

The Church on the Move

Acts 8:1-17

There is a Yiddish proverb loosely based on *Psalm 2* and *James 4* that says, "***We make plans and God laughs.***"

This illustrates the truth of how we make our plans; however, unexpected events and things from the LORD alter those plans.

Before going back to heaven, Jesus commissioned His followers to go and tell others about the kingdom of God.

Matthew 28:19 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. NKJV

If you read Church history during the time of the *Book of Acts*, you will discover that most of the original Apostles did not go out into the whole world but rather stayed near Jerusalem.

Stephen was martyred for his faith, and that started the dispersion of other Christians, fleeing Jerusalem.

Please open your Bibles to *Acts 8*

Last time, we heard the conclusion of Stephen's defense as he spoke to the religious leaders about where the true Tabernacle of God can be found, and finally, how we should forgive others.

The final words from Stephen led to him becoming the first Christian Martyr, because the truth of Christ demands a reaction.

The life a believer lives on earth is a dress rehearsal, as the believer prepares for something greater, waiting for heaven.

I. Saul causes Christians to flee.

Read *Acts 8:1-4*

Saul was a dedicated member of the council, and I am convinced that he had good intentions, being zealous for the LORD.

However, all the good intentions in the world could not make up for the havoc he was causing within the early Church.

Notice, “*A great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.*”

Stephen’s death was only the beginning of the persecution of the Church; it only got worse from there.

The LORD told the early Disciples that His work began in Jerusalem, but they were supposed to take it to the world.

It took persecution to get these followers to move!

Does it take God shaking things up in our lives to get us to follow His directives?

These are the times to be aware of how the LORD is moving, so we can jump into what He has planned and enjoy the ride.

When we stress out over circumstances, we miss the abundant life the LORD has planned for us.

The LORD says, *“I know the plans I have for you; your part is to simply rest and trust Me to accomplish it in and through you!”*

So devout men buried Stephen, but Saul began arresting believers, dragging them out of their houses, and creating havoc for Christians all over Jerusalem.

All believers scattered except the Apostles; *why didn't they flee?*

- Maybe they didn't want to repeat their past failures, like when they fled because Jesus was arrested
- Maybe they felt that God would protect them if they stayed
- Maybe they learned to clarify God's purpose for their lives!

C.S. Lewis has said that there are two kinds of people:

1. Those who say to the LORD, “**Thy** will be done”.
2. Those to whom the LORD says, “All right then, have it **your** way”.

The LORD allowed this persecution to happen because the result was that those who were scattered because of the persecution went everywhere preaching the Word.

? What if Phillip didn't heed the call of God to leave?

Garth Brooks, *“I'm glad I didn't know the way it all would end, the way it all would go. Our lives are better left to chance I could have missed the pain, but I'd of had to miss the dance.”*

? What areas in my life am I following God's plan, and what areas need improvement?

Reese said, “*Until the love of Christ and the Gospel of Christ so fills the heart of the average Church member, that he goes out to proclaim the Word.*”

“*Until he (average Church member) is so sold out on the Gospel that he will do that, the Church will never reach the pinnacle of success that Christ intended for her to have.*” (Gareth L. Reese)

II. The LORD uses a Deacon.

Read *Acts 8:5-8*

This was **not the Apostle** Philip. However, like Stephen, Philip was one of the original deacons mentioned in *Acts 6*, and he fled Jerusalem due to persecution, eventually settling in Samaria.

Philip was believed to be a Hellenized Jew who preached the Gospel in addition to fulfilling his duties as a Deacon.

Years earlier, after rebelling against the LORD, Northern Israel was conquered by the Assyrians, who took some Jews captive.

The Assyrians intermarried with the poor, remaining Jews in northern Israel, and later, it was the mixed descendants of the Jewish/Assyrian descendants who became the Samaritans.

A Good Jewish person at this time in history would hate anyone who was a Samaritan because they were considered half-breeds, who did not worship YHWH at the **Temple** in Jerusalem.

This event is a few short years after the narrative of Jesus meeting the woman at the well in *John 4*.

John 4:21 Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father.

John 4:22 You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. NKJV

Jesus told the woman at the well she could have everlasting life through Him. In *Acts*, Philip arrived in Samaria and, “***Hearing and seeing the miracles which he did,***” many believed.

The LORD gave the original Apostles special abilities, but here one of the original deacons was given the power to win people to Christ. There are varying opinions on this authority today.

Some people believe all sign gifts and apostolic miracles stopped after the formation of the early church.

Others believe there are modern-day Apostles like this today.

The original Apostles laid the groundwork for the Church as they were given the task of forming the Church and delivering the complete written revelation of God of the New Testament.

These men had seen the risen Christ and were directed by Him. Today, in most conservative churches, it is understood that the specific Apostolic power was limited to that initial period.

