

Evangelization

(Acts Session 13—May 31, 2026)

Today we move into **chapter 8** of the book of Acts. It is a watershed moment for the church, and their grasp of God's vision for the church suddenly gets enlarged exponentially.

You will remember from chapter 7 that Stephen had been stoned to death for his testimony about Christ. And his martyrdom leads to the series of events that unfold in our text this morning.

Acts 8:1-3

1 Now Saul was consenting to his death. At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout *the regions of Judea and Samaria*, except the apostles.

2 And devout men carried Stephen *to his burial*, and made great lamentation over him.

3 As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing *them to prison*.

This mostly ties up the loose ends from **chapter 7**. The martyrdom of Stephen leads to a season of persecution for the church. Saul plays a leading role in this, and he starts hunting down Christians and dragging them off to prison.

Fortunately, the vast majority of believers managed to get out of town, heading either north to Samaria or south to Judea. Those who fled to Samaria did so out of desperation.

Because historically, the average Jew would avoid going to Samaria at all costs. But this violent wave of persecution forced their hand. And I have to wonder—did any of those folks high tailing it into Samaria remember the last words of Jesus before He ascended into heaven?

None of them would have heard them directly, because only the Apostles were present for that climactic moment. But I'm sure the Apostles

would have recited the Lord's parting words as they taught the church about all of Jesus' sayings. And here's what Jesus said on that occasion:

Acts 1:8

But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.

They were to be witnesses to Jesus first in Jerusalem, then to all Judea, and then to...*Samaria*. Now the church had been in existence for 4 or 5 years at that point, but no mention thus far of any special efforts being made to take the gospel to Samaria.

And I have to think that Satan figured this persecution would calm things down, and the silence the preaching of the Gospel.

But all the persecution ended up doing was to spread the Word further and further. Using persecution to stop the church worked about as well as trying to put out an oil fire with a flyswatter.

The persecution gave the believers the motivation to leave Jerusalem and spread the message of Jesus further than they had ever done before.

Acts 8:4

Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere...preaching the word.

Philip goes right into the heart of Samaria. To the capital city itself. A place that was chock full of bad vibes for any orthodox Jew who knew its history.

Lots of religious and spiritual compromise had taken root there, and everyone knew it. But in spite of the spiritual corruption of the Samaritans, Jesus had them on His mind specifically when He left our world.

No one would have figured that Samaria was ripe for the gospel. If you're reading the Cross and the Switchblade, David Wilkerson probably thought something similar when God sent him to preach the gospel to the kids in the gangs in New York.

By the way, most of the books are gone. A few left. We'll get as many as we need. If you haven't gotten one yet, and you'd like to read it, sign the paper in the back on the little brown table, and we'll order some more.

OK, back to Philip's adventure in Samaria.

Acts 8:5

Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them.

Now let me clarify something if I may; this individual was not Philip the Apostle. All of the Apostles had remained back in Jerusalem. This was Philip, a man who identified as one of the Deacons selected back in **chapter 6**.

We will find out much later on in the book of Acts, that Philip is referred to as ***Philip the Evangelist***. In fact, he is the only person in the entire New Testament who specifically bears that title—***Evangelist***.

Acts 21:8 NLT

The next day we went on to Caesarea and stayed at the home of Philip the Evangelist, one of the seven men who had been chosen to distribute food.

The only other time the word "evangelist" is applied to a specific person is when Paul uses it to encourage his protégé Timothy to engage in evangelism. He says, "***Do the work of an evangelist.***"

Most commentators agree that Timothy was not primarily an evangelist, but functioned mostly as a pastor and a teacher. Which means that Paul is reminding Timothy that evangelism is still part of the deal, even if you have another function in

the body of Christ. Timothy was a pastor. But he also needed to "***do the work of an evangelist.***"

And to a degree, I think you could say that same thing applies to anyone who is a serious follower of Christ. "***Do the work of an evangelist.***" In other words, share your faith with others.

I think I'm beginning to see a consistent pattern unfolding here. You will remember that the Apostles were sized up very negatively by the intellectual elite of the day.

Acts 4:13 KJV

Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.

Unlearned and ignorant. These religious leaders looked upon Peter and John with disdain. They had no credentials, other than they had been with Jesus.

So let's be clear on this: the Apostles—the leaders of the church at the time—were not highly educated scholars. Just ordinary blue-collar workers. Ordinary, until they crossed paths with Jesus.

And now you have Philip. And Stephen before him. Not sure what their educational experience had been prior to this. But the initial position they held within the church was nothing dramatic.

Their initial assignment was to help take care of the nutritional needs of the widows in the congregation. Philip was "***meals on wheels***" or something like that.

He began his formal ministry as a deacon. And the word deacon simply means "***servant***" or "***attendant***". Philip served the needs of the congregation in a very practical way.

But just like Stephen, other spiritual gifts began to surface in Philip's life. And by this point in chapter 8, he starts preaching the gospel to others. And what's more, God allows miracles to occur through him.

Acts 8:6-8

- 6 And the multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did.
7 For unclean spirits, crying with a loud voice, came out of many who were possessed; and many who were paralyzed and lame were healed.
8 And there was great joy in that city.

I've got to think that one of the reasons Philip's spiritual gifting increased in the way that it did was that he put himself on the front lines of the outreach to others.

Which suggests one further observation to be made in this regard. Early in the history of the church, the separation between the clergy and the laity was not nearly as distinct as it became later on.

Make no mistake, there was definitely a hierarchy of authority, with the Apostles overseeing the big picture. But ministry—such as the preaching of the Word, with attending miracles occurring—the lines of demarcation were often blurred.

