

Acts Chapter 8

Acts 1 to 7, the chronicle of the birth of the new church in Jerusalem, a Jewish church. In chapter 8 it goes off to Samaria (8 to 10) and then after that to the ends of the known world at that time. So today's issue on chapter 8 is about mission.

1. Organic Missions

And Saul approved of his execution. And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. 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 (Acts 8:1-3 ESV)

Paul was grabbing everybody, putting them in and as a result people go to Judea and Samaria. Samaria is very important, you need to know the background, why is it such a big deal to go to Samaria. It is a big deal because that used to be the center of the northern kingdom and this is the king of Judea which is southern kingdom and then we actually have a couple of wars. In 700 BC the Assyrians come and take Israelites in the northern kingdom and collapsed the northern kingdom and brought them to Assyria. Then the Babylonians came at 586 BC, took Daniel all the way down to Babylon. The only difference here was that Assyrians took gentiles and filled up Israel again. So when you take the original inhabitants out and you bring other people in they will tend to intermarry. So here you intermingle and this intermingles make them un-pure and people look down on them. In fact a Jew wasn't even allowed to touch a Samaritan, because touching them will make them ceremonial unclean. The Samaritans reacted to this inferiority by saying, we have our own Bible. They have got their own Torah and that Bible consists of Genesis, Exodus, Deuteronomy, Leviticus and Numbers. All the rest are thrown away. They don't look forward to a Messiah, they look forward to what we call the Samaritan Taheb which is a restorer of the world based on Deuteronomy 13 which is basically the passage about Moses telling that a new prophet will come in my place which is actually a Messianic prophet but they have described this as a Taheb, a restorer. So they have got a truncated Bible and they worship God with that. That is why Jesus told the story of the Good Samaritan. It is so unusual that a Samaritan who is not even a priest will actually look after Jew.

Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word (Acts 8:4 ESV)

It is not the apostles who now preach the word. This is normal every day Christians going to preach the word. It is not leaders, it is not apostles and they went not because they wanted to do missions, because they were scared out of their minds of getting persecuted and locked in jail. So God does not care why you go to Samaria, as long as you go and he will use persecution sometimes to scatter them. It is left everyone goes. Once you are away from apostles, everybody tends to take up responsibilities.

Away from apostles they are less eloquent but each one takes responsibility for evangelism it is a movement ..more effective as more of them and lay persons testimony more effective

2. Urban Missions

Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word. 5 Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ.

The most strategic spot, he starts off at the city. So urban missions are very-very important. In fact if you go to the city, you bring the gospel to city then the gospel will percolate down to the towns, towns will go down to the villages. This is the strategy of evangelism which is going to be very operative today. Today urban missions are very important because it is cosmopolitan.

When you come to KL, if you speak the Malay language, a Nepali understands Malay, a Bangla understands Malay, and everybody understands Malay. If you got the one culture you can learn, you got ideas, capital, commerce, they will flourish in the cities. 21st century will be dominated by cities. Half of the world lives in cities. 100 cities of world account for 30% of the world's economies and almost all of its innovations

3. Embodied Missions

Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word. 5 Philip 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 (Acts 8:4-8 ESV)

So here you have a situation where this missions does not only come in word, they comes in body. We actually minister to the totality of mankind.

Characteristics of embodied missions

- Word
- Deed
- Community
- Racial reconciliation

5 Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ. (Acts 8:5 ESV)

WORD: So first of all evangelism or setting up of missions must be primarily based on the word. It is always the word. The only thing that will grow the church is not the supper, it is the word. So that has got to be the bedrock.

DEED: You cannot just preach the word and do nothing. So they healed, they ministered. People were paralyzed and lame were actually healed and then they have got community when they believed in the name of Jesus they

COMMUNITY: 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. (Acts 8:12 ESV)

I would imagine this church did the same thing as Acts Chapter 2 church. They met together, they broke bread, they had fellowship. They shared things in common and that is implied in the text.

