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**Is Moved and Directed by the Spirit to Share the Gospel
of Christ
Acts Chapter 8**

We are in Acts Chapter Eight. What I would like to do tonight is to throw it out to you. If you were to only have the first 7 chapters of the Book of Acts, you would have the description of what the church is really all about. What would you know about the church? What would a church be? We have looked at Chapters 1 through 7. The church is now being led by the Spirit. Led by the Spirit. Pretty clear. Pretty clear, right from the very start, is it not? “Wait. Do not do anything.” Chapter One, wait until the Spirit of God comes. Then, Chapter Two, wait until the empowerment of the Spirit of God comes and things begin to move. Things begin to happen. Lives begin to change. 3,000 people accepting Christ on that day is a magnificent testimony. But is that it? *(audience speaks)* We are to be supporters of the truth. Supporters of the truth. God has established the

church to guard and protect the truth. It is the Spirit of God who bears witness to the truth; but it is the church that is, as Paul was saying to Timothy, the pillar of the truth.

(I Timothy 3:15) “...I write so that you can know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth.”

We see those stands being taken quite powerfully, especially with Ananias and Sapphira. The Holy Spirit brings us the Word which guides us. *(audience speaks)* I sorry? Who brings us to the gospel's word which guides us? Yes, the Holy Spirit. You see the power of the gospel in Acts and how it really begins to pull people together. In fact, our one commonality is that we believe in the name of Jesus Christ. The other word we heard from the Book of Acts is witnesses. It says: “you will be My witnesses.” You should be My witnesses, which is not only the fact that somebody is speaking the truth, but also that he is willing to go the distance for it. In chapter 7, we have Stephen, the

martyr. It reveals to us that the church really should be led by those who are willing to go the distance. If they are not willing to go the distance, they should not be leading the church. I think Acts chapter 7 really conveys that. Is there anything else that we know about the church from Acts Chapters One through Seven? (*Audience speaks*) You see, the confidence of the church and the authority of the church are that we stand in the name of Jesus Christ. It is Christ in us. In fact, the evidence that the Spirit of God is in us is that we are confident. If there is no confidence in the things that we say, it is actually revealing that we are not walking in the Spirit. In almost every case where you see the Spirit of God filling these men, there is great boldness on behalf of the gospel. It is not boldness on behalf of themselves, but it is boldness in the proclamation of what the truth is. What is interesting is that by the time we come to chapter 7, we really do not have the structure of the church. It still feels fluid. Even so, we have a bare-bones structure in the sense that we have managers. The text calls them deacons. They come in and serve those who are

in need. But we still do not really have what we would later perceive as the overseers and the pastor of the church. That will be established as we continue in Acts. But before then, some intense things are about to happen.

In Chapter 8, we are going to go through some intense tribulation. I never believe that Scripture understates anything. Therefore, when Scripture says that something is quite intense, guess what? It is quite intense. It is quite intense, probably far more so than we could imagine. As you come to Acts Chapter 8, we know that there is a great persecution--not just a persecution, but a great persecution--that arises. If I were to give you an overview of Acts Chapter 8, there are three particular circumstances that are listed within this chapter. The first is the beginning of the persecution of the church. The second is that evangelism then spreads to Samaria. God uses Philip again both to speak and to perform great wonders. Miracles happen through the hand of Philip, and God uses him in the region of Samaria. Eventually, they come in contact with a

guy by the name of Simon who is a magician. We have the great persecution. We then move to Samaria, a different genre, a different setting. That setting has a man who is pretty powerful in this particular region of Samaria, Simon the magician. A lot of people are listening to him. He draws a big crowd. He is quite popular, and Philip will interfere with that. We will then close with the Ethiopian eunuch and the testimony that is given to him. In every one of those circumstances, God is telling us something. God is telling the church something. He is going to reveal to us that the Holy Spirit is the One who is directing the show. The Holy Spirit is the One who is moving the hearts. You need to understand this.

Some of us were talking earlier about someone's house and some of the problems that they are having as well as the circumstances that arise within our lives. When God says that He is causing all things to work together for good, guess what? He is not just talking about the metaphysical. He is talking about the physical as well. He is talking about

everything that touches our lives. God is orchestrating all these things for our good. More specifically, what is the main focus of the church? This is a rhetorical question. I am going to answer. It is to proclaim the name of Jesus because there is no salvation in any other. There is no other name. The truth is Jesus with the Spirit of truth dwelling within us, and God has called the church to proclaim His Name.

In Chapter One, you shall be My witnesses. You are going to tell people about Me. That is what is going to transform people because when you begin to proclaim that message, the gospel, the good news of My Son, Jesus Christ, the Spirit of My Son will come upon those who are listening. I will begin to change them one by one. It is both fantastic and amazing that people can actually change. I remember taking a social psych class where we were taught that the most difficult changes in the human psyche are called attitudinal changes. This involves the changing of people's attitudes towards things. Attitudes of bias and bigotry are

very difficult to change. Why? If a person has a certain attitude towards something, unless something catastrophic happens or unless something divine happens, people will more than likely not change. What we are going to see is the power of the Spirit of God to change the hearts of men and that God is calling the church to do a special work.

What we are going to see specifically in Chapter 8 is that it is not the design of the church to make the decisions on how God will use it. This is very interesting because we live in a time when, even though we know that God wants to be in control, we want to be in control. That means that we want to orchestrate how we are going to do ministry. I think that this is one of the great fallacies of the church today. We see what perhaps looks like a successful ministry. Then someone writes a book about it, the book is widely circulated and read, and everybody imitates whatever that original church did. What they do not comprehend is that maybe that Lord had a specific ministry for that church just

like He has a specific ministry for you. It is a big misnomer when everybody tries to emulate somebody who seems to be successful in ministry; yet God never called you to be like anybody else. I mean, there is no way that Moses was anything like David. There is no way that David was anything like Daniel. You can go through the entire list of those whom God ordained and chose throughout Scripture, and you will find that each one's ministry was unique. Ruth's ministry was quite unique but different from Esther's. Every person has a unique ministry. So, too, every church will be called to have a unique ministry even though it will be proclaiming the same name, the name of Jesus Christ. How will we know how God will move us? What we are going to see within the passages is that the Spirit of God is fully capable of moving the church in any way that He wants in order to get the church to do exactly what He wants. Once again, what He wants is that we proclaim the name of Jesus.

As we look in Acts Chapter 8, we are going to begin by seeing how God works through great persecution. People are having to deal with not only grief, but they are having to deal with abuse. People are having to deal with loss in almost every form of their life. You have to take a step back and ask: "how could anything good come out of this?" It is like asking: "how could anything good come out of Nazareth?" As we look at the passage, what we are going to be surprised about is how God is using this. I want to remind you that the church in Jerusalem is getting quite hefty. We know that 3,000 men plus their families were saved at Pentecost. We know that it later grew to 5,000. The church is getting quite large. It is bursting at the seams. They are even having internal problems--dealing with the widows of Hellenistic Jews. We know that God had called the church to be the guardian of the truth but also to be witnesses.

Now if you go back to Acts 1:8, He tells us what He wanted them to do. He says that they are to be My witnesses; but

then He adds, first in Jerusalem, then in Judea, and Samaria, and even the uttermost parts of the earth. That is basically the outline of the Book of Acts. As you come to chapter 8, what we are going to see is that they are going to go now into Judea and into Samaria. This is phase two of God's ministry. What is strange to us is how God does it. I think it is important that you and I realize that when something difficult comes into your life or something hard happens in your life, the first response is often “Why is this happening to me?” What we should be doing is turning to God and asking, “How are You wanting to proclaim Your name through this?” That is the whole purpose for whatever is happening. Whatever is happening to the church is for the purpose of the name of God being proclaimed. If you look with me in verse 1,

(Acts 8:1a) “Saul was in hearty agreement with putting him (that is Stephen) to death...”

We watched the death of Stephen in Chapter 7.

(Acts 8:1b) “...And on that day a great persecution arose against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.”

I often hear people say, “Well, you know, if God wants me to go to Africa, how would I know?” I do not think you will miss that boat. I think He will get you there. If God wanted the church to go into Judea and Samaria, guess what happened? They went to Judea and Samaria.

(Acts 8:2) “Some devout men buried Stephen, and made loud lamentation over him.”

The reason why Scripture is interjecting that is to let us know that they are dealing with grief. They are dealing with grief. They are grief-stricken in this. A beloved brother has died, and they watched him suffer even after he had made his great proclamation. They loved him. It is a fact that you are going to have hardships. You are going to have difficulty. I do not believe like some people that you should necessarily celebrate at funerals. I could be all wrong in

this. If the Lord has touched your heart to celebrate and be thankful that the deceased is in heaven, go ahead. But there is nothing wrong with sorrowing. We do not grieve as those who have no hope.

