

## Preach! – Acts 8:4-8

Welcome. Livestream. I hope you had a good Christmas and refreshing New Year's break. Becky and I sure did, and we're thankful for it.

I'm also thankful for our *finances* as a church. If you haven't noticed the update on the back of your notes, we met and exceeded our year-end goal. God bless you for that. Your generosity and faithfulness are commendable. Especially your faithfulness to tithe *throughout* the year. We couldn't even *think* about a year-end goal if it weren't for that.

I also praise God for those of you who were *saved* last month. *Dozens* of you gave your life to Christ. And I trust you'll join the rest of us in striving to live for him. Worshipping in church, growing in groups, serving in ministry, and abiding in Christ. That's what it means to *follow* Christ as part of the *body* of Christ.

- That said, we're back to our journey through the book of Acts this weekend, under the theme of **Compelled**.  
B/c that's what people *are* in the book of Acts – from the apostles, to the disciples, to the church.  
They were compelled by the Spirit, compelled by the message, and compelled by the need. And *my* hope, my prayer, is that we will be too.  
So turn with me to Acts 8, and let's refresh our memories with a little review.

### Review

Acts was written by *Luke*, around *62AD*, covering events from *30-60AD*.  
And it's about the *church*. The inspiring account of its formation, growth, and spread. So that we would be inspired ourselves. And continue the work in *our* day.  
Acts isn't just history for the sake of knowledge, but history for the sake of action.

And so far, we've seen a bunch of it. From the ascension of Jesus in chapter 1, to the stoning of Stephen in chapter 7.  
With the coming of the Holy Spirit, several sermons by Peter, and miraculous healings in between.  
Not to mention imprisonment, death, and the appointment of leaders.  
This book moves. And compels us to do the same.

- So let's pick it up in v1b, right after Stephen's stoning. Acts 8:1.  
*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.*  
The apostles stayed put. No doubt feeling it was their responsibility to hold the fort down *regardless* of the consequences.

And after some comments to finish the account of Stephen's stoning in ch7, it says in v4:  
[4] *Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word. [5] Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ. [6] 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] 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. [8] So there was much joy in that city.*

The first thing I want you to see and take to heart here, is that . . .

### Proclaiming the Gospel is for everyone (v4)

V4 – *Those who were scattered went about preaching the word.*

*Those who were scattered*, referring to the church. The *entire* church. Look at v1 again.  
[1b] *There arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered.* All of them.

So those who were scattered in v4, refers to the entire church. Everyone.

And as they fled, they all *went about preaching* it says. Proclaiming something as good news, glad tidings. Sound familiar?

In Greek, it's the word from which we get “evangelize.”

They went about talking to anyone who would listen.

- And the thing they talked about, proclaimed, preached, was the *word*.  
*Those who were scattered went about preaching the word.* A.k.a. the Gospel. The good news of Jesus.  
Because that's how Luke *refers* to the Gospel. Like in chapter 4 after *Peter's* sermon about Jesus. *Many of those who heard the word, believed.* (Acts 4:4)  
The word that everyone in the church proclaimed, was the Gospel.

You say, “What is that, Pastor? I'm not sure.” (**Good News of Jesus Bridge**)

Well, it's the good news that God has provided a solution to our problem of sin.

God created a perfect world, in perfect harmony, but we sinned. Separating us from him, and condemning us to hell.

So he came to save us by dying for our sins, and rising again.

If we believe and repent.

That's the gospel, that those who were scattered went about preaching.

They didn't stop with the weather, they didn't obsess on their hardship, they didn't leave it at small talk like we're prone to do . . .

They preached the word. They talked about that.\*\*\*\*\*

- And did so for 3 reasons. (**They preached the Gospel . . .**)

**1. To fulfill *Jesus's* words.** They proclaimed the Gospel to fulfill *Jesus's* words.

Acts 1:8 – “*You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.*”

They were his witnesses, and they were in Judea and Samaria. So they preached.

Second, they preached the Gospel . . .

