

Acts 8:1–25

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[0 : 00] on page 1014 of the Bibles on your chairs. Again, our scripture reading today is Acts chapter 8, verses 1 through 25.

Please stand for the reading of God's word. 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. Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him. But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison.

Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word. Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ. 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.

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. So there was much joy in that city.

[1 : 13] 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. They all paid attention to him from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the power of God that is called great.

And they paid attention to him because for a long time he had amazed them with his magic. 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.

Even Simon himself believed. And after being baptized, he continued with Philip. And seeing signs and great miracles performed, he was amazed. Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to him Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit.

For he had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, saying, Give me this power also, so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.

But Peter said to him, May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money. You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God.

[2 : 42] Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity.

And Simon answered, Pray for me to the Lord, that nothing of what you have said may come upon me. 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.

This is the word of the Lord. Well, good morning. My name is T.J. Morissette. If you're visiting us for the first time, I serve with our youth group here at Holy Trinity.

It's a pleasure to proclaim God's word on the last day of the year, my daughter's birthday, her first birthday, and pray for God's strength.

A great word. I titled the sermon, Great Word. Not to solicit any sort of compliment at the end of the sermon.

[3 : 57] Great word, you know. But I would solicit your prayers for us. For your own hearts. For the hearts of those that are hearing this great word.

This morning, our text begins with Luke's narrative of the account of the death of Stephen. We're on the heels of that.

We saw it two weeks ago in chapter 7. The last half of verse 60 in chapter 7. Going even into our chapter 8 today.

As he says, And when he had said this, speaking of Stephen, he fell asleep. And Saul approved his execution.

It's as if Luke is leaving us with the ultimate cliffhanger for us to follow. Just a glimpse of what the word of God will do next.

[4 : 57] In the next few weeks. Within his writings. Luke gives us even more detail, even more specific scope into the book of Acts on just what it is this great word is accomplishing right before our eyes.

Look at your neighbor and say, Great word. This is a great word. Well, for starters, this great word has some results for us in chapter 8.

For starters, we see a great persecution. If you look down at verse 1 through 4. Great persecution. It says, And there arose in that day, starting in verse 1, And there arose in 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. The devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him.

But Saul was ravaging the church and entering house after house. He dragged off men and women and committed them to prison. It's as if Luke is picking up on the words of Jesus that he had already said to Mr. Theophilus.

[6 : 27] Before that, in Luke chapter 21, verse 12, and he says, But before all this, they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, talking to the disciples, delivering you up to the synagogues, prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name's sake.

This great persecution that is breaking out amongst the church is just affirming what Jesus has already said would happen. because of his namesake.

Well, take a look at what Luke says happens in the book in verse 1 through 4. First of all, persecution does break out at the death, after the death of Stephen.

It's interesting that the young man, Saul, is again mentioned as the central figure for what is happening, showing the readers just how great this persecution really is.

the church was scattered, verse 1, meaning they were dispersed outside of the region of Israel, but for the purpose of being planted or being planters elsewhere, like seeds being scattered.

[7 : 41] scattered. If you look down at verse 4, you see what the result of that scattering was. Look at verse 4. Now, those who were scattered about were preaching what?

The word. It tells us that what the scattering meant for believers, an opportunity to preach the word.

The church was being ravaged in verse 3a. Insults, meaning there was harm coming to the members of the body.

Continually, that's the emphasis there. It wasn't just a one-time thing. Saul had intentions on eradicating those who were following the way.

The church was being dragged out. You got members of the body in their house being dragged out and committed to prison. I mean, if you're looking for hope in the new year and you come and you hear that this great word will cause great persecution, well, just hold on.

[8 : 49] As we also see within Luke's geographical shift from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria that this scattering was serving to fulfill the master's plan for the work of the gospel in the church and this started all the way back in chapter 1 with the promise of Jesus, you will be my witnesses!

in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and even to the ends of the earth. And if you're wondering why such a great word would cause such great a persecution to so many and still does to this day, let me just give you three things we learn from this great persecution.

First of all, persecution targets the whole body. Look at verse 1 again. And those days there arose great persecution amongst the church in Jerusalem and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria except the apostles.

