The Samaritan Follow-up

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[0:00] Welcome here for this Sunday, September 22nd. So we're continuing in our ongoing sermon series, Acts to All the World, this morning. And throughout this series, we're exploring the New Testament book of Acts.

And now, as an aside, if you're familiar with the series, The Chosen, which we are showing, there's lots of people who are fans of that show. They made some announcements recently.
One of them is a new series that's coming out several years from now, but it's on their production schedule. It is called The Way of the Chosen.
Guess what it's going to be about right here. So it's going to be about the book of Acts. So lots of the actors that we've seen playing different apostles, we will see ongoing in that series.
So that's pretty exciting. So our focus passage this morning is found in Acts 8, verses 14 to 25. So let's hear that now. And you can grab your Bible.
[0:59] Acts 8, 14 to 25. So it tells us there, When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to Samaria.

When they arrived, they prayed for the new believers there that they might receive the Holy Spirit, because the Holy Spirit had not yet come on any of them. They had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.
Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money and said, Give me also this ability, so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.
Peter answered, Then Simon asked, Pray to the Lord for me so that nothing that you have said may happen to me.
After they had further proclaimed the word of the Lord and testified about Jesus, Peter and John returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many Samaritan villages.
[2:34] Last week we considered how the persecution of the early church dispersed the followers of Jesus from Jerusalem. Do you remember that? And they dispersed from Jerusalem into regions beyond.

And while that may have seemed like a negative thing, we touched on this a bit last week as well, God was ironically using that persecution, the dispersion that followed, to spread the gospel as he had always intended.
It's like God knows what he's doing. And I also mentioned last week that there was a bit more to come with this story, and so here we are. This is a part two of sorts. So our sermon this morning is titled, The Samaritan Follow-Up.
So we're going to cover some interesting events, as well as a bit more about Simon, the man who had been known as the sorcerer. Last week, if you remember, we reflected on the fact that Philip preached the gospel of Jesus to the Samaritan people.
The Samaritans would have heard all about Jesus, who he was, who he is, his mission, his ministry, his death, and resurrection. And the opportunity to receive forgiveness from sin and to be restored into relationship with God the Father.
[3:49] So these Samaritan people, we talked about them last week, were seen as less than, and even despised by the Jews in that region. They were seen as far from worthy to receive the good news of the Messiah, and yet they were the very people that God chose to be the first non-Jews to receive this eternal and life-changing message.

God's thoughts and plans, we hear this in Scripture, are so far above human thoughts and plans. And guess what? They always have been, and they always will be.

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And I believe many of you would likely agree that from your own lives and experience, that's what you have seen. That God shows up in ways that you do not expect, and God answers prayer and provides in ways that you can never even begin to imagine.
And thank God for that. So the simple gospel, we talked about that last week, it's what was communicated to the Samaritans. And not simple in the sense of being in any way inferior or weak, we think of that when we hear that word, but simple as in uncomplicated, accessible, which is how it was always intended to be.
I talked a little bit about Billy Graham, right? People have often criticized Billy Graham for his basic and accessible way of conveying the gospel. And yet that's what Jesus did.
[5:22] And why do we have to make things complicated? We don't. So the conversion of the Samaritans was simple and straightforward. And as we learned last week, Philip preached Christ and the people listened to him and received that message.

And so this head and heart knowledge that they received, it took root and it sprouted into action. And they responded to believing this message they heard and then being baptized.
They took hold of it and took action from there. So one aspect of the conversion of the Samaritan people that was unique was the follow-up that occurred. And that's what we're going to look at briefly this morning.
So let's explore these events together. When the apostles in Jerusalem learned about the conversion of the Samaritan people, Scripture tells us, they immediately sent Peter and John to find out whether or not the Samaritans were truly becoming believers.
So when I read this passage, I don't know about you, but when I read this passage, why did this happen? Were they checking up on Philip? Well, Philip's okay, but somebody better check and make sure he did it right.
[6:36] Didn't they trust that Philip knew what he was doing? He had been chosen as a deacon in the early church, and we considered that a few weeks ago. So didn't we, don't, can't we just assume that Philip would have been taught the same things, that he would have preached in the same way, that he would have shared the good news in the same way that the apostles did the way Jesus commanded?