**2. To prove *Stephen's* point.** In chapter 7. That the Gospel is for everyone.

Far from being limited to one people in one *place*, it's for everyone in *every* place.

And third, they preached the Gospel . . .

**3. To serve as an example.** For us.

Not that *everything* in Acts is an example we're to follow. Some of it's purely descriptive. Meant to inspire. And fuel our worship.

But if it agrees with the *rest* of Scripture, it's *prescriptive* – an example we're to follow.

And the proclamation of the Gospel *certainly* falls into that category.

They preached the Gospel to fulfill *Jesus's* words, prove *Stephen's* point, and serve as an example that we would do the same.

➤ So whatever you do . . .

• **Don't fight it**

It's not only a *privilege* to speak on God's behalf, but the compulsion you have to do so, is from the Holy Spirit.

Don't fight that. Speak up. Ask questions. Share your testimony.

And then *follow up*. Have *another* conversation.

But whatever you do, don't fight the feeling that you should share. Don't fight the impulse of the Spirit. Because proclaiming the Gospel is for everyone.

And second . . .

• **Don't shirk it**

It's not only our privilege, but our *responsibility* to preach the Gospel.

We're not only witnesses, but ambassadors. That's what the Apostle Paul said.

Having entrusted to us the *message* of reconciliation, *we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us.* (2 Cor 5:20)

Don't shirk that. Don't ignore it. There's too much at stake.

And when you get right down to it, if *we* don't proclaim the Gospel, who will?

*Unbelievers* sure won't.

So preach! Over coffee, over a meal, over the phone, everywhere.

*Tell* the old, old story. Just like our brothers and sisters in Acts.

And as you do . . .

**Trust God to prepare the hearers (v5)**

It's not explicit in v5, but it's certainly implied.

Because that's exactly what God *did*, as we'll see in a minute, and exactly what Philip *must* have done.

Especially so, given the *animosity* between the place he was going and the place he was leaving.

V5. While everyone in the church proclaimed the Gospel wherever they *went* . . .

[5] *Philip* [the same guy appointed in chapter 6 as one of the *leaders* in the church; and later called an *evangelist* because of what he did here (Acts 21:8)] *went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ.*

*Proclaimed*, meaning essentially the same thing as preached, with the added nuance of doing it openly and publicly.

More than just conversations over a meal, or in the market place, or as he was going, Philip preached to crowds.

And not just any crowds, but crowds in the city of *Samaria*.

➤ The problem is, there *wasn't* a city in that region called "Samaria" at the time.

In *Old Testament* times (**Map 9, ESV Study Bible**) there was; but not in Philip's day. At that time it was called Sebaste.

So what's up with that? Is it a mistake?

Not at all. In fact, I think Luke was very *intentional* about it, in order to make this point.

That God can and does prepare the most unlikely people to hear and receive the Gospel. **(No Arrow)**

➤ You see, the Judeans, people from Jerusalem and *its* surrounding area, were at odds with the Samaritans, going back at *least* 10 centuries.

Starting with the separation of the northern tribes, in the region of Samaria, from the southern tribes, in the region of Judea, right after King Solomon died.

They hated each other.

And over the years, that hatred grew.

Like in 722BC when the northern tribes were overthrown by Assyria, while Judea sat back and watched.

Resulting in the mixing of cultures and marriages that made the Judeans think of the Samaritans as half-breeds, half Jewish and half pagan . . .

And the Samaritans think of the Judeans as stuck up and hateful. They hated each other.

Made worse by a series of other events.

Like the Samaritan opposition to rebuilding the Jerusalem temple, in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC.

And building their *own* temple in the 4<sup>th</sup> century (~323BC).

And then opposing the Judeans in a regional war 150 years after that.

Only to have the Judeans destroy *their* temple, and the city in which it sat, in 127BC.

They hated each other.

And by the way, the *name* of the city that was destroyed, was Samaria. Where Philip most likely preached. Philip, from Judea.

Surely the Samaritans wouldn't listen to *him*. Or anything from there.

