant. And in many ancient cultures, when a peasant wanted to be upwardly mobile and had ambitions in life, he would enter politics, but at a cost.

Because it was normal to require peasants entering politics to be castrated. Because nobles didn't trust peasants who would be working sometimes around the women, and they wanted to ensure that these people with their ambition couldn't be a threat to the ruling regime.

So this man was a commoner, but he'd been ambitious enough in life, early in life, to sacrifice family and children in order to get ahead.

And he'd been very successful in getting ahead. He'd been successful enough to work his way up to be a high official in the royal court. He was educated, he was successful, and he was powerful.

[13 : 20] But we also know he was not happy. He had been a driven man, but he was a man who had not found success and satisfaction.

And we know that because at some point he had become a spiritual seeker. He was not happy with who he was. He was a man who had regrets.

He was a man who had regrets. He was a man who had regrets. And he'd begun searching for spiritual solutions. And for some reason, the opportunities for worship and religion in Ethiopia hadn't satisfied, and he'd become interested at some point in the Hebrew religion and the Hebrew God. So interested as to ask for time off, to travel hundreds of miles to Jerusalem, the text tells us to worship God.

Now even that, for him, had to have been a very disappointing experience.

[14 : 30] Because this man had gotten to Jerusalem only to discover that not only were Gentiles not allowed in the temple courts, in the inner courts of the temple, not only that, but eunuchs were specifically forbidden in the Old Testament from being part of God's people.

In Deuteronomy 23, verse 1, God specifically forbids eunuchs from becoming part of the assembly of the Lord because of their brokenness and uncleanness.

So can you imagine the irony of this man's life? Most likely, when he'd been in Jerusalem, he hadn't encountered any Christians because this was a period of persecution in the church and the Christians had all been scattered.

Despite this, somehow he had managed to obtain some Old Testament scrolls. That in itself was unusual.

Most people didn't necessarily read. Actual scrolls of the Old Testament were expensive. Regular people did not walk around with pocket Septuagintes in their back pocket.

[15 : 46] But somehow he'd managed to obtain some and specifically the prophecy of Isaiah. And that's interesting for several reasons.

Because Isaiah prophesies a time when the nations would seek the Lord and be accepted by God as worshipers.

And specifically he mentions in Isaiah chapter 11 that Ethiopians would come to worship the Lord. And as you saw, the passage that he was reading is actually Isaiah 53.

And that's interesting because you remember he's reading a scroll. And in the same section of Isaiah and maybe even the same scroll is Isaiah 56.

So if you take your Bible and turn back with me to Isaiah chapter 56. Isaiah 56 says, Thus says the Lord, keep justice, do righteousness, for soon my salvation will come and my deliverance will be revealed.

[16 : 55] Down in verse 3 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 and the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord to minister to him to love the name of the Lord and to be his servants. Everyone who keeps the Sabbath and does not profane it and holds fast my covenant, these I will bring to my holy mountain and make them joyful in my house of prayer.

So this is the section of Isaiah, the section of the scroll of Isaiah that he's reading. It's a passage that in the midst of this man's disappointment and rejection offered him hope of a time when he would be acceptable to God.

And at the center of this section of Isaiah is a person that is talked about repeatedly in Isaiah called the servant of the Lord. If you've at all read this section of Isaiah, you see this mysterious figure called the servant unto the Lord appearing.

[18 : 38] And that's who the Ethiopian is reading about. And he's also presented as a suffering servant. And that's who the Ethiopian wants to know about. Who is this servant?

And specifically at this point he's reading Isaiah 53 verse 7 and 8. If you turn back to Isaiah 53 again. It says, He was oppressed and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth like a lamb that is led to the slaughter and like a sheep that is before its shearers is silent.

So he opened not his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away. And as for his generation who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living stricken for the transgression of my people.

The Greek version of that same passage would have read, in his humiliation justice was denied him. And who can describe his generation, his descendants literally, his seed.

And you can see what had caught the Ethiopian's attention. This is someone he could identify with. Someone who'd experienced humiliation.

[19 : 59] Who'd been denied justice. Someone who'd experienced frustration and vanity in his life. Someone who'd been denied being part of God's people because his generation was cut off.

He was denied descendants. He was cut off from the land of the living. sin. This is somebody who knows his experience. And yet, somehow, this was a person who had borne his people's sins and been vindicated by God.