Or another thing we might be confused about is that don't people, so our understanding would be, now go with me on this, that someone who hears the gospel, who recognizes and receives Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, doesn't that person automatically receive the Holy Spirit?
Is that your understanding? So didn't we just learn last week that these Samaritan people heard this gospel? They obeyed and acted. That's what we heard, right?
And so when people are baptized as the Samaritans were, aren't they baptized in part in the name and power of the Holy Spirit? As pastors baptize someone, you all know this for anyone who is baptized, you are baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
Weren't the Samaritans baptized? Wasn't it a legitimate baptism? Well, these are all good questions, if you've had them, or maybe you're listening to me right now going, I don't know, I don't know.
[8:01] But I mean, they're fair questions, but maybe they didn't cross your mind. So why did Peter and John need to come to the Samaritans at all? They were sent to confirm these events, but why?

Why does Acts 8, verse 16, make it clear then that, this is what we heard this morning, the Holy Spirit had not yet come on any of them.
They'd simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. That's what the passage says. And then Acts 8, verse 17 tells us that it was only when Peter and John prayed and laid hands on the Samaritan people that they received the Holy Spirit.
Doesn't feel like it makes sense somehow, right? It doesn't feel like it fits with maybe what our understanding is. The church was to be, as Ephesians 2, verse 20 tells us, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets.
That's what it says. And as I said a moment ago, Philip had been a deacon in the Jerusalem church, but he was not one of the 12 apostles. That's the distinction there.
[9:11] So for whatever reason, and we'll get to it in a moment, it's clear that an apostolic presence was needed, that Peter and John, as apostles, needed to be present in Samaria for this official start of the Samaritan church.

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Just as they had been in Jerusalem for the official start of the Jewish church. Does that make sense? So the presence of Peter and John kept the early church unified.
The apostles being involved kept it unified. And remember that there was huge animosity between the Jews and the Samaritans. That's an important factor in this case.
So if the church in Samaria had begun on its own, can you see the potential problems? With no connection to the Jewish church, the church in Jerusalem would likely have never accepted it.
Do you see that? And now the Samaritans, more than being despised by many of the Jews, were seen as historically the corruptors of Judaism.
[10:17] So pure, in quotations, Judaism was often seen as being corrupted by the Samaritan people. So God acted here and made sure that Peter and John, apostles and Jews from Jerusalem, were present to witness this gift of the Spirit given to the Samaritans.

Can you see that? So God's message was that the church in Samaria wasn't some kind of heretical startup. Do you see that? God was making it clear that this was part of the church as he had seen it, as he had always intended.
The Samaritans were part of the same church that had been started in Jerusalem. And they were filled with the same Spirit. So Peter and John were also eyewitnesses.
Do you remember the importance of eyewitnesses? They were carrying on this theme that we've seen throughout Acts so far, that this eyewitness account, first-hand witnessing of events, was critical in the formation of the early church.
So their testimony was clear. What happened in Samaria was not a separate religious movement of some kind. And in this way, God prevented the early church from immediately dividing into different sects.
[11:44] You see that? He's holding that early church together. Because what happened, what has happened over the centuries since then? Fracture after fracture after fracture.

So let's look a little bit more at Simon. I mentioned last week that we'd be looking at his story a little more. And remember, we recognize that Simon seemed to be swayed more by the mystical than the message.
He was more about the show than the substance. Acts 8, verse 18 and 19. And you can pop over there. Acts 8, 18 and 19 tells us, When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money and said, Ooh, give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.
Simon, Simon, Simon, Simon, Simon. When will he really get it? Right? Rather than gratefully and gracefully accepting the gift of the Holy Spirit and blessing the apostles, blessing of the apostles. Simon just wants to buy it. Right? Oh, that's good. I like that. I want to do it myself. So that's why I mentioned last week that the people had questioned, many theologians have suggested, was Simon's conversion legitimate?
[13:06] Was it real? Because as soon as he gets the opportunity, he seems to be tempted by the personal prestige that he can gain. Rather than humbly receiving the gift from those who had been given the authority and power to offer it, he wanted that power for himself.

He wanted to buy the ability to give the gift himself. Everything or everyone has a price. You've heard a variation of that phrase.
Is that expression familiar to you? It seems too often to be common for our world of bribes and wealth and materialism. Everything has its price.
Everything can be bought and sold. So as we've heard this morning, Peter rebukes Simon strongly in Acts 8, 20 to 23. We'll hear that again. May your money perish with you because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money.
You have no part or share in this ministry because your heart is not right before God. Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord in the hope that he may forgive you for having such a thought in your heart.
[14:26] For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin. And so we see it in action here. Simon clearly thought he could just buy this power.

He could buy the ability to convey the Holy Spirit to someone else. He wanted to own it for his own purposes. He wanted to have the prestige that he perceived it would give.
But Peter harshly rebuked and corrected him. And so then, I think, hopefully, we see Simon's response in Acts 8, verse 24.

