

What does it mean to have the good news of Jesus preached to you? Does it mean you're told that Jesus was born of a virgin, lived a sinless life, died in your place, rose again three days later, and ascended to the Father? I mean that's all really good news. But, **"Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness among the people."** Matthew 4:23

before most of what I just said had taken place. What does it mean for us to hear the good news of what Jesus has done? Does it impact us now, in this moment? Does the good news have the power to change, transform, and redeem our lives? What does it mean to have the good news preached to me today?

In Acts chapter 8, we are told about a preacher named Philip. He went to a city in Samaria and began to proclaim the good news of Jesus. When the crowds heard what Philip said they were amazed. Then the miracles started and people were being healed – specifically paralytics and people who had been crippled, and people were being delivered from all sorts of things and evil spirits came out of many people. The Bible says there was great joy in the city as a result. Revival was breaking out in Samaria. **"When they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women."** Acts 8:12

Peter and James hear what's happening and go down to check it out. People are now getting filled with the Holy Spirit – it's amazing. But, then an angel of the Lord comes to Philip and says, **"Go south to the road – the desert road – that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza. So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. This man had gone to Jerusalem to**

worship, 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.'" Acts 8:26-28

When the good news of the Kingdom and the story of Jesus, implying they are different but connected, were preached to the people in Samaria revival broke out. People were saved, baptized, filled with the Holy Spirit, healed, and delivered. But, the good news of the kingdom is even bigger than that. How can it be bigger than that? Well, through this one single witness let me show you just how incredible it is to have the good news preached to you. You see the good news of Jesus will seek you out even on deserted, desert roads where you think no one can find you. In the place where you might feel left out, abandoned, and confused – with more questions than answers – God wants to show up and announce really good news. The Spirit of the Lord had an assignment for Philip so big that He directed him to leave a region wide revival to walk alone down a desert road to find one, single person who needed good news. But, before we get to just what that news was we have to go back to the Old Testament. Come on – you knew that's where I was gonna go.

After Moses led the people of Israel out of Egypt they wandered in the desert for 40 years. During that time God was setting up a nation – laws, a criminal code, instructions for worship, commands to live by were all given. A priesthood was established, a tabernacle was designed, and who could enter, how they could enter, and when they could enter was all spelled out for the people of God. Deuteronomy 23 stated, "No one who has been emasculated by crushing or cutting may enter the assembly of the Lord." Deuteronomy 23:1 For that matter foreigners couldn't enter the assembly of the Lord either. There is no law against these men only against them entering the assembly and specifically serving as a

priest and making an offering to the Lord. They were seen as not a “whole individual,” as less than, and therefore could not participate in the worship activities of a Holy God.

It goes without saying that eunuchs could not have children, but children were how the blessings of God were to be passed from one generation to another. The Lord had told Moses, **“When you enter Canaan, the land that will be allotted to you as an inheritance will have these boundaries...” Numbers 34:2** And that whole chapter explains what belongs to them and then who would assign the lands to each tribe of Israel. Then we’re told **“Every Israelite will possess the inheritance of his fathers. No inheritance may pass from tribe to tribe, for each Israelite tribe is to keep the land it inherits.” Numbers 36:8-9** The eunuch can’t pass on land and an inheritance. He cannot forward the blessings of God.

It's the exact opposite of what we read in the Psalms. **“Sons are a heritage from the Lord, children are a reward from him...Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them. They will not be put to shame when they contend with their enemies in the gate.” Psalm 127:3,5**

The eunuch has no heritage, no reward, and shame was often his.

In Acts 8, we’re told this eunuch from Ethiopia had gone to Jerusalem to worship, but we aren’t actually told if he did. How could he have? He was to be excluded – on two counts. He’s a foreigner and he’s a eunuch. We’ll talk next week about the position that eunuch’s often held. He’s an official in the Queen’s court. He has wealth and position, but no lasting legacy, and no future reward. What good is money and power if there’s no future for you? No promise of future blessing? He fears God but doesn’t yet know of the good news Jesus brings or of the salvation Jesus death has now made possible. So, now we see him reading

the Scripture from the prophet Isaiah and maybe he's wondering if there was in fact any good news for him to be found there.

