**THE GOSPEL TO JUDEA AND SAMARIA**

Acts 8:1-40

Key Verse: 8:4

**“**Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went.”

Stephen’s martyrdom set off a wave of violence against the church. But in the midst of trials, the gospel ministry continued even more prosperous. In this chapter, we see how God was working in His ways to spread the gospel. God oversees the gospel work and leads a person or a church to right directions according to His plan. May we prayerfully follow God’s leading upon each of us, family and our church as we submit ourselves to the Lord.

1.They preached the word wherever they went (1-4)

Verse 1 says, **“On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.”** Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. On the other hand, Saul began to make havoc of the church going from house to house dragging off both men and women and put them in prison.

There was God’s purpose for the persecution in Jerusalem. This was the fulfillment of God’s plan of evangelism. The Risen Jesus commanded his disciples in Acts 1:8b, “You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.” So the time came for the believers in Jerusalem to go out.

Deuteronomy 32:11 says, **“like an eagle that stirs up its nest and hovers over its young, that spreads its wings to catch them and carries them aloft.”** When the time for a bird to be independent, a mother bird pushed her chicks out of the nest and forces them to fly. When the baby bird is about to fall to the ground, the mother bird swoops down and catches it. Sometimes Christians become too comfortable in their life of faith and are reluctant to leave their nest and begin to fly. But God stirs our nest out of complacency for His good purpose.

Verse 4 says, **“Those who has been scattered preached the word wherever they went.”** A great persecution arose to eradicate Christianity in Jerusalem. But the persecution was turned out like hitting a campfire with a rod causing the embers to spread another fires. So the running away Christians were like small embers carrying the burning lamps in their heart. Later, the apostle Peter encouraged the early Christians, the diaspora who were scattered throughout all minor Asia by planting the living hope in their trials and reminding them of their identity as a holy nation. These diaspora built churches in their new homes. The word of God had been planted in the hearts of the believers in Jerusalem. They were driven out from their home land but the word of God could not be driven out from their hearts. So wherever they were scattered, they preached the word, the seed of life.

The scattered Christians in Jerusalem seemed to have lost many things like families, careers, security and houses. Once our Canadian UBF church pioneers were persecuted in Winnipeg, Manitoba as they served prosperous ministry, they had to close their fruitful mission field and move to different cities. They had to drive trucks loading all their belongings and move to Eastern cities driving on icy highways many days and nights in winter. These young missionary families in their early 30ties moved with their babies and some faithful bible students to Montreal, Toronto and Hamilton in 1986. They might be sorrowful from human perspective, but they had Jesus in their heart and their vision for campus mission was ever brightly burning like a flaming torch. But in all things God worked for the good of those who loved him. Churches have been built newly and campus pioneering work continued in Eastern cities until now. That is the reason why we are here as their successors. The situation could be worse. However, may we be faithful to God’s divine calling in God given situation as the good and faithful servants.

2.Philip proclaimed the Messiah in Samaria (5-25)

One of the scattered Christians was Philip. Verse 5 says, **“Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Messiah there.”** Samaria was the land of the ten lost tribes of Israel. It had been long since the word of God was proclaimed in this land. In view of Israel’s history, Samaria was a despised and deserted land because they lost the purity of Jewish race and became the people of mixed blood. The Jews did not want associate with the Samaritans let alone trample on their soil.

But when the crowds heard Philip and saw the miraculous signs he did, they all paid close attention to what he said. With shrieks, impure spirits came out of many and many paralytics and cripples were healed. So there was great joy in that city. There was a person named Simon who had practiced sorcery in the city and amazed all the people of Samaria. He boasted that he was someone great. All people in Samaria gave him their attention and exclaimed, “This man is rightly called the Great Power of God.” Simon deceived them for a long time. People followed him because they were astonished by his magic power. We can see the spiritual climate of Samaria. When there was no word of God, impure spirits and occult were rampant. People are deceived by futile magic arts. The land was occupied by the reign of evil spirits. People were under the grip of Satan.

Look at verse 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.”** The kingdom of God is the territory where God reigns. Man lost the kingdom of God because of sin, but the kingdom of God is restored again through Jesus’ death and resurrection. This is the good news. The people of Samaria accepted the message of the kingdom of God and put their faith in Jesus. Here the word, “attention’ appear twice in this chapter. Before Philip’s preaching, people gave their attention to worthless and futile sorcery, but later they paid close attention to Philip’s message, the message of the kingdom of God as he spoke. The name of Jesus set them free from shackles of Satan. The name of Jesus healed their souls. Simon, the sorcerer himself believed and baptized. And he followed Philip everywhere astonished by the great sings and miracles he saw.

