



Sunday School Lesson for October 9, 2005.
Released on October 5, 2005.

"The Samaritans and Philip"

Printed Text: **Acts 8:4-17.**
Devotional Reading: **Acts 19:1-10.**
Background Scripture: **Acts 8:4-25.**

Time: A.D. 36
Place: Samaria

Acts 8:4-17

4 Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word.

5 Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them.

6 And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did.

7 For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed.

8 And there was great joy in that city.

9 But there was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one:

10 To whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God.

11 And to him they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries.

12 But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.

13 Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done.

14 Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John:

15 Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost:

16 (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.)

17 Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost.

TODAY'S AIM

Facts: to summarize Philip's ministry in Samaria.

Principle: to affirm that the message of salvation is for all who will believe.

Application: to encourage Christians to be willing to share Christ's gospel beyond their personal comfort zones.

How to Say It

SAMARITANS. Suh-*mare*-uh-tunz.

Introduction

Taking Christ Where People Are

An astute observation (attributed to George MacLeod) puts a lot of things in perspective: "I simply argue that the cross be raised again at the center of the marketplace as well as on the steeple of the church. I am recovering the claim that Jesus was not crucified in a cathedral between two candles, but on a cross between two thieves; on the town garbage heap; at a crossroad so cosmopolitan that they had to write his title in Hebrew and in Latin and in Greek ... and at the kind of place where cynics talk smut, and thieves curse, and soldiers gamble. Because that is where He died. And that is what He died about. And that is where churchmen ought to be, and what churchmen ought to be about."

What this writer says reminds us that we have work to do for Christ. This is a work that emphasizes content over cosmetics and Christ over self. It is a work that takes the gospel beyond the church walls rather than simply being contained within them. It is a work that may be uncomfortable. In today's lesson Philip shows us that we

should take up this work regardless of how uncomfortable it may be. Some of us may need to read this again.

Lesson Background

Just before Christ ascended to heaven, He told His disciples, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). Although they were to begin their mission in Jerusalem, the message of God's forgiveness was to be "preached in his name among all nations" (Luke 24:47). Thus far, though, the church of Jesus Christ existed only in Jerusalem. But that was about to change.

With the death of Stephen, the enemies of the gospel were now emboldened to begin a widespread campaign against the Christians. "At that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem" (Acts 8:1). Spearheading these efforts to stamp out the "sect of the Nazarenes" (24:5) was a young man named Saul. Later we will learn of his dramatic conversion to Christ and his call to preach the gospel of grace (9:1-20). For now, though, he was the primary persecutor of these first believers in Jesus. Yet instead of stamping out this new faith, the persecutions actually aided in its growth. This is a case where God was able to take something bad (persecution) and use it for His good (the spread of the gospel).

SCATTERED SAINTS-Acts 8:4-8

1. Who were those who were "scattered abroad" (Acts 8:4)? What did they do?

So intense was the persecution against the Jerusalem believers that they were "all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles" (v. 1). In some of His final words, Jesus told the disciples that they were to be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, "and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (1:8). They had done a good job of evangelizing the city of Jerusalem, but it seems that they had gone no farther.

Now, however, the persecution of the church forced believers to move into other areas where they could share the saving message of Christ. Since the apostles remained behind in Jerusalem, the work of witnessing was not limited to them. "They that were scattered abroad" (8:4) were the members of the Jerusalem church. They were the ones who "went every where preaching the word." In some way or other, each believer was involved in sharing the gospel with others. This should also be true today, for there are not enough ministers and missionaries to reach everyone (Luke 10:2).

2. Think about it. Being "scattered abroad" meant that the Christians of the early church were willing to suffer persecution for their faith in order to continue to proclaim the gospel. What does this say about the trustworthiness of the gospel? How should this affect our stand for the gospel today?

Some of the earliest Christians were eyewitnesses of the work of Christ. Convinced of the truthfulness of the gospel, they responded by upholding it in dire circumstances. If the eyewitnesses knew that their own testimonies were fabricated, they certainly would have renounced their faith when faced with deadly persecution. A rational person is not willing to die for a lie that he or she knows is a lie.

The suffering that the first-century Christians endured for their faith is thus a testimony to the truth of the gospel message. Today we build upon the faith foundation of these first-century saints. If anyone should doubt the testimony of the Word itself, they need but look at these Christians faith and commitment. These truths should challenge us as believers to maintain our own walk with Christ!

