

Philip and the Ethiopian

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[0 : 00] If you've got a Bible, you can turn to the New Testament book of Acts, Acts chapter 8 and verse 26.!

We did 25 verses last week, and we're going to go all the way up to verse 40 this week. So some of you are like, wow, Stephen, this is the fastest you've ever gone through the book of Acts.

Like, what's going on here? It's getting exciting, so hang in there. Acts chapter 8 and verse 26. Luke writes the book of Acts, and this is what he says, verse 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. And so he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of the treasury of the Kandiki, which means queen of the Ethiopians. This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the book of Isaiah the prophet. The spirit told Philip, go to that chariot and stay near it.

[1 : 29] Then Philip ran up to the chariot, and he heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. Do you understand what you're reading? Philip asked. How can I? He said, unless someone explains it to me.

So he invited Philip to come up and to sit with him. This is the passage of scripture the eunuch was reading. He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he did not open his mouth.

In his humiliation he was deprived of justice. Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth. The eunuch asked Philip, tell me please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?

And then Philip began with that very passage of scripture and told him the good news about Jesus. As they traveled along the road, they came to some water, and the eunuch said, look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptized? And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and Philip baptized him.

[2 : 37] 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 in his way rejoicing. Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and traveled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea.

This is the word of the Lord. Let's pray. Let's ask for God's help as we study. Merciful God, your word is truth, and we ask this morning that you would impress this truth upon our hearts, that we might know it, we might have our spiritual hearts open to receive it, to be fed by it.

Help us to see Jesus clearly, and help us to be changed by what we see. Thank you for your word, Lord, this great mercy to us. Bless us now, we pray for Christ's sake.

Amen. Alright, so we are still in the book of Acts, carrying on, and we come to the next part of Philip's little subsection in the book of Acts.

Now, it feels like, if you look at the world that you and I live in right now, it feels like, and I suspect this will resonate with most of you, but it feels like we live in one of the most, if not the most, polarized moments in human history.

[3 : 57] I am, if you think about those sort of age categories, I am an older millennial.

Technically, I'm an older millennial. You say, Stephen, you look like such a young millennial, but I'm an older millennial. But in reality, I actually feel like a young Gen Xer.

See, because although I was born in 1981, and the supposed cutoff date for Gen X is 1980, in South Africa, particularly in the 1980s and the 1990s, we got everything two years later than the rest of the world.

So I'm really actually a Gen Xer in that sense. Even generational shifts came two years later. But I'm basically from the generation that grew up before the rise of the Internet and social media, and

then got to have a front row seat watching it all happen, watching its development.

So going from sort of dial-up and Yahoo and AOL and Internet Explorer, all the way through to Instagram and TikTok and ChatGPT and Claude and whatever else.

[5 : 03] Now, what has continued to grow through that entire period is our access to information. Just more and more and more and more and more information. And everywhere, in our pockets, right by us.

You don't have to go to the library anymore. It's just right here. As I've watched this growth information, and these insights are not unique to me at all. You can read a lot of commentary online about this.

But it seems that we have also grown exponentially in our ability to divide. And to polarize. To go into different camps. Now, I want to say, division, polarization, tribalism has always been around. It's not like this is this new thing that suddenly appeared when the Internet, the big bad Internet came along. But the Internet, and social media in particular, is a little bit like throwing a big bucket of fuel onto a fire.

And the polarization is pretty extreme in lots of places. No longer do we just sort of disagree with each other, or even disagree strongly with each other. We hate.

[6 : 04] And we demonize. And we distrust. There's actually a term for this. The term affective polarization. So, here's what a prominent sociologist, how he defines this term.

Affective polarization refers to the mutual dislike between different societal groups. This phenomenon is predominantly studied in a political context. For example, in the United States, many individuals express positive feelings towards the Democratic Party, while disliking the Republican Party, and vice versa.

In the UK, a similar divide exists between Brexiteers and Remainers. And there are many other examples worldwide. Essentially, affective polarization is about people's feelings.

