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UNBINDING YOUR HEART Michael B. Beagh  
Acts 8:26-39 August 30, 2009  
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From the beginning, Jesus Christ expected his disciples to go and make more disciples. That's what he commands them and us to do in Matthew 28:19-20. That is what Philip is doing in Acts 8. It has always been the character of Christian faith that it is evangelistic, sharing the good news of salvation with others. Christianity is a missionary faith.

Our movie *Last Flight Out* is about missionaries. Specifically, it is about a pilot named Dan who flies to a village in the jungles of Columbia, South America, to rescue a missionary. The missionary is a woman doctor named Ann who is his ex-girlfriend. Her father hires Dan, thinking he may have some luck in getting her to come home. She is in danger for her life because of bad guys who are taking over villages and threatening to kill anyone who opposes them.

In this first clip, Dan has reluctantly picked up a passenger, another missionary doctor named Dr. Mateo who works with Ann in the jungles. As they fly to the village, we learn that the doctor is a man of deep faith, optimism, and irrepressible joy in the Lord. Dan reveals what he thinks about all this religion business.

Clip #1 – 00:18:58-00:21:44

Dan is like a lot of people. He just doesn't get the faith thing. Even when he sees the good work the doctors are doing and the joy they bring to the people in the village, his only thought is to get Ann and get out of there. He begs her to come with him, but she will not leave. The only way she will leave is if Dan agrees to fly all the villagers out to safety.

Flying everyone poses a problem. The load will be too heavy for the airplane. But Dan finally agrees and does everything he can to lighten the weight.

In this next clip, Dan and Dr. Mateo are on the way to the plane to lighten it some more. Again, Dr. Mateo brings a faith perspective. For him, this is more than just about flying out of the jungle. It is about God's plan for Dan.

Clip #2 – 00:45:00 – 00:46:36

With the bad guys on their way to stop them, the villagers pile into the plane. Everyone makes it aboard except for Dr. Mateo. He stays behind to slow down the bad guys. It likely means he will not survive.

Dan tries to get the plane off the ground. No luck. Too heavy. He makes another try. Just at the right moment, a strong headwind rises and gives the plane just the lift it needs to clear the trees. The bad guys shoot at the plane. A bullet

pierces the fuselage and strikes Ann. She is wounded but not fatally. Dan flies them all to safety.

While Ann is in the hospital recovering from her wound, Dan flies back to the jungle in a helicopter to look for Dr. Mateo. Miraculously, Dr. Mateo is alive. The helicopter puts down to pick him up, but as he runs for the helicopter, he gets shot in the back. Dan picks him up and carries him to the helicopter. The helicopter lifts off.

In this next clip, Dan is trying to keep Dr. Mateo alive as they fly to safety.

Clip #3 – 01:07:35-01:09:18

From the beginning of Christianity, missionaries have travelled far and wide to tell others about the love of God. They have risked their lives. Many have given their lives.

In merely human terms, it doesn't make sense. Why would anyone do it? On the other hand, why are so many of us reluctant to do it? What would it take for all of us to become evangelists in our own way right where we are?

**I decided to raise these questions with a man in the Bible called the Ethiopian Eunuch.** I found him repairing a wheel on the chariot he was driving when Philip came along (See Acts 8:26-39). He seemed glad to stop working when I introduced myself and told him why I was there. I explained that I wanted the perspective of someone like him who had learned of God's love from a missionary.

"What you really want to know," he said, "is techniques for getting more members in your church. Isn't that right?"

I said, "Well, the truth is my church is not growing like we think it should. So we are getting ready to do a study on evangelism. We want to know how to approach others with the good news of God's love. I thought you might help me understand where the unchurched are coming from, what they want to hear."

He said, "Unchurched? Where did that come from? I was a non-believer. Are you for real or am I just dreaming you up?"

I thought that was ironic. I managed to keep my composure. "Look," I said, "I feel like you could be helpful to us. We simply want to know what works."

"And when you know that," he shot back, "then you'll be like Philip. Is that what you think?"

I went into a momentary sulky silence. He continued.

"See this broken wheel? I ran over a rut in the road and the next thing I knew I was flying through the air. Scattered pieces of my wheel fell all around me.

My chariot is useless unless I can repair this wheel. I can't carry out my mission for the Queen of Ethiopia until I fix it."

He turned and looked at me. "What I know is that your faith is like this wheel. Unless it is in good repair, you won't be much of a missionary like Philip. You see, Philip didn't have a technique. He simply offered to help me understand what I was reading. As I drove the chariot, he told me about Jesus, Jesus' death on the cross for my sins, Jesus' resurrection from the dead, my need for repentance. He didn't beat around the bush. He didn't make me feel guilty. It was like he was really interested in me. He knew what he was talking about. He was genuine. He talked to me man-to-man, straight on. It wasn't like a memorized speech. It was his life he was talking about. How Jesus made sense of his life. How Jesus makes sense of this crazy world we live in."

The Ethiopian looked deeper into my eyes, and said, "Let me tell you. There are lots of people like me all around your church. Do you want to know how many people in your area claim no religious affiliation?"

I said, "It seems like everyone has a church. They're just not attending my church."

He said, "48%."

I said, "No way!"

He said, "Yes way! Now let me ask you, which one out of that 48% is God wanting you to reach out to?"

I said, "I try to live my life so everyone will see Jesus in me. By the way, we're building a new building to attract more people. When they come, we'll tell them about Jesus."

He laughed. "Oh, you mean stealth evangelism. If they get in your chariot, you will tell them. How's that working?"

I squirmed a bit under his unrelenting stare then admitted, "**Most of us would rather get a root canal than do evangelism.**"

He said, "I am certainly glad Philip didn't leave it up to my imagination. Or wait until I showed up at his church. I didn't even know where his church was. I didn't know what a church was. He told me about Jesus, and it was like the heavens opened above my head. Then I asked the most important question of my life. 'What is to prevent me from being baptized?' When your church does its study on evangelism, I hope you remember this question. It will turn your study into changed behavior. **The truth is Christians are often the biggest barrier for people like me.** We don't care if your church grows. But we will listen if we really think you care."

He turned back toward his broken chariot wheel and started working on it again. He said, "Got to get this wheel repaired. Someone out there is waiting for me to tell them about God's love."

As I left him to his work, I thought about our focus on evangelism in our Growth Groups this fall. Our theme and discussion guide is called *Unbinding Your Heart*. That's what the Ethiopian was talking about. We need to let God unbind our hearts so we can unbind the hearts of others who need to know the love of God. The Bible says, "How will they hear unless someone tells them."

In our movie, Dr. Mateo dies in Dan's arms as the helicopter flies out of the jungle. His death brings Dan to a moment of decision. There in the helicopter, the pilot tells Dan about the love of God and the salvation we receive in Jesus Christ. God unbinds Dan's heart, and he gives his life to Christ.

In this final clip, the missionary community celebrates the life of Dr. Mateo. We see how his witness impacts the lives of everyone involved in the mission to the villages in Columbia. We see how God works to make all things new in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Clip #4 – 01:15:21-01:18:54