

Breaking Down Barriers

Acts 8:26-39

Ephesians 2.11-16: 11 Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called “the uncircumcision” by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands— 12 remember that you were at that time **separated** from Christ, **alienated** from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having **no hope and without God** in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were **far off** have been **brought near** by the blood of Christ. 14 **For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility** 15 by **abolishing** the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself **one new man in place of the two**, so making **peace**, 16 and might **reconcile** us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby **killing the hostility**.

Ephesians 2 is a passage about the barrier between Jews and Gentiles being torn down by the blood of Christ. Eph 2.11-13 portrays the former life of the Gentiles as being **separated, alienated, no hope and without God**, and **far off**. But in verse 14 the tide shifts and Paul talks about how Christ **broke down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility**. When Jesus died, was buried, and resurrected he had broken down the wall that divided God’s people from the Gentiles and made them one new man in place of the two. He made peace, he reconciled the Gentiles to God, and killed the hostility between the two groups.

This morning I want us to look at the story in Acts 8 that helps us see Ephesians 2 played out in the real world. We all know the Ethiopian Eunuch and the barriers that he faced in Acts 8. This is a well-known story, but I want to look deeper into who the Eunuch was as a man, the things he faced before he came to know Christ, and how Phillip led him to see how Christ had broken down that wall of hostility. So, lets dive in and learn more about the Ethiopian Eunuch.

Acts 8:26-29: The Ethiopian Eunuch

Acts 8.26.39: 26 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. 27 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** 28 and was returning, **seated in his chariot, and he was reading the prophet Isaiah.** 29 And the Spirit said to Philip, “Go over and join this chariot.” 30 So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, “**Do you understand what you are reading?**” 31 And he said, “**How can I, unless someone guides me?**” And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. 32 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.

33 In his humiliation justice was denied him.

Who can describe his generation?

For his life is taken away from the earth.”

34 And the eunuch said to Philip, “About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?” 35 Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus. 36 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?” 38 And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. 39 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.

Who exactly was this Eunuch? What barriers did he face?

Often, we glaze over 8:27-28 and do not look deeper into the story because typically we use this passage to talk about baptism. Rightfully so, this passage is full of teaching on baptism.

However, the text gives us several clues about the Eunuch and who he is in just a few short words in 8:27-28 if we take the time to read it. When we look deeper into who the eunuch is and where he has been it tells us a lot about him and what he is thinking when he sat in his chariot in Acts 8.

- **An Ethiopian (Foreigner)**

- On the road from Jerusalem to Gaza in the desert.
 - The Eunuch is on his way home after his pilgrimage to the temple. He is in between Jerusalem and Gaza. As a foreigner who was seeking God in Jerusalem, the eunuch did not have the same privileges as a Jew. He could not enter the temple.
- **Temple Balustrade Inscription** says, “No outsider shall enter the protective enclosure around the sanctuary. ***And whoever is caught will only have himself to blame for the ensuing death.***”
 - The Eunuch as a foreigner would have been limited to the court of Gentiles at best and would not have been allowed into the sanctuary to publicly worship or sacrifice to God. The “wall of hostility” that separated Jews and Gentiles in Ephesians 2 was not just a spiritual wall, but a physical wall on which these inscriptions hung.

- **A eunuch (Social Outcast)**

- Not only was the man a gentile, but he was also a eunuch.
 - “an ***emasculated*** man, one ***naturally*** incapacitated for, or ***voluntarily*** abstaining from wedlock” (Matt 19.12).

- Because of his position in the Queen’s court, he would have likely been forced to become a eunuch.
 - To the Jews, he would have been seen as in a **constant state of ritual impurity**. (Dtr 23.1; Lev 22:24) Josephus, a Jewish Roman historian from the 1st century reacted to the views of some of the Jews to eunuchs saying,
 - **“Turn away from eunuchs and flee companionship** with those who have effeminacy of their soul. Similarly, in fact, considered as a whole by those who see them, **they are a monstrosity**. And it is not permitted to castrate either men or other living creatures.” (Josephus *Ant.* 4.8.40 290-291.
 - Not only was he unable to enter the temple to worship, but outside in Jerusalem he would have been a social outcast as well.
 - Imagine being treated in this way when you did not even have control over the decision that was made for you to be a eunuch!
- **A court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure... Seated in his chariot, and he was reading the prophet Isaiah. (Wealthy)**
 - Despite the eunuch being an outcast to the Jews, the eunuch was a man of means. We can see this because he was riding in a **chariot (\$\$\$)** and was reading from a **scroll of Isaiah (handwritten and \$\$\$)**. Both items would not be common among a normal individual. Likewise, he would have most likely had someone with him to guide the chariot so he could read the scriptures aloud and learn.
 - Although, his money and influence in Jerusalem did not do him much good since when Philip asks him if he understands what he is reading the eunuch says, **“How can I, unless someone guides me?”**
 - Since he was not able to enter the temple or associate with many Jews, he likely was unable to learn much in Jerusalem. He was a ritually impure foreigner, surely no Jew wanted to teach him about God.
- **He had come to Jerusalem to worship and was returning (God Fearer)**
 - At 25 miles a day this trip from Ethiopia to Jerusalem and back would take **48-60 days there** and a total of **96-120 days round trip**. This man was dedicated to learning who God was! He wanted to know and was willing to spend a lot of money, time, and energy to know him!
 - But as we said, as he arrived in Jerusalem whether he knew beforehand or not, he was unable to enter the temple to worship or learn about God.
 - **Dtr 23.1: “No one whose testicles are crushed or whose male organ is cut off shall enter the assembly of the Lord.**
 - **See also Lev 21.20; 22.24:**
 - Not only that, but as a eunuch he would have been prevented from becoming a **proselyte**, so he was most likely a **God-fearer**. As the Ethiopian Eunuch sat in his chariot reading aloud, he is probably thinking that he came all that

