

Acts 8 Sermon

The Important Mission

I'm going to start with a word association game, I'll say a word, and I want you respond out loud with the first thing that comes to mind!

The word is, Evangelism

Good to hear we all think in a similar way, I heard quite a few people say the words, fear and scary.

They are words I think we can all relate to when it comes to evangelism.

I remember in my first year of Bible college receiving the course subject list for the that coming semester, and seeing Evangelism as one of the subjects.

Instantly I felt the sweat on my forehead as I thought about the practical nature of the course and how I would have to physically go out and do mission to people I didn't know.

All I could think about, was not being able to answer tricky theological questions when people asked because my bible knowledge wasn't that great.

I remembered what it had been like as a new Christian, being politely told by my family and friends to keep my religious views to myself whenever I had tried to share my faith with them.

As I sat there looking at that subject title, I can remember thinking that maybe I won't ever be able to do mission or share Jesus with people, because only people with lots of knowledge and skills like pastors can do that kind of work.

Now maybe you have felt the same, that sharing Jesus with people is hard because you think your bible knowledge isn't up to scratch or because you don't feel like you are good at talking to people.

Maybe like I did, you've conceded that mission should be left to people that have the knowledge and gifts do this kind of work.

If that's where you are at, which I think most of us at some point have been, then it might be helpful to know that in the 60's and 70's intentional mission or sharing faith with people by paid clergy in Sydney almost ground to a halt because ministers in churches talked themselves into this idea that mission was only for people with the gift for mission.

It's scary to think of what our churches might have become if this kind of idea had taken hold.

Let's think for a minute, what kind of effect would this have on our own church here.

<Slide> C@tP Vision statement

What would happen if we took the "mission" out of our vision statement, especially the part that says, **we want to see everyone in Peakhurst and beyond transformed by the good news of Jesus.**

Well when any organisation stops doing the one thing that brings growth, the organisation whether a business, a soccer club or even a church eventually stops growing and goes into decline.

There are lots of examples of this happening to churches in Sydney. I've spoken with a Pastor that knew of an Anglican church in the south that in the 60's used to have a mission that at various times throughout each week reached over one thousand children, the mission though was effected greatly when large numbers of people from other countries came to live in that area.

Now it's hard to know exactly the reasons that church closed its doors but maybe the church couldn't understand the new Australians that were moving into the area and didn't know how to do mission to them.

Maybe the church started thinking that this kind of mission to new Australians should be done by people with gifts and skills specific to reaching these people.

At the end of the day, when churches close their doors Jesus at some point stops being witnessed into that community, even if it's just for a short while.

We are no different, if we start thinking as individuals that mission is up to someone else who has the gifts to get the mission done, or if we stop finding new ways to do mission to the people that live in our community, then the mission at Church at the Peak will also eventually decline and maybe even stop all together.

What a terrible thing that would be to see, all the time, financial investment, and even the relationships that have been built not only with each other but also with the school community, the families that come to youth and mainly music.

Would we be happy to see all that end?

I'm hoping you can see that the mission we are involved in here at Church at the Peak is just as important as the first mission that we read about in our passage today, because people in this community at Peakhurst and beyond need to hear the good news of Jesus just as much as the Samaritans did when the early church went out from Jerusalem.

Now knowing our mission is important is great, but it doesn't make it any easier, does it? We still have fear and find it scary whenever we think about doing mission.

So, to help us, let's look at 2 examples from our passage that might help us be less fearful and scared about the mission we have.

The Urgent Mission

Our first example is that we see the early church go out into mission because of persecution.

Look at verse 3 with me to see how different the mission going out was for the early church in Jerusalem. Verse 3 says, **But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison.**

The sending out of the new Christians from Jerusalem in to the Mission field in the early church wasn't a joyful or planned mission, it was a mission that went out because of the persecution that they were facing just after Stephens death.

The biggest surprise out of all this, is verse 4.

Verse 4 says, **those who had been scattered, preached the word wherever they went.**

Now considering the persecution, they were facing, I would have expected verse 4 to say, those who were scattered took everything they owned and moved to a safe place to lay low until the dust settled.

But that's not what the early Christians did.

Verse 4 describes for us a situation in which those who were scattered which would have numbered well over 10,000, preached wherever they went.

<slide> Acts chapter 1:8

Clearly Jesus directive in Acts chapter 1 has got through to all followers of him and the scattered Christians have a sense of urgency about sharing the good news of Jesus with people they meet, it's like they felt there was no time to waste because they knew Saul's crucifixion mobs were coming after them.

