

Acts 8:1-25

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[0 : 00] Heavenly Father, would you open our ears and our hearts to your word, that its power might work to transform us and give us a share in your ministry.

! We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Please be seated. Friends, it's good to see you. My name's Jacob. We continue this morning in a sermon series in the book of Acts. We're going to be looking at Acts chapter 8, which we just heard read by Laol.

Join there with me, page 916, Acts chapter 8. Acts was written by Luke. It is volume 2 of his writings, the first being his gospel, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

And in this series, what we're doing is we're touching down at different points along the way in the book of Acts, looking at different episodes that teach us about the gospel mission that Jesus has given us as his disciples.

At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was poured out on the disciples, and they were given the power and the authority to carry forth the gospel to the ends of the earth. And what we learn in this episode, in the book of Acts, is that the word of God is powerful.

[1 : 20] The gospel of Jesus Christ is powerful to accomplish God's purposes in this world. And in the sermon today, I just want to help us to see, from Acts chapter 8, four ways that the word of God is powerful.

And that power is put on display in particular ways in this story. Because as we see the power of God's word at work here, we'll come to more fully understand how his power is at work in us. And we'll also come to understand how God's word is powerful to transform this world that we live in. So, four ways that God's word is powerful.

Number one, we see that God's word is powerful because it's unstoppable. It is unstoppable. Here at chapter 8, it's been two years since Pentecost. The church in Jerusalem has been growing stronger and stronger and expanding.

[2 : 29] Thousands and thousands of people coming to know the Lord Jesus. But at the end of chapter 7, we see this major turning point. Stephen, who had been ordained as a deacon, gives this amazing, powerful gospel sermon.

And he is killed publicly for it. Luke calls it an execution. Look with me at verse 1. Saul approved of Stephen's execution.

And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem. And they were scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria except the apostles.

Devout men buried Stephen, made great lamentation over him. But Saul was ravaging the church, entering in house after house.

He dragged them off, men and women. He committed them to prison. Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word. So this public execution of Stephen sets off this movement of persecution against the church.

[3 : 34] And this should have been devastating to the church in Jerusalem. This would be as if on some Tuesday night, when Ben's teaching catechism, somebody comes to the church, drags him out into the street and murders him.

Could you imagine how devastating that would be to this community? Should have been absolutely devastating to the church in Jerusalem.

But it's not. The church is scattered. But God uses it. Instead of dissolving the church, the church disseminates.

And this is the starting point from which the church spreads to the rest of the world. When this horrible circumstance meets the power of God's word, the circumstances are transformed.

And God's purposes are accomplished through them. His word is powerful because it is unstoppable. And the church is built up.

[4 : 41] Not because the disciples who were scattered out into the world were super talented. Not because they had a bulletproof plan for expansion. It's built up because the word is powering the expansion.

And Jesus is the content of that word. Jesus is the word. And he is powerful. He is powerful, irrespective of circumstances.

Irrespective of the talent of those who carry his word into the world. His gospel. His presence. This means that God uses, friends, terrible circumstances to accomplish his good purposes.

If we only love God and live under his rule, he will work all things for our good.

Even the things that look in the moment like defeat. And we may not see the fruit for a long time, but we can be confident that he is working.

[5 : 50] And we have a role to play in it. Look at verse 4. Those who experienced this tragedy of Stephen's murder are scattered.

And what did they do? They went about preaching the word. And this doesn't mean preaching from a pulpit. This means living a life that proclaims the gospel in the normal, everyday circumstances. Sharing the good news of Jesus in whatever way cuts through to your neighbors. It's your job just to be sensitive. To have your eyes and your ears open.

Listening. And looking for how God wants to speak into the lives of the people, the families, the city around you. It's our job to preach the word with our lives.

And it will be powerful. Regardless of how well we do it. We just have to be simply obedient.

Because the word of God is unstoppable.

[7 : 01] And the point of this unstoppable expansion out into the world is so that everyone is included. This is the second point. The word is powerful because it's for everyone.

Look at verse 5. Philip, one of those who was scattered, went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ.

