

Bibles???

The Word of God is the Absolute Truth and the Final Authority

Turn your bibles with me to Acts 8

We have been looking at the work of the Holy Spirit within the early church.

And for the most part – the first seven chapters in the book of Acts is centered around the work of the Holy Spirit in Jerusalem – especially in the area around the temple.

The Holy Spirit descended upon the 120 in the upper room in Jerusalem

Peter gave his two sermons in the area of the temple

Peter heals the lame man at the door of temple

Stephen stood before the Sanhedrin – who would meet at the temple

Beginning with chapter 8, we are going to see the church expand beyond the city limits of Jerusalem.

And some would argue that the catalyst for getting the ball rolling – was the events that transpired at the end of chapter seven –

Let's pray...

So last week we left off with Stephen – a faithful servant – who provided the Sanhedrin (the council of religious rulers) a history lesson –

The lesson pointed out their tendency to reject those that God had sent to deliver them – Joseph, Moses, Jesus Christ

It pointed to the history of the Jews to resort to idolatry - (which they themselves had turned to as they worshipped the temple)

And really his entire speech to the Sanhedrin can be summed up with the following – God is not interested in religion, but in a relationship.

So the Sanhedrin were not very receptive of what Stephen had to say and they proceeded to do the same thing that they did to Jesus Christ, a few months earlier -

[Act 7:58 NKJV] 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.

Now – I want to point out that Saul – as the witnesses laid their garments at his feet – the reason that they laid their clothes at his feet was not because he was the coat-boy for the Sanhedrin.

He was acting as the official authority condoning Stephen's execution.

We learn more about Saul in the opening verses of ch. 8 . . .

[Act 8:1-8 NKJV] 1 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.

I had you make a note that Saul was consenting to the death of Stephen.

The word that is used here in the Greek doesn't simply mean that he approved or that he went along with – it means that Saul was overjoyed / he applauded the act of stoning Stephen.

Keep in mind, this is the man who will one day be known as Paul, who God will use to bring the gospel to the Gentiles and will one day write most of our New Testament.

He had a hatred for the early church –

Turn with me to Acts 26

In Acts 26, we have Paul giving his testimony before Agrippa.

[Act 26:10-11 NKJV] 10 “This I also did in Jerusalem, and many of the saints I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against [them]. 11 “And I punished them often in every synagogue and compelled [them] to blaspheme; and being exceedingly enraged against them, I persecuted [them] even to foreign cities.

So not only did Saul go after the believers of the early church, he arrested them and even executed or at least approved of the execution of many of those that were arrested.

And if that was not enough, he compelled some of the early believers to renounce their faith in Jesus Christ.

The persecution after the death of Stephen became so intense; thousands fled Jerusalem & went to other cities in the surrounding state of Judea, as well as the neighboring state of Samaria.

Now, in the beginning of the book of Acts – right before Jesus ascended into heaven, He told His disciples the following,

[Act 1:8 NKJV] 8 "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."

From the time that Jesus ascended into heaven until we get to chapter 8, it is estimated that a period of 3-5 years had already passed.

The church was growing in Jerusalem – but Jesus said that they were supposed to go throughout Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth.

Up to this point, we find nowhere in scripture that gospel had been preached outside of Jerusalem.

So here we see God use the death of Stephen and the persecution of the church to expand the reach of the gospel into the rest of Judea and Samaria.

I also had you make a note of the word scattered –

Because the word that is used here is not the word that is used to describe what happens when you turn on the lights in the kitchen in the middle of the night and all the cockroaches scatter behind the fridge. That word means they disappeared and hid.

That's not what happened here.

The word that is used here for scattered is the word that is used in the scattering of seeds.

No longer is the God just in Jerusalem – it has been scattered about in the surrounding areas.

2 And devout men carried Stephen [to his burial], and made great lamentation over him.

It was common practice for Jews to lament with great wailing and beating of their chest when someone they knew died.

Here they had seen the empowerment of the Holy Spirit on the life of Stephen and now that he is dead – he was certainly going to be missed.

However, there was another reason that they were lamenting.

The early church thought that Jesus Christ was going to return immediately.

So when Stephen died – they lamented thinking that he was going to miss out on Jesus' Second Coming – that because he was dead, he wasn't going to heaven.

Turn with me to 1 Thes 4 –

Because Paul addresses this issue

[1Th 4:13-18 NKJV] 13 But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. 14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. 15 For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive [and] remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. 16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive [and] remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. 18 Therefore comfort one another with these words.

So as the early church matured, they began to have a different attitude toward the death of a loved one.

Yes, it is ok for us to grieve for ourselves over the loss of a loved one, because we will miss them.

But we shouldn't grieve for them because they are in a better place, with Jesus.

3 As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing [them] to prison. 4 Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word.

So as Saul continued in his persecution of the early church – instead of stopping the church growth, it actually contributed to the gospel expanding to new areas.

Think about how God works –

God is going to use the same man to minister to the churches that were started partly because of his persecution.

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

Philip was another servant that God used.

He was one of the original seven – just like Stephen.

And just like Stephen, he was faithful in what God called him to do.

He goes to Samaria –

Remember, Samaria was the capital of the Northern Kingdom.

After the Assyrians invaded Israel – they took the people captive and repopulated the area with other people from their own kingdom.