And an effectively polarized society is divided into mutually hostile political groups. And it's this that sparks a lot of the sort of outrage culture that we see in so much media.

We see online. It's also this that demands absolute conformity. When you identify with a particular tribe, there's absolute conformity.

[7 : 18] You have to adopt and you have to embrace the entire package that comes with being part of that group of people. If you waver at one point of the whole package, then your credentials are called into question.

Like, are you really one of us? Are you part of this group? And so, I'll give you an example of this. And this is no commentary on these actual issues, but just an example of this. If you're a white political conservative, and you suggest that you might have more open and expansive views about immigration, well, then see how that goes down in your particular tribe.

Or if you're a black political progressive, and you suggest that all the kind of documented social ills that we see in majority black communities in the West not only result just from systemic racism, but from things like fatherless and other problems, we'll see how that goes down in that sort of group. The tribalism is intense, and it's absolute. And spaces where there is meaningful civil disagreement, those sorts of spaces are incredibly rare.

Now, why do we do this? I mean, besides the internet fueling our extreme tribalism, why do we do this as human beings? And the answer to that question is probably, well, there are probably several complex factors feeding into this.

[8 : 38] I don't want to say, like, this is the one and only thing. But I do think there is one very significant factor that we would do well to consider that feeds this whole cycle. And that is fear.

Fear of exclusion. Fear of not fitting in. We have deep, inbuilt fear of being excluded. And so one of the ways that you can sort of remedy that fear is by joining a tribe.

Joining an ideological group. And marching in step with that tribe then at every single point.

Because that ensures your inclusion. It ensures that you belong now.

You belong with this one group of people. I mean, think back to high school. What was one of the worst experiences for you to have as a teenager? Being excluded, right?

Being excluded from a group of friends. Being excluded from an invitation to a party or an event.

Being excluded from a sports team. Being that person who's always picked last when the captains pick the teams.

[9 : 44] That fear was horrible fear that we had of being excluded. Included. In a sense, in that sense, we're all outsiders. We sense it.

We sense that we're outsiders. That in some intrinsic way, we come into this world as outsiders and we are desperate to belong, to be included. And so what we do is we engage in all sorts of activity and sometimes very destructive behavior to get that sense of inclusion.

From kind of being the mean girls on the schoolyard to ethnic and racial conflict and violence and racism and political polarization. We know we're outsiders.

We know we're outsiders and we desperately want to be on the inside. And so what I want to do this morning is I want to try and show you how the gospel sets you free from that. And takes you from being an outsider and brings you inside.

Inside into the love of the God who created you. Now we're in Acts and we're following Philip as he preaches the gospel. Last week we were in Samaria, the region of Samaria.

[10 : 52] Now we're going down south. The Lord sends him down south to a desert road where he meets a really, really interesting individual. An Ethiopian eunuch. So there are two things I want you to see this morning.

Number one, I want you to see the outsider comes in. The outsider comes in and then I want you to see the insider goes out. Those are our two points. The outsider comes in and the insider goes out. Here's the first one. Look down at verse 6. Sorry, not 6. Verse 26. It says, Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, Go south to the road, the desert road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.

And so he started out and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of the treasury of the Kandaki, which means queen of the Ethiopians. This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship.

And on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the book of Isaiah the prophet. And the spirit told Philip, Go to that chariot and stay near it. So Philip meets this Ethiopian eunuch.

[11 : 58] And he's an individual of quite high standing. But he's also a eunuch. A person who is unable to procreate. Either born that way or deliberately made that way in that society.

I told my son this morning that we were going to preach about the nether regions being chopped off and he thought that was very exciting. So there it is. But in the ancient world you have lots of these eunuchs.

You have these eunuchs and they serve basically as slaves. Many of them are slaves and servants in the bed chambers of the wealthy. But then some of them rise up in the royal courts to be quite high officials with the presumption that they can be trusted.