Now, what's meant there by except the apostles is not that they weren't being persecuted as well. It wasn't that they just happened to go hide. But it was that the fact that we already seen the apostles being persecuted and beaten and thrown in prison.

But now we see what's happening with members of the body that aren't necessarily the apostles also feeling the effect of this word that they say they are living under.

[10 : 11] I mean, think about it. You're chilling one day and you're with your people and someone says, we need someone to help wait tables. And you, like, yeah, I could do that.

That's great. And then you turn around and you're being persecuted because not only are you called to wait tables, you're called to be men and women full of the spirit and faith and virtue.

And you're called to stand up and testify to why you believe and what you believe in. Yeah, so these people are being targeted. This event is to highlight the members of the body, but also that people might have still had the view of fear in their head.

The people that are causing this persecution except the apostles and not except the apostles, they are probably thinking, well, there's probably still reason to fear the body of Christ.

I can imagine being one of the Pharisees or religious leaders who are causing this persecution thinking, well, Gamaliel didn't say not to attack the deacons.

[11 : 25] He didn't say not to attack the mothers in the back or the dad at work. He said, don't attack the apostles. Technically, we can actually get them. Chapter 5.

But secondly, this great persecution brings about great devotion. Everybody say devotion. So not only do you have members being targeted, but you also see a devotion.

Look down at verse 2. Now, devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him. I don't want to make too much out of the word, but it's interesting that you find devout men even in the midst of persecution.

Sometimes you'll see images of things happening in the world and you'll wonder how people find the faith and the strength to survive because they are holding on to something deeper than just a list of rules.

Perhaps they wanted to give Stephen a burial that kind of hinted to Christ's burial where devout people came and took his body and made great lamentation over him. But you see, nonetheless, I like the way Luke kind of doesn't leave out their humanity and their spirituality.

[12 : 39] They're devout men, but they're going to cry. They're going to lament, but they're devout. But thirdly, persecution identifies worshipers.

That's a very easy word thrown around today. Where am I worshipers at? I'm a worshiper. But persecution strategically is used to identify worshipers.

Where am I pulling this from? Look at verse 3. But Saul was ravaging the church, entering house after house. He dragged off men and women and committed them to prison.

Families that would be again chilling in their living room on New Year's Eve, Christmas Day, Thanksgiving, just wanted to enjoy the game.

And all of a sudden their neighbor tips off the local agencies that no, they're actually followers of this Jesus Christ. Or perhaps Luke is trying to draw out the idea even further that this house after house scene is maybe because Saul wanted to get everybody in one fell swoop.

[13 : 54] He knew who was using their house as a local gathering spot for the followers to come and lift up holy hands together and look at the apostles' teaching and fellowship and break bread.

So maybe when one Sunday he's standing back kind of just, and then now let's go get them. There's story after story of persecution of churches and people in the middle of praying to the Lord and people coming in and slaughtering them.

Persecution identifies worshipers. Persecution brings out devout men. Persecution targets the whole body. If you think you are exempt, sorry, welcome to the body, but it's a great persecution because of the word that is happening, that is moving.

Yeah, persecution identifies people who are devout and claiming to be a part of the body, but people who worship the living God, they have hope even in this persecution.

persecution. It draws out of the believer exactly what God has put in them, that if Christ is for you, who can be against you?

[15 : 12] Yet when the church comes under persecution, this in no way stops the word of God, this in no way stops the gospel from going forth or being preached or being heard or being received and being acted upon or responded to, or in other words, no matter how great the persecution, it neither hinders nor deters the movement of this great word, no matter how great the persecution you see or you experience, it neither hinders nor deters what God has.

But secondly, what does this great word do? It identifies great pretenders, great pretenders, verses 5 through 12.

Luke doesn't just stop at persecution, ladies and gentlemen, when seeing the movement of the word, because due to the persecution, Luke tightens the scope just a little bit, so we're not just generally talking about the region of Judea, Samaria, but let's just focus on Samaria specifically, and let's focus on one person in Samaria, an evangelist by the name of Philip.

Philip, you remember Philip, one of the seven chosen to care for the poor and widows. He too is experienced in persecution, he too is scattered about, and he ends up down in Samaria, where he is proclaiming Christ.

Look at verse 6 through 8, and the crowds with one accord said, paid attention to what was being said by Philip when they heard him and saw the signs he did 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.

[17 : 05] So there was much joy in the city. After being introduced to Philip and watching the people of Samaria who are seeing the signs that Philip performed, witnessing the miracles of casting out demons and healing of the sick, they're filled with joy.

Right away we are introduced to a man named Simon the magician, who in the text Luke serves as something of a contrast to what Philip's doing.

You have to understand that Simon had already been at work before Philip ever arrived. Simon had his boots on the ground. He already had his shop, he had his permit, he knew what he was doing, he knew his regular customers, he knew what they were doing, he knew how to get over.

Not to speculate, but the text lets us know that this man Simon the magician amazed the Samaritans. And how did he amaze the Samaritans? By making false claims about who he was.

Look down at verse nine. 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.

[18 : 20] He said he was somebody great. Our second outcome to the movement of this great word is the understanding that we have great pretenders.

Those who would make great claims about themselves. Setting themselves up against God. God. Whereas a friend of mine would say, bro, they don't speak highly of Christ.

He's from Tuskegee, Alabama. They just don't speak highly of Jesus. Who would make claims of authority that God has never given them or anybody for that matter.

And for Simon the magician, this worked. Take a look at verse 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.

If you study Simon, you also know that his name is also in history Simon Magas or Magas Simon the great.

[19 : 28] Now, I don't know if he coined himself that, but he definitely didn't shy away from it. Like, yeah, I'm great, pretty great. Magas meaning great.

This man is the power of God. Simon's content to call himself power. Like, no, I'm the one God's using. What we have to notice here is that Luke is letting us know that there were just, these were just names and these were just tricks that Simon wasn't all-powerful, Simon was into making money.

Two things we learned from this great pretender, especially in light of this great word. One, where you find God's truth flourishing, expect to find those who prefer to placard false truths.

Where you find God's truth flourishing, expect to find those, even amongst us, us, today, in this room, who will declare false truths.

It's a scary thought. It should allow for some self-examination. Isn't that what Simon is doing here? Whether he knows it or not, look at what Luke's laying out regarding the response of the people.

[20 : 49] Even they jump to a conclusion about God when they see Simon. He is the power of God. Well, I was just coming to do some magic tricks, but yeah, I'll take that too.

It's funny how we jump so quickly, our hearts are looking for something to explain everything except the one who can't explain everything.

Secondly, what this great pretender teaches us is that the crowds are never the gauge or the authenticity and the credibility of man.

Your crowds, your audience, I guess as I'm a rapper, it's mainly just for me, is never the gauge of how good you are. You know who the standard is?

Jesus Christ and those God has given you, the body of Christ, the word of God. The crowds are never the gauge for the authenticity and the credibility of man.

[21 : 52] I could have summed that up way simpler if I thought a little bit more. The applause, the yeses, the amens, the retweets and the follows and the likes, don't be fooled.

Search me, oh Lord, that I may be clean. Wash me, that I may be whiter than snow. Lord, if there's anything in me that, like whatever happened to that, despite the fact that many are amazed at the call of Simon or what they called Simon, the power of God, despite the fact that they're amazed, despite the fact that even men like Justin Martyr, who was a Samaritan himself, second century, would say that there is an erected statue in Samaria that is named to a guy named Simon, who actually they write under there that says Simon the magician, he did many major acts of magic.

Despite the fact that even Justin Martyr says that they consider this Simon God, the crowds are not the gauge. What the people have to say if they come to the conclusion that there's another God, it's not the gauge, it's not the measuring line.

Still, the great word of God is on the move. Despite great pretenders. But then thirdly, what this word of God is doing, especially in chapter eight, what I would hope it's doing in the hearts of us today, it's demonstrating great power.

A demonstration of great power. You get a great persecution, there's an identification of great pretenders, great power.

[23 : 45] But we're not fooled, we know there's great power behind everything God has and is and does. We turn the rest of our attention to this great power.

We see verse 12 as the shift takes place, but when they believed Philip as he preached what good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.

They believed Philip, so much so that they were baptized, so much so that they had to express it. Our text lets us know that even Simon himself believed.

Verse 13, he says, even Simon himself believed and after being baptized he continued with Philip and seeing the signs and great miracles performed, he was amazed.

But check the language here of verse 13, after seeing the signs and great miracles performed, he was amazed. Now we already know that Philip was not simply there to perform miracles of great works and power, but that the gospel would perform the work of power in the hearts of man as the preaching would go forth, as they would make disciples, as you will see the apostles would come down.

[25 : 09] Still, what amazed Simon though, the magician was seeing the signs and great works of power performed. This is what captured his gaze. Like, yo, he's killing it over there.

I want that. He's killing it. not, they're being killed. I want that, which is actually the response. You see, signing up to be a Christian was not a good thing, per se.

man. But what sparked his attention, Simon, was the great works of Philip. That's what captured his attention, the instrument wielding the power, but not the purpose of that power, to change men.

Yet, to get the idea of this great power, Luke turns the corner yet again with the geographical shift, verse 14 through 19. Check it out. the apostles hear about what is happening in Samaria, and they send Peter and John to confirm it.

The question here is why the Samaritans did not acquire the spirit upon belief. Repentance is still debated, even though some have offered some perspective of why they don't have the spirit, even though they say they believe and they were baptized.

[26 : 23] Look down, look at verse 14. Now, when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent them Peter and John who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, for he had not yet fallen on any of them, for they had only been baptized in the name of Jesus, the Lord Jesus, and they laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

Now, when Simon, again, saw that the spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money saying, give me this power also, so that anyone whom I lay my hands on may receive the Holy Spirit.

You see what just happened there? First of all, the people who previously believed, they get their, they are being laid hands on and they receive the Spirit.

Now, to answer the previous question of why they didn't actually have the Spirit in the first place, again, it's still a question, but the first view is that God withheld the Holy Spirit until Peter and John arrived, in order so that the affirmation would be official in front of people, in front of the people, the Samaritans might be seen to be fully incorporated into the body, just like the day of Pentecost, that's one view.

The second view is that the response and commitment of the Samaritans was defective in some point, and possibly the Samaritans needed more assurance from the apostles as they arrived, or I threw a view in there, it's basically that God just didn't allow the Holy Spirit to come in order for Peter to call out Simon.

[28 : 13] I don't know. At the same time, despite the viewpoint, Luke is silent concerning why or how the Spirit didn't impart initially, but the Spirit comes generally, and he actually comes when they laid their hands on them.

The point is that Simon's motives wasn't based on whether or not he had the Spirit or not. It was based on the fact that he's seen something else he can also get, and that's what he wanted.

I want the ability to give somebody else the Spirit. I don't really want the Spirit. I don't know if he said that, but I'm just saying he didn't say that here. I don't know. I don't want necessarily that.

I want your ability to do that. I want your great power. All they had to do was listen to Simon long enough to see where his heart really was.

Just listen a little long and you start to see the realities of where people stand. hang around somebody long enough, watch them stump their toe.

[29 : 17] We had a saying growing up, oh, that's what comes out you? Okay, that's what you, okay. Just listen a little longer. Man, the Morissette household, we were sick this week, and we had some house guests come through, so I'm running to the guest bedroom trying to find all the covers to throw them in the wash, run down to the basement, it's freezing.

I'm like, oh my god, why is it so cold down here? Get down there, get ready to throw the clothes in the wash, and I notice at the corner of the base of the threshold of the laundry room, there's an opening where it looked like water had just been coming through.

It's all black now. And I'm like, oh, here we go again. I gotta figure out who to call. And I'm looking, and I'm holding the clothes and there's a puddle anywhere.

And I get close and I start looking and I notice there's bubbles all through the door frame as if water was making its way through the door frame. And it's the craziest looking, it looks like a disease.

It's like, oh my gosh. And you step back and you're like, oh, the whole thing's messed up. Now I gotta strip it, repaint it, and then figure out where the water's still coming from. And then I dip my head in just to see where everything is, is there any water on the ground in here?