Down in verse 10, it was the will of the Lord to crush him. He has put him to grief. When his soul makes an offering for sin, he shall see his offspring.

He shall prolong his days. The will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. And the Ethiopian wants to know, who is this person?

Is the prophet talking about himself or someone else? And at that very moment, out of the blue, up comes Philip, running alongside the chariot.

[21 : 09] Philip. And the text says, beginning with this scripture, Philip told him the good news about Jesus.

Philip says, I know exactly who that text is talking about. it's talking about Jesus. Maybe you heard his name when you were in Jerusalem.

He was a mighty prophet among the people, but because of jealousy, the rulers despised and rejected him. But, it was all actually part of God's plan.

That he would bear the sins of the world and become a sacrifice for sin. He became a substitution. A substitutionary sacrifice.

Stepping away from that story for a minute, I was talking to somebody recently about Isaiah 53. We were actually talking about the subject of complaining and how the gospel speaks to us about

complaining.

[22:20] And one of the things that we said from verse 7, Jesus opened not his mouth. He was a sheep led before shearers. We said that Jesus was the only one in the world who would have had the right to complain.

Everything that he experienced was really injustice. And yet, Jesus did not complain. And not because he was just this strong, stoic man in himself.

He did not complain. He opened not his mouth because he was taking his people's place. He was taking on their guilt and shame.

The only one in the world who had the right to complain was taking on and becoming someone who had no right to complain because he was guilty. He was taking on himself our guilt and he was giving us his righteousness.

he was becoming a substitute. I was talking to this friend saying, you know, the fact that Jesus did not open his mouth, if anything, should tell you to shut your mouth.

[23:35] The fact that he took upon our sin does not give us the right to sin, complain, do whatever we want. It puts us, if anything, doubly in Jesus' debt. It humbles us in our complaining and comforts and challenges us in his love.

It's a powerful story. The cross of Jesus Christ, is it not? And this was the powerful story that Philip was telling the eunuch.

And Philip tells him, this Jesus died, but he was raised from the dead. And I witnessed it. I was there, I saw the risen Christ, and I have been sent here by God to tell you about it.

Because now the message that he is the Savior and the Messiah is going out to all the world. That if you repent and turn from your sins and are baptized in his name and take on his identity and take on his substitution for you and you become his follower, then you too you too, of all people, you can be saved and become part of the people of the Lord, no longer rejected, no longer unacceptable, but now completely acceptable and loved by God.

At that very moment they come upon some water. And the Ethiopian says, here is water. What prevents me from being baptized?

[25:11] Maybe there was still some doubt in his mind. Maybe part of him is still unsure. Maybe there is something that will still exclude me and prevent me. But Philip says, let's do it.

And they go down into the water and he comes back up and Philip is carried away. But in that moment, that man knew, God found me.

God has been seeking me. God has accepted me. And he went on his way rejoicing. We don't know for sure, but early church tradition tells us that this man became the first missionary to the Ethiopians.

Now what do we learn here about real conversion? Real conversion happens when a man comes to an end of himself.

Despairs of hope in himself, in his own efforts to save himself, to find significance and success for himself, when he feels the weight of his own uncleanness, that he is in himself sinful and unacceptable to God.

[26:41] That's where this man had been brought. But, he finds a hope outside of himself. He finds hope in Christ.

He wants to identify with Christ. In Christ, he finds what he had been looking, his whole life for, who he wants to be.

He no longer wanted to be who he was. He wanted to be someone else. And in Christ, he finds who it is he wants to be. I mentioned earlier, the story right before this in Acts is the story of Simon the Magician.

Simon the Magician was a man who had supposedly converted to Christ. But on the inside, he was not changed.

He was, on the inside, the same man he'd always been, because he really had never wanted to be anybody else. Simon the Magician had been a man who had been powerful.

[27:51] He had, in his life, gotten power and influence over others through displays of illusion and magic. And that was the thing that was important to him.

That was his significance in life, being a person of influence. And when Christianity came along and he saw the power and influence of Christianity, he thought, yeah, I want to sign up for that because I still want to be a man of power and influence.

How many of you know people who their goal in life is to get power and influence over others? There's many different ways people do it. Some people try to become a Christian to gain power and influence over others.

