

SCATTERED SEEDS

ACTS 8



A Scriptorium Study from The Fellowship of Ailbe

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Scattered Seeds: Acts 8
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Introduction to Acts 8

What looked like an unmitigated disaster turned out to be a boon for the Kingdom and multitudes of lost souls.

The persecution that followed the murder of Stephen was real, harsh, and constant. But God used it to scatter the believers into the next stage of the ongoing work of Christ, that of dispersal.

In Acts 8 we see the Spirit at work in many ways, opening doors and hearts of people from Samaria to Ethiopia, and fulfilling the Acts 1.8 vision and mandate of the Lord. The overarching lesson of Acts 8 is that God is sovereign in the Gospel, and nothing men might do can keep Him from realizing His purposes.

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We hope you find this study of Acts instructive and helpful to equip you for your walk with and work for the Lord. Thank you for joining us.

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1 Persecution

Pray Psalm 53.5, 6.

There they are in great fear
Where no fear was,
For God has scattered the bones of him who encamps against you;
You have put *them* to shame,
Because God has despised them.
Oh, that the salvation of Israel would come out of Zion!
When God brings back the captivity of His people,
Let Jacob rejoice *and* Israel be glad.

Sing Psalm 53.5, 6.

(Leoni: *The God of Abraham Praise*)

The wicked flee in shame; their ways our God rejects.
Renew Your people in Your Name with great effects!
Let great rejoicing sound once we renewed have been,
and let salvation's Word resound from us again!

Read Acts 8.1-3.

Preparation

1. What happened in Jerusalem following Stephen's death?
2. To what did this lead?

Meditation

Jesus promised His followers that they would experience persecution (Jn. 15.18-20), but it's not likely the believers were expecting what they began to experience here. We have seen the pent-up anger of the religious leaders of Jerusalem building in chapters 4 through 7. Threats and warnings heated up to beating; and beating boiled over to murder. Having gone that far, those who opposed the faith of Christ felt no qualms about unleashing a broad-based, violent assault against the believing community.

This is the same Christian community whose witness had won many to Christ, and whose manifest love for one another and their neighbors had convinced a great company of the priests to believe. No matter. All it takes is one incident to unleash the forces of persecution. The fledgling Christian movement was forced out of the nest, and a new stage in the ongoing work of Christ began. *Launched* in chapters 1 and 2, and *established* in chapters 3-7, that ongoing work of Jesus now began to *disperse* outward from Jerusalem toward the uttermost parts of the earth, where it would be *replicated* far and wide.

The time had come for the Kingdom to break out of its nursery soil in Jerusalem. Our Lord has many ways of scattering the seeds of the Church to fulfill the Acts 1.8 vision of His ongoing work. We need to be ready and willing to follow as He leads, however He chooses.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

In the face of persecution, it is essential that the persecuted know their cause is true.

In our case, we can rest assured that everything about God is perfect and true:
“Your righteousness *is* an everlasting righteousness, and Your law *is* truth.”

“You *are* near, O LORD and all Your commandments *are* truth.”

“The entirety of Your word *is* truth, and every one of Your righteous judgments *endures* forever.”

“Every word of God is pure [flawless, true]; He is a shield to those who put their trust in Him.”

(Ps. 119.142, 151, 160; Prov. 30.5)

During the troubling times of the early Church’s persecution and dispersion, the testimony of Stephen bolstered their faith and confidence in the truth of Jesus. Stephen was a first-hand witness to the absolute truth of the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ, their Savior and ours.

Stephen knew Jesus. He had walked with Him and learned from Him. Fellowshiped with Him. And Stephen recognized Him. He saw Him with his own eyes! “Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!” (Acts 7.56)

That recognition and confirmation solidified their faith and determination to go forward in courage, no matter what. And our faith is solidified by these same words and bolsters us to “be ready and willing to follow as He leads, however He chooses.”

The truth of Gamaliel’s words continue to be proved: “...if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it” (Acts 5.39).

For reflection

1. How should the example of saints and martyrs encourage us to persevere in our witness for the Lord?
2. What should we do day by day to remind ourselves that our cause is true? How can this help to prepare us for opposition and persecution?
3. Do you pray daily for God to revive His Church? For His salvation once again to come roaring out of Zion for the salvation of the world? Should you?

Though persecution must not drive us from our work, yet it may send us to work elsewhere. Wherever the established believer is driven, he carries the knowledge of the gospel, and makes known the preciousness of Christ in every place. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), *Commentary on Acts 8.1-4*

Pray Psalm 53.1-4.

