

**The Persecuted Church Reaches Out**

Scripture: Acts 8:1-8

Code: 1725

1973

Let's have prayer. Father, we come to You now and we ask in a special way that You might really teach us...speak. We don't want just to hear a voice, a voice that is human, a man's voice. We wanna hear You speak. So Father, help me to be able to allow You to speak through the text, so that this can be the time when the Spirit is our teacher. Give us ears to listen, hearts to hear. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Turning in our Bibles this morning to Acts chapter 8, we come to a great transitional portion of the book of Acts; one which establishes for us the second area of mission for the church as it moved out from Jerusalem into Judea and Samaria. And the thing which really moved the church out was the death of Stephen, which we just studied last Lord's Day.

A missionary to Egypt told an American audience how a fellow missionary had seen a little Arab Muslim boy in the water, drowning. And the missionary had dashed into the surf to attempt to rescue the child. By some strange confusion, the missionary had drowned and the child made it to safety. Somebody commented to this missionary afterwards, regarding the sacrifice of his fellow missionary, "Isn't it rather pointless for a well trained, well equipped, strategic individual like such a missionary to give his life for a Muslim Arab boy?"

We might ask the same question in the case of Stephen. With all of the capacities that Stephen had, with all of the capability that he had, with all the personal dynamic that was his, with the energy and the power of a Spirit-filled life, with such a great ability to handle the Old Testament, why was it necessary that that man have a ministry that was so brief? Why did it have to be that he got himself into the kind of situation that he was in, and it cost him his life? Why is it that that has to happen? Isn't it rather pointless?

His speech really seemed to have nothing but negative results. It was the trigger that set off the persecution of all Christians. It was because of Stephen that the whole avalanche came down. For another thing, his public testimony unleashed the anger of a Jew by the name of Saul, who set about killing Christians and trying to extinguish the Church as rapidly as he possibly could. And so it seems from just a cursory view, that the whole situation of Stephen's death was tragic in the case of Stephen, and tragic in the case of everything that ever happened after Stephen. Because the

persecution wound up scattering the believers, it just fractured the fragile fellowship and sent them all over everywhere.

But you see, to make that kind of evaluation is not to really understand how the Holy Spirit works. The Holy Spirit is in the business of turning negatives into positives, of taking disasters and turning them into miracles. You can't blockade the Holy Spirit. He likes to take those kind of tragedies and turn them into victory.

If you've been with us in our study of the book of Acts, you know what He's done with Peter and John. Every time they got in a hopeless situation, it just was a greater opportunity to preach the gospel. Every time they got into a negative scene, the Spirit of God turned it into a positive. Every time the persecution arose, the preaching followed right on it's heels. And God allowed the gospel to reach into areas and the hearts of people who could never otherwise be reached, other than through persecution. It's kind of like trying to stamp out a fire, and the harder you jump on it, the more you scatter the embers and start fires all over everywhere. And that's exactly what happened. They started jumping all over the church in Jerusalem and all they did was send the embers all over the world, because that's how the Holy Spirit works. And we've said before and we say it again: "They'll never avoid the negative situation."

That's what the Holy Spirit wants to use. And I'm not talking about sin; I'm talking about a negative situation. God uses persecution. And the first great missionary movement of the church began with persecution. The church had been in Jerusalem all this time, in Jerusalem, and finally the catalyst that shocked the church out was persecution. Tertullian said, "The blood of the martyrs has become the seed of the church." Stephen's death was a catalyst. In fact, persecution was so tied in with preaching Jesus Christ, that the word for witness is *martyros*, and it came to mean martyr. It just was natural, seemingly. It was just intrinsic to being a believer that you confer to the world and you got a negative reaction. But that was only impetus for new evangelism and new opportunity.

And so as we approach chapter 8, the church takes a great giant step. It's the first missionary effort of the church outside Jerusalem. Stephen's martyrdom burst the church forth from its temple husk, exploding the believers into Samaria, Judea, Philistine coast there, Antioch, Cyprus, Asia Minor, finally even over in Europe. And all of this because of persecution.

Now we know, as we've studied Acts up to chapter 7, that the church began as a very Jewish thing. It was, of course, involving Jewish people. In Acts 6 we saw the first step, kind of just moving away a little bit because Stephen began to preach, not to Jerusalem Jews, but to Hellenist Jews, or Jews who lived in the Greek speaking world; foreign Jews.

And that was a little bit of an extension that Stephen began to make, and Philip and those other early men who were selected to serve the church in chapter 6. All of them having names that were Greek,

indicated that some of these Greek speaking Jews were coming to Christ. And so the extension came from these men to the Jews who didn't live in Jerusalem.

That's the first gentle extension. But still, they hadn't gone past the Jews. But in chapter 8, the church moves out. And first it goes to Judea and Samaria and then at the end of chapter eight, we even see Philip embarking on a ministry in the Gentile world.