Imagine being in their position, you have just heard and responded to the good news of salvation yourself, its changed your life and you are now a joyful follower of Christ, but the label you now have as a Christian means that you are being hunted.

The only thing you can offer people, knowing your days are numbered, is the joyful news of new life through Jesus and you don't waste any time telling people this good news.

<slide> - Hawaii ballistic missile threat

Now on January 13th this year, the people of Hawaii were sent this inbound ballistic missile warning on their mobile phones by the emergency management agency, thankfully it was a

false alarm, but everyone who received that message on their phones that morning thought it was real.

As I watched the news reports and saw the mobile message that had been broadcast on people's phones, I saw a common theme from people in what they thought would do with their last few hours of life.

The most common thing that people reportedly did when they got the message was to try and contact their family and friends to tell them that they loved them.

What occurred to me as I saw the footage of fathers lowering their children into fallout shelters, is that maybe my level of urgency hasn't been that high when it comes to reaching the people I love with the good news of Jesus and that just like the early church we don't know how long we might have to share that good news with people.

I think that's what this part of Acts chapter 8 is asking us, are we urgently looking for opportunities to share the good news with people or have we moved to a safe place to lay low for a while.

As you know Easter is coming, and we have Friday and Sunday services planned here at Church at the Peak, both services are perfect opportunities for our friends and family to hear the Gospel message clearly spoken.

We have an opportunity to act on the urgency of reaching out to the people we know we want to hear the gospel message.

The Directed Mission

The second thing that we have in our personal mission that we can see in our passage today is that God and his spirit, gives the power and direction we need to do mission.

Let's look at the examples from Philip's mission to see how that's happening.

We see from verse 5, Philip going into Samaria and we see that the crowds that paid close attention to him especially when he preached and did miraculous signs, even the evil spirits we are told came out of many and that also many people who were paralytics and cripples were healed. God is doing powerful things through Philip and we are told that many were baptised and that there was great Joy in the city.

As we continue, we see not only God working powerfully through Philip, but that God also gives the mission direction through the angel of the lord speaking to Philip and giving him the direction to go and even who to speak to.

And it's at this point that we notice Philip be unwavering in his trust in God's direction. He fully trusts that God is driving the mission and knows that God's plan will succeed.

Now I'm not sure if you have ever had a nervous passenger in the car with you before?

If you have, you would have noticed that regardless of how safe or slow you were driving, nothing can put a nervous passenger at ease, nothing that is except them taking control and driving the car themselves.

God sometimes has a similar problem with us in mission, He's driving the mission, but we often think we need to be the ones in control.

We think that the mission depends on us, to get us to the mission destination.

That's exactly the reason why I was sweating in my first year of college when I saw the subject list with Evangelism written down, because I thought that my abilities to speak to people and to have all the right answers were what was needed to get mission done.

What I had forgotten, was that God is in control of the mission, not me or any of my abilities.

How are you going with God being in control of Mission?

Are you the nervous passenger that wants to be in the driver's seat of mission? Have you forgotten that God is in control?

Have you not even been willing to put your hand up for mission, because you think you aren't the right person for the job.

In hearing that God is in control, in seeing the example of God in control of Philips Mission, does that take the pressure off for you a little?

Does hearing God will be the one directing the mission and giving us the power to do amazing things, make you want to put your hand up and give mission a go if you haven't before?

Or do you need a better example, to trust God that he is in control of mission?

The Prepared Mission

Ok, then.

To confirm that God is in control of the mission, let's look at the one thing that is impossible for us to do in any mission we are part of. It's the one thing we always pray for, before we start mission - that hearts would be softened to hear the good news of Jesus and be willing to accept it.

The impossible task of preparing the hearts of those we will meet in mission to accept the good news of Jesus is our second example from today's passage when Philip meets the Eunuch.

Let's move forward to verse 29 and see Philip meeting the Ethiopian Eunuch.

It says in verse 29 **The Spirit told Philip, “Go to that chariot and stay near it.” Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. “Do you understand what you are reading?” Philip asked. “How can I,” he said, “unless someone explains it to me?” So, he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.**

Now what’s clear from this verse is that God has directed Philip to the Eunuch but something else is happening here.

Let’s get a more detailed look at the Ethiopian so that we might fully understand what he may have been thinking before he met Philip.

Our passage only gives us very few facts about the Ethiopian, but we know he is an important official in charge of all the treasury of the queen of the Ethiopians. And we know that he has just come from Jerusalem where he has been worshipping and that he is reading a scroll from the prophet Isaiah.