Pray for the lost people of the world, for those who persecute Christians, and for those who oppose the Gospel by any means. Pray that God would strike fear in their hearts at knowing they are opposing and persecuting *Him*. And pray that He would revive His Church and send witnesses to lead many of the lost to salvation in Jesus Christ.

Sing Psalm 53.1-4.

(Leoni: *The God of Abraham Praise*)

The fool says in his heart, “There is no God at all!”

Corrupt are they in whole and part, unjust and small.

Not one of them does good; God sees their wicked ways.

None understands the Word of God or gives Him praise.

Have all these wicked men no knowledge of God’s grace?

The Church they hate with passion and seek not God’s face.

Lord, strike their hearts with fear, where fear was not before.

And scatter all who camp so near Your holy door.

2 “Gossiping the Gospel”

Pray Psalm 33.1-3.

Rejoice in the LORD, O you righteous!
For praise from the upright is beautiful.
Praise the LORD with the harp;
Make melody to Him with an instrument of ten strings.
Sing to Him a new song;
Play skillfully with a shout of joy.

Sing Psalm 33.1-3.

(Truro: [*Shout, for the Blessed Jesus Reigns!*](#))

Sing with rejoicing in the Lord, for praise becomes His righteous ones!
With harps and songs raise grateful words, and let new songs of praise be sung!

Read Acts 8.1-8; meditate on verses 4-8.

Preparation

1. How did the Gospel spread?
2. Where did the believers take the Gospel?

Meditation

Only the apostles, and probably a small contingent, remained in Jerusalem (v. 1). The people “were all scattered” in all directions. Were they chased out of Jerusalem, or did they simply flee before they could be arrested? (The verb could just as easily be translated “scattered themselves”.)

If the religious leaders in Jerusalem hoped their problem had at last been solved, they were in for a rude awakening. Michael Green (*Evangelism and the Early Church*) says these dispersed believers went everywhere “gossiping the Gospel.” These believers had Jesus on the brain and in the heart. “Why are you fleeing?” “Because we love Jesus!” “Who’s Jesus? I thought He was dead?” “Well, let me explain...” And so forth. They talked about Him as they were going here and there, just as He had commissioned them to do (Matt. 28.18-20).

Throwing aside all ancient prejudices, Philip, following the example of Jesus (Jn. 4), went among the Samaritans to proclaim the Good News. Were there people in Samaria who had remembered Jesus’ visit, not that long ago? Perhaps. At any rate, the harvest was substantial, both because of Philip’s preaching and because of the good works done in Jesus’ name. Good works and good words go together in carrying out the ongoing work of Christ. The result? Joy all around!

Gospel seeds were being flung into the wind of the Spirit, and Kingdom fruit abounded.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

Philip, like Stephen, was a faithful man chosen to be a deacon to serve the Hellenist widows. Now his Personal Mission Field was expanding because of persecution; he was broadening his sphere to Samaria. As the people were “scattering themselves” there, and to the ends of the earth, they were carrying the love of Christ with them. They probably traveled light in earthly goods (Mk. 6.7-9), but carried weighty works and words about Jesus to a hungry and needy world (Acts 3.6).

Philip, through the power of the Holy Spirit, healed those who were possessed by unclean spirits. He also cured the paralyzed and the lame (Acts 8.6, 7). His courage did not lag because of the outcome with Stephen.

He boldly went forth to do the same works, not allowing the fear of coming to the same end deter him.

Peter wrote to the pilgrims of the Dispersion in other cities these words of encouragement and guidance: “Dear brothers, you are only visitors here. Since your real home is in heaven, I beg you to keep away from the evil pleasures of this world; they are not for you, for they fight against your very souls. Be careful how you behave among your unsaved neighbors; for then, even if they are suspicious of you and talk against you, they will end up praising God for your good works when Christ returns” (1 Pet. 2.11, 12 TLB).

And the writer of Hebrews reminds us also, that this is not our home. He said of the people of the Old Testament that “they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.” And that now they “desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. “Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them” (Heb. 11.13, 16).

God understands our heartfelt desire to be a part of a family, with a home, and a country. He will fill those needs with Himself and with the plans that He has for us (Jer. 29.11). He gave us the Church for family and fellowship, and He gave us Himself as our tender and caring Father. We have hope for a better day and a perfect home in eternity with Him. Jesus said, “In My Father’s house are many mansions; if *it were* not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, *there* you may be also” (Jn. 14.2, 3).

