

**Acts** | The Incendiary Fellowship  
*The Gospel In the City (or The Bad Samaritan)*  
Acts 8.1-25  
7.3.16

*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. Some devout men buried Stephen, and made loud lamentation over him. But Saul began ravaging the church, entering house after house, and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison.*

*Therefore, those who had been scattered went about preaching the word. Philip went down to the city of Samaria and began proclaiming Christ to them. 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. 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. So there was much rejoicing in that city.*

*Now there was a man named Simon, who formerly was practicing magic in the city and astonishing the people of Samaria, claiming to be someone great; and they all, from smallest to greatest, were giving attention to him, saying, "This man is what is called the Great Power of God." And they were giving him attention because he had for a long time astonished them with his magic arts. But when they believed Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike. 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.*

*Now when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent them Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. For He had not yet fallen upon any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they began laying their hands on them, and they were receiving the Holy Spirit.*

*Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was bestowed through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, saying, "Give this authority to me as well, so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! "You have no part or portion in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. "Therefore repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray the Lord that, if possible, the intention of your heart may be forgiven you. "For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bondage of iniquity." But Simon answered and said, "Pray to the Lord for me yourselves, so that nothing of what you have said may come upon me."*

We're looking at this New Testament book called The Acts of the Apostles. It's a book of sacred history. The church has always believed that it's both inspired by God AND it's written by a very able and careful historian, Luke... the physician who also wrote the Gospel that bears his name.

And IN this sequel to The Gospel According to Luke ("Luke Part 2") the message of what Jesus Christ achieved in His life, death and resurrection, that message...is like a CHARACTER in the

Book. It moves; it ACTS. It's like a fire. The Church is the "incendiary fellowship" – people kindled, people carrying a flame that ignites others. And that's what's happening - Life is on the move through this spreading message.

And NOW ...we've reached a saturation point: IN Jerusalem a lot of people have believed "the message of this Life" (as it was called [5.20]); some estimates say that as much as 1/10 – 1/3 of Jerusalem has joined this movement, this Vital Temple made of people, living stones (1 Peter 2.5) in Jerusalem but today the flame...breaks OUT.

Up to now the movement is homogenous, ONE ethnic group (the descendants of Abraham, Israelites) but today the Message will come to a new city, Samaria (home of the Bad Samaritans) and THIS will change things!

Today, the start of the catholic church, the church no longer isolated to ONE NATIONALITY...today, that begins. The Gospel (the Message) comes to a non-Jewish city and the multi-ethnic nature ever after a mark of the Church first appears. Let's look at 1) Pain With a Purpose 2) Visit From the Fire Marshals 3) Shame and the Bad Samaritan

The Pain with a Purpose was the tragedy we witnessed last week in the martyrdom of Stephen.

And immediately the church faces persecution and the church is scattered. The church whenever it's normal and healthy...whenever the Holy Spirit is IN the Temple –...whenever the church is healthy it wants to reproduce (like all other healthy organisms).

But this Jerusalem Church was not seeing the change in God's mission that Jesus Christ's finished task had initiated. They weren't yet with the outward thing!

So God moves them in THAT DIRECTION and they are scattered like seed ("a Sower went out to scatter his seed" – Jesus Christ's basic parable). God uses pain to MOVE them outward...and suddenly this deacon, Philip, scatters to the fringe...to the Samaritans.

It would have required a great deal of boldness for Philip to go to this ethnic group because they were long-standing enemies of the Jewish people.

They had broken away (seceded) from Jerusalem and made their own nation out of ten tribes...They were taken into exile by Assyria and then blended Assyrian, pagan religion with the books of Moses (they rejected the rest of the Hebrew Bible) and around 400BC they built their own temple on Mt. Gerizim (remember the dialog with Jesus Christ and the Samaritan women, "this mountain of that?" John 4).

But...Jesus Christ did say, "You WILL be My witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, SAMARIA and the ends of the earth..." so, Philip, the deacon, SCATTERED with the other Christians, did what Christians do: told people the Good News – these people happened to be Samaritans.

And this, as we saw last week, is so often God's method and IS IN FACT...His main method – the Body of Christ gets crucified, gets broken...and out of that broken-ness comes blessing. The Church is the Body of Christ and out of her being broken comes benefit to the world...and comes resurrection and LIFE!

It's a major MOTIF in the Bible, "the tender shoot out of parched ground" motif (Isa. 53.2) ... life comes out of death, honey comes from the carcass of the lion for Samson...Joseph is given up for dead and it saves the world (end of Genesis)... God turns pain and evil into good...death into LIFE. And, there's a man standing by...a fanatic, a terrorist who's RAGE and violent AMBITION will be turned to GOOD, "Saul began ravaging the church..." God will bring tenderness and life even out of THAT parched ground.

And then to note: God scatters His people on purpose (a sower went out to scatter his seed). We're not perfect...we're not even GOOD (Rom 3.10ff) but we HAVE something Good – we have GOOD News...and who doesn't like to tell good news? So... ask God, "Why have you put me here...in this neighborhood, this job, parched ground? Use me to spread life."

There was (v. 8) "much rejoicing in that City" when Good News came to town.

Well, a lot of the enemy Samaritans (bitter rivals with a long hostility for the Jews) a lot of them believed in Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God...and the Mother-Ship, the Church in Jerusalem and the Apostles...they're NEVER gonna believe that these unclean Samaritans have believed...

So, they send for the inspectors...the Fire Marshalls to come from Jerusalem and sign-off on this...and the Big Church sends Peter and John.

John (you may remember) was with Jesus Christ once and they were looking to stay at a hotel in Samaria but the Samaritans wouldn't let Jesus and His students stay there because they were headed for Jerusalem.