Verse 14 says, **“When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to Samaria.”** Once John wanted to call down fire on an unrepentant Samaritan city, but now he and Peter were sent as a journey team to support the ministry. When they arrived, they prayed for the new believers there that they might receive the Holy Spirit. The new believers only received the baptism in the name of the Lord Jesus. But when these two apostles placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

When Simon saw that the Holy Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles’ hands, he tried to buy the ability to give the Holy Spirit to others. His evil motive was exposed. He wanted to gain power and influence for selfish purpose. Peter rebuked him harshly saying, “May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money!” “Repent of this wickedness and pray for God’s forgiveness!” Simon’s heart was poisoned with bitterness and captive to sin. The gospel exposed the power of darkness in Simon’s heart. The Holy Spirit is the gift of God. Our father in heaven gives the Holy Spirit to those who ask him(Lk11:13). The gifts of God are received freely from God by faith.

Verse 25 says. **“After they had further proclaimed the word of God and testified about Jesus, Peter and John returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many Samaritan villages.**” After serving new converts in Samaria, Peter and John did not return to Jerusalem hurriedly, instead, they took time to proclaim the word of God in many Samaritan villages.

Here we see some principles in the work of God. **First, God’s work is the ministry of the word of God.** Verse 14 states, “**Samaria had accepted the word of God.”** The work of God begins when God’s word is planted in the hearts of people as they pay close attention to it. Then the work of the Holy Spirit takes place as one prays and repents of his sins. So our struggle must be to saturate our hearts with God’s word through every possible means such as reading the bible, downloading bible reading app, listening to audio bible, memorizing key verses and so forth. Many of our church members set goals to read the bible once a year or once in two years or setting daily portions. God’s work sparks right in our heart as we pay close attention to the word of God and strive to accept one word right in our heart.

Secondly, **God’s work is the work of sowers and reapers together.** The name Samaria reminds us of Jesus’ encounter with a Samaritan woman near the well in Sychar. Jesus had a well conference with the them “the living water.” Jesus had a bible study with a wayward woman until she received a living water welling up to eternal life in her soul and became a passionate evangelist in her town.

There is a poem “The sower and the reaper” written by missionary Daniel Lee in South Africa.

*“Yes, my brothers, it was a miracle. Yes, it was a blissful festival! With our minds, souls, and with our hands, we touched the Lord! However, we shall not forget. We were reaping what the people before us had sowed. “Brothers, now we must become sowers. For people who will reap in the future, we must sweat a lot again. No, we will have to tear. Brothers, it is not right for a sower to gather what he or she has just sown. But remember the word of our Lord, “One sows and another reap.” For those who will reap with joy in the future, let us sow with tears today.”*

Yes, behind Philip’s successful ministry, there was hard sowing work of Jesus and the Samaritan woman’s labor of preaching and even prophets who had served before in the land of Samaria. Now Philip reaped the harvest. We need to have a sense of history being able to see the past and next generation beyond our generation. Although we do not see the fruit now, we need to sow diligently for the future generation. One day, someone will harvest for eternal life of our sowing work so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together.

3.Philip and The Ethiopian eunuch(26-40)

Verse 26 says. **“Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Go south to the road- the desert road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.”** In the midst of a fruitful ministry, an angel of the Lord called Philip to go south to the desert road. There must be not many people on a desert road. In that situation, one might think, “Not now, not me or not there.” But Philip started out in obedience to the angel’s command.

On his way, Philip met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of the Kandake which means “queen of the Ethiopians.” His position was the minister of finance in the country. The Ethiopian was a successful man. Yet his success didn’t quench his spiritual thirst. This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship. On his way home, he was sitting in his chariot reading the book of Isaiah the prophet. It would be difficult to read a book in the chariot on the desert road because it wavers a lot. But this eunuch showed his unceasing desire for God’s word. He was searching and seeking God constantly through reading the Scripture. The Ethiopian was hungry for God’s word. God never fails to bless such souls.

The Spirit told Philip, **“Go to that chariot and stay near it.”** Look at verse 30. **“Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. ‘Do you understand what you are reading?’”** The Ethiopian answered, **“How can I,” he said “Unless someone explains it to me?”** The Ethiopian eunuch was reading Isaiah chapter 53, the suffering servant, “He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before its shearer is silent.” The eunuch asked Philip, **“Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?” Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.** Philip did not have a chance to prepare for this bible study, but he was always ready to teach. Philip baptized the Ethiopian in the water. Then the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away to Azotus and he traveled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached the large city of Caesarea.

This amazing encounter was not by chance. God orchestrated the meeting between Philip and Ethiopian eunuch. God was leading Philip to a specific person whom He prepared. God seeks those who are seeking him. God is in control of all events. Fishing is not random, but carefully orchestrated by God who oversees the gospel work. When we are ready to teach, God will lead our steps to meet such thirsty soul for God.

Today, we learned how God’s work was being done. God went ahead of the early Christians to reach all Judea and Samaria according to his own plan. The work of God is the ministry of the word. God uses ready bible teachers to serve truth seeking souls. May we all be led by the Holy Spirit and grow as good bible teachers.