God’s scattered are secure. In Him we find home. “May He grant you according to your heart’s *desire*, and fulfill all your purpose” (Ps. 20.4), as you are scattered for “gossiping the Gospel” into your Personal Mission Field.

For reflection

1. How will you scatter seeds of the Gospel today?
2. As the Gospel continues to go forth, it travels on the good works and good words of Jesus’ witnesses. How does this help you in thinking about your Personal Mission Field?
3. Why is it so important for our here-and-now mission that we keep our then-and-there home always in view?

*For the voice of the gospel, which was heard heretofore in one place only, doth now sound everywhere; in the mean season, we are taught by this example that we must not yield unto persecutions, but rather be encouraged unto valiantness; for, when the faithful flee from Jerusalem, they are not afterward discouraged either with exile or with their present miseries, or with any fear, that they degenerate into slothfulness; but they are as ready to preach Christ even in the midst of their calamity as if they had never suffered any trouble. John Calvin (1509-1564), *Commentary on Acts 8.4**

Pray Psalm 33.8-12.

Pray that the salvation of the Lord may go out from His churches, as His people “gossip the Gospel” throughout their Personal Mission Fields.

Sing Psalm 33.8-12.

(Truro: *Shout, for the Blessed Jesus Reigns!*)

Let all below now fear the Lord; let all in awe of Him abide!

The worlds exist by Jesus’ Word; let all on earth in Him confide.

He nullifies the nations’ plans; forever stands His sov’ reign Word.

All they are blessed who with Him stand – the chosen people of the Lord.

3 Amazing the Amazer

Pray Psalm 130.7, 8.

O Israel, hope in the LORD;
For with the LORD *there is* mercy,
And with Him *is* abundant redemption.
And He shall redeem Israel
From all his iniquities.

Sing Psalm 130.7, 8.

(Hamburg: *When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*)
Hope in the Lord, with Jesus is love!
Plenteous redemption abounds in His face.
He will redeem us, who rules from above;
He will forgive us by His grace.

Read Acts 8.1-13; meditate on verses 9-13.

Preparation

1. Who was Simon?
2. What happened to him?

Read and meditate on Acts 8.9-13.

Card tricks? Bogus fortune telling? Delphic double-speak? Did Simon have others working with him to pull the wool over the credulous Samaritans' eyes? We don't know. Simon was impressive, to say the least (vv. 9, 10). But even Simon was boggled and amazed by what he heard and saw in Philip. So amazed, in fact, that he "also believed" and "was baptized" (v. 13). The *amaz*er was amazed, and he put his trust in the Lord, or so it seems.

The signs and wonders that clustered around those early believers weren't merely healings and deliverance from demons. The love which shone out from the Christian community in Acts 6 was a *sign* that created *wonder* and conversion to Christ on the part of many. Philip's witness – bold, effective, accompanied by good works – was a sign of the Kingdom that caused even Simon to wonder and be amazed.

Simon's power may have been occult in nature. He may even have known a few sleight-of-hand tricks, or how to manipulate the natural world to produce a "wonder" (remember those science class experiments?). We don't know. But he knew his "power" (v. 10) wasn't really "the power of God". As we shall see, Simon wanted the power but not the Lord – the gifts and benefits, but not the Giver and Benefactor.

He'll have Peter in his face over his self-centered "faith" in Jesus.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

Simon's situation is a sad one. He had experienced much acclaim through his "astonishing" deeds; and his heart must've soared with hubris because all gave him "heed" saying he had "great power" (Acts 8.9-11). But oops. Now someone new had rolled into town and caused "great joy" because of his good works of healing in Samaria (Acts 8.8).

The thing was, Simon was also amazed at the good works Philip was doing because he knew they were real, authentic, and true. Jealous? Probably. But amazed. Truly (Acts 8.13).

The lesson here for us is clear. We can be amazed at the Gospel. We can get baptized. We can attend church. We can even be a full-fledged member of a church. But unless we heed the words of Stephen, we will not have made the complete turn to following Jesus. Merely mostly following.

Stephen said to the church leaders of his day, “*You* stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your father *did*, so *do* you” (Acts 7.51).

There is a further step that we all must take to truly be servants of the Lord Jesus Christ. He told us Himself: “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matt. 28.18-20).

And, “you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1.8).

