

## EXPOSITION OF ACTS

### Message #18

Acts 8:1-25

Years ago when we lived out west, I took several different courses pertaining to hunting in the mountains; survival in the mountains, horses in the mountains, medicine in the mountains. I took courses on packing horses, trailer loading horses, and various knots to use in tying up horses. One of the courses demanded that we track a wounded animal. The instructors took fake blood and sprinkled it in various places, and it was our responsibility to follow it along the side of the mountain until we found the animal. If you wound an animal, you have the responsibility under western hunting law to track that animal until you hopefully find it.

What is so unusual about what happens here is that Stephen was already dead, however, the forward progress of the gospel was actually marked with drops of his martyred blood. It is like the Gospel trail moves forward from the very spot of death. So we start with the dead body of Stephen and track the trail forward deep into the Church Age.

Before Jesus ascended back into heaven, he told His apostles that they were to take the Gospel from Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria and to the remotest parts of the earth. God will see to it that this is exactly what will happen.

From what we have seen so far, there wasn't any rush to move the Gospel out of Jerusalem. Thus far, everything that had happened was happening in Jerusalem. But God wanted the Gospel of Grace to advance to the whole world and Stephen becomes the starting point of this very reality. What we see is this:

### **STARTING WITH THE MARTYRDOM OF STEPHEN, GOD'S WORD MOVED OUT FROM JERUSALEM AND POWERFULLY IMPACTED A SATANIC WORLD.**

The fact is this world is dominated by Satan. Satan has no say in heaven, but he has a lot to say on earth. The Apostle Paul said that this world is "according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience" (Eph. 2:2). But, the Gospel of Grace has the power of God behind it, and when it gets into the world it dramatically changes lives.

There are three main gospel actions we want to see.

### **GOSPEL ACTION #1 - God used persecution in Jerusalem to move the Gospel to Judea and Samaria. 8:1-4**

The doctrine of the Grace of God will not win popularity contests in this world. In the aftermath of Stephen's death, great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem. In **verse 1**, we come to the first use of the word "persecution" (διωγμος) in regard to the Church. The word means to persecute people to the extent that you put them to flight because you are after them (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 119). Christians were on the run for their lives.

The Gospel of God's grace caused a violent reaction in Jerusalem and the one leading the charge was a young man named "Saul". Saul was "ravaging" the church. The Greek word (λυμαιομαι) means to be outraged to the point of maltreating and abusing people (*Ibid*, p. 272). The imperfect tense of the verb indicates that Saul was continually hateful and brutal to Christians. In fact, later in Acts, Saul himself will say he killed Christians; he bound them and he put both men and women into prisons (Acts 22:4). In fact, when he wrote his famous letter to the Galatians, he will say he literally tried to "destroy" the Church of God (Galatians 1:13).

Now you might wonder what possible good could come from this? Notice carefully from **verse 1** that because of the persecution all of the church scattered to Judea and Samaria, with the exception of the apostles. **The martyrdom of Stephen, which led to terrible persecution against the church, led to amazing evangelism of the world.**

Sometimes God will permit your world to fall apart because He has a sovereign plan to use you elsewhere. God can use terrible persecution, abuse, and negative things to actually get you to move in another direction because He has a key plan in mind.

I have known of believers who have actually come to this church because things were a mess and disaster in another church. Some were being mistreated for wanting to be fed God's Word and things became tense. As a result, God moved them out.

Jesus told His apostles that if they went somewhere and were not received, to shake the dust off their feet and go somewhere else. I have never agreed with the mindset that says we must always hang in there and hope things get better. The way God gets His Gospel to go to various parts of the world is through persecution coming from one particular spot; Jerusalem.

**GOSPEL ACTION #2** - God used Philip to preach God's Word in Samaria. **8:5-13**

The Jews did not like the Samaritans. In fact, as Kent Hughes said, they viewed them as a "mongrel nation of half-breeds" (*Acts*, p. 111).

