

Crisis Mode



Acts 8: 1–25

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Well folks, here we are again. It is unbelievable to think about just this last week, because to be honest I didn't think hardly anything about COVID all summer. I hadn't really heard much about it, and this last week I've gotten more texts, more calls, and I've had more conversations about people being sick, people testing positive, people quarantined, and even whole sports teams quarantined. All the sudden, it's like this virus that we thought was just going to go away is here again. If you are like me, you were not expecting this. I thought this was done, I thought this was over, but it seems the pandemic is persisting. So I want to ask the obvious question. What do we do? I mean, what do we do as Christians when it seems like the pandemic is persisting, when it seems like the world we thought was getting better now seems to be getting worse? What do we do when the pandemic persists?

Don't Panic, Proclaim

So, what do we do when we are in crisis mode? That is what we sort of go into when we hear all these things about the pandemic, we go into crisis mode. What do we do in the midst of crisis mode? Here's what I want to urge us to do...not to panic, but instead, to proclaim. The reason I say this is because we are going to walk through Acts Chapter 8 and we are going to learn from our brothers and sisters who have gone before us. They are not facing a persistent pandemic. What they are facing is a great

persecution. They are facing the risk of being killed or being imprisoned. They are facing some really, really hard stuff. So in midst of their crisis mode, we are going to see that in their persecution they don't panic; but rather, they proclaim the gospel.

I think for us as a church, yes, there is going to be some panic, but we don't need to panic, what we need to do is to proclaim the gospel. What a pandemic and a persecution both show is that the kingdom of this world is broken and it desperately needs a Savior. There are people this week that you are going to come in contact with who thought their world was back to normal and now their world is shaking again, and they are not really sure what to do. You are going to have the opportunity in the midst of their shaking kingdom of this world experience to show them a Kingdom that is unshakeable, and a King that is here to rescue. So during this moment, whatever this moment looks like, none of us can predict the future, but right now, what can we do? We cannot panic; but instead, we can proclaim. Proclaim the good news of the gospel.

This brings us to a bigger question. What exactly is the gospel? What exactly is the gospel that we are to proclaim? Acts chapter 8 is going to help us with that, because we not only see the disciples proclaiming the gospel, but they are going to help us define what exactly the gospel is. So if you have your Bibles let's go to Acts Chapter 8 and let's learn from our brothers and sisters who have been in a place similar to where we are now. When life is not going good, when life is messy, we need to focus on the mission. That's what they do.

Scripture

"And Saul approved of his [Stephen's] execution. And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles."

We are going to see that there is a great persecution that comes upon the church and one of the men responsible is a guy name Saul. I want to read that first sentence again, because it is very daunting for the early church, but I think, for us, it is actually going to bring some hope to us. Look at the first sentence in verse 1 again, "And Saul approved of his execution."

Now, the reason that sentence kind of jumps out at us is because if you are a Christian, if you have been around Christianity very long, (even if you are not a Christian and you have no idea who Saul is so it is not as shocking to you) the reality is that Saul has another name, a Greek name that people call him, and his Greek name is Paul. Wait...hold on! It seems like every book I read in the New Testament is written by Paul, right? Yeah, Paul, who wrote most of the New Testament, is the same guy here who is approving of the execution of Stephen, the deacon who gets up and preaches a

message about Jesus, and the crowds don't like it. The synagogue leaders don't like it. So they stone him, and Saul approves of it. Saul is clapping. Saul saying yes, that's exactly what should happen. Not only that, we are going to see that Saul is actually dragging people out of their homes and putting them in prison. That's what Saul is doing.

Your Past Does Not Cancel Your Future

So how does this bring hope to us? I want to give you some hope from this one sentence, and here's the hope that struck me: One sentence doesn't define you. That is really good news. One sentence doesn't define you. In other words, we can say it like this: Your past doesn't cancel out your future with God.

Just think about that. I mean, look at that sentence again, "And Saul approved of his execution." Saul is killing Christians. Saul wants to stop the church. But in the next chapter in Acts, Saul comes to know the Lord Jesus. And Jesus uses him, who once tried to kill the church; He uses him to build the church. He becomes the great Apostle Paul who we have as one of our heroes, but right now, he is the villain. His life didn't start out right. He made some very big mistakes.

