

The Real Deal
Acts 8:1-25
Notes

If we are going to be honest, the detriment to our witness is not the world's persecution of the church, nor its fast slide into secularization, and not the world's love of self and promotion of all forms of idolatry.

The greatest detriment to the witness of the church and its people is the failure of those who claim to be in a relationship with Jesus to live with no intentional faith.

For those who claim to know Jesus, to say I have been saved by Christ and yet Christ has no impact on your life, your choices, your relationships, your marriage, your parenting, your morals and ethics, your goals and purpose is to effectively live as a practical atheist.

Sure, we may claim Christ, we may even go to church, we may be able to produce a record of church membership, but nothing in our life, shows that we belong to Jesus.

We are living as fakes and frauds.

When we live like this, our lives produce no fruit for the kingdom of God and our witness is powerless to direct others to the life-saving Gospel.

And be sure, the world can spot the real verses the fake. There are tell-tale signs that a person belongs to Jesus, follows Jesus, and has been changed by Jesus.

While we absolutely verbally proclaim the Gospel and engage the lost world for Christ, the manner in which we live will either support our claim of belonging to Christ or be a mockery to our salvation.

If we are going to live for Christ, follow him, be disciples and disciple-makers we must do so with a fierce intentionality.

There are no accidental Christians and there are no accidental Christ-followers.

Would people around you (friends, spouse, coworkers) say your claim to be a Christian is supported by the way you live your life?

We want to be the real deal when it comes to our discipleship.

Saul was in hearty agreement with putting him to death.

And on that day a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. ² Some devout men buried Stephen and made loud lamentation over him. ³ But Saul began ravaging the church, entering house after house, and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison.

⁴ Therefore, those who had been scattered went about preaching the word. ⁵ Philip went down to the city of Samaria and began proclaiming Christ to them. ⁶ The crowds with

one accord were giving attention to what was said by Philip, as they heard and saw the signs which he was performing. ⁷ For in the case of many who had unclean spirits, they were coming out of them shouting with a loud voice; and many who had been paralyzed and lame were healed. ⁸ So there was much rejoicing in that city.

⁹ Now there was a man named Simon, who formerly was practicing magic in the city and astonishing the people of Samaria, claiming to be someone great; ¹⁰ and they all, from smallest to greatest, were giving attention to him, saying, "This man is what is called the Great Power of God." ¹¹ And they were giving him attention because he had for a long time astonished them with his magic arts. ¹² But when they believed Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike. ¹³ Even Simon himself believed; and after being baptized, he continued on with Philip, and as he observed signs and great miracles taking place, he was constantly amazed.

¹⁴ Now when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent 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 upon any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ¹⁷ Then they began laying their hands on them, and they were receiving the Holy Spirit. ¹⁸ Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was bestowed through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, ¹⁹ saying, "Give this authority to me as well, so that everyone 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 no part or portion in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. ²² Therefore repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray the Lord that, if possible, the intention of your heart may be forgiven you. ²³ For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bondage of iniquity." ²⁴ But Simon answered and said, "Pray to the Lord for me yourselves, so that nothing of what you have said may come upon me." ²⁵ So when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans.

Paul - Responds in Denial

*Saul was in hearty agreement with putting him to death.
And on that day a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. ²
Some devout men buried Stephen and made loud lamentation over him. ³ But Saul began ravaging the church, entering house after house, and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison.*

We end Chapter 7 with the stoning and death of Stephen. At the end of Chapter 7, Luke lets us know that the men who stoned Stephen laid their cloaks down at the feet of a man named Saul.

Saul apparently was the boss who gave the approval of Stephen's death.

Luke continues to tell us about Saul in the opening verses of Chapter 8, by stating that Saul was in *"heartly agreement with putting him to death."*

This phrase lets us know that Paul was not only in agreement with them, he not only gave his consent, but the Greek tells us that this action pleased Saul.

Luke also tells us that Stephen's death sparks a wide-scale persecution of believers by the Jews.

And we see the expression of this played out in verses 2-3 with Luke telling us that Saul went around from town to town, village to village, and house to house arresting believers.

This persecution seems to be spear-headed by the guy named Saul.

Luke gives us a general understanding that persecution breaks out against the church and he then highlights this person named Saul.

There are three important points to be made here:

(1) This tells us that God will do extreme things to move his church to obedience.

The church did not scatter until the persecution began. The church had not been fulfilling Jesus' will to take the gospel to the ends of the earth until persecution began.

God will use many means to get our attention and move us to his will.

The believers had gotten comfortable in their faith and were not fully obeying Jesus.

This is not to say they were in open sin, but they had found a happy medium with their expression of faith and living in the world.

(2) The world will not tolerate any level of genuine Christianity.

The Jews thought they were doing the right thing by taking out believers, so they convinced themselves that any and all measures were acceptable in order to shut them down, even death.

This same tactic is happening in the world today. The world will absolutely continue its attacks on the church and practicing believers.

The attacks will continue to increase in frequency and intensity.

