

**Sermon Notes of
Pastor Craig Kuhlman's Sermon on November 22 2020:**

**"Transformation of the Early Church Series on
The Book of Acts – A Christian Calling to Witness
(Acts 8:1-40) (Part 8)"**

[In today's sermon, Pastor Craig Kuhlman on Zoom shows us from the writing of Luke about how God moved the church to witness the good news of Jesus for the first time to Gentiles in the detested nation of Samaria.]

Introduction:

- Since Thanksgiving is just a few days away, and we need to remember that Thanksgiving is a focal point for helping us remember our physical blessings from God.
- And at Christmas, we remember and thank God for the spiritual blessings that He has given us, especially the person of Jesus.

- Today's question: who thinks that to receive the Holy Spirit after baptism, we need to have hands laid on us?
 - Comment from Ed: That's what Acts 8 talks about, but there are other instances in the New Testament where the Holy Spirit was received without the laying on of hands.
- Is the account in Acts 8 descriptive or prescriptive?
- In other words, was this account describing a situation that was particular at hand or was it prescriptive for the whole church?
- When you get down to it, Acts 8 is the only place that talks about the laying on of hands.

- In fact, when Jesus was baptized, after He rose out of the water, the dove representing the Holy Spirit descended upon Him – there was no laying on of hands.
- And when the followers of Jesus received the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost without the laying on of hands.
- In today's message, we will see why the Holy Spirit was postponed for a while after the Samaritans believed.

Overview of today's message – A Christian Calling to Witness (Acts 8:1-40):

- A. Persecution leads to a scattered witness (verses 1-4)
- B. Philip in Samaria (verses 5-25)
 - 1. Philip connects in word and deed (verses 5-8)
 - 2. Philip confronts opposition (verses 9-13)
 - 3. Philip's work confirmed by apostles (verses 14-17)
 - 4. Simon tries to buy power (verses 18-24)
 - 5. Peter and John witness many Samaritan villages (verse 25)
- C. Philip witnesses to the Ethiopian leader (verses 26-40)
 - 1. Philip meets the Ethiopian eunuch (:26-29)
 - 2. Philip shares good news with the Ethiopian (verses 30-35)
 - 3. Philip baptizes the Ethiopian (verses 36-38)
 - 4. Philip is parted from the Ethiopian (verses 39-40)

C. Conclusion: some lessons about witnessing

In Preview of today's message (Acts 8:1-40) – Pastor Craig's rhyming verses:

*A There once was a man named Saul,
Whom God would later name Paul.
He assented to the killing of Stephen,
Apparently in an effort, to make things Even.*

*With great persecution, the church was now Scattered,
To God it seems, witnessing, is what really Mattered.
To the ends of the earth they were now Headed,
As Saul went house to house the church was Shredded.*

*Those who were scattered shared the Word,
Proclaiming Messiah to whom hadn't Heard.
When the crowds heard Philip and saw his Signs,
Great joy in Samaria as separation Realigns.*

*Boasting of greatness, practicing sorcery we See,
Another Simon now makes his Plea.
As it turns out Philip's message was Greater,
Even Simon believed, no longer a Hater.*

*As many were baptized and accepted the Word,
Peter and John in Jerusalem had now Heard.
Traveling to Samaria they now Go,
Finding receipt of the Spirit was not So.*

*Prayer and hands they laid on new Believers,
Of the Holy Spirit they were now Receivers.
When Simon saw this he wanted that Power,
Even offered money at that Hour.*

*At hearing this Peter raged with Curse,
This you can't buy with exchange of your Purse.
Calling him wicked and captive to Sin,
Little grace bestowed by Peter Herein.*

*At this response, Simon was Shaken,
Asks Peter to pray to not be Forsaken.
Peter and John were not Deterred,
Throughout Samaria proclaiming the Word.*

*Now an angel directs Philip the prophet to Go,
Meets an Ethiopian reading Isaiah, as it was So.
Asked if he understood what he was Reading,
An interpretation of Good News is what he is Needing.*

*After understanding the Good News of JC,
The Ethiopian seeks baptism is what we now See.*

*At this request Philip had no Choice,
 Arising from water the Ethiopian began to Rejoice.
 So Philip continued along his Way,
 Preaching the gospel with much to Say.
 Appearing at Azotus, he travelled while Preaching,
 Until Caesarea, many with witness he was Reaching.*

Acts 8:1 (NIV), And Saul approved of their killing him. On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.

- The first sentence here concludes chapter 7.
- Saul was a Hellenistic Jew.

2) Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. 3) But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison. 4) Those who had been scattered preached the word [Greek verb euangelizo – “announce the good news” or ‘share the good news’] wherever they went.

- So, what does it take to witness? It’s simply sharing the good news.
- Today the Western church has changed this to try to convince people to believe what your church believes.
- So, when we go out to evangelize, we’re not trying to convince people to buy our story instead of somebody else’s story.
- To try to colonize people this way can be offensive.
- Our role is to simply announce the good news by telling the story of Jesus and let the Holy Spirit change people by changing their minds and transforming their hearts.
- As these verses tell us, the Holy Spirit has been working with people long before we show up and talk to them.
- So, when we share the good news with others, we share what Jesus has done for us in our lives and that we are different people now than we used to be.
- So, to share the good news you don’t have to preach.

5) Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Messiah there.

- Now the Samaritans believed in a Messiah and that He would come, but they didn’t realize that Jesus was the Messiah.
- So, Philip proclaimed this to them.
- Now, twice in Chapter 8 the object of the Greek verb euangelizo is the towns or villages witnessed to; and three times the object is the message itself, namely the good news of ‘the word’, which is Scripture (:4), of ‘the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ’ (:12), and simply of ‘Jesus’ (:35).
- Witnessing has 3 essential components:
 1. The message (the gospel – the good news about Jesus)
 2. The messenger (the witness who shares the gospel)
 3. The recipient (the person or persons who hear and receive the gospel)

6) When the crowds heard Philip and saw the signs he performed, they all paid close attention to what he said.

- So, because Philip performed various signs, Luke is telling us that Philip was a prophet, as well like Stephen.
- In a later chapter, we're told that Philip's 4 daughters became prophetesses.

7) For with shrieks, impure spirits came out of many, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. 8) So there was great joy in that city.

- Luke reminds us that what people were looking for was spiritual healing.
- When great joy is bestowed, it's a sign of receiving the Holy Spirit and acknowledging the Holy Spirit in one's life, who directs our thoughts and actions.
- Joy is a fruit of the Spirit and experiencing that fruit of the Spirit versus not experiencing that fruit of the Spirit is the hallmark of a believer verses a not-yet-believer.

9) Now for some time a man named Simon had practiced sorcery in the city and amazed all the people of Samaria. He boasted that he was someone great, 10) and all the people, both high and low, gave him their attention and exclaimed, "This man is rightly called the Great Power of God." 11) They followed him because he had amazed them for a long time with his sorcery.

- Some translations refer to him as Simon Magus, which means Simon the great.
- Now, Simon held sway over Samaria up to this point by his sorcery.
- But, magic and sorcery doesn't come from God – it comes from another source.

12) 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. 13) Simon himself believed and was baptized. And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw.

- And as we'll see, for a very good reason the Holy Spirit was not yet given to the Samaritans.
- So, after hearing Philip, Simon did believe in Jesus even though his past actions didn't correspond with Jesus.
- So Simon became a follower of Philip as he traveled throughout Samaria.
- It's interesting for us to note that the persecution of Christians in Jerusalem became a catalyst for promoting the great commission that Jesus gave His disciples of sharing the gospel from beyond Judea and Jerusalem to Samaria and "to the ends of the earth."
- So, when we see negative things happen, like persecution which we think is contrary to the gospel, we haven't seen the end of the story.
- This persecution, that God allowed, laid the groundwork for the whole church to be witnesses.

14) When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to Samaria.

- This section of scripture was more about Peter and John than those in Samaria.

- John tells us in his gospel that the Jews didn't associate with those in Samaria because they were despised (John 4:9).
- Now what do we know about Jesus, the Father and the Holy Spirit and their relationship with each other and about unity?
- Jesus is all about unity as well as the Father and the Holy Spirit.
- And our triune God wants unity to be a hallmark of the church itself.
- We need to note that unity within the church didn't happen immediately.
- Now the reason why the Holy Spirit had not yet been received by those in Samaria because Peter and John had to witness that for themselves.
- This is why what we see here in Acts 8 is so different in what we see in common practice of the church in all other scriptures.
- This is descriptive of a unique occasion concerning Peter and John.

