

Acts 8:4) So those who were scattered went on their way preaching the word. 5) Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Messiah to them. 6) The crowds were all paying attention to what Philip said, as they listened and saw the signs he was performing. 7) For unclean spirits, crying out with a loud voice, came out of many who were possessed, and many who were paralyzed and lame were healed. 8) So there was great joy in that city. 9) A man named Simon had previously practiced sorcery in that city and amazed the Samaritan people, while claiming to be somebody great. 10) They all paid attention to him, from the least of them to the greatest, and they said, *“This man is called the Great Power of God.”* 11) They were attentive to him because he had amazed them with his sorceries for a long time. 12) But when they believed Philip, as he proclaimed the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized. 13) Even Simon himself believed. And after he was baptized, he followed Philip everywhere and was amazed as he observed the signs and great miracles that were being performed. 14) When the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. 15) After they went down there, they prayed for them so the Samaritans might receive the Holy Spirit because he had not yet come down on any of them. 16) (They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.) 17) Then Peter and John laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. 18) 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 I lay hands on may receive the Holy Spirit.”* 20) But Peter told him, *“May your silver be destroyed with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! 21) You have no part or share in this matter, because your heart is not right before God. 22) Therefore repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, your heart’s intent may be forgiven. 23) For I see you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by wickedness.”* 24) *“Pray to the Lord for me,”* Simon replied, *“so that nothing you have said may happen to me.”* 25) So, after they had testified and spoken the word of the Lord, they traveled back to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans. 26) An angel of the Lord spoke to Philip: *“Get up and go south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.”* (This is the desert road.) 27) So he got up and went. There was an Ethiopian man, a eunuch and high official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of her entire treasury. He had come to worship in Jerusalem 28) and was sitting in his chariot on his way home, reading the prophet Isaiah aloud. 29) The Spirit told Philip, *“Go and join that chariot.”* 30) When Philip ran up to it, he heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, *“Do you*

understand what you're reading?" 31) "How can I," he said, "unless someone guides me?" So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. 32) Now the Scripture passage he was reading was this: He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb is silent before its shearer, so he does not open his mouth. 33) In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who will describe his generation? For his life is taken from the earth. 34) The eunuch said to Philip, "I ask you, who is the prophet saying this about – himself or someone else?" 35) Philip proceeded to tell him the good news about Jesus, beginning with that Scripture. 36) As they were traveling down the road, they came to some water. The eunuch said, "Look, there's water. What would keep me from being baptized?" 38) So he ordered the chariot to stop, and both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him. 39) When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him any longer but went on his way rejoicing. 40) Philip appeared in Azotus, and he was traveling and preaching the gospel in all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

The martyred death of Stephen in Acts 7 triggered severe persecution. We concluded last week that Christian persecution is inevitable, intense, and invasive. Jesus articulated clearly that those who choose to follow Him can expect hatred, insult, harassment, exclusion, rejection, and discrimination. These first century Christians now face **The first major turning point in the church's future = witnessing through persecution**. In our journey through the Acts of the Apostles and What Matters in the Church, one clear, settled matter continued to resound: Evangelism Matters. And specifically, evangelizing and reaching those who've never had an encounter with Jesus Christ. Consider first that

1. Witnessing through persecution requires faithful evangelists. Acts chapter 8 abruptly shifts the preaching of the good news that God so loved the world that He commissioned His one and only Son – Jesus Messiah – so that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but shall inherit eternal life. Empowered and indwelled by the Holy Spirit, these Christ followers went to work witnessing in Jerusalem, and in just a few weeks, fulfilled the first edge of the Great Commission. But the very day of Stephen's death instigated not just persecution, but severe persecution, so that

- ***All except the apostles were scattered throughout the land of Judea and Samaria. (8:1)*** Dr. Luke's word for their dispersal (*diaspeiro*) originates from the Greek word for seed. They were dispersed – scattered like seed. They could not go back to their homes and families. The high cost of following Jesus resulted in a literal run for their lives. But as Jesus reminded us in the parable of the sower and the seed – scattered seeds grow, and these scattered, persecuted Christian began to

seed fulfill the second and third challenges of the Great Commission – witness to Judea and Samaria. Not only were they scattered, but

- ***Those who were scattered went on their way preaching the word. (8:4)***

The one thing they were warned to stop doing – the one thing they were severely flogged for doing, the one thing that cost Stephen his life, these persecuted Christians continued to do – to preach, to proclaim, to herald the word. With Stephen standing with Jesus in heaven, Philip now assumed center stage. Remember that

- **Philip, one of the seven selected servant leaders selected to oversee the daily distribution to the Greek speaking widows, is a layperson, not a preacher.** I know what some of you were thinking when I stated that witnessing through persecution requires faithful evangelists: *Whew, I'm off the hook, he's talking about those who are vocational preachers and evangelists.* Think again. The first evangelist in Acts is a persecuted layperson. You've heard me say from this pulpit: Witnessing is every Christian's obligation. Don't miss the blast of verse 1: *All EXCEPT THE APOSTLES were scattered.* The preachers stayed in Jerusalem. Extending the Great Commission to Judea and Samaria now hinged on every believer becoming a faithful evangelist. Consider second that