And we know that's what Simon did because eventually Simon wanted to buy the distribution rights to the Holy Spirit. He wanted to franchise the Holy Spirit. He said, I'll give you money if you give me the power to give the Holy Spirit.

He was a man who'd become a Christian in order to use God, not out of love to God. He had not come to an end of himself. He was trying to get for himself because he was on the inside who he always wanted to be and never wanted to be someone else.

[29:06] But the Ethiopian had lost any hope in himself. He knew that hope in himself was death, was hopeless, was meaningless.

He had gotten there. And it was vanity. He'd pursued it all of his life and in the end all of his success he found it to be meaningless and what he wanted now was to know Christ.

He didn't see miracles or displays of power that attracted him like it attracted Simon. All this man had was a Bible. and what attracted him in it was a Savior who would die for him and wash him and accept him.

The main reason people are not converted is they are still hoping in themselves. They haven't come to an end of themselves.

themselves. They're going to get ahead on their own. They're going to find what they want. And then they're the people who have gotten there.

[30:27] I don't know how many of you have seen the Veggie Tales story of Madame Blueberry. I'm not a huge Veggie Tales fan but Madame Blueberry is an interesting story.

Madame Blueberry is somebody who wants lots of things. wants things so much that at some point she's asked how many things do you need to be happy?

And she answers I don't know. How many things are there? And then there are the people who have gotten everything they could ever want.

Tiger Woods. Tom Brady has three Super Bowl rings. Beautiful wife.

He told Time Magazine though about seven or eight months ago that he's discontent in life.

Something's missing. Michael Jordan probably the most best basketball player of all time and yet tells people he was happier when he was at the top and he got there and he no longer has it and his life seems empty.

[31:55] All the people who were looking to achieve success and hope and happiness and meaning in life for themselves in themselves. this man stopped looking for it in himself.

He began seeking a hope outside of himself. In the big questions of life, is there a God? Is there a God who gives me hope? And he began to look and to have a hope in God.

He goes to Jerusalem and it's a hope that leads to despair. I am not acceptable to God. I would never be acceptable to God by myself.

And in that place, God meets with him. God sends someone to him. The person seeking God discovers it was actually God seeking him.

That's an amazing story. How many of you remember the time in your life when you were seeking the Lord and you came to a point in that journey where you actually became aware it was God seeking you?

[33:18] How many of you had that experience? You became aware there is a real power out there, a real person, and he's the one pursuing me, bringing me to this point of despair, bringing me to this point where I stop hoping in myself and where I have no place to look other than him.

There's a hymn that says, I sought the Lord and afterward I knew he moved my soul seeking me.

It was not that I found O Savior true, no, I was found of thee. Some people believe that they made a decision for Christ and certainly when you become a Christian you do make a decision for Christ.

But afterwards you become aware that it was never just you getting yourself to that point, there was a reason bringing you to that point and the reason wasn't that you were smarter or wiser or quicker than anybody else.

That's not what the Bible says. That would be something you could boast about. The Bible says there's nothing you can boast about. The Bible tells you it was all grace from beginning to end.

[34:43] There was something at every point along the way and it was God at every point along the way in your life bringing you, shepherding you to a point where you were brought to an end of

yourself and you become aware that the hound of heaven is pursuing after you.

And then at some point along the way, someone explains the gospel to you. Real conversion happens when someone begins to understand the gospel.

Not perfectly, not completely, but with a dawning realization that there is a hope for you outside of you in Christ. You can have a claim on Christ and through preaching and through Bible study, the gospel begins to sink in and make sense.

And real conversion happens when someone decides that he wants to be baptized. Not because baptism saves you, but because baptism is a sign that you have taken on a new identity, a new basis for life.

Baptism is you identifying to the world that you are a Christian, that you are a follower of Jesus Christ, that your fundamental hope in life is in him.

[36 : 07] That if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. So, how do you get real conversion?

It's all the things we just said. Romans chapter 4 says, to him who does not work but believes on him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness.

To him who does not work but believes on him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness.

So, the first thing that has to happen is you have got to come to an end of yourself. An end of trusting in your own strength, an end of any hope or claim that you would merit the favor with God to make you acceptable to him.

You have to come to an end of yourself. Has that happened in your life? It has to be a real end.