That they can at least be trusted not to have an affair with the queen or the princess because they've been emasculated. And so some of them become really powerful quarterfishers like this guy.

He handles the treasury for the Ethiopian queen Kandiki which probably is the queen mother. The Latin is Kandis. So some of your translations might say Kandis. Probably the queen mother, not the actual king because the queen mother did the administration in that society.

[13 : 06] And he appears, also here's an interesting fact, he appears to be what we might call a God-fearer. So there are several references in the New Testament to people who are basically Gentiles.

They're not ethnically Jewish. But they seem to have converted to belief in the God of Israel.

Because in the few centuries leading up to the time of the New Testament, the time of Jesus, Jews had basically scattered around the ancient world and taken their faith and their culture with them.

And so from time to time, probably in relatively small number, occasionally foreigners came to hear about and even embrace the God of Abraham. So this eunuch, he has some acquaintance already with the Jewish faith.

And he appears to be heading home after he's actually just come to try and worship God at the temple in Jerusalem. And so now Philip goes along and Philip goes to have a gospel conversation with him to speak about Jesus.

Now we're going to come to the content of that gospel conversation in the second point. But long story short, the eunuch believes this gospel presentation that Philip puts before him. They stop on the side of the road and Philip baptizes him.

[14 : 17] And then Philip gets whisked away by the Holy Spirit. And the eunuch heads off back to Ethiopia, full of joy in his newfound faith, taking the gospel with him. Now, this is a remarkable thing

in the book of Acts.

You might have heard the story many times and not thought about it, but this is a remarkable thing in the unfolding story of the book of Acts. Because it's clear that Luke is trying to show us this outward expansion of the gospel.

That it keeps going and it keeps moving over boundaries and barriers. In the previous section, it went to the Samaritans. It's what we saw last week. Which was a surprise, remember, to the apostles.

But you could sort of justify it in their minds. I mean, the Samaritans are distant cousins of the Jews in faith and culture. So, okay, I can get why the gospel might go to the Samaritans.

But now it extends out even further. To an Ethiopian, a person who inhabits a kingdom on the very edge of the known world at the time.

[15:17] And this theme of this ever-expanding gospel just continues to move forward all the way through the chapters of the book of Acts. This theme, really, that the gospel is no respecter of ethnicity or tribe or race.

There are no human-made boundaries that can stop its expansion. If anything, the gospel is the destroyer of polarization.

I can imagine what the initial response of the apostles would have been to this encounter. I mean, Luke doesn't record for us what they would have thought when they first heard about it. But because we've read the rest of the book of Acts, we could probably guess what they would have thought.

I can imagine Peter and John saying, Hey, did you hear that Philip preached the gospel to an Ethiopian court official? And apparently he converted and he was baptized.

And at that point, the others had no way. There is no way. I mean, why? Like, I can't get on board with this. It was hard enough for me to get on board with the idea of Samaritans becoming Christians.

[16:28] But Ethiopia, like, where even is it? My Google Maps doesn't go that far. I don't know where this place is. Those people are outsiders. They're not like just Gentiles, but they're like the Gentile of Gentiles.

They're on the very edge of the world. What could God possibly want by including these outsiders into the gospel? I think there would be all sorts of strong opinions shared in that particular discussion.

A lot of discomfort expressed in that discussion. A lot of prejudice probably on display in that discussion. But Luke is showing us that the gospel is no respecter of your tribal identities.

It is going to bring the outsider in no matter how far outside you think that person is. Think about it this way. Today you'll encounter a lot of rhetoric around the idea, or supporting or proposing the idea, that Christianity is essentially a white man's religion.

And that it's really been nothing more than a tool for colonialism and racial superiority. The pan-Africanist philosopher, and I think Frantz Fanon, very famous writer if you read in that sort of literature, he famously wrote, the church in the colonies is a white man's church, a foreigner's church.

[17:54] It does not call the colonized to the ways of God, but to the ways of the white man, to the ways of the master, the ways of the oppressor. You can find that sort of thinking all over the place in a lot of literature, a lot of modern black liberation literature.