And then John (BIG spiritual swag) says to Jesus, "Ya' want us to call down FIRE from heaven to consume them?" And Jesus Christ said, "WHAT?! I didn't come to destroy lives, but to save lives (Luke 9.56) "

And NOW...in God's playfulness...He's sort of saying, "I WON'T send FIRE down to hurt them but I WILL send YOU down to HELP them!"

And when these inspectors (Peter and John) arrived and realized that the Samaritans had believed, they prayed for them and put hands on them and THE FIRE CAME DOWN... the Fire of LIFE! The Holy Spirit baptized them with FIRE...with New Life in some visible way!

Normally people receive the Holy Spirit at the moment they believe and that's the way it's always been in Jerusalem BUT THIS TIME God made a delay and a DISPLAY so the Fire Marshalls could witness FIRST-HAND that "YES! The Fire of LIFE fell from Heaven and ...even our ancient enemies have believed the Good News and received the LIFE of God! WE SAW IT WITH OUR OWN EYES!"

And, this is going to be crucial because it connects this new Samaritan Church with the Apostles' Church AND it prepares the way for the Message to move OUT... Abraham's people are going to bless the whole world and the Apostles are being prepared for that!

There was...however...one Samaritan...who didn't quite get it. He was a magician, a charlatan/con artist or even a man with some sort of paranormal powers...maybe he had access to spirits...but one way or the other...HE ASTONISHED PEOPLE...and people were in awe of this Simon...a home-town hero they called "the Great Power of God" ...And he himself claimed to be someone great... BUT NOW, in that City the Real Thing had arrived...a rival to Simon the magician that was infinitely greater...it really was THE great power of God in the City.

Philip wasn't great but the Name that Philip represented was "the Name above all names" and all the powers had to bow to that Name...spirits...illness and the messed-up human heart...People were believing in this Name and receiving the Government of God, the Kingdom where things are made whole.

Simon saw it and seems to have believed and rejoiced with the rest of the city...got baptized into the Body of Christ (the Church) and then followed Philip around being "constantly amazed". This was the real thing (he had astonished people but THIS was in a league of its own...it was real).

Then, when those Fire Marshalls came to certify this thing in Samaria (yuck!) and Simon saw that when John and Peter brought the Fire...laid hands on people and they received the Life, the Spirit of God... well, Simon saw a huge opportunity to reclaim his old credibility... HE COULD RECUPERATE HIS POSITION as the town practitioner! He could really cement his place and the astonisher...the power man who had the attention of the City...HE COULD BE A SUPER-HERO (and who doesn't wanna be that?!)

So...he offers to BUY the power from Peter...and Peter responds in what seems an EXTREME way... WHY IS THAT? ("Peter! Where's the sensitivity?")

Well, Simon was a man in control...whether he could control the spirits or just trick people into respecting him... Simon assumes that this Gospel-Life Way works on the same principles: "You

do for God or for the practitioners and then GOD DOES FOR YOU...you can USE money to get God and then YOU CAN USE GOD TO GET WHAT YOU REALLY WANT AND NEED"... (which in Simon's case was the applause of the PEOPLE!)

It's all about controlling people...that's what Karl Marx said about religion...and he did actually have a point... religion CAN be a means of control and that's what Simon wanted – HIS OLD RELIGION HAD DISAPPOINTED HIM (and he's exposed/ashamed because there's a NEW GAME IN TOWN!) but here's a new religion he can use to get what he really wanted which was to get people to like him, to be impressed, astonished...to tell him he was great!

And Peter says (so stern!): "May your money and YOU be in destruction...because you thought you could purchase the gift of God with money".

"You're right," says Peter..."religion IS about control but this is not religion (in that way) – this is about giving UP control (or the illusion that we're in control!) This is (in that way) the opposite of religion – in religion you do stuff or buy stuff or make commitments/sacrifices in order to GET WHAT YOU REALLY WANT – power, blessing, health, control, appreciation, acclaim, applause, security, safety, significance.

People MAY go to the gym (not that there's anything wrong with that!) to look good so people will like them – because they want to be liked... or will sacrifice to have the kind of car that people admire SO THAT I WILL BE ADMIRERED – because admiration is what I really want! It's "the idol under the idol" (Powlison).

But Peter says, "This that we have...and was offered to you for FREE...can't be bought with money...it was purchased FOR US...with blood: the obedient life, sacrificial death and victorious resurrection of Jesus Christ – YOU HAVE INSULTED and BELITTLED the death of God's Son...How is it to mock the death of someone's child?

Don't you see, Simon, you're being offered what YOU REALLY CRAVE – you want approval and applause and significance...BUT PEOPLE CAN'T GIVE IT in the quantity that we want it and need it...that can only come from God.

The acclaim of people gave you a little rush of importance and self-esteem and greatness... but it will always let you down...what you really want, you could NEVER buy ...WHAT WE REALLY WANT IS FOR GOD TO LOVE US, to recognize and acknowledge us (the Applause of Heaven!)

And God in the Gospel is saying to us, "I have come to You to give you My very Self...I stoop to you...in Jesus Christ, I bleed for you...in Him I live, die and RISE for you... I FREELY offer what you can never control...what people's approval can't give...what your super excellent vacation can't give...what a raise at work can't provide.

All those things will fail you and leave you ashamed and disappointed...and gasping for life and breath...they all become TOXIC when you try to make them ultimate...

“Come,” says Jesus Christ...to Simon...to the Samaritans to YOU and to me..., “aren’t you tired of trying to prove it...trying to buy it...I have paid the price...COME unto Me and rest.”