RACIAL RECONCILIATION: Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit. (Acts 8:17 ESV)

Here you have Samaritans and they were not supposed to touch them and the apostles came and actually laid hands. So we actually have racial reconciliation at the end.

So in our country or town you can see people coming from all over the place, from God's point we see that people coming to our country. We can share the gospel with them.

Results of Embodied Missions:

8 So there was much joy in that city (Acts 8:4-8 ESV)

Because of the ministry of the church, the people of the city were very happy because people were getting healed, people were kinder, the whole of the place completely changes already.

When it goes well with the righteous, the city rejoices, and when the wicked perish there are shouts of gladness. 11 By the blessing of the upright a city is exalted, but by the mouth of the wicked it is overthrown (Proverbs 11:10-11 ESV)

So Proverbs tells you when Christians are active in the city, the city rejoices. This is the result of embodied ministry. So the gospel is holistic, mind, spirit and soul.

The nature of Samaritan Conversion

(ESV) 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.....

(ESV) 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.

This is a little bit unusual because Peter said in Chapter 2.

Acts 2:38 And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

It is a one-step procedure and now you actually see a two-step procedure where you repent, you baptized and then there is a space in between and this has caused a lot of speculation.

Some people think that when Philip preached the gospel. His gospel is not the real deal, so therefore they did not really believe properly the full gospel and then only they received the Holy Spirit because Simon was one of them. He did not have real faith and then they say

12 But when they believed Philip

(ESV) 21 You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God.

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

He preached about the kingdom of God. He didn't preach about you having prosperity, you getting healed. So therefore the gospel must be real for them.

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

Does the laying of hands of apostles impart the spirit?

Not really because it just confirms that the spirit is going to fall on them. The real issue is there is a dual stage conversion. Catholics and Anglicans believe you have baptism and then you have got confirmation. This was started by Hippolytus of Rome about 300 century AD.

The Pentecostal position is

You got faith, regeneration by Holy spirit and then you got baptism and then only have got baptism of Holy spirit with more power and tongues. So it is also a two-stage procedure and all of this is based on this particular passage. So we have to look at this passage closely.

We have conversion, impartation of spirit, Acts chapter 1 and 2, Samaritan church and also the Ephesian church in Acts 19. So there is a period when there is faith but no spirit imparted. This is the pattern

Is this the only pattern?

If we look at gentile conversion in Acts 10.

Before you actually have water baptism the Holy Spirit just fell on them and they believed. So there is no two-stage. Then we have got Paul's conversion. Paul baptized in the Holy Spirit first and then only he got water baptism and then later on he spoke in tongues. Then you have got Peter speaking to the new converts in Acts Chapter 2, 3000 converts there is no mention in Acts Chapter 2 that all the 3000 converts had another of getting baptized again in Holy Spirit. Then you have got 5000 converts in Acts Chapter 5. When they believed, the Bible just says there was no another ceremony part 2 of lay hands and then they all had speaking in tongues. There is none there. Why did James or Luke not record that?

There is no set pattern. You have faith then you wait but you don't have laying hands in Acts Chapter 2, the Holy Spirit just fell on them. Then you have got Acts Chapter 10 with the gentiles, no laying of hands just preaching half way and preaching the Holy Spirit fell and then you have got laying of hands in Prayer in Acts Chapter 8 which is this chapter and Acts

chapter 19, there is no set pattern. If you have no set pattern, it is very hard for you to form doctrine based on the fact that there is no set pattern and you know the Book of Acts is basically not prescriptive, it is descriptive. Because it is descriptive it is very hard for you to form any doctrine out of it. You have to take the passages which are didactic and prescriptive like Paul and then match them together with Acts.

Why then is there a gap between belief and the Holy Spirit falling on them?

John Stott writes a very good commentary in Bible Speak Today series and he has an alternative suggestion which is basically, the Jews were very prejudice against the Samaritans, even the apostle John who accompanied Peter. This is what he said.

Luke 9: 52 And he sent messengers ahead of him, who went and entered a village of the Samaritans, to make preparations for him. 53 But the people did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem. 54 And when his disciples James and John saw it, they said, "Lord, do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them?"

So these people in the village didn't like them very much, because they were Jews. Samaritans and Jews both hate each other. So there was a huge problem there. There were two centers of worship. For the Judeans worship was in the Jerusalem temple, for Samaritans it was on Mount Gerizim. That is why we go to John Chapter 4, the woman first of all asked, where should we worship, is it Jerusalem or is it Mount Gerizim. Samaritans were regarded as outcast. So if they have become Christians, nobody would believe they may have a separate religion, so therefore if they laid hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit because the Lord wanted to show solidarity, authenticity to the apostles as well as the Samaritan. So the apostle is going to come and verify that this is true faith and then the Samaritans who had hands laid on and received the Holy Spirit from the apostles also realized that this is authentic. This is one commentator says

"If God had not withheld his Spirit until the Jerusalem apostles came, converts on both sides of the cultural barrier might have found Christ without finding each other."

So from years and years of schism and separation and division, now through the Holy Spirit coming in and this one ceremonial act where the apostles of Jerusalem came and laid hands on the people of Samaria, they both became one and that is why there was a delay. If there was no delay the received the Holy Spirit on their own then they will say, we Samaritan got our own Christianity. Now you have both and they are both interdependent

Simon the Magician

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. 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." 11 And they paid attention to him because for a long time he had amazed them with his magic. 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 (Acts 8:9-13 ESV)

Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit. 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." 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." 24 And Simon answered, "Pray for me to the Lord, that nothing of what you have said may come upon me (Acts 8:17-24 ESV)

So here we have a story of a man who is full of ego, who uses magic in order to have people look up on him. His self-esteem is based on his magic and when he apparently becomes a Christian he uses money. Having money to get spiritual gift is not unusual, a lot of people will buy priesthood in those days. But let's look very closely what is this gall of bitterness? Why does that guy just wanted to buy the Holy Spirit? He did not know it was free, he just want to buy it and then Peter calls him bitter. Was he bitter? Is an attempt to buy the Holy Spirit transformed as bitter? May be if he fought with his neighbor, cannot forgive his brother, you call it bitterness.

Whenever I looked at this passage I always got confused and was wondering why this guy being condemned for being bitter. So we need to dig a little bit more into this issue here. First of all, was he a Christian? It says, Simon believed and was baptized and then after being baptized he continued with Philip. It sounds like all of us.

We have got a situation where Peter said,

20 But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money!

Peter is cursing him, this money and you both die, condemning him.

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." (Acts 8:17-23 ESV)

If we go back in the Old Testament, there is only one passage that talks about bitterness and is described as root of bitterness. So this is where you get the background and the background is Deuteronomy 29:18

Beware lest there be among you a man or woman or clan or tribe whose heart is turning away today from the Lord our God to go and serve the gods of those nations. Beware lest there be among you a root bearing poisonous and bitter fruit, 19 one who, when he hears the words of

this sworn covenant, blesses himself in his heart, saying, **‘I shall be safe, though I walk in the stubbornness of my heart.’**

The word of covenant says, I am your God you shall be my people. This means you belong to him but yet you walk in the stubbornness of your heart. That means un-forgiveness, rebel, and idolatry. So he was basically like so many of us

Heb 12: 15 See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no “root of bitterness” springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled;

The trouble is if you teach this kind of religion, others will be defiled. Joseph Prince teaches hyper grace. Hyper grace is everything is grace, no need to do confession. All you have to do is do the Lord’s Supper, proclaim grace and you are saved. So it does not matter what you do. So therefore

- Secure and presumptuous
- Based on sinners prayer and past experiences I am safe from judgment
- I can ignore a life of vigilance in the fight of faith and the pursuit of holiness.
- Such a person or a doctrine defiles many

