

Preaching and Reaching for the Sake of the Gospel

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[0 : 0 0] Continuing where we left off in the chapter 8 of the book of Acts, we've seen the persecution of the church leading directly to the spread of the gospel.

As I mentioned last week, Tertullian mentions in his book Apologeticus, written around 197 AD, says that the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.

And many in the early church not only believed the message of the gospel, believed that Jesus is the Christ, believed that he is God in the flesh, who lived a sinless life and shed his blood on the cross for the forgiveness of sin, but they gave their lives in their commitment to share that news, that message with others.

In fact, of the 12 apostles, only one is believed to have not died a martyr's death. That would be the apostle John. He's the only one believed to have died of old age sometime after AD 98, so about 65, 66 years after Jesus ascends back to heaven.

Tertullian also writes that before John was banished to the island of Patmos, which is where he receives the revelation of Revelation, the book.

[1 : 3 2] He gets that from Jesus. He writes that they brought him, the Romans brought him into a coliseum and dumped him into a vat of boiling oil, but he emerged unharmed, and the entire coliseum converted to Christianity.

Again, that was Tertullian reporting that. I have no reason not to believe it, but wow. I can't imagine being in that situation.

But John, like other apostles, were unwavering in their commitment to Christ and were willing to go to whatever extent they needed to to proclaim that, whatever they needed to sacrifice, including themselves, they did so.

But it's not so important how the apostles died. What is important is the fact that they were all willing to die for their faith. If Jesus had not been resurrected, the disciples would have known it.

People will not die for something that they know to be a lie. So the fact that they did die, firmly believing that Jesus rose again from the dead, is God, and is the one through whom we receive forgiveness of sin, should be affirming to us, should be encouraging to us that the message is indeed true.

[2 : 5 1] Coming back to Acts 8.1, we see the first great persecution of the church under Saul that caused people to scatter from Jerusalem throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria.

And this is the means by which Jesus is fulfilling His promise to the disciples. He says in Acts 1.8, not 8.1, we just looked at 8.1. 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.

So it starts in Jerusalem. That's what Acts 1 through 7 is about. It's the church presence in Jerusalem meeting in the temple, and the portico of Solomon.

And then Acts 8, you see the persecution. It starts actually with Stephen. The martyrdom of Stephen is the spark that lights that fuse of persecution, and the people scattered because of the persecution brought about by Saul and the Jewish council.

It's not uncommon for God to use persecution and trials to spread His word through His people. 2 Corinthians 2.14, Paul writes, But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of Him everywhere.

[4 : 19] So we are, as believers, as followers of Christ, we are the ones that are used by God to share His truth and show His love. And sometimes it takes the persecution and trials to spread us out and to push us on, especially as we're in the book of Acts.

In Philippians 1, 12 through 14, a prison epistle, Paul writing from prison, he says, I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel.

He didn't see his imprisonment as a horrible thing. He says, So that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard that to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ.

And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear. So Paul, ironically, Saul in Acts 8, the one leading the persecution, is now the one being, I guess, persecuted, being arrested for preaching the gospel.

And it is through the way he deals with that, and he goes along with that, and he continues to preach Christ, that others are also encouraged in their faith.

[5 : 40] So that's a big reason why I've focused so much on the last couple weeks. You know, we've got the martyrdom of Stephen, and the persecutions of the church, especially in the Roman Empire we saw, the first 300 years or so in church history, ten great persecutions that took place, and what happened.

It's because through those times and through those martyrs and through those trials and hardships that God is growing the church. The seed of the gospel is being spread about as people are scattering and moving away from the persecution to other areas.

So rejection, what we see here in Acts and what we see in other places in Scripture and what we see in the whole of church history is that rejection in one place becomes the opportunity for people elsewhere to receive the gospel.

So the efforts of Saul and the Jewish council to stop the preaching of the gospel and wipe out the early church entirely only resulted in its expansion and a broader impact. Now let's get to Acts 8, verse 4 through 8, which is the text I want to focus on today because last week we saw that there was the scattering, people were preaching the gospel.

Now we pick up verse 4. 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.

[7 : 12] 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. Father, help us to take from this text, Lord, some points in which we can apply apply and be changed and molded to the image of Christ.

Amen. So Philip, we see, goes to Samaria. He is ministering among the Samaritans. If you remember from John 4, Jesus' divine appointment with the woman at the well, we learn that the Samaritans and Jews do not get along.

There is no dealings with one another. The Samaritans were considered a half-breed people. They were a mixture of Jew and Gentile. Samaria was a nation that originated when the Assyrians captured the 10 northern tribes in 722 BC.

And then they deported many of the people and then imported others who intermarried with the Jewish people. And so this is the birth of Samaria and the Samaritan, as they call it, the Samaritan race.

[8 : 31] Samaritans had their own temple. They had their own priesthood. Friendship between Jews and Samaritans was verboten. In the initial ministry of the disciples in Matthew 10, Jesus sends them out to only the house of Israel.

In fact, he specifically tells them not to go to the Samaritans. But now, Philip, being driven away from Jerusalem and away from the Jewish people, is going into and being given direction by God to go to Samaria, to go to what would be considered in the eyes of a Jewish person an undesirable people, an unlovely people.

The outcasts in Jewish culture. And Philip, given a little background on him, we know he is one of the seven that is chosen in Acts 6 to serve the tables.

Remember that contention that was brought up and they chose seven men of good repute and full of faith and to fulfill the ministry of making sure the Hellenistic Jewish widows were being served properly in the distribution of the goods.

Stephen was one. Philip's named along with him as well. We also see in Acts 21, verse 8, that Philip becomes an effective evangelist.

[9 : 59] We see it start here in Acts 8, but then it must continue to follow him through the rest of his life as we see Paul meeting up with him in Acts 21 and staying at his house.

So going into Samaria as a Jew was certainly not desirable and could potentially present some problems. And maybe Samaria was on Philip's no thank you list.

I've heard, and maybe you have too, that if you ever, whenever you say, I will never go and minister there or do that, that it feels like God often sends you in that direction.

I don't know if that's the way God works or not. I tend to think not, but it does seem to happen that way from time to time, that you make a declarative statement, I will not, and it just seems like God is humored by making you, putting you in a position where you do.

And I think Philip may have been one of those people who initially was like, I will not go to the Samaritans. Yet, despite the possible discomfort that may be present, Philip provides, I believe, a good example for what every believer ought to be doing no matter where they are serving or why they are in the situation they are in.

[11 : 20] Because Philip, from what we understand, probably had no desire to leave Jerusalem. He was happy ministering to where he was and doing what he was doing. He was content. But God, through persecution, drove him and others out of Jerusalem into other areas.

So one thing that we see that Philip does as an example of what every believer ought to be doing no matter where we are and whatever our circumstance is, is he preaches the gospel.

He preaches the gospel. We see in verse 5, he went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ. He told them about Jesus. He told them who he was. He told them about the life that he lived, the death he died, and the resurrection.

Forgiveness of sin offered through Christ. The great commission command from Jesus to make disciples of all nations extends to believers for all time.

We need to be sharing the gospel message. That's the act of making disciples. How do you make disciples? How can they be followers of a message or of an individual if they don't hear about Jesus?

[12 : 31] How can they make a, how can they make the decision to commit their lives to Jesus if they do not hear about him? So we need to be sharing the gospel. And we need to be sharing it with all people without discrimination.

That's all nations. Philip's offer of the gospel to this despised people was a radical step forward. It was a step away from the established Jewish tradition and was stepping towards, in a new direction with a new message.

And it showed a newness of perspective. No longer are Samaritans to be considered less than worthy to receive the truth of God. No longer are they considered less than worthy to talk to, to befriend, to engage with.

Instead, they're to be seen as sinners who need to hear about the redeeming hope of Jesus. And that is how Philip saw them.

Is that how we see people? Do we see people as sinners who need to hear about the redeeming hope of Jesus? Now, I'll let you answer that quietly because I know you're answering in the affirmative, yes we do.

[13 : 48] Okay? I'll let you keep that answer. Alright? But do you really see all people as needing the hope of the gospel?

I had an opportunity to wonder that same question myself. My son Judah is my witness as we were driving down to Rochester for our softball tournament, which was an unfortunate disaster last weekend.

But as we were going down, I was, it was a part of the, the lanes there. I was a little confused on how things were. One seemed to be, it looked like one was a turn lane only and one was a straight and then turn other way.

Turned out you could be in either lane, it didn't matter. But I, to correct myself, took a quick glance in the rear view mirror, saw that, didn't see anybody in my rear view mirror, and quickly cut over to the other lane.

Well, you know what happened, right? I don't even need to continue. Yeah, somebody let me know that they were there. They also proceeded to let me know they thought our team was number one and wished me well as we went down to this tournament and was just screaming all sorts of encouraging words as he drove by Judah's side of the car.

[15 : 16] And all Judah, I think his words exactly were like, whoa. And at that point, that type of situation, I was like, that person needs Jesus.

But I wonder if I was in his situation, if I was on his side of the experience and I was the one getting cut off or I was the one being slowed down by some dingbat who doesn't know how to drive on the road, if I would have been so quick to say, hey, that person needs Jesus too, or would I have been quick to act in the same way as this guy acted in a way that made me feel like I just didn't, I was unworthy to be on this road with this excellent driver.

But just think about that. So that's my own personal experience, one of many, I know, and you have similar ones as well. Do you see all people as needing to hear about the redeeming hope of Jesus?

And some of you have had some tremendous trials in your life with people at the expense of people who, it's just straight evil the way they treat you.

But do you see them as needing the hope of Jesus or do you just hope they get what they have coming to them? Romans 3.23 tells us that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

[16 : 56] Across the human spectrum, through the corridor of time, every person to walk this earth has transgressed the law of our creator God with the exception, of course, of Jesus himself. And we know that God is holy.

Psalms 7, verses 11 and 12 says that he is a righteous judge and a God who feels indignation every day. And if a man does not repent, God will sharpen his sword and he will exact wrath upon the unrepentant.

But all have sinned. We all are in, I guess you'd say, the crosshairs of God's wrath. At some point in our life. But we're also told in Romans 3.23, we like to quote that and say all have sinned, but we forget to include verse 24 where it says that and are justified by his grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

It's easy to look at the world and see that all have sinned. We can read the news and we can see the media and experience political unrest or whatever and realize sin is rampant and everyone is guilty of it.

But they can't be delivered from that apart from the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. The only means of being made right in the sight of God or judge is through the redemption that is in Christ.

[18 : 26] And since we have that revelation given to us in the word of God, it is our responsibility to share it with others. It is our responsibility to share it with others.

It's not something that God has given to us to just keep to ourselves. We grow in knowledge and we come to Christ and we're saved and we're excited about it and we study the word and scripture and we get into theology and church history and we gain all this knowledge and it just kind of sits there.

We become spiritually flabby Christians with all that we know but what are we practicing and how are we showing what we know in our lives? I heard this quote about 13, 14 years ago now and it sticks with me.

It comes from, you may have heard it, I've probably shared it more than once here, a guy by the name Penn Jillette, so Penn and Teller, magicians in, I don't know, Las Vegas, something, I think they've moved on.

Anyway, well-known magician act and he's an atheist and he makes no bones about it, he makes it very clear but it wasn't an interview, it was just doing like, he kind of recorded like a vlog or whatever it was in that day.

[19 : 52] It's on YouTube now, you can find it. where he's talking about a Christian individual would come to the show and this guy was, he didn't know he was a Christian at the time, was just kind of off to the side while they were signing autographs and such and he was one of the last ones there and he came up to him and he just shared with him that he was a Christian and wanted to, you know, talk to him a little bit about Jesus and gave him a Bible and a tract and I don't know, he tells about what happens there and he talked about the respect that he had for that individual to share and what he, in this, I'll just read the part of the, the part of the rant that he had that was very, very challenging for me and continues to be.

He goes on to say, he says, if you believe there's a heaven and a hell and people could be going to hell or not getting eternal life and you think that it's not really worth telling them this because it would make it socially awkward, how much do you have to hate somebody to not proselytize?

How much do you have to hate somebody to believe everlasting life is possible and not tell them that? And then he goes on to say, he says, I mean, if I believed beyond the shadow of a doubt that a truck was coming at you, and you didn't believe that truck was bearing down on you, there's a certain point where I tackle you and this is more important than that.

Those are the words of an atheist. Those are the words of somebody who doesn't believe there is a God, let alone that the message of the Bible is true and real and he's saying, I don't respect Christians who don't proselytize, who don't share their faith because of this.

This was challenging and it's still, I mean, from time to time haunts me. Obviously, I brought it up this morning. How much do you have to hate somebody to believe everlasting life is possible and not tell them that?

[22 : 04] We sit here in our pews nice and comfortable and we say, yes, all people are sinners. Yes, all people need to hear the gospel and we claim to love everybody but yet we don't show that love when we're choosing not to share the gospel because it makes us feel a little funny, makes us feel like a little bit of a social awkwardness and in a sense from a non-believer he says, that's hating somebody else.

If everlasting life is possible and you don't share that with somebody. I like what Charles Spurgeon has said on this matter. He said, if sinners be damned at least let them leap to hell over our dead bodies and if they perish let them perish with our arms wrapped about their knees imploring them to stay.

If hell must be filled let it be filled in the teeth of our exertions and let not one go unwarned and unprayed for. How concerned are we about people?

I mean naturally we're concerned about our loved ones and our friends but what about our neighbors? What about the people who cut us off?

What about the people who do wrong by us? Are we praying for them? Are we sharing the gospel with them? Philip was God's commissioned messenger to deliver his message to the people of Samaria.

[23 : 34] You and I are God's commissioned messengers to deliver his message to the people of Shapley or Sanford or Acton or Waterboro or Wolfboro or Osby or wherever in the world you're from somewhere in Florida or wherever you're at wherever you find yourself we are God's commissioned messengers to preach the gospel.

But not only to preach the gospel but to love the people. See in Acts 6 excuse me Acts 8 verse 6 through 8 it says that the crowds went and paid attention to what was being said by Philip because of what he was doing.

Philip went into Samaria with an important message to proclaim and God provided him with the power to perform signs among the people. Now as I mentioned before the primary purpose of these signs was to assure the hearers that the message is of divine origin.

This is not something that is given to all believers. It's not something that is given for the purpose of going in and doing signs and wonders and getting people's attention. It was meant to show these people that this is a message with divine origin.

It credentialed the word. But equally as important is that these signs were acts of love toward people. And that's what I really took from this. These verses alone, Philip, he exercised unclean spirits from people.

[24 : 58] He healed those who could not walk. And it's likely that he did more than this. But the fact is that his words accompanied by these acts of love brought much joy in that city.

He was sharing the truth about Jesus, but he was loving the people. And he was able to love the people in the way Jesus loved the people. Miraculous signs of healing to get their attention, to earn their trust, and to show the love of God.

Our actions are an irreplaceable aspect of our witness to others. If we preach what is true about God without representing what is true about God, why would anyone listen to us?

And isn't that one of the complaints against the church? Oh, the church is full of hypocrites. They preach one thing but live another.

And rather than address that issue, rather than take that as constructive criticism, many in the church body have sat and smiled and said, well, they just don't know us.

[26 : 12] They just don't understand. But they know what they see and they understand how you engage and interact with them.

And this is the conclusion that they come up with. Is it that they're so far off or is it that we're not very observant of our own actions with people?

We know that God cares about human suffering. The psalmist in Psalm 68 5 calls him a father of the fatherless and a protector of widows. In Psalm 146 9, the Lord watches over the sojourners.

If that isn't a topic of hot discussion lately, the sojourner, the immigrant, the asylum seeker, the refugee in today's verbiage. God watches over them.

Psalm 102 17, he regards the prayer of the destitute and does not despise their prayer. The poor. The poor who cannot provide for themselves. God hears their prayer.