If you go back to Acts 1:8 in your mind, I'll read you these words. Here's what Jesus says to be the pattern of the expansion of the church: "But ye shall receive power after the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you shall be witness unto Me." Now here comes the pattern. "Both in Jerusalem and all Judea." Now, Jerusalem was a city in which, which was in Judea, as a province or country. And so He said "In Jerusalem and all Judea, then in Samaria, and then the outermost part of the earth." Now there you have the outline of the book of Acts. First in Jerusalem, then Judea, then Samaria, then the world. And so in 8, we're beginning to move out of Jerusalem, into Judea and Samaria; the gospel extending. And the Samaritans, I think, in the mind of God, formed a perfect bridge to the Gentile world, because the Samaritans were half-breeds. They were part Jewish, part Gentile. And so it was a little extension, then to go smack into the Gentile situation. But even in chapter 8 later on, as Philip encounters the Ethiopian eunuch, he begins to move in a world that is completely removed from Judaism. So chapter 8, then, is the beginning of the church moving out. And it's a sad thing in a sense, as well as a great thing, to see the gospel move out. It's a sad thing to see the door shut on Jerusalem.

As we continue in the book of Acts, Jerusalem takes kind of a backseat, whereas in the first 7 chapters it was dominant. And it serves to point up repeatedly to us, that opportunity ignored is opportunity lost. The Bible says salvation is of the Jews. The apostle Paul said, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ," Romans 1:16. "It's the power of God and the salvation of everyone that believeth, to the Jew" - what - "first. Also to the Gentile." God, in terms of the priority of the extension of His message, came to Israel first. And the sad thing is that they rejected the truth. And finally the door was shut. Stephen gave final testimony to the leaders of Jerusalem. And they reacted as they always had, with hard apostate hearts. And they killed him. Now the door was shut. The leadership of Jerusalem had established itself, finally, in antagonism to Christianity. They had a prior claim on the gospel. They lost everything. And it began to move out. It's exciting for us, for we are the Gentiles to whom it came. It's tragic for Israel.

Now as we see the church move out in Chapter 8, I want to show you three simple points. This is just basic general narrative. We'll get into some really more involved detail of exciting things as we go further in the chapter. But this is just kind of getting us going. We are just getting off the ground a little bit here. But there are three things that stand out in a progressive way in the expansion of the church.

The church expanded, and as it expanded in this first opening 13 verses, three things kind of come progressively. First came the persecution, which lead to the preaching, which lead to the productivity. And those are the three things you want to consider.

First of all, let's look at the persecution. Now the persecution had been sort of hit and miss up to this time because there had been somewhat of an antagonism toward particularly Peter and John. They had been in and out of jail constantly. And then there arose a little more antagonism towards Stephen, but the persecution reached its culmination in the first martyr, Stephen. Finally they got to the point where they just killed him, and that was the extreme point in the early persecution. They hadn't gotten that far yet, and here they finally arrive. So, persecution really just kind of flamed at the death of Stephen. That kind of kicked it all off. And the central figure in the persecution as it began here is a man by the name of Saul. And being from the tribe of Benjamin, no doubt he was named for the great King of the Old Testament, Saul himself.

Now let's look at verse 1, and see the persecution. "And Saul was consenting unto his death." Now that's really a P.S. to chapter 7. Stephen was stoned and Saul gave his approval. It says in verse 58 that the people who are taking off their robes, in order to get all their power into throwing rocks at Stephen, laid their garments at the feet of a man named Saul. Saul, we know, was also from Cilicia, so it was very likely that he was in the argument with Stephen that went on back in chapter 6, when Stephen, in verse 9, was moving from the synagogues, from synagogue to synagogue, arguing with the Hellenistic Jews, and very likely got into some debates with this man Saul, who was no small time operator.

He was a brilliant individual. He was a Pharisee, jealous for Judaism. He was the kind of guy who was committed. I like commitment, even if it's commitment to the degree that Paul went to. At least he was committed to something. He was zealous in killing Christians. In some ways that's better than being apathetic about good things. Not in all ways, but in some ways. Nevertheless, he was a committed kind of guy, which makes for a great conversion, right? When he got committed, he just redirected all that zeal that he had. Praise God for it.

But he was there consenting until Stephen's death. This means that he gave full approval. It's very likely that he may have been the ramrod in the whole deal since they were putting their clothes at his feet. He was involved from the very beginning of this conflict with Stephen. But you know, little did he know as he stood there and kind of gloated over what they were doing to Stephen, that he would go through infinitely more than Stephen ever went through. Stephen had the wonderful blessing of dying the first time. Paul just keep getting it, and getting it, and getting it, and never died until finally they chopped his head off in Rome.

