

Conversions 2

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Acts 8:4-5

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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.

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This had to be a time that was at the same time both disheartening and exciting. The gospel had spread like wildfire throughout Jerusalem. The leaders of the Jews were having a violent reaction to what was happening, to the point that they were having converts arrested, beaten, and cast into prison.

Acts 8:1-3

4

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.

The persecution that had begun in Jerusalem was the catalyst for the actions of Saul. He was responding to the attitude of the leadership. That's what we see in our text, believers were being scattered abroad because of this persecution and with them went the Gospel.

Think about this dynamic for a moment, those that had been converted were staying around Jerusalem so they could be near the Apostles, the miracles, and, at least in my mind, the source of the Gospel the Apostles. They didn't want to leave Jerusalem. Now, as hard as it might be to think about this, the persecution was the perfect stimulation people needed to leave. Many of these people had homes to go back to. They had come to Jerusalem for the Jewish feasts and had stayed after obeying the Gospel. Now they had reason to back home. That is what we see in this passage.

Remember the three thoughts that we are using as we look at some of the different conversions in the book of Acts...

5

- 1) The Opportunity
- 2) The Character of the Convert (s)
- 3) The Nature of the Message

Philip has gone to Samaria with those that had been scattered because of the persecution in Jerusalem and is preaching the Gospel to all that will hear it.

Acts 8:6-7

6

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.

The Samaritans were listening to what Philip was saying. Philip was performing signs and wonders to confirm what he was preaching. Unclean spirits were being cast out, the paralyzed and lame were being healed, the word was being confirmed.

Here is our first point...

7 1) The Opportunity

Samaritans

This was the name given to the new and mixed inhabitants whom Esarhaddon (677 B.C.), the king of Assyria, brought from Babylon and other places and settled in the cities of Samaria, instead of the original inhabitants whom Sargon (721 B.C.) had removed into captivity (2 Kings 17:24; comp. Ezra 4:2,9,10). These strangers (comp. Luke 17:18) amalgamated with the Jews still remaining in the land, and gradually abandoned their old idolatry and adopted partly the Jewish religion. After the return from the Captivity, the Jews in Jerusalem refused to allow them to take part with them in rebuilding the temple, and hence sprang up an open enmity between them. They erected a rival temple on Mount Gerizim, which was, however, destroyed by a Jewish king (130 B.C.). They then built another at Shechem. The bitter enmity between the Jews and Samaritans continued in the time of our Lord: the Jews had "no dealings with the Samaritans" (John 4:9; comp. Luke 9:52,53). Our Lord was in contempt called "a Samaritan" (John 8:48). Many of the Samaritans early embraced the gospel (John 4:5-42; Acts 8:25; 9:31; 15:3). Of these Samaritans there still remains a small population of about one hundred and sixty, who all reside in Shechem, where they carefully observe the religious customs of their fathers. They are the "smallest and oldest sect in the world."

Easton's Bible Dictionary

John 4:8-9

8

8 For His disciples had gone away into the city to buy food. **9** Therefore the Samaritan woman said to Him, "How is it that You, being a Jew, ask me for a drink since I am a Samaritan woman?" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.)

This racism, and that is what it is, is seen here in the response of the Samaritan woman at the well, not on her part or on the part of Jesus. But the racism of enmity that existed between the Jews and the Samaritans was thick in their encounter. That's what we see in this passage, the woman is confused that Jesus, a Jew, would deign to talk to her.

This is the situation that Philip has gone into to preach the Gospel. And what is seen is that the Samaritans are responding to what is being said. They are overcoming centuries of racial enmity between themselves and the Jews and they are listening to Philip tell them that Jesus is the messiah that they also have been waiting for...

John 4:25-26

9

25 The woman said to Him, "I know that Messiah is coming (He who is called Christ); when that One comes, He will declare all things to us." **26** Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am He."

The Samaritans had continued to practice at least a form of worship to God. They had obviously kept up with the tradition of the promises that had been handed down from their fathers.

John 4:11-12

10

11 She said to Him, "Sir, You have nothing to draw with and the well is deep; where then do You get that living water? *12* You are not greater than our father Jacob, are You, who gave us the well, and drank of it himself and his sons and his cattle?"

Philip comes into this situation and begins preaching the Gospel. The opportunity is there because the Samaritans were just as anxiously looking for the messiah as were the Jews. I think we have to understand that it was for a different reason. The Jews were expecting the messiah to restore Israel as an Earthly kingdom in all its glory as in the days of David and Solomon. The Samaritans were looking for the same thing but with an eye to being restored to the family of Israel, no more division.