Philip asks if he understands what it is he is reading. **"How can I," he said, "unless someone explains it to me?" So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. Acts 8:31** The passage he was reading was from what we know as Isaiah 53. The man turns to Philip and asks – who is the prophet talking about? **"Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus." Acts 8:35**

Back to the Old Testament we go. Isaiah had written hundreds of years before Jesus was born that a future servant of God Almighty would act wisely, and would be raised and lifted up and highly exalted and even kings would bow to him but first he would suffer. **This servant "was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering...and we esteemed him not." Isaiah 53:3**

He would be "pierced for our transgression...crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him." Isaiah 53:5

Then we get to the part quoted in Acts 8:

"He was oppressed and afflicted...led like a lamb to the slaughter." Isaiah 53:7

"In his humiliation he was deprived of justice. Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from this earth." Acts 8:33

Imagine the hope beginning to rise in the Ethiopian eunuchs heart as he hears Philip talking about Jesus as one who was familiar with our own sufferings – of which this man had had a few. Jesus had also known humiliation and shame, had been deprived of justice, and left without a legacy and descendants.

But, Isaiah goes on – **“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.” Isaiah 53:10**

How can this be? How can this one with no descendants see his offspring or prolong his days after he’s been placed in the grave? In ancient Israel everything was tied to your children – in life and in death. Children were the permanent marker that life had existed, mattered, and served a purpose. But, then Isaiah 53 keeps going – **“After the suffering of his soul he will see the light of life and be satisfied...I will give him a portion among the great...because he poured out his life unto death. For he bore the sins of many.”**

Isaiah 53:11-12 Imagine Philip preaching this good news to this one excluded man – after the servant suffered and because he poured out his life unto death – everything afterwards changes. Philip declares to this man who had been considered less than, not whole, other, kept apart that this servant Isaiah wrote about was none other than Jesus Christ who had suffered and died, was placed in a grave but then rose again 3 days later. Then, Philip preached the good news. What does it mean to have the good news preached to you?

I would imagine Philip returned to the text he had in his hand. You see right after the verse we just read Isaiah begins to envision something new that will take place because of the work of the Suffering Servant. The very next verse is something that sounds utterly ridiculous and impossible, **“Sing, O barren woman, you who never bore a child; burst into song, shout for joy, you who were never in labor; because more are the children of the desolate woman than of her who has a husband.” Isaiah 54:1** How can that be? It sounds totally insensitive to our ears. How could someone barren begin to sing and how could a single woman without a husband have more children than the married woman with

a houseful? Yet, Isaiah then says, **“Enlarge the place of your tent, stretch your tent curtains wide, do not hold back...you will spread out to the right and to the left; your descendants will dispossess nations and settle in their desolate cities. Do not be afraid; you will not suffer shame. Do not fear disgrace; you will not be humiliated.”**

Isaiah 54:2-4 The work of the suffering servant allows for shame and disgrace to be taken away and single women and barren women to be blessed even without children. Chapter 55 begins with an invitation for “All you who are thirsty, come to the waters...” Where are the exclusions? Who gets left out of the blessing this time? Could all really mean all in this new envisioned kingdom made possible by the Suffering Servant? The eunuch sitting in the chariot with Philip must have felt his heart beating out of his chest at this point wondering if Philip is saying Jesus is the Suffering Servant and he’s telling me this and reading this invitation I wonder if there’s good news for me too. Then maybe Philip unrolls just a bit more from the scroll and begins to read from Isaiah 56:

This is what the Lord says: “Maintain justice and do what is right, for my salvation is close at hand and my righteousness will soon be revealed. Blessed is the one who does this— the person who holds it fast, who keeps the Sabbath without desecrating it, and keeps their hands from doing any evil.” Let no foreigner who is bound to the Lord say, “The Lord will surely exclude me from his people.” 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; I will give them an everlasting name that will endure forever. And foreigners who bind themselves to the Lord to minister to him, to love the name

of the Lord, and to be his servants, all who keep the Sabbath without desecrating it and who hold fast to my covenant—these I will bring to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations.” The Sovereign Lord declares—he who gathers the exiles of Israel: “I will gather still others to them besides those already gathered.” Isaiah 56:1-8

Can you picture the Ethiopian eunuch hearing this? Can you see the light begin to dawn? Can you hear Philip’s voice rise just a little as he says oh let me tell you the good news of Jesus.

Because of Jesus our genealogy – who are parents were or if we have children – is no longer a requirement for being part of God’s people; instead, obedience to His commands is the new sign of God’s people.

Oh, listen...

Because of Jesus no longer is anyone excluded from the assembly; instead, we are all invited to experience joy in the house of the Lord.

Oh, and there’s more

Because of Jesus the tents are widened and those formerly left out from receiving and passing on the blessings of God are now instead the offspring of the Suffering Servant and entitled to all the blessings His Father has to give.

In this new kingdom that Jesus ushered in the choice to keep the Sabbath and hold fast to the kingdom is what sets people apart as holy and chosen, and not their “wholeness” as an individual or their ability to have children. This obedience is tied to the keeping of the commands. Later in Isaiah 58, Sabbath keeping will be linked to justice and righteousness

and the command to “maintain justice and do what is right” will be followed (Isaiah 56:1). Obedience to the Lord is what brings these formerly outcast individuals, who could not serve in the temple or offer sacrifices, into God’s holy mountain where their “burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar” (Isaiah 56:7).

