

The Gospel Goes to Samaria
Acts #11 | 8:1-40
November 1, 2020

Introduction

Romans 1 ¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, first to the Jew, and also to the Greek.

- Such great news! And such clear distinctions
- But...what do you do about the messy middle space?

Acts 1:8 ...Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria...then to the ends of the earth |

- This is a transitional section, the gray areas before the ends of the earth
- All sorts of messiness in this passage, almost nothing is clear cut
- Two converts: both are sort of Jewish, but sort of not | GOSPEL WIDENING

Darrell Bock Acts 8 is full of contrasts showing the expansion of the mission: there is work in the north (Samaria) and the south (Gaza on the coast); a magician and a government figure are exposed to the message, as are Samaritans and God-fearers from Africa. God is mightily at work with a wide array of people. (*I would add a wide array of messy people*)

Big idea: The Holy Spirit is not afraid of messy people or messy situations.

Scattered But Preaching

¹ Saul agreed with putting him to death. On that day a severe persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout the land of Judea and Samaria. ² Devout men buried Stephen and mourned deeply over him. ³ Saul, however, was ravaging the church. He would enter house after house, drag off men and women, and put them in prison. ⁴ So those who were scattered went on their way preaching the word.

Samaria Hears

⁵ Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Messiah to them. ⁶ The crowds were all paying attention to what Philip said, as they listened and saw the signs he was performing. ⁷ For unclean spirits, crying out with a loud voice, came out of many who were possessed, and many who were paralyzed and lame were healed. ⁸ So there was great joy in that city.

Samaria | (Luz, Bethel, Ephraim)

- Both a city and a geographic region
- Headquarters for divided kingdom | 1 Kings 12-13
- Conquered and exiled by Assyria | 2 Kings 17-18
 - Repopulated with foreigners, weakens tribalism
 - Alternate Jewish religion emerged
- Constant tension with Judea | John 4 (Jesus and the Samaritan woman)

National, regional, or family history won't scare away The Spirit and can't stop the gospel.

Simon the Sorcerer

⁹ A man named Simon had previously practiced sorcery in that city and amazed the Samaritan people, while claiming to be somebody great. ¹⁰ They all paid attention to him, from the least of them to the greatest, and they said, "This man is called the Great Power of God." ¹¹ They were attentive to him because he had amazed them with his sorceries for a long time.

- Aramaic / Samaritan OT words that are associated with divinity
- Complex, but...in the messy Samaritan religion, he is viewed as divine (Angel of the Lord?)

Simon Believes!

¹² But when they believed Philip, as he proclaimed the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized. ¹³ Even Simon himself believed. And after he was baptized, he followed Philip everywhere and was amazed as he observed the signs and great miracles that were being performed.

- *Sure looks like a genuine conversion here. There is some skepticism out there...more in a moment*
- **Note:** in this conversion and the next, baptism and faith are **inextricably** tied together
 - Baptism and belief occupy synonymous grammatical positions

Receiving the Holy Spirit

¹⁴ When the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. ¹⁵ After they went down there, they prayed for them so that the Samaritans might receive the Holy Spirit because he had not yet come down on any of them. ¹⁶ (They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.) ¹⁷ Then Peter and John laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

- Only time in Acts where such a delay happens. Typical pattern:
 - Repentance, belief, baptism, and Spirit *at* salvation
 - Continual re-filling by the Spirit in an ongoing manner
- *So why the messy delay here? Apostolic authentication of "suspect" Samaritans*

Simon's Sinful Motives

¹⁸ 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 I lay hands on may receive the Holy Spirit." ²⁰ But Peter told him, "May your silver be destroyed with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! ²¹ You have no part or share in this matter, because your heart is not right before God. ²² Therefore repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, your heart's intent may be forgiven. ²³ For I see you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by wickedness." ²⁴ "Pray to the Lord for me," Simon replied, "so that nothing you have said may happen to me."

- Peter is hard on him, because he wasn't there from the beginning like Philip
- Seemingly sincere repentance?

Personal sin and mixed motives won't scare away the The Spirit and can't stop the gospel.

South of Israel

²⁵ So, after they had testified and spoken the word of the Lord, they traveled back to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans. ²⁶ An angel of the Lord spoke to Philip: “Get up and go south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” (This is the desert road.)

²⁷ So he got up and went. There was an Ethiopian man, a eunuch and high official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of her entire treasury. He had come to worship in Jerusalem ²⁸ and was sitting in his chariot on his way home, reading the prophet Isaiah aloud.

