

Philip, Samaria and the Gospel

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[0 : 0 0] This is the AM service on July the 12th 1998 The preacher is Phil Muleman His sermon is entitled Philip, Samaria and the Gospel and is from Acts chapter 8 verses 4 to 25 You may like to open your Bibles to page 892 at Acts chapter 8 Let's bow our heads for a word of prayer Our gracious God we thank you for your word that it feeds us and Lord we pray now that you would open our hearts and our minds to what it has to say and help us to understand this difficult passage in Jesus name we pray Amen There's been quite a deal of concern by many people about the controversy that one nation is causing or has caused in this country and this has no doubt created a bit of uncertainty about what the future holds for some people

Well after last week's reading and sermon the church in Jerusalem is in all sorts of trouble it seems We have seen how Stephen has become the first Christian martyr being stoned to death for preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ and he also accused the religious authorities of killing the righteous one that is Jesus Christ As a result of this attack the church now comes under great persecution and all the Christians except the apostles are forced to flee Jerusalem You'd think that this would be the end of the church after its scattering wouldn't you?

After all the church is only in its infancy stages but it's not although God has scattered these people into the hills of Judea we don't sense that they went complaining about losing their families, their homes or their jobs but what we do see here is that after being scattered they went about preaching the word they went on preaching the gospel they did this because they were encouraged by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in their lives God showed them that in reality they were just passing through this world we too are aliens and strangers here in this world and we have to stop living as though this is all there is the Jerusalem believers were also inspired by Stephen's wonderful testimony in defence of the gospel before he was stoned to death then they were instructed by the Lord to move out of Jerusalem so they had a clear mandate to preach the word to tell the people the good news of God and in the same way you and I who have come to know Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour also have a message of hope in a world without hope the disciples preached the word everywhere they went around heralding the word about Jesus

Jesus the Messiah Jesus the Christ they used the prophets of the Old Testament they used their own personal experiences and they were using signs and miracles to prove their claim that Jesus was indeed the Messiah well Luke, the author of Acts introduces us to this man Philip in chapter 8 that went down to the city of Samaria and began proclaiming Christ to them but first a little of the background about Philip in Acts chapter 6 apart from having a great name we learn that Philip was one of the seven men chosen to serve food to the Hellenistic Jewish widows in Jerusalem in other words Philip was going to serve food Philip was a waiter Philip himself was also a Greek speaking Jew or a Hellenistic Jew and he is a convert to the Christian faith and we are told in chapter 6 that he was a man of good reputation and full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom and Philip becomes the father or became the father of four daughters all of whom had the gift of prophecy and we learn that in Acts chapter 21 so you could say that Philip seemed like a pretty normal guy living a normal life with the knowledge of Jesus Christ as his Lord and Saviour now that the church in Jerusalem has been persecuted and scattered

Luke tells us how God was now going to use Philip the waiter to preach the good news the gospel of Jesus Christ in Samaria now the history of Israel is long and involved and I can hardly do any justice to it here this morning but it's important for us to understand just a little bit about the history of Israel to help us understand this passage now if Joanne would mind just turning on the map I know it's a bit hard to see but she's going to point her pen in the various areas when I get to them Israel had been divided into three regions Galilee in the north which is up the top Samaria in the middle and Judea in the south now the city of Samaria in the region of Samaria so just look up there yep had been the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel in the days of the divided kingdom before it was conquered by the Assyrians in 722 BC now part of the history of Israel is that there was lots of wars and fighting going on well during this particular war in 700 years before Christ the Assyrian king took many captives leaving only the poorest people in the land and resettling it with foreigners now these foreigners intermarried with the Jews who were left and the mixed race became known as the Samaritans and that was up in the Samaria area now the Samaritans were considered half-breeds by the pure Jews or the Aramaic

