

The First Missionary

Acts 8:1-25

Pastor Johanan Justin

The Church is called not just to be a city on a hill but also for our light to shine *individually* before those around us. We see in Acts 8 how the church reacted to Stephen's death and the persecution they faced.

The Early Church: Scattered or Dispersed?

1. Bad News vs. Real News

Acts 8 opens with bad news: on the day that Stephen was stoned to death, a city-wide persecution against Christians began. A man named Saul was at its forefront, seizing and imprisoning believers. This forced many believers to flee to the outer regions of Judea and Samaria. Yet despite the bad news of persecution, there was still great courage – several believers had courageously buried and mourned Stephen's death, an act of protest against the unjust execution of Stephen. Philip, a Hellenist and one of the seven chosen to oversee the daily distribution to the poor in the church, had fled to Samaria but was proclaiming the gospel to them (vv. 5-6). The result of Philip's ministry was much joy in the city despite the bad news (v. 8). The Christians were able to discern the real news beneath the bad news: it is Jesus who has the authority, not Saul and the religious leaders. The Church is at her best when she is on the move, on mission, and making much of Jesus Christ. Making disciples and being a witness of the gospel must be the heart of the church's mission. Take heart as sojourners and exiles! In the face of bad news, behold the real news: Jesus will

advance His kingdom, shine His light through us, and lead us to find rest in Him.

2. Great Power vs. Real Power

Simon had a great supernatural power that brought him much attention and influence (v. 11). Yet his great power was not from God. In contrast, Philip displayed real power that came from the Holy Spirit: this brought many to follow and believe in the gospel, even Simon himself (vv. 12-13a). Philip, relying on the Holy Spirit, displayed real power that drew the Samaritans to hear and believe in the gospel. When Christians demonstrate real power, the ears and hearts of unbelievers are open to really hear the gospel. The Church is at her most effective when she relies on the Holy Spirit to demonstrate real power! Every culture has its own "great power". How can we as Christians wield "real power" and lead non-Christians to Christ?

3. False Faith vs. Real Faith

Peter called out Simon for thinking he could obtain the gift of God with money (vv. 20-21). Simon had a false faith. On the other hand, the apostles displayed real faith that is grounded in the gospel. They had gone down to Samaria and laid hands on Samaritans, a people the Jews hated. They did it because Christ had first done it for them. They cherished the gospel, and that was also behind their strong response to Simon's request. With that gospel-sharpness, Peter rebuked Simon and called him to repent. The

Church is at her sharpest when she cherishes the gospel.

The crucifixion of Christ was ordained and allowed by God. This should encourage believers who are sojourners and exiles on this earth to live as a church ever on a mission and move. The authority is not in the world's hands but God's. The sufferings we face for the gospel will never exceed the boundaries set in God's will. But more than that, we never simply suffer for suffering's sake. There is always a resurrection that comes with suffering (John 16:21-22). Our God turns our mourning into dancing; weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning (Ps. 30:5b, 11-12).