And, “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father.” “If you love Me, keep My commandments.” “And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—the Spirit of truth...He dwells with you and will be in you.” (Jn. 14.12, 15, 16, 17)

We don’t want to be like sad Simon—almost there, almost powerful, almost useful.

We want to be complete in Christ. (Col. 2.10)

Full of the Holy Spirit and power!

For reflection

1. How can you know whether your faith in Jesus is true and genuine, or whether it’s like Simon’s?
2. What would you say are the identifying marks of one who was “merely mostly following” Jesus, but not a true disciple?
3. What can believers do to help one another love Jesus and keep His commandments?

... we see thereby how mighty the truth is, there is also set before us an example of constancy in Philip, who, though he saw no way, yet doth he set hand to the Lord’s work with a valiant courage, waiting for the success which God should give. And thus must we do, we must valiantly attempt whatsoever the Lord commandeth, even when our endeavors seem to be vain. John Calvin (1509-1564), Commentary on Acts 8.11

Pray Psalm 130.1-6.

Thank the Lord for His forgiveness. Wait on Him to help you prepare for the day ahead, that you might serve Him well in all you do.

Sing Psalm 130.1-6.

(Hamburg: *When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*)

Out of the depths I cry to You, Lord!

Lord, hear my voice; have mercy on me!

Who can resist Your powerful Word

if You should mark iniquity?

There is forgiveness, Lord, with You,
that we may fear before Your face.
I wait for You; in Your Word most true
I hope to find renewing grace.

More than the watchmen wait for the day,
eagerly seeking the morning light,
I wait for You and earnestly pray,
hoping in You with all my might.

4 Not for Sale

Pray Psalm 40.4, 5.

Blessed is that man who makes the LORD his trust,
And does not respect the proud, nor such as turn aside to lies.
Many, O LORD my God, are Your wonderful works
Which You have done;
And Your thoughts toward us
Cannot be recounted to You in order;
If I would declare and speak of them,
They are more than can be numbered.

Sing Psalm 40.4, 5.

(Dix: *For the Beauty of the Earth*)

Blessed are all who trust in You, turning both from lies and pride.
Countless wonders, Lord, You do, and Your thoughts with us abide.
Lord, Your worth who can declare? None with You can e'er compare.

Read Acts 8.1-25; meditate on verses 14-25.

Preparation

1. What did Simon hope to acquire?
2. How did Peter respond to his request?

Meditation

The apostles had come down to Samaria from Jerusalem to verify and validate the work of Philip and the others. The Lord withheld the outpouring of the Spirit until their arrival because He wanted there to be no doubt in anyone's mind that this new stage in the ongoing work of Christ, beyond Israel to the Samaritans, was as valid as what had happened in Jerusalem (vv. 14-17). The advance of the Kingdom is *always* the work of the Spirit.

Simon was seeing his new experience through old, self-centered eyes (vv. 18, 19); but he learned quickly that this was a new order, a new kind of experience and Kingdom, and the power of God could not be bought and sold. This is because it is *real* spiritual power, bestowed not bought, and not just the hocus-pocus employed for impressing men and making a fast buck.

Peter's rebuke stung Simon to the soul and awakened him to the truth of his self-centered ways (vv. 20-23). His response to Peter's rebuke – including the fear of judgment against his sins – suggests to me that he was truly contrite (v. 24).

Now in the dispersal stage, the Gospel spread to the Samaritan nation (v. 25) – a prelude to chapter 10 and the bringing of the Good News to the Gentiles (which is itself a prelude to chapters 13-28). The Lord's ongoing work continues to unfold according to His promise, and all this is merely the portent of more amazing things to come.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

“The advance of the Kingdom is *always* the work of the Spirit.”

And the Holy Spirit works the way He works.
There is no conjuring up of Him or His power.

There is no purchase price for Him, or His work.
There is nothing any person can ever do to activate this power.
Only the Spirit works the Spirit.

As Jesus said to Nicodemus, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit” (Jn. 3.5-8).

And as Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus, “In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise...” (Eph. 1.13).

And then a word of warning from the writer of the book of Hebrews about this gift of the Holy Spirit: “For *it is* impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put *Him* to an open shame” (Heb. 6.4-6).

The Holy Spirit is a gift. And only that. He is not for sale.
But beware, lest you receive the gift, and fail to use it properly!