Not a lot of facts but there is enough to give us a pretty good picture of who this man was.

Firstly, we know that he is a Jewish convert who has made a massive one way trip of 1500 miles in his chariot from his home in Ethiopia to Jerusalem to worship at the temple.

He must be as the passage says very important to be able to go on trip like this and to have a chariot. Without too much imagination we can surmise that he is extremely trusted and a well-respected person in the queen Candice’s administration.

But, although he is a well-respected man in his own home, I doubt he was given the same respect in Jerusalem.

You see, I know that the Eunuch didn’t even see the inside of the temple when he travelled to Jerusalem, he wasn’t able to worship like other Jews because the Law forbid Eunuchs to enter the temple.

In Deuteronomy chapter 23 it says that. **Anyone who has been emasculated by crushing or cutting may not enter the assembly of the Lord.** Also in Leviticus chapter 21, **No man who has a defect may come near to offer food to his God.**

Now I think we are getting a better picture of the Ethiopian Eunuch a man who would have felt excluded from God especially in the temple.

So, as he reads the following verses from the prophet Isaiah he is probably very aware of the promises that God has made directly to Eunuchs just like him in Isaiah 56.

Isaiah 56 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 not be cut off.**

The Ethiopian as we find out, has been given a new hope through Gods word in Isaiah 56 but up till this point hasn't worked out where his hope lies.

And this is the preparation work that God does in the lives of people from Samaria to Peakhurst.

Work that is impossible for us to do.

The Message of the Mission

Now obviously, we can't know Philips exact words when the Ethiopian asks him to explain the meaning of Isaiah 53, we don't even know if they spoke about the whole passage.

What we do know is that the Eunuch wants to know who the prophet is speaking about in the Isaiah 53 scroll that he is reading. he says to Philip, **tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?**

<slide> Acts 8:32-35.

So, when Philip sits with the Ethiopian in his chariot, he tells the Ethiopian Eunuch of a man that the world did find unattractive, a man who was ultimately despised and rejected by men and who was crushed and pierced for the sins of all mankind.

Philip would have said that this promised man from Isaiah 53 has already come into the world, that he already faced this terrible death in place of all of us who deserved punishment.

He would have explained that when the messiah that Isaiah was talking about went to his death, he was silent like a lamb, that he didn't open his mouth and that he was deprived of justice.

I can only guess, but surely Philip told the Ethiopian that this man was Jesus of Nazareth and that he did have victory over death because he had seen him alive after the crucifixion.

And from the immediate response we see from the Ethiopian in wanting to be baptised, Philip must have explained to him, that whoever believes in Jesus and is baptised will be saved but whoever does not believe in him will perish.

What an appropriate and important message for a man that would surely have been hoping for something better than he had experienced as a Eunuch worshipping in Jerusalem.

Knowing that as far as the law was concerned, he was considered defective and blemished. Unable to enter the temple to worship his God.

What good news it must have been to hear that Jesus the messiah had already come and paid the price that was due to him, just so he could be part of the promise found in Isaiah 56 that he will be given an everlasting name that will never be cut off from God.

It's no wonder then that the last we hear about the Ethiopian is that he went on his way rejoicing.

Friends this is the same important message that our community needs to hear, that all have been invited to enter God's kingdom to have eternal life.

<slide> Acts 1:8

We may dig our heels in and believe that mission is for someone else, because you think you are no good at it, but Jesus says that we will be given power when we believe and follow him.

I've been amazed lately in our men's growth group, each week I'm hearing from someone different how they are taking opportunities at work or with neighbours to share the Gospel and talk about their faith.

I'm certain that for all the men that have given their weekly stories that this would have been scary for them to go out to share Jesus with people.

But in these stories, that I'm hearing, I see men that are trusting in God who has shown them, just like we have read today, that he will be in control, that he will work in people's hearts to get them ready to accept him.

These are men that see the importance of mission, men that are feeling urgent about the mission to share the gospel.

How do you now feel about mission, I expect that there will still be fear, but are you willing to be directed by God, are you willing to take an opportunity when it arises.

Are you willing to trust that God is already working in the people you have already asked or are planning to ask to Easter services in two weeks' time?

Friends, I'm sure that God is doing some amazing work in people's hearts around this area and beyond, people that we already have contact with.

All they are waiting to hear, is the message that God has given us about his son who died on a cross so that they might have hope for an eternal life.

Friends I think that God is directing us to be a church on mission with him, to be a church that takes bold moves to share this good news message with the people around us.

Let's pray now that he continues to challenge us and transform our hearts this week so that we all might be bold in doing mission.