

BELPRES CHURCH

The Transforming Word

Acts 8:26-39

Speaker: Sergio Chavez

Disclaimer: This transcript was computer generated and may contain errors.

Oh my goodness, I'm short. I need a taller stand. Sorry, I've maxed out at 5'8. That's it. There's no more coming. This is it. This is what you get. Actually, I'm shrinking now, I think, is what my doctor told me. That's not in the Bible. No one told us that. It's new news to me. Anyways, let's dive into scripture, see what is in there. All right, Acts 8:26 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. So he started out and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of the treasury of Kandake, which means queen of Ethiopians. This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship and was his way home, was sitting in his chariot reading the Book of Isaiah, the prophet." Essentially he was reading the Bible at a red light for today's modern standard version.

"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." For all you young cats who like fun games to find out how many times the disciples run after things, those guys were in some good shape because one of them apparently runs faster than the others. You can find out who that is. "Do you understand what you're reading?" Philip asked. And he says, well, how can I, he said, unless someone explains it to me. So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. This is the passage of scripture the eunuch was reading. He says He was led like a sheep to the slaughter and as a lamb before its shear 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? Then Philip began with that very passage of scripture and told him the good news about Jesus. And 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. 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."

God in heaven, may my words be your words today, Lord. May your spirit continually to move, Lord. May we learn from your scripture. Today, Lord, may we make that connection with you. In your beautiful, in your glorious name. Together, we all said Amen.

Well, for those of you who may not know me, my name is Sergio Chavez and my job here is to bring the worshipping communities together, sanctuary, modern, New Hope, which is our East African praise meeting in the upper campus and just down the hall in S-150, our partner church, Seattle Chinese Covenant Church, so English speakers and non-English speakers, with the power and the help of the Holy Spirit, to bring you together to be more culturally competent, which is just a very fancy word for saying to learn how to be in relationships together, to give us tools to do so because God's call for BelPres is to be connected to a multicultural and intergenerational community.

But that doesn't happen overnight, we must take yearly, monthly, weekly, sometimes daily changes to give you the opportunities to build these relationships. Like last week, we had stories of culture where we had couples who were married from different cultures. We had Senior Scott and Senior Scott advisor, Christina Dudley there to share their stories along with some others who were married to people from other cultures. We also give you opportunities to connect and serve our young cats at Kids Night-In or at youth summer camps or helping on Sundays or D groups. And vice versa, we have our youth leading us in choirs, in worship, in production, just to name a few things. All of these small opportunities lead us to transformation of this community to be a more culturally competent community and more like Jesus who was connected to everybody. And that is what we're learning through the current sermon series, Transform: Becoming More Like Jesus.

I'm just going to tell you right now, this stand is most likely going to fall and all my junk is going to go on the floor. At that point, we're going to be riffing. It's going to be amazing because I can already feel it going. So as we continue from the marks of a disciple, which we covered in the past sermon series, now we're going to practices, meaning things that we're actually doing with a word that used to be used, or still used, disciplines, into how we become more like Jesus. And first I want to start by given the definition of transformation. This is like the Webster Dictionary, Wikipedia, online whatever description of transformation. This is what it says. It says the act or process of transforming, change in form, appearance, nature, or character or alteration, especially a radical one. Now, that's a great definition.

That's a kind of a standard definition, but actually came across a definition transformation in a business model that I thought actually applied more to today. And it was this consultant talking about how to transform an organization. Said most organizations that are struggling to move forward, what they do is they look at the past at the things they've done and they look at things that they need to fix in order to become better. But he says instead of that, forget the past. Do not look at the past, but actually look at the future that you want to be and make changes to create that future instead. This is how an organization transforms. For me, that felt like in my brain, my little three cells that are going on up there, that sounded a lot like baptism, how when we go into the water, we die to self and we come out a new being renewed.

I like this quote that he ended it that I'm going to totally use out of context with my kids all the time. And he said, "A butterfly is not a better, faster caterpillar. It is a new system." So the next time my daughter asks me for money, "Hey Pops, can I get 20 bucks?" I'll be like, "A butterfly is not a better, faster caterpillar. It is a new system." Is that a no? Is that a yes? It's going to be great. Transformation takes time with small and big changes to our lives to get us there. So the practices that we're talking about here is let me just spell them out for you. Sabbath, prayer, generosity, scripture, mercy and justice, fasting, community, solitude, and witness. And today we're going to learn from Philip, a deacon or a chosen disciple after Jesus' death and resurrection interaction with an Ethiopian eunuch on a desert road. And this interaction is like a condensed version of what some of our faith journeys have been or can be in connection with scripture, which leads to discipleship.