If you preach grace to the whole world, everything is just grace and there is no holiness, there is no judgment, nothing else, everybody will come to your church, your church will be full and this is what bitterness is. Someone who continues with the stubbornness of his heart based on the fact that he is saved and this should put upon all of us a little bit of Godly fear that we cannot say that just because I am a child of God apparently so I can do whatever the heck I want because that is you may not be. So if you look at the fruits of this man’s life it would be unlikely that he is actually transformed, he may say the sinner’s prayer but it is not inside his heart. So in the world there are two kinds of people, Batman and Superman. Batman is a legalist, rules apply and Superman is when the rules don’t apply, he can fly. So you have both sights, the legalist will try to judge other people. The legalist will have low self-esteem, trying very hard that this will be over confident, do all sorts of things but he is basically blind. So we actually have two extremes in the church. You are caught in the bond of inequity; basically they are still in prison by the devil. Their thoughts are turning away from the lord. We are also in danger that many people in mega churches where apparently do not join and become Christian but they do as they like. As long as I go to church on Sunday that is okay, the rest of the week I can do whatever I want and they will elect people like business people or rich people to run the church because their attitude is not changed. So therefore the things that they admire are still the same that is what the world admires. So we have to be careful.

The Ethiopian Eunuch

Acts 8:26 (ESV) Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” This is a desert place

So all of a sudden the Holy Spirit tells Philip to go down

(ESV) And he rose and went. And there was an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure.

History is the Queen of Sheba went into king's tent to visit Solomon and she brought gifts and history has it apparently. So if you look it up they must have had a wild affair because when she went back to her own country in Ethiopia she had a son and the son is from Solomon. So they brought the Jewish faith to Ethiopia. So here we actually have a situation where the Queen of Sheba, legend has it we cannot prove it, that's why this Ethiopian Eunuch is actually going to Jerusalem to worship.

Acts 8:27-28 (ESV) He had come to Jerusalem to worship 28 and was returning, seated in his chariot, and he was reading the prophet Isaiah

Now let's look, first of all you will see he is black in color. Jewish people are very-very ethnocentric, probably much like the Chinese, it is a huge barrier, and he is black. Number 2, he is also very rich. He was also the finance minister of Ethiopia. He is in-charge of all the money, the treasury. So he has got a lot of money, he has got lot of power. He has taken a huge risk getting in leaving his post for one year and going to temple. He is also a eunuch, which means in that society family honor is the most important thing. For him to become a finance minister he must give up his male sex and he climb to the top and yet he is willing now to give everything up. For a man in that time family honor is the most important thing. Everything is on the family, nowadays we are so individualistic, it does not matter but for him he gave up everything and yet he is willing to give up everything to go to Jerusalem and risk everything. He must have had a great emptiness in his heart. Though he goes up to Jerusalem to look and he is coming back and he is reading the Book of Isaiah and you think when he went to the temple he got a chance to worship but he can only worship from outside of the temple. He is also a ceremonially unclean if you touch a dead body. Eunuch can never go in. So imagine he goes all the way there and he feels upset that he has to be turned away and he is reading Isaiah 50 and this is verse which probably has read

Isaiah 56:3-5 (ESV) Let not the foreigner who has joined himself to the Lord say, "The Lord will surely separate me from his people"; and let not the eunuch say, "Behold, I am a dry tree." 4 For thus says the Lord: "To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose the things that please me and hold fast my covenant, 5 I will give in my house and within my walls a monument and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off.

Acts 8:29-31 (ESV) And the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over and join this chariot." 30 So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" 31 And he said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

So Isaiah in 50s writes about this animatic figure who is a servant.

Acts 8:32-34 (ESV) Now the passage of the Scripture that he was reading was this: "Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter and like a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he opens not his mouth.³³ In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth."³⁴ And the eunuch said to Philip, "About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?"