For reflection

1. Why do we say only the Holy Spirit can advance the Kingdom of God? What are the implications of that for you personally?
2. How does the Spirit do this ongoing work of Christ in us? Through us?
3. What’s the difference between seeking the gift of power and the Giver of the gift of the Spirit?

Simon Magus was ambitious to have the honor of an apostle, but cared not at all to have the spirit and disposition of a Christian. He was more desirous to gain honor to himself, than to do good to others. Peter shows him his crime. He esteemed the wealth of this world, as if it would answer for things relating to the other life, and would purchase the pardon of sin, the gift of the Holy Ghost, and eternal life. This was such a condemning error as could by no means consist with a state of grace. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), Commentary on Acts 8.14-25

Pray Psalm 40.11-17.

Pray that God would empower you to serve Him today, that He would keep any foes from opposing or thwarting you, and that you would have many opportunities to magnify His Name by your words and deeds.

Sing Psalm 40.11-17.

(Dix: *For the Beauty of the Earth*)

Keep Your mercy not from me; let Your love and truth prevail.
Evil and iniquity make my trembling heart to fail.
Lord, be pleased to rescue me! Let my shelter with You be.

Bring to shame my ev’ry foe, all who would my life destroy;
bring them down to scorn and woe who at my hurt sing for joy.
Let them come to grief and shame who heap scorn upon my name.

Let them shout for joy and sing who in saving grace delight!

Scattered Seeds: Acts 8

Let them praise to Jesus bring, though affliction be their plight.
Christ, our help, our Savior He!
Of us ever mindful be!

5 Things to Come

Pray Psalm 96.1-4.

Oh, sing to the LORD a new song!
Sing to the LORD, all the earth.
Sing to the LORD, bless His name;
Proclaim the good news of His salvation from day to day.
Declare His glory among the nations,
His wonders among all peoples.
For the LORD *is* great and greatly to be praised;
He *is* to be feared above all gods.

Sing Psalm 96.1-4.

(Mit Freuden Zart: [Sing Praise to God, Who Reigns Above](#))
Sing to the Lord! O, bless His Name! All nations tell His glory!
Salvation's tidings loud proclaim; let earth rehearse His story!
For God is greatly to be praised; His throne above all gods is raised –
Fear Him, and sing His glory!

Read Acts 8.1-34; meditate on verses 26-34.

Preparation

1. How did Philip know to go to this man?
2. What was he doing when Philip found him?

Meditation

This Ethiopian was either a proselyte to Judaism or a “God-fearer” – a Gentile who had either converted to Judaism or was friendly to it. We’ll see another one in Acts 10. This eunuch had been worshipping in Jerusalem, and he possessed a scroll of the book of Isaiah (v. 28). He was a man of some means, obviously, since he served in the court of the Ethiopian queen (v. 27).

The Lord spoke to Philip through His angel (v. 26) and His Spirit (v. 29); and Philip did not hesitate to carry out his assignment, even though initially the whole of it was not revealed to him. Philip found the man reading from the scroll of Isaiah, perhaps reviewing something he’d heard while in Jerusalem. He could not have been focused on a more propitious text. Note Philip’s courtesy: he asked a question about the man’s reading, then waited to be invited up into the chariot with him. The eunuch explained that he needed a guide, and Philip was the man for the job.

The Word of God is living and powerful. It was already at work in this man’s heart, for, even as the Spirit was summoning and sending Philip, He was wooing and striving with this Ethiopian (Gen. 6.3). There is something to be said for reading the Scriptures with unbelievers, or for encouraging them to read the Bible for themselves.

Jesus uses those who are faithful, giving them opportunities, resources, and power to do His ongoing work. Phillip, like Steven, is another example of the kind of men and women we meet throughout Church history who, because they are faithful in a few things, are given greater opportunities and more power to do greater works for the Lord. They are examples and encouragement to us all.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

Trust and obey, for there’s no other way

to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.
(Sammis/Towner, 1887)

Philip's life is a study in obedience, trust, and working his Personal Mission Field.
"Arise and go..." "So he arose and went" (Acts 8.26, 27).
"Go near and overtake this chariot." "So Philip ran to him..." (Acts 8.29, 30).

He is following in the footsteps of his predecessor, Isaiah. The Lord said to him,
"Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?"
Then Isaiah answered the Lord and said,
"Here am I! Send me." (Is. 6.8)

There are many people in our Personal Mission Fields to whom we can ask,
"Do you understand what you are reading?" (Acts 8.30)
And we can pray and hope for those that will respond,
"How can I, unless someone guides me?" (Acts 8.31)

Will we be ready to answer?
Will our lives have matched up to our offer of help?
Will we be obedient to God's instructions to us?
To arise and go?