[6 : 59] Aramaic speaking Jews who were in Jerusalem and they were in the southern kingdom of Judah and between the Samaritans and the Aramaic speaking Jews there was this intense hatred between the two groups they just did not get on now the Samaritans had their own temple in their city and the Jews the Aramaic speaking Jews had their own temple in Jerusalem as well now the Samaritans developed their own theology they pretty much along the similar sort of lines they believed there was one God and Moses was his prophet they had the Pentateuch or the first five books of the Old Testament was their Bible and they believe it was his written revelation God's written revelation and a place called Mount Gerizim I don't think it's on that map was appointed was the appointed place for sacrifice for the Samaritan Jews now there was the day of judgment and reward for the Samaritans they believed in that and they also believed that a Messiah was coming now

I think you can turn it off now thanks now at the time of Jesus hostility still existed between the Jews and the Samaritans it was so bad that Jews would go to any lengths to avoid contact with the Samaritans even to the extent of adding miles to their journey when they wanted when they wanted to go up to Galilee because they would not pass through Samaria they just hated the Samaritans that much but when Jesus was on earth he was willing to heal a Samaritan leper as we read this morning in Luke chapter 17 and Jesus also tells that wonderful story about the good Samaritan now I don't think that we today can appreciate the heading or the title of that story the good Samaritan for in the Jews eyes of course there was no such thing as a good Samaritan and then there was the incident in John chapter 4 with the woman at the well

Jesus unlike the other Jews did not deliberately avoid Samaria he went right into the town and he asked a half-breed woman for a drink of water probably one of the worst things you could do is ask talk to a Samaritan and worse than that is talk to a Samaritan woman which was just unthought of in those times well at the time of Philip's visit to the city of Samaria it was a city filled with religious folk who were influenced by other forms of worship by Roman gods by sorcery and by some followers of Jesus Christ we know from the passage in John 4 that many Samaritans from that city believed in Jesus because of the Samaritan woman's testimony although the Jews refused to have any contact with the Samaritan people

God loved them God loved even the Samaritans and now was the right time to move in and call out a people for his namesake now Jesus said to the apostles in Jerusalem before he ascended to heaven in Acts chapter 1 verse 8 he gives this proclamation a prophecy of what his apostles will do and he says in Acts chapter 1 verse 8 you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth Philip's proclamation of the gospel in Samaria as he leaves Jerusalem and goes down to Samaria is the beginning of the fulfillment of these words well Philip began his testimony to the Samaritans by proclaiming to them the Messiah that is proclaiming to them Jesus Christ and three things happened as a result first there was unity verse 6 of chapter 8 says the crowds with one accord listened eagerly to what was said by Philip second there was confirmed the truth that Jesus was the resurrected Messiah by the signs which Philip did in casting out demons in this demon oppressed society and by his healing of the paralysed and the lame

Philip by the Holy Spirit reached out to the Samaritans where they were hurting most he reached out and third in verse 8 we read that there was great joy in that city after all the things that he did there was great joy resulting from the teaching and from the physical the spiritual and the emotional healing which Philip brought to Samaria a preacher by the name of Ron Ritchie tells the story about the time he and his wife and another couple offered some counselling to a Jewish couple who were having marriage difficulties he says and I quote we all spent an evening with them sharing with them and praying for them a couple of months later the four of us got an invitation to this family's Passover dinner I had never been to such a dinner before and I wondered how I should act at the dinner

[13 : 02] I noticed an empty chair and asked if they were expecting somebody else yes they told me we're expecting Elijah as I went through the various functions of the Passover meal I asked several questions about the symbolism of what they were doing a couple of times I said that doesn't sound right to me don't you know that your Bible says that I only would go on and explain and he went on to explain from the Old Testament the significance of what they were doing and he goes on to say this led into my teaching them for an hour and a half when I finished the mother said why aren't you our rabbi I never heard anything like this what I'm trying to do here is illustrate normal I'm not sure normal authentic Christianity as Christians we just have to be available and show up you think that you are going to a meal but God is preparing a feast for you he wants each one of us as Christians to feed people with the truth of Jesus the Christ the Messiah the resurrected

