

The Acts of the Apostles

Sermon Number: 13

Acts 8:1-25

May 15, 2011

“Motivated to Preach the Word”

Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word. Acts 8:4

This series of expositions on the Book of Acts Back was started in June 2010. The last sermon in this series was on January 16th of 2011. It has now been 16 weeks and that makes it virtually impossible for anyone to have any continuity of thought from one message to the next. That said we do attempt to make every sermon stand on its own and so we trust that as we work through a book of the Bible that you will have read through the book several times and can grasp the flow of events.

The last sermon was in Chapter 7 about “The First Christian Martyr” and about how the church provided for the widows and about the stoning of the Steven.

The English word “martyr” derives from the Greek word that means “witness.”

Because of the persecution of the first witnesses of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, viz. Jesus of Nazareth, the Incarnate Son of God; who lived a sinless life under the Law, who died on the cross for the sins of His people, who was crucified, buried. But He arose from the dead, according to the Scriptures; He ascended back into heaven, then because men and women were faithful to preach the Gospel, the word “martyr” came to mean one who suffers for a cause. In the case of Christians it is the cause of the Gospel of Christ.

What was the motivation for these first witnesses to preach the word?

When you really believe something you can't help but tell about it.

Do you think any of the survivors of those tornadoes of April 27th have any problem telling others to pay attention to the warnings and to go to a safe place?

By the grace of God I am alive today because one night in about 1967 I was wearing a seat belt. Listen young people it is utter stupidity, and not cool at all to not wear a seat belt.

You will witness to something that you believe in!

That motivation is seen in a negative sense in the actions of a young Pharisee named Saul of Tarsus. Saul really believed that Jesus of Nazareth was a blasphemer and a threat to the religion of the Jews.

Say hello to Saul, the Pharisee.

First the last words of Steven:

Acts 7:51-60

⁵¹ "You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers *did*, so *do* you. ⁵² Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers, ⁵³ who have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept *it*."

⁵⁴ When they heard these things they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with *their* teeth. ⁵⁵ But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, ⁵⁶ and said, "Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!"

⁵⁷ Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord; ⁵⁸ and they cast *him* out of the city and stoned *him*. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul. ⁵⁹ And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on *God* and saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." ⁶⁰ Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not charge them with this sin." And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

Acts 8:1-3

Now Saul was consenting to his death.

At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. ² And devout men carried Stephen *to his burial*, and made great lamentation over him.

³ As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing *them* to prison.

In the study of Acts 5:33-39 we saw that a Pharisee named Gamaliel gave advice to the Jewish Council to, in effect, wait and see.

The errors in Gamaliel's advice were:

- 1) That he compared Jesus to other men;
- 2) That he had a false criterion which was "success";
- 3) His advice was against Christ.

But Saul ignored the advice of Gamaliel who told the Jewish leaders to "wait and see" if this new sect of Jews, called "The Way" and later "little Christs" would turn out to be successful.

The term "the Way" will come up in the next chapter.

Acts 9:1-2

Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest ² and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

The term "Christian" began in Antioch.

And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch. Acts 11:26

It is somewhat surprising to me that Saul would ignore the advice of Gamaliel because later in his defense before the Council in Jerusalem he points out that among his credentials was his training under Gamaliel.

"Brethren and fathers, hear my defense before you now." ² And when they heard that he spoke to them in the Hebrew language, they kept all the more silent.

Then he said: ³ "I am indeed a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, taught according to the strictness of our fathers' law, and was zealous toward God as you all are today. Acts 22:1-4

And so in his zeal for his religion, Saul justifies killing those who do not believe as he does. Saul is an example of modern Muslim radicals who will kill anyone who follows a different religion. It is incredulous to me that anyone could follow a religion that is based on hatred! Such is the power of Satan!

Anyway, Saul was convinced that traditional Judaism and the Way, or Christianity, could not coexist. Saul had received a commission from the Council, the Sanhedrin, to eliminate those who believed that Jesus was Messiah.

³ As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing *them* to prison.

The mental image here is from a Greek word that is used to describe a wild boar ravaging a vineyard or a wild beast savaging a victim's body. This is the intensity with which Saul persecuted the church.

Later in Acts we have evidence that while all Christians were subject to persecution, that the ones that Steven ministered to were the main focus of Saul's attacks.

Acts 11:19-21

¹⁹ Now those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to no one but the Jews only. ²⁰ But some of them were men from Cyprus and Cyrene, who, when they had come to Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists, preaching the Lord Jesus. ²¹ And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord.

This may help explain why the apostles did not immediately flee from Jerusalem.

Acts 8:1

At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.

The Law called for the burial of executed criminals, but strictly prohibited a public display of grief. The devout men took a great risk by staging a public protest against the killing of Steven.