Will we say, as the children of Israel said to Joshua,
"The LORD our God we will serve, and His voice we will obey!?" (Josh. 24.24)
Yes, we will because we know and believe that "to obey is better than sacrifice" (1 Sam. 15.22).

Isaiah and Philip are two obedient examples that we can wholeheartedly follow. With enthusiasm.
"And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ" (Col. 3.23, 24).

Here I am. Send me.

For Reflection

1. What do we mean by a "Personal Mission Field"? Have you mapped out yours? Watch [this brief video](#), then download the worksheet and get started.

2. How should you expect the Lord to speak to you and direct you in working your Personal Mission Field?

3. What is the Gospel? How would you explain the Gospel in just a few sentences?

*Philip is first commanded by the angel to go toward the south; the angel telleth him not to what end. And thus doth God oftentimes use to deal with those that be his, to prove their obedience. He showeth what he will have them to do; he commandeth them to do this or that, but he keepeth the success hidden with himself. Therefore let us be content with the commandment of God alone, although the reason of that which he enjoineth, or the fruit of obedience, appear not by and by. John Calvin (1509-1564), *Commentary on Acts 8.26**

Pray Psalm 96.8-13.

Pray for the worldwide spread of the Gospel, that God would embolden His witnesses and prepare the hearts of many lost people to receive the Good News of Jesus.

Sing Psalm 96.8-13.

(Mit Freuden Zart: [Sing Praise to God, Who Reigns Above](#))

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Bring offerings sweet to Him, our Lord, in holy garments praise Him!
Tremble before Him, all the earth; among the nations raise Him!
The earth is fixed, it will not move; the peoples will His justice prove.
Exalt the Lord and praise Him.

Let heaven sing with lusty voice; let earth and sea sing sweetly!
Let fields and trees in Him rejoice, for He is coming swiftly
to judge the world in righteousness, the peoples in His faithfulness.
He comes; exalt Him greatly!

6 On His Way Rejoicing

Pray Psalm 22.23.

You who fear the LORD, praise Him!
All you descendants of Jacob, glorify Him,
And fear Him, all you offspring of Israel!

Sing Psalm 22.23.

(Darwall: [*Rejoice, the Lord is King*](#))

All you who fear the Lord, now praise His holy Name!
You children of His glorious Word, declare His fame!
We stand in awe of our eternal God, and on His mercy call.

Read Acts 8.1-40; meditation on verses 35-40.

Preparation

1. What did Philip do for the Ethiopian?
2. Where did Philip go? Where did the Ethiopian go?

Meditation

We note that baptism must have been intimately connected with believing in Jesus, because the eunuch was eager for it at the earliest opportunity. Not that baptism saves, but we are commanded to baptize – and, by implication, to be baptized – as a first act of obedience to the Lord (Matt. 28.18-20). First acts of obedience are more likely to lead to next steps of obedience.

His work done, the Lord “caught Philip away” to Azotus and beyond for whatever He had next in mind. The eunuch continued south to his native land, a new person, filled with joy. Luke leaves the eunuch’s homecoming to our imaginations. We can believe that what happened in the home of Cornelius (Acts 10) happened in the home of that Ethiopian as well. Like the woman at the well in Samaria, this eunuch may have helped pave the way for the Gospel in Africa. Luke can’t tell us everything, but he can point to it, and he does.

Luke wants us to understand that the power of God is at large in the world, that Christ’s work is ongoing, and that no place is off limits, no person is beyond reach, and no power on earth can resist God’s Spirit as He carries out the ongoing work of Christ. He is telling a true and thrilling story, brilliantly.

Launch, establishment, dispersal, replication: Here is a pattern of the ongoing work of Christ with respect to His Kingdom and the communities that are its signs and outposts. And it’s a pattern for us in working our Personal Mission Fields as well.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

“First acts of obedience are more likely to lead to next steps of obedience.”

This is true for all of us.

Look at how ready this Ethiopian was to hear the answer to his question. It seems as if a lot of people had been obediently sowing seeds into his life, working the soil of his soul, and preparing him to bear fruit! He already knew about the Scriptures and their importance. He was familiar with the concept of baptism. He was ripe. And the Lord sent Philip to the harvest.