So let's jump back into scripture. Acts 8:27. Says, "On his way, he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of the Kandake, which means queen of Ethiopians." I don't know if I'm saying that word right, Kandake, any Greek people here? Nope. Sounds good. Sounds good to me. Here we go. This man, a caterpillar is not a better, faster butterfly. "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 the chariot and stay near it." So first of all, who's Philip? Who's Phil? Let's find out who Phil is. Okay, earlier in the book of Acts, in the Acts six, we know that Philip was a chosen disciple and he was chosen to help hand out alms or help with the poor or hand out stuff to people at a table. But then with seven other cats, he was chosen to then go and preach. So these seven cats go out and preach.

Now, these disciples weren't the apostles, they weren't the ones who rolled deep with Jesus. This is post-Jesus's resurrection. These are new cats who are out there discipling. Philip is a great example of what a mature or transformed disciple looks like. This is what we're talking about. He shows quite a bit of all those marks of disciples that we talked about. He's marked by Jesus's love and grace. He's living sacrificially, clearly going to preaching at the risk of his own life because one of those seven cats that was chosen with him was Steven, who was stoned to death for preaching the gospel just a chapter earlier. He is equipped and eager to share the good news of Jesus, clearly. He's connected to a

multicultural community as currently he's interacting with a foreigner from Ethiopia, and he knows and obeys Jesus as Lord through prayer and scripture.

He listened to the spirit to tell him to go to this chariot. And clearly, he's preaching, so he has to know scripture, which is the Torah at the time, because the New Testament isn't been written because he's the one helping write it. Every step that he takes is going into the New Testament. So he is preaching what he knows from the Torah and what he knows from Jesus. So when we talk about creating disciples, this is what we mean. Philip was a deacon chosen and asked, served in the community to hand out alms, and then he went to preach in the surrounding areas. Now, for all of you who are having a panic attack right now, let me make it clear, we will not all be called to preach, only about 85% of you. The other 15, you guys are, well, I don't know the percentage. You can ask Colin, he has a seminary degree, he'll tell you. We will not be all called to preach. We may not all be preachers, but we will all be called to serve in other ways. In our jobs, in our neighborhoods, within our families and our schools. But Philip is in this position because God called him and equipped him to be there because he is practicing the way of Jesus and God will equip you when the time is right.

So we jump back and Acts 8:30. Says, "Then Philip ran up to the chariot and 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 sit with him." So this takes us back to the eunuch, which earlier that we heard that he's an important official in charge of all the treasury of Kandake, which means queen of the Ethiopians. And for those of you who do not know what a eunuch is, maybe you know the name but maybe not the role. A eunuch was a man who was castrated and who would be a trusted advisor or protector and took care of domestic affairs for harems and queens, and they did that so that they'd know there was no funny business that was going to go on between him and any of the ladies.

Now, this was a very specific and very important role in that culture. They were mentored, educated, and people of influence due to their role and typically religious. Well, everyone was religious then. Everybody believed in something at that point. So we can safely assume that because of his education and his role that this is why the eunuch was seeking God as he could have been curious and trying to learn more of this Yahweh, this God of the Jews. Although most likely none of us in modern day time are eunuchs. Maybe us, like the Ethiopian, though, we are curious. We are seeking God for more understanding, for comfort, for connection with the Spirit. And you may be in a place right now where you are ready to hear and learn more. May BelPres be a place to help you take those next steps.

This is a picture of Rosalind Picard. Before we get through all the dad jokes, no, she is not the husband to Jean-Luc Picard of Star Trek's Next Generation so we can move on from there. All you young cats are like, I never even heard of Star Trek Next Generation. What

are you talking about? All you older ones who don't want to admit it, who didn't laugh, you know what I'm talking about? A caterpillar is not a faster, better butterfly. No, Rosalind Picard, she's a scientist, an inventor, an entrepreneur, a professor at MIT, an author and an engineer. Her inventions, just to name a few applications in helping with autism, epilepsy, depression, PTSD, sleep, stress, dementia, autonomic nervous system, autonomic atomic, atomic whatever, autonomic nervous system disorders, just to name a few. She is a brilliant woman. I hope more people get to know about her.

And although these accolades alone are amazing, there's actually something that's very interesting about her as well. And that is that she was an atheist who is now a Christian and one of the few female voices at that level of science of atheists to Christians. There's plenty of men there, Frances Collins and all these other cats. But she's one of those few female voices up there. To paraphrase her journey, her testimony, she essentially didn't grow up with religion. She thought people who were religious were kind of emotionally crippled and they kind of needed myths to help them. And they were just people who really didn't think for themselves and that Christians were not very intelligent. And she found the idea of religion just kind of offensive altogether. But eventually, she met some people who were pretty smart and had their lives together and she was like, well, I kind of have my life together, but these people really do have their life together. And she came to find out that they were also Christians, they're religious, and she spoke with them.