➤ And yet, God had prepared them.\*\*\*\*\*

Because through it all, the Samaritans had retained their respect for the Pentateuch, the first 5 books of the Old Testament . . .

And consequently, looked for a messianic restorer like Moses. Just like the Judeans.

In other words, despite their animosity toward one another, God preserved a mutual adherence to part of the Scriptures, and a mutual longing for a deliverer.

Using the animosity to make them yearn for peace, and the oppression to make them yearn for a deliverer.

It's a perfect example of the principle that God can and does prepare the most unlikely people to hear and receive the Gospel.

Highlighted for us, because Luke used *Samaria* instead of Sebaste.

The only question is, do *you* trust him to prepare people?

➤ If we're going to proclaim the Gospel like we *should*, we have to trust him to prepare the hearers. Hearers like the Samaritans.

Who were down and out, oppressed, broken, and second class.

And at the other end of the spectrum, people who are self-sufficient, self-absorbed, and hard of heart.

You never *know* what people might be looking for. You never *know* how God has been at work. In the days, years, or even *decades* beforehand.

But we *do* know, that we can trust him. And should.

And last . . .

## Trust God to get through (v6-8)

Give a speech about politics these days, and there's no guarantee that *anything* will get through. Talk about quantum mechanics and eyes will glaze over.

But talk about the gospel, and God will get through.

Whether that's getting through to awaken their soul to faith, or getting through to plant seeds for later, or getting through to harden their heart . . .

In order to magnify his patience (Rom 9:22-24).

One way or another, God will get through. Just like he did with the Samaritans.

V6-7 – *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] 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.*

➤ The crowds paid attention, because God got through. In 2 main ways.

First, through Philip's preaching. Which is almost *always* God's method of getting through: preaching. Preaching the Gospel.

Whether over a coffee table or a pulpit, that's God's primary means of getting through to people. When they *heard* him it says, they paid attention. (6)

Which totally debunks that infamous and over-used quote, "Preach the gospel at all times, and when necessary use words."

It's *always* necessary to use words. Philip's example *shows* it, and Paul's teaching *proves* it. (Rom 10:14-15)

*How are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? . . . As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!"*

God's primary means of getting through to people, is preaching – the audible, open proclamation of the Gospel.\*\*\*\*\*

➤ The second means, and a very *distant* second, is miracles. Like exorcisms and healings.

But the vast majority of Gospel preaching and Gospel conversions in our day, take place completely apart from such things.

Most of the time it's an *inward* miracle. Changing someone's mind and softening someone's heart.

Does that mean signs and wonders *never* happen anymore, or *can't* happen?

Not at all. They can and do.

But for the purpose of authenticating and confirming the gospel, like they did in Philip's day, they're *rare* in our culture. Because the Gospel doesn't *need* authenticating.

It's well established and readily available. Well-supported by an existing church, and well-attested by changed lives.

God doesn't use signs and wonders so much these days, because he doesn't *need* to.

We live in a different time and different place.

But in Philip's day, it *was* necessary. And therefore God used both preaching *and* miracles to get through.

Because not only was the *Gospel* brand new, but so was the *church*. It was different.

➤ But the *result* was the same – joy. V8.

Philip preached and the people believed – *So there was much joy in that city. Much joy. Much happiness. Much exuberance.*

And the same is true *today*; when *we* preach the Gospel and people believe. There's much joy. Joy on the part of *new* believers, *and* old ones. On *earth* as it is in heaven.

In fact, joy is one of the surest indicators that God's at work and getting through.

Whether it's his work to save or to sanctify. (Summary)

So whether you travel in the course of your work, or move in the course of your life, or walk on a course of golf – preach! By any and all means, *preach* the Gospel! Trusting God to *prepare* the hearers, and get *through* to them.

Pray – Oh God, we pray as Paul did, that words would be given to us to open our mouths and proclaim the mystery of the gospel. Compel us to declare it boldly as we should, and tell the world of who you are. For your glory, and our joy.