

# The Power of the Word

3-Year Bible Reading Plan

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**Bible Text:** Acts 8:4-8; 28-40  
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I don't know if you grasp the gravity of what you've just been singing, you just declared that all authority has been given to Jesus Christ. You do realize that there is a significant portion and a majority of this world that would argue with you about that? They would dialog, they would dispute, they would debate and say, "No, I don't see it that way. That's not the way I perceive things." And so today though we have declared that, we have to understand where do we get that idea? Where do we get the idea that all authority belongs to Jesus, just because some pastor somewhere said it? Because some creed was written? Because some song we sing? I can tell you how, Matthew 28, Jesus said, "All authority is mine." That means that what you've just declared, your source, your authority is this book right here. Now you may have a paper copy, it may be on your phone, it may be on your tablet, do you understand the weight and the significance of the words that are contained in this book? We can declare all authority is his, how about this verse, "We will overcome by the blood of the Lamb and the word of our testimony"? That sounds good, right? Here's the good news: it comes from Revelation 12. In other words, we know that not because we want it to be true but because it is written that it is true. So today as we've sung what we've sung and declared what we declared, we need to understand we don't say these things just because we like to hear them said, we declare them because the Lord has inspired them and given them to us and the question is do we actually believe what it says.

Let's pray.

*Lord, as we gather at this time, as we prepare to open your word, Lord, there's a lot written that we haven't even sung about today but all that we've sung about is somewhere, somehow written therein, Lord, help us to grasp, help us to realize the impact and ultimately the power of your word for our lives. Lord, I pray that these would not just be words that were scribbled down thousands of years ago that are suggestive or possibilities for our life, but help us, O God, to see today that the very source of our life, the power of our life comes and derives from these words. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.*

This morning, I want to encourage you, open your Bibles to the book of Acts, or turn on your Bibles to the book of Acts 8, and as you're turning to Acts 8, if you're a guest or

visitor with us this morning, we as a family of faith, we have been walking through a Bible reading program together that is typically a chapter a day, sometimes two chapters a day, and this last week on our Bible reading plan, we are in one of the most exciting action filled passages or sections in all of the Bible. In the first part of the book of Acts, this is the origination of, this is the manifestation, this is the beginning days of the early church of Jesus Christ and today we're going to look at a passage that was actually a part of our reading yesterday in Acts 8, and as today on the fifth Sunday as we celebrate kind of a family worship day, let me encourage you at some level as you as a family are walking through these passages, just to speak about them at some point during your day. Typically in our home, we speak about them at night and so last night I sat around and discussed with our children some of the elements and the issues and the people that are in Acts 8, but today as we look at the issue of the power of the word, we're going to look at a section in Acts 8 that doesn't get a lot of, shall we say, screen time. This is at the sorcerer confronted with the Gospel. This isn't the Ethiopian eunuch who is converted on the way back home. This isn't Stephen back in chapter 7 who is martyred, or Saul whose cloak was left at his feet. In fact, in verses 4 through 8 of Acts 8, it somewhat just appears like the minutes of a business meeting; it just kind of gives you the facts and maybe the bylines. As you read online, you know, this would be kind of the headlines of a news story.

Beginning in verse 4 of Acts 8 it says,

4 Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word. 5 Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them. 6 And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. 7 For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed. 8 And there was great joy in that city.

Now this is one of those passages of Scripture just kind of tucked between Stephen's martyrdom and the sorcerer and his confrontation with the Gospel, but what it shares with us today is the power of the word of God, the Scriptures that you hold in your hands, the ability and the power that they possess when applied to our lives.

The first thing that I want to address, though, is this, what I call the relationship to the Scriptures. Notice what it says in verse 4, they preached the word, but when you get to verse 5, it says they preached Christ unto them, and one of the things you'll see particularly as you're reading through the Gospels and throughout the New Testament is that the word of God, the Scriptures, is oftentimes used interchangeably with the Word, capital W, of God, Jesus Christ. For example, in John 1:1 it says, "In the beginning was the Word," capital W, "and the Word was with God, the Word was God," the Word was God and yet later we see here they preached the word and we see in 2 Timothy 3 that all Scripture is inspired by God, and this is what is significant for you and I today, that means that every word that we have contained in the Scriptures derived from, was inspired by and given to us by Jesus Christ, yet all those words in some capacity point

back to who Jesus is. So when it says they preached the word and then they preached Christ, you cannot separate the two and yet at the same time, if you'll allow me, I'm going to use the famous air quotes, what you and I possess in our hands today or on our phones or our tablets is actually an improvement of days gone by.

