

“Philip and the Samaritans” // Sent #10 // Acts 8:1–25

Introduction

In 2005 I took a mission trip back to S.E. Asia...

- ~~Tsunami had just hit... devastation.~~
- ~~City gates: “my city.”~~
- ~~Why don't you feel that way about your city? Host culture~~

~~About the same time, I was preaching through the passage we're coming to today here in Acts. And, as I'll show you, and I really felt like it gave us a new vision for our city.~~

For those of you that are new, we're going to get into passage that has been really formative for how we see our mission. We came to this passage **9 years ago** and really felt like it gave us a new direction in how we relate to our city...

I'm going to just walk us through this passage (the 1st 25 verses)... now, there's a lot of things in here...

- **In some sermons, I just kind of hone that down** to one point and really try to drive that one point home... but in this one, I'm just going to walk you through the passage and uncover all these things as they come up...
- I'm almost afraid it will seem **a little disorganized**, because I think all of them are warning the Holy Spirit intended to use to instruct us.
- And just look at it like you and me **reading this passage together**. That's my favorite definition of preaching: helping people read the Word of God better.

So here we go...

Acts 8:1–25

The Gospel and Samaria

[8:1] And Saul approved of his (Stephen's) execution.

And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem (Stephen's martyrdom sparked an outbreak of mass violence against Christians), and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. (that's an important detail) [2] Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him. [3] But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison. (Stephen's execution really got to Saul, and so he responded with **frenetic violence**. Because, sometimes you know, that is how people respond to conviction... lash out against the church and you.)

[4] Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word. [5] Philip (another one of the deacons; layman) went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ. [6] And the crowds with one accord paid attention to what was being said by Philip when they heard him and saw the signs that he did. [7] For unclean spirits, crying out with a loud voice, came out of many who had them, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. [8] So there was much joy in that city.

This passage gives us a pattern for reaching our city. Jot down this definition:

Evangelism: a group of 'ordinary' Christians living intentionally in a city to bring joy to it through word and deed.

Let's look at a few of the key words in that:

“ordinary people”

- Luke makes the point that the **first time the gospel left Jerusalem** the Apostles were not its carriers.

Vs. 1: “except the Apostles.”

Why include that detail? Well, Luke doesn’t tell you what the Apostles did when they stayed, so the only reason he would include that detail is to put the focus on what those who left did: They carried the gospel outside of Jerusalem!

- The first time the gospel expanded beyond Jerusalem, it was carried in the mouths of normal people, not Apostles.
- This, I believe is the **Holy Spirit’s sign for how the Great Commission will be accomplished.**
- I’m afraid I’ll make this point so much in this series you’ll get sick of it, but it’s the theme of Acts:
 - ***The church grows not by the preaching of a few anointed Apostles, but when every believer is filled with the Spirit and testifies to the gospel in the streets.***
 - **Sometimes God takes you into these “places”** through a divine call (you feel called to move to a particular city; enter a certain career field; or move into a specific neighborhood); sometimes he moves you there through normal life circumstances—in their case, it was persecution; it could be that that is simply where your job takes you. We have a lot of you whose jobs naturally take you into all the world!
 - **Aircraft carrier**
- **We want to equip you!**
 - SJI (website: summitrdu.com/sji)
- To you, church. *You have the Holy Spirit!* **Acts 1:8.** “You will receive power, and you will testify in Judea, Samaria...” the ones who went to Samaria were “laypeople!”
 - He is amazing when you yield to him...
 - Jesus promised he’d put **words in your mouth** when you needed them—**Michael Jordan**; same power he had, you would have.

- **Greatest prophet ever to live:** John the Baptist. Jesus: “Yet the one least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than him!”

Ordinary people... “through word and deed”

- This passage tells us Philip’s ministry was one of **word and deed**. They “**heard him**” and “**saw the signs he did.**” Vs. 7 tells us that “the lame were healed and demons were cast out.” This is spiritual deliverance *and* physical one.
- A true witness always involves both.
 - **Word:** the gospel is an announcement: Greek general
 - **Deed:** in vs. 6 it calls his deeds: “signs”
 - **Important word:** sign points to something. “Grand Canyon: that way.” Miracles pointed to the gospel—they gave tangible expression to Jesus’ physical kingdom. His kingdom was one of healing, sight, abundance... **not magic tricks.** Miracles in the Bible did not show the naked fact of Jesus’ power, but the **redemptive purpose.**
 - “Signs” can be natural things, too: Acts 9:36–39, Tabitha. 1 Peter calls them ways we “adorn” the gospel (1 Peter 2:12–3:15).