Now, as somebody who likes to read history, who enjoys history, I don't want to whitewash Western missionary involvement in Africa in the last 500 years. There have been some terrible things done under the guise, under the banner of Christianity.

But history is just way, way, way more complicated than that. It's way more complicated than, here are the good guys, here are the bad guys. Because missionaries also built schools, they built hospitals, they led in the abolitionist movement, they exposed the atrocities in the Belgian Congo, and they did tons of other wonderful life-giving things, often at great cost to themselves and to their families.

So history is a really complicated mixed bag. But this rhetoric that Christianity is a white man's religion is very historically dubious.

And really, it's rhetoric that is designed to divide, to polarize, to break down and push people into camps.

[19 : 09] It's there to foster that effective polarization that we spoke about. But probably the main problem with that sort of rhetoric, that Christianity is a white man's religion, is Acts chapter 8.

Because here, before the gospel goes to Greece, before the gospel goes to Rome, and certainly long before the gospel gets to Britain, or to Germany, or to France, or to Scandinavia, where all the blonde-haired, blue-eyed people are, before the gospel goes to any of those places, the gospel goes to Ethiopia.

Now, we actually know from this reference to Kandaki that the term Ethiopia, although sometimes it can refer to basically anything that is south of Egypt, here it almost certainly refers to the ancient kingdom of Moreau, a black kingdom, made up of black people.

The people in Moreau were black Africans. We know that because we can actually have images of them depicted in Egyptian hieroglyphics. We have references to it in Roman literary sources that these were black people.

So while my Scottish ancestors were running around naked in the middle of winter worshipping pagan gods and painting themselves blue, and yes, they did that, the gospel was being believed by and spread by black Africans.

[20 : 34] Christianity is not a white man's religion. It's not a black man's religion. It is not only for Jews, and it is not only for Samaritans. It is for everybody out there who is struggling to figure out where they belong.

Which group? Which political ideology? Which tribe? The gospel is there to bring the outsider in, to banish that fear of exclusion, to break down those horrible artificial barriers that we have created as we try to get rid of that fear of exclusion.

Here in the Ethiopian, what we get to see is we get to see the outsider coming in. So that's the first thing I want you to remember. But the second thing is that the insider goes out.

Let's look at exactly how this outsider comes in. Have a look at verse 30. It says, Then Philip ran to the chariot, and he heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet.

Do you understand what you're reading? Philip asked. Well, how can I? He said, unless someone explains it to me. So I invited Philip to come up and sit with him. This is the passage of Scripture the eunuch was reading.

[21 : 51] He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before its share is silent, so he did not open his mouth. In his humiliation he was deprived of justice.

Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth. And the eunuch asked Philip, Well, tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?

And then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus. So the eunuch is reading the Old Testament Scriptures, and Philip's like, Well, I'm going to use this as an in to talk about the gospel, have a gospel conversation.

And he asks the guy, Do you understand what you're reading? And the eunuch's pretty honest. Look, I actually don't really know what I'm reading. I need somebody to explain it to me. And so Philip duly obliges.

Now remember, at this stage, the New Testament has not been written yet. The New Testament is going to be written in a few years' time, or start to be written in a few years' time. So all you have is the Old Testament Scriptures.

[22 : 56] And the text being read from is the prophet Isaiah. And really, in some ways, there couldn't be a better place to go to in the Old Testament for a gospel conversation.

You'll notice in this story that the providence of the Lord is all over this story. From the angel, like literally saying to Philip, Go here. To the Spirit saying, Philip, go up next to the chariot. To him reading out loud so that Philip can hear it.

To the fact that he's reading this particular text of all texts. This is the best place to go in the Old Testament for a gospel conversation. Luke only mentions two of the verses.

From Isaiah 53, verse 7, verse 8. But I want to read you the longer section that he would have been reading at this time. So it starts in Isaiah 52, verse 13.