I remember the words of Ananias, in chapter 9. We'll get to the fact that in Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus, he then met with this man Ananias. And Ananias said to him, "I will show him

how" - the Lord said to Ananias, "I will show him how great things he must suffer for My name's sake." Paul is going to get a lot more than Stephen ever got. What's interesting is, you study the life of Paul, how many things in his life parallel Stephen. The Jews, for example, disputed and resisted Stephen in the synagogue; so they did with Paul. The Jews rejected Stephen's gospel; so they did with Paul. Stephen was accused of blasphemy; so was Paul. Stephen was accused of speaking against Moses, the Law, and the Temple; so was Paul, at least four times in the book of Acts. Stephen was dragged out of the city; so was Paul. They thought he was dead after they stoned him, and \_\_\_\_\_ chapter 14 they dragged him out. Stephen was brought before the Sanhedrin; so was Paul. Stephen was stoned; so was Paul. Stephen was a martyr; so was Paul. And so everything that Paul was gloating over that day, he paid for, in his own life, for the cause of Christ. And you wanna know something? It wasn't punishment for him; it was glory. Boy, that's a change of attitude, isn't it?

Just a footnote there. In verse 1 it says that Saul was consenting unto his death. The word "death" there is a very vivid word. It is used often in medical terms and old Greek writings. And it has to do with the word "destruction." It is to show that his death was not just dying; he was destroyed, just to show the horror of the kind of death that he would die under the stones that fell on him.

Now the death of Stephen, then, set off the fireworks. You know, it's just like seeing a little bit of blood, and all of the sudden they just got bloodthirsty. A little bit of blood like piranha, you know? They saw it and they wanted to rip and shred the church. And so, that's exactly what they did, and Saul was the prime mover. Verse 1: "And at that time, right then, there was a great persecution against the church, which was at Jerusalem." This was just the thing that kicked it off, and now we are beginning to see the fulfillment of the Lord's words in John 15 when He said, "Don't be surprised that the world hates you. They hate Me, they shall hate you. They shall persecute you." Chapter 16 begins by saying "They'll drag you out of the synagogues and they'll kill you." And now it's beginning to happen. And Saul was the leader, and it may have been that right there at the death of Stephen, he got the whole deal organized. "At that same time" it says. He might have pulled that mob around him, and the very seed of bloodshed was Stephen was dying, was the thing that really spawned the group of people that followed this man Saul around to kill Christians.

Now we don't have any of the gory details of what Saul did specifically, we only have some general terms. But whatever it was, it resulted in the people being scattered all over everywhere and being driven out of the city. He just drove them out, and I am sure that the ones who were driven out were dominantly the Hellenistic Jews, the Grecian Jews who didn't really belong there. And it may have been in these early times that the whole movement was still associated with Stephen as a Grecian Jew.

And so, many of the Jerusalem Jews still remained there, because the church in Jerusalem did remain, and in fact, in history as we go from this point on, we find the Jerusalem church made up only of Jerusalem Jews. So they likely - many of them did stay. Some of them perhaps couldn't flee, and

so many of them stayed. Perhaps some of them did flee, and the Hellenistic Jews, undoubtedly they fled. So it was a great exodus and it scattered them. The end of verse 1: "They were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea, Samaria" and I like this, "except the apostles." They stayed back to hold the fort.

Now they were courageous men, and like the faithful watchmen, they remained at their post. There were believers in Jerusalem that needed to be continually nurtured. There were those who couldn't flee and they needed to be ministered to. And this, there were those there to be reached, for the cause of Christ. Oh yes, the leaders have been rejecting, but not all of the people had. Not all of the people. And I say that in reference to verse 2. It says, "And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him." And I think that's a note that the Spirit adds to show us why the apostles stayed there. There were still devout men there.

Now, let me give you a thought on that. The devout men, I do not think, refers to Christians. If they were referring to Christians, it would have said "believers," or "the brothers," or something. But it says "devout men". That's a term that has to do with pious Jews. And what it says is this: "There were some Jews in Jerusalem, though not Christians, who still believed that the murder of Stephen was wrong." That's kind of nice to know. There was still some fertile soil for the gospel in Jerusalem. The apostles stayed; devout men carried Stephen.

You know, it's interesting that criminals, according to the Jewish law, had to have a fitting burial. They had to be buried. They couldn't just let the body lie around. They had to be buried. But the law also said that they were forbidden to weep or lament over their death. And here you have a direct protest to devout men - not only bury Stephen - but they did make lamentation over him. So in a very real sense - and incidentally it was probably very public. What they were doing there was reacting by protest to the murder of this man. Now here's some fertile soil for the apostles to reach for the gospel of Jesus Christ.

So they stayed behind and kind of acted like a home base. You remember that James later became the head of the Jerusalem church, and things still kind of tied into Jerusalem as we go along. You remember in chapter 15, the great Jerusalem council and all that. So they did remain there, but a great mass of these Jews were scattered, and they went everywhere.

