



Summary

This powerful exploration of Acts chapter 8 reveals how God's sovereignty transforms persecution into purpose. We witness the remarkable truth that what Satan intends for evil, God redirects for His glory. As believers fled Jerusalem under Saul's brutal persecution, they didn't run in fear and silence—they scattered like seeds, preaching the gospel everywhere they went. This pattern reminds us that God never wastes our suffering. The persecution that seemed designed to stamp out the early church actually became the very means of its expansion into Samaria and beyond. We discover Philip, an ordinary deacon who waited tables, becoming a powerful evangelist performing signs and wonders. His ministry teaches us that God doesn't need our credentials or status—He needs our availability. The Samaritans, previously despised by the Jews, became recipients of the gospel because Jesus had already prepared their hearts during His earthly ministry. This challenges us to recognize that God is always working ahead of us, preparing hearts in places we never expected. The message calls us to embrace the truth that our greatest setbacks can become God's greatest setups for kingdom advancement.





Points

Title: The Empowering Presence of the Holy Spirit: From Persecution to Power

Sermon Summary: This sermon explores Acts chapter 8, examining the persecution that scattered the early church and how God sovereignly used it to spread the gospel beyond Jerusalem into Samaria. The message focuses on three distinct relationships believers can have with the Holy Spirit: the Spirit with us (conviction), the Spirit in us (salvation/indwelling), and the Spirit upon us (empowerment for ministry). Through the accounts of Philip's ministry in Samaria and Simon the Sorcerer's conversion, the sermon demonstrates that while salvation comes through faith in Christ alone, believers are encouraged to seek the baptism with the Holy Spirit for power in witness and ministry. The message emphasizes that God's sovereignty ensures that even persecution and suffering of His saints ultimately serves His glory and the advancement of His kingdom.

Key Points:

- Persecution scattered the Jerusalem church, but believers went everywhere preaching the Word, fulfilling Jesus' command to be witnesses in Judea and Samaria
- Saul of Tarsus (later Paul) was a terrorist against the church before his conversion, demonstrating God's transforming power
- God's sovereignty ensures that nothing but His glory results from the suffering of His saints (Psalm 116:15)
- Philip, like Stephen, was a deacon who became a powerful evangelist accompanied by signs, wonders, and healings
- Jesus had already prepared the Samaritans to receive the gospel through His encounter with the woman at the well (John 4)
- Three distinct relationships with the Holy Spirit exist: para (alongside/with us), en (in us at salvation), and epi (upon us for power)
- The Samaritan believers were saved and baptized but had not yet received the empowering baptism of the Holy Spirit until Peter and John laid hands on them
- Simon the Sorcerer was genuinely converted and exorcised of demonic forces when he believed and was baptized
- Believers cannot be demon-possessed because the Holy Spirit does not share residence with demonic forces
- The baptism with the Holy Spirit is available to all believers who ask (Luke 11:9-13)
- Fresh baptism with the Holy Spirit can be sought repeatedly for strength against temptation and power for ministry
- The proper interpretation principle: "If the plain sense makes the most sense, seek no other sense"

Scripture Reference:

- Primary: Acts 8:1-25
- Supporting: Acts 1:8, Acts 26:9-11, John 4:1-42, John 20:22, Matthew 16:18, Psalm 116:15, Luke 11:9-13, Luke 9:51-56, 1 John 4:4, Matthew 3 (John the Baptist's testimony), Matthew 8:28-32 (demon-possessed men), John 14 (the Helper/Comforter)



Stories:

- Stephen's martyrdom and burial by devout men at great personal risk
- Saul of Tarsus dragging Christians from their homes to imprison and kill them
- Mao Zedong forcing Chinese Christians to become mailmen, which inadvertently spread the gospel throughout China
- Jesus meeting the Samaritan woman at the well and revealing Himself as Messiah
- The Samaritan revival under Philip's ministry with signs, wonders, and healings
- Simon the Sorcerer's conversion and subsequent attempt to buy the power of the Holy Spirit
- Billy Graham's testimony of receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit in England, transforming his ministry from powerless to powerful with hundreds responding
- The pastor's father, a World War II Navy veteran who lived to be 100 years old, being honored at a Mississippi State football game as an illustration of the heavenly reception awaiting believers
- The pastor holding his father's hand as he passed into the presence of the Lord