Perhaps some of you who are in this room, or maybe you are watching online, and you are thinking this thought...*I've done some things in my past that are either public or private that I really think cancels out my future with God. Maybe I can be a Christian, but I sure can't be used by God because just look at my past, look what I've done.* If that's you, I just want you to look down and read that sentence again "And Saul approved of his execution." Saul didn't start out right; he started out very wrong. He had some really bad things in his past, including murdering Christians, but his past did not cancel out his future. Do you know what happened to that past as we are going to see in Acts Chapter 9? That past was washed in the blood of the Lamb. The blood of Christ washed away his sins so that he could have new life and righteousness in Christ. In other words, God changes Saul's story and He can change yours too. No matter how you start, no matter where you are, you can have a different ending. Your past doesn't cancel out your future.

Saul Leads a Great Persecution

So let's see what happens in this great persecution. Let's look at the rest of verse 1, "And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem and they were all scattered throughout the region of Judea and Samaria." Now that sounds familiar, Judea and Samaria. Remember back in Acts Chapter 1:8 when Jesus said they would receive power and would be witnesses in Jerusalem, and in Judea and in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. Now, there's a great persecution that pushes the people out to Judea and Samaria. Luke is giving us some clues that God might be

up to something in the midst of this great persecution. But the end of verse 1 says, "...except the apostles." The apostles are staying in Jerusalem, probably because they see themselves as the shepherds who need to take care of the sheep under great persecution, so the apostles stay there.

Then, verses 2–3 say, "Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him. But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison." That is a great persecution. You know you are under persecution when people are coming to your house and dragging you off to prison. That's when things are bad. Like, how do we know when things are bad in America? When those kinds of things start happening, things are bad. These people in Acts have gone through some stuff, they are under a great persecution, and the one behind it is none other than Saul. He's going in and asking people if they follow Jesus, and if they say yes, he drags them out and puts them in prison, not just the men but the women too. So you can imagine that the kids are just left in their house by themselves, mom and dad are dragged off to prison.

- **The Church Scatters and Proclaims the Word**

Notice that it says as this is happening the believers are scattered. They have to flee the city because of this great persecution. They have to run to escape death and imprisonment, so they scatter; and it is not the apostles who scatter, it is the church. It's the normal everyday Christians, those who follow Jesus are now spread out. They are running for their lives, they are going to Judea, they are going to Samaria, they are running. The question is what do you do when you scatter?

Just imagine that you are in that situation and there is this crazy persecution happening. Anyone who followed Jesus either dies or goes to prison. You have been able to make it out of the city, but now what do you do? If you had your family and you made it outside of Jerusalem, and you are now in Judea or Samaria, what would be your reaction? What do you think you would do in that situation? I know what I would be tempted to do. I would be tempted to not wear my Jesus T-shirt. I would probably take off my WWJD bracelet. I would probably take off my cross necklace, and I am probably not going to say anything about Jesus. That would be the most obvious thing to do...*Hey kids, we just left Jerusalem because they were going to kill us about Jesus, let's just not talk about Him. Let's go on vacation, let's go on holiday. When things ease up, then we'll come back...* I think the great temptation would be to run, hide, and be quiet. That is perhaps what some of us would do, but that is not what these early believers did.

Notice verse 4. This is a shocking verse, "Now those who were scattered went about preaching the Word." Why are they scattered? People are trying to kill them because

they follow Jesus and they are talking about Jesus. So they scatter; they flee the city. What is the most obvious thing for them to do? Go run, hide, and be quiet. Those who scatter, not the apostles, but just everyday Christians, just everyday followers of the Lord are scattering. And as they scatter, notice what they do. They went about preaching the Word.

That word, preaching, might make us think of a church building, a stage, a pulpit, and a congregation. It is not the word in Greek that Paul used when he told Timothy to preach the Word; but instead, it is to proclaim. They went about proclaiming the Word. Everywhere they go they are speaking the Word to people. They are proclaiming the good news; they are proclaiming the gospel. So here, under great persecution they don't panic; they proclaim. When we are in crisis mode, when we feel a moment where the pandemic is perhaps persisting a little bit, what do we do? We don't panic, we proclaim. We do what they did, we proclaim the Word.

What is the Gospel?

Now the question is what exactly is the Word? I mean they are proclaiming the Word, well what is that? What is the Word that they are proclaiming? Maybe I should ask it like this: What exactly is the gospel? I mean it's a great question to ask. What is the gospel? When I counsel people who think they came to know the Lord, whether it is a child or an adult, one of the questions that I usually ask is can you tell me what the gospel is, and the answers vary. I get anything from angels, or the Bible, or Genesis, or God. There are just all sorts of different answers you get when you ask what is the gospel. If I were to ask you what the gospel is, I want you to imagine articulating an answer back to me. Just answer it in your mind. So, what is the gospel? Perhaps some of us are a little fuzzy on the gospel story...*I think it's like...Well you have the tree, there's an apple, there's eating, and then something about a snake...*It's a big book, right?

So when they are proclaiming the Word, what are they proclaiming? I mean, what story are they starting with? There is a lot of information here. What is the content of that Word that they are proclaiming? Luke actually tells us what the content of their message is. So if you are a little cloudy on what the gospel is, that's OK. Stay tuned because we are going to get some clarification on what exactly the gospel is.

Notice what it says in verse 5, "Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ." Do you remember the mission? It is to take the gospel to Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria, and Philip went to Samaria and proclaimed Christ. So we are first told that as the people scatter they preached the Word. What is the Word? What is the content? What is the gospel? The gospel is now defined for us. What does

Philip proclaim? He proclaims Christ. If you want to think of a very simple one word answer to what the gospel is, it is Christ. Christ is the gospel. Jesus is the gospel. Who He is and what He has done is the gospel. So they are not just proclaiming the Word, they are proclaiming the Word about Jesus. We are going to see that happens as we walk through this text.

Jesus is the content of the gospel. Sometimes we think about the gospel as a plan. For ease of use and for shareability, we have put the gospel into various plans. There are different tracts or different booklets, and maybe you have a favorite one that you use. Maybe you came to the Lord through a gospel tract, through a plan someone presented to you. It is the ABC's, just Admit, Believe, and Confess. There is this kind of plan that you follow, and if you do the plan right then it equals salvation. And none of those things is wrong, but sometimes we can go to the plan and believe the plan is the gospel, but the plan is trying to point us to the gospel, which is Jesus.

You see, the gospel is not a plan. The gospel is a Person, the Person of Jesus Christ. So when you go about telling people the gospel, what are you telling them? You are not just telling them how to get to Heaven, that's included. You are not just telling them how to get their sins forgiven, that's included. You are telling them about Jesus. You want them to know who Jesus is, that Jesus, God's own Son, who is fully God, became a man, and He lived the righteous life you could not. He died the death that you deserve, and three days later, He rose again to defeat your death and to defeat your sin. And if you put your faith and trust in Him, you will not perish but you will have everlasting life with God forever. That is the gospel. It is who Jesus is and what Jesus did for you. So as you communicate the gospel to people, that is what you tell them...who Jesus is and what He has done for them. That Christ died on behalf of their sins, and that by faith, they can have life in Him. So, Luke has clued us in a little more on what that Word they are proclaiming is, and that Word is really a word, Christ. Christ is the Messiah who has come and He has rescued us through His work on the cross.

The Gospel Brings Joy

As Philip is proclaiming Christ in Samaria, notice what it says about the crowds in verses 6 through 8, "And the crowds with one accord paid attention to what was being said by Philip, when they heard him and saw the signs that he did. For unclean spirits, crying out with a loud voice, came out of many who had them, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. So there was much joy in that city."

So, accompanying the gospel message about Christ are those things that happened when Christ was on earth – that when Christ would come, He would cast out demons, He would heal people. We have seen in the scriptures that the Jews demand signs.

And what is accompanying the gospel during this narrative of the scriptures? Signs. Signs are accompanying the gospel to show this is God's power. Philip is not on a road mission, he is doing exactly what God wants him to do, and it is accompanied by the power of God.