Now I like verse 3. It says this: "As for Saul," meanwhile, back at the persecution, "he made havoc of the church." I mean, this guy was something. Entering into every house, he just went right down the block, every house. If he could find a Christian - hailing men and women - committed them to prison. Just yanking Christians out of everywhere. He's the prime mover in blasting the church out of Jerusalem. I mean, once they were disposed of their homes, I am sure many of them took off and high tailed it out of town.

It's interesting to note that he had the full authority of Jewish leaders. Chapter 26, and verse 10, the apostle Paul indicates that he had this right from the chief priests and all. It says in verse 10 and - verse 9 he says, "I did many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth, which thing I also did in Jerusalem. And many of the saints that I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priest." They hired him to do this. "And when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them. And I punished them often in every synagogue and compelled them to blaspheme." And the compelling them to blaspheme is probably some sort of torture to get them to renounce their faith. "And being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them, even into foreign cities." Now that guy was really zealous. He chased Christians all over everywhere.

It's interesting to think about the fact that he thought he was right. He thought he was right. He wasn't just some kind of a horrible criminal. He really believed in what he was doing. Galatians 1:13 proves that: "Just as you heard of my manner of life in time past, in the Jew's religion. How that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God and wasted it. And profited in the Jew's religion above many my equals and mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers. I thought I was pleasing God. I was so zealous for my religion." But he was wrong.

You know how people say, "It doesn't matter what you believe, as long as you believe." That is so dumb. Paul believed. He was wrong. He was zealous for his religion. You say, "If a man is religious, leave him alone." If that man's religion says he kills me, then I don't have to buy his religion. And if my religion says I run around and kill everybody that doesn't agree with my religion, then there's something wrong with my religion. Don't tell me that you can believe anything that you want. Paul was wrong....absolutely wrong.

It's like the new religion they invented at St. Quentin. One of the things they ask for - did you read that in the paper? One of the things they ask for, in those demands that they made, was the right for this new religion. And you hear what the tenants for this new religion were? Porterhouse steak, and several other things, and sexual privileges, and all this kind of stuff.

See? You cannot say that everybody's entitled to his own religion, and all religions are true and right. That isn't so. There is only one way to God and that's through Jesus Christ. And Judaism was right all the way until Jesus came, and then it was wrong. It didn't include the fulfillment in the Messiah. And Judaism today is no different than the most primitive paganism because it's nothing but the absence of God, because if Christ isn't there, God isn't there.

And so Paul was zealous, but he was wrong. He was wrong. He made havoc. The word "made havoc" literally means he "exercised brutal and sadistic cruelty. It's used of a wild boar, ravaging a vineyard in some old Greek literature. Another old Greek writing has it, an animal savagely tearing a body apart, and it's the same word, here translated "made havoc." You could say, as for Saul, he tore

the church apart.

You know something? It's interesting to psychoanalyze Paul. This thing really hurt Paul in years to come. You know, all of us have things we can't forget, right? Dumb things, sinful things, painful things that we've said to hurt something. Or things that we've done that were so foolish and only hurt us. We all have those things in our background that keep rearing their ugly heads at us from time to time and we wish we could forget. Can you imagine living your life like Paul, all your life long knowing that you had slaughtered hundreds of Christians? Well, it bothered him. There's no question in my mind that it bothered him. Chapter 26, I just read you how he said he did it. In Galatians 1 he repeated he did it. In chapter 22 of Acts, verse 3, he says "I am verily a man who is a Jew, born in Tarsus, city of Cilicia, brought up in this city of Jerusalem, at the feet of Gamaliel, taught according to the perfect manner of law of the fathers, zealous toward God, and I persecuted this way under the death, binding, delivering into prisons both men and women." Same statement. He seems to need to say this, partly from the psychological standpoint, I'm sure just the relief of expressing his honesty at saying it, because it was a hard thing to carry in his heart. Later on in the very same chapter, in verse 19, he says "And I said 'Lord they know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue those that believed on Thee. And when the blood of Thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by consenting unto his death and kept the raiment of them that slew him.'" In other words, there were times he didn't want to talk to God about it.

So it was a hard thing for Paul, I'm sure, to remember these days. He was zealous. He raged against the church like a wild beast. And I like just a little note that Luke makes there. He says "men and women" which indicates there was no exception for the weaker sex. He entered into every house. Most Christians in the book of Hebrews, chapter 10 verse 32, 34, it says of them that they were "disposed of all their possessions" and that's apparently what happens here and perhaps some of them were even in this Jerusalem persecution and later when to the congregation to whom the book of Hebrews is written.

But notice the word "haling." It's kind of a strange word if you have an authorized version. It really could be translated to the English word "hauling." He just hauled them out of the houses. It means dragging, literally. It's used in John 21:8 of dragging the fishnet in with all the fish. Remember when Peter caught so many fish he just dragged them? That's what he did. He grabbed them, dragged them out into the street, and threw them in jail.