(3) Believers who are living out their faith in an intentional way will not only be attacked by the world, they will also be blessed by God.

Believers who fail to live out their faith will slowly fade into the background and eventually blend in with the world and participate in its attacks. These "believers" have reason to question their salvation.

The response to the Gospel caused Saul and other Jews to violently attack the church.

Those believers who lived out their faith and did not stop worshipping were identified with Christ and attacked.

Those who were in the church, but saw the way the world attacked, stopped living for Jesus because they did not want to experience the hardships; they did not want to pay the costs.

Saul openly identified with the world. The persecuted openly identified with Jesus. Saul responded to the Gospel with anger. The persecuted church responded with faithful endurance.

How are you responding to a world that is increasingly putting pressure on you to limit the impact of your faith?

Jesus tells us that persecution will come and those who are genuine believers will remain, but those who are believers in name only will scatter.

When the pressure comes, let us be faithful in our walk with Jesus, intentionally engaging the world, even as it tries to shut us down.

Philip- Responds in Obedience

⁴ Therefore, those who had been scattered went about preaching the word. ⁵ Philip went down to the city of Samaria and began proclaiming Christ to them. ⁶ The crowds with one accord were giving attention to what was said by Philip, as they heard and saw the signs which he was performing. ⁷ For in the case of many who had unclean spirits, they were coming out of them shouting with a loud voice; and many who had been paralyzed and lame were healed. ⁸ So there was much rejoicing in that city.

Saul responded to the Gospel by openly persecuting the church. The real deal genuine believers scattered and endured the persecution.

In contrast to Saul, Luke introduces us to another one of the servants chosen in Acts 6, Philip, who responds to the Gospel message with obedience.

Philip views his life as belonging to Jesus and follows faithfully and obediently.

Verse 4 gives us a general sense of the reaction of the church to the persecution. Instead of retreating and changing their approach, the text tells us those who were scattered, those who were run from their homes, who had to quit their jobs, who had their lives uprooted, they did not stop living for Christ, they “went about preaching the word.”

They continued to do what God called them to do.

These believers did not allow their circumstances to dictate their faithfulness to Jesus.

We cannot allow our circumstances to dictate our faithfulness to Jesus.

The harder the world pressed against them, the more determined they were to make Christ known.

So often in our lives, the harder we are pressed the quicker we are to give up. But for the believer, this should not be the case.

What about you? Are you feeling the pressure of the world right now?

Are you questioning God's care and concern for you? Do you feel like you are living on the edge of your faith and it will only take one push to take you over?

The edge of our faith is where we discover the depth of Christ's compassion for us and his firm grip of our hearts.

The early church ministered more greatly in times of trouble than in times of comfort.

Often, those who are in Christ are all on board while life is going well, when they don't have any major issues, much less persecution.

For many believers though, as soon as pressure comes, as soon as the bills pile up, when that relationship ends, when the job ends, or when friends leave, we simply give up walking with Christ; we give up serving; we give up worshipping.

Think about your own life. We are all guilty of this, me included. What event or circumstance in your life has caused you to step back from following Christ?

You may be in this situation right now.

Luke moves from the general to the specific when he tells us that Philip went down to Samaria to preach the Gospel.

Philip preached the Gospel and he did ministry as the Lord enabled him.

Philip left Jerusalem and went to Samaria, a place despised by the Jews to preach the Gospel to them.

Notice what the text says in verse 5, "he proclaimed Christ to them."

Philip got it. He knew the mission. The mission was to preach Christ. The mission was to share the Gospel with the lost.

And guess what? The mission has not changed.

The mission has not changed since Jesus gave the call in Mt. 28:18-20 and Acts 1:8.

The mission is still the same. But if we are honest, we have lost sight of the mission.

Jesus' mission has stopped being our mission.

Somewhere along the way in our Christian journey we have decided we do not need to be "real" Christians. We can get away with being culturally acceptable Christians and it is still ok.

The problem with living as a culturally acceptable Christian is that those who live in this way have no power and have forfeited the mission.

If we fail to live a Gospel-centered life, we are living opposite the mission of Christ.

Philip did not allow his circumstances to determine his faithfulness.

He allowed his circumstances to magnify his faithfulness.

What about you? Are you allowing your circumstances to hinder or highlight your faithfulness?

Are you being faithful to serve Christ where you are? Are you taking opportunities to serve Christ in the church?

Part of living a faithful life and being a genuine believer is serving others in the name of Christ.

I want to challenge you. If you are a member of our family and you are not serving in an area of ministry, I would like for you to step up and serve.

Find a place to serve. Get with myself, Gene, Hayden, Hannah, or James. Share with us your skills, talents, and passions and I promise you we can find a place for you to glorify God in the church.

Philip shows us how to be faithful and obedient regardless of our circumstances.

God grants us many opportunities to glorify him through service and sharing.

When we are faithful to the Gospel, God will provide many opportunities to share and to serve.

If we fail to share, we are robbing people of an opportunity to hear the life-saving message of the Gospel.

