

Eternity Daily Bible Study - No. 383
Series: The Primal Church - Acts Chapters 1-8
Verses: Acts 8:5-8
Topic: The Samaritan Revival
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Acts 8:5-8 MKJV And Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed Christ to them. (6) And the people with one accord gave heed to those things which Philip spoke, hearing and seeing the many miracles which he did. (7) For out of those having unclean spirits, many came out, crying with loud voice. And many who had been paralyzed and lame were healed. (8) And there was great joy in that city.

The gospel moves outwards: In Acts 1:8 Jesus had said: "But you shall receive power, the Holy Spirit coming upon you. And you shall be witnesses to Me both in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

Up until the stoning of Stephen the Christian community had been almost totally confined to Jerusalem. After the stoning of Stephen the gospel then moved to the next stage – Judea and Samaria "and all were scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria...Now those who were scattered went from place to place preaching the word. ". (Acts 8:1,4)

A lot of this preaching was being done by Greek-speaking Jews such as Philip (Philip was a common Greek name of that period). This Philip, was not Philip the apostle but was one of the seven deacons, and next in line after the martyred Stephen. The apostles had remained in Jerusalem.

The way that Stephen's no. 2 moves immediately into his ministry and power is startling, as if the anointing did not die with Stephen but was transferred 'from Elijah to Elisha'. It is a testimony that persecution cannot remove anointing from the Church, even if the anointed ones are killed.

Philip did two things right – he went to Samaria, and he proclaimed Christ to them. We need to go to those who are thirsty, such as the woman of Samaria at Sychar, and we need to give them Christ. Samaria had been well-prepared by the visit of Jesus and the testimony of the Samaritan woman and the people of Sychar who believed.

The town of Samaria had been leveled by Hyrcanus and then rebuilt by Herod as Sebaste – or Augustus, after the Roman emperor. It had a long history of deviant worship, first as the center of the Baal worshipping kings of Northern Israel and of the cult of Ahab and Jezebel, then after the Assyrian captivity, as a place of a cross-bred religion between Jews and Assyrians, finally Herod built a temple to Augustus the Roman emperor there and a massive statue of him. It may have been the center of blatant emperor worship in the Holy Land. It was what we would probably call a New Age city of many blended religions.

Therefore with all the traumas of wars and sieges just past, and with pagan immorality and idolatry, it would have been heavily demonized. Into this theological maelstrom went Philip.

Here is a great irony – the Temple authorities with their theology reject Christ but the heretical Samaritans joyfully receive Him! Thus Christ is most received by those who feel most in need. In a sense the Samaritans represent the marginalized people in our midst, well away from the mainstream, with a bunch of odd beliefs. The New Agers, the dope smokers, the conspiracy theorists, the pseudo-Zen Buddhists and the Rastafarians. If the gospel is presented to them clearly they will gladly believe. They are looking for an alternative faith – and a faith that has been persecuted by the Jews and kicked out of Jerusalem will do them just fine! If the Jewish Temple authorities had approved of the Christians, then the Samaritans (who detested these authorities) would probably never have listened. But because the Christians were persecuted, because they sensed the marginalization, - they related, and listened and accepted Christ.

Philip was accepted because he was a persecuted minority, able to talk Greek and understand a multi-cultural city and importantly because he was NOT one of the “enemy” - the orthodox Hebrews-speaking Jews. It is very important that we not “represent the enemy”. A brief attempt of mine to minister to Australian Aboriginals turned into disaster because as a white Australian male from a certain social circle I was “too white”, too much the enemy, and too alien to their ways. We must not project ourselves so as to represent power and dominion, or as a member of a master race or dominant culture over the people we serve.

Finally Philip came with redemptive power: And the people with one accord gave heed to those things which Philip spoke, hearing and seeing the many miracles which he did. (7) For out of those having unclean spirits, many came out, crying with loud voice. And many who had been paralyzed and lame were healed.

People listened because they “heard and saw” – the many miracles taking place including powerful deliverances and the healing of paralytics and the lame. Some healing ministries seem to have “specialties” Philip’s was legs – the paralyzed and lame. I think we should ask God to raise up people who can miraculously heal cancer and AIDS, especially in Africa. For in such tragic places they simply cannot recover unless God heals them.

This traumatized, idolatrous, demon-infested city saw mighty deliverances and works of power “and there was much joy in that city”. The demons left shrieking, blasted out of people by the power of the name of Jesus Christ. It was what missionaries call a “people movement” due to a “power encounter” between Christ and the local spirit world. Oh for more of the power of Jesus! Yet such power often, maybe only, lies with those who are prepared to take a lowly place among the marginalized people of this world.

Blessings,

John Edmiston

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