3. Who was Philip? Where did he go? What did he do there (v. 5)?

As an example of one who preached the Word, Acts introduces us to Philip. While one of the Twelve was named Philip (Luke 6:14), this Philip was likely one of the seven deacons (Acts 6:5) and later known as "Philip the evangelist" (21:8). Samaria was the region in the central part of Palestine, located between Judea in the south and Galilee in the north. The land where the Samaritans live originally had rested squarely in the middle of the tribes of Israel in Old Testament times.

Since the Samaritans were both racially and religiously mixed, they were looked down on by most Jews. They nevertheless accepted the Mosaic law, worshiped one God, and were awaiting the Messiah. Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman (John 4:4-26) laid the necessary groundwork for Philip's evangelistic mission in Samaria.

Like other first-century evangelists, Philip "preached Christ unto them" (Acts 8:5). Since salvation can be found in no one else (Acts 4:12; John 14:6), Christ must be at the center of all biblical preaching. Sadly, there is much preaching today that has little to do with the gospel. As Paul said, "I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2).

4. Besides preaching, what else did Philip do? Why was this important in the early church (vs. 6-8)?

Like Stephen (6:8), Philip may have been endowed with miraculous powers when the apostles laid hands on him (v. 6). "Seeing the miracles which he did" (8:6) caused the people of Samaria to sit up and take notice of what Philip was proclaiming by word of mouth. Such miraculous powers served as confirmation of the preached Word (Mark 16:20; Heb. 2:3-4) and were very important in the early days of the church. Specifically mentioned were the casting out of demons, or "unclean spirits" (Acts 8:7). Modern Christians must deal with the reality of Satan and his power, whether this power is demonstrated in overt demonic activity or in more subtle forms of temptation to (Ephesians 6:12).

There were many healings of paralytics and the crippled. Naturally, "there was great joy in that city" (v. 8), because many people were healed of various afflictions.

5. Though we may not be able to perform miracles to gain a hearing, what are some things that Christians can do today to be an influence?

One key element to reach others effectively with the gospel message is to be sure that our lives match up with the words we share. People do not just want to know if what we say is true, they want to know if we are living out that truth ourselves. If we are teaching about a Lord who calms our fears yet we live in a visible state of anxiety, then our actions belie the words we speak. As a result, people will refuse to believe.

We also gain a hearing by responding appropriately to one another in the church. To proclaim a gospel of love and peace while allowing strife and discord to fill our churches undermines the validity of the gospel message (1 John 4:20,21).

SIMON'S SORCERY-Acts 8:9-13

6. What do we know about Simon (vs. 9-11)?

Since there are a number of men named Simon in the Bible, this Simon is usually called Simon the sorcerer or Simon Magus. The word for "sorcery" is related to the Greek magos, which denotes "a wizard, sorcerer, a pretender to magic powers, a professor of the arts of witchcraft" (Vine, Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words, Revell).

Since Simon claimed to be "some great one" (v. 9), many people in Samaria were tricked into believing that his powers were from God (v. 10). Simon was not a fly-by-night performer, because for a "long time he had bewitched them with sorceries" (v. 11). There is no doubt that Simon, "to whom they all gave heed," commanded great respect in Samaria. "By claiming supernatural abilities, Simon could gain both money and prestige as he sold his advice in matters of business, politics, health, and romance" (Root, Acts, Standard). Of course, people are still deluded today by those who claim to possess similar powers (cf. Deut. 18:9-12).

7. What happened to Simon's deception when Philip arrived in Samaria (v.12)?

With the arrival of Philip, however, the people of Samaria were introduced to genuine miracles rather than the sleight of hand trickery that Simon practiced.

The miracles performed by Philip opened a door to preach the gospel, just as the healing of the lame man provided a similar opportunity for Peter (3:1-19) and later for Paul (14:8-18). Since Satan's servants can perform counterfeit miracles (Matt. 7:21-23; 2 Cor. 11:13-15), we must take care not to be led astray by false prophets. While signs and wonders might help the afflicted and authenticate the messenger of the gospel, only through believing what Philip said about Christ and His kingdom could sinners be brought into a saving relationship with the Lord Jesus. Like the

three thousand on Pentecost (Acts 2:41), "they were baptized, both men and women" (8:12).

8. What happened to Simon? What did he attempt to do later? Why was this wrong (v. 13)?

Like others in Samaria, Luke recorded that Simon believed and was baptized. As was customary with many converts, Simon accompanied his teacher, Philip, and was amazed at the signs performed by the evangelist. No doubt he saw a vast difference between these genuine miracles and the things he had previously done as a magician.