Lord let's look again at Philip he was a table waiter a mere table waiter but he allowed God to use him in fact he couldn't help but proclaim Jesus as Lord and Saviour well Luke now moves from Philip's dealing with a multitude of Samaritans to his encounter with perhaps one of Samaria's leading citizens and I'm talking about Simon the magician here in verses 9 through to 13 Simon had previously practiced magic in the city and in doing so he had amazed the people he had also drawn attention to himself saying that he was someone great and the crowd's response is to think that yes he is someone great but when we contrast

Simon to Philip there are a couple of notable differences Philip's work of signs and wonders aren't magic and secondly they seek not to draw attention to himself Philip comes proclaiming Jesus Christ and the good news about the kingdom of God as we're told in these verses he doesn't claim to be anyone great as Simon did and the result of Philip's ministry people are eternally saved the result of Simon's magic well apart from drawing attention to himself is to leave people momentarily astonished whenever the gospel of Jesus Christ is proclaimed the enemy brings out his counterfeit versions but scripture has much insight on how to spot a counterfeit prophet i'd encourage you to go and read deuteronomy chapter 13 verses 1 to 5 about how we might be able to find such a person basically it's reminding us to think about the laws and the commandments that god has given us to love the lord your god and to serve him not to serve yourselves we're here to serve god and scripture goes on and it gives many more warnings really about people who do not serve god so when people tell you they believe in jesus here's a good question to ask sometimes when someone says they believe in jesus ask which jesus philip preached jesus christ and the good news about the kingdom of god as a result many people believe philip's words of witness and people were baptized and simon the sorcerer was right there in line with others with the others that were lining up for baptism being baptized and simon we read continued on with philip observing the signs and wonders and he was amazed the question is though did simon become a real believer or was he looking for a new act for his magic show when people tell me they believe in jesus i sometimes ask which one there are so many who claim to believe in jesus even mormons jehovah's witnesses and muslims believe in jesus but there is only one true jesus the resurrected lord god's son who is revealed to us in the scriptures and whom the scriptures point to as we look at the old testament so god's beautiful plan to use philip the waiter to be his witnesses to the samaritans is right on schedule the news of this is carried now to jerusalem and the apostles peter and john are sent on around about a forty mile journey sent down to see what's going on in this half-breeds town the samaritan the town in samaria and we read in verses fourteen to seventeen about the situation now when the apostles at jerusalem heard that samaria had accepted the word of god they sent peter and john to them the two went down and prayed for them that they might receive the holy spirit for as yet the spirit had not come upon any of them they had only been baptized in the name of the lord jesus then peter and john laid their hands on them and they received the holy spirit there are several very important things happening here but

one of the most important is what is not happening to the samaritans following their conversion and baptism philip knew that the holy spirit was supposed to come upon all who confessed jesus christ as lord as the spirit came upon the believing jews at pentecost and when pentecost happened it was a once off experience yet he gave no instructions to the samaritans about the holy spirit so they did not seek him why had the holy spirit not fallen yet upon the samaritans i want to give four reasons first we read that peter and john went to samaria to pray for the samaritans to receive the holy spirit the samaritans in verse 16 had only been baptized in the name of the lord jesus second the apostles came down so that they could establish the authority of the lord's apostles in samaria there were no apostles and from god's perspective these jerusalem apostles we're talking here at this particular moment about peter and john these jerusalem apostles were not jews but apostles of jesus christ who were laying the foundations of the church third i think that the holy spirit was held back because the lord did not want to have two separate churches one in samaria and one in jerusalem and that leads us to the fourth reason why the holy spirit had not fallen upon the samaritans because god wanted to take two separate peoples the samaritans and the jews and unite them into one one of jesus greatest gifts to us is that is that he takes all of us samaritan jew gentile male female black white adult and child and he makes us one in christ when i worked at my previous parish all saints in clayton we had a large multicultural parish 35 percent of the congregation was sri lankan now in sri lanka as some of you may be aware there has been a lot of fighting over the years between two cultures or two people there that is the tamil people and the singalese people they live in the same country yet have different ethnic backgrounds the two cultures hate each other and it has been a tragic thing to hear about the difficulties and the murders and the persecution that is going on between both the races at all saints in clayton there are tamils and singalese christians worshipping together and it's a great sight to see and they are all aware of the tensions in their own country even of the tensions that they have between their different they're just their different cultures knowing their different backgrounds they are aware of all the tensions in their country and themselves but as christians they are united together and it's been fascinating to see how their unity in christ has managed to bring the ethnic differences together for the sake of the gospel and it was probably highlighted best of all for me last year when a group of tamils and singalese sang together at our local christmas carols in the park we sang before a crowd of a couple of thousand people or they did i should say their unity

