**Round Top Church Christian Fellowship**

Twenty-Second Week Since the Resurrection

 ***Acts 8 - God’s Victory Carries On -***

***Believing, Water-Baptism & Receiving God’s Holy Spirit***

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(Unless otherwise noted, NAS is quoted.)

 Despite deadly opposition, God’s witnesses of salvation move forward. The foe against the Gospel Message has always been united in hearty agreement to put down any witness from God. In the 1st century church, all who converted to Jesus’ Message could expect push-back from family, friends, local state and religious authorities.

From a civil-right protected society of our time, it is repulsive to read about a person (Stephen) who loses their life by mob violence during religious persecution. However, we see this, mob violence, in many places in the world today regarding religious disagreements. We know that in countries like Saudi Arabia, it is against the law to witness Christianity. Basically, we can expect to see the same thing that happened to Stephen in many countries around the world were Islam has become a major political force.

 Acts 8 begins with the introduction of Saul, the burial of Stephen and the continued persecution of the church. We know that God changed Saul’s name to Paul after He struck him down on the road to Damascus detailed in Acts 9. Saul, being a Pharisee of Pharisees, fully believed he was pursuing God’s will in his life by persecuting followers of Jesus Christ. We need to keep this in mind, when we have the opportunity to witness to Muslims. Due to our demographic, most of us will not have that opportunity. So, like Saul, many Muslims really believe they are on God’s side of things. Some are marginal followers of Islam, lending to a more open dialogue. Back to Saul; we will soon see that God corrects his direction and purpose in life (Acts 9).

**Acts 8:1** 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.

**Deacon Philip – Preaching, Healing & Relieving Unclean Spirits**

As we go through our lesson today, we will see that Acts 2 is reflected upon in Acts 8 and Acts 8 is reflected upon Acts 10.Philip, like Stephen, was one of the servants/deacons chosen to serve the Greek speaking widows (Acts 6). Obviously, God had additional plans for Philip, as He did Stephen. They both are an example to all servants in the Church. Basically, start serving in whatever the Lord has initially called you to do and wait for additional assignments that compliment your spiritual gifts.

 Philip was ministering just like Jesus, Peter and John. This resulted in people surrendering to God, being healed and relieved of unclean spirits.

**Example**

Speaking of a person being relieved of an unclean spirit, I recently watched an online interview with Eric Metaxas and David Wood. David gave his testimony from being a convict criminal and diagnosed psychopath to one of the leading voices in Christian apologetics and polemic witness to Muslims. No doubt, David had an unclean spirit. While in prison, David prayed to receive God in his heart and was immediately relieved of his mental/spiritual condition. This is a must-see interview. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CoxxYvKtb8A

The importance of David’s surrender to the Lord is a game-changer for Muslims. David is the one who consistently witnessed to Nabeel Qureshi, author of “Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus.” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k0D8Uz4oQck

**Acts 8:5** 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.

**Simon The Magician**

 Simon the magician is representative of the charlatan T.V. characters we see today populating the airways with the health and wealth/name it - claim it false teachings. Those of us who know the Truth in God’s Word can see who these people are today. When their message is all about the money and the power of God working uniquely through them, they too are like Simon the Magician. They just want power for themselves. Not for the glory of God.

**Acts 8:9** 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; [Samaria -just north of Jerusalem]

 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.

**Salvation in Progress**

 There are a number of important things happening within this account of Philip’s witness. People were believing, receiving God’s Word, being water-baptized, and receiving God’s Holy Spirit. Here we see the components of salvation taking place. But the key component, like Jesus told Nicodemus, is receiving the Holy Spirit, to be re-born of Spirit. The sequence /order of believing (heart change), repenting followed by water-baptism is the same order we see in Acts 2:37-38. So, what came next? Like in Acts 2:38, the gift of the Holy Spirit was imparted to the new converts as also chronicled in Acts 8:14-17.

**Acts 2:37** Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?" 38 Peter said to them, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

**Acts 8:14** 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.

 We also see in Acts 10:43-48 (Cornelius’ house) where Peter calls upon people to “believe.” Peter then allows them to be water-baptized because of a significant event that took place while he was preaching. There was one important difference that took place between the point of belief and the point of water-baptism as compared to Acts 2 & 8. The Holy Spirit fell upon them in Acts 10, prior to being water-baptized. No apostle laid hands on anyone.

Starting in verse 43, Peter is preaching. . .

43 "Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins."

 44 While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message.

 45 All the circumcised believers who came with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the **Gentiles** also.