way for nothing. That his search for God was back to square one and that maybe he wouldn't get to know him at all.

- But then Philip shows up in the middle of the desert! All of a sudden, a Jew starts asking this outcast a question and the Eunuch is able to engage with Philip and ***his feeling of being an outcast begins melting away!*** He can ask questions and this Jew is not fleeing from him or making him feel ashamed for who he was!
- For the eunuch he is probably incredibly excited learning about Jesus, but at the same time ***he still has a gnawing feeling in the back of his head*** thinking ***“Okay, but what’s the catch? What is going to stop me this time?”***
- He was likely afraid that he would be prevented from being a Christian just like he was prevented from being a proselyte!
 - Having a scroll of Isaiah, the eunuch likely read Isaiah 56 and found hope that he could become a child of God one day. If not, I am sure Phillip would have pointed to out to him here.

Isaiah 56.3-5:

³ **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.”**

⁴ **For thus says the LORD:**

**“To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths,
who choose the things that please me
and hold fast my covenant,**

⁵ **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.**

- When the eunuch read this maybe before this occasion or for the first time, I know that it gave him hope. However, after his trip to Jerusalem he sat his chariot and read aloud Isaiah 53 frustrated because of all the barriers that separated him from God. When As Phillip taught him, I am sure he was probably waiting for another barrier to stop him. This can be seen in his response to Phillip when he says, ***“See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?”***
- The eunuch is hopeful here, but skeptical in his response to Philip. It's funny that the passage does not record Philip's reaction to this question. Instead, the chariot makes a screeching stop and Philip and the eunuch go down immediately into the water! There were no longer barriers in the eunuch's way! Philip had helped the eunuch see what Christ had done in breaking down that dividing wall of hostility so that he could be joined to God.

- We don't know what Philip said when he taught from the scriptures and told him the good news about Christ. But I like to think that is sounded something a little like Ephesians 2. Maybe Philip acknowledged the separation the Eunuch experienced and felt from God and Israel. Instead, Philip showed him how he was a child of God because of the blood of Christ. Possibly Philip mentioned that wall that surrounded the temple and excluded the gentiles. Perchance he told the eunuch that Christ had broken that barrier down that even though it still stood physically (until 70 AD) it had been demolished spiritually.
- Now that Eunuch who felt so isolated had become a member of God's family and had access to God, not in a physical temple, but a spiritual one. He himself was made into a building block and was added to the building of God's people in which God's spirit dwells.
- In the end, the Ethiopian Eunuch went on his way rejoicing knowing that the long trip he made was not in vain. All his barriers had been broken down. I bet that made the rest of his trip a whole lot sweeter.

Our Call to Break Down Barriers.

- We are called to be like Philip. Let's look at some practical things Philip does in Acts 8 that can help us better break down barriers for other people.

Be willing to share your faith with people outside your comfort zone.

- We must be willing to be led by the Spirit and engage with people that are different from who we are. Philip was led to a different geographical location and was allowed to speak to a man who came from ***a different culture and background***.
- This is not an easy thing to do! It is scary talking to people who are different because there are ***more opportunities for miscommunication or unintentional offense***. Sometimes there are barriers in ***language, socio-economic status, race, gender***, that make engaging with people difficult.
 - What if Philip told God he wouldn't talk to the man because he was a foreigner or a eunuch! Just because he was different!
- These are barriers in themselves ***but if we want to be barrier bashers then we must believe in the power of the gospel to overcome them***. This is not our story. It is Jesus' ***and it is not my power that convinces people of the Gospel. It is the power of God, His Son, and His Spirit that convicts and draws people in.***
- When we encounter people that are different from us, and we struggle to find ways to relate ***put your trust in Christ and his gospel to bridge gaps*** between you and the other person and God will do the rest.
- I think what I learned the most from Philip is that ***it starts with just a simple question. We must engage people.*** (Challenge of introverts) Sometimes a simple question can open up a major opportunity for someone to share about themselves and to teach them. You do not know what will happen unless you try. ***We cannot let the loss of comfort prevent us from sharing the gospel with others!***

Pray God will allow you to share the gospel with people who have a desire to know God.