15) When they arrived, they prayed for the new believers there that they might receive the Holy Spirit, 16) because the Holy Spirit had not yet come on any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. 17) Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

- So when pastor Craig asked the question at the beginning of this message, "Is it true that the Holy Spirit is received by the laying on of hands?" was true of the Samaritans.
- But, it's not the primary way nor the practice and prescription of the rest of the church.
- Pastor Craig believes this had to do with an attitude that Peter and John had.
- In Luke's gospel, he tells of a time when Peter wanted fire brought down from heaven to consume a particular Samaritan city.
- And we know that in John's gospel he said that Jews don't associate with Samaritans.
- We see that Jesus changed the hearts of Peter and John by their participation with the Samaritans.
- So, When God brought them into this situation where Peter and John see God's response to their laying on of hands the Samaritans, their personal attitudes toward the Samaritans dramatically changed.
- Luke's interest is bringing the restored people of God together and not let anyone feel like they are despised or left out.
- We are all at the same table of Jesus Christ, all receiving His love.
- And we also know that unity is a hallmark of the church.

18) When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money 19) and said, "Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit."

20) Peter answered: "May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money! 21 You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God. 22) 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. 23) For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin."

- Peter was very harsh in dealing with Simon.

- Because of Peter's attitude toward Gentiles wasn't very good, he attributes to Jesus that Jesus might not forgive Simon, because he had such a bad attitude.

24) Then Simon answered, "Pray to the Lord for me so that nothing you have said may happen to me." 25) After they had further proclaimed the word of the Lord and testified about Jesus, Peter and John returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many Samaritan villages.)

- Notice that Simon didn't drop over dead like Ananias and Sapphira did.
- This was probably because Simon was beginning to have a change of heart when he asked Peter to pray for him.
- What's interesting here is that Luke doesn't say any more about what happened between Peter and Simon.
- We don't know if Peter prayed over Simon and if he did, what he prayed.
- That's because Luke changes the subject and talks about the actions of Peter and John and how they started preaching the good news about Jesus in many Samaritan villages.
- So by their participation of laying on of hands upon the Samaritans that Philip had preached to and were baptized really did change the hearts of Peter and John.

26) Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Go south to the road – the desert road – that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." 27) So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of the Kandake (which means "queen of the Ethiopians"). This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship,

- It appears that the Holy Spirit had been working with this Ethiopian, who was converted to Judaism.
- In the Jewish community, Eunuchs could not participate like the Jews did, but had to stay on the periphery, because of their physical status.
- And we also see that the Ethiopian was well to do – he had his own chariot and had someone drive him to Jerusalem and then back home.

28) and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the Book of Isaiah the prophet. 29) The Spirit told Philip, "Go to that chariot and stay near it." 30) Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. "Do you understand what you are reading?" Philip asked.

31) "How can I," he said, "unless someone explains it to me?" So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. 32) This is the passage of Scripture the eunuch was reading: "He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he did not open his mouth.

33) In his humiliation he was deprived of justice. Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth." 34) The eunuch asked Philip, "Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?" 35) Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.

- It's amazing to see that the Holy Spirit had led the Ethiopian to read the passage of Isaiah which talks about Jesus when Philip was nearby.

36) As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, “Look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptized?” 37] (omitted, because it’s not found in the original manuscripts) 38) And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him.

39) When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing.

- Please notice that there is no mention of the laying on of hands to receive the Holy Spirit.
- It’s obviously not a big deal to do nor is it prescriptive for the Holy Spirit to come upon us.
- Because Luke mentions that the Ethiopian “went on his way rejoicing”, it means that he was experiencing the lead of the Holy Spirit.

40) Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and traveled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea.

- Hopefully, we can gather from this passage here how the hearts and minds of Peter and John were changed about they felt about Gentiles, especially the Samaritans.

In Summary of Acts 7:1-40 (Let’s say this together):

*There once was a man named Saul,
Whom God would later name Paul.
He assented to the killing of Stephen,
Apparently in an effort, to make things Even.*

*With great persecution, the church was now Scattered,
To God it seems, witnessing, is what really Mattered.
To the ends of the earth they were now Headed,
As Saul went house to house the church was Shredded.*

*Those who were scattered shared the Word,
Proclaiming Messiah to whom hadn’t Heard.
When the crowds heard Philip and saw his Signs,
Great joy in Samaria as separation Realigns.*

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Another Simon now makes his Plea.
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Finding receipt of the Spirit was not So.*

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*Of the Holy Spirit they were now Receivers.
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Preaching the gospel with much to Say.
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Until Caesarea, many with witness he was Reaching.*

Concluding comments:

- Witnessing was very important for the early church just as it is for us today.
- Witnessing is part of a Christian's DNA, so to speak.
- Could this COVID situation cause us to witness to others in a different way?
- Could it be that we can invite friends and family members to our Zoom service, who live out of state who could have never attended with us in Monrovia?
- Our job is to simply witness to and to share who we are and to invite others into a family relationship that we share with God.

Closing prayer: