

The Unfolding | A Journey Through Acts

Week 8: "The People We Don't Like"

Text: Acts 7:59-60; 8:1-8, 14-17

November 2, 2014

Scripture reading: Acts 7:59-60; Acts 8:1-8, 14-17

59 And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." 60 And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

1 And Saul approved of his execution. And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. 2 Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him. 3 But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison.

4 Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word. 5 Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ. 6 And the crowds with one accord paid attention to what was being said by Philip when they heard him and saw the signs that he did. 7 For unclean spirits, crying out with a loud voice, came out of many who had them, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. 8 So there was much joy in that city.

14 Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to 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 on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. 17 Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit.

1. Introduction

> **Jonathan McIntosh's quote from last week:** "The greatest pain in our lives is the greatest grace, because it leads us through our greatest weakness to look to our greatest hope."

> **The same is true for the Jerusalem Church 2000-years ago.**

> **Text - Short explanation:** Deacons → Stephen → Scattering of disciples → Acts 1:8

> **"You are going to face the people group you most dislike."**

> Persecution: Not for our maturity alone, but so our lives will be magnifying glasses that others may see his goodness. God loves other people so much that he will smoke us out of our comfort zones.

2. Does the bible teach that we can be born again and not yet have the Spirit?

> The bible systematically teaches that all Christians have the Spirit.

- 1 Corinthians 12:13: "For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body-Jews or Greeks, slaves or free-and all were made to drink of one Spirit."
- Romans 8:9: "Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him."
- John 3:3-8: "Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."...7 Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' 8 The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." [Jesus uses "born again" and "born of the Spirit" interchangeably]
- Galatians 3:2-3: "Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? 3 Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?" ["Receive the Spirit" is Paul's shorthand for the born-again experience.]
- Ephesians 1:13-14: "13 In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, 14 who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory."

If you believe that you are guilty of sin, have put your trust in Jesus, and authentically seek to exchange your ways for his ways, you have the Spirit!

> Clarification Before We Move Forward

- I'm not saying that nothing happens after conversion.
 - The early church sought after and experienced many subsequent "infillings"
 - Paul directs us to be constantly filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18)
- I'm not being dismissive of our experiences; only attempting to bring biblical clarity to them. conversion.
- We must seek subsequent "infillings"...We must cultivate a lifestyle of moment-by-moment dependence on the Spirit.

3. So What Is Going On? Clues...

> **Acts 1:6 prejudice?** “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” 7 He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. 8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

- An unhealthy pre-occupation with regaining their position atop the food chain.
- Jesus redirected them to think outside themselves...the nations they were to live, not just rule
- Amazing how pain affects our theology; can even be used to reinforce our prejudices.

> **Fast-forward 7-10 years to Acts 10...**

> **Acts 10:44-48:** “While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. 45And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles. 46For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter declared, 47“Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?” 48And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to remain for some days.”

- God has made clean what was unclean
- Peter's amazement - a decade later! Gentiles don't have to jump through Jewish hoops.

4. Acts 8 Alternate Interpretation

> The Spirit seemed to have been addressing the apostles' muted, socially accepted prejudices. Most people in the early church had no problem whatsoever neglecting the entire Samaritan ethnic group. And I bet that many of them would have been more than okay never seeing any of these people in heaven. But that wasn't okay with God. We must look at every ethnic group through God's eyes. There should be no person on earth who we insist must jump through our arbitrary hoops in order to be saved and be our friends.

> Prejudice leads to missional paralysis. (...and, therefore, the problem of ingrown, comfortable churches that barely lift a finger to bring healing to the people who need it most.

> It took persecution to get the church thinking about Samaria and the Gentiles. If we don't confront our prejudices for certain people groups, God will.

> One last bit of speculation: The goal was to unify believers into one church under Jesus' apostles. We must be urgently serious about preserving our unity in Christ. We must confront offense, division, strife, and quarreling with the resources of the Spirit: repentance, tenderness, understanding, endurance, and peacemaking.