Jesus said to His disciples: “Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest! And he who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal life, that both he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together. For in this the saying is true: ‘One sows and another reaps.’ I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored; others have labored, and you have entered into their labors” (Jn. 4.35-38).

And again, Jesus said to His disciples: The harvest truly *is* plentiful, but the laborers *are* few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest” (Matt. 9.37, 38).

Paul adds further clarification: “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase. Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor. For we are God’s fellow workers...” (1 Cor. 3.6-9).

We each have our own calling in this Field! And at different times we might have different callings. But as you can see, there are places for all of us to do our part. Some sow the seeds of the gospel, some water the seeds, some are the sun that warms the soil, some are called to pray. Some harvest. Be aware, there is no place for drought or blight.

Happily, each of us who belongs to Christ, can find a growth spot in this eco-system of the Good News of Jesus, so that many souls will go on their way rejoicing!

For reflection

1. What do we mean by saying that “we each have a calling in this Field”? What can we learn from Philip about fulfilling this calling?
2. Paul wrote that some sow, some water, and some reap the harvest God prepares. Do you think there should be a bit of all this in your Personal Mission Field? Explain.
3. How would you explain the “ongoing work of Christ” to a new believer?

When the inquirer after salvation becomes acquainted with Jesus and his gospel, he will go on his way rejoicing, and will fill up his station in society, and discharge his duties, from other motives, and in another manner than heretofore. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), *Commentary on Acts 8.26-40*.

Pray Psalm 22.28-31.

Pray for a great worldwide revival in the churches of the Lord, and for a great awakening to saving faith on the part of many unbelievers. Jesus saw this as He was dying on the cross (Ps. 22.1-21; cf. Heb. 12.1-3), and He taught us how to pray for revival and awakening in our day.

Sing Psalm 22.28-31.

(Darwall: *Rejoice, the Lord is King*)

All nations shall repent and hasten to the Lord.
All those to whom His truth is sent shall praise His Word.
The Lord is King! His sovereign rule on high now we His people sing!

(Dix: *For the Beauty of the Earth*)

All the prosp’rous of the earth shall before His mercy fall.
Bending low before His worth, hear them humbly on Him call.
Even those low in the grave He will by His mercy save.

Let the generations all witness to His saving grace.

Scattered Seeds: Acts 8

Let them to all nations call, "Bow before His holy face!"
Let the children of the earth hear of Jesus' saving worth!

7 Know Where You Stand

Pray Psalm 69.13-15.

But as for me, my prayer *is* to You,
O LORD, *in* the acceptable time;
O God, in the multitude of Your mercy,
Hear me in the truth of Your salvation.
Deliver me out of the mire,
And let me not sink;
Let me be delivered from those who hate me,
And out of the deep waters.
Let not the floodwater overflow me,
Nor let the deep swallow me up;
And let not the pit shut its mouth on me.

Sing Psalm 69.13-15.

(Greensleeves: [*What Child Is This?*](#))

O Lord, we make our prayer to You; receive our words, O Savior!
Let lovingkindness see us through, and answer us with favor!
Lord, lift us above the mire; deliv'rance is our one desire!
Let not the floods conspire to swallow us forever!

Read Acts 8.1-40; meditate on verses 1-4.

Preparation

1. What changes came to the Church in this chapter?
2. Which parts of Acts 1.8 are being fulfilled here?

Meditation

The book of Acts can serve as a kind of template for the Christian life, as the ongoing work of Christ takes root in souls and communities, and within peoples and nations.

Acts 1-7 shows us the first phase of the ongoing work of Christ, in which the Kingdom *launches* in the power of the Holy Spirit, believers are gathered out of the kingdom of darkness into the Kingdom of God's dear Son (Col. 1.13), and a new life of faith and Kingdom community becomes *established*. We saw how the evidence of the Kingdom – that not-of-this-world realm where King Jesus is bringing righteousness, peace, and joy to light (Jn. 18.36; Rom. 14.17, 18) – became so compelling that multitudes were drawn to Christ and His new community, precisely as the prophets had foretold (Mic. 4.1-8; Is. 2.1-4).

Chapter 8 begins the next phase of that ongoing work, in which the Kingdom – launched and established – begins to be *dispersed* according to the strategy and outline Christ announced in Acts 1.8. Every believer has a place in this template, through a multitude of callings, gifts, and skills, so that the Kingdom is dispersed by each of us individually in our Personal Mission Fields (Act 8.4) and by the work of gifted evangelists and missionaries like Philip. This dispersing of the good seed of the Kingdom will lead to the *replication* of the ongoing work in people and places unto the uttermost parts of the earth.

