

Christ's Authority is Greater, Part 1—Acts 8:9-25—9/28/25

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Open your Bibles to Acts 8 & let's begin by reading the next section as continue in our study of the foundational beginning of the church.

Follow along as I read Acts 8:1-25. [READ]

We studied verses 1-8 last week & saw that Stephen's martyrdom did not produce fear in Jesus' followers like the Jewish leaders had hoped.

Since Jesus had prepared His people for such persecution, it only further proved how Jesus should be trusted & followed.

So just as Jesus had said, His followers kept on preaching Him as the Lord & Christ even when they were scattered outside of Jerusalem.

After all, they had a lot to tell—Jesus had come from heaven as the promised Messiah & proven His deity & then died for sinners & risen again & returned to heaven.

That was the center of all history & the pivot of biblical revelation as Jesus fulfilled many promises & His followers anticipated more.

Acts 1:3-8 says He taught of the kingdom of God & they asked if it was time for Him to restore that kingdom to Israel.

He left that time in the Father's hands & said to be His witnesses *in Jerusalem, & in all Judea & Samaria, & even to the end of the earth.*

And as the story of the NT era unfolds, we find out that the Apostles had little idea what all that would mean.

They knew they were to wait for the Spirit to come as Jesus had said & He had promised the Spirit would lead them into all truth.

But what that would look like would be revealed to them step by step as God began this mystery called the church.

Remember when we the NT uses that word *mystery*, it means something that was hidden before, but has now been revealed.

The OT spoke of blessing on all the families of the earth through Abraham's seed in Genesis 12:3 & other passages, but the OT did not reveal the dawn of the multinational church.

Even the Apostolic preaching first focused on Israel's repentance & restoration so that Jesus would return & set up His earthly kingdom.

Remember that's what Peter preached in Acts 3:19-21.

To his Jewish audience in Acts 3:19-21, Peter said: *Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; and that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you, whom heaven must receive until the period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time.*

So God had spoken by the OT prophets about this time of restoration for Israel, but the Apostles did not yet understand what Israel's rejection of their Messiah would birth.

They did not yet know the rest of the NT like we do now—Paul had not yet written Romans 11:11 to explain that by Israel's *transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles, to make them jealous.*

They did not know Romans 11:25, that *a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in*

They did not know God's plan to save Gentiles to make Israel jealous to return to their own Messiah so that He could keep His promises of restoration for Israel all by His grace as Romans 11 explains.

They did not yet know that the fullness of the Gentiles coming to faith in the Jewish Messiah would produce the mystery of the church with Jews & Gentiles together in one body.

The explanation of that in Ephesians 2-3 had not yet been written.

But that was the plan God that was working out in Acts & that He would reveal as the church began & the NT was written.

Yet it was such a counterintuitive & countercultural plan that God had to be loud & clear that this was indeed HIS plan for His people.

But that was not easy—as we'll see later in Acts 10, it required a vision from heaven to get Peter to go eat with Gentiles.

Then Acts 15 describes a worldwide Church Council convened to establish how to incorporate Gentiles into the church as believing Jews were sorting out laws for circumcision & diet & much more.

Paul told in Galatians 2 how even Peter was inconsistent in his acceptance of Gentile believers despite the vision from Jesus.

So again, God had to make it undeniably proven & consistently affirmed that He was raising up this new thing called the church.

That's one reason we know the events of Acts were uniquely transitional to set the new foundation of the church.

The extraordinary coming of the Spirit in Acts 2 established that the last days had begun because the Messiah had come.

But all the promises of the Messiah's kingdom on earth were not yet fulfilled & the Davidic king had gone back to heaven.

So as persecution came from Israel's own leaders, how could Jesus' followers know that His power was still supreme & active?

They could know through events like we see in Acts 8:9-25.

They could know by Christ displaying His authority as greater than spiritual forces of darkness & historical forces of division.

The church could spread with certainty by seeing Christ's authority as greater in 4 ways we'll see this week & next week.

We'll outline 2 evidences of Christ's greater authority this week & 2 next week as we marvel at His sovereignty in the spread of His name.