“bringing joy” (8:7)

- It was **that phrase that really convicted us** as a church! Was there “much joy” in our city because of our presence? Would anyone “weep” over our death if we were gone?
- I want to tell you a few stories that, if you have been here for a while, are like Summit legends... If you’ve been here more than 5 years, you know them well; if only a year, you’ve never heard them and I think it’s important that you understand.
 - **If you’re like, “I’ve heard this; get some new stuff...”** I would remind you how many times Moses told the Exodus story to Israel... they were part of Israel’s national identity. These are part of ours.
 - **Eastway:**

- Looking for ways to serve; school leery
- Teacher came to us with needs...
- A couple in our church wedding shower;
- Small groups serving classrooms, bringing breakfast
- Landscaping and cleaning
- Pray over students
- Tutoring
- “Teacher of the year” because of the turnaround...
- Teacher: “We always knew you Christians believed...”
- Plaque
- **MLK day**
- (Ministry opportunity through WCPS for Summit Cary)
 - A couple of months ago, one of our pastors received a call from Wake County Public Schools asking him to come in because of “potential ministry opportunity.” (now it was our turn to be skeptical—“why don’t you go and handle that)
 - When he arrived at the administrative office, he was escorted into a conference room, in which a large county map had been spread across the table. The representative asked our pastor, “Does the Summit have plans to launch a campus in *this* part of the county?” Our campus pastor said, “Not yet, but why?” “Oh,” the representative replied, “There is a school in this part of the county where 70% of the students receive free or reduced lunch. It’s failing, and nothing we’ve done has been able to help. We were hoping that The Summit Church could adopt this school like y’all have done other places.”
 - **Ten years ago they’d hardly let us onto a school. Now they are bringing us maps and asking us to help them.**

- Are you involved? You say, “What can I do?” Ask: How can I bring joy to my workplace? To my campus? To my neighborhood? Ask God to show you needs you can meet.
 - **SJI: 26 ways.**
- Let us help you. Summitrdu.com/localoutreach
 - **Local outreach group.**
 - Programs like “**GoMentor.**” 110 people came out.
 - One of our families in the **fostering program** told us there is only 1 other family in Wake county certified for emergency: **what better way to bring joy to the city than for us to meet that need?**
- Easy way: **Be a part of a new campus.** That’s where these things are the easiest to apply.
- One more thing on this: in this story, one of the primary sources of joy was the **reconciliation of races**. Philip was a Jew; the people of Samaria were Samaritans, of course.
 - **The Samaritans and Jews had history, to say the least.**
 - There was a hatred and mistrust that existed between the two races that stretched back 1000 years.
 - ~~Around 950 B.C. there had been a civil war in Israel... split~~
 - ~~The Northern Kingdom had been especially unfaithful to God, so in 722 God sent the armies of Assyria against them, and they were conquered and carried off into exile... The Assyrians forcibly intermarried with them, and then sent back their offspring to repopulate the area.~~
 - Samaritans were half-Jew; half-Gentiles
 - Jews were really big into purity
 - Jews would not even wear **mixed clothing**; much less accept a group of Muggles
 - They would **not so much as sit on** something that a Samaritan had touched.¹

Summit: We are a people committed to bringing joy to our city!

¹ Andreas Köstenberger, *John*, Baker Exegetical Commentary

- They would **walk around Samaria** to get to the top, adding a day.
- Samaritans were **not the nicest people, either**.
 - Built their **own temple**, said it was the real one
 - They **antagonized the Jews** in ways spanning from the comical to the cruel.
 - **Fake smoke signals**; like ordering pizza
 - **Launched pigs** into the temple on the eve of the Passover.
 - (On a more serious note, they would attack pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem who were loaded up with gifts for the Temple).
 - **Jews retaliated by destroying their temple**:
 - Like high school teams, except people died; hatred was deep

So, here is a **Jew, Philip, being embraced** by the Samaritans. And **when they believed** there was “much joy” in the city.

The gospel, you see, creates a unity that overcomes years of hurt and mistrust. **A unity we long for** but seem powerless to accomplish in our society.

I was **reading one sociologist** recently (talking about race) who said, “We know how to forcibly integrate society; we know how to pass laws to guarantee fairness; what we haven’t been able to do is make races and cultures love and embrace each other.”

What politics is unable to do, the gospel can do. How?