Samaria was a region. So this is probably talking about the capital city of Samaria. And that's where Philip goes. And the people of this area, the Samaritans, had a very unusual relationship with the Jewish people.

The people of Samaria during this time were a mixed people. They shared a common history, a common ethnicity and religion with the Jews.

But they were separated. They were estranged. Back in 900s BC, they split from the Jewish nation.

[8 : 07] Two tribes in the south, ten tribes in the north. And a lot of those ten tribes in the north lived in this area of Samaria. And as that area of Samaria was conquered by invaders, they sort of did this ethnic mixing and religious mixing.

So Jewish people who were mixed with Gentiles. And so the Jews at this time hated the Samaritans. They hated them.

They hated them because they thought of them as ethnic half-breeds. They hated them because their religious culture was compromised. The worship of Yahweh had been poisoned.

The Samaritans had actually set up a competing temple with the temple in Jerusalem. And they practiced parts of the traditional Jewish religion, but they mixed it with Eastern spirituality, practices akin to what we would consider witchcraft, things like charms, magical incantations, acts of power that demonstrated control over the natural environment.

And so the Jews hated the Samaritans. They saw them as unclean, compromised, and in every way second-class citizens. And so do you see how radical it is that Philip goes there?

[9 : 35] He preaches the gospel to the Samaritans. The gospel is for them, even the ones that he was predisposed to hate.

They are fully included in what God is doing. They are not second-class citizens. The word of God is powerful because it is inclusive.

It includes everybody. And it's inclusive, but it's also unified. It's inclusive, but it's unified.

This, friends, is why we get this story about James and John going down from Jerusalem. Look at verse 14. Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, two good Jews.

They 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 Jesus. Then they laid their

hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

[10:43] The Jewish apostles come down to Samaria not to kick out the Samaritans, not to set up a really strong guardrail, but to include them, to welcome them in, to put their hands upon them.

The Gospel of Luke says that John, at one point, wants to call down hellfire and brimstone on a Samaritan city, and now he comes to call down the Holy Spirit upon them.

This is a radical shift. And this is why the Holy Spirit is delayed until the apostles come. Did you notice this?

The New Testament teaches that repentance, faith, baptism, and the Holy Spirit, they all go together. It's a package deal.

You don't get one in stages and the next in another stage. But here the Spirit is delayed until the apostles come and lay hands on the Samaritan.

[11:47] And this is why. Luke wants this to be surprising for us. Because it's a special demonstration that the Samaritans are included. They are part of the church.

There's not one Jewish church and one Samaritan church. There's one church. And it's created by the unity of God's Word.

The Word is powerful to include everyone. And yet it doesn't leave us each where we are. It draws us together. It transforms disparate groups.

Makes us all new creations in Christ. The Word of God is powerful because it's for everyone. And it brings us all onto the same path under the authority of God's Word.

Common people for a common mission. And it doesn't just transform us individually. It transforms whole cultures.

[12:54] This is verse 6. Look with me. The crowds with one accord in Samaria paid attention to what was being preached 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 and lame were healed. So there was much joy in that city.

The Word is powerful because it transforms cultures. Do you see in this passage how the gospel comes in and engages the Samaritan culture and yet strips away its sickness?

This was a culture that is grasping for power. It's a culture that's obsessed with magic. Maybe what we would call today technology.

The control of natural environment for our use. The demonstration of power over all things. This culture is taken with entertainment.

[14:05] They enjoy a good show of power and prestige. One commentator I listened to this week talked about how the Samaritans had been really created as a second class culture.

They saw themselves as less than the Jews. And so it makes perfect sense that their culture would grow up grasping at power.

Wanting anything to sort of get over against this feeling of inferiority. And Simon in this story. Simon the magician.

He's the symbolic head of this culture that Luke is describing. Look at verse 9. There was a man named Simon who had previously practiced magic in the city.

And he amazed all 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.

[15:05] That is called great. And they paid attention to him. Because for a long time he amazed them with his magic. The Samaritans love a strong man.

