Sermon Highlights

The Spread of the Gospel Through Persecution and the Danger of False Profession

Sermon Summary:

This sermon examines Acts chapter 8, focusing on three critical themes: the persecution that scattered believers from Jerusalem, Philip's ministry in Samaria, and Simon the sorcerer's false profession of faith. The message emphasizes how God used persecution to accomplish His purpose of spreading the gospel beyond Jerusalem into Samaria and the uttermost parts of the earth. The sermon contrasts genuine salvation with mere intellectual belief through the account of Simon, who believed and was baptized but whose heart remained unchanged. A central warning emerges: true salvation produces transformation, not just profession. The message challenges believers to examine whether their faith has genuinely changed their lives and warns against taking upon ourselves the glory that belongs to God alone.

Key Points:

- God used persecution under Saul to scatter believers from Jerusalem, forcing them to obey the Great Commission to spread the gospel to Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the earth

- Believers had become comfortable in Jerusalem, staying near the apostles rather than fulfilling their mission to be witnesses worldwide

- Philip's ministry in Samaria demonstrated genuine power from God, contrasting with Simon's demonic sorcery and witchcraft

- True ministers never take credit for God's work but acknowledge that power comes from the Lord Jesus Christ, not from themselves

- Simon the sorcerer represents false profession - he believed intellectually and was baptized, but his heart was never changed

- Genuine salvation produces transformation and good works; profession without change indicates deception

- Simon's attempt to purchase spiritual power revealed his unregenerate heart filled with bitterness and bound by iniquity

- The church cannot judge hearts perfectly, but believers must examine themselves to ensure their faith is genuine

- Demons believe and tremble, but belief alone does not constitute saving faith

- True believers approach God humbly through Jesus Christ, not with arrogance or presumption

Scripture Reference:

- Acts 8:1-25 (primary passage)

- Acts 1:8 (the Great Commission to be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the earth)

- Ephesians 2:8-9 (salvation by grace through faith, not of works)

- James 2 (faith without works is dead)

Stories:

- The martyrdom of Stephen and Saul's (later Paul's) role in consenting to his death and persecuting the church

- Philip's ministry in Samaria, performing miracles and casting out demons through God's power

- Simon the sorcerer who had amazed the Samaritans with witchcraft and was regarded as "the great power of God"

- Simon's false profession of faith, baptism, and subsequent attempt to purchase the power of the Holy Spirit with money

- Peter's confrontation with Simon, declaring his heart was not right before God and calling him to repentance

- The woman at the well encounter when Jesus previously ministered in Samaria

- Peter and John's earlier desire to call down lightning on Samaritans who rejected Jesus, contrasted with their later ministry there

- The apostles laying hands on Samaritan believers so they would receive the Holy Spirit