If you want to turn there, you can turn there and follow along with me. But it starts in Isaiah 52, verse 13, and it runs to 53, verse 12. Listen to this. This is what the eunuch was reading in his chariot. See, my servant will act wisely.

[23 : 59] He will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted. Just as there were many who were appalled at him, his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any human being and his form

marred beyond human likeness.

So he will sprinkle many nations and kings will shut their mouths because of him. For what they were not told, they will see. And what they have not heard, they will understand.

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 mankind, a man of suffering and familiar with pain.

Like one from whom people hide their faces, he was despised and we held him in low esteem.

Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him and afflicted.

[25 : 05] But he was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. The punishment that brought us peace was on him and by his wounds we are healed.

We all like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to our 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 its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away, yet who of his generation protested?

For he was cut off from the land of the living. For the transgression of my people he was punished. He was assigned a grave 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 an offering for sin, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand.

[26 : 09] After he has suffered, he will see the light of life and be satisfied. 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 sins of many and made intercession for the transgressors.

This section of Isaiah is known as one of the servant songs. There are four of these servant songs in the book of Isaiah that describe this strange servant figure who is ordained by God to come and to bring justice and peace, to be a light to the nations, to bring forgiveness to sinners, and he's going to accomplish all of this through his suffering, and ultimately through his death.

The late great reform theologian R.C. Sproul said that if you read this fourth servant song that we just read now, it sounds like it was written by someone who was an eyewitness to the crucifixion. Right? It sounds like somebody who stood there at the foot of the cross as Jesus poured out his life unto death.

[27 : 34] But the incredible reality, in fact the mind-blowing reality, is that the servant song was written 700 years, 700 years before Jesus was crucified. It has the gospel all over it.

So incredibly clearly, so vividly. He was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. The punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.

If I read those to you, and I said, if you'd never read the Bible before, if you knew some stuff about Christianity, I said, which testament do you think those words are in? You're going to say, that must be in the New Testament. We all like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Who is the servant that Isaiah has predicted? Who is he? How about the one who in Mark chapter 10 says, the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many?

Is that him? How about the one who was pierced by nails and a Roman sword, hanging on a cross to pay for the penalty for our transgression? Do you think that's him? How about the one who suffered the punishment for sin by giving up his life, thereby bringing peace between us and God?

[28 : 54] Does that sound like him? Or what about the one who in his body bore all of our iniquity as he suffered there? Friends, this is the gospel.

When the eunuch asks Peter in verse 34, who is the prophet talking about? The crystal clear as daylight answer is he's talking about our Lord Jesus.

He's talking about our Lord Jesus Christ. He's the suffering servant. And we are the sheep who have gone astray. And it is only by him that we can be saved from our sin.

That's the gospel. I mean, this whole evangelistic encounter is really laid on a plate for Peter. I mean, you couldn't get this more set up than you.

If you wanted to share the gospel with your friend, like this is a really nice setup. Hey, I'm reading this thing about Isaiah, about a guy who seems to get crucified and then save people from their sin. What's it about? In verse 35, then Peter began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.

[30 : 03] And the scales fall off his eyes as he meets his Savior in the pages of Scripture. And he says, look, here's the water. I want to be baptized. In some senses, what you get here is actually just a classic example of evangelism.

One person opening Scripture and sharing the good news with another person, calling them to repent and believe in Jesus. I'm sure that many of you who are sitting here this morning came to faith in a way similar to this.

Maybe in a one-on-one conversation with somebody. Maybe with your parents having this conversation with you. Maybe in a small group Bible study. If you're sitting here this morning and you're not a Christian, that is you wouldn't consider yourself to have trusted in Jesus.

Maybe you're trying to figure out the Christian faith still and you're saying, well, I'm not sure what I think about this. But if you're not a Christian, this is what Christians believe. This is how you become a Christian.

This is what you are meant to believe. It is to admit that you are a sheep gone astray. A sinner, alienated from your Creator, justly deserving God's punishment.