Scripture

Explicitly Mentioned References

1. Acts 8:1-25 - Primary text of the sermon
2. Acts 26:9-11 - Paul's testimony about persecuting Christians
3. Acts 1:8 - "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you"
4. John 4:1-42 - Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well
5. Psalm 116:15 - "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints"
6. Matthew 16:18 - "On this rock I will build my church"
7. John 20:22 - Jesus breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit"
8. Leviticus 23 - The seven feasts (reference to Pentecost timing)
9. Acts 2 - The Day of Pentecost
10. 1 John 4:4 - "He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world"
11. Matthew 3 - John the Baptist's testimony about Christ
12. John 14 - Jesus promises the Helper/Holy Spirit
13. Luke 11:9-13 - Ask and it will be given; Father gives the Holy Spirit to those who ask
14. Luke 9:51-56 - John wanting to call down fire on Samaritans
15. Matthew 8:28-34 - Jesus and the demon-possessed men in Gadarenes
16. Joel 2:28-32 - Promise of the Father (alluded to)
17. Acts 1:4-5 - Wait for the promise; baptized with the Holy Spirit
18. John 3:16 - "For God so loved the world" (referenced)

Additional Relevant Verses for Sermon Themes

Theme: Persecution Spreading the Gospel

- Acts 11:19-21 - Persecution scattering believers who preached
- Philippians 1:12-14 - Paul's imprisonment advancing the gospel

Theme: Stephen's Martyrdom Impact

- Acts 7:54-60 - Stephen's actual martyrdom
- Acts 22:20 - Paul's later reference to Stephen's death

Theme: Power of the Holy Spirit

- Acts 4:31 - Filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke boldly
- Romans 8:11 - Spirit who raised Jesus dwelling in you



- Ephesians 5:18 - Be filled with the Spirit

Theme: Baptism with the Holy Spirit

- Luke 24:49 - Tarry until endued with power from on high
- Acts 19:1-6 - Disciples at Ephesus receiving the Holy Spirit

Theme: God's Sovereignty in Suffering

- Romans 8:28 - All things work together for good
- 2 Corinthians 4:17 - Light affliction working eternal glory

Theme: Conversion and Salvation

- 2 Corinthians 5:17 - New creation in Christ
- Ephesians 2:8-9 - Saved by grace through faith





Quotes

In God's sovereignty, he will never allow anything but his glory to be the direct result of the suffering of his saints.

The gates of Hades shall never prevail against faith. What faith? The rock of faith that Jesus is the Christ.

If the plain sense makes the most sense, seek no other sense. This will always protect you according to the truth of what God's word literally declares.

God is a great communicator. He says what he means, and he means what he says. This is particularly important when it comes to the proper interpretation of God's word.

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 in Samaria and to the end of the earth.

A Christian cannot be demon possessed. Being born again is in reality our only protection from being possessed by a demonic force or many demons.

How much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him? Why? Because he knows you need it.

I would rather be baptized afresh with the Holy Spirit to prevent me from saying something stupid or desiring something stupid or doing something stupid.





Discussion Questions

How does the persecution of early Christians, particularly by Saul of Tarsus, demonstrate God's sovereignty in spreading the gospel to unexpected places like Samaria?

In what ways does Philip's ministry to the Samaritans challenge our own prejudices about who is worthy or ready to receive the gospel message?

What is the significance of the distinction between being baptized by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ and being baptized by Jesus with the Holy Spirit for empowerment?

How does Simon the sorcerer's story illustrate both the transformative power of genuine salvation and the ongoing struggle with sinful desires even after conversion?

Why do you think Jesus needed to go through Samaria and seed the pond for Philip's later ministry, and how does this inform our understanding of divine preparation?

What does it mean practically to ask for a fresh baptism with the Holy Spirit in moments of temptation or before ministry, and have you experienced this in your own life?

How does the contrast between the Samaritans' receptiveness to Jesus and the Jewish leadership's rejection challenge our assumptions about religious background and spiritual openness?

In what ways does the laying on of hands by Peter and John for the Samaritans to receive the Holy Spirit differ from or complement modern understandings of Spirit-filled living?

How can Stephen's faithful martyrdom and the subsequent spread of believers demonstrate that God never allows anything but His glory to result from the suffering of His saints?

What does it mean that the theology of demons is perfect, and how should this understanding affect our approach to spiritual warfare and discernment?