Notice what happens when the gospel invades a city. It says there was much joy in the city. In other words, in this village of Samaritans, when they came to know the Lord, when they heard the gospel, it brought rejoicing; it brought joy. Now, why do we need to be reminded of this? I think we need to be reminded because often we don't think the gospel is good news to people. I mean, we say it is, but do we really believe it? If you are like me, in the back of my mind when I see my neighbor, or I see my friend who does not know Jesus, here's what I think—I think his life is A-OK...*He's got a good family, gotta good house, mows his yard - everything seems right with him. He's got it going on. He doesn't need Jesus because if I tell him about Jesus, I'm going to have to talk about repentance and sin. I don't want to tell him about all that stuff! I just want to be happy, so I am just going to leave him alone because he has a good life...* That is what some of us think when we look at a co-worker...*She's got it all together. Everybody likes her, she has a great job, and everything is happening for her. She doesn't need the gospel because that's about repentance, and sin, and all that stuff! I'm just going to leave her alone because she is great...*

Do you know what the truth is? Apart from Christ, these Samaritans had nothing. They might have had some material things, but in reality, they had nothing. Our friends and our neighbors, apart from Christ, they have nothing. What they need desperately is the Lord Jesus Christ. So it might appear that their life is great, it might appear that everything is perfect, but they are really broken because of sin, and they need a Savior who is Jesus. What we need to be reminded of is when the gospel came to a city it brought joy. When the gospel comes to your coworker, it will bring joy. When the gospel comes to your friend, it will bring joy. We are the people who bear a news that brings joy, so let's give it to people so they can have joy! It's good news not bad news. So let's proclaim that good news to people.

Simon the Magician

While Philip is in Samaria he is going to meet a guy named Simon, and we are going to learn quite a bit about Simon. We have to make a decision about Simon. Is Simon a true believer or not? That is the question we have to wrestle with as we walk through this text. I just want that question to be looming in your mind as to whether you think Simon is a genuine believer or not. As we walk through this text, maybe you can make a decision because truthfully, we really don't know for sure.

Let's just get introduced to him and these Samaritan people in verses 9–11, "But there was a man named Simon, who had previously practiced magic in the city and amazed the people of Samaria, saying that he himself was somebody great. They all paid attention to him, from the least to the greatest, saying, "This man is the power of God that is called Great." And they paid attention to him because for a long time he had amazed them with his magic."

So Simon is like the main dude of this town. There are probably billboards of him with the price of tickets to his show. If you know Simon, you are somebody big. Simon is the big deal. He is actually called Simon the Great, and it is said that he has the very power of God. Perhaps these people really thought he was like a deity, or that he was a god himself. He had these magic tricks that he would do that the people couldn't explain. So they would probably come to him for all sorts of things. If they were sick, if they needed direction, they would come to Simon. Simon was their man. He had complete control over this village. He was their hero. This is Simon, the magic guy who has all the sway over this particular town. But the problem is his magic is about to be trumped with something greater, and that is the gospel.

We are going to see what happens to Simon and these people as the gospel invades. Here is what we see in verses 12–13, "But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. Even Simon himself believed, and after being baptized he continued with Philip. And seeing signs and great miracles performed, he was amazed." So Philip comes and preaches the gospel and the Samaritans now believe in Jesus; and Simon, the guy who is filled with magic, the guy who has all the power, he too believes in Jesus. He too gets baptized. He too seems to turn to the Lord Jesus Christ. But we are going to put a big question mark on that because I'm not sure he came to Jesus for the right reason. This is going to be teased out in the way he responds and the things he asks for in just a moment, so we are going to leave a question mark on Simon's life.

The Full Context of the Gospel Message

So, the people of Samaria are coming to Jesus and they are getting baptized, and I want to see what Luke says about the gospel that Philip proclaims. Remember, first they proclaimed the Word, and then it said Philip proclaimed Christ. So, what is the Word? What is the gospel? The gospel is Jesus Christ. That is the gospel. But now, we are going to get a little more information about that gospel message. We are getting a little bit of the fuller context, and it is going to help us to know whether or not we are believing in the full gospel or not. Some of us might only believe and understand half of the gospel and not the full gospel. Look at verse 12 again. It says, "But when they believed Philip as he preached good news..." That is the gospel; gospel literally means

good news. So, what is the gospel? Verse 12 says it is news "...about the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ." So, we already know that Jesus is the gospel, now we are hearing about the Kingdom of God. Why does Philip introduce the Kingdom of God to these Samaritans? Why does he not just stick with Jesus? The gospel is Jesus, so why does he bring in the Kingdom of God to them? And notice he says the gospel is not just the Kingdom of God, but the gospel is the Kingdom of God **and** Jesus Christ. In other words, the gospel involves both a Kingdom and a King.