2. **Witnessing through persecution involves reaching the left-outs.**

Philip the evangelist encountered three representatives of those we can identify as left-outs. The Left-outs define a large segment of the American “unchurched” demographic. (See Robert Dale and Delos Miles, *Evangelizing the Hard-to-Reach*, chapters 1 and 2)

- Philip's first evangelistic encounter involved **The Samaritans** – they represent **the excluded**. From a Jewish perspective, Samaritans were half-breeds and heretics – neither Jew nor Gentile (Polhill, NAC, 214). In the familiar encounter with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well in John 4, Jesus flabbergasted the disciples and the woman by engaging her in conversation. When the Samaritan woman quizzed Jesus, “*How is that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?*” John confirmed, “*For the Jews do not associate with Samaritans.*” In response to the question in Luke 10, “*Who is my neighbor?*” Jesus positioned the Good Samaritan as the only one who stopped to assist a near-death stranger. The head of every Jew who heard that parable exploded. So, I believe that by intention, Philip's first evangelistic venture thrust him right in the middle of the excluded.

Excluded left-outs define a large segment of the unchurched and the unevangelized. As with the Jews, exclusion often involves racial prejudice and ethnic bias, but it extends to those who struggle through socio-economic

disproportion and who fight cultural alienation – homeless vagrants, migrant workers, the disfigured, the illiterate, and the list goes on and on. It's a dual tension. *"They're not like us"* describes the church's tension. *"I won't be welcome there"* describes the attitude of the excluded. We should be challenged and encouraged, that the response of the excluded to Philip's evangelistic efforts produced *"great joy in that city."*

- Right in the middle of the evangelistic harvest appeared a sinister figure a man named Simon, who called himself *"the Great Power of God"*. The encounter with **Simon the sorcerer** resembles **the unsought**. For a long time he had amazed the Samaritans with his sorceries and magic tricks. As both men and women responded to the Gospel message and were baptized, the Jerusalem church dispatched Peter and John to investigate the Samaritan revival. Simon himself believed and was baptized. But when he offered Peter and John money for *"the trade secret"* of Holy Spirit power, Peter confronted him: *"may your silver be destroyed with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with your money. Repent of this wickedness of yours and pray that your heart's intent may be forgiven."* Whether or not Simon the magician repented is not known. But the applied truth of this encounter affirms that Christianity and magic are polar opposites. God's Spirit is a gift – not for sale or manipulation.

Unreached and unchurched left-outs like Simon the sorcerer describe people looking for their next spiritual fix, sometimes drifting from church to church, often doctrinally deranged, embracing frequently a *"whats-in-it-for-me"* attitude. As with the excluded, we often neglect and ignore them, afraid that their extreme and different theological dispositions will disrupt our tight circles of friendship.

With the evangelizing of the Samaritans now fully engaged, an angel of the Lord came to Philip and led him in the opposite direction – the Gaza highway connecting Jerusalem with Egypt, where he met up with an Ethiopian man – a high official with Candace, queen of Ethiopia, and also a eunuch. He was reading from the scroll of Isaiah, chapter 53, the prophecy about Jesus Messiah. And as they rode along in the eunuch's chariot, Philip asked him, *"Do you understand what you are reading?"* He replied, *"How can I unless someone guides me?"* So Philip proceeded to tell him the good news about Jesus, beginning with that Scripture. They came to a roadside pond, and the eunuch asked Philip, *"What would keep me from being baptized?"* Philip baptized him, and the eunuch continued on his way back to Ethiopia. What happened to this Ethiopian eunuch? Church historians conclude that he became a missionary to Ethiopia. Epiphanius proposed that he evangelized Arabia and the Red Sea coastal area. (Polhill, NAC, pp. 227-228). We don't know for sure, but what we do know is that the first converted Christian foreigner in Acts is a eunuch, a Gentile, an African black man.

- **The Ethiopian eunuch represents the overlooked.** It would have been

easy, yet tragic, for Philip to have passed right by this chariot. How many times have we overlooked? I'm extremely impressed with your ability to reach the overlooked. You've breached some of the overlooked left-outs – ministry to the deaf, care for the handicapped, compassion for the lonely widows and widowers. But what about the hearing impaired and those with communicative disorders beyond just the deaf? What about compassion and outreach for all who live a single lifestyle, not just widows or widowers? What about all of the other overlooked left-outs – the blind and visually impaired, the mentally handicapped, the autistic, the socially retarded, and as with the excluded and the unsought, the list of potential evangelistic harvest among the overlooked is endless.

No One is Beyond the Reach of God's Hand!

Isaiah 59:1 – *“Indeed, the Lord’s hand is not **TOO SHORT** to save, and His ear is not too deaf to hear.”*

2 Peter 3:9 – *“The Lord does not delay His promise, as some understand delay, but is patient with you, not wanting **ANY** to perish, but **ALL** to come to repentance.”*

1 Timothy 2:3-4 – *“This is good, and it pleases God our Savior, who wants **EVERYONE** to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”*

Any questions?