Nothing can stop this ongoing work of King Jesus. However, many would obstruct, divert, interfere with, or otherwise delay it. But the work goes on as the Kingdom is launched in new people and places, and becomes established through Scripture, prayer, worship, and oneness. Where the faith becomes firmly rooted and

established, the dispersing of Kingdom seed takes place, as believers work their mission fields and churches collaborate to reach the lost in their communities and beyond.

We're either participating in and contributing to this process, or, like Saul of Tarsus, we're hindering it by our disobedience, or like Simon the magician, we're trying to milk it for our own petty interests and thus are more of an obstruction than a help. Make sure you know where you stand in the stream of Christ's ongoing work, and that you're swimming with, and not against, the current of the Lord.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

"Affliction" aptly describes the situation in which our early brothers and sisters in Christ found themselves.

They were afflicted by Saul and others who threatened them for their faith.

They were afflicted in grief for their dear brother Stephen.

They were afflicted through separation and dispersion into unfamiliar places and lands.

And they were afflicted by the havoc and confusion within the church through persecution.

All this contained in three short verses in Acts (8.1-3).

It is enough mayhem and sadness to fill an entire book.

I cherish the thought, that in the midst of all these trials, "devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him" (Acts 8.2). These courageous men were not afraid to show respect and deep sorrow because of the death of Stephen. Paul wrote, "But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus" (1 Thess. 4.13, 14). And as was recorded in Acts 7.60, their dear brother Stephen "fell asleep".

But Paul does not tell us that we shouldn't sorrow; he merely points out that our sorrow is not without hope. So these men were sorrowing greatly for their loss. They were sad. They would miss this man who brought them so much joy and encouragement. And who showed them how to live kindly and courageously.

Even to this day, Stephen is a man we revere for his faithful work in the Kingdom of God. Let's remember that he was first chosen for his good character, "a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit" (Acts 6.5), to serve the Hellenist widows their daily distribution. He was also called to be full of power, and he did great wonders and signs among the people. And all these callings led to his final calling of martyr. Which he did as well as he did all his other callings.

Stephen knew and read the Psalms. Here is one that reminds me of him and his faithful work.

*Afflicted, I believe His Word, though lying men would undo me.
What shall I render to the Lord for all His blessings to me?
Salvation's cup I lift above and call upon the God of love
and pay my vows most truly.*

*How sweet to Him when saints depart—save me, Your servant, Savior!
From sin You loosed my wand'ring heart; I praise Your Name forever!
On You I call, my vows to pay; here in Your Presence I would stay
Your praise to offer ever.
(Psalm 116.10-19 *The Ailbe Psalter*)*

Stephen knew where he stood. And his stance was clear to everyone who observed him. And those who observed him followed his example in bold witness, gossiping the Gospel wherever they went.

For reflection

1. What do we learn about our calling to be witnesses (Acts 1.8) from Acts 8?
2. What would “gossiping the Gospel” look like in your Personal Mission Field?
3. How can Christians encourage one another to be more consistent in sharing the Good News of Jesus?

Wherever the established believer is driven, he carries the knowledge of the gospel, and makes known the preciousness of Christ in every place. Where a simple desire of doing good influences the heart, it will be found impossible to shut a man out from all opportunities of usefulness. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), *Commentary on Acts 8.1-4*

Pray Psalm 69.34-36.

Pray for yourself and your church, that you will praise God more consistently and be used of Him to bring many to a saving knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Sing Psalm 69.34-36.

(Greensleeves: *What Child Is This?*)

Let heav'n and earth now praise You, Lord, the seas and all their creatures,
for You will save us by Your Word and build Your City's features.
There we will with Jesus dwell and know His blessings full and well.
His glorious Name we'll tell to every man and creature!

For reflection or discussion

1. Why do we call this next stage of the ongoing work of Christ “dispersal”?
2. How can you see that God used the persecution of His people for their good and for the Kingdom?
3. What was Simon the magician’s problem? Does this problem ever occur in churches today?
4. How did God use Philip to win the Ethiopian man to faith in Jesus? What can you learn from Acts 8 to help you in working your Personal Mission Field?
5. What’s the most important insight or lesson you’ve learned from Acts 8?

For prayer:

The Fellowship of Ailbe

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Thank you.