Paul said in *Ephesians 2:19* ***Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,***

Ephesians 2:20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, NKJV

Once this foundation of the Church was laid and the canon of scripture was established, the office of Apostle, with its unique authority and revelatory capacity, ceased to **function**.

The LORD can do whatever, but there are no Apostles today since a condition for being one is to have seen the risen Christ.

We have the final revelation of God through Christ, so no further revelations like those in the ***Book of Acts*** are needed.

In ***Acts 8***, Philip was able to cast out evil spirits and heal people of various illnesses. And because Philip presented the Gospel, with signs and wonders, ***there was great joy in that city***.

You can imagine that many people who were in bondage being freed would have caused much joy!

The Lord's desire for His children is to be free from the **bondage** that comes from the world, our flesh, and the enemy, as we are being transformed by receiving the Mind of Christ.

III. A profession of faith.

Read ***Acts 8:9-13***

One of the most notable people from Samaria was this man named Simon, a sorcerer who had bewitched the city of Samaria, declaring himself to be someone great.

This man was involved with cultic activity and could display many false miracles, but remember, not all miracles are of God.

So, Simon was the big man on campus before Phillip showed up on the scene.

It is said, “***Pride*** is a weed which grows in the garden of every person alive”, and in Simon’s case, his pride was a tree.

The magic Simon performed was powered by Satan, even though the Samaritans thought the power was from God.

Philip preached the Gospel and Simon professed to be a believer

Acts 8:13 Then Simon himself also believed, and when he was baptized. NKJV

Many commentators argue whether or not Simon was really saved at this point or was simply one whom Jesus spoke of.

Matthew 7:22 Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?'

Matthew 7:23 And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!' NKJV

In ***James 2:19***, we read, “***You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe — and tremble! NKJV***

In every Bible-teaching church, there are three different types of people in attendance.

1. The on-fire, **Spirit-led** believer (not perfect, but surrendered to the LORD)
2. The carnal Christian (born again, but led by the flesh)
3. The **non-believer** (never really born again)

1 Corinthians 2:14 But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

Someone can have intellectual knowledge of God and not know Him personally. **James** says the demons know God and tremble.

If the Holy Spirit does not live within your heart and has not changed you, your knowledge of God is no better than the knowledge the **demons** have of the LORD.

We are told that men and women were making professions of faith and then were being baptized as a demonstration of their faith. But the question about Simon remains.

Did Simon have a genuine moment of faith and become born again, or was his profession of faith simply lip service?

So far, there is nothing showing Simon's faith was not genuine. After his baptism, he continued with Philip. More on that later.

It was normal for converts to stay with their teacher for a time.

Some say the fact that Simon was baptized proves he was a believer. Others would say Simon's baptism proves a non-believer can make a **false** profession of faith.

Either way this is proof that water baptism cannot save anyone.

Notice, he was *amazed, seeing the miracles and signs*. Simon was amazed that the power of the Holy Spirit in Philip was greater than the power of magic he previously possessed.

IV. The gift of the Spirit.

Read *Acts 8:14-17*

Even though many within the Church were scattered, the original Apostles were still in Jerusalem, and they were informed that the Gospel was preached to those in Samaria.

Why did they send Peter and John to the believers at Samaria?
Here, we read that Peter and John went to Samaria to pray for the people that they might receive the Holy Spirit.

This passage can cause much confusion for believers today.

Paul said in *Romans 8:9* ***You are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. NKJV***

According to *Romans 8*, if I do not have the Spirit of God, I am not saved, nor am I a child of God.

This can create confusion within believers, and this is how some people get the timing of the baptism of the Holy Spirit mixed up.

1 Corinthians 12:13 For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body — whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free — and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.

Who receives the Baptism of the Holy Spirit?

1 Corinthians 12:13 For by one Spirit we were all baptized.

Who was Paul speaking to? Paul wrote ***1 Corinthians*** to the Christians at Corinth; to both carnal and sold-out Christians, Paul said, ***we were all baptized.***

Dr. John Bechtle said, “*It's ironic that Christians have argued so much about the baptism of the Spirit, when Paul used it as one of his main arguments to prove that we are all united in Christ!*”

Paul also said in ***Ephesians 4:4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling.***

Ephesians 4:5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism.

Ephesians 4:6 one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. NKJV

After the beginning of the Church, there are now two types of baptism: a believer's water baptism and a spiritual baptism.

The “***One Baptism***” in ***Ephesians 4:5*** cannot be speaking of water baptism, because we were not present at Paul's baptism, so we know Paul is speaking about the Baptism of the Spirit

The Baptism of the Spirit was predicted by John the Baptist and by Jesus ***Acts 1:5 for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.***

*“This promise (Baptism of the Holy Spirit) was fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost; for the first time, people were **permanently** indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and the church had begun”*

So, the Baptism of the Holy Spirit is given to any, and all people who trust in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation, and it places that person into the family of God.