- We also be praying for opportunities to share the gospel with others. Especially people who want to know and learn about God. **Often converting someone is not done in one conversation.** It is not every day that you come upon someone reading Isaiah 53 aloud and scratching their head in frustration!
- **It can take time and hard study with people even when they want to believe!** We need to pray but also realize that answered prayers can cost time and effort! **Be prepared but know you do not have to do it alone! Ask your brethren for help! If they begin asking questions you can't answer, then find someone who can!** It is okay to say "I don't know the answer to that. Let me ask someone who does know. Would you mind if I invited them to our study?" **If the person is genuinely learning, then they will want you to invite others along to teach!**
- So, let's pray for God to open doors and that his spirit will guide us to people that want to learn so that we can break down barriers of understanding and help others come to know Christ just as we have.

Answer questions.

- It is interesting that **Philip initiated the conversation; but the Eunuch led it by asking questions. Philip allowed the Eunuch to guide the conversation and he helped him come to a better understanding by answering his questions.**
- I think we can get in our heads when it comes to sharing the gospel with someone. **We think that we need to have a sermon prepared** when someone asks a question, but that is not so. ("Here is my 3-point sermon on why you need Jesus")
- Let the person you engaged ask questions and answer them as you go the best you can. **Don't dominate the conversation and come off preachy. Have a conversation, show them you are interested in them, that you love them, and that you want to help them learn more.**

Begin with the scriptures.

- Acts 8 tells us, **"Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus."** When the Eunuch asked questions **the first place Philip went was to the scripture.** Remember, we are not telling our story, we are telling God's. Don't think you have to have every argument worked out in your head. **Maybe you don't know what to say to a question, but you may have an idea of where to turn in your Bible.**
- **Let the scripture speak for itself and start there.** Of course, there is always a level of interpretation involved, but you don't want to spend your time proof texting each point you want to make. [Ex. Someone proof texting you and you feel like they care more about making a point than about you] **KNOWING WHERE TO TURN TO DEFEND WHAT YOU BELIEVE IS NOT A BAD THING BUT THAT IS NOT WHAT WE ARE TALKING ABOUT HERE. THIS IS PREACHING THE GOSPEL ABOUT**

JESUS. NOT TELLING PEOPLE OUR DOCTRINE. THERE IS A TIME FOR THAT BUT THAT IS NOT WHERE WE START WITH AN UNBELIEVER. (Car wreck analogy)

- Remember, Philip started where the Eunuch was at in the text. He only had Isaiah in front of him and he was able to preach the good news about Jesus! He didn't feel the need to flip to every passage to be able to tell the Eunuch who Jesus was. He just had Isaiah!
- Let your starting point be what God's word and see what it has to say! If someone has a question about a specific passage, start there and let God's word do its work. Let the gospel speak for itself! The great thing about telling people the good news is that you can just about find Jesus on every page of the Bible!

Tell the good news about Jesus.

- What do you think the Ethiopian Eunuch did when he got back home? ***I bet he shared the good news about Jesus Christ to everyone he could talk to.*** I bet he recounted his trip and its apparent failure, but how Philip appeared in the desert and taught him the gospel of Jesus Christ. I bet he told his other ***eunuch friends*** in the court of Candace what he had heard. That ***they could have hope in Christ too.*** Maybe he even told the ***Queen and all her subjects*** this wonderful news about Jesus.
- This week strike up a conversation with someone. Ask them a question. It doesn't have to be forced. Let it be natural and talk to people about the gospel and what it has done for you. ***Tell people how Jesus has broken down the barrier of sin and reconciled you to God so that his spirit could dwell in you.*** Tell them how it has changed your outlook on life and how you live differently because of Jesus' sacrifice.
- ***Let's begin making the gospel a larger feature of our conversations with others. Let's have genuine and meaningful conversations with people who are searching.*** Pray that God will lead you to these people. When he does, engage them, ask them questions, listen to them, and tell them the good news about Jesus. Start with Eph. 2.

Ephesians 2:14-22: **14** For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility **15** by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, **16** and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. **17** And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. **18** For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. **19** So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, **20** built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, **21** in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. **22** In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.