

New Proclamation

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Preacher: John Lau

[0 : 00] Greetings, and so glad to speak with you again. If you do not know me, my name is John Lau, and I'm still the minister here at St. Paul's.

Do you like to follow TV series? I was following a couple from the US, but I was forced to stop because the channel is working out whether they will continue the show or not.

TV channels always leave the viewers hanging between series, and we are left to wonder what is going to happen next.

And what is worse is they also do not tell you when we start the series, or they will start a very similar franchise, like all the different CSI and NCIS series.

And I really, really don't like the cliffhangers in between series. We are in the middle of a series looking through the book of Acts in the New Testament.

[1 : 05] We are looking into how the first generation of believers of Jesus live out their life in a new world. We come to a point in the book of Acts, there are four cliffhangers.

But these kinds of cliffhangers are good and worth looking into. These are the kinds of intercession that I enjoy. The chapter we are looking into today can be divided into three mini-series based on the three main characters.

They are Philip, Simon the sorcerer, and the Ethiopian unit with no name. So let's ask two questions for each of these characters.

What happened to them? And what is next? If you already have turned your Bible, or if you haven't, please turn with me to Acts chapter 8.

And we'll begin with Philip from verse 4. In verse 1 to 3, there are a couple of characters called Stephen and Saul, which we have already addressed last week.

[2 : 10] Stephen was chosen to be a leader of the early church, and he became the first martyr. And Saul is a major character in the development of Christianity.

Luke, the writer of Book of Acts, has given us a bit of teaser, like a movie trailer, in the chapter leading into our chapter, and following our passage today.

Since we'll be meeting Saul, and Luke dedicated a whole episode for him next week, I will not spoil your enjoyment. Stay tuned and come back next week to find out what happened to Saul, and what's next about the proclamation of God's good news of salvation.

After Stephen was martyred towards the end of last chapter, naturally, when a significant local leader in any movement was killed, we were asked, what's going to happen to the movement?

In Acts 1, chapter 8, told us that Jesus started this saving work of God by commissioning his disciples to take the good news of salvation from Judea to Samaria, to the Gentiles, and to the end of the earth.

[3 : 31] Stephen's death started this expansion of proclamation of good news to the new ground, and we came to see what happens to another leader, Philip. So in chapter 8, first one says, On that day, a great persecution broke out against a church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.

And then we jump down to verse 4. Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Messiah there.

What has happened to Stephen has become an impetus. The believers had stayed in Jerusalem since chapter 2, is now scattered.

The scattering is a corrective action done by God because the good news of salvation was meant to go out. Philip was chosen with Stephen initially to look after food distribution among the believers in Jerusalem.

Now, he went down to Samaria, and instead of distributing food for physical need, he proclaimed the Messiah and preached the word of Jesus to provide food for the soul.

[4 : 53] A new proclamation has begun. It's new because we have new agents and new locations. Adding to the apostles who remain in Jerusalem.

Now we have believers scattered throughout Judea and Samaria, preaching and proclaiming as they go. Philip brought the gospel to a city in Samaria, proclaiming Jesus.

Verse 6 to 8 tell us how the crowd responded. They say, when they heard Philip and saw the signs that he performed, they all paid close attention to what he said.

And there were great joys in the city because many immediate needs were fulfilled. Then in verse 12, when they believed Philip as he proclaimed the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.

They heard and accepted the good news. They responded by their action, just like those believers back in Acts 2. This is not the first time the name of Jesus proclaimed in Samaria.

[6 : 09] In John chapter 4, verse 39 to 42, Jesus' name was proclaimed by a woman who met Jesus. And this also happened to the crowd.

John chapter 4. Many of the Samaritans from that time believed in him because of the woman's testimony. So when the Samaritan came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed. And because of his words, many more become believers. They said to the woman, we no longer believe just because of what you said, but we have heard for ourselves, and we know this man really is the savior of the world.

From these two occasions, if I'm going to think about a body part to represent the people of Samaria, I would definitely define them as a people of active ears, actively listening, attentive, and responsive.

They all heard and believed the proclamation and responded. They believed what they heard from the witness, but they did not stop there. They seek out the object of their belief to confirm he really is the savior of the world.

[7 : 30] Our current climate, living under the shadow of a pandemic, has opened up a lot of people towards the idea that they may also need a savior. They want some comfort to their worries and religion and religion seems to be able to provide.