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Then Simon answered, Pray to the Lord for me so that nothing you have said may happen to me.
So Simon's reaction here is an important one that we need to recognize and adopt for ourselves because we can definitely learn a lesson here.
I don't know about you, but I can say this for myself. Sometimes it can sting or hurt our feelings when someone who we admire, someone we care about, rebukes and corrects us.
[15:35] But can we recognize that it often happens for our own good? Being rebuked by someone for a bad choice we've made or bad behavior should help us to return to the path that God wants for our lives.

We're all grown-ups. It can be awfully uncomfortable to have another grown-up tell you that you're behaving badly, right? But can you recognize, hopefully you can, the people in your life who have the authority, the relational capital.
I love that expression. As a friend of mine says, the chips in the basket, the developed relationship over time that gives them the opportunity, the ability to speak truth into your life.
Because we should admit our errors. We should be able to. We should repent quickly and with humility. And we should ask for prayer. The Bible tells us to do it.
We just need to be reminded. So a few other things in this story this morning. Whatever Luke meant when he talked about the process for the Samaritans to receive the Holy Spirit, we can see that Philip was not able to complete that task on his own.
[16:56] So it clearly required the apostles to be present as we've considered and for them to perform the laying on of hands to the Samaritan people who had followed Jesus and just been baptized recently.

And we know that Simon could see that this happened. He could see and hear something went on here. That this laying on of hands was the means by which the Spirit was conveyed.
Whether it was visible or audible or both, it caught Simon's attention. Remember I said he liked the demonstrative things that happened. And he immediately recognized what went on and wanted to be able to do that.
So many scholars believe that God chose to do this this way for a very specific reason. God chose to have this dramatic infilling infilling of the Spirit as a sign that this was a very special moment in history.
That the spread of the gospel into Samaria through the powerful and effective preaching of believers was worth noting. Normally the Holy Spirit, as we've talked about, enters into a person's life at the moment of conversion when you receive Jesus as your Lord and Savior.
[18:16] that's mostly how we would be familiar with that working, right? But this was, as we can recognize, a special event.

God was declaring through this event that the gospel was now open to all people. That all people could be forgiven and restored into relationship with him.
Just as Simon witnessed and experienced a miraculous event as Philip and Peter and John preached the gospel to, baptized and brought the presence of the Holy Spirit to the Samaritans, we can recognize that this was a miraculous time for the early church.
The events that we've considered this morning marked a crucial time for the spread of the gospel. A crucial time for the growth of the church. Peter and John had to go to Samaria to keep this new group of believers from becoming separated from other believers.
God was fostering unity here right from the very beginning. When Peter and John saw the Lord working in these people, they were assured that the Holy Spirit worked in and through all believers.
[19:34] Gentiles and mixed races as well as pure Jews. this would change their perspective on the gospel. Change their perspective on how God was at work in the church.

So, what have we learned from the events we've looked at this morning? Well, first of all, the ministry of Philip to and among the Samaritans had been confirmed by the miracles which Philip had done among them.
and it also resulted in true conversions where people believed and were baptized. Peter and John's mission to Samaria seems to have in lots of ways sealed the deal for the Samaritans.
It brought the presence of the Holy Spirit to them in a very real way and it also ushered in the spread of the gospel to nations other than the Jews. This was a critical change.
The Lord took pains to ensure unity as we've talked about in the early church and Jesus himself had commanded the gospel to be preached in Samaria and here it happens.

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[20:48] Philip the evangelist obeyed that command and God blessed his efforts. So, whatever animosity existed between the Jews and the Samaritans was overcome by the unity of the Spirit.

It's important to recognize that this was the first event in a long line of succession that allowed the gospel to ultimately spread to the Western world and ultimately to you and to me.
And while that early conversion event seems to have involved a more dramatic filling of the Holy Spirit as a sign of this special moment of history, today we know that conversion occurs when people believe and are baptized.
That people to this day are established in the faith when they observe the apostles' doctrine and teaching which was revealed and confirmed by the miraculous gifts of the Spirit in the first century which we're seeing happen and unfold now.
The church today, as the church today, we should remember the efforts of other people to preach the gospel faithfully, to seek to maintain unity and harmony in Christian communities.
[22:07] As Paul encouraged the church at Ephesus in Ephesians 4, 3-6, and the same encouraging message applies to us today. Paul said, make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father over all, who is over all and through all and in all. Amen.

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