So basically now Philip takes an opportunity to tell him about Jesus Christ who basically is the suffering servant. So when you are reading about is the suffering servant. He came few years ago and he died and you notice the entire Bible all its language is used to describe this substitution of this lamb being led before the shearer who basically died in its place. If you look at the battle language, Christ fights the battle on our behalf.

If you look at market's place, language where we are slaves. Christ pays the ransom. If you look at the imagery of the temple Christ is the ultimate sacrifice. If you look at the law of courts, Christ plays penalty. So everywhere we talk about is substitutions. Substitution is in the heart and soul of the entire gospel. So it is beautiful. Someone dying on your behalf is the most powerful compelling story of love anyone will ever tell you because nobody will die for you.

The Gospel and Racial Diversity

Lamin Sanneh looked at where Christianity is. He figures that most religions are basically an extension of culture to ensure societal cohesiveness. So wherever you want society to bind together you actually start a religion. So therefore he figures that most religions when they start out, they actually don't go very far from where they start off because it is born out of the culture. Islam is always around the 10/40 window where it first started. If we look at Hinduism is only around India and Buddhism is in a similar situation. But if we look at Christianity, it is basically all over the world. In fact China will be in about 30 years' time the largest Christian country in the world. Why is it so diverse? Because the diversity undercuts ethnic pride and points to grace. Salvation by other means will allow us to judge others less than ourselves based on our efforts. Why is Christianity very inclusive? Christianity is inclusive and suitable for all cultures simply because it is based on grace.

"Mr. Trump judges by group: Muslims are untrustworthy, women are weak or treacherous, the disabled are to be mocked, Jews are tough negotiators, African Americans are living lives of desperation, Mexicans are rapists — and their American offspring are unfit to serve as federal judges." **Washington Post editorial 2/11/16**

What is racism?

You measure other people by your standard and when you measure somebody by your standard, you are number one like everybody got to be number two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten. As long as we have ideas as this, let's say you have a strong God, everybody obeys his law will be saved then everybody else who cannot obey his law will be side-lined. The thing about Christianity is that it is based on substitution and the substitution is based on grace. So no matter whether you are white, you are black or you are colourless it

is not dependant on your effort. Because grace undercuts all ethnic superiority. Since a religion is a faith that draws all mankind, it is the only faith that can draw all mankind together. That is why racial reconciliation is extremely important. When we talk about racial reconciliation only the gospel can do it and if you come to a church and you see a church filled with different coloured people that confirms the authenticity of the gospel. If you come here and see all china man, big problem for you, because your gospel only work for china man. It is not powerful enough to reach to anybody else. So the diversity and racial reconciliation of a church is extremely important.

Psalms 96:3-4 (ESV) Declare his glory among the nations his marvelous works among all the peoples! 4 For great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; he is to be feared above all gods.

The greatness of our God is reflected in the diversity of the people who actually worship. For example, if you look at a piece of art, how many of you think this looks great.

The fact that God is praised and worshiped and adored among all cultures and all different kind of people they all bow these and say this is God, is actually glory to him.

Romans says, praise the lord all you gentiles and let all the different ethnic groups extol him

Romans 15:18 (ESV) For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedience—by word and deed

The greatness of Christ to bring all the nations together

So we would like to see in this church especially with all the migrants coming into our city that we are a church that has got every ethnic group and we get along and the fact that we get along is a great testimony to others that our gospel works. So don't ever look at a Nepali or look at a Bangla and think you are better than him, because the gospel is a gospel of grace. You do not deserve what you got.

The eunuch might have gone back to Ethiopia and spread the gospel there because in AD 300 Ethiopia was the first country to be thoroughly Christian, 60% of that population became Christians through one Ethiopian minister of finance. He went back and spread the gospel there. Recently Ethiopian Christians, 20 of them were martyred on the shores of Tripoli in Libya. This is a great honour. This is the Christianity that was passed down from them for 2000 years ago and the church has maintained.

So imagine all of us we have the gospel of Jesus Christ. Wherever we are we have to share the work of God. The eunuch did this and he touched an entire nation and we could do the same.