[31 : 14] Bearing that iniquity. And then it's to turn away from that sin and to place your trust in Jesus Christ who was pierced for your transgressions.

Because it's in Him that you're going to find forgiveness from sin and peace with God. And the Bible says there's no other way to be saved. The eunuch asks Philip and says, well, what's stopping me from getting baptized?

And I guess my question to you this morning would be, well, what's stopping you from believing this morning? What is stopping you from believing this morning? Right now on the spot as you listen to this gospel message being presented to you.

What is stopping you from believing? What is keeping you from placing your faith in Jesus? If you're sitting on the fence, I want to say, do it now. Get off the fence and do it now.

Don't delay. Don't put off the joy of forgiveness of sins, peace with God for one more moment.

Repent and believe in the good news of Jesus. There's such a crystal clear example of it here.

[32 : 26] But there's a special sense in which this encounter is particularly precious to this eunuch. Now I'm going to take a little bit of creative license here.

But the basic idea I think holds true all the way through. But think about this eunuch's backstory. What's going on in his life. He is returning from Jerusalem where he went to worship at the temple of God.

But he probably discovered a very painful reality when he got there. He probably discovered that he couldn't go in to worship God.

He couldn't go into the presence of God in worship. This is Deuteronomy 23 verse 1. It's what is written down in the Old Testament law. No one who has been emasculated by crushing or cutting may enter the assembly of the Lord.

to the whole section of the Lord. It's about people with blemishes not being able to come in and worship God. Now it was apparently at least a two month journey from Moreau to Jerusalem.

[33 : 37] That is two months of arduous dangerous travel to get to the temple of his God. And yet tragically when he finally gets after this long journey when he finally gets there he can't go in.

He can't go into the assembly with all of the other worshipers because he carries this deformity in his body. Whether that was self-inflicted or is an accident he has this physical blemish and it bars him from the presence of God.

Now at that point he must feel more like an outsider than he has ever felt like an outsider at any point his entire life. And look he's lived his whole life as an outsider.

Bearing children was so incredibly central to the identity of ancient cultures. He would have always felt himself to be on the outside on the margins because he would never have any descendants.

He would never have a son of his own to carry on his legacy. And so he always lived on the outside. But you look and you think well he had some other things to fill him up like he'd risen in stature in the royal court.

[34 : 54] He had power. He had status. He had wealth. And then he had his God. He'd come to gain something of a knowledge of the one true God. And so he had these things to cling to to fill his life up.

and now he finally comes to worship his God. But he can't go in. He can't go in.

It is a desperately sad and heartbreaking moment if you think about his back story. His likely back story. And yet in the providence of God he's reading Isaiah 53 verse 7 to 8.

He was led like a sheep to the slaughter and as a lamb before its share is silent so he did not open his mouth. In his humiliation he was deprived of justice.

Who can speak of his descendants for his life was taken from the earth? He's reading that and he's thinking who is this tragic man?

[36 : 02] Who is this victim of horrible injustices that seem to be outside of his control? Who is this one who appears not to have any descendants like a eunuch? This person that I'm reading about, this person is an outsider.

He's an outcast. I can imagine that as he reads Isaiah 53 there's a deep part of him that resonates strongly with the suffering servant.

And so then I can also imagine his heart absolutely bursting. When Philip says, do you know who this man is? Do you know who this man is? That is your very God himself come into this world as a man to suffer, to be thrown out like an outcast so that you can be brought into his presence.

That is the one who is without any blemish, the purely spotless lamb of God being pierced, being horribly scarred and deformed so that the blemish of sin can be removed from you forever.

I can imagine Philip saying to him, you my friend have known a life without descendants, knowing that there will never ever be a possibility for children, that you'll never have a son.

[37 : 23] Well my friend I want you to know that you are reading about the time that the father displaying a love that you and I cannot understand sent his one and only son to bear your iniquity to the point of death.

Christ is the insider who is cast out that you and I can get brought in. Friends, that's the inclusion that you need.