Since Simon quickly fell into sin by trying to buy the power of the Spirit (vs. 18-24), many think that his conversion was not genuine. "Peter's words to Simon give every indication that the sorcerer was not a converted man... (Wiersbe, The Bible Exposition Commentary, Cook).

Others, however, view Simon as a backslider, that is, one who falls back into old habits before being firmly grounded in the faith.

Either way, Simon was told to repent of sin and pray for divine pardon (v. 22). "Simon's attitude was strictly materialistic. The evil request of Simon originated a new word in religious circles-'simony,' which means the attainment of ecclesiastical positions by means of money" (Allen, ed., Broad-man Bible Commentary, Broadman).

SPIRIT SENT-Acts 8:14-17

9. Why were Peter and John sent to Samaria (vs. 14,15)?

As mentioned earlier, the apostles remained in Jerusalem when the church was scattered throughout the general region of Judea and Samaria (v. 1). Word had now come back to the apostolic band that "Samaria had received the word of God" (v. 14).

To receive the Word of God means not only to hear it but also to accept it and obey it. When we receive Christ as our Saviour, we become children of God. As John 1:12 says, "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name." Those who receive Christ are also enjoined to live the Christian life (Col. 2:6).

Peter and John were sent to Samaria for the express purpose of praying for the Holy Spirit to come upon these new believers. While the coming of the Holy Spirit is clearly connected with conversion in the New Testament, there does not seem to be one clear pattern for the arrival of the Spirit in Acts.

On Pentecost, the Spirit came upon the disciples suddenly with both physical and audible manifestations (Acts 2:1-4). As Peter preached on that occasion, however, he promised the Spirit to penitent baptized believers (v. 38). With the household of Cornelius, the Spirit came prior to baptism (10:44-48) and in a similar fashion as on Pentecost (11:15). Later, Paul laid his hands on certain believers, and they received the Holy Spirit, evidenced by speaking in tongues and prophesying (19:1-6). What happened on that occasion was similar to the account of the reception of the Holy Spirit in Cornelius's household.

10. What does "baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus" (v. 16) mean?

At this point in the narrative, the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon the Samaritan converts, but this does not mean that the Holy Spirit was uninvolved in the conversion of the Samaritans. When the Word of God is proclaimed, the Holy Spirit is active in bringing about conviction of sin. Indeed, one of the primary ministries of the Holy Spirit is to awaken sinners to the need for the Saviour.

That the Samaritans "were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus" (8:16) indicates they repented of sin, believed the gospel, and professed faith in Christ. To be baptized "in (literally, 'into') the name of the Lord Jesus" does not contradict the Great Commission, where baptism is commanded in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19). "In the name" can simply mean "by the authority of."

11. What did the apostles do to impart the Holy Spirit to these converts (v. 17)?

It is clear that on this occasion the Holy Spirit did not come until Peter and John laid their hands on these converts. But some speculate that what occurred here was not an impartation of the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, which comes by faith (Gal. 3:2), but an impartation of charismatic gifts. The fact that Simon endeavored to purchase this power from the apostles (Acts 8:18-19) might point to such a conclusion.

Since there were a variety of gifts of the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:4-10, 28-30), we cannot rule out this interpretation, though there is not enough said in the text to be dogmatic. Luke's purpose in mentioning the coming of the Spirit was probably for the purpose of giving background to the evil intentions of Simon Magus.

What Philip had begun in Samaria, Peter and John continued, for this section ends by stating that the apostles "returned to Jerusalem, and preached the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans" (Acts 8:25).

Conclusion

Philip's courageous trip to preach to the Samaritans opened doors for God's grace. When modern believers determine to preach the gospel beyond their own cultural borders, God is honored. Surprising results can come, as missionaries will attest. What mission fields are waiting for us to respond to today?

Prayer

Lord of the nations, help us to remember that there are people of every race and culture who are ready to become Your children. But they can do so only if we will take the gospel of salvation to them. We confess that we have not always had the heart to do this as we ought. May the Spirit give us such a heart today. We pray through Christ, amen.

Thought to Remember

The gospel is meant for all the world, including those parts that do not look just like home.

Anticipating Next Week's Lesson

The Holy Spirit had more work for Philip to do in spreading the gospel to the Gentiles. Acts 8:26-40 gives the account of the conversion of the Ethiopian official.

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