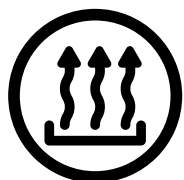




ACTS: THE STORY CONTINUES



WARM-UP

When was a time that someone misunderstood you or you were treated differently because of your faith? How did you handle that?

Pray for your time together as a group.

Read out loud as a group

ACTS 8:1-8 (NIV)

1 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. 2 Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him. 3 But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison. 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.



God uses Stephen's death and the scattering of believers in order to increase the presence of the gospel. Do you think Saul was expecting the church to grow? What is it about persecution that spreads the Gospel faster, further, and more efficiently?

Possible Answers: Paul probably wasn't expecting that! That instead of stamping out the flame of the gospel, HE was responsible for spreading it even further. People are willing to go to extremes for something they truly believe. The Holy Spirit was with them giving them boldness to share their faith even during intense persecution. When they left Jerusalem, they took the Gospel with them and shared with people they came in contact with, so what was once confined in Jerusalem was now reaching the entire Roman empire and beyond.



We still have persecution of the Church to this day. How does getting to zoom out and see how God used the persecution in Acts encourage us when we see it in our world today?

Possible Answers: In some parts of the world Christians are being put to death and scattered the same way the early church was. In others, Christians are challenged in their foundational beliefs. God seems to allow this to happen to fulfill the great commission of spreading his word to all people. This encourages us to

Read out loud as a group

ACTS 8:9-25 (NIV)

9 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. 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." 11 And they paid attention to him because for a long time he had amazed them with his magic. 12 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. 13 Even Simon himself believed, and after being baptized he continued with Philip. And seeing signs and great miracles performed, he was amazed.

14 Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, 15 who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, 16 for he had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. 17 Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit. 18 Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, 19 saying, "Give me this power also, so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." 20 But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! 21 You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. 22 Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. 23 For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity." 24 And Simon answered, "Pray for me to the Lord, that nothing of what you have said may come upon me."

25 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.

NOTE: The delay between the baptism and receiving the Holy Spirit should be read as descriptive vs prescriptive. Meaning we should read it as simply describing something that happened in the story of Acts, not that it is specifically teaching that this is something that should continue to happen.



This is one of a few instances we see a delay between a baptism and the receiving of the Holy Spirit. Samaritan's shared some similarities with jews but had some big differences. What do you think it added that John and Peter, two jews, came to pray and lay hands on them?

Possible Answers: it really authenticated and united the Samaritan converts with the Christians which is an even more stark contrast when you consider the differences and hostilities that were common between the jews and the Samaritans. Peter and John were following in Jesus' footsteps in breaking cultural barriers for the sake of the Gospel.



If receiving the Holy Spirit is a sign that you have been saved by Christ, why do you think Simon asked to pay for the power to give the Holy Spirit to people? And what does it say about Simon's heart?

Possible Answers: He was used to the people following him for his "powers" of sorcery and likely charged for his services. He saw the disciples' giving of the Holy Spirit as another "power" he could capitalize on either to make more money or grow his own personal notoriety. It also is a huge indication that he believes he can buy and sell salvation. That it can be because of HIS work that people are saved not Jesus. He's missing a key element of Christianity: it's by Jesus' nailed hands that we are saved, not our own.



How does Peter's rebuke in verses 20-23 redirect Simon? What hope does it offer for Simon?

Possible Answers: He tells Simon to repent and points out the sin in his heart. His rebuke may sound harsh, but he is warning Simon against a wrong reading of the gospel, the sin of his past, and attempting to lead others in ministry before he examines his own heart and where he is at with God. It offers him a new mindset and new way of being. The gospel takes our fame!



Simon sees the power of the Holy Spirit as a way to get ahead personally and potentially make money for himself. Are there any ways you see yourself or you've observed others use their Christianity for self-promotion or personal gain?

Possible Answers: Answers may vary. Examples: General examples of misuse people may observe in society are televangelists, politicians who tout their faith to win votes, etc.

Leaders Note: While we can/should still critique sin within the Church, try to avoid this turning into church bashing or gossiping about misuse of leadership. Direct people toward personal reflections or broad generalizations of misused power.

Optional Activity

Take 3-5 minutes to silently reflect and write out an application for yourself from today's passage and your discussion. This should be something that you can take out into your daily life. After the 3-5 minutes, spend some time sharing what you wrote.

DISCUSSION FOR ACCOUNTABILITY



- How can we share the gospel in our own contexts?
- Are there ways you are using your faith for personal gain that you need to repent of?