**Show and Share**

Acts 8

Last week we met this young man, ***Saul the Pharisee***, presiding over the execution of Stephen. Saul led a city-wide effort to round up all the members of this dangerous new cult. In his zeal to protect the Jewish Law and traditions, Saul saw Christianity as a serious threat and therefore set out to destroy it. We’ll learn more about Saul soon. But for now notice the result:

“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.” Acts 8:1

For some reason the apostles themselves were not targeted - maybe they were too famous for the Jewish leaders to threaten or arrest them. But the other believers were either arrested by Saul or running for their lives. Notice that they scattered throughout ***the regions of Judea and Samaria***.

“They were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria.” Acts 8:1

“You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, all Judea and Samaria…” Acts 1:8

This was ***the command and promise of Acts 1:8!*** Here we see it fulfilled. Unfortunately it wasn’t fulfilled through the obedience and boldness of the early church moving forward on mission - it happened through persecution.

There is **a somber warning** for us in this. If the American church does not become boldly obedient to share the gospel here and abroad, we should not be surprised if the Lord brings persecution or other forms of hardship to get us moving… The gospel of the kingdom WILL BE proclaimed in all nations. Will we be a part of completing the Great commission or not? Will we go willingly, joyfully, or will God have to force us out, as He did in Acts 8:1?

Our lesson today is simple: **wherever you go, share the good news!** We’ll talk about how to do that in a minute. But first, let’s look at the three parts of Acts 8 and draw some principles of how God moves His workers.

**God may move you through:**

1. **Situations**

“There arose on that day a great persecution… and they were all scattered.” Acts 8:1

This chapter shows us three ways God might move us. The first one is through situations - circumstances. This was not something the Christians had any control over. Suddenly the Jewish leadership, led by Saul the Pharisee, became much more aggressive in attacking followers of Jesus.

<https://christianhistoryinstitute.org/magazine/article/persecution-in-early-church-gallery>

Through the first three centuries there were **several severe times of persecution**. **Nero** was the first, starting in AD 64. He was the emperor who had both Peter and Paul executed. At the end of the first century the emperor **Domitian** demanded to be worshiped as a god and had many Jews and Christians executed who refused. In the second century **Trajan** enforced worship of the Roman gods and later that century **Marcus Aurelius** escalated persecution by teaching against Christianity and encouraging Romans to inform against their Christian neighbors and have them turned in for execution.

**Decius** in the middle of the 3rd century demanded that everyone offer at least one sacrifice to get a certificate showing they supported the empire. Requiring this throughout the Roman Empire produced the first persecution that spread all over Roman territory. Many Christians compromised and made the sacrifice but others refused and were killed.

At the turn of the fourth century **Diocletian** attempted to fully purge the Roman Empire of Christians - prohibiting worship, burning books and arresting pastors. Mercifully, Diocletian got sick and his successor was not as committed as he was to the project. Soon after, Constantine emerged as the new ruler and issued the edict of Milan in 313 that brought an end to the persecution of Christians.

So off and on the Lord allowed persecution to purify and redistribute the church. And the Lord uses all manner of **other circumstances** and situations in life to move us around:

* **Work** opportunities are probably the most common reason we relocate.
* **Kids** and family - seasons of life.
* **Illnesses and struggles** might prompt you to move closer to better medical care or closer to family or friends who can help.

God may move you through situations in life. Or God may use a direct invitation from someone.

**God may move you through:**

1. **Invitations**

“When the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John.” Acts 8:14

We need to remember how big a deal this was - for the gospel to be well received in **SAMARIA**. The early Christians were mostly Jewish - as certainly Peter and John were. Jews did not associate with Samaritans because Samaritans were half-Jews - Jews who had intermarried with non-Jews. In other words, they were sell-outs; compromisers; MUDBLOODS.

***The Jews felt righteous*** in their racist attitudes because they felt they were protecting the purity of the nation. But Jesus would have none of it. He spoke with the woman at the well in Samaria and offered her grace in the same way he did to everyone else.

Hearing from Philip that many people were responding to the gospel in Samaria, Peter and John went to check things out. They were invited by a fellow apostle and a group of new believers. They saw both an opportunity and a need - and went to pray with these new believers to be sure they received the Holy Spirit.

Many missions agencies operate on this principle of **INVITATION**. We did some evangelism with Revive Florida. They never start a work in a city unless they are invited by local pastors. I’m also working with a national organization called Christ Together that provides resources to city networks. They too will only go where they are invited.

I met **Jill Briscoe** on a staff retreat in North Carolina. Just 12 of us from a church and Jill Briscoe came to lead our staff retreat! Jill is a gifted author and speaker, married to Stuart a well known pastor and church leader. Jill told us that she and Stuart agreed with each other and with the Lord that if their schedule was open and an invitation came, they would say “Yes.” They didn’t want to prioritize big events or well paying events. They simply wanted to be available to the work God had for them.

Jill told a story in this regard, that early in their public ministry she got ***invited to speak at a church*** and, without tell him, took one of Stuart’s sermons and preached it at this gathering. Two weeks later Stuart pulled her aside and said, “Jill, when you went to that church recently, what did you share with them?” “Oh,” she replied, a little nervously, “That talk about such and such.”

“Yes,” he responded. “I know. When they invited me to speak this Sunday I chose the same message. About ten minutes in someone raised their hand and said, ‘Sorry Pastor, but we’ve heard this already from your wife.’ Now they think I steal your content. In future, when you take a speaking engagement, I trust you will come up with your own material?”

And that is how Jill Briscoe was prompted to ***start writing her own work***. I love their hearts to respond to any invitation - to go wherever the Lord leads them by invitation. Here is the third way the Lord moves us:

**God may move you through:**

1. **Directions**

“Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, ‘Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.’” Acts 8:26

Now, I’m not saying you’re likely to get a statement like this directly from an angel - or an audible voice from the Lord. Could happen - but not very common. The much more typical way the Lord guides us and directs us is through the **“still, small voice”** of the Holy Spirit, prompting us, nudging us in a certain direction.

Often ***the Spirit places someone on your heart*** - a friend, family member or neighbor - and prompts you to pray for them. As you pray, the Lord will often move you to do something - maybe write a note of encouragement, send a text, make a call or drop by for a visit.

That’s more what I mean by DIRECTION - ***the quiet but clear leading of the Lord in your life***. The Holy Spirit is very good at making Himself understood. For me it’s not a question of knowing what the Spirit wants me to do - it’s just a question of doing it (or not).

It’s important to notice **how the Lord’s leading works**. Look at this story with Philip. At first the direction is just about a place to go - nothing more. No word about what kind of work he would be doing, what kind of person he might meet. Just - take this road. Go south.

But once Philip followed that instruction, he got more instruction. There at the designated place he saw an entourage from Ethiopia.

**God may move you through:**

1. **Directions**

“And the Spirit said to Philip, ‘Go over and join this chariot.’ So Philip ran to him.” Acts 8:29-30

At first it was just - take this road south. Once Philip followed that instruction, he got much more specific direction - **go to THAT CHARIOT**. Then Philip hears the African official reading from the Old Testament and it’s pretty obvious from there - his job is to connect the dots from Isaiah to Jesus - which, as we’ve seen, is not very hard to do.

***Haven’t you experienced this?*** The Lord gives you a gentle nudge and you follow that leading. When you do, you see much more clearly what the opportunity is in front of you. Jason and I started meeting **every Thursday at Panera**. We need to meet every week - we have lots to talk about. But we sensed the Lord encouraging us to be more present in the community. Panera has this unlimited coffee thing and we often went there anyway. So we said, “Let’s meet there.”

By consistently going to the same place, we have started to ***get to know the employees and regulars there***. One of the more vocal regulars approached us one day to strike up a conversation. Since then we have chatted with him and his friends several times. One Thursday I felt led to get to Panera 20 minutes early to sit down with this gentleman and get to know him and his friends a little more. We continue to get to know him and his friends and are listening to the Lord’s leading about how to move that conversation along.

So that’s our first half today - three ways God moves us:

**God may move you through:**

1. Situations
2. Invitations
3. Directions

“Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word.” Acts 8:4

The Lord will use ***all kinds of factors to place us where He wants us*** to connect with people and point them to Jesus: life circumstances, political craziness, health trouble, personal relationships, connections, networking, and direct leading from the Spirit. But notice what these believers did as they were scattered. They didn’t fuss and pout that they weren’t in Jerusalem anymore. They didn’t whine and hide because people like Saul were chasing them. ***“They went about PREACHING THE WORD.”***

That’s our key lesson for today.

**Wherever you go, share the good news!**

* Communicate the grace of Jesus
* Demonstrate the love of Jesus

“Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word.” Acts 8:4

There have always been two sides to the evangelism coin - ***proclamation and demonstration***; communicating the gospel and demonstrating the life changing power of the gospel. SHOW and SHARE the good news of Jesus. These things go hand in hand. Good News and Good Deeds. Jesus didn’t just talk about the kingdom, he healed people, he cast out demons, he spent time with the poor, the outcast, the sinners. Jesus unapologetically proclaimed the kingdom of God but he also gave himself in service to the real needs of people.