Now Philip was not an apostle. Like Stephen, he was a man who went to the church in Jerusalem and heard about the Grace of God from the apostles, and he got it. He also was one of the seven selected faithful men who were responsible for helping the Hellenistic widows (6:5). Philip is the only man in the New Testament who is called "an evangelist" (Acts 21:8). His gift was not apostle, not pastor/teacher, but an evangelist. **It is very interesting to note that some of the most effective witnesses for Jesus Christ who evangelize are lay people, not trained theologians.**

A minister is to do the work of an evangelist (II Timothy 4:5), but that is not his gift. His gift is to train the flock in the Word of God so he may equip his people to do God's work (Ephesians 4:11-12).

Philip was a Hellenistic Jew, which meant he did not live in Jerusalem, and when persecution broke out he got out of the city. He took off for Samaria. He took what he knew of the Word of God and the Grace of God with him and he ended up in Samaria. We are not certain what city in Samaria he is in. The Greek reads that “Philip came into the city of the Samaria” (my translation). So he must have been in a key city of Samaria. **One critical thing to see here is that initially missionary work went into cities, not jungles.** If you want to form a Biblical philosophy of missions it is wise to observe, as William Arnot said, missionary efforts were aimed at the “great cities” (*Acts*, p. 153). The city here is not named, but it was in a city. There are two main impacts he has on the city:

**Impact #1** - Philip’s preaching of God’s Grace was impacting Samaria in a wonderful way. **8:5-8**

When Philip got to Samaria he started preaching Jesus Christ to them. He specifically was preaching that Jesus was “the Christ”; that is He was the Messiah/Savior. **He invited the Samaritans to believe on Jesus Christ as Messiah and Savior, and before he knew it he had a major revival on his hands.**

God was confirming Philip’s message by permitting him to do certain apostolic kinds of things. It is specifically brought out in **verse 7** that his preaching was affecting the demonic world in a major way. Demons were coming out of people and many paralyzed and lame people were healed. As **verse 8** says, there was much rejoicing in the city. When one believes on Jesus Christ, one will have a new joy in life. The emphasis is on the fact that Philip is preaching the Grace Gospel and God is using the Gospel to rid the people of demons. When Jesus Christ takes up residency in a person, demons flee.

The Gospel of God has the power to transform people who are satanic and demonic. Our job is to do exactly what Stephen did, go and preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ to people. When we do that, God will do powerful things with people who are demonic.

**Impact #2** - Philip’s preaching of God’s Grace impacted a satanic man named Simon. **8:9-13**

Simon was a man who went around the city calling himself “Simon the Great” and even Simon “the Great Power of God.”

There is some speculation as to whether or not Simon was just an illusionist like a Harry Houdini, who was tricking people with his illusions or whether he was actually satanic and able to do satanic things. The verb “practice magic” (μαγεύω) in **verse 9** and the noun magic (μαγία) in **verse 11** can refer either to a skilled magician or a sorcerer of the satanic arts (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 274).

It is possible he was simply doing some illusion type of things and fooling the people. Perhaps using some tricks of chemistry to make the people believe he was great. R.C. Sproul said that he was golfing one time and wanted to play a trick on those he was golfing with to convince them that he hits a golf ball with fiery power. So he took two stick matches and stuck them in the

ground behind the tee, where they could not be seen. He said when he hit the ball, the matches popped and the people thought he had some unusual power to hit a golf ball. It was simply a trick (*Acts*, p. 143). It is possible Simon was doing illusionary tricks. However, it is also possible that he was actually doing some demonic things.

In view of the contextual fact that “unclean demonic spirits” were being affected by the Gospel (8:7), it is legitimate to assume that Simon was some sort of known Satanist who was in the occult. He astonished people in Samaria with his demonic “magic arts” and trickery and he made a lot of money by doing the things he did.

There are satanic people who can cast spells and break spells on people that inflict sickness and healing. Merrill Unger says there was a “black-magic” expert in Europe who was able to kill a cow in four days. He said in Switzerland there was a man who cast a spell on his neighbor’s pigs and killed thirty-two of them (*Demons in the World Today*, p. 94). We know that the Antichrist will be able to have all satanic power to perform signs and false wonders (II Thessalonians 2:9-10). So it is possible that this Simon was truly able to do satanic things.

There are people today who are dabbling in the occult because they think it will give them some key answers to life and power. What they don’t realize is that the ultimate power and answers to live are found with God in a relationship with Jesus Christ.