My point is this: God doesn't just use the church leaders to do the work of the ministry. In fact, Paul taught that the primary job of those leaders was to help equip the other members to do the actual gospel ministry.

Long story short, we can all function as ministers of Christ. Or to frame it in the context of today's emphasis, we can all "**do the work of an evangelist.**"

Ephesians 4:11-12 ESV

- 11 And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers,

12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.

Ministry occurs via the entire body of Christ, not just through those who are called to oversee or lead. Qualification for ministry centers primarily on the gifts and calling of God.

You can call it lay ministry if you want, but these ordinary believers performed apostolic functions on several occasions, and Acts chapter 8 is a good example of that.

But there is a flip side to all of this, which is brought out with the introduction of a man named Simon, who used to be a sorcerer.

Acts 8:9-13

- 9 But there was a certain man called Simon, who previously practiced sorcery in the city and astonished the people of Samaria, claiming that he was someone great,
10 to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, "This man is the great power of God."
11 And they heeded him because he had astonished them with his sorceries for a long time.
12 But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized.
13 Then Simon himself also believed; and when he was baptized he continued with Philip, and was amazed, seeing the miracles and signs which were done.

Well, there you have a concrete illustration of why the Jews avoided coming to this area. There were lots of pagan practices in the region, and this man Simon was deeply involved.

However, he believed what Philip was preaching about Jesus. But that being said, something very fundamental remained unsundered in his life.

More of that in just a minute. But first, the good news of this revival has caught the attention of the Apostles.

Acts 8:14-17

14 Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them,

15 who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit.

16 For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

17 Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

Alright, now I've got to go doctrinal on you. Just for a few minutes. But listen up, because this is important.

There are some serious misconceptions regarding the subject of receiving the Holy Spirit that get cleared up in this chapter.

And this carries some serious implications for those who desire to be involved in ministry on any level whatsoever.

First of all, let's establish the Samaritans' spiritual status by looking at **verse 14**. The Scripture says that they had "received the word of God." And in **verse 16** it says that they had been "been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus".

That would indicate—I must conclude—that these folks were saved. Converted. However, Luke goes on to tell us that at that point the Holy Spirit had "fallen upon none of them".

And he states that in such a way as to imply that it was expected that such a thing should happen. That the Holy Spirit would—pay attention now—"fall on them." That was the normal expectation.

Now it may seem like I'm splitting theological hairs here, but I assure you this is a very big deal. This situation clearly indicates that the baptism in the Holy Spirit is something that comes to a person after salvation, and not as a part of salvation.

Let's consider for a moment something we read earlier in **chapter 1** of Acts, where Jesus says that the purpose of being baptized in the Holy Spirit was to receive power for ministry.

Acts 1:8

But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.

In addition to this, Jesus made it clear that they were not supposed to engage in the ministry of extending God's Kingdom until they had received this experience of being baptized with the Holy Spirit.

Which is why the Apostles were careful to apply this principle in the lives of those who converted to Christ. Because of the reality that all believers are called to be ministers of Christ to the world around them. And they will need the power of the Holy Spirit to do that.

Evangelism requires power beyond mere human intellect and persuasiveness. A power that is only imparted when the Holy Spirit comes upon a person in the way that occurs here in **Acts chapter 8**. That is the clear pattern throughout the Book of Acts.

Something happened when the Apostles laid hands on these Samaritans and the Holy Spirit fell on them. We're not told what it was. But whatever it was, it caught Simon's eye. And he desperately wanted that ability for himself.

Acts 8:18-19

18 And when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money,
19 saying, "Give me this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit."

This is an early instance of what might be called the dark side of ministry. The love of power. The love of influence. The desire to impress others. And even further, to control others.

Simon was the kind of person who believed the facts of the Gospel, and who was impressed with the supernatural signs that he saw. But his heart was not right with God. Lucky for him, he got both barrels from the Apostle Peter.

Acts 8:20-23

20 But Peter said to him, "Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money!
21 You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God.
22 Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you.
23 For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity."

Simon the former sorcerer was a blessed man in this regard. Left to himself, he might have gone on his way, seeking the power of God for self-promotion. We've seen it happen often in modern times. Where the misuse of ministry ruins a person.

Most would say that Simon was not truly converted at first, because of Peter's assessment of him.

"Your heart is not right in the sight of God... I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity."

That sounds pretty bad. But then there are others who say that Simon had to be saved because it says he actually believed. In addition, they will say that Peter's prescription for Simon was oriented towards a specific sin, not to sin in general as would be the case in conversion.

"Pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you."

And that would mean this situation was an issue of correction rather than salvation.

Whatever the case, it appears that Peter's rebuke had the desired effect on Simon, because the man suddenly displays a healthy amount of the fear of God. And we know that "*the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.*"

Acts 8:24

Then Simon answered and said, "Pray to the Lord for me, that none of the things which you have spoken may come upon me."

And so the ministry to the Samaritans—these neighbor of the Jews who had long been the objects of rejection and scorn—the Samaritans responded very, very enthusiastically to the Gospel.

And Peter and John—inspired by the good work that Philip had begun—decide to do some evangelizing of their own, as they made their way back to Jerusalem.

Acts 8:25

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.

And my guess is that this little foray into Samaria helped to soften Peter up for what would happen to some Gentiles over in chapter 10. We'll get to that in a few weeks.

Evangelization. That is a definite calling on each of our lives. Why not make it a prayer this week? Perhaps something like this...

“Holy Spirit, I’d like to be able to share the Gospel with others. I’d like to be used by You to reach someone for Jesus. Teach me, and empower me. Make me a tool in your hand, for Jesus’ sake and for His glory. Amen.”