This is our calling too - as it was in the early church - to both communicate and demonstrate the gospel. Let’s look at these two callings in Acts 8. ***The emphasis in Acts is on proclamation***, but the church never loses sight of the need to minister to the needs of people as well.

**Communicate the Grace of Jesus:**

“Went about preaching the word… proclaimed to them the Christ… preached the good news about the kingdom of God.” Acts 8:4,5,12

As they were scattered throughout the region of Judea and Samaria, ***these everyday believers became preachers***. The word, “preach” did not mean three point sermon at this point, it simply meant “announce,” or “proclaim.” They simply shared the message about Jesus they had heard.

How did the gospel spread throughout the Roman Empire in the first century? The apostles helped, for sure. But mostly the good news spread through normal Christians just ***talking about Jesus with the people they met***.

Sometimes this attracted a crowd. The first scene we get in Acts 8 is of ***Philip in the city of Samaria***. This was not Philip the apostle - Luke explicitly tells us the apostles were not among those who were scattered. This is **Philip the DEACON**, just mentioned in Acts 6, and because of this chapter he is known as **Philip the EVANGELIST**. So this was one of the everyday believers - one of the faithful followers of Jesus.

Philip went to Samaria - straight to the city - and began to preach about Jesus. Before long a crowd came together.

**Communicate the Grace of Jesus:**

“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.” Acts 8:6

Right away we see ***proclamation and demonstration*** going together. Philip starts by preaching about Jesus but as crowds come up, he continues the ministry of Jesus by driving out demons and healing the sick.

Then, from the crowds, Luke zooms in to focus on one member of the crowd, a magician named Simon. This gives us a clear window to the gospel message Philip preached.

**Communicate the Grace of Jesus:**

“Simon… amazed the people of Samaria, saying that he himself was somebody great.” Acts 8:9

Like magicians today, Simon gave himself **a grand and dramatic name** - “The power of God, Simon the Great.” And he was able to do some kinds of magic, almost certainly through connection with demons. Perhaps he was able to tell the future or have impossible insights into the lives of people. Some demons had superhuman strength and other abilities. Ancient sorcerors tried to communicate with dead people. Whatever he did, it was impressive enough that crowds of people in Samaria flocked to see him as “Simon the Great.”

But then the Magician heard about Jesus and was ***impressed by the POWER of JESUS’ Name***. Understanding power and the spirit realm, Simon wanted more of this. But Peter and John confronted his selfishness and confusion and Simon appeared to repent.

**Communicate the Grace of Jesus:**

“Your heart is not right before God. Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours… the intent of your heart may be forgiven.” Acts 8:21-22

***There is POWER in the name of Jesus***. The apostles consistently demonstrate this truth. But primarily, there is **GRACE and MERCY in the name of Jesus**. The central power of Jesus is to cleanse and wash away sin - even the sin of wanting to use Jesus for His power.

So here in Acts 8 we see Philip preaching to crowds in Samaria, then Peter and John come and help Philip ensure the new believers receive the Holy Spirit; and they confront the magician and make sure he understands the fullness of the grace and power of Jesus.

Then the scene changes as the Lord leads Philip to his next assignment, with an African government official. One of the key takeaways from this chapter is the indiscriminate grace of Jesus. ***The believers went and preached wherever the Lord sent them*** - even to Samaritans, even to Africans, even to a Eunuch who was, let’s just say, “damaged goods.”

**Communicate the Grace of Jesus:**

“Beginning with this Scripture, he told him the good news about Jesus.” Acts 8:35

In Samaria, where the people understood supernatural power, the Lord enabled Philip to do miraculous healings. With this Ethiopian official, who understood Scripture, Philip worked from the passage the man was reading in Isaiah to Jesus, the promised Messiah.

Go where the Lord sends you and meet people where they are. This is a key principle for us in evangelism.

* I was trained in **the CANNON METHOD** of evangelism. You learn a gospel presentation and load your cannon, waiting for someone to shoot it at. I learned the five questions to “share Jesus without fear,” and was trained to IGNORE how people answered. Just go on to the next question. 1) Do you have any spiritual belief… 2) To you, who is Jesus? 3) Do you believe in heaven and hell? 4) If you died today do you believe you’d go to heaven? 5) Why would God let you in?