And so the persecution began. And it was negative, there's no question about it. But God always takes those negatives and turns them into positives. So what followed persecution is the second point: preaching.

I love the first word of verse 4. And you know, I studied all week on this thing, and this is one of those kind of passages you gotta squeeze everything there is in it, out, because there's just not a lot there



to make a whole sermon out of. And so I just worked on this thing, I gotta make this thing live, and all this, and I struggled. Then I was sitting up here this morning, and Lenny was reading it, and I thought "Boy, that never hit me before." And I just looked at that word "therefore," which is so matter of fact, it simply says, "Therefore they were scattered abroad, went everywhere preaching the Word." The thing that hit me was "therefore" is like, that's the natural thing you always do when you get persecuted. They were being torn apart, thrown into prison, therefore they went everywhere and preached the Word. I mean, it wasn't any big change. It just - if they got thrown around, they just preached wherever they got thrown. You see, it's a case of a whole lot of people, preaching Christ, and if you take a whole lot of people here preaching Christ, and throw them, then you have a whole lot of people all over everywhere preaching Christ.

So the issue of the "therefore" is not therefore they started preaching, it's therefore they were already preaching - no it's they were already preaching, therefore when they got scattered they preached wherever they got scattered, which is so good. Now you don't look too excited, but I'm excited about that. I mean, it was so much a part of their life. They were just - they were in the world to do that, you see? And it doesn't say when they were scattered they abroad they all huddled in little caves and made little fires and prayed to God and kept warm. They did, wherever they went, they just kept doing what they always did. Just like it says, like trying to stamp out the fire and all you do is scatter the embers all over the world. So therefore they went, preaching the Word. That's so good.

The word "went about" is used many times in the book of Acts. It literally means, "They went through countries and districts." And it's used of missionary extensions, and here you have the first missionary effort of the church. Missions is born right here. What a sight. I imagine God, from His view up in heaven, just could look at the north gate of Jerusalem and just see these people just surging out and going into the world, all of them talking about Jesus Christ. What a fantastic thing. And they just were busy preaching the Word. Everybody was a preacher. What does it take to get Christians out of the box, into the world? Persecution? Then let's pray for persecution. Right? Not so anxious on that one either.

I talked to a student last year and he said to me - he'd been working on a campus. In fact he was on the staff of Campus Crusade. We had a real good time together, a lot of good fellowship. And one day he said to me, "John, I think I've figured out why this ministry is so difficult for me." And I said "Why?" He says, "I don't have the gift of evangelism." I said, "Well, let me tell you something." I said, "That is not a gift. That is a command."

There is no gift of evangelism. That's a command. "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. You shall be My witnesses." We don't say, "Well, my gift is making daisy chains, not evangelism." That isn't even a gift, that's a command. Everybody is to be involved in that. And don't you like the fact that they all went everywhere preaching the Word? I mean, the devil thought, "I'll fix them, I'll get this guy Saul and he'll get 'em." And all he did was scatter all over everywhere, and they

went right where God expected them to go, Judea and Samaria. So Satan was doing his best and God was just checking off point two in His outline.

We are all to evangelize. None of us can say, "Well that's not my job." The word "evangelize-evangelisco" just means to preach the gospel. I think of what my daddy used to say, that it comes originally from a word that means, "soap sellers." And the reason it does is because when soap was first invented - what a blessing you know? Don't you wish everybody did? When soap was first invented, it needed to be demonstrated to the populace, and so there were street soap sellers. And they would find some crummy looking, dirty, disheveled opportunity, and they would bring him out in the crowd and proceed to wash him, and to demonstrate how effective this really was in cleaning up. And so when the Christian people started preaching Christ, they weren't talking about external cleansing; they were talking about internal cleansing, so they became known as "spiritual soap sellers." And that's where we get the word "evangelist." We ought to be busy confronting the world with the claims of Christ by which men's hearts can be cleansed.

And so everybody went everywhere preaching Jesus Christ. Boy wouldn't I like to think that this morning, we could open all these doors, and that would happen. Wouldn't that be terrific? Everybody just go out of this place and start preaching Jesus all over the place. You know, \_\_\_\_\_ and see and get a little upset. We could hit the Broadway, and all those stores. That would be terrific. And McDonald's® and everywhere else.

You know several - there's a lot of things in this passage that speak to my heart and hit me, but just to pull together, some of the things we've thought about: persecution, you see, tends to promote the very thing it's designed to destroy, you see. Another thought that hit me was that persecution is good for Christians because it turns them loose with zeal for new opportunities. It also has a way of pairing off the dross, getting rid of the fluff. The third thing that hit me was that it's right for all Christians to preach the gospel. Doesn't belong to a few, it belongs to all of us, that wonderful opportunity. Fourth thing that hit me was it should be my desire to do that. I should be just so much talking about Christ that wherever you put me, that's what I'm doing.