Theology of Gospel Content

Now why was that important? It was important for us to understand because even in our own day and age we can get this a little confused. And what we can do is we can lean on two different ditches. This has been spoken before; I do not think this is original to me, but it has been noted that what has happened is sometimes we can have a Kingdom without a King, and sometimes we can have a King without a Kingdom. Now let me explain exactly what that means.

1. Kingdom without a King

We are going to start with the first ditch. Sometimes when we think about the gospel, what we end up with is that we have a Kingdom without a King. Philip proclaims the Kingdom of God. And this would be more of liberal theology. They would love kingdom, but would have little to do with Jesus's death, burial, and resurrection. So, there is not what the King did for you on the cross, it is just this kingdom that has been brought. So, all the gospel is – it's leaning into the Kingdom of God. What that really means is, look at all of society and try to fix all of society's ills. This would be the social gospel only. We are not only dealing with society, we are only dealing with social issues, we are only going to fight injustice, we are only going to do those things, and by doing that we are walking in the steps of Jesus, so it is really high on the Kingdom and it's only focused on this world. In other words, don't think about heaven, don't think about afterlife, sin, or judgment; just think about right now, planet earth, and how we can make the earth better. How can we make sure everything on earth is just the way God wants it? And that is not a bad thing; it's just not the whole thing. We should care about the earth. We should care about what happens in society. But when you only have a Kingdom without a King, then you only focus on the Kingdom and you lose the King. Philip is saying no, there is the Kingdom of God **and** Jesus Christ. There is a Kingdom and a King.

2. King without a Kingdom

Now the other ditch, we can be guilty of as Evangelical Christians. Sometimes, what we can be guilty of is having a King without a Kingdom. So our only message is come to Jesus to be forgiven of your sins and to go to Heaven. That is the whole thing, the

whole message. The only reason you need Jesus is to go to Heaven because the whole gospel is only about Heaven; God doesn't really care about this world. It's going to blow up one day, so just forget the earth, think about Heaven, come to Jesus, and then just live out the heavenly life and don't worry about trying to do good for your neighbor. Don't worry about getting involved in some of today's issues, just let the world go and only focus on Heaven, because we have been brought out of this world now and we have a Heaven that we are going to. You see, that would be having a King – we have Jesus – but we forget He also brought a Kingdom to this world, a Kingdom that is supposed to invade the darkness, a Kingdom that is supposed to be filled with good works. It is a Kingdom full of His people that pray like Jesus prayed, "Our Father in Heaven, hallowed be your name. Your Kingdom come, your will be done [where?] on earth as it is in Heaven." We *are* supposed to care about the earth. We *are* supposed to make earth more like Heaven. The liberal theologians will say that it is *just* making earth like Heaven. No, it is making earth like Heaven because there is a King, and His name is Jesus who died in our place for our sins; and therefore we now have the power in His Kingdom to actually make change in this world that is going to last for eternity.

3. King and a Kingdom

See, Philip made sure they had the full content of the gospel. In other words, you are coming to Jesus the King, but when you come to Jesus the King, you are put in the Kingdom of God; therefore, your whole life changes. It is not just your destination at the end of life that changes, but your whole life changes – your priorities, your desires, your commitment, your work. Everything changes, and now it's oriented in a King and a Kingdom. So I want to make sure that when we talk about the gospel that we don't just make the gospel about this earth, and we don't just make the gospel about Heaven, but we make the gospel about a King and a Kingdom, and God cares about both this earth and our place in Heaven. Both of those are true. It is the full message of the gospel that Philip proclaims to them. It is about a King and a Kingdom. It is not a King without a Kingdom, and not a Kingdom without a King, but both a King and a Kingdom together.

Samaritans Receive the Holy Spirit

Now we're going to see what happens next. After their baptism, some strange things happen for us Baptists, and we are going to have to wrestle through what this means, exactly, for our theology. What we are going to see is that they come to faith, they get baptized, and then later on they receive the Holy Spirit, which contradicts a little bit about what we believe. So we are going to lean into this text and untangle some of it.

Verses 14–17 say, “Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, for he had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit.”