As she spoke with them, they presented to her the questions of Christianity also as an intellectual one, not only one of the heart. And they invited her to church, but she didn't want to go. She'd always make up stories at why she couldn't go. She's like, I don't want to dress like the people in church. I don't want to go. And so they kind of gave up on her. So they stopped asking her to go. But over time, they explained to her, look, faith is not just about going to church, but it's really a question of what do you believe? And then, they asked her a question that would change her perspective, her worldview for the rest of her life. They asked this very kind of intellectual and important and profound question they said, and I quote, "Well, have you read the Bible?"

And I quote what she says. She's like, "No, I just believe the Bible was wrong without having read it. It occurred to me that that was not actually kind of an inconsistent intellectual position. To think that I was so well educated and knew about the Bible, but I actually hadn't read it." So she decided she would fix that problem and she got a Bible and she got one of those one-year Bible reading plans where you kind of check off every day and you read some of these parts of the Bible. And what she found was profound wisdom and truth, and she had to acknowledge that she thought religious people who were so stupid, she actually had a lot to learn herself. From that experience, she read through the Bible every year for 10 years. Long story short, she made daily changes that led to her transformation of being a dedicated Christian, what we call a disciple.

And she proclaims her faith in the academic and the scientific world. Like the Ethiopian and Rosalind Picard, they were curious and they wanted to know more. So it brings us back to us. The other thing that the Ethiopian and Rosalind needed was either to get into scripture or understand it was community. They needed a Philip. Some of us may be disciplined enough to just burn through scripture on our own. And if you are great, that's awesome. But some of us, we need someone to come alongside us. We need a Philip, someone to help us understand it. And for those of us who are longtime Bible readers, well, this is your chance. Maybe all that reading has led you to something to read in community. You can help others, which should also help keep you accountable to keep up in the practice of absorbing scripture.

This is where all-in groups come into play. Bible study groups come into play for helping us absorb scripture, not memorize scripture, not just read through it, but absorb it where it actually makes changes in our lives. And stay tuned, if you're one who needs more structure, we're going to have reading plans coming in the future for more of those. Some of us, we need guardrails. That's okay. And some of us, we need help. We may need the help. We are on all different levels in the Bible. Some of us are like Bible 101, asking questions. So is Saul Paul's old rapping name or something? Is that when he left the thug life and he changed it to Paul? What's going on there? Some of us are at that level. Some of us are at 501, 601 whatever level. And we're asking questions like, oh, which century did they find it in scripture that the Catholic church decided to take on the doctrine of transubstantiation, your thoughts?

Phil, we're teaching the kindergartners today. Maybe that's next year's curriculum. Just hold the puppets and maybe no talking for today. Maybe some of us are at that level. Whatever level we may be, when we are in community, we can help one another. So the Ethiopian, for instance, most likely new Greek, because that was the language at the time. The manuscript that he was reading was most likely in Greek. But some scholars have come to the conclusion of like, so how is it that the Ethiopian didn't know about Jesus? He was in Jerusalem, he was worshiping. Maybe he didn't know Aramaic or maybe he didn't know Hebrew. Maybe there was a language barrier. It's a possibility somehow he didn't know all the details of Jesus. And if it was a language barrier, well, that required Philip to fill in that gap.

At BelPres, we're a multicultural, multilingual community. We, too, need some of you who are well-versed in scripture and who have the patience to help some of us who may need help, not just with scripture, but with also the language. And not only is this beneficial to the ones who obviously need the help, but this is also beneficial to the ones who are helping. When you help others learn scripture, especially any of those of you if you've ever tried to teach kids about scripture, sometimes they ask questions that you had never thought of. That is changing your worldview. Or when you ask questions to somebody who's from a different country, a different background, they might ask questions that you have never thought of either. That is broadening your worldview.

Our worldview is how we create or how we see reality. This is why it's so beautiful to be part of a multicultural and intergenerational community. Just remember, the Bible was not written in English. It was not written here. It's not written just for the US. It is for the world. There's many voices, many questions, and it is something that is worldwide. We can broaden our worldview when we help others. And on your own, you can, of course, read commentary from different backgrounds. There is different scholars from different countries of pretty much every continent in the world, except for maybe Antarctica. I don't know, Colin, you have a seminary degree. Is there scholars in Antarctica? Anyways, you can ask him later if there's any Antarctic scholars out there. The Penguin version. There you go. Yes.