It would be so great if they have the active ears of Samaritans to truly know and confirm Jesus really is the savior of the world.

our current climate also reveals a lot of ignorance and arrogance of religious people, believing that they are above the health advice of their government because their God will protect them.

And we can see the sad consequences of many infection clusters from religious establishments. is it possible that they aren't really following the real savior and just going through motions?

Is it possible that they believe just because of what the other humans tell them and have not heed for themselves and come to real knowledge of who really is the savior of the world?

[8 : 47] People will end up putting their life and the life of other people and many other people's at risk if they do not take God seriously. Our second character gives us a very stern warning that something serious is at hand.

It is more deadly than catching COVID-19 and that character is Simon the sorcerer. Let's read what happened to him, see what happened next starting from verse 9.

Now for some time a man named Simon had practiced sorcery in the city and amazed all the people of Samaria. He boasts that he was someone great and all the people both high and low give him their attention and exclaim, this man is really called the great power of God.

They follow him because he had amazed them for a long time with his sorcery. I believe we can assume that Simon is not originally from Samaria by the way that he was introduced.

He was a man that came to the city and amazed all the people of Samaria. He's most likely a traveling sorcerer, making a living out of selling sorcery.

[10 : 07] And when he came to Samaria, he got so much attention and publicity, so he stayed. If we read on, it says, but when they believed Philip as he proclaimed the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized both men and women.

Simon himself believed and was baptized. Simon seems to be a great comfort. He believed and responded. He got baptized. He followed Philip everywhere.

He was devoted and paid full attention. So what is the danger? What was wrong with his situation? Let's look at him closely again.

Let's go back to verse 9. He boasts that he was someone great and all the people gave him their attention. Then in verse 11, he had amazed people for a long time with his sorcery.

And verse 13, he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great sign and miracle he saw. Do you start to see the picture of who he is?

[11:15] He's an attention seeker. He put his attention at great signs and miracles. He's not like the Samaritan that wanted to find out for themselves who Jesus really is.

He seems to have become a Christian for the wrong reason. Why do I say that? Let's read on verse 18 to 19. When Simon saw the Spirit was given to all at the laying hand of the apostle's hand, 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.

When Peter and John were sent from Jerusalem to Samaria to bring encouragement and spiritual gifts, they prayed for the people to receive the Holy Spirit. Simon wanted that ability too, and he thought he could buy it off Peter and John.

Why does he want the ability? It say, so that everyone on whom he lay his hands may receive the Holy Spirit. Do you remember how the people reacted to him earlier?

They treated him like a superstar, and maybe that was what he missed, the feeling of being important, being the center of the universe.

[12:35] His desire blinded him. He no longer see the price that God had paid for him, that he is purchased by the life of God's one and only son.

He is blinded to how much God values him. Instead of rejoicing and full of gratitude towards God, he wants to get back to his own way of life, to represent the great power of God.

He is blinded to the fact that he was not representing the real savior of the world. All along, he was puffing up the idol of his self-gratification, the idol of himself.

He allowed bitterness to grow within him. He craved power and attention, but did not get what he wanted. he is unsatisfied with God and with his new life.

His situation in this stage is diastrate. And Peter said to him in verse 20, may your money perish with you because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money.

[13:45] You have no part of share in this ministry because your heart is not right before God. this is a very serious indictment, but Peter did not leave him hanging.

Peter did not say he has no part or share in the kingdom of God. It was in the ministry of God that Simon is not fit to be involved in at this stage.

And Peter goes on saying, 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.

For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive in sin. Peter knows where Simon is at and calls him to repentance and direct him to how to get right with God.

Pray in the hope for forgiveness to address the bitterness of the heart and flee from sin. At that point, we are told Simon respond by requesting Peter to pray for him.

[14:56] Pray to the Lord for me so that nothing you have said may happen to me. It seems to be right to respond when someone calls you to repentance to ask for prayer.

But something seems very strange to me. What would it be like if Peter followed precisely what Simon has requested and pray that nothing he has said may happen to Simon.

Does that mean Simon's money will not perish with him? That he can take part and share in the ministry? That he does not repent of his wickedness and the Lord does not forgive him?

We are left with a huge cliffhanger because Luke did not tell us what happened to him. Luke got back to the main story of what the book of Acts is about.

It's about the proclamation of the word of the Lord. In verse 25, after they had further proclaimed the word of the Lord and testified about Jesus, Peter and John returned to Jerusalem and preached the gospel in many Samaritan villages.