Then here comes Philip preaching that the messiah has come and doing signs and wonders to prove the truth of what he was saying.

A quick aside for a moment, Philip had the ability to perform miracles, he was casting out unclean spirits, he was healing the lame, and he apparently had miraculous knowledge as he was preaching the Gospel. Philip was not an Apostle. The first time we are introduced to Philip is in the account concerning the Grecian Jews in Acts that were being neglected in the daily dispersing of food. The Apostles told the people to...

Acts 6:2-3

11

2 So the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables. *3* Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task.

The Apostles gave the people a charge to work out this problem amongst themselves by choosing seven men to handle it. Some point to this as the appointment of the first deacons in the Church. While that is not said to be so in the scriptures, in terms of deacons being servants and assisting in the work of the Church, these men would certainly qualify.

Acts 6:5-6

12

5 The statement found approval with the whole congregation; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch. *6* And these they brought before the apostles; and after praying, they laid their hands on them.

So here we are introduced to Philip as one of the seven put forth to assist the Apostles as they dealt with the problem concerning the Grecian widows. While we are not told for certain, all indications are that this is the same Philip that was chosen with the seven.

So we now find him in Samaria preaching the Gospel. That brings us to our next point...

13 2) The Character of the Convert (s)

As we have seen, these Samaritans had tried to maintain their relationship with God, they had held on to the oral traditions and promises of the fathers. They had an enormous desire to be God's chosen ones once again. They wanted to hear how they could become that again.

What defines the character of a person that becomes a convert? Last week we looked at the parable of the sower and saw that Christ said that the one who receives the Word is the one with a good and honest heart.

Luke 6:45 14

45 The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth what is evil; for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart.

In Luke's account of the parable, Christ talks about the hearts of men, read character. He illustrates that good can only come from a good heart, but evil comes from an evil heart.

Prov 11:20 15

20 The perverse in heart are an abomination to the Lord, But the blameless in their walk are His delight.

Solomon says much the same thing as did Jesus. Good comes from good. But there is a point here that we need to note...

Matt 7:15 16

15 "Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves.

Good comes from good. But, let's be honest here, evil, in its quest to overcome good, far too often disguises itself as good, because that makes it easier to attack the unsuspecting. Leopards are considered to be more dangerous than lions. Now, mind you, neither are friendly little kitty-kats to snuggle with, but those that supposedly know say that when a lion attacks a group, it tends to focus on a single target and will pretty much ignore the rest of the group while it attacks the one. A leopard on the other hand, when attacking a group doesn't focus on any one of the group, but rather, they will try to inflict as much pain on as many as they can. Christ is talking about people, false teachers, that are just as dangerous. They scheme to get themselves into the group so that they can then inflict as much damage and hurt as possible. What kind of character of heart seeks to destroy other people, especially those that are sincerely trying to do God's will? Evil character, and isn't that what Christ and Solomon both say...

17 ***The evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth what is evil; for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart.***

Coming to God through Christ requires a good character and from a good character comes good fruit.

Matt 7:17 18

17 So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit.

Now, I would be remiss in not making mention of this. Simon the Sorcerer was one of the those who was converted in Samaria. Based on the discussion we have been having, we would have to conclude that he had a good and honest heart which led him to believe, and he did believe...

Acts 8:13

19

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.

If we accept the scriptures for what they say, we must accept that Simon believed and responded out of faith. I think that what this account illustrates is that even someone who believes and accepts the truth can get caught up in looking away from God and falling away. What is interesting is that he is told...

Acts 8:22

20

22 Therefore repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray the Lord that, if possible, the intention of your heart may be forgiven you.

What I find interesting about this is that Simon is told to repent, change his will to God's will, the very same thing that brought him salvation is what can restore him back to God.

This brings us to our last thought...

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3) The Nature of the Message

Acts 8:4-5

22

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.

Here is where the real impact of this;

23

5 *Philip went down to the city of Samaria and began proclaiming Christ to them.*

Christ can and will be the power to change people's lives, free them from their sin, but only if they will let him.

1 John 4:15

24

15 Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.

Confession, scriptural confession, is not something that can be coerced from someone. Scriptural confession is not something that is done out of just emotion. Scriptural confession is an acknowledgment of Jesus as our Christ and savior, the Son of the Living God. It is based on a clear understanding of all the evidence, both internal and external, as well as the emotional response to that evidence. But first and foremost, it is a choice that each of us as individuals must make for ourselves.

The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation.

What choice will we make?