was brought about by their eagerness to serve the lord as jesus christ and making him known and thinking back on that day for me was a very rewarding experience maybe the singing wasn't the best or loud enough for everyone gathered to hear but the significance and the symbolism of what they were doing was to show that jesus christ through his holy spirit had brought about a oneness among these warring peoples so how could these two opposing peoples that let's go back to the jews and the samaritans how could these two opposing peoples become one in christ god's answer was to withhold the holy spirit and send the apostles to samaria to pray for and lay hands on these once hated half-breeds recognizing the apostles the samaritans recognizing the apostles to be the servants of jesus the messiah the samaritans then experience what paul later writes about in one corinthians chapter 12 he says for by one spirit we were all baptized into one body whether jews or greeks whether slaves or free and we were all made to drink of one spirit now we come to the final question was simon a true believer for will the real simon please stand up and we can read about that in verses 18 to 24 let me say that christians i think are allowed to examine the fruits of each other's lives a person may say for example that they're an apple tree and for three seasons or however long it takes for an apple tree to bear fruit you may not be able to tell if they're telling the truth or not but come harvest time there had better be apples on that tree simon the sorcerer was saying in effect that he was an apple tree he was an apple tree but peter saw right through this and he says in effect don't tell me you're an apple tree i see the intent of your heart through the power of the holy spirit may you and your money perish for trying to buy the holy spirit your heart is filled with wickedness you need to pray that god will forgive your evil heart because you're filled with bitterness and held in bondage you want to be somebody you're seeking the holy spirit as an act for your magic show well we're not in the business we're not in show business we're trying to bring the jews and the samaritans together in christ and all you can think of is what's in it for you simon's response to that is to pray for me he asks peter and john pray for me the text doesn't tell us what happened to simon after this incident maybe he had genuine repentance perhaps he didn't we don't know he seemed more concerned though to escape punish to escape punishment than he was to turn to the lord in other words simon just wanted something for himself in the here and now he didn't want eternal salvation if we genuinely turn away from our sin friends then we don't need

[27 : 26] someone to pray for us whilst that is a good thing to do i think it is good to pray with other christians and to have christians pray for you we also need to be praying ourselves and asking god to remove our wickedness and our bitterness we have many such people among us too in our own time who ask for prayer but are unwilling to pray for themselves they cannot they cannot stay disguised forever because sooner or later they will have to produce the fruit they claim they can produce friends we are living in the age of the spirit the holy spirit has come and we live in that age now and we are empowered by him to be witnesses of jesus christ that means that the spirit will scatter us into all kinds of places to talk about jesus here in doncaster and way beyond its boundaries it doesn't matter who we are god uses all kinds of people he even uses waiters in greek costumes speaking hebrew with a funny greek accent he wants each one of us as christians followers of the lord jesus christ to be available to be sensitive to the holy spirit and to let him use each one of us to his honor and glory and friends as we do this know that while you are doing this that there is an enemy out there who is trying to destroy you remember that there are false so-called believers all around you but don't worry about them don't worry about them god will point them out to you he will point them out in time keep witnessing so that men and women will come to know jesus christ as their lord and savior amen