

May 27, 2018

“Empowered: The Church on Fire!”

“A Journey through the Book of Acts”

“The Fire Spreads!”

“But the believers who were scattered preached the Good News about Jesus wherever they went.” Acts 8:4

A. God’s message of salvation through Jesus began to spread...

1. Stephen’s powerful sermon set off a flurry of persecution.

“A great wave of persecution began that day, sweeping over the church in Jerusalem; and all the believers except the apostles were scattered through the regions of Judea and Samaria.” Acts 8:1

2. Saul’s zeal was unleashed on the church.

“But Saul was going everywhere to destroy the church. He went from house to house, dragging out both men and women to throw them into prison.” Acts 8:3

3. This persecution brought about the fulfillment of the promise and command given to the disciples.

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be My witnesses, telling people about Me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” Acts 1:8

B. Philip played a key role in spreading the Good News...

“But the believers who were scattered preached the Good News about Jesus wherever they went.” Acts 8:4

1. Philip was one of the Hellenistic Jews who was appointed to wait on tables. He was recognized as full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom.
2. Philip left Jerusalem and began preaching in Samaria.
3. Simon the Sorcerer became one of the followers.
4. Peter and John were sent from Jerusalem to Samaria when they heard that the message was catching fire.
5. Simon’s “faith” was exposed.

“But Peter replied, ‘May your money be destroyed with you for thinking God’s gift can be bought! You can have no part in this, for your heart is not right with God. Repent of your wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps He will forgive your evil thoughts, for I can see that you are full of bitter jealousy and are held captive by sin.’” Acts 8:20-23

C. Philip and his Ethiopian Eunuch encounter...

“So he started out, and he met the treasurer of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under the Kandake, the queen of Ethiopia. The eunuch had gone to Jerusalem to worship,” Acts 8:27

1. An angel of the Lord directed his steps.
2. Philip obeyed and encountered the treasurer of Ethiopia under the queen. He was wealthy. He had traveled over 1600 miles in a pilgrimage to Jerusalem.
3. The Holy Spirit directed Philip to walk along beside the carriage.
4. The Eunuch was reading the passage from Isaiah 53.
5. Philip shared Scripture with him and then baptized him. The Eunuch was the first gentile Christian.
6. Philip then was “snatched” away and went to Azotus to preach and finally settled in Caesarea. In Caesarea, he met with Saul/Paul and had 4 daughters with a gift of prophecy. He was known as Philip the Evangelist.

“Meanwhile, Philip found himself farther north at the town of Azotus. He preached the Good News there and in every town along the way until he came to Caesarea.” Acts 8:40

D. Let’s look at the four characters from this passage and learn from their responses...

1. **Stephen:** It is very clear that Stephen’s fiery sermon was the trigger for bringing the wrath of the Sanhedrin and resultant persecution. Stephen, however, was not blamed or berated for his message; rather, he was honored. Instantly, persecution was experienced but it became the fulfillment of Jesus’ command. It was the key that forced the spreading of the gospel.

How do you handle difficulty? Do you judge by the circumstances, or do you wait to see what great thing God is doing next? (Even what man means for evil, God can change for good!)

2. **Simon:** Simon was enamored with what he saw on the surface as the signs and wonders. Simon could do a little of his own magic...but this “magic” was even better. He was immediately drawn to it and believed with an expectation that he could do even more than he had done before. The deeper level of loving God and following God for more than the “fishes and loaves” was just not present.

Why are you following Jesus? Did something go wrong in your life that created a need and you saw Jesus as the answer, but didn’t choose to go any further? Has there been a true time of repentance or sorrow for your sin and a clear desire to follow Jesus no matter what comes your way?

3. **Eunuch:** The Eunuch was definitely a seeker! He traveled over 1600 miles to find spiritual answers. He expended great money in purchasing a scroll to read the Scriptures and the carriage for his trip. He was hungry for truth. His immediate response when he saw water was, “Why can’t I be baptized?” He wanted nothing to stand in the way of his coming to a full understanding of faith. It is not known for sure, but it is believed that he became an evangelist to Ethiopia.

What are you willing to give to seek after truth? What holds you back from being obedient to Christ’s teaching? Why wouldn’t you be baptized? How vital is the fire in your heart that makes you want to share Jesus with your world?

4. **Philip:** Philip left Jerusalem and his job at the church, waiting on tables, to go and share the message in Samaria and wherever God led. It is true, all the leaders, except the apostles, left when the persecution began, but persecution became the impetus to moving outside of the city. Philip listened to the Spirit guiding him and God blessed his ministry. He was sensitive to following the Spirit’s lead and went, even when he didn’t know the next step he was taking!

How should we share Jesus with others? Are you prepared with a knowledge of Scripture and a plan to share with those God puts in your pathway? Are you sensitive to God’s leading when He brings people into your life? Are you looking for the right timing? Are you following step by step? Just be obedient...learn to listen to God’s voice...and “Yes” to where He sends you!

“Don’t burn out; keep yourselves fueled and aflame. Be alert servants of the Master, cheerfully expectant. Don’t quit in hard times; pray all the harder. Help needy Christians; be inventive in hospitality.” Romans 12:11 The Message

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