Small Group Guide: Acts 8:1-25 - The Power of the Holy Spirit

Opening Prayer

Begin your time together asking God to open hearts and minds to understand His Word and the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

Ice Breaker Question

Share a time when you witnessed God using a difficult situation to accomplish something good that you didn't expect.

Key Themes from the Sermon

1. God's Sovereignty in Persecution

- Stephen's martyrdom led to increased persecution
- Believers scattered, spreading the gospel everywhere they went
- What Satan meant for evil, God used for His glory

2. The Baptism with the Holy Spirit

- Three distinct relationships with the Holy Spirit:
 - Para (alongside) - conviction before salvation
 - En (in) - indwelling at salvation
 - Epi (upon) - empowerment for ministry

3. God's Heart for the Outcasts

- Jesus intentionally went through Samaria (John 4)
- Philip brought the gospel to the despised Samaritans
- The "dogs" received what the religious leaders rejected



Discussion Questions

Understanding the Text

1. Read Acts 8:1-4. How did persecution actually help fulfill Jesus' command in Acts 1:8? What does this teach us about God's sovereignty over difficult circumstances?
2. Read Acts 8:5-8. What characterized Philip's ministry in Samaria? How did the Samaritans respond differently than the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem?
3. Read Acts 8:14-17. Why do you think Peter and John needed to come to Samaria? What was missing from the Samaritans' experience even though they had believed and been baptized?

Personal Reflection

4. The sermon emphasized that "God will never allow anything but His glory to be the direct result of the suffering of His saints."
 - How have you seen God bring glory from suffering in your own life or the life of someone you know?
 - What current difficulty might God be using for purposes you can't yet see?
5. The pastor shared about his father's homecoming celebration at the football game as a picture of entering heaven.
 - How does this image affect your view of death for believers?
 - How might this perspective change the way we grieve or comfort others?

Theological Discussion

6. The sermon presented a controversial topic: baptism with the Holy Spirit as a separate experience from salvation.
 - What was your previous understanding of the Holy Spirit's work in believers' lives?
 - How do you respond to the distinction between being indwelt by the Spirit (at salvation) and being baptized with the Spirit (for power)?
 - Read Luke 11:9-13. What does Jesus promise to those who ask for the Holy Spirit?
7. Read Acts 8:18-24 (Simon's response).
 - What does Simon's mistake teach us about the nature of God's gifts?
 - Why was Peter's rebuke so strong?
 - Do you think Simon was genuinely saved? Why or why not?



Practical Application

This Week's Challenge

Choose one or more of the following to practice this week:

1. Ask for Fresh Empowerment

- Before a challenging situation (difficult conversation, temptation, ministry opportunity), pause and ask God for a fresh baptism with the Holy Spirit
- Journal what happens when you do this

2. Share Your Faith with Someone "Unlikely"

- The Samaritans were the last people Jews expected to respond to the gospel
- Who in your life seems unlikely to respond to Jesus? Pray for them daily and look for opportunities to share

3. Memorize Acts 1:8

- "But 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."

4. Study the Holy Spirit

- Read John 14-16 this week, noting everything Jesus teaches about the Holy Spirit
- What promises does Jesus make about the Spirit's role in our lives?

Reflection Questions for Personal Growth

1. Am I relying on my own strength or the power of the Holy Spirit in my daily life and ministry?
 2. Have I asked God to baptize me with the Holy Spirit for power to witness? If not, what holds me back?
 3. When facing temptation (alcohol, pornography, gossip, anger), do I turn to the Holy Spirit for power to overcome?
 4. Am I willing to go to the "Samaria" in my life—the people or places I'd rather avoid?
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Closing Discussion

Read Acts 8:4 again: "Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word."

- How can our group "go everywhere preaching the word" in our daily lives?
 - What would it look like for persecution or difficulty to spread the gospel through us rather than silence us?
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Prayer Time

Pray together for:

- Boldness to share the gospel like Philip
- Fresh empowerment by the Holy Spirit
- Those who are facing persecution for their faith worldwide
- Specific "Samaritans" in your lives who need Jesus
- Anyone in the group who wants to receive the baptism with the Holy Spirit

Consider: If anyone in your group wants to ask for the baptism with the Holy Spirit, pray for them specifically, laying hands on them as the early church did.