Imagine, the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8 hearing this for the first time having just come from Jerusalem where he wouldn’t have been able to make a sacrifice. Imagine, the excitement too as he realizes what could now be his.

You see, Isaiah 56 says that because of their choice to keep and obey the commands, the eunuchs will now be given what they before could never have: an everlasting name.

Without children there was no other way to be remembered. There was nothing and no person to tie them to the past or to the future. However, because they have chosen to obey the Lord they will be remembered in His kingdom where they will be given a place with Him for eternity (Oswalt 459).

What does it mean to have the good news of Jesus preached to you? For the man in Acts 8 it meant redemption, it meant a story of grace with him at the very center, it meant Jesus’ death on the cross really had changed everything, it meant inclusion into the family of God.

Philip told him the good news about Jesus and all that was different because of Him so then when they came to water – on a desert road no less – the man said, **“Look, here is water.**

Why shouldn’t I be baptized?” And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing.” Acts 8:36-39

The rituals regarding purity in the temple had caused the eunuch to be excluded, he couldn't be circumcised, but the new act of baptism introduced by Jesus now brings into the family of God those formerly left out. When the Ethiopian eunuch sees a body of water and asks what could possibly stop him from being baptized, the answer is nothing because of the transformative and redemptive work of Jesus Christ.

So now, what does it mean to you, personally, today, to have the good news of Jesus preached to you? What does this one single man's story in Acts 8 bear witness to all of us today about Jesus? What does the story of a eunuch being baptized, a kingdom where barren and single women have more children than married women, and an invitation for outcasts to come in have to teach us today at Carbondale? Well, it's the same good news Isaiah saw, Philip preached, and the Ethiopian heard:

Obedience to Jesus and His commands is still the mark for God's people.

Who you are, what you've done, how you've lived, whether you're married now or single, if your family has 5 generations of ministers or if you're the only Christian in your family – none of that gets you into God's family or excludes you from it. Church attendance won't mark you as a child of God either. You know that old line about living in a garage doesn't make you a car and coming to church doesn't make you a Christian? Well, it's silly but there's truth to it.

Here's what brings us into the family of God – obedience to His commands. Here's what Jesus said – **“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it but whoever loses his life for me will find it.” Matthew 16:24-25** Following Jesus is the way to life and the way into the family of God. We can make the decision to follow Jesus – there's nothing,

absolutely nothing keeping us away from Jesus – we just decide, and then we keep deciding and we begin obeying His commands. Jesus said, **“If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. He who does not love me will not obey my teaching.” John 14:23-24** In another place Jesus mother and brothers had come to see Him and Jesus said well actually – anyone who does the will of my Father – in other words anyone who obeys His commands – the are now my brother and sister and mother. Obedience to Jesus is what makes us family.

The second piece of good news is:

The invitation to experience joy in God’s kingdom is still on offer to all who will believe.

The Apostle Paul said **“Whoever would confess with your mouth, Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved...For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile – the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” Romans 10:9-13**

You aren’t excluded – there’s nothing that can keep you away from forgiveness and mercy except your own stubbornness. Forgiveness is on offer for anyone who would confess that Jesus is Lord. There’s no difference between those who were always in the assembly and those who have been brought in by Jesus – Same Lord and Father of us all. You’re invited to be part of God’s kingdom. This is such amazing, good news for those who have wondered is the good news of Jesus really for me? Am I really able to come to Jesus and find forgiveness? Can I really be part of the Family of God? The answer is yes.

Finally, the good news being preached to you today is that:

All the blessings of God are now ours in Christ Jesus.

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.” Ephesians 1:3 Every spiritual blessing – is now ours – passed on to us not from our own parents or lineage but through the work of the Suffering Servant who does in fact live forevermore to see His offspring.

“We see Jesus...now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God...should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering.” Hebrews 2:9-10

Because of the work of Jesus everything has changed. This is the good news of the kingdom. For everyone who has ever felt left out, less than, unworthy, or like they didn't belong. For anyone who has lived with shame or feelings of inadequacy or wondered if their life mattered – even mattered to God. This man's story in Acts 8 lets us all know that Jesus has good news for us left out ones, his story teaches us shame gets washed away as every spiritual blessing gets poured out on us too. What does it mean to you, today, in this moment, to hear the good news of Jesus preached? It means Jesus sees you and loves you enough to meet you on a desert road and announce to you today – I've got good news – in my kingdom all is made new.

Invite to stand and worship. - PRAY