News gets back to Jerusalem that the Samaritans have come to faith in Christ. And you can imagine that was a little bit of a shock to some of the Jews because what we know from the gospels is Jews and Samaritans had no dealings with each other. The Samaritans were seen as the outcasts; they had married people who were not Jews, they had abandoned the covenants, so the Samaritans did not like the Jews and the Jews did not like the Samaritans. So the Jews would have thought Jesus was their King to bring about God’s Kingdom, and it didn’t include the Samaritans. But now, the Samaritans are coming to Jesus. The Samaritans are putting their faith and trust in the Messiah, this Kingdom thing is going outside of Jerusalem, which, by the way, is exactly what Jesus said it would do.

So, the apostles John and Peter go down to check it out, and when they get there, they realize these people have believed and been baptized in the name of Jesus, but they don’t have the Holy Spirit. So Luke says the apostles lay their hands on these Samaritans, and then the Samaritans receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. So this is where we have to untangle this as Baptists because this seems strange to us. If you have been a Baptist for a while, you have always been told that at the moment of belief you are sealed with the Holy Spirit, just like Ephesians 1 says, that when you believe you are sealed with the Holy Spirit. It is a simultaneous thing; when you believe, you get the gift of the Holy Spirit. But here, we are seeing these people believe and they got baptized, but they do not have the Holy Spirit yet. They didn’t receive the Spirit until the apostles laid their hands on them. And so some, even today in different denominations, will take verses like this and they will say that there is a second grace that is given. They say you can believe in Jesus and not have the Holy Spirit – that you need to be *baptized* with the Holy Spirit, you need to have hands laid on you, you need to have certain signs that tell you that you actually have the Holy Spirit because sometimes the Holy Spirit does not happen just on belief – that was what happened with the Samaritans.

So as we wrestle through this, there are the questions we need to think through. Is this normative to the Christian experience then and for all time, or, is this an abnormal situation where God is doing something to tell us something significant for us to pay attention to? That is the two options. Either this is normative, and we should still be doing this today when we get saved – go to an apostle and have him put his hands on you. Good luck finding that guy! Is that normal today; should we be still doing that? Or

this is abnormal, and God was doing something significant in that moment that we need to pay attention to?

I am going to argue that this was an abnormal event. Now, why do I argue that this was an abnormal event? Well, first of all, just the way Luke pens it shows it is a little abnormal. Luke is saying...*Hey, if you were baptized, but something is missing, they don't have the Holy Spirit. They are only baptized in the name of Jesus...*So he is clueing us in that this seems to be abnormal. Now the Apostles are having to come and figure out what exactly is going on, because what should have happened is they should have gotten the Holy Spirit, but they don't have the Holy Spirit. So it seems that Luke is writing to let us know this is an abnormal situation and not normal.

One Church, One Gospel, One Spirit

So, if it is abnormal and not normal, then why did God require the apostles to lay their hands on the Samaritans before they received the Holy Spirit? That's our question, and to be honest the text doesn't tell us, so we are going to have to speculate. Here is what I think, along with Bro. Ricky, and along with most commentaries that I consorted. You have to understand that during this time, none of the Jews would have thought the Samaritans would have been invited in the Kingdom of God. They are outsiders. There is no way they would be invited in. There is no way they could come to faith in Jesus. There is definitely no way they are going to get the Holy Spirit and be a part of the church. They would believe this is just a Jewish thing. But all of the sudden, Samaritans were coming to faith in Christ. So how does God confirm that for everybody to know so that there will be no miscommunication and everyone will know what's happening? God has the apostles come down and lay their hands on these Samaritans. These apostles are Peter and John; they are representatives of the church, of Jesus. They are laying their hands on these Samaritans saying that they agree that these people also believe in the Lord and that they also are part of the church. They lay their hands on them, and by laying their hands on them these people receive the Holy Spirit.

Why did God confirm it in this way? Because He wanted all the Jews to know, and He wanted all the Samaritans to know that there is one church, there is one gospel, and there is one Spirit and the Samaritans are invited in. See, if this hadn't happened, there could easily be an offshoot of Christianity. There would be Jewish Christianity, Samaritan Christianity, then Gentile Christianity, and all three would be separate. Instead, God is showing that there is one group of Christ's followers. There is one church, and it includes both Jews and Samaritans. The apostles are proving that by

laying on their hands, giving their stamp of approval to say that this is not the first church of Samaria, Red Sea, but they are the same church as the church in Jerusalem. They are brothers and sisters in Christ who have the Holy Spirit just like they do. It was God's confirmation that the gospel is also for the Samaritans.