Well, they all went everywhere preaching. And in order for us to kind of zero in on what kind of preaching they did and how it worked, the Holy Spirit just pulls one man out: Philip, and says, for example, verse 5: "Then Philip." During the midst of all this preaching we're going to zero in on one guy and just see what he did.

Here's the first missionary name: Philip. He was one of the 7 chosen to care for the business of the Jerusalem church. Wonderful man; Spirit filled man. I believe as I said at the time we studied that, that he was one of the New Testament prophets. It's interesting too that his daughters were prophets, which is a little departure from the norm. But nevertheless, in the book of Acts that's indicated. But he was a prophet. But he also, in Acts 21:8, is the only man in the Bible called an evangelist. He is

technically an evangelist.

Now, here's a little thought. Some of you can put this back in a frame of reference of a few months ago. Ephesians 4:11, remember we talked about the apostles, prophets, evangelists and teaching pastors? We said that the apostles and the prophets were chronologically fading away and did so by the end of the early church age. They were replaced by evangelists and teaching pastors. And it says in Ephesians 2:20 that "the apostles and prophets were the foundation." They were followed then by the evangelists and teaching pastors. Those are the two key ministries in the church. Those evangelists are ones to reach out, win people to Christ, establish a church. The teaching pastor is one who continues the instruction. So those are the key two. But it's interesting that in a transition there had to be some overlap, and apparently Philip is the overlap. He is called an evangelist but it's obvious he is also a prophet, so he is bridging a little bit. He's the last of the prophets and the first of the evangelists. So named.

All right, so Philip is a wonderful fellow. We're going to follow him a little bit in this chapter. In fact, from verses 5 through 40, it's all Philip, with the intrusion of Peter there, at one point. And Peter and John as they arrive, but nevertheless it's Philip that is the key here. We're going to see how this one man ministered and we'll get into the accounts later in weeks to come as we study. But for our time this morning I just want us to see Philip for a moment, as it's introducing us to his ministry.

Verse 5: "Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ unto them." Now when it says he went down to Samaria, everybody always thinks, "Well, my map, Samaria is up." But if you were in Jerusalem, everything is down because Jerusalem is way up on a high plateau and you go down to go to Samaria, down to go to Jericho, down to go to anywhere. And so he went down and north to Samaria. Samaria was an area, and it was also the name of the city, the ancient capital of that whole area, the Northern Kingdom, was Samaria. And so he went to this place.

Now this is an exciting thing to realize, that he went there, because the Jews just didn't have any dealings with the Samaritans. Remember what the woman at the well said to Jesus in John 4? "What are You doing talking to me?" Jews don't have any connection or any conversation with Samaritans. But Philip went. And there's something wonderful about Philip. He is so strategic. He is the first man that kind of takes the gospel to people. And you know, that's great, because it takes us back to when he was just elected to handle the business of the church and we learn again the principle that "He that is faithful over a little, I will make lord over much." You see?

People will say to me, inevitably, I want to go in the ministry. I suppose I'm always talking to somebody about this, at all time, or praying with somebody about going in the ministry. And they say to me, "They want - I think God's leading me into ministry, I want to go into ministry, I hope to go into ministry." And I always say the same thing. I say "Well, it's usually those that are faithful in what God has already given them, that He lifts up to places of real responsibility." And I think that's true, don't

you? I think that's the way God works. If you are faithful in what God's given you - if you're a faithful deacon, God may make you an evangelist. If you're faithful in teaching a Sunday school class, God may lift you up to be an elder in the church, a Bible teacher someday. If you're faithful in ministering your spiritual gift at any point, at that point, when your faithfulness is established, then God may place in your care a great responsibility. But I don't really think God gives his great responsibilities to people who haven't proven themselves faithful.

So Philip had a humble beginning, but he sure came on strong as he proved himself faithful. So you do what God has given you to do. You worry about the mission field, and you worry about the ministry elsewhere, when you've proven yourself faithful here.

A guy said to me one time, the head of Wycliffe, a missionary organization, he said, "We have found that if an individual is not effective in evangelism here, they never become effective in evangelism on the mission field." That's what he said. And I said, "Of course the geographical location of your feet has nothing to do with what's in your heart." We always think there's something magic about if you're a missionary, you'll be aggressive in evangelism. I'm not sure that's true, if it isn't true in your life here. Prove yourself first.

