

ISDO...In our series, “The Church That Changed The World” we are looking at some power-filled people from the book of Acts. Last week, Barnabas. Today, Philip. Tim began with foot washing. I will begin with a stoning demonstration!

Ever feel like the world is falling apart? That’s because it is. Man’s inhumanity to man is on full display in the headlines every day. Israel, Ukraine, the U.S. Congress, we just can’t seem to get along. How do we solve this problem? In the 16th century Utopianism emerged; the belief that the world could become a place of peace and harmony. In the 1970’s many believed it was the dawning of the age of Aquarius? Early in the 20th century we fought a “war to end all wars?” It turned out that WWI was just a warmup for WWII. Chances are pretty good that there will be a WWIII. Aren’t you glad you came today? You should be because our passage today is a vivid reminder that **God often does His best work on our worst days. It is against the dark backdrop of human depravity that the gospel shines brightest.** That’s the message of Acts 8. At the end of Acts 7, in an attempt to snuff out Christianity, Stephen, a man full of the Holy Spirit, was arrested, charged, and executed for preaching the gospel. But that’s not how the story ends...Acts 8:1-3.

The killing of Stephen opened the door for all kinds of persecution. Men and women ran for their lives, but many couldn't run fast enough. Some landed in prison. Some became martyrs. It was the worst of times, but it was also the best of times. God often does His best work in the worst of times. Remember that. In fact, In Acts 8 we discover some priceless principles that help us remember that the worst of times can be a prelude to the best of times.

That fact is an indispensable feature of the gospel. On history’s darkest day, the Lord of Glory was nailed to a cross. Satan scoffed, and demons danced with delight. But God was at work pulling off the Great Reversal. What was intended for evil God used for good. That is why we worship, to remember that God does His best work in the worst of times. Acts 8 is proof. Here are a couple of important reminders from this chapter...

I. Remember, the gospel advances despite adverse circumstances...v. 4. God often uses what is evil to promote what is good. Persecution becomes God’s method of fulfilling the mandate of Acts 1:8, **“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”** The church was scattered through the very regions Jesus commanded His disciples to take the good news.

It had to be a shock for some of these Jewish Christians to hear Jesus mention Samaria. Those Christians who were ethnic Jews, had no desire to take the gospel to Samaritans. But persecution forced the issue. The church was “scattered.” (v.4) like a farmer scatters seed. One of the early church fathers, Tertullian, observed, “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.” Just think of all the rulers and regimes that failed to snuff out the faith. The Roman Empire, the Ottoman Empire, the Soviet Union, the Chinese Communists, the Third Reich, just to name a few.

No matter the global circumstances, God uses those circumstances to further the spread of the gospel. The gospel advances despite the circumstances. Notice I said, “despite” not “because of.” I have heard people say, “What the American church needs is more persecution.” No, we don’t. We need Christians to do what Philip did in vv. 4-8.

II. Remember, the gospel exposes the hearts of men. Chapter 8 features three responses to the gospel.

Philip was one of the men the apostles appointed to make sure the Hellenistic widows were not stiffed in the distribution of food. The Hellenists were Jews who grew up outside of Judea under the influence of Greek culture. They were easy to identify – they spoke Greek rather than Hebrew or Aramaic. The fact that Philip was Hellenistic might explain why he was God’s choice to go to the Samaritans. They too were considered inferior to those of pure Jewish descent.

The Jews had a disease that has plagued every culture throughout history. It is called racism. Racism is the belief that my race is superior to all others. It is never said quite like that, but the attitude is unmistakable. The problem with racism is that once you conclude someone is less of a person than you are, then you don’t have to extend to them the rights and privileges you enjoy. When Peter meets Cornelius, a Roman centurion, in Acts 10, he says to those gathered, **“You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation, but God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean.” Acts 10:28.** When Peter reported back to the Jewish leaders about what he had seen, he was scolded, **“You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them.” Acts 11:3.** God went to great lengths to heal His chosen people of this disease. Remember Jonah? Still, racism persisted.

Since Philip was not an ethnic Jew, he was God’s choice to take the gospel to non-Jews. The gospel is the only solution to racism. Jesus said, “Go, to all nations (ethne - people groups) and make disciples.” Remember how the story ends? “a

great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and *all* tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches *were* in their hands; and they cry out with a loud voice, saying, “**Salvation** to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.” Rev. 7:9-10. When that future scene informs our present reality, racism doesn’t stand a chance.

The second guy is Simon...vv. 9-13, 18-25. He was a magician - but not the kind that you invite to your children’s birthday party. Simon held the attention and amazement of the Samaritans for a long time with his magic. So amazing were his miracles that Luke says in verse 10, the Samaritans called him “the power of God that is called great.” Most likely, the source of his magic was demonic. After all, Luke says there were many who, when they heard Philip preaching the gospel, had demons come out of them.

“Can demons perform miracles?” They sure can - Pharaoh’s magicians were able to turn sticks into snakes. Jesus warned in that “false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect.”

Simon was a poser. He had apparently made a profession of faith of some kind, but it wasn’t a genuine faith in God based on truth. He was just drawn to the power that he saw, and he wanted it for himself. He saw the Spirit as a force that could be manipulated and bought with money, a force that if he could get his hands on it, could make him a tidy profit, and make him legit.

Simon earlier made a profession of faith and was even baptized but it is clear now that he made this profession and was following Philip with the wrong motive. He didn’t come to Jesus because Jesus was the One who could save him and give him eternal life. He wasn’t drawn by a desperation to be saved. He was drawn by a lust for power. It wasn’t Jesus He wanted, but power. He was even willing to pay for it.