Now I did not say that having the Bible was more important than Jesus. I didn't say that. What I am saying is this: you and I don't have the privilege of being on the Sea of Galilee and hearing Jesus speak words, we don't have the opportunity to be there in Jerusalem as he sits with the scribes and the Pharisees and he confounds them with his wisdom at age 12, but what you and I do have access to is his inspired words throughout all of time. You understand when they preached the word back then, that didn't happen to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, they didn't have the book of Acts, that's what we know as the Old Testament. Yet there in verse 5 when it says they preached the word, they preached Christ so don't fall into this trap that now that we're New Testament believers we don't need the Old Testament anymore because the Old Testament points us as much to Christ as the New Testament confirms that he is who he claimed to be. But in John 16, Jesus makes this incredible statement during what we know as the farewell discourse, he says it's actually beneficial, it's expedient that he depart from us because the Holy Spirit will descend and live in and among us.

You know, you and I today have an incredible benefit that people in days past did not have. In fact, just a couple of hundred years ago, people did not have access to the Scriptures in their homes. You had to go to a public place of worship, oftentimes, to even see or to hear the Scriptures, and yet the average American home today has three Bibles in it. Now our home has about 70 so we kind of skew the average, but nonetheless, and that doesn't even include what you have on your phones and on your tablets and the means of electronics, but what we need to see today when we talk about the relationship of the word of God in totality to the Word of God, Jesus Christ, we have an incredible access to it, the question is what do we do with it.

I want you to notice their response here in verse 6, it says, "And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did." It says very clearly that they gave heed to, they actually were craving what he had to say. Let me ask you a proverbial question: when's the last time in our culture that you've actually craved anything? I mean, you so desired to have something? We have access to so much. There is accessibility to so many things whether it be information or just the things of life.

Let me take it a step further: when's the last time you craved food, physical nourishment? I didn't say you were hungry, I didn't say that you had some kind of stomach growling and such. You and I, we live in the South and this is how you know you're in the South, if you are having a meal with somebody and while you're eating you're talking about the next meal you're going to have. Is that not who we are? So, yes, we may be hungry and every now and then we may have skipped a meal but let's be honest, most of us, if not all of us, could skip the next meal and we'd still be okay, would we not? In fact, I'd say there's probably been only one time in my life that I've actually craved food. I mean, I

was so destitute to have physical nourishment, I would have given anything for a morsel of bread. It was years ago, in fact, I was a college student and I was serving alongside a ministry and one of the things they did with about a half dozen of us is we went through what they called a poverty simulation weekend, which meant for several days we as a team would live as homeless. We would be on the streets. We would have to get our own food. We'd have to get our own clothes. We had access to nothing of monetary value, relationships, communication. We were on our own to fend for ourselves just as if those who oftentimes find themselves in that predicament. It was a means of empathizing with those who were struggling to get by in this world and as we went through the assignments, we had to walk everywhere we went; we had to sleep outside in the cold together.

So we're going through all those things and at midday on Saturday, I mean, we were hungry and we discovered that there was actually a place that was a long ways away that handed out free peanut butter sandwiches at lunch on Saturday. You did notice I didn't mention jelly, right? Just peanut butter. We walked for one hour to get to that place and one of the students who is a lot smarter than I was figured out we actually burned more calories getting to the sandwich than it had in the sandwich so by the time nightfall came, we weren't just hungry, I can honestly tell you it's the only time in my life I have carved food; that I would do anything just for a bite of food.

We were running late, we were headed toward an engagement that had been set up for us, a ministry opportunity, and so the guy who was leading this weekend did something unusual, he actually picked us up in his truck because he didn't want the children to be disappointed at us being late. So he picked us up in the back of his truck, we're rolling down the street and, again, we did what we do in the South, one of the guys banged on the top of the cab. You know what that means, right? Stop. So he banged on the top of the cab, the truck came to a stop. He jumped out of the truck and when he came back in the truck it was one of the most beautiful sights I've ever seen in my life, he had about an 18 inch long piece of French bread, not in the wrapper, that had been run over by several cars and he said, "Look, food!" Can I be honest? It was the best bread I've ever had in my life. Now I had had bread with butter before, I never had bread with rubber pellets but I had it that day. We prayed over that food. We blessed that food and that food nourished us.