- The gospel identifies **one common problem**: sin and one Savior: Jesus.
- It creates a **“new humanity”**: “3rd race”: If you are a Latino man, say that is your 1st race. You live in a culture where everyone is white. That’s your 2nd race. “3rd race” in Christ that should be largest. It doesn’t erase the others; it just outweighs it.

If the gospel overcame theirs, can’t it overcome ours?

- We want to be a **multi-cultural church**. Not just a multi-colored church, a multi-cultural church. A lot of white people want a multi-colored church—which means a bunch of different colored people all doing traditionally white music, etc. In a multi-cultural church, different influences. Here’s how you know you are in one you feel uncomfortable sometimes! In a multi-cultural church, everyone will feel a little uncomfortable because we’re always going to be doing something a little outside your culture. But you put up with it because our unity in Christ *outweighs* your cultural preferences.
- ***There is a time to leave behind past grievances; to choose to put away mistrust and suspicion*** (there’s no evidence they went back and resolved everything—e.g. black and white; Hispanic—they **chose** to put aside these things); ***they chose to put aside cultural preferences, and embrace one another in Christ.***
- **SUMMIT: Do you want this? It’s not going to come naturally, and will only happen through the power of the gospel.**

OK, let’s keep going, because there are a couple of important warnings for us in this next story...

Simon the Magician

[9] But there was a man named Simon, who had previously practiced magic in the city and amazed the people of Samaria, saying that he himself was somebody great. He was a self-proclaimed great guy...

[10] They all paid attention to him, from the least to the greatest, saying, “This man is the power of God that is called Great.” (Called great by whom? Well, remember, he gave himself that name. Dr. Awesome. They didn’t seem to notice that) [11] And they paid attention to him because for a long time he had amazed them with his magic.

- What kind of magic is this? Not really card tricks.

- His magic was a mixture of **genuine scientific knowledge** (about medicine and astronomy and math); **superstition** (use of amulets and charms; interpreting dreams and horoscopes); and **sleight of hand**.
 - In our modern era this would be the equivalent of people who **read horoscopes** or use **crystals** or claim they saw the Virgin Mary crying and collected her tears in a bottle and they'll sell them to you for healing... or saw Jesus' face in a grilled cheese sandwich, named it "**Grilled Jesus**" and will sell it to you on E-bay for the "buy now" price of \$10,000.
 - **Did this guy have any actual power?** Well, there's another magician in Acts whom Paul said was filled with the devil, which implies that some of his magic was demonically empowered (Acts 13:10), so, yes, there might be actual occultish power here.

[12] But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. [13] Even Simon himself believed, and after being baptized he continued with Philip. And seeing signs and great miracles performed, he was amazed.

- There was something here fundamentally different about what they did... Theirs were not tricks, they were genuine miracles; and they pointed to a message beyond the greatness of the miracle worker. They pointed to a crucified Savior who could forgive our sins and heal our souls.

[14] Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, [15] who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, [16] for he had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. [17] Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit.

Quick question: Why was the Holy Spirit was not conferred immediately when they believed? This is the only time after Pentecost that falling of the Holy Spirit is delayed.

- After years of hostility, they wanted to show that they were included
- Think of it like a ribbon cutting ceremony. NYC 5 boroughs. Celebration and validation.
- In a few places they speak in tongues... also the ribbon cutting ceremony.

This particular expansion of the gospel was fraught with so much hostility that God wanted the Jewish apostles to go up there and confirm it so there would be no more hostility.

[18] Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, [19] saying, "Give me this power also, so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." (In those days, magicians bought each other's secrets)

[20] But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! [21] You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. [22] Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. [23] For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity." "Be blessed and encouraged! It's your time. Discover the champion in you."

[24] And Simon answered, "Pray for me to the Lord, that nothing of what you have said may come upon me."

I believe this story is included to give us a warning that always goes with the growth of the church. I think there is **a warning here for you** as a congregation member of a growing church, and **one for me**, as a

pastor. (Which do you want me to warn first? To me? Yours is first in my notes, so I'm talking to you, first)

*Simon the Magician is a warning to YOU: **Not everyone who believes and is baptized is a real disciple.***