For Next Week

- Read Acts 8:26-40 (Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch)
 - Think about: How does God orchestrate divine appointments?
 - Consider: When have you experienced God's perfect timing in ministry?
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Additional Resources

- Book recommendation: *The Holy Spirit* by Billy Graham
- Study the seven feasts of Israel (Leviticus 23) to understand Pentecost better
- Research: R.A. Torrey, D.L. Moody, and other revivalists' teachings on the Holy Spirit



Daily Devotional

5-Day Devotional: Empowered by the Spirit

Day 1: When Persecution Spreads the Gospel

Reading: Acts 8:1-8

Devotional: The early church faced brutal persecution under Saul of Tarsus, yet what Satan meant for destruction, God used for expansion. When believers scattered from Jerusalem, they didn't retreat in silence—they went everywhere preaching the Word. Philip's ministry in Samaria demonstrates that God's purposes cannot be thwarted by human opposition.

Consider the challenges you face today. Are they obstacles or opportunities for the gospel? Like those early believers, we can trust that God sovereignly uses even our trials to advance His kingdom. The same Spirit that empowered Philip empowers you. Where has God scattered you? That's your mission field. Don't let fear silence your witness—let persecution refine and redirect it.

Reflection: What "scattering" in your life might God be using to spread His message through you?

Day 2: The Transforming Power of Conversion

Reading: Acts 8:9-13; Acts 26:9-11

Devotional: Simon the Sorcerer and Saul the Persecutor both encountered the power of Christ and were radically transformed. Simon, once revered for demonic power, became amazed at God's true power. Saul, the church's greatest terrorist, became its greatest missionary. No one is beyond redemption's reach.

When you become born again, the Holy Spirit doesn't share residence with darkness—He drives it out completely. "He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world" (1 John 4:4). Whatever held you captive before Christ—addiction, bitterness, pride, fear—loses its power when the Spirit takes residence. Your past doesn't disqualify you; it qualifies you to testify of God's transforming grace.

Reflection: What areas of your past remind you most powerfully of God's transforming work in your life?



Day 3: Receiving the Spirit's Empowerment

Reading: Acts 8:14-17; Luke 11:9-13

Devotional: The Samaritan believers were saved and baptized, yet something was still missing—the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit for ministry. This wasn't about salvation; they were already born again. This was about power for witness and service.

Jesus promises that our Heavenly Father eagerly wants to give the Holy Spirit to those who ask. Why would we refuse what God freely offers? Before temptation, before ministry, before witnessing—ask for fresh baptism with the Spirit's power. This isn't reserved for elite Christians; it's God's provision for every believer who desires to live victoriously and witness effectively. The same power that raised Christ from the dead is available to you.

Reflection: When did you last specifically ask God to empower you with His Holy Spirit for the challenges you face?

Day 4: Precious in His Sight

Reading: Psalm 116:15; John 4:1-26

Devotional: "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints." This isn't callousness—it's profound purpose. God never wastes the suffering or sacrifice of His children. Stephen's martyrdom didn't end the gospel; it spread it. The Samaritan woman's encounter with Jesus seeded a harvest Philip would later reap.

God is sovereign over every detail of your life, including your trials and even your death. He orchestrates circumstances so that His glory becomes unavoidable. The memorial services we hold, the testimonies we share, the lives we touch through suffering—all become platforms for the gospel. Your faithfulness in hardship may plant seeds that bear fruit for generations. Trust that God sees, God knows, and God will use everything for His glory.

Reflection: How might God be using your current struggles to prepare a future harvest?

Day 5: The Welcome Home

Reading: Matthew 25:21-23; Revelation 21:1-7

Devotional: Imagine entering heaven to thunderous applause, angelic celebration, and Jesus Himself welcoming you home. "Well done, good and faithful servant!" This isn't fantasy—it's the promised reality for every believer. The angels rejoice over one sinner who repents; how much more when that saint comes home?

This world is not your home. You're passing through enemy territory, empowered by the Spirit, on mission for the King. Every act of faithfulness, every moment of endurance, every witness you bear is observed and will be rewarded. The reception awaiting you far exceeds any earthly honor. Live today with eternity in view. Your labor in the Lord is never in vain.



Reflection: How would living with your heavenly homecoming in mind change your priorities today?

Closing Prayer: Father, baptize us afresh with Your Holy Spirit. Empower us to be bold witnesses, transform us completely from our past, and help us live each day with eternity in view. May we never settle for powerless Christianity when You offer supernatural empowerment. In Jesus' name, Amen.

