Acts chapter 8

The book of Acts is remarkable and challenging in equal measure. It is not a polished, easy story. Instead, it gives us the real thing - an unflinching, raw account of the early church - full of both tragedy and triumph, conflict and miracles, fear and courage. It shows us how God builds His kingdom not through perfect people in perfect circumstances, but through ordinary believers who obey, through weakness, and often through suffering.

Just one chapter earlier, we read about Stephen, the first Christian martyr, who was brutally stoned to death because he was proclaiming the gospel.

Discussion question: What is the gospel?

Acts Chapter 8:1-3 (NIV)

1 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. 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.

Acts Chapter 8:4-8

4 Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. 5 Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Messiah there. 6 When the crowds heard Philip and saw the signs he performed, they all paid close attention to what he said. 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.

Discussion Question: Why did God empower Philip with extraordinary "signs and wonders" in Samaria?

Acts 8:9-13

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. 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.

Acts 8:14-25

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

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."

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.

That's the tragedy of Simon. He is physically close to the gospel -- baptized, amazed, even walking with Philip -- but is spiritually so far off; his heart remains unchanged. He wants the signs without the **surrender**. He wants the Spirit's power without the **Spirit's lordship** and that should make us pause. Simon's story reveals that it's possible to be impressed by miracles without being changed by the message, to go through the motions of faith without surrendering the heart, and to want the blessings of God but not God Himself.

Discussion Question: Are we seeking Jesus for who He is, or only for what He can give us? Are we surrendering to the Spirit or trying, consciously or unconsciously, to use God for our own desires and ends?

Following Jesus means dying to ourselves and receiving an entirely new life under His reign.

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Acts chapter 8: 26-27

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…"

Discussion question: Who is an eunuch?

Acts chapter 8: 27-35

27 So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian[a] 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,

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.
In his humiliation he was deprived of justice.
Who can speak of his descendants?
For his life was taken from the earth."[b]

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.

Discussion Question: Who are the outsiders of our community today? Who do we consider "eunuchs" in our churches today?

So Acts 8 leaves us with two portraits: Simon, the insider dazzled by power but unwilling to surrender and the Ethiopian eunuch, the ultimate outsider -- excluded by race, by body, by status -- yet welcomed by the grace of Jesus. Both experience miracles, but only one finds transformation. Simon chases the performance; the eunuch finds the Person. One treats the gospel as a tool while the other receives it as a gift. Together, their stories press the same question on us: What are we really seeking? Power, approval, control -- or the living Christ Himself?

The lesson of Acts 8 is this: God's kingdom advances not through empire-building but through obedience. Not by always chasing the crowds but by chasing the lost. That is the heart of our Lord and the quiet, unstoppable work of the Spirit -- transforming lives, one by one.