Transitions throughout Acts

Now, as you look through the book of Acts, you will notice that the mode of baptism changes throughout the book of Acts. There is an evolution of baptism and receiving the Holy Spirit. You might be thinking how could that be. Well it makes sense because Acts is a transitional book. That is one of the main things you have to know about Acts. It is really hard to build theology on Acts because there is a transition that is happening. OK, there are things that are normal in Acts that are not normal now. How do we know that? We know that because it is going from old covenant to new covenant. It's a transition. People are just coming to faith, they are just coming into the Kingdom, so certain things are happening. In Acts Chapter 2, for example, in order to get the Holy Spirit, the Jews have to believe and be baptized, and then they get the Holy Spirit. But then when we get to this passage, the Samaritans believe, then they get baptized, and then the apostles have to lay their hands on them for them to get the Holy Spirit. So you have two different things...Jews believe, get baptized, and get the Holy Spirit. Samaritans believe, get baptized, then have hands laid on them, and then they get the Holy Spirit. And then, something crazy thing is going to happen in Acts chapter 10, and we are going to deal with it when we get there, but you have these Gentiles who believe in Jesus, and by believing they get the Holy Spirit! And Peter shows up and says...*Um, we didn't really see this coming, I didn't think the Samaritans were good, but the Gentiles are now in the Kingdom? Um, well, can anybody forbid water for them to be baptized? Because they had the Holy Spirit, just like we do...* So what do they do? They baptize them.

So, we see in the beginning of Acts, the Jews believe, get baptized, and then get the Holy Spirit. Samaritans believe, get baptized, laying on of hands, then receive the Holy Spirit. The Gentiles believed, get the Holy Spirit, then they are baptized. So we see this morphing take place in the book of Acts. Why is it like that? Because God is confirming the gospel going to these various groups of people. What we would say now is that when you look at the rest of New Testament, the mode is when you believe in the gospel you are sealed with the Holy Spirit, and you get baptized as a response to that. So when you find some of these troubling verses in Acts, you have to remember there is a transition taking place. Why did the apostles put their hands on these Samaritans? They are confirming that the gospel truly gone to the Samaritans.

Was Simon a Believer?

Now let's think back to Simon. Is he really a believer? Let's read the rest of this story. Verses 18–23 say, "Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, saying, "Give me this power also, so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity."

Simon sees the apostles laying on hands, and he sees the Holy Spirit coming upon them so it must have been a visible manifestation of the Spirit. We are not told exactly what happens here, so again, this is kind of an abnormal event. But this happens, and then Simon's like...*Oh ok, here I got 20 bucks like can I get some of that?...* He tries to buy it! This would have been common because he is a magician, so he would have bought and sold some of his tricks. So he is thinking...*Hey, this is new magic, give me some of that magic, it's better than my magic...* Simon tries to buy the power of God. Now remember, he was the man with the power of God before Philip showed up with Jesus. Now, he has lost his power and he wants it back.

Notice how sharply Peter rebuked him. He said may your silver and gold perish with you. You can't buy the power of God. It's not for sale. Then Peter talks about how his heart is not right and he is actually in the gall of bitterness, and he is in the bond of iniquity. I think what Peter is trying to get us to see is Simon actually came to Jesus for the wrong reason. Simon, it seems, came to Jesus for selfish gain. He saw he was losing his power, but if he came to Jesus, maybe he could get it back. He thought he could buy it back and become strong among this people once again. Simon is coming to Jesus really for himself, not for Jesus, and it shows up here.

Peter calls Simon to repent, and here is his repentance in verse 24. It says, "And Simon answered, "Pray for me to the Lord, that nothing of what you have said may come upon me." Now the question is, is that real repentance? I mean Peter lays it out...*Hey, you are dead wrong, your heart is not right before God, you are selfishly coming to the gospel, you want it for selfish gain...* and Simon's response is...*Hey, Peter will you pray to God so that what you just said doesn't happen to me ...* So it seems to me that he is more concerned about the judgment that's coming, and he doesn't even really know Jesus because he is asking Peter to pray on his behalf. So I think these clues show that Simon doesn't really know the Lord. He hasn't really come to Jesus by faith to get Jesus. He came to Jesus by faith to get more power for himself.