That's what you need this morning. That's where you're going to find your belonging. an identity and it's a belonging, it is an identity that you can't get from any other group because you don't get into this group because you were without blemish.

You don't get in because you're of pure blood, you've got the right lineage, you don't get in because your views align perfectly with everybody else in the group. You come in deformed, you come in broken with all your sinful blemishes and Christ comes and he washes those things away.

And so when you know that that is how I got to be in this group, well then you're filled with humility and you're filled with compassion for every single other person out there who is struggling with that sense of feeling like an outsider.

[38 : 44] You're not judgmental of them. Why would you be? You know you only got in because of what Christ did. this gospel identity won't produce that affective polarization in you.

To the extent that you believe it and embrace it, it will produce love and care and compassion for your neighbor. Peacemaking. And in your heart of hearts, really down in your bones, the deeper that you plunge into the love of Jesus, the more you'll start to feel like you truly belong.

That you don't have that sense of being an outside and outcast in this world anymore, regardless of your external circumstances. You know that Philip is whisked away at the very end there and the eunuch continues on home with this newfound joy in his heart as he's discovered the gospel.

I wonder if he kept reading Isaiah on that day, that exact day, because if he kept reading, Isaiah, just three chapters later, he would have come to these words.

Isaiah 56, verse 3 to 5. Let the foreigner who is bound to the Lord say, the Lord, sorry, let no foreigner who is bound to the Lord say, the Lord will surely exclude me from his people.

[40 : 09] And let no eunuch complain, I am only a dry tree. For this is what the Lord says. To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose what pleases me and hold fast to my covenant, to them I will give within my temple and its walls a memorial and a name better than sons and daughters.

And I will give them an everlasting name that will endure forever. Imagine you've read that later that day. in Christ we are taken from being on the outside and we are brought on to the inside.

It's trust in him, it's hope in him. Let's pray. Amen. Heavenly Father, that sense of exclusion runs deep in our hearts.

We feel it, we see the effects of it, and we try and medicate it in all sorts of unhelpful ways. we're looking, desperately, desperately looking to be included, and so often looking in the wrong places. Father, show us where we can find true inclusion this morning. Show us Jesus Christ. Show us the gospel. Show us the suffering servant. Show us that he was pierced for our transgressions, that the iniquity was laid upon him, that through that we are set free, and brought in, into your love.

[41 : 52] Father, I pray for any person who's sitting here this morning who's really struggling with their sense of exclusion. I pray that they would find the gospel this morning in all its power applied by your Holy Spirit to their hearts, and that they would be filled up with joy.

And I pray for any person who's never known the good news of Jesus, who, like the eunuch, is wondering, how do I get in? How do I find this stuff? I pray that you would, you would do a work in their hearts this morning, and that they would come to trust and believe in Jesus.

Father, may we as a church who have now known this gospel and tasted this gospel of inclusion be a church that welcomes, that cares, that includes the outsider, that practices the hospitality of the gospel, because we understand that we have been recipients of such good news.

Make us that church, we pray. We ask this all for Christ's sake and his glory. Amen. We're going to respond to the teaching of God's word by saying a prayer of confession together.

That's going to be up on the screen. When we confess our sins, essentially one of the things we're doing is we're owning the symptoms of that experience of being outsiders.

[43 : 11] we're saying yeah, I do do these things, I do think these things, I do feel these things, and then we're taking them to the Lord Jesus and we're running back to him for that sense of inclusion. And so I invite you to confess your sins before almighty God.

O Lord, we want to enter your presence awed by your majesty, greatness and glory, encouraged by your love.

Yet there is a coldness in our hearts, a hardness toward you, an unwillingness to admit our sin and need for you. Forgive us for Jesus' sake.

Come near and strengthen us until Christ reigns supreme within us in every thought, word and deed. Give us a faith that purifies the heart, overcomes the world, works by love, fastens us to you and always clings to the cross.

In Jesus' name, Amen.