[16:08] What a cliffhanger! I believe Luke lets at a cliffhanger for excellent reason. We need to realize that starting right is only the beginning.

And it is so easy things slowly lure back to our old way. This cliffhanger is reminding us to continue to examine our heart to make sure it is right before God.

To make sure you have not elevated any other things above God. to continue to repent of ingratitude, pray to the Lord in hope for forgiveness, not to allow sin to take hold within us, and to watch out about how we respond to correction.

Now Peter and John were preaching gospel in many Samaritan villages as they traveled back to Jerusalem. So God kept using Philip to proclaim to the end of the earth.

Let's read on from verse 26 to 27. Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, go south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.

[17 : 26] So he started out and on his way he met an Ethiopian unit, an important official in charge of all the treasury of the queen of Ethiopians.

We're now introduced to a unit with no name, but with a considerable credential. He is a significant official in charge of all the treasury of the queens of Ethiopia.

And despite his status, he is an incomplete man. And these incomplete men have gone up to Jerusalem to worship and on his way home.

He traveled to Jerusalem to worship and according to the temple rules at the time, he will be turned back without any success. The temple do not allow incomplete people to enter.

An incomplete man being rejected with a successful adventure. I wonder how he will feel. What would you do if you are this person?

[18 : 39] Luke told us that he was sitting in his chariot reading the book of Isaiah the prophet. Do you see how similar he is with the Samaritan that was mentioned before?

He goes to a source to learn about worship. The people at the temple may have rejected him, but he did not stop there. He goes, God knows this incomplete man is searching for him, so God sent Philip to help this person.

I really like the interaction between them. The spirit told Philip go to that chariot and stay near it. Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading a side of the prophet.

Do you understand what you are reading? How could I unless someone explained to me? So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. I like this interaction because this scene is driven by the spirit.

Philip acts in obedience. The man shows his love for God's word with humble authenticity. All speak to what we value here in St.

[19 : 52] Paul Cheswood. Luke told us the person was reading a passage about personal sacrifice, submission, humiliation, the deprivity of justice, the impossibility of having offspring.

All these seem to be speaking about this incomplete man himself. And he asked Philip, tell me please, who is the prophet talking about?

Himself or someone else? Then Philip began with that very passage of scripture and told him the good news about Jesus. God sent Philip to this man to make sure he understands the Bible is not about us.

What is written in the Bible is the good news about Jesus. It is not an encyclopedia about your life or us. When we look into the Bible, the ultimate question is who is God and what is he doing with his people?

this incomplete man traveled to Jerusalem to worship and he got to complete what he set out to do because God, the one that he should worship, reached out to him through Philip, his believer.

[21 : 15] man was to man to worship, his attempt to worship was rejected, but he kept searching and at the end he went on his way rejoicing.

This all made possible because God reached out to him and he responded humbly with authenticity about where he is at in his life.

Something miraculous happened to him which gave us another cliffhanger of this passage. He stopped the chariot so Philip could baptize him in around verse 36 to 39 and then in 39 when they came off the water the spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away and the unit did not see him again but went on his way rejoicing.

What had happened to Philip seems to not bother him at all. All we know is he is now complete and went on his way rejoicing.

What are you looking for to complete you? Are you looking into your career? A certain kind of body? A partner to start a family?

[22 : 38] Or having certain things? St. Augustine opened a confession confessing that to praise you is a desire of man because you have made us for yourself and our heart is restless until it rests

in you.

You have made us for yourself and our heart is restless until it rests in you. Jesus the real savior of the world is our place of identity.

He is what completes us. There are a few cliffhangers in our passage today and I'm sure we all feel the cliffhanger of COVID-19.

Feels like our life is hanging about. God is calling you and warning you to take this time to examine yourself. to make sure there is no bitterness that builds up in your heart.

God is reaching out to you to set you free from sin because his one and only son Jesus had died on the cross for you and raised from the dead to set you free.

[23 : 53] When you are certain that Jesus is really the savior of the world and he is your place of identity, he has complete you and you can go on your way rejoicing.

If you have started following Jesus but have been lured back to your old way, now is a good time to repent and pray to God for forgiveness. If you do not know Jesus as savior, now is a good time to ask for explanation about the good news of Jesus and get to know God.

He knows you are looking for him and maybe already sending someone your way to help you define him. Today is a day you can rest your heart in God and be complete in him.