When *does Baptism of the Holy Spirit take place?*

In **Acts 10**, Peter was preaching, and some Gentile believers had the Holy Spirit before they were water baptized

Some people say that there is a “second work” of grace or a second Baptism of the Spirit, after the initial Baptism that happens at Salvation.

gotquestions.org, *“The Spirit of God places the believer into union with Christ and into union with other believers in the body of Christ at the **moment** of salvation.”* (gotquestions.org)

Although it is true that as we submit to the Lord, the Holy Spirit will use us for mighty works, those times are **not additional** or a separate baptism.

Paul issued a command **Ephesians 5:18** *And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, Filled* means **controlled by**. *Being filled with the Spirit* happens at the moment of Salvation; and again, there is then a moment-by-moment surrender to the Spirit after that surrender.

What does Baptism of the Holy Spirit do in the life of a believer?

1 Corinthians 12:13 tells us that the Baptism of the Holy Spirit makes us members of the body of Christ, and because we are members of Christ's body, we also have **newness** of life.

2 Corinthians 5:17 *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. NKJV*

Now that we are new creations in Christ, we should exercise our spiritual gifts to play our part in keeping the body functioning the way the Head (Christ) determined it to function.

The Church is not a place to come and consume; you are the church, so we use our gifts to build up and edify the whole body.

The Holy Spirit baptizes us to make us part of the body, and He is our power source to share the Good News of Jesus.

Once saved, the Spirit takes up residence in us and with the Holy Spirit, we start to display the *fruit of the Spirit*.

Notice what *verse 17* says, “*They laid hands on them.*”

We see this at different times within scripture, where the Spirit was received by hands laid on a person and prayer offered.

Paul told his protégé Timothy in ***1 Timothy 4:14*** *Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership. NKJV*

Next week, we will lay hands on Thilo as we ordain him.

The leadership of the Church has witnessed the LORD's gifting in Thilo's life. We will ordain him in agreement with the LORD.

We are not told what evidence was shown to demonstrate the empowering of the Holy Spirit, but something made the receiving of the Holy Spirit in these folks obvious to others.

We have already said that a person receives the Holy Spirit at the moment of salvation, *so why was this a subsequent event here in Acts 8?*

Some say they were never truly born again (converted) under Philip's preaching. When Peter and John came, they trusted in Jesus and then received the Holy Spirit for real.

Some say they were born again, but then a subsequent experience of receiving the Holy Spirit happened.

Some say they were converted in response to hearing the Gospel, but the LORD at that **specific** time **uniquely withheld** the gift of the Holy Spirit until Peter and John could come.

Some say they were born again and received the Holy Spirit at the time of conversion, but were given special gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit when Peter and John laid hands on them.

Some say what the Samaritans experience seems to be more than just the "regular" bestowal of the Holy Spirit at salvation.

Again, there are differing opinions within Christian circles today about what happened then and what happens today.

A person receives the Holy Spirit at the moment of salvation.

V. Conclusion.

The dispersion of the early Church began with the martyrdom of Stephen, followed by great persecution.

This scattering of believers led to the spread of the Gospel and Christianity to other areas of the world.

James 4:13 Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit";

James 4:14, whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away.

James 4:15 Instead, you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that." NKJV

As we make our plans, we need to be sure and seek the LORD and His will so we are obedient to the call He has for our lives.

"*We make plans and God laughs.*" What we see as setbacks, the LORD can see as calculated moves towards His plans.

People make their plans; however, unexpected events and things allowed by the LORD can alter those plans.

Originally, the LORD said to take the Gospel to the world, and then He facilitated their obedience by allowing trials to come into their lives, which forced the Church to be on the move.

As Christ-followers we can easily deceive ourselves and live our lives in selfish pursuits while thinking we are serving the Lord.

What is the reason for our existence? Why do we exist as a Church? What is the purpose of our Church?

A church on the move first focuses on glorifying the Lord Jesus Christ. We teach the pure Word of God, introducing people to Jesus so they can enter into a relationship with Him.

A church on the move must have an open and welcoming community where people are loved and challenged to grow.

A church on the move must reach our community with the Gospel while encouraging prayer, Bible reading, and worship, to deepen a personal relationship with Jesus.

A church on the move is a community of believers who glorify and obey Christ while actively desiring to share Christ with others, both within the church and our community.

Are you serving yourself, being governed by your appetites and affections, or are you living to serve God and others instead?

Persecution led the early Church to go out and fulfill the LORD's plan.

We must respond to the Holy Spirit's will for us as His Church is on the move, fulfilling His will and spreading the Gospel!

There is a world around us, dying to hear about the love and forgiveness of Christ, so as His body, let's get moving!