[30 : 38] And then I start hearing something, I started hearing a water drip. And I'm like, wait, where's that coming from? And I'm like, where's that coming from? Is it still dripping right now?

And I'm holding the clothes in my hand, I step back, I see nothing. There's not even any water on the ground anymore. And I'm looking, holding the clothes, and I'm like, what's the refrigerator? I drop the clothes, run back upstairs, pull the refrigerator back, and when you know, the ice maker hose was dripping water because the guy that hooked up the ice maker didn't tighten it.

And by the way, I'm the guy that hooked up the ice maker. But if you listen long enough, you start to find where the problem is. And I think that's exactly what's happening here.

They listen long enough and they start to see that Simon isn't exactly who he says he is. And that's why the rebuke from Peter comes. And that's where our rebuke would come.

When you start listening even to your own selves long enough, like, am I actually saying what the text has to say? Or am I saying what I want to say? Well, what are we listening to?

[31 : 47] Yet again, based off Simon, of what Simon saw, the performance of great power, that was what was more beneficial for him, not a transformed heart.

Not what the power of God was given for, to draw men to worship Christ, despite persecution. Take a look at what Simon's, of Peter's response to Simon's request.

When you look at verse 20 through 23, Peter's words are given as a strong rebuke because the very idea of gaining a gift of God without repentance, without contrition of heart, without submission to God, means that Simon or anyone for that matter is operating in a pagan understanding of God.

you've created a different God. It's evident that your heart is far from God, that you remain under the law, that Simon remained under the wrath of God, and you have not received the mercies of God or understood him for that fact.

Peter thus lets Simon know that he will have no part in the ministry because his heart is far from God. That's what he says in verse 21.

[32 : 59] Because your heart is far from God, you have no lot in this. What are you talking about? That's not God. Peter calls for Simon to repent and plead with the Lord for his soul, verse 22.

Even though Simon is bitter, tasteless, useless, and full of sin, that's what he means by you're full of gall and bitterness. Like you've lost your flavor, but you want to act like you're salt.

Simon's prayer in verse 24 resembles Pharaoh's prayer in Exodus. I don't want that to happen to me, so pray for me.

I remember years back there was a famous singer that got on a Christian television station, and that brother could sing, and he grabbed the mic and he said, pray for me.

And they prayed for him. But nowhere in the broadcast was sin ever mentioned, repentance, or, you know. And what that teaches me is that I can live any way I want to live and then come to church and ask to pray, as long as I give my money, as long as we exchange something Simon-y.

[34 : 18] Well, we're not told if Simon was truly repentant or the fate of Simon later. There's some tale of the fact that maybe Simon was the starter of Gnosticism, and the opponent of Paul, but again, we don't know for sure.

Above everything else, we are told in verse 25 that the word of God still went forth. Look at verse 25. Look at the way Luke ends it. And when they heard, when they had testified and spoken the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans.

Well, I don't know how you're entering this new year. I don't know which character might resemble you in this text, but I do know personally, we can't expect to receive the gifts of God and our hearts be far from them.

Is your heart on display as identifying yourself with the body of Christ? Is that evident, despite the persecution that might occur towards you?

will you show you're more of a great pretender to display a form of godliness but deny the power of God and call yourself the power of God?

[35 : 54] That you can do it? That you can make it? I don't know, as we head to 2018, one of the things I'm teaching my little one-year-old is the question of will the demonstration of this great power be enough to convince us that we're weak, we can't buy our way into heaven, can't buy a blessing from me, I don't have money for you.

I got my own sins to deal with that I can't even pay for. Salvation of God is only given to those who are weak, and that is what Simon missed in this text.

That's what he misunderstood, and that's what I pray you grasp this morning. This great word identifies believers, whether you're in great persecution, in lieu of great pretenders, and change mankind because of God's great power.

Let's pray. God, we are recipients of your grace, just generally the fact that we made it here this morning, that we made it through the night, that we have one more breath to draw with our lungs.

Lord, I pray that your great word would take root in the hearts of our church, our body, and in our city.

[37 : 32] In Jesus' name, amen. God