And outside of scripture, we need language help anyways. We have some learning opportunities going on here at BelPres. If you would like to help with those, learn more about English or practice English, please come talk to me afterwards. So for those of you who may be new to scripture, this is a new thing that you're just jumping into, let me just at least put this out there. All the scripture leads to Jesus. That is what the passage of Isaiah, that the Ethiopian was reading, was talking about. He asked, "Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?" Then Philip began with that passage of scripture and told him the good news about Jesus. As I mentioned, all scripture leads to Jesus, but if you've read it, there's some of those passages a little hard to connect to Jesus, especially when you get to Exodus and he's got these long descriptions on how to build a tabernacle tent. You're like, where is Jesus in all this? I do not see it.

But if you partner with somebody who's more well-versed, who more understands the symbolism and the parallels to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and then it helps you fill in those gaps. This is why scripture absorbed in community is so important. To move on to Acts 36:30, it says, "As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, look, here's 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."

So after understanding scripture and the good news of Jesus, the Ethiopian is ready to make the big change in his life and seeks to be baptized. He doesn't want this opportunity to pass him by, so he asked Philip to baptize him on the spot, fulfilling the great commission. Go ye therefore baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This is what the transforming word looks like. This Ethiopian is making one more change on his journey to transformation. This encounter is a microcosm of what our experience can be or maybe what it has been. When our eyes and ears are finally open to the word of God, when we finally absorb scripture, the most natural step for disciple is to dedicate our heart and our life to Jesus through baptism.

That's what next week's Sunday is all about; a road to transformation. We'll be baptizing all ages from small and young to old and tall and short and everything in between by

immersion or by sprinkling, and if we need to introduce new forms of it, we will get you baptized. We don't care. If it's Super Soaker, whatever we want to do, we just want you to be baptized. We'll find new ways if we have to. It does have to go through session though. I'm just letting you know right now. It might take 18 years before we can get there, but it can happen whatever, which way. Seattle Chinese Covenant, our partner church, every summer, they baptize people at the lake. We just want to help you make that next step. We are probably going to change our slogan to, Got Water, Will Baptize. We'll figure it out. We want to help.

Maybe you've been baptized before and you want to renew, you're in a new spiritual place and you want to reaffirm your vow. We can help you with that as well, because this matters. And maybe you're like the Ethiopian, this is your first experience and you're saying to yourself, look, here's water. What can stand in the way of me being baptized? Well, you can sign up on the website, but you can also talk to anybody who looks like they know what they're doing. If they have some sort of name tag or anything, just ask them. Elders, prayer ministers, whoever, just ask them. If you're ready to take that step, we want to help you. The website's one way. If you can call the church as well, leave a message, but talk with someone.

Absorbing scripture is more than just memorizing. It's more than just knowing. It has so many of the things that I know many of us already desire. Some of us have anger issues or have problems with forgiveness, that's in scripture to help us learn how to forgive not just other people, but even ourselves. We're looking for peace. Oh my goodness, this world needs peace. You will find that in scripture. Anxiety. Is that a thing that any of you are struggling with at all? Raise of hands. You're too anxious to raise them, so don't have to. You'll find that in scripture. Let tomorrow worry for itself. You will find that in scripture. Being more loving, more kind, and full of joy, all of that is in scripture to transform us on a daily basis so we can share that love and mercy with everyone we come in contact with.

Bow your heads with me. Father in heaven, thank you so much for this day. Lord, thank you so much for your living word that continually lifts us up, supports us, gives us new life, Lord. Thank you for this community who is dedicated into learning how to be like you, Lord. We just thank you for this beautiful day in your beautiful and your glorious name. Together, we all said, Amen.

Discussion Questions:

Read this week's scripture(s) & answer the below questions with your friends, family, or All In small group.

Opening Question: Looking back to last week's sermon and scripture... How did you live differently or practice what we talked about in your life this week? What did you do and how did it go?

Scripture Reflection Questions: Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following:

- Why do you think God chose Philip to talk with the Eunuch? (Read Acts 8:4-8)
What was the outcome of Philip's visit in Acts 8:8?
- From Philip and the Eunuchs interaction what marks of the disciples do we see?
- In reflection of this short encounter, how important do you believe the transformation of scripture in our lives is?

Sermon Reflection Questions: Reflecting on this week's sermon, discuss the following:

- Do you have a regular practice of reading or studying scripture? Is that something you do alone or with others? Share about what works well for you. If this isn't part of your regular practice, share what holds you back. Given your own reflection as well as what you hear shared in the group, what could you try this week to practice spending more time in scripture?
- What are some ways that you might make yourself available to connect with people around you who are curious, seeking God, or ready to learn more about Jesus?

Closing Question and Application: Given what we've discussed together today, how might God want you to apply these learnings to your life or in the life of your community this next week? Who might you share this with?

Closing group prayer: Spend a few minutes together in your group sharing prayer requests and then praying together for each other. Thank God for the time together, the conversation shared, the other people in the group, and for encouragement in the week ahead.