The reason I share that story with you is very rarely, if ever, does anybody in our culture find ourselves in that position where we're so desirous of something we can't think about anything else. You do understand here in verse 6 when it says that they gave heed to these things, it's saying they so craved the word of God they didn't want to pay attention to anything else.

I know what I'm about to ask is rhetorical but I'm going to ask it anyway: how many of us this week gave more time and attention to a political process than the word of God? We all stand guilty. We so crave to know what's going on, we so desire to see what's going to happen in the days ahead, and yet when's the last time we did that with the word of God? And the reason I bring that up is what we're about to read in verse 7, hopefully we would

look at this verse and say, "I want that for my life," and we say, "Why don't I experience that? Why is that not a part of my life?" Maybe it's because we haven't responded to the word of God the way they did in Acts 8. Maybe we don't have that craving, that hunger, that we will forsake everything else to experience it.

So what were the results? What happens here in verse 7? It says, "For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed." There are actually three things that we see take place in this passage. The first one is this: the spiritual world was altered, and what I mean by that is Ephesians 6, it says we don't fight against flesh and blood, we fight against principalities and powers and rulers of darkness. In fact, some years ago there was a fictional book written based on this idea and the title of it was called "This Present Darkness." It's an interesting read because it talks about the spiritual environment or spiritual warfare in a small community that just so happens to have a college in it. Does that relate to any of our lives? It talked about that the struggles, the addictions, the difficulties, that it was the spiritual reality behind the scenes that was simply being manifested in the physical. Yet you and I live in a world today where almost every issue, every problem, can be solved by a pill or a program but what did Jesus say in Matthew 17? He said, "These only come out by prayer and fasting," and yet here when they gave heed to the word of God it says those that were spiritually oppressed, those that were possessed, they were delivered. Then it takes it the next step further, it says that those that were sick and had palsies, those that were lame, they were healed.

You know, I think many of us are guilty of reading passages like this and saying, "Yeah, but that was then and it's just a different world today." Not so fast. Some years ago, I had the privilege of being what we would call the other side of the world, completely different continent, different context, and I was there to lead an evangelistic crusade but also to encourage and to teach the local pastors of which none of them had had any formal education, much less theological education. So when I arrived on the scene that first day with the pastors, there was a group of them that were all huddled up and they could not wait for me to hear this one pastor's story. Now honestly, these pastors didn't speak English, I didn't speak their language so we did have interpreters that were bouncing all the information back and forth, but when they finally cleared the scene and I was able to see this pastor, you've heard the expression they had a grin from ear-to-ear, this was literal, and I don't just mean the smile that this man had, there were scars on his face that went from the edge of his mouth all the way to his ear cavities on both sides, and so when he grinned, there was literally a smile across his entire face.

Over the course of the next few moments, he shared his story with me through the interpreter, that he had been a pastor for some years and lived in a community that was very much against Christianity and even violent toward Christians. He had been beat up on more than numerous occasions. He had been threatened and told if he ever preached Jesus again, they would take his life. He didn't stop, kind of like what we read in the book of Acts this week.

Finally one day he was walking down the sidewalk and a group of these individuals came behind him and they knocked him down and they made this statement to him, they said, "You will never speak the name of Jesus again," and they took what you and I would call a filet knife, fish filet knife, inserted it in his mouth and proceeded to do the damage. They thought that tearing his flesh from end-to-end would cease his opportunity to share the name of Jesus.

Now that's an incredible story because obviously he's still sharing but allow me to confess what took place in that moment, is I began to think like my good old Western materialistic self, I'm thinking, "Oh my! How much pain did you go through?" I started asking him about his recovery. I started asking him about the pain. I started asking him about the bleeding. I'm going through all this, I mean, I sounded like a representative from WebMD, I mean, I'm just going to town on this guy, and he just begins to shake his head and through his interpreter he's saying, "Pain? No pain. What are you talking about, pain?" And so I said, well, obviously there's a language barrier here, there's a miscommunication until he clarified his story. He said, "Sir, there was no pain." I said, "How was there no pain?" And then he shared with me, he said, "The week before I was attacked, I was reading through the Scriptures and in Proverbs 17:22 it says, 'A merry heart makes like medicine.'" He said, "I quoted that verse the whole time they attacked me, the whole time I was in the hospital. I never felt an ounce of pain." Hear me clearly, church, that story didn't take place 2,000 years ago in the book of Acts, that story took place a few years ago by a man who's still alive today.