A strong man that can display power and control over all the circumstances of their culture. And they paid attention to him.

Everybody from the poor person in the street to the big businessman in the sky rise. They all paid attention to Simon. The whole Samaritan culture was taken with him. They say he's the power of God.

And it happens for a long time. This idolatry of worship of a man. Worship of themselves. Was ingrained in the Samaritan culture for a long, long time.

And yet. When Philip comes. Preaching the good news of Jesus Christ. The word of God. The culture is transformed. The Samaritans transfer their attention from Simon to Philip.

[16:11] Unclean spirits are driven out. The sick are healed. And there is what? There is much joy in the city. Not pleasure.

Not amazement. Not excitement about these new acts of power. But deep abiding joy. Joy. And this joy doesn't come because of Philip.

You see the content of Simon's message. Was Simon. Right? He. Is all that there is.

In the Samaritan's mind. He was saying he. Was someone great. Look how powerful and great. Simon is. But the content of Philip's gospel.

Is Jesus. Do you see this? Philip comes preaching a word. Not about himself. But he's pointing away. Saying look how great.

[17:10] And merciful. And powerful. And good. Jesus is. And this is the point. That anytime Jesus is introduced.

Into a sick culture. The result is transformation. From despair. From depression. From self-centeredness.

From self-consuming idolatry. To joy. And it's joy that comes from a renewed.

And reconciled relationship with God. Where we truly become ourselves. The children of God.

Where we have eternal security.

In that identity. With new purposes. To glorify him. In our lives. The word of God is powerful.

[18:06] Because it will transform you and me. And it will transform our culture. Through us. And the last point. Really quickly.

Is this. The word is powerful. Because it's uncontrollable. It's uncontrollable. You'll have noticed that.

Even Simon. This man. Who was the center point of idolatry. Even he. Came. To Philip. And it even says that he believed.

And was baptized. But. And there is a but. When he saw the power on display. From the apostles. That old seed of idolatry.

Was still growing. And it springs up. And he wants to buy that power. That he sees. Not to glorify God. Not to have a share.

[19:06] In this great work of ministry. That the apostles are doing. But so that he could glorify himself. Yet again. It's so that he could retain. His position of power.

And Peter's response. Is absolutely cutting. Look at verse 20. Peter says to him. Simon 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. Your heart is not right before God. Repent therefore of this wickedness.

And pray that the Lord if possible. The intent of your heart may be forgiven of you. One translation I read this week. Which is very literal.

Translated it. To hell with you and your money. That's really close to what it says in the Greek. The point is.

[20:06] The word is powerful. To transform you and me. And our culture. But it has to be received. It has to be received.

Simon obviously did not receive it. He was not transformed. He believed intellectually. Intellectually. But his heart was not converted.

And friends. There is a warning for us here. It is possible. For individuals. And for whole cultures. Nations.

Cities. Churches. Families. It's possible for us. To sign up. For all the things in Christianity. That seem powerful to us.

And yet for us. To never actually submit. Ourselves. To the rule of Jesus Christ. As our Lord. It is possible.

[21:03] For us to feign belief. To grasp. At the power of the gospel. And try to wield it. For our own purposes. So this is a warning for us.

That we cannot control. The power. Of God's word. We always have to receive it. As a gift. And it's a gift that only comes.

If we will submit ourselves. To the lordship. Of Jesus. And receive. His word. And this. Brothers and sisters. Is actually.

Very. Very good news. Because this means that the word. Simply has to be received. You can't earn it. There's absolutely nothing.

That you and I can do. That can grasp the power from God. It is not in our control. The power of it is not on our shoulders.

[22 : 02] We are simply to receive it. Receive that gospel. And to share it with others. We have to drop our barriers. Believe in Jesus.

Receive him as Lord and Savior. And he will transform us. He will transform our despair into joy. And he will include you.

Even you who are estranged. Even you who feel like you're not worthy. Who feel like you're compromised morally.

Religiously. You are included. And he wants to make you part of his ministry. To bring the salvation in Christ.

To the end of the world. Amen. Thank you.