 46 For they were hearing them speaking with tongues and exalting God. Then Peter answered,

 47 "Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did, can he?"

 48 And he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to stay on for a few days.

 There are major theological understandings that come from these three events in Acts 2,8,10.

**One** – In Acts 10, Peter was sent by the leadership in Jerusalem. This is an indication that Peter was not the leader of the Jerusalem church. We know from later events that the half-brother of Jesus, James, was the leading figure in Jerusalem.

**Two** – Forgiveness of sins is tied to “Belief,” not the Law.

**Three** – Gentiles are saved without having to undergo circumcision. Gentiles do not have to become a Jew first.

**Four** – Water-Baptism and confession of faith can be superficial.

**Five** – A person must receive the Holy Spirit to be saved. God instructed the Apostles to be sure that people understood that the Holy Spirit had to be received and become indwelled in person. This is why Peter and John were sent. Paul witnessed the same thing in Romans 8:9. (1 John 4:13, 1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19; John 14:17; Romans 8:11; 2 Timothy 1:14;

Philippians 1:19; 2 Cor 6:16; Galatians 4:6)

**Six** – Water-baptism is a sign of “Belief” not an act for salvation.

**Seven** – In Acts 2:37,38, repenting and water-baptism is a result of the condition of the heart, circumcision of the heart (Deut. 30:6-9). The same thing happens in Acts 8 and 10. Belief is a change of heart.

**Eight** – Receiving the Holy Spirit is not dependent upon being transferred by the laying on of hands as witnessed in Acts 8:18. In Acts 10, there wasn’t any laying on of hands. As Peter was preaching, the Holy Spirit fell upon those who believed.

**Nine** – Remember Jesus said to Nicodemus. . . (John 3:7-8) 7 "Do not be amazed that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' 8 "The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit."

**Continue in** **Acts 8**

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 solemnly testified and spoken the word of the Lord, they started back to Jerusalem, and were preaching the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans.

**Our Own Experience**

 From this passage of Scripture, we can reflect upon our own ‘*surrendering to God experience’*. There are hundreds of traditions within Christianity. Many are represented in our own group. Obviously, because these traditions exist means that their understanding of how to be “made right” with God varies. We see here in Acts that the order of events in a person’s *eternal-life changing experience* is not always the same. This is particularly punctuated in the manifestation of the Holy Spirit. The “constant” is the elements of salvation, starting with (1) a surrendered heart, signifying belief, (2) an intent to turn (repent) from a person’s previous life-practices, (3) followed by water-baptism as a public witness. But wait? What is left? All of this is under the direction of God’s Holy Spirit. As these “constant elements” take place, a person’s heart receives God’s Holy Spirit. Religious leaders cannot control the timing of salvation. We preachers are instruments of God and His Holy Spirit. We have no authority on our own. Like Jesus, we can do nothing without God. Jesus is the example of how God works through flesh in a fallen world. The biblical reality is . . . that God’s Holy Spirit is in operation the whole time. As Peter found . . . people started speaking in tongues before he gave the final invitation.

**John 3:8** "The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit."

**Ecclesiastes 11:5** Just as you do not know the path of the wind and how bones are formed in the womb of the pregnant woman, so you do not know the activity of God who makes all things.

AMEN

 End Sermon September 13, 2020

**Acts 8 continues**

 26 But an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip saying, "Get up and go south to the road that descends from Jerusalem to Gaza." (This is a desert road.)

 27 So he got up and went; and there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure; and he had come to Jerusalem to worship,

 28 and he was returning and sitting in his chariot, and was reading the prophet Isaiah.

 29 Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go up and join this chariot."

 30 Philip ran up and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet, and said, "Do you understand what you are reading?"

 31 And he said, "Well, how could I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

 32 Now the passage of Scripture which he was reading was this: "HE WAS LED AS A SHEEP TO SLAUGHTER; AND AS A LAMB BEFORE ITS SHEARER IS SILENT, SO HE DOES NOT OPEN HIS MOUTH.

 33 "IN HUMILIATION HIS JUDGMENT WAS TAKEN AWAY; WHO WILL RELATE HIS GENERATION? FOR HIS LIFE IS REMOVED FROM THE EARTH."

 34 The eunuch answered Philip and said, "Please tell me, of whom does the prophet say this? Of himself or of someone else?"

 35 Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him.

 36 As they went along the road they came to some water; and the eunuch said, "Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?"

 37 And Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."

 38 And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he baptized him.

 39 When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; and the eunuch no longer saw him, but went on his way rejoicing.

 40 But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through he kept preaching the gospel to all the cities until he came to Caesarea.