And devout men carried Stephen *to his burial*, and made great lamentation over him. Acts 8:2

The church had been given a commission by the Lord.

But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." Acts 1:8

It appears that the church was fairly comfortable in Jerusalem and had no real motivation to leave.

Here is an example of how God can stir you up. It has been about seven or eight years since the ascension of Jesus Christ and it is time to move out. But what will make it happen?

Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word. Acts 8:4

God used the persecution of the church to spread the Gospel. It appears that if the believers had been left alone that very few of them would have gone into Samaria much less the “end of the earth.”

The spread of the Gospel outside of Judea did get first to Samaria.

Acts 8:5-8

⁵ Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them. ⁶ And the multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. ⁷ For unclean spirits, crying with a loud voice, came out of many who were possessed; and many who were paralyzed and lame were healed. ⁸ And there was great joy in that city.

Jerusalem is set in the mountains of Judea. So it did not matter the direction that a Jew took when he departed from Jerusalem, he is always said to go “down.”

We are not told the city of Samaria that Philip came to; we are only told that he went to the north into Samaria.

The religion of the Samaritans was a hybrid of Judaism and paganism. In 930 B.C. after the conquest of the Northern Kingdom by the Assyrians there were Jews and pagans all mixed together in the region.

2 Kings 17:24

Then the king of Assyria brought *people* from Babylon, Cuthah, Ava, Hamath, and from Sepharvaim, and placed *them* in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel; and they took possession of Samaria and dwelt in its cities.

These mixed multitudes developed their own religion. They built a temple on Mount Gerizim and combined some of the practices given to Moses by God with various practices of the pagans.

The Samaritans accepted as Scripture only the first five books of the Old Testament. They did anticipate the coming of Messiah.

"The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear.... Deut 18:15

Thus Philip's proclamation of Jesus as the promised Messiah was not such a strange idea.

An interesting aside is the story of the encounter by Jesus with the woman at the well in Samaria.

John 4:1-26

Therefore, when the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John ² (though Jesus Himself did not baptize, but His disciples), ³ He left Judea and departed again to Galilee. ⁴ But He needed to go through Samaria.

⁵ So He came to a city of Samaria which is called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. ⁶ Now Jacob's well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied from *His* journey, sat thus by the well. It was about the sixth hour.

⁷ A woman of Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give Me a drink." ⁸ For His disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.

⁹ Then the woman of Samaria said to Him, "How is it that You, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?" For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.

¹⁰ Jesus answered and said to her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water."

¹¹ The woman said to Him, "Sir, You have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep. Where then do You get that living water? ¹² Are You greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank from it himself, as well as his sons and his livestock?"

¹³ Jesus answered and said to her, "Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, ¹⁴ but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life."

¹⁵ The woman said to Him, "Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw."

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here."

¹⁷ The woman answered and said, "I have no husband."

Jesus said to her, "You have well said, 'I have no husband,' ¹⁸ for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; in that you spoke truly."

¹⁹ The woman said to Him, "Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet. ²⁰ Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you *Jews* say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship."

²¹ Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. ²² You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. ²³ But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. ²⁴ God *is* Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."

²⁵ The woman said to Him, "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When He comes, He will tell us all things."

²⁶ Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am *He*."

This woman is a representative of the false religion that had developed in Samaria.

When Jesus told her:

"Go, call your husband, and come here."

¹⁷ The woman answered and said, "I have no husband."

Jesus said to her, "You have well said, 'I have no husband,' ¹⁸ for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; in that you spoke truly."

The woman stands for Samaria and her five husbands are the five pagan peoples that were mixed together.

2 Kings 17:24

Then the king of Assyria brought *people* from Babylon, Cuthah, Ava, Hamath, and from Sepharvaim, and placed *them* in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel; and they took possession of Samaria and dwelt in its cities.

And so we have the spread of the Gospel into Samaria.

Meet Simon Magus.

Acts 8:9-13

⁹ But there was a certain man called Simon, who previously practiced sorcery in the city and astonished the people of Samaria, claiming that he was someone great, ¹⁰ to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, "This man is the great power of God." ¹¹ And they heeded him because he had astonished them with his sorceries for a long time. ¹² But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized. ¹³ Then Simon himself also believed; and when he was baptized he continued with Philip, and was amazed, seeing the miracles and signs which were done.

In the Samaritan city that Philip came to there was a man, that by tradition, is called "Simon Magus." The word "magus" in Greek means a member of the Zoroastrian priesthood.

Without going into much background, Zoroastrianism is a Persian religion and it goes heavily into angelology and demonology. In the New Testament times it was used to practice sorcery, astrology, and the occult. It used drugs to produce "magical" effects.

Simon had become popular with the people because he astonished them with his illusions and sorcery. The people believed he had power from God.

As the Samaritans believed Philip's message of the Gospel they came to be baptized. Among the believers came Simon, who we are told was attracted by the miracles and signs that were done by Philip.