These days the cannon method doesn’t work very often. Once in a while you get someone who is ready for the bridge illustration, but most of the time we need a different approach - a slower, more relational, more LISTENING approach. Think of it as **the FISHING METHOD**. You have to think about where you are, when you get there, the kind of people who are there and what kind of bait they’ll be interested in.

Philip met a religious minded, educated official who was - right then -reading the Bible. It was perfectly natural, therefore, to sit down with him and study that passage, showing how it pointed to Jesus (as every passage in the Bible does).

***Who has the Lord placed in YOUR LIFE right now?***

* What are they interested in?
* What is their religious background, if any?
* Do they know the Bible at all, or are they more about football or business or their grandkids…?

We need to become more skilled at ***meeting people WHERE THEY ARE***. Put the cannon away at first and get out your fishing pole. Fish can be skittish and jumpy. You have to be quiet and subtle with your movements. People are like that these days. You have to be gentle and sensitive and move slowly into spiritual conversation. A great book that is helping our leadership team in this area is called ***GOD SPACE***. If you want some help growing in this area, order that book and maybe go through it with a friend or with your small group.

And that transitions us to our final point for today.

 **Wherever you go, share the good news!**

* Communicate the grace of Jesus
* Demonstrate the love of Jesus

“For unclean spirits… came out of many of them, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed.” Acts 8:7

Our job is both to SHARE the good news of Jesus and to SHOW the love of Jesus. Both are necessary. ***Without love, people won’t listen***. But without words, people won’t understand. It is not loving to serve and care for people but never tell them about Jesus. That just makes them more comfortable on their way to hell. But it is also not loving to just preach and talk at people without caring for their current felt needs.

We need to recover **both sides of outreach** - evangelism and service; communication and demonstration of the gospel. The early church simply followed Jesus’ lead and did ministry the way they had seen Him do it. We just need to get back to doing life and ministry like Jesus! And that means, wherever you go, share the good news! Love people, serve them, and as you do, share about the Savior who changed your life.

For the crowds in Samaria, there were demons to cast out, illnesses to heal. As they heard the good news about Jesus and experienced His life-changing power, look at the result:

**Demonstrate the love of Jesus:**

“Many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. So there was much joy in that city.” Acts 8:7-8

When we get this balance right, the outcome is ***JOY and BLESSING***. This is a powerful, irresistible combination: love and truth. If you study the history of missions, you quickly see how effective missionaries bring both word and deed.

* ***The early church*** not only boldly preached the good news of Jesus, they took in the unwanted children of their Roman neighbors; they cared for people as they died of plague. When non-believers fled to save their own lives, Christians stayed and many gave up their lives. This apologetic of LOVE was among the reasons that Christianity grew exponentially in the first three centuries after Jesus.
* Fast forward to the ***Reformation***. Yes, it was focused on doctrine and recovering the gospel itself - justification by faith alone. But from the earliest days Luther understood that love for God necessarily required love for fellow man. He confronted landowners who confiscated property to fight their wars and instead insisted that property sales be distributed fairly to prioritize caring for orphans, widows and the disabled.
* ***George Mueller*** in England is rightly famous for caring for thousands of orphans and street children even as he preached for 63 years in the same church.
* Mueller inspired missionary ***Hudson Taylor*** to trust God completely to provide for him and his mission to China. Taylor was trained as a doctor and even as he distributed thousands of gospel tracts he also sought to minister to the sick and needy. By the end of his 51 years of ministry in China, Taylor had started 125 schools and 300 mission stations. More than any missionary before him, Hudson Taylor advocated INCARNATIONAL ministry - adopting the dress, language and practices of the locals in order to help them understand the good news of Jesus.
* Taylor inspired a young girl named ***Amy Carmichael*** to a life of missions - and Amy ended up in India, helping girls escape the gruesome world of Hindu temple prostitution.

All of these examples are simply the continuation of the ministry of Jesus and the ministry of the early church: the communication and demonstration of the love of Jesus. Here is our summary:

**Wherever you go, share the good news!**

* Communicate the grace of Jesus
* Demonstrate the love of Jesus

**Let’s take a minute now and pray**. Ask the Lord to give you one assignment for this week. Invite the Holy Spirit to show you a person or a need, an opportunity. How can you show the love of Jesus to someone this week? How can you connect with them to hear how they are and get to know their situation? As you SHOW the love of Jesus, how could you then begin to SHARE about His grace?

Trust the Holy Spirit to lead you and to empower you. WHEREVER you go this week, take the opportunities the Lord gives you to share the good news!

Pray - w/ instrumental