The same thing can be true of us. Some of us even in this room or watching online, we have come to Jesus for a selfish motivation. We have actually come to Jesus to get

something, maybe it's to get a better life. We were told if we come to Jesus, we would have a great marriage. We were told if we come to Jesus, our kids would obey us. That didn't work, right? We have come to Jesus and things are not happening the way they should, because we were told if we just go to church and obey, and do good, everything would be perfect, and it hasn't worked out that way. And then we get bitter towards God because the gospel did not work. Your life is not perfect. You don't have all the power that you were promised. The reality is we believed a wrong gospel. We believed that coming to Jesus would make our life better. But in fact, we found a whole people that Jesus did not make their life better, he made them have to leave their homes under persecution. Some of them were in prison for knowing Jesus.

See, the gospel is not Jesus will make your life better, the gospel is realizing your life is insufficient without Christ, so you give up your life to get His life. It's not Jesus makes your life better; He gives you His life which is better. Jesus is better than your life. Jesus is the one you come to, for Him, not for the power that He can give you. If you came to Jesus like Simon, to get something, just to try something, just to have a little more power with you, it won't work. You will be found out, and what you need to do is to repent in a true way, not just to ask a friend to pray for you, but go to the Lord and confess your sins, and claim Christ as your Savior.

So what do they do at the end of this scattering? Notice what it says in verse 25, "Now when they had testified and spoken the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans." They had scattered, and we don't know how much time is gone, but now they are starting to come back to Jerusalem. As they come back towards Jerusalem, what are they doing? Every village they come to with Samaritans, they are proclaiming the gospel. Why? Because the gospel brings joy, the gospel is the news that these Samaritans need to hear. They are proclaiming the gospel.

So again, what is the gospel? We have learned the gospel is Jesus, but the gospel is also, in the fuller sense, is about Jesus and His Kingdom. It's about a King and a Kingdom. When you come to the Lord Jesus, you are coming to who He is and what He has done. You are coming to Him as the King of your life. But when you come to Jesus, you are then placed into a Kingdom that makes a real difference on this Earth. You are now one who bears that message of the gospel for everyone to hear.

These people realized they were not just following a King that gets them to Heaven; they were following a King that brought His Kingdom on earth and they wanted to spread that Kingdom everywhere they went. And that is what they did. They proclaimed the gospel. These people were under great persecution, but they didn't panic, instead they proclaim. Whenever things got messy, they leaned into the mission

of God, and God used persecution in their time to advance His gospel outside Jerusalem to people who are far from God.

Today, we find ourselves in a day that we did not want to come to, in a moment we did not want to come to where it seems like the pandemic is persisting again. We hope it's only days and not weeks and months, but we don't know what the future looks like. So what do we do when we start getting the news that things are getting bad again? We don't panic, but instead we proclaim.

Do you know what a persecution needs? Do you know what a pandemic needs? It needs a cross and an empty tomb. People going through these things need a cross and they need an empty tomb, and you have the message of both of those things. When the kingdom of this world shakes, your security in this world shakes. That is what happens during a pandemic. Your security and keeping yourself from danger and harm, all that gets shaken, and you are not in control. What happens when the kingdom of this world shakes? It leads people to look for a kingdom that doesn't shake, a kingdom that is indestructible and unstoppable and that is the Kingdom of God.

So as you go to work tomorrow, or as you video conference tomorrow, wherever you are, what do you do? You point people to the Kingdom and its King, the Lord Jesus Christ. In a pandemic, people are waking up to the world being broken, and they need a Savior. You have that news.

Do you know what I noticed about this church in Acts? Without even being told, they just realize that they are sent. I mean, the apostles didn't tell them to go preach; they just went and preached. They were a sent church. It seems to be they just loved following Jesus and they wanted others to know about Jesus too. Do you know what we are? We are a sent church in the same way. Those who love Jesus should want to tell others how they can follow Jesus. So as the pandemic persists, what do we do? We don't panic; we proclaim the gospel. What is the gospel? It's Jesus, a King and a Kingdom. Let's proclaim that this week.