What is Peter’s response? “May your silver perish with you.” Literally - to hell with you and your money...v. 20.

The third guy was an Ethiopian eunuch. (vv. 26-40). He served the queen mother (Candace is a title) of Ethiopia. This was an area in Africa called Nubia that ran from Cairo to Khartoum. Once again, God “beams” Philip over in Star Trek fashion to explain the gospel to the eunuch and the gospel goes to Africa. Centuries later, many of those who were herded onto slave ships and sent to the Americas were Christians. As a result, a vibrant African-American church is born and thrives to this day.

In the parable of the soils Jesus made it clear that the preaching of the gospel will always produce a response. He mentions four responses that correspond to four kinds of soil. When we share the seed of the word of God with someone, they will prove to be hard-hearted, shallow-hearted (rocky soil), half-hearted (thorny soil) or whole-hearted.

III. Remember, God does some of His best work on some of our worst days.

We don't always see what God is doing. Those first century Christians had no idea that their circumstances were working out for the greater progress of the gospel. But they proved that God does some of His best work in some of our worst times.

So, what are we to do? Do what Philip did, open your mouth. This week, when you hear someone talk about how bad things are in our world today offer some words of life. Do what Philip did, "Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture, he told him the good news about Jesus." 8:35.

Story of Jose...he was a bad man. Grew up in the barrios of East L.A. On a NY Eve, on Colorado Blvd. he was approached by a couple of enthusiastic young people who wanted to honor Jesus by taking to the streets and sharing the good news with anyone who would listen. They approached Jose and it didn't go well. In a drug/alcohol stupor, he threatened them and told them to go away. As they did they said, "Ok man, but remember, Jesus loves you." Not long after that Jose assaulted a police officer and went to prison. He told me that he would lay on his bunk, and he just kept hearing those words, "Jesus loves you." He went to the prison chaplain who shared the gospel and Jose became a new creation in Christ.

I often think of those two young martyrs. Martyrs? Yes, the word is used for those who bear witness to the truth. Jesus said, "You shall be my martyrs." I thought martyrs are people who die for their faith. They are. To do what we read in this chapter will cost you. It might not cost you your life but it might cost you your dignity...or your fear of how people will react...or your time...or the admiration of others once you've blown your cover. "Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture, he told him the good news about Jesus."

Pray for Dunagan family and HPPC.

Acts 8:1-3

Remember, the gospel advances despite adverse circumstances.

Acts 8:4.

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” Acts 1:8

Acts 8:4-8.

Remember, the gospel exposes the hearts of men.

“You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation, but God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean.” Acts 10:28.

“You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them.” Acts 11:3

Acts 8:9-13

Acts 8:18-25

Remember, God does some of His best work on some of our worst days.

“Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture, he told him the good news about Jesus.” 8:35.

Two days after her seventeenth birthday, Laura Welch was driving around town with a friend in her car. The windows were down, the music was up when, in the midst of a carefree day, Laura made a mistake. She didn't see the stop sign, and broadsided a car driven by another seventeen-year-old Michael Douglas who happened to be Laura's boyfriend. He was thrown from the car, suffering a broken neck. By the time help arrived, he was dead. Laura says, "No words to describe it," It was the worst day of Laura's life. It would be many years before Laura could think of dating seriously again. After that day in 1963, Laura found comfort in the only real strength she could count on – Jesus Christ. Laura eventually married a man from a wealthy family. Her too-rich husband started drinking more and more.

In 1986, Laura came to another intersection. She told her husband he must choose between her or alcohol. Laura's husband made a wise choice. He subdued his thirst and paid more attention to the faith his wife had shown him. He soon found that a deep, abiding faith was worth the effort, worth his investment of time and energy. And today, both Laura and her husband - President George W. Bush - look back on that entire season of struggle as the turning point for their marriage, their family, and their political journey. Laura, however, says her life changed years before, on an ordinary day in 1963 that became the worst day of her life. (Kenneth T. Walsh, "Laura's Moment" U.S. News and World Report, April 30, 2001, pg. 22).

1 And Saul approved of his 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. 2 Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him. 3 But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison.

ACTS 8:1-3

REMEMBER, THE GOSPEL ADVANCES DESPITE ADVERSE CIRCUMSTANCES.

4 Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word.

ACTS 8:4

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

ACTS 1:8

4 Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word. 5 Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ. 6 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. 7 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. 8 So there was much joy in that city.

ACTS 8:4-8

REMEMBER, THE GOSPEL EXPOSES THE HEARTS OF MEN.

"You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation, but God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean."

ACTS 10:28

"You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them."

ACTS 11:3

9 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. 10 They all paid attention to him, from the least to the greatest, saying, "This man is the power of God that is called Great." 11 And they paid attention to him because for a long time he had amazed them with his magic. 12 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. 13 Even Simon himself believed, and after being baptized he continued with Philip. And seeing signs and great miracles performed, he was amazed.

ACTS 8:9-13

18 Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, 19 saying, "Give me this power also, so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." 20 But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! 21 You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. 22 Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. 23 For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity." 24 And Simon answered, "Pray for me to the Lord, that nothing of what you have said may come upon me." 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.

ACTS 8:18-25

REMEMBER, GOD DOES SOME OF HIS BEST WORK ON SOME OF OUR WORST DAYS.

"Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture, he told him the good news about Jesus."

ACTS 8:35