Though what we study in Acts 8 is transitional & foundational, these proofs of Christ's supremacy can still strengthen our faith as we proclaim Him & enjoy His amazing power today.

The 1st evidence is found in verses 9-13 as we find out more about what Philip's preaching overcame among the people of Samaria.

Note 1st, that Christ's authority is greater than demonic magic.

Point #1—Christ's authority is greater than demonic magic.

Verse 4 says Christians had been scattered by the persecution & they went about evangelizing the Word, announcing the Good News of Jesus as Lord & Christ from the Scriptures.

Specifically, verse 5 says Philip was one of those as he went north out of Jerusalem, down from the hill country, to a significant city of Samaria & he was proclaiming the Christ to them.

Then look at verses 6-7 & read them again. [READ]

This was crowds—plural, not just one crowd at one time, but multiple crowds at multiple times—unanimously with one mind, one purpose.

The imperfect tense verb indicates that they were continually focused with attention.

And the object of that ongoing attention was what was said by Philip.

The focus was the preaching of the Christ & then alongside that were the sights & sounds of the signs Philip was doing.

And we said last time that verse 7 describes those sights & sounds as freeing people from unclean spirits & from crippling disabilities.

But when verse 7 uses the word ‘many’ for both the spiritual & physical troubles, do you wonder how so many got that way?

Verse 9 gives us a clue how this city could have many enslaved to unclean spirits—which is another way to describe demons, isn’t it?

Unclean spirits were unholy invisible beings, demons or devils in league with the chief devil himself, Satan.

How did *many* in that city get ensnared under demonic control?

Read verses 9-11 again to answer that question. [READ]

When I phrase our 1st point today by saying that Christ’s authority is greater than demonic magic, here’s the demonic magic.

Such magic was from mixing occult practices like divination with superstition & some science as Medo-Persian magi did.

The verb tenses in verse 11 about this man Simon highlight his continual practice & his ongoing influence over the people.

He had formerly been the dominant force in the city.

With his regular magic, he was amazing the people of Samaria, possibly referring to the whole region & all Samaritans.

And this Simon did it by self-promotion, by self-identifying as someone great & telling people that he was someone great.

That sounds ridiculous, but it was working because verse 10 says they all were continually, regularly giving him attention.

And all is defined as from the small to the great, young to old.

They were all so enslaved that they were hailing him as divine, as the power of God Himself or at least as great power from God.

It’s not clear if this was an explicit claim to be God or to be some power of God with mixed Samaritan Messianic beliefs.

What is clear is that they were all focused on this man Simon because, as verse 11 says, he had amazed them for a long time.

He did that with his magic arts, his controlling of transcendent powers somehow, his manipulations of the spirit world.

In other words, he was good at dealing with demons to wow people & shock & scare them & get & keep their attention.

That’s what controlled this area of Samaria before Philip came.

That’s the background of demonic magic for Philip’s preaching that turned attention away from Simon to what Philip said about the Christ.

The preaching & signs that Philip was doing must have been greater than the magic that Simon had been doing for them.

The message of the Christ & the signs Philip was doing were freeing many from the slavery of Simon’s demonic magic.

Philip was showing that Jesus’ followers had scattered from Jerusalem because of persecution, but that was not because the Christ they preached lacked power or authority.

As they left Jerusalem & spread to a different ethnic group in a different place, the same God in the same name was still supreme.

Read verse 12-13 to see that stated. [READ]

To be clear, they did not trust in Philip personally, as if he was the object of their faith—rather, they trusted in Philip evangelizing.

That's one word in Greek—preaching the Good News—and that was about the kingdom of God & the name of Jesus Christ.

As the woman at the well in John 4 mentioned, the Samaritans were looking for the Christ or Messiah to come.

And they would've known of the promised Davidic king & His kingdom even though they only accepted the books of Moses.

Since Jesus had been through Samaria & had ministered around there, they had heard of this Jesus whom Philip preached & knew His name.

His name included His character & wisdom & power & the fulfillment of OT promises as part of who He is.