[27 : 15] He regards them. Do we? Do we regard the homeless on the streets? Do we regard the panhandler in the middle of the median in Biddeford or Portland or wherever else it might be, Sanford?

Psalm 146 verses 7 and 8, he executes justice for the oppressed. He gives food to the hungry. He lifts up those who are bowed down. God cares about human suffering.

God cares about people in every area of life, in every trial and circumstance in life, and we are called to imitate him.

Jesus cared. Read the Gospels. Who did he engage with? Oftentimes it was with the people who were the outcasts, with sinners and tax collectors, women at the well, Samaritans.

He engaged in conversation and he showed love to them. Opportunities abound to meet people where they are at in their suffering.

[28 : 28] We have a tremendous ministry in the food pantry ministry here, and that ebbs and flows with families who have need. Sometimes there's more, sometimes there's less, but it's an opportunity to meet somebody where they're at.

The Benevolence Ministry of the Deacons have helped meet needs of people in the community. People we know, people we don't. But that opportunity is there. But what else can we do?

In what other ways can we meet people where they are at? I came up with, off the top of my head at like one o'clock in the morning, five things that just came off the top of my head, and I was like, I think that's good for now.

One thing that I've had a conversation with somebody about on a few occasions is something called Grief Share, a support group to help people move through their grieving process.

Somebody had called last week looking curious about widows and widowers support groups and ministries in the area. Financial education, providing principles of financial stewardship through instruction and encouragement.

[29 : 37] The one that was big years ago and I think is still probably a good idea is Financial Peace University. Helping people get out of debt, helping people to get a hold on their money.

Addiction, counseling, and support. Could be substance abuse, could be pornography, could be a myriad of things. Addiction doesn't have just one niche. Biblical counseling, helping people with their hardship through the truth of scripture, helping them keep a view on God and Christ and how they can be comforted in their relationship with him through what they're going through.

Opportunities are nearly endless people. They're nearly endless. So what can you do to love people where they are at? It doesn't have to be a program of the church.

It does not have to meet here. It can. We have this great building. We can use this building for God's glory in these ways that are different than what the church has done for 100 years.

Are we willing to do it? Are we willing to do something different? Are we willing to make changes that can be good and show the love of Jesus to our community?

[30 : 52] But don't forget, while our actions are an irreplaceable aspect of our witness to others, preaching the gospel requires words. We're not preaching the gospel with our lives if we're not also preaching the gospel with our lips.

Good works alone cannot impart the good news that Christ died to redeem sinners. Good works alone cannot share the truth about the redemption that is in Christ and the hope and peace that comes in knowing Jesus through the gospel.

It's both and, not either or. And we see that with Philip and others in history. I pray we see that here at First Baptist Shapley.

And if we don't, then what do we need to change? What do we need to do differently? Let's pray. Father, I thank you for your word.

I thank you, Lord, that you love us. I thank you for Jesus who died and gave his life for us. And Lord, I thank you for people, the opportunities we have to show and share your love, to preach the gospel and to love others.

[32 : 09] Opportunities are endless, Lord. They abound. And you've made us a body of Christ with various members, with various burdens, various ideas and opportunities, Lord.

I pray that in the coming weeks, in the coming days, even today, Lord, help us to be in prayer. Help us to be seeking you and your wisdom, your discernment. Help us, Lord, to be waiting on you and allowing you to open our eyes to change that needs to take place or open our eyes, Lord, to opportunities that are present before us but we're too blind to see because of our busyness and our focus on ourselves.

Lord, we are here for your glory. We are here to worship you and give you praise and thanks, but Lord, we are also here as we scatter from these walls, Lord, to proclaim the gospel, to preach it, to live it, to show it.

Help us to do so for your glory, I pray this week. And Lord, I pray that perhaps this time of fellowship that we have now across the hall may be an opportunity of discussion as we seek your will.

In Jesus' name I pray. Amen. God bless you. You can go across the hall and enjoy some refreshments and fellowship together. Amen. Hmm.

[33 : 31] ambient voice topic group music through environment