So the Jews despised the Samaritans –

Not only were they mixed (gentile blood) – they had a different type of worship.

But here we have Stephen being obedient to what God has called him to do and preach Jesus to them.

By the way, later on in the book of Acts, about twenty years later - Philip is going to welcome Paul into his home -

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.

So the Holy Spirit empowered Philip to perform miracles in the same way the Apostles and Stephen had been empowered.

So by preaching Jesus to them and through the miracles that were performed through Philip, there was great joy that came upon Samaria.

So we see a genuine awakening that occurs throughout Samaria.

[Act 8:9-13 NKJV] 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.

So before Philip came to Samaria, the guy that the Samaritans looked up to was Simon.

He is described here as a sorcerer and as someone able to perform miracles

He appears to have a power that the average man does not have – and it was that power and influence that grasped the reverence of the Samaritans for a long time.

Now, we don't know if these were tricks or illusions or if Simon was under the influence of demonic power.

I don't think that Simon cared – as long as he continued to have the notoriety.

By the way, the big difference between Philip and Simon was that Philip was accompanying the miracles that God was working through him with the gospel.

Which shows us that miracles don't save people, preaching does.

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.

Now, the people of Samaria responded to the gospel message, they believed and they were baptized.

Simon the sorcerer believed and he was baptized.

The baptism that is spoken of here is a physical baptism – submersion in water.

Which is supposed to represent our physical death as we go under water and our spiritual rebirth (new life) as we come out of the water.

It's a way of saying that we've died to the old ways and have been given a new life in Jesus.

[Act 8:14-17 NKJV] 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.

The apostles in Jerusalem get word of what's happening in Samaria - Peter and John go to Samaria and find that those that responded to gospel had only been physically baptized but had not received the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Remember, this is “upon” of the Holy Spirit

They all had the “in” of the Holy Spirit – when the Holy Spirit resides in us. This happens when we receive Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior

But – there was no “upons” – when the Holy Spirit comes upon us in power, filling us, giving us the ability to live the Christian lives He wants.

So notice – Peter and John, they show up and the first thing they do is – pray.

When the 120 were in the upper room, when they were baptized by the Holy Spirit – what were they doing? Praying.

The next thing they did was they laid hands on the people and they were baptized with the Holy Spirit.

This is the same way the Paul was baptized with the Holy Spirit (Ananias prays for him and then lays hands on him)

Later on in Acts (19:6) - in Ephesus, Paul lays hands on twelve individuals and the Holy Spirit came upon them.

So, sometimes it happens through prayer, sometimes through the laying of hands and the there is another way – faith

[Jhn 7:37-39 NKJV] 37 On the last day, that great [day] of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. 38 "He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of

living water." 39 But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet [given], because Jesus was not yet glorified.

Jesus said you had to be thirsty (you had to want it), you had to come to Him for it, and you needed to simply receive it (drink).

It's the one that believes that will receive.

It's not a matter of having enough faith to receive, it's simply trusting that Jesus will fill us if we ask Him to.

Ephesians 5:18 states that it is His will that we be filled.

[Act 8:18-19 NKJV] 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."

Simon sees what is happening when the apostles laid hands on individuals and he wants the same thing.

So he offers to buy the power.

He sees this opportunity to get back on top.

He had followed Philip around for a while but now Peter and John had shown him something new.

He wants what they have.

Back then as it is now, magicians paid a huge amount of money to other magicians in order to learn new tricks.

Today, there is the New Age Movement that charges thousands of dollars to those who want to learn new ways to tap into the spiritual realm.

Simon was simply doing what others had done in the past.

Simon's error was that he could buy what only grace could give.

By the way – there is a word, simony – whose origins is here from Acts 8.

It is the act of trying to buy religious position and influence.

Anytime someone tries to attain position, power, or influence by giving special favors they follow in the footsteps of Simon.

[Act 8:20-23 NKJV] 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.**"

The Holy Spirit gives Peter discernment as the heart of Simon is revealed to him.

Simon is bitter because Philip took away his livelihood – all his followers have abandoned him and are now followers of Jesus Christ.

If Simon was sincere in being used by God – Peter would have corrected him. But here, he is rebuking him and telling him to repent of his evil ways.

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.

Instead of humbling his heart before God – notice Simon's response

"Peter – pray that nothing bad happens to me as a result of my sin."

The problem with his response is that Peter can't humble Simon heart for him.

He had to do that on his own.

BTW -

We get no indication whether Simon ever repented for what he did.

The one thing that is clear is that God's kingdom is not for sale.

Amen

Let's pray...

To Receive Christ do the following:

Admit, "I am a sinner."

Confess and be willing to turn from your sin.

Believe, by faith that Jesus Christ died for you on the cross.

Receive, through prayer, Jesus Christ into your heart and receive eternal life.

Dear Lord Jesus,

I know that I am a sinner and need Your forgiveness. I believe that You died on the cross for my sins. Please forgive me for my sins and cleanse me by Your blood. I accept You by faith as my personal Lord and Savior. Give me a thirst for Your Word and Help me to follow You all of my days. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

[Num 6:24-26 NLT] 24 'May the LORD bless you and protect you. 25 May the LORD smile on you and be gracious to you. 26 May the LORD show you his favor and give you his peace.'

