

# THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

## ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

### MOVEMENT (ACTS 8:1-8)

#### A DEATH THAT STARTED GLOBAL EXPANSION

After the death of Stephen at the hands of the Sanhedrin and organization of a young aggressive rabbi, the Book of Acts takes a sharp turn. We see a bridge from **martyrdom to persecution to evangelism**. The first persecution was focused on Hellenistic Jews in Jerusalem because they were a vulnerable minority.

#### GOD WORKS IN MYSTERIOUS WAYS

The first Christians to be scattered are the same group that not only spoke Greek, but were comfortable in Greek culture. So, we see that **even in hard times, God has a plan for the gospel to be advanced**.

- In the moment it can be difficult to see that progress is taking place. **We must trust that God knows what He's doing!**

#### "AT THE FEET OF A YOUNG MAN NAMED SAUL"

The persecution focuses on a single leader, the young rabbi Saul. He led charges in the streets, breaking into homes, and dragging off men, women, and children.

- Saul's oppression caused the Hellenist Christians to scatter. These were not the apostles (they stayed in Jerusalem), but lay leaders of the faith.

#### PHILIP WAS ONE OF THOSE "VOLUNTEERS"

Philip was one of the 7 chosen to do the rationing of money and food along with Stephen. He was also a Hellenist (an outsider), a reason why the area of Samaria responded well to him. Samaria was not considered part of the Holy Land by Hebraic Jews even though it is only 30 miles or so away.

#### PHILIP THE EVANGELIST

Stephen was the courageous and eloquent leader; Philip was the aggressive and effective evangelist. He went into Samaria and cast out demons and healed many sick people with the power of the Holy Spirit.

- Many argue that this a first century thing. Though healings propelled the gospel, **the gifts of the Spirit have not ceased**.

#### THE POWER OF THE SPIRIT DRAWS PEOPLE

Deliverance of demonic oppression and physical healings will cause some to follow Christ, but Christians must remember that miracles are secondary to the Gospel.

- **The purpose of miracles is to draw attention to the saving message of Jesus. We don't worship gifts, but the Giver of those gifts.**

### MAGICIAN (ACTS 8:9-13)

#### SIMON THE MAGICIAN

In Samaria there was a famous occultist named Simon. Justin Martyr and Tertullian mentioned this man in their writings, showing that he was powerful for his connection to the demonic. They called him the Great Power of God.

#### SO, HE BELIEVED AND BECAME A CHRISTIAN?

We can imagine the people were shocked when "Simon himself believed" and was even baptized. This looks like a huge win for the Kingdom at first, but we learn that the conversion wasn't genuine.

- **Belief in Christ and the work of the Spirit does not always mean one has saving faith.**

#### GETTING CAUGHT UP IN EMOTIONALISM

Simon was more turned on by the power of the disciples and the excitement of this new movement than he was with Jesus.

- **If we're not careful, we can center our faith on works, emotions, and consumerism rather than a true understanding of what it means to follow Jesus.**

### SIMON'S SIN (ACTS 8:14-19)

#### SENDING IN LEADERSHIP

When the apostles heard about Samaria, they sent Peter and John to make sure the church properly took root. Philip was a younger, less experienced Christian that was great at evangelizing but lacked the authority and wisdom of the apostles.

#### BELIEF, BAPTISM, BUT NO HOLY SPIRIT?

v16-17 confuse many people because it says the followers of Jesus had been baptized but hadn't receive the Holy Spirit. Acts is a transitional book. The reason it took Peter and John laying hands on these people to receive the HS is God wanted to establish proper spiritual authority in a "foreign" region.

#### THE HOLY SPIRIT IS PRESENT WITH ALL BELIEVERS

We are saved "by grace through faith" in Jesus (Ephesians 2:8-9), we respond with baptism, and are promised the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). At belief we are "sealed with the Holy Spirit" (Ephesians 1:13).

- **The teaching of spiritual hierarchy based on particular gifts of the Spirit is poor theology.**

#### THE POINT WAS UNITY

One cannot be saved without being "born of the Spirit" (John 3:5). So, the laying on of hands was a lesson in **unity and submission to pastoral authority that has biblical theology**.

- Philip models how **less experienced Christians should respect and follow more experienced**

**Christians.** This doesn't diminish his role; it affirms it.

### PHILIP CAME TO GIVE, NOT SELL (V18-19)

Simon saw, or more likely heard, people receiving the Holy Spirit at the hands of Peter and John. Watching Philip do miracles was cool, but distributing the Spirit of God would have blown Simon's mind. Not just the power but the ability to make money off of such a gift drew in this false believer.

#### NOT FOR SALE

So, Simon offers to purchase the ability to administer the Holy Spirit. In simple vernacular, he wanted to **easily obtain power, profit, and prestige without having to fully submit to the Christian model. Do we do this?**

- **Simony** is the act of purchasing or selling church privileges and power.

#### I THINK WE CAN FALL INTO A SIMILAR CAMP

Not only do we have celebrity rock star church leaders that make a fortune, but we have congregations that are so self-centered and self-serving that we tend to look like an occultist from the 1st century.

- **There's blasphemy of belief; there's also blasphemy of behavior.**

### MISSION (ACTS 8:20-25)

#### "TO HELL WITH YOU AND YOUR MONEY"

J.B. Philips translates v20 pretty sternly. The true heart of Simon starts to come out and Peter says that his "heart is not right before God." We learn that **external recognition doesn't always mean the heart is aligned with God**.

#### BITTERNESS AND INIQUITY

Peter says that Simon is "poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity." Bitterness is perpetual anger for being unfairly treated, and iniquity is not just sin, but adopting the character and nature of evil.

- **So many are stagnant because of offenses or have been immersed in sin so long they have no moral compass.**

#### MORE FEAR THAN REMORSE

After being called out by Peter, Simon asks that he pray "so that nothing you have said may happen to me." This was a response more out of the fear of perishing than actually feeling bad about what he had done.

- **To truly repent is to not only feel remorse, but to turn from something and go another way.**

#### UNITY AMONGST UNLIKELY PEOPLE

Because of the influx of people interested in the gospel, Peter and John stayed in Samaria to teach before returning home. And now a new component has been added to the church: the evangelist.

- Philip planted the seed, but others saw more of the fruit and enjoy the growth. **We see a team dynamic in the church.**

### SOMETIMES IT TAKES A SHOVE

- The church gained tremendous traction at its inception, but we can imagine many were tempted to leave the Church when persecution became a reality.
- The results of persecution didn't stop the Christians, it made the faith expand globally and grow at an amazing pace!
- We look at resistance as a negative, but maybe God is trying to force us out of our comfort zone,
- grow in patience and understanding, look at things from a different perspective, create empathy, or reach out to the marginalized or lost.
- If we will lean on God's understanding and not our own, we will strengthen, unify, and mature in times of resistance.
- But, if we are not proactive with prayer, study, and Christian community we will not be able to withstand opposition. We will fall.