[37 : 28] One of my favorite verses in Scripture is Isaiah, or not Isaiah, Psalm 51, verse 7. It's one of my favorites because it's a promise. Isaiah 51, 7 says, the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

This is a promise to you. A broken and contrite heart, God cannot despise.

He cannot ignore. He must respond to a broken and contrite heart. He delights to respond to a broken and contrite heart.

Here is someone who stopped trusting in themselves, stopped trusting and hoping in themselves, and now they're ready to finally find real hope. You have to give up hope in yourself.

And God makes it a promise to you, when you really do that, I cannot ignore it. Second, you do have to seek the Lord.

[38 : 45] This Ethiopian eunuch was a man seeking the Lord, and you must seek. God promises you, he who comes to me, I will by no means cast out.

Come to me, seek me. He says, seek and you will find. You want to get converted? Seek the Lord. You got to seek.

Third, you must encounter the Lord who is seeking you. Meaning, the idea of a God out there is not just a theory.

You need to encounter God. His seeking of you needs to be real to you. Real to your awareness.

There is a God, a holy God, and a gracious God, and He is seeking me. And when you realize that, it should knock you back on your heels.

[39 : 54] All your life, God's been an idea in your head, and all of a sudden, it becomes real. God is seeking you. Fourth, you must understand the Gospel.

You have to see the hope that you can have only in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, His substitutionary death for you, taking on your sins, giving you a hope that you never deserved, and yet you, becoming despite that, His offspring.

And then fifth, you must step out and identify with Christ. You have to confess Him before men.

You have to believe in your heart, but you have to confess with your mouth. Confess Him before family. Confess Him before friends.

Take up a cross. Die to your old man and live as a new man to Jesus Christ. Live for Him. Leave off that old person.

[41 : 10] Put on a new person. Become someone who says, Jesus, the very thought of Thee with sweetness fills my breast.

How sweet the name of Jesus sounds in a believer's ear. It soothes his sorrows, heals his wounds, and drives away his fears.

This man experienced that? Have you experienced that? Have you been converted? Has this happened in your life?

Is God seeking you maybe even this morning? If so, the question then is, what is to prevent you from being baptized?

Is there something preventing you? If it is, it's something inside of you, not inside of God.

Something you're clinging to.

[42:16] Some sin, some hope, some comfort, not in Christ. Has the death, the death of Jesus Christ become real for you, his suffering, death, and resurrection.

I believe that there is a God, and I believe that he is seeking some of you today. Because you're here.

You're hearing his word. the Bible is open like the Ethiopian and his chariot. And the Bible is whispering and prodding and pleading with you.

You've been seeking all your life satisfaction, hope, joy, meaning. You're not going to find it until you find your creator.

You have this wonderful opportunity. The Bible is open, I hope, with some clarity, maybe I've explained something of it to you today so that the gospel makes sense.

[43:38] If you're a Christian here this morning, what do we take away from this text? I take it as a reminder the Lord is at work in salvation.

Salvation belongs to the Lord. When we are called to share with our families, our children, our neighbors, the gospel, we're not called to fight that battle on our own, to convince people on our own, just as through the whole Bible, God goes before us.

And His Word is powerful. Sometimes He's got to prod us like He prodded Philip. Go up. Go up to that chariot. Run up to that chariot.

Be bold. But God does prod us and He will prod us. And we need to expect that the Lord is at work and is working even now. Is He working in your life today?

If anyone here has questions, how can I understand? There's things I still don't understand. There are pastors here in this church who would fall over themselves with gladness to sit down with you, talk with you, open the scriptures with you.

[44:59] I urge you to seek them out. Let's close in prayer. our Father, we are presented this morning with a beautiful story.

A man of success and yet a man of despair. a man whose life was had ironies all the way around and yet somehow somewhere in the middle of nowhere you pursued him and you met him and you opened his eyes to Jesus Christ and you washed him by your Holy Spirit.

And he went on his way rejoicing. I pray this morning that we would have that joy of knowing that we, though sinners, have been made acceptable to you, our holy and loving God.

That that would fill our breasts with sweetness. And that we would have a joy that would transcend all of the trials and sorrows of life and that would keep us on our way for eternity.

And I pray, Father, if there are those here who have not found that joy and hope and comfort, that you would open their heart today. In Jesus' name I pray.

[46:33] Amen.