- **Even with the best preaching**, false conversions slip in. **Vs. 13** says Simon believed, was baptized, and even continued on in a discipleship relationship with Philip.
- **A lot of people get baptized here**, but some don't actually become actual disciples.
 - *Some of our pastors were this way* (Matt and Bowe)...!
- **I think Simon genuinely believed** in the sense he was persuaded Jesus was the Christ... but here's the problem (and it is the problem with most false converts): He seems to have believed in a **"Jesus and..." gospel**. Jesus and his magic and his agenda and his personal platform.
 - A lot of people are like that. **They have a "Jesus and me" conversion.** In other words, "I'll follow what Jesus says, let him be a big influence... but I reserve the right to exempt out of a few things I either don't want to believe or don't want to do..."
 - (We have a lot of people like that: "Well, I don't agree with what the Bible says about..." as if the Bible was a book of suggestions and "best spiritual practices.")
 - **Listen, if you're 99% committed to Jesus, you're still 100% in control**, because ultimately *you* decide which 99% he gets to be in charge of, and you can change the terms any time.
 - Say a man is having an affair and his wife asks if he's faithful, and he says 'Yes, 99%.' That may be generally true... For 99 women he knows, he is abstaining from sex with them. But for 1, he is pursuing.
 - **You either have given Jesus full control or you haven't given him control at all**

- For some, it's **Jesus and other gods** (Buddhist friend)
- For many, it's **Jesus and some area he can't touch** like family...

- The true gospel demands everything.
 - "Take up your cross." Death to everything. Hate your father and mother (a. *not literal hate*; b. *no limitations*; c. *in light of your commitment to God every other thing feels like hate*): "Jesus, you can't say that."
 - Throne and cross.
- **Simon is a guy who wants Jesus in his life, but doesn't want to give up full control to Jesus.**
 - Example: **Rosary ring**: you have to be in 1 of 2 places. Him in your hand or you in his. If in his, you are in a posture of total surrender!

So, Simon is a warning to you, and...Simon is also a warning to me:

- **In Simon we see a man who wants the spotlight to be on him, and envious when it no longer is...**
 - **How many pastors get excited** when they get to share in the spotlight that belongs to Jesus. Devastated when it passes
 - I've told you, as a pastor, **"Thy kingdom come and my kingdom come have** to be separated but sometimes it is difficult."
 - **The way you can tell is how you react** when you don't the recognition, or people take you for granted, or when the spotlight moves to someone else...
 - **You can pray for me!** I want it to be about Jesus...
 - E.g. Best man/groom
- **In Simon, I also see a man who thinks money he can purchase the power of God with money.** *He believes that the power of God comes from him (his ability to purchase it) and exists for him (to direct the spotlight back to him).*
- What does the **true gospel** teach? **Ephesians 2:8-9**: For by grace.. not of yourselves... gift of God... no man can boast!

- **Not of yourselves:** can't be purchased.
- It follows, if it's a gift of grace, **no one can boast:** I have nothing to boast about it because my entire standing before God is a gift of grace and any ability I have is a gift of the Holy Spirit.
- If I really believe the gospel I wouldn't *want* your attention directed to me because **there is nothing in me** that could help you! I would **want you to see Jesus.** I am simply **one beggar telling another** where to find bread!
- So In **contrast to Simon the Magician is Simon Peter...** who knows his salvation and power are a gift of grace.
 - He learned that the hard way, didn't he?
 - How many times did he **boast about his strength?** *"Even if everyone else denies you, I won't..."*
 - And wasn't he the one in **an argument over who** got to sit next to Jesus in the kingdom?
 - But **Peter has been to the cross** and experienced grace... *and* notice that **the result of that experience of grace** is that money is powerless over him (He's not like, "Umm... How much can you offer? I can show you a few tricks")
 - **When a pastor really experiences the power of grace, money loses its power over him.** Those **two things always go** together—the gaining of God's power in grace and the lessening of money's power over you.
 - To those of you in ministry: ***If you want a power that can't be bought with money, money has to be powerless over you.***
 - **John Calvin** was a father of the Reformation that helped the church rediscover the gospel in the 16th century; he was mightily used by God... One of the religious leaders of his day who was trying to shut him up (the pope) said in disgust about him: *"This heretic derives all his spiritual power by his utter disregard for money."*

- **Spurgeon** to Barnum Bailey: "Acts 8:20." Spiritual power.

[25] Now when they had testified and spoken the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans.

And the gospel goes forward. It is unstoppable!

- **Do you know the gospel?** (explain simply)
- **Are you committed to this movement?** Are you proclaiming the gospel in our city in word and deed? I want you to get committed Start this weekend with some of these steps I've given you!

Communion

Well, from start to finish this is a gospel movement... the miracles, the power, the courage, all come from the gospel.

So, our campus pastors are coming for the Lord's Supper...