- Ethiopia = aithops (darkened by the sun) | Gaza in the south, *almost* to Egypt/Africa
 - Might not be *modern* Ethiopia, possibly Sudan | general term for sub-Egypt
- Candace = not a name but a title. Kings “reigned” but the Queens “ruled”
- Many interesting connections in the history of Judaism and Christianity with Africa
 - Early Christians in Africa like Augustine and Athanasius
 - Solomon & the Queen of Sheba | rumor of the ark of the covenant going there
 - Lemba tribe in Zimbabwe | left Israel after Nehemiah’s reform
- Question: is this guy Jewish? Scholars are divided on both sides.
 - I vote yes because of the structure of the book of Acts | Gentiles coming soon!
- Either way, he’s deeply devoted: travel, expensive scroll, eunuch’s participation
 - On his way home, I wonder if he was sad over being excluded?

Isaiah 56 ³ No foreigner who has joined himself to the Lord should say, “The Lord will exclude me from his people,” and the eunuch should not say, “Look, I am a dried-up tree.” ⁴ For the Lord says this: “For the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, and choose what pleases me, and hold firmly to my covenant, ⁵ I will give them, in my house and within my walls, a memorial and a name better than sons and daughters... ⁷ I will bring them to my holy mountain and let them rejoice in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be acceptable on my altar, for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations.” ⁸ This is the declaration of the Lord God, who gathers the dispersed of Israel: “I will gather to them still others besides those already gathered.”

The Spirit Leads

²⁹ The Spirit told Philip, “Go and join that chariot.” ³⁰ When Philip ran up to it, he heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, “Do you understand what you’re reading?” ³¹ “How can I,” he said, “unless someone guides me?” So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. ³² Now the Scripture passage he was reading was this: *He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb is silent before its shearer, so he does not open his mouth.* ³³ *In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who will describe his generation? For his life is taken from the earth.*

- The **GOSPEL** is itself messy: the slaughter of the perfect Lamb of God

Sincere Motives

³⁴ The eunuch said to Philip, “I ask you, who is the prophet saying this about—himself or someone else?” ³⁵ Philip proceeded to tell him the good news about Jesus, beginning with that Scripture. ³⁶ As they were traveling down the road, they came to some water. The eunuch said, “Look, there’s water. What would keep me from being baptized?” ³⁸ So he ordered the chariot to stop, and both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him.

Geographic distance and physical issues won't scare away The Spirit and can't stop the gospel.

Strange Ending

³⁹When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him any longer but went on his way rejoicing. ⁴⁰Philip appeared in Azotus, and he was traveling and preaching the gospel in all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

- Last we hear from Philip until ch. 21. He settles down in Caesarea, and has four girls!
- “Carried away” | could mean “forceful,” same word for soldiers taking away
- “Appeared” is the Greek word for “find” | Like “he found himself”
 - Could be a more dramatic teleportation, could be “The Spirit forcefully led him away, and he found himself after he ended up in Azotus.”

How Can We Apply This?

Personal: Are you honest with God, yourself, and others about the mess in your life?

- Non-Christian: bring your mess to Jesus and receive his grace
- Christian: God sees, knows, cares, he loves. Family history? Personal sin? Physical issue?
- Are you really scared or ashamed? We're all a complete trainwreck. Loved by God!

Corporate: Do you believe that God could do amazing work in our collective messes?

- Our church is a mess. Literally, the building. But also new leaders, old bad habits, merge, a move, and a building project. Do you think that scares God or stops him from working?
- Our nation is a mess. Divided and fighting. You think

Living in community...is not always easy or pretty. In fact, things may get ugly...The challenges are real, but these are precisely what we must face in order to grow and mature in our true self.

Scripture reminds us that in the midst of broken, sinful, frustrating people, God's Spirit is at work creating a transformed community. God is not surprised by our brokenness. His way of maturing us isn't thwarted. In fact, it is *in* and *by* the messiness that God does the supernatural work of drawing us into the likeness of his Son...The Spirit is most active when there is great work to do.

— Rich Plass and Jim Cofield

Bring your mess and honesty to Jesus. Don't wallow in it and beat yourself up. Don't celebrate it in a lighthearted way. Bring it to the horrible cross and receive the cleansing love of Jesus.

Benediction

2 John 3 ³Grace, mercy, and peace will be with us, from God the Father and from Jesus Christ the Father's Son, in truth and love.