Now according to **verse 12**, Philip was preaching the Word of God and people were responding in huge numbers. Philip was able to do certain sign things that Simon knew were no normal tricks of an illusionist (**verse 13**). **Whatever power Simon had, he realized that Philip’s power was way beyond his.**

Now we may observe that people were believing and being baptized. We may suggest that the thing they were believing was that they were sinners in need of a righteousness they did not have, which may only be found in Jesus Christ. The only baptism Philip knew about was John’s pre-Holy Spirit baptism. Since he was presenting Jesus to be “the Christ”, that is the Messiah (**v.5**); he was connecting this baptism business to this. People in Samaria were being baptized, but they had not received the Spirit of God; so this was like John’s baptism in which they acknowledged they were sinners and admitted they needed a Savior. Simon, himself, was watching all of this and he himself believed that and was baptized (**8:13**).

**GOSPEL ACTION #3** - God used the apostles to preach God’s Word in Samaria. **8:14-25**

The truth is the apostles should have moved out from Jerusalem by now, but they hadn’t. As S. Lewis Johnson observed, “Jerusalem is not the headquarters of the Christian Church, Heaven is the headquarters of the Christian Church” (*Acts* 8:1-25, p. 4). If the apostles weren’t going to move themselves, God would move them. He had a sovereign plan and He will work it out.

We can begin to clog things up, but God has His way of doing things and He decided it is time I get some of these apostles to move out of Jerusalem. When word got back to the apostles in Jerusalem that Philip was preaching and a revival had broken out in Samaria, they sent their two front line men, Peter and John.

According to **verse 15**, when the apostles arrived in Samaria they prayed that the believers would receive the Holy Spirit. They had been baptized in water, but not baptized by the Holy Spirit (**verse 16**). Now the apostles laid their hands on the people and the believers received the Holy Spirit (**verse 17**). Philip was not authorized to do this; only an apostle could do this. But this is a critical moment in the history of the Church because it shows that the Spirit of God was branching out in a grace work that would ultimately reach the world.

Now according to **verse 18**, when Simon saw that the apostles had the power to impart the Holy Spirit to people, he offered them a huge sum of money if they would give him that power (**v. 19**). **Carefully observe this; Simon does not want the Holy Spirit in his life, he wants to be able to give the Holy Spirit to others.** Simon wanted power in order to promote himself, not to promote Jesus Christ.

Simon wants to buy the Holy Spirit. To Simon this is all about money. However, the apostles told him the Holy Spirit isn't for sale. Money can buy many luxurious things, but it cannot buy anyone spiritual power. Money can buy pleasure, but not happiness. Money can buy medicine, but not health. Money can buy preferential treatment with men, but never with God.

The apostles responded and said "may your money perish with you" (**8:20**). Then they said you have no part at all in a relationship with God because your heart is not right (**8:21**). **This is a man who has been baptized in water, and he is on his way to hell. You cannot buy the Grace of God. The Grace of God is not for sale.**

Kent Hughes told a story of a pastor and his wife who wanted to buy a house. They found a home they wanted and they went to make an offer on the home. The people who were selling the home were wealthy people, and they knew this was a pastor and wife and so they said "we would like to give you the home." The pastor and his wife were shocked and wanted to know why, and the couple said because they believed that if they gave this minister and his wife the home, they would ensure themselves of Heaven. Well, the Pastor and his wife were people of integrity and he said, "No, it does not work like that." So he sat with them and shared the Gospel and told them that only Jesus Christ could give them Heaven and that they entered a relationship with Christ through faith and not through works. He told them in effect that your money and generosity cannot buy you Heaven. Interestingly, the couple did end up giving the home to the pastor and his wife, but not for the purpose of buying eternity (*Acts*, p. 114).

In **verse 22**, the apostles tell him to repent and pray to the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation and forgiveness.

But notice how Simon answers in **verse 24**, he asks the apostles to pray for him. That is not what the apostles told him. If he were to be saved, he needed to pray himself. He is not about to pray to Jesus Christ. He is not about to humble himself and admit he is an arrogant, satanic sinner. He did not really want a relationship with Jesus Christ, he wanted power. The apostles started back toward Jerusalem and they kept preaching the Gospel in many villages and many Samaritans were being saved (**v. 25**).