All right, so he went to Samaria. Samaria wasn't an easy place because the Samaritans were hated by the Jews. In the 8th Century B.C., you remember before that had been split into the Northern Kingdom and Southern Kingdom of Israel. After Solomon, Solomon messed everything up so much that Solomon had brought about a fracture in the kingdom and, of course, following Solomon, the kingdom was split: Jeroboam and Rehoboam in the north and the south. Ten tribes went north, two tribes went south: Judah and Benjamin. The Northern Kingdom, by the 8th Century, was carried off into captivity by the Assyrians. And at that time, there were some Jews left in the lands. Most of them were carried off; some were left. They then moved strangers into the land, and the Jews, not being really committed to their Judaism, intermarried with the strangers that the Assyrians put in the land. Consequently, it became a mongrel race.

In the 5th Century B.C., the Jews who had been carried into Babylonian captivity, the South Kingdom, was Judah, Benjamin. They'd been carried off. After 70 years, Cyrus gave a decree they could come back. Now remember they came back under Ezra and Nehemiah to build the temple again, and the walls. So they all marched back and started their building. Well, all the guys in the North who were now half-breeds came down and said, "We want to help." They were contemptuously rejected. Remember the story? They didn't want a thing from those half-breeds who had desecrated their Judaism by intermarrying with Gentiles. And that began the rift, and it's continued even until the book of Acts, and often times even until today.

And so, Philip went to these people, which was quite a thing for him to do, just from a human stand point, really nothing for him to do in the energy in the Holy Spirit, because he was totally obedient.

And it says he preached.

Now this is an interesting thing because the word "preached" in 5 is different than the word "preaching." One is euaggelizo, one is kerusso. Philip - kerusso; that means he "proclaimed". He was a public herald. There is a difference between an individual presenting the gospel, and somebody who is a preacher, a herald, a public speaker. Philip was a public speaker and he presented, in preaching - look at it - Christ, unto them. The word "Christ" is "Messiah." He presented the Messiah. You say, "Did they believe in the coming of the Messiah?" Sure they did. They still hung on to their Judaism. You remember that they worshipped God, the woman at the well in John 4 said, "We worship God up here in our mount, You worship him down there in yours." Jesus said, "There's coming a day when neither one of those places are going to mean anything. They that worship God must worship Him in Spirit and the truth, for God is Spirit." And she had said after all of this that Jesus said unto her, she said, "Is this not," what? "The Christ." You see, she was looking for the Messiah; they were too.

So, when Philip went there, he presented to them that Christ is Messiah. It was a simple message, and they were ready for it. Now, hang on to this point. You see, they had the background to understand that announcement. We cannot just walk super simplistically into our world today and say, "Jesus is the Messiah." 99 out of 100 people haven't gotten the foggiest idea what that means. And that's why I believe that pre-evangelism in our world is so very necessary.

Now when we're dealing with Jews and with people who are knowledgeable in the Old Testament, I think we have a basis for offering them Christ on a very simple basis, simple level. I mean, there are some people, and other people sometimes, even Gentiles, that God has prepared them, that they are ready. I told you about the fellow I led to Christ on the airplane, and he always laughs even today and says "See you took all those years learning all that stuff, and you couldn't use any of it on me because I was ready." I was sitting next to him and he said to me, "Do you know how a man could receive Christ." And I just thought, "You're not supposed to ask that yet, that's an hour away."

There are times when people are ready; the Spirit of God has done the pre-evangelism for you. In the case of the Samaritans, they knew enough that all they needed to hear was that the Messiah was here and then whatever went from there. But in our case in dealing with a pagan world, I think we need to be ready to teach people the Word of God, to be able to teach them who God is, what man is, God's plan for the ages. All of these things are basic before Christ makes any sense. That's why as we are working on the evangelism program that we are going to be presenting to you and I am going to teach to our new deacons, it's going to involve an understanding of the Scriptures, so that we can teach somebody the basics of the Word of God, and at any point along the way, introduce them to Christ, when the Spirit of God has made them ready. But sometimes we have to present enough evidence and enough background to make the soil fertile for the planting of the simple gospel.

But Philip had a group that was ready. In verse 6, bang, they responded right off. And these people, the word is "multitudes," with one accord, they had a wholesale spiritual awakening; gave heed unto those things which Philip spoke. Isn't that fantastic? They just did. They responded that fast.

Now there was some attendant miracles that made that response a little more immediate. It says at the end of verse 6, "hearing and seeing the miracles which he did." You see, again, God confirmed the preaching with miracles, so they would know it was from God. Quickly, verse 7, "For unclean spirits, crying with a loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them, and many take with palsy and that were lame, were healed." That just tells you what some of the miracles were.