If we fail to serve, we are robbing people of an opportunity to be blessed by the Lord through us.

Simon- Responds in Greed/Selfishness

In contrast to Philip, Luke, beginning in verse 9, shares with us a story of someone who responds to the Gospel in selfishness.

For not everyone who is in the community of the church and of the faith is not actually a part of the community of faith.

⁹ Now there was a man named Simon, who formerly was practicing magic in the city and astonishing the people of Samaria, claiming to be someone great; ¹⁰ and they all, from smallest to greatest, were giving attention to him, saying, "This man is what is called the Great Power of God." ¹¹ And they were giving him attention because he had for a long time astonished them with his magic arts. ¹² But when they believed Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike. ¹³ Even Simon himself believed; and after being baptized, he continued on with Philip, and as he observed signs and great miracles taking place, he was constantly amazed.

¹⁴ Now when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent 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 upon any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ¹⁷ Then they began laying their hands on them, and they were receiving the Holy Spirit. ¹⁸ Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was bestowed through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, ¹⁹ saying, "Give this authority to me as well, so that everyone 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 no part or portion in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. ²² Therefore repent

of this wickedness of yours, and pray the Lord that, if possible, the intention of your heart may be forgiven you. ²³ For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bondage of iniquity.” ²⁴ But Simon answered and said, “Pray to the Lord for me yourselves, so that nothing of what you have said may come upon me.”

So, what does Luke tell us about this man Simon and his situation?

He was a magician who used many ways to trick and deceive the people.

According to church historians Simon was such a big deal he had a large following who viewed him as the “first god.”

Simon was a charlatan who was taking glory away from God- “the Great Power of God.”

Those who were following Simon believed the message of the Gospel and were saved, leaving their pagan life behind them.

Simon was a magician who was amazed by the miraculous signs and wonders the Lord was doing through Philip.

Simon, himself, apparently believes and is also baptized.

The apostles from Jerusalem came to Samaria to see what was going on because they heard that God was doing a great work there.

Samaria was the ancient capital of the northern kingdom of Israel which fell to the Assyrian empire in 722 B.C.

God caused Assyria to destroy the city and exile the people because of centuries of idolatry and rebellion.

After resettling many of the people to other conquered lands, the Assyrians moved a bunch of Gentiles in the area resulting in a mix of Jews and Gentiles who became known as Samaritans.

This resulted in a different type of worship and a skewed understanding of the Old Testament on the part of the Samaritans.

This caused a giant rift between the Jews in Jerusalem and the mixed race of Samaritans.

Luke tells us of an interesting situation in verses 15-17.

¹⁵ who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. ¹⁶ For He had not yet fallen upon any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ¹⁷ Then they began laying their hands on them, and they were receiving the Holy Spirit.

What is taking place in this short passage? Why did the new believers not receive the Holy Spirit when they accepted Christ? Other passages in the New Testament fully support the Holy Spirit convicting, filling, and sealing each person who believes in Jesus at the moment of belief, so why did this not happen here?

These few verses do not support the subsequent filling of the Holy Spirit after salvation.

This was a transitional period in church history in which it was necessary for the apostles to verify the inclusion of this new, non-Jewish group, into the church.

Because of the hatred between the Samaritans and the Jews, it was essential for church unity for the Samaritans to receive the Spirit in the presence of the church leaders so they could vouch for them and their salvation.

We see this happening again in Chapter 10 as well as Chapter 15.

No longer was the church one nation (Israel) but was now made up of many nations.

To authenticate their salvation at this point in history, it was necessary that this Samaritan Pentecost take place.

This situation was a historical description and not a doctrinal prescription for the church.

After seeing this take place Simon flipped out and wanted the power of the apostles, because he thought it would make him money and give him more power.

This very act showed that his salvation was not genuine.

Peter brings the smack down on Simon in verse 20-23 and tells Simon to repent so that he might actually be saved.

What does this little episode show us?

This episode shows us the importance of being real in our salvation and the danger of playing games with God when it comes to our salvation.

Philip continues in faithful obedience and shows us how to serve God in all situations.

Simon shows us the danger of treating Jesus like a vending machine. We put a little something in just trying to win the game and get something out.

Simon shows us the danger of trusting in works for salvation.

- It is not the prayer that saves.
- It is not baptism that saves.
- It is not service that saves.
- It is not church membership that saves.

Salvation comes to us through the grace of God.

We place our faith in Jesus' finished work on the cross. We trust that his death satisfied God's requirement for sin and in that trust, we are saved.

Faith is the means by which grace is received. Faith is the hands that take hold of the gift of God.

A person can go to church their entire life and do many things for the church, but if they have never actually placed their faith in Christ, which results in repentance they are not in a relationship with God and they have reason to fear hell.

Maybe you have trusted in a certain work for your salvation.

I implore you to leave the works behind and today, right now, ask God to forgive you.

Right now, you can trust in Christ.

Simon wanted Jesus for what Jesus could do for him.

Why do you desire of Christ?