And the woman in John 4 had told many that He must be the Christ.

So Philip's preaching the Good News of the kingdom of God & name of Jesus Christ made sense & Samaritans believed.

That must mean most of the people in that region of Samaria believed & that included both men & women.

When they believed, they were then being baptized & this was ongoing & not just once at one event.

Verse 13 says even Simon himself believed & after being baptized, he attached himself to Philip & yet his reason for doing was not good.

Simon's bad motives become clear later, but here he focused on the ongoing amazement of seeing the signs & great power.

He had called himself someone great & had convinced others to call him the power of God called great, but Simon saw something greater.

Simon had astonished the people of Samaria for a long time, but now Simon was astonished with Philip's greater power.

The word for miracle is the same as the word for power & so Simon was seeing in Philip's signs the greater power of Christ over demons.

He saw that Christ's authority is greater than demonic magic & Luke was reporting that as evident to everyone in Samaria.

The Good News of Jesus the Christ broke the chains of demonic oppression of people & brought physical & spiritual freedom.

And listen—that same Gospel of Jesus Christ still frees people from the chains of demonic power today.

Just because the signs gifts have served their transitional purpose does not mean that Christ cannot rescue the spiritually oppressed today.

We should fear toying with the demonic through whatever means that may even seem like a game, but we should not fear believing the Gospel can set spiritual captives free.

Whatever you may face or hear about or wonder how to deal with, you can know that Christ's authority & power & sovereignty are greater.

We're not told incantations or formulas to recite.

We're not even commanded to speak to demons directly.

But we can call on people to surrender to the Lordship of Jesus Christ as the greatest Ruler & most trustworthy Savior.

Don't doubt the power of the Gospel for anyone & don't fear proclaiming the Gospel in even the most hopeless or scary situation.

I can think of situations where I had no clue what else to do, but I knew I could pray & keep speaking the truth in love.

And as we do, we can watch God work in amazing ways like He did among the people of Samaria who came to faith in Jesus.

Samaritans trusted & identified with Jesus, following the Jews who had believed in Jesus in the ceremony of water baptism.

Despite persecution, the testimony of Jesus was spreading in victory & power just as Jesus had predicted.

The Good News of the name of Jesus the Christ was being proclaimed & proven to have authority greater than demons.

Even the demons were subject to Jesus' & His name, just like they said of Jesus in Luke 4:36 & of the 70 sent out by Jesus in Luke 10:17.

These signs confirmed that the same authority of Jesus continued through Philip as he scattered preaching Jesus.

Christ has repeatedly shown His authority as greater when He was on earth, but His authority was still greater as His church began & spread.

Christ's greater authority was displayed among the Samaritans as the church expanded to include the first non-Jews.

That expansion was such a cataclysmic shift in religious thinking & relationships that it required loud & clear signals from God to verify it.

John 4:9 noted that Jews had no dealings with Samaritans, but that was not a mere custom Jesus was correcting.

Listen to Jesus' own words in Matthew 10:5-6 as He sent out the 12: He said, *Do not go in the way of the Gentiles & do not enter any city of the Samaritans, but rather go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.*

At that point, Jesus was going first to Israel & there was historic reason for Jews to have no dealings with Samaritans.

The northern kingdom Israel had broken from the southern kingdom after Solomon & built a city called Samaria as 1st Kings 16:24 says.

When Assyria exiled that kingdom in 722 BC, 2nd Kings 17-18 says those left mixed with Gentiles ethnically & religiously.

Then Ezra 4 describes those mixed people in the land as not welcome with the Jews when they returned from exile & rebuilt Jerusalem.

Nehemiah even speaks of Samaritans like Sanballat as the chief opponents of the Jews in rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem.

Nehemiah 4:1-2 says, *it came about that when Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he became furious and very angry and mocked the Jews. He spoke in the presence of his brothers and the wealthy men of Samaria and said, "What are these feeble Jews doing? Are they going to restore it for themselves? Can they offer sacrifices? Can they finish in a day? Can they revive the stones from the dusty rubble even the burned ones?"*

From that background, animosity continued to grow such that calling Jesus a Samaritan in John 8:48 was a type of insult.

It would go against every historic impulse to join Jews & Samaritans.

So not only did such a cosmic shift require signs to show God's approval, it also required signs with Apostolic confirmation.

Read Acts 8:14-17 to see this Apostolic affirmation. [READ]

Point #2 today is this—Christ's authority is greater than historic division or you might also call it ethnic strife.

I couldn't decide which label fit best so you can note both.

Point #2—Christ's authority is greater than historic division or greater than ethnic strife.

The historic division is the ethnic strife between Jews & Samaritans that was overcome by the greater power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

As the Samaritans believed & were baptized, they had come to the One true God through Jesus the Promised Jewish Messiah.

But they were not to be treated as second-class believers or outcasts who needed to form a community separate from Jewish believers.

They had received the word of God just as many Jews had in & around Jerusalem & so they sent word to the Apostles as Jesus' appointed witnesses & leaders of the church.

For Samaritan believers to be added to the church, they needed to be rooted in the rest of the OT that they had rejected with its promises of the Messiah King from David's line.

So Apostolic affirmation was needed at this pivotal time of the church as the step was made to include these half-Jews.

That's why Peter & John went down & prayed for them—as verse 15 says—that they might receive the Holy Spirit.

It may seem odd that they had not yet received the Spirit.

Acts 2:38-39 promised that those who repent & are baptized in the name of Jesus Christ have their sins forgiven & receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

So the 3000 who repented & trusted Jesus in Acts 2 & 3 & 4 & 5 & 6 had received the Holy Spirit when they had believed.

So then why had the Samaritans not received the Holy Spirit?

It was not to teach kind of second blessing of the Spirit conferred by some modern Pentecostal experience nor was it some confirmation by a Catholic priest.

This was not normal because it went against the order of other situations in Acts & against the NT teaching like Romans 8:9 & 1st Corinthians 12:13 that every Christian has the Spirit.

And we know it's not normal because Luke knew this had to be explained in verse 16 with terminology that is unique to only a few times when the Holy Spirit fell upon people.

His wording that they had simply been baptized also highlights the unique exception that this situation was in this transitional period.

If this was normal or an expected pattern to follow, Luke would not have had any need to explain it as he did.

His explanation used a word—fall upon—the Greek *epiipto*—that's used of the Spirit only in Acts 10:44 & 11:15 referring to the Holy Spirit falling upon the Gentiles.

It's used in Mark 3:10 of crowds pressing on Jesus to touch Him & in Luke 15:20 of the prodigal's father embracing him.

It's used in Acts 20:10 & 37 for that kind of falling upon & embracing & so you get the overwhelming, surrounding picture of this term.

But it's used in Acts 10 & 11 to tell & re-tell of Peter preaching to the Gentiles & them believing in Jesus for the first time.

Acts 10:44-48 says, *While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message. All the circumcised believers who came with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. For they were hearing them speaking with tongues and exalting God. Then Peter answered, "Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did, can he?"* And he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.

Catch that reasoning—since the Spirit fell on all the Gentiles to receive the Spirit just as with the Jews in Jerusalem, they were to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ into the same church.

Since the Spirit came the same way, both groups joined the same body.

And by the way, that word for poured out in Acts 10:45 is only used of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2:17, 18, & 33 to describe the pouring out of the Spirit at Pentecost when the church began.

So again, this was a unique transitional event of divine authentication.

Peter spoke similarly in his report of those Gentile conversions.

In Acts 11:15-17, he said, *“as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as He did upon us at the beginning. And I remembered the word of the Lord, how He used to say, ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ Therefore if God gave to them the same gift as He gave to us also after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God’s way?”*

Verse 18 says when Jerusalem church leaders *heard this, they quieted down & glorified God, saying, “Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life.*

So why am I telling you all this?

Because as the church spread to Samaritans in Acts 8 & to Gentiles & OT saints in Acts 10 & 19, these signs occurred.

Visible signs occurred like those in Acts 2 at the beginning of the church to show the unity & solidarity of these groups.

As the church started with Jews & expanded to Samaritans & to Gentiles & to OT saints, God proved them the same way.

God used miraculous signs to confirm their unity in the church.

The situations in Acts 2, 10, & 19 are the only times in Acts that speaking in tongues is mentioned & it was possible here.

We only know from verse 18 that Simon observed some kind of manifestation of the Spirit bestowed on Samaritan believers.

Whatever that was, it came under the authority of the Apostles as Jesus’ appointed witnesses & leaders of the church.

Since the NT had not yet been written, God was proving His work as the mystery of the church was being unveiled.

The mystery of Jews together with Samaritans & Gentiles in one new body was a new phase in His unfolding plan.

Since it raised questions about laws of separation from pagan nations & more, God had to prove that this was from HIM.

He did so under the authority of His Apostles that was shown by them laying their hands on & praying for the Samaritans.

God answered their prayer by giving the Samaritan believers the Holy Spirit & proving it somehow visibly.

It is interesting that John went because Luke 9:51-56 records him & his brother James as wanting to call down fire from heaven on Samaritans that had refused to receive Jesus before.

But here John was used with Peter to show that God was building this new mystery called the church that He would later reveal more about.

That had begun in Jerusalem with Jews, but Acts 8 reports how it moved to Samaria with those of mixed Jewish backgrounds.

And that bringing together of diverse, enemy groups showed how Christ’s authority was greater than historic divisions & ethnic strife.

It’s difficult to illustrate or calculate how great that historic divide was & how intense that ethnic strife was.

It was many centuries old with many religious reasons, but it was not strong enough to resist Christ’s love drawing the factions together.

It was not enough to stop Christ's authority being shown on earth by making disciples together from those nations.

It was not enough to stop Christ's commitment to build His church with people from every tribe & language & nation.

That was the answer to historic divisions & ethnic strife then & it's still the answer to such issues today.

If you fear people with different language or culture or appearance, know that Christ's authority is greater than whatever might divide you.

If you need to know how to answer some of the ethnically or culturally divisive issues of this century, today's a fitting day to remember how helpful Voddie Baucham was on such issues.

When God took that dear brother to heaven on Thursday, the church lost a powerful cultural apologist & passionate evangelist.

I remember I was greatly helped by his messages explaining divisive ideologies like what he termed cultural Marxism.

But he rightly brought the answers back to Scripture, that we're all made in God's image as descendants from Adam & we're all sinners in need of salvation & Jesus is the only One who can save us.

The most estranged individuals & groups can be reconciled to God & reconciled to one another when we come to Christ & are adopted into God's family together.

So need not fear ethnic strife or historic divisions as beyond all help.

We can enter a conversation with anyone with hope to help by lifting up Christ & praying He will draw all men to Himself.

And since Christ is the answer to larger issues, He's the answer to smaller issues of strife in marriages & families & other relationships.

As Christ's authority was greater than demonic magic, so His authority was greater than historic division or ethnic strife.

And these proofs of Christ's supremacy resulted from preaching the Good News of Jesus the Christ, the Word of God about Jesus the promised Messiah & King & the salvation found in Him.

Please get that—the miraculous signs are not chiefly what grabbed & kept the Samaritans' newly focused attention & changed hearts to want to identify with Jesus & His followers.

That happened by proclamation of the Word about Christ, explanation of Jesus as the Promised Savior & Lord.

That is so clarifying for us, isn't it?

We can call out the evils of the occult & the errors of divisive ideas like DEI, but then we must turn people to the only true power to change lives & unite people.

That is the Person & work of Jesus Christ by His grace alone.

People are rescued from spiritual slavery through the Gospel that promises belonging by adoption into the family of God in His church.

That's what we proclaim & that's why we pray for God to do His supernatural work to save & reconcile sinners to Himself.

If we can lead you to faith in Jesus this morning, please let us know how to help you after the service.

And if you know Christ, then let this passage deepen your faith in His superiority over demons & divisions.

Be encouraged & emboldened to speak of Him & pray in His name for His glory & authority to continue to be shown as greater in our times.

Pray with me as we close.