Just a footnote here: it says, "Unclean spirits crying with a loud voice came out of many that were possessed." The Bible talks about people who are possessed with unclean spirits and with demons. The term "demon possession" is not really a Biblical term as such. At least, it's not put together in that combination. But it does talk about, in the Bible, people who are demoniacs. Mark 5, and usually they are said to be *dimoanidzomanou*, which means they are demonized. It is possible and it is frequent that individuals are inhabited by demons. You say "Yeah, I read about that in voodoo land. Stick little darts and people roll and foam at the mouth." Yeah, well, you know, there are also demon-possessed people in our society, much more than we dream. You say, "Well, they don't do the things they do in other cultures." That's exactly right, but don't you know that Satan is not stupid? He makes sure that he adapts his demonic activity to the culture. And we have smooth, suave, well dressed, articulate, educated, demoniacs in our society, propagating their stuff in institutes of higher learning, if you will, who maintain enough of an apparent equilibrium to be listened to and admired by unwitting people. Sometimes we see people lying on the ground, foaming at the mouth. Sometimes demons work like that. But sometimes they are much more subtle than that, especially in our society. Now, if you go to Africa or the Caribbean, to South America, you'll find that they will operate in the kind of cultural context in which the people really are used to seeing things.

The condition, then, of a possessed person may vary, it may run the gamut. But what it means is that a demon or demons is controlling that person and that point; they can take that person at will, and make him do and say what they want him to say and do. The chief distinguishing mark is that there is another person inside that individual. Sometimes they speak in different voices, different languages. Sometimes they make him do different things. They often have supernatural knowledge. It's interesting; some people are saying, "how is it that Jean Dixon knows as much as she knows?" I don't want to sit in judgment of anybody, but if ever there was evidence of being demonized, she gives it. She knows some things that really are only known to the spiritual world.

It's interesting that he had the power to do this. We don't have that power today. Jesus had the power to cast them out with a word. His apostles and these two, whom He gave the gift of miracles, had the power to do it. But today, we are the same level as we are when we come to the sick. We have to

pray for their healing. And so with demon possessed people. We can't walk around saying "Alright all you demons. In the name of Christ, get out." And I think a lot of people today are frustrated because they try it and it doesn't work. You know, people say to me "Well, I tried to cast these demons out. It didn't go." Well, I've done the same thing and I've tried and it didn't go either.

There's a question of the ability to do miracles here that does not belong to us and we have to pray for these people even as we do sick people, because we can't just walk up and say, "Be healed." That gift belonged to this age.

Just to give you an idea on this, I've only had one occasion really where I encountered somebody that was - well, I think three times I've encountered demon possessed people. But one person when I really got into it. And it was since I've been here at this church. It was after a service here, person came. There were several of us involved with it, Jerry Mitchell, me and others, and we got into this situation. This girl had 6 different demons in her. All had different voices, all had different names, and we talked to all of them. She had been demonized, and she had even gone so far as to mistake some of these demons for the Holy Spirit. But we found out that she was uncontrollably being driven by these demons, that she had a desire to kill people. We found out there was a demon, and his name was Murder, and he told us that was his name. She couldn't figure out why she wanted to strangle people. And it went on and on and on like this, and she had a demon; she was being deceitful all the time. She had a demon in her body by the name of Decito- he kept saying his name was - in this strange ethereal voice. We figured he must be an Italian demon, Decito. I don't know if they have nationalities like that. But he may have been speaking to us in a different name, and we might have mistaken his name, a different language. But anyway, we found that we had to pray, and it all boiled down to her confession of sin before those demons ever left. Because I had worked for two hours and so had Jerry, trying to get rid of this one demon, called Decito. And nothing ever happened until she finally was willing to confess some really filthy things in her life for which she needed relief, the relief that comes in confession, and the cleansing. And then it was gone, no problem.

So again, we cannot go about casting out demons, but we can certainly pray for people. And we can certainly confront them with the need for confession and cleansing that there might be no place for demons to occupy.

And then he healed the palsy in all of this. And because of this, there was a great response.

Now on your outline, I'm going to stop right here. It says there are two kinds of response, two kinds of productivity in preaching. The faithful and what? And the phony. And there were some real people saved. Verse 8: "And there was great joy in that city. But, there was a certain man, called Simon." Now he's the phony. Whenever you preach the gospel, you always get two reactions: the faithful and the phony; the wheat and the tares, the seed that springs up for a little while, chokes and dies, and the seed that grows. Preaching always brings about both results. We know it; we have to live with it. I

hope in your life, it brings about true faith.

Let's pray. Father, we do thank You and we look forward to next week, when we can study Simon, and see what it is you want to teach us about him. But we thank you that we can really know you, and we can perceive that You're real, the gospel is true, Christ is real, and in perceiving this, we know that by faith, we can come into a living relationship with You. Father we know there are many who are phony, many who mask unbelief in a façade of faith. We pray that You'll unmask them, for their own sake that they might come to be in real faith. God, may no one leave this morning that doesn't really know You, who doesn't really respond to the preaching of Jesus Christ. We pray in His name, Amen.

Available online at: <http://www.gty.org>

COPYRIGHT (C) 2015 Grace to You

You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (<http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright>).