What about the Holy Spirit?

Acts 8:14-17

¹⁴ Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them, ¹⁵ who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. ¹⁶ For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ¹⁷ Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

When the Samaritans with their hybrid belief system believed the Gospel that Philip preached, the apostles sent Peter and John to see what was going on. Is this the real deal? Some things needed to be resolved in order to be sure that the Samaritan church was consistent with the church in Jerusalem.

There is only one Gospel and there is only one church of the redeemed of the Lord.

There are many manifestations of the local body of Christ and they are known by many different names, e.g. Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, etc.

This passage is a good example of why we shouldn't formulate a universal doctrine on a unique event recorded in the Bible.

E.g., There is only one virgin birth, Jesus; there is only one baby regenerated in his mother's womb, John the Baptist.

So in this passage there are three things that the Holy Spirit worked in a unique way among the Samaritan believers.

- 1) The apostles' prayer for the Samaritans to receive the Holy Spirit [15];
- 2) The lapse of time between initial faith and receiving the Holy Spirit [16];
- 3) The link between laying on of hands and receiving the Holy Spirit [17].

This is the only record in Acts of the apostles praying for someone to receive the Holy Spirit.

Nowhere else is there a lapse of time between believing and trusting in Jesus and receiving the Holy Spirit.

The laying on of hands in connection with receiving the Holy Spirit is only in Acts.

Acts 9:17

And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit."

Acts 19:5-6

⁵ When they heard *this*, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ⁶ And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied.

In the case of the Samaritans, it was important that the apostles, representing the whole church, be there to welcome them, pray with them, lay hands on them, and affirm the work of the Holy Spirit.

Because Peter and John were there the Samaritans knew that they had been brought into fellowship with the whole church. And also, the Samaritans recognized the authority of the apostles, even though the apostles were Jews. Thus on their return to Jerusalem the apostles could affirm that God had included the Samaritans in His eternal purpose.

Was Simon's Faith Genuine?

Acts 8:18-25

¹⁸ And when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money, ¹⁹ saying, "Give me this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit."

²⁰ But Peter said to him, "Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money! ²¹ You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God. ²² Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you. ²³ For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity."

²⁴ Then Simon answered and said, "Pray to the Lord for me, that none of the things which you have spoken may come upon me."

²⁵ So when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans.

From Luke's account here in Acts the genuineness of Simon's faith is doubtful. However, Philip accepted his confession and baptized him.

The lesson here is that as mere men we accept someone's confession and trust the Lord to discern the truth of a person's heart.

Based on what Peter said the best we can hope for in the case of Simon is that his faith was superficial and Simon's request was answered.

Jesus warned that faith based on signs and miracles is not to be trusted.

John 2:23-25

²³ Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name when they saw the signs which He did. ²⁴ But Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all *men*, ²⁵ and had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man.

John 4:46-48

⁴⁶ So Jesus came again to Cana of Galilee where He had made the water wine. And there was a certain nobleman whose son was sick at Capernaum. ⁴⁷ When he heard that Jesus had come out of Judea into Galilee, he went to Him and implored Him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death. ⁴⁸ Then Jesus said to him, "Unless you *people* see signs and wonders, you will by no means believe."

John 7:1-5

After these things Jesus walked in Galilee; for He did not want to walk in Judea, because the Jews* sought to kill Him. ² Now the Jews' Feast of Tabernacles was at hand. ³ His brothers therefore said to Him, "Depart from here and go into Judea, that Your disciples also may see the works that You are doing. ⁴ For no one does anything in secret while he himself seeks to be known openly. If You do these things, show Yourself to the world." ⁵ For even His brothers did not believe in Him.

In the case of Simon the best we can do is simply consider what we are told:

- 1) Simon had a seriously flawed concept of grace; he thought he could buy God's favor.
- 2) Simon failed to grasp the difference between the magical or occult powers by which he had gained his influence and the power of the Holy Spirit. He wanted to be in the "ministry" from selfish motives. He thought that if he had the Holy Spirit he would be as "apostolic" as Peter and John.
- 3) Simon saw the ministry of the Holy Spirit as a means for personal gain. He thought to add to his reputation with just another power.

Peter's response show how mistaken Simon was and how serious was his error.

Peter and John return to Jerusalem.

²⁵ So when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans.

After preaching to the Samaritan converts, Peter and John return to Jerusalem.

In our next lesson we will follow Philip's evangelism to wherever the Holy Spirit took him.

God has a way of motivating His people, even if it is very uncomfortable for them. Persecution is what,

“Motivated to Preach the Word”

What is your level of commitment to the Gospel?

We must not boast in what we would do under persecution but we can pray that we would do what we should do.

Never deny the Lord Jesus Christ.

Repent and believe in the Gospel!

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