So when we hear those stories, we think, "Wow, why is that not happening in my life?" Well, maybe it's because unlike this young man, we don't crave the word of God like he does. We would rather have something else and something of convenience. Oftentimes what we know as the Bible is just another app or maybe a paperweight on the dining room table, but when we crave it, when we heed it, we see the spiritual darkness lifted, we see the physical world altered, but more importantly, we see eternity forever changed.

We read through the book of Acts and we get to verse 28, there's a man that we commonly call the Ethiopian eunuch, it says in verse 28,

28 Was returning, and sitting in his chariot read [listen to this] Esaias the prophet. 29 Then the Spirit said unto Philip [the same man who spoke earlier in the chapter], Go near, and join thyself to this chariot. 30 And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest? 31 And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him. 32 The place of the scripture which he read was this, He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth: 33 In his humiliation his judgment was taken away: and who shall declare his generation? for his life is taken from the earth. 34 And the eunuch answered Philip, and said, I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man?

[Listen to verse 35] 35 Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus.

Today you and I can sit down and we can share all kinds of stories about all kinds of amazing things whether in the spiritual or the physical world that we've seen happen because and through the word of God, but the most powerful thing that happens through the word of God is when someone recognizes that they are lost, they recognize that they have sinned, and they ask Jesus to save them.

I can share with you, it was some years ago when I came to that conclusion. I found myself in a position where I realized I was lost, I realized I had sinned and I asked Jesus to forgive me and I asked Jesus to save me. Now let me ask you this question: how did I know how? Why did I know? Was I seated across the table from Jesus himself? No. Because the Bible says, "He that has the Son has life, he that does not have the Son does not have life," 1 John 5:12. You realize that I, and hopefully you, are staking our entire eternity based on what is said between the covers of this book, that Jesus Christ prophesied, revealed, lived, died, buried and rose and he makes it very simple: those who believe inherit eternal life, those who do not, do not.

So when we talk about the power of God, we can talk about stories of miraculous healings and incredible deliverance, but the most powerful demonstration of the word of God is when someone recognizes their sin and as according to Romans 10, they call on the name of the Lord and they are saved and they are forgiven. Maybe today is your day to experience that power.

Let's pray with our heads bowed and our eyes closed. Maybe you're that individual today for whatever reason, find yourself in this position where you recognize today maybe for the very first time your need for the person of Jesus Christ in your life and maybe you're asking how, what do I do? Romans 10 says, "Whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." Let me just encourage you to have a conversation with the Lord. You don't have to have this conversation out loud, in fact, you don't even have to say the same words I might say, but maybe your prayer, maybe your conversation would go a little something like this. "God, today I just want to admit and confess the obvious, I'm the problem. I'm the one who has sinned. I'm the one who has messed up, but I believe and I understand today that Jesus Christ is the answer. I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much that he was willing to be born on my behalf. I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much that he was willing to live a sinless life on my behalf. I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much he was willing to pay the price for my sin on the cross and three days later I believe he rose from the dead so I could have access to forgiveness and salvation through him and him alone. God, today I don't have all the answers to the world's problems but I do know that Jesus Christ is the only answer to my sin problem. So the best way I know how, I'm asking you to forgive me, I'm asking you to save me. I just want to turn my life over to you."

With our heads still bowed and our eyes still closed, maybe you're that person today, maybe today's the day you had that conversation with the Lord. We'd love to celebrate

and have a conversation with you. Whatever the decision may be, whatever the struggle, whatever the concern, we'd just love the opportunity to engage in a conversation.

*Lord, as we come to this time in our service, thank you. Thank you that you're a God of second chances. Thank you that you're a God of third and fourth and fifth and we've lost count of changes. Thank you that no matter where we've been, what we've done, there is nothing that can take us further than your outstretched hand of grace, mercy and forgiveness, and may this day potentially for the very first time, may we truly experience the power of your word. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.*

I'm going to ask you to stand with me as our team leads us. Any and all decisions, I'll be right here at the front.