(I Thessalonians 4:13) “But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope.”

You know, I miss these people. I also know that I will see them again; even so, I am still separated from them now. For me not to have feelings of grief for them would be inappropriate. However, beyond that realm, we know that through that grief, God is working to bring about His master plan of people coming to know Him. We know that is happening. It is the moving of God's hand in spite of the grief. Let us look at verse 3.

(Acts 8:3) “But Saul began ravaging the church, entering house after house, and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison.”

You are looking at some intense abuse. It represents a great loss of all kinds of things. He would put them in prison. You think, “Well, all is lost and there goes the church.” But what does the very next verse say? Read what it says.

(Acts 8:4) “Therefore, those who had been scattered, went about preaching the word.”

Do you see the text? Had they not been scattered, the word of God would not have been scattered. It is like the sowing of seed, isn't it?

(Acts 8:4) “Therefore, those who had been scattered, went about preaching the word.”

There is an interesting parallel to this if you look with me in Acts chapter 11. Drop on down to verse 19.

(Acts 11:19) “So then those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose in connection with Stephen made their way to Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except to Jews alone.”

Stephen in this verse is the one we read about in chapter 7. In this particular passage, verse 20, some from Cyprus and Cyrene go into Antioch and begin to witness to the Greeks. This is the beginning of the gentile outreach in this region. It will be the beginning of the establishment of the first gentile church, the church at Antioch. That is pretty wild, isn't it? That church would not have been established had those Jews not been scattered from their homes. Who initiated that scattering? Who was that again? That was Saul. Right? Saul will be ordained from the church at Antioch in Acts 13. Whether Saul realized it or not, it is the Gentile church that he helped establish by virtue of scattering and tormenting the Believers. Because they went out and began to spread the word of God, a church was founded. God's hand is in all these things. One of the things that Acts chapter 8 is going to demonstrate is that it is the Spirit of God Who is leading and directing the church. It is the Spirit of God Who is moving to proclaim the gospel. It is the Spirit of God Who does this. The Spirit of God is the One who is directing the church. We are also going to see that these happenings are

not things that man can fabricate or duplicate. I want you to catch this because it is going to be repeated in each instance. These things are the work of the Holy Spirit. You cannot fabricate the work of the Holy Spirit. He does a very unique work, and He is the One who begins to move in the hearts of men. That is why it is so important to be ready.

(I Peter 3:15) “but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to every man who asks you to give an account for the hope that is within you, yet with gentleness and reverence,”

It is God's way of saying, “I will take care of where you go. I will take care of how you get there. I will take care of the doors that open. If your heart is right, I will send people to you. I will have them knocking on your door. You will try to send them away. They will not go away.” God is going to make sure that you are going to be a testimony, but God is not going to send anybody to you if your heart is not ready, if you are not prepared in this. The moving of the Spirit is also the Spirit preparing the hearts that are right. That is why

within the body of Christ our hearts have to be right. When our hearts are right, God is moving; and we are going to be able to minister to people all around us. Look. We are not trying to build big edifices any more than the church of Jerusalem was trying to build big edifices. We are trying to reach out into our community. We want you to lead people to Christ. If they go to another church, fine. We just want to see you touching lives and leading people to Christ. As you see this beginning to happen, you are going, wow! Who would have expected that those who would be scattered would begin to preach the word of God?

Then Acts Chapter 8 transitions to Philip who goes to a city in Samaria. First, Judea; Samaria is the next stage. Philip began to proclaim Christ. Now, if I read every verse, we are not going to have time to finish this chapter. Therefore, I am going to synopsise for you. As Philip goes into this region, what he finds is a guy by the name of Simon who is like a movie star. The guy is a magician, a magic man, a sorcerer. He is doing all kinds of wondrous, mystical, magical things.

We know that much of that region was highly superstitious. We know that it was probably a lot like the region of Ephesus in that, when Paul goes there, God will give Paul great power to perform miracles to such a degree that people would fall under Paul's shadow and be healed. They would touch his handkerchiefs and be healed. The magnificent powers of Paul at that stage were so great that it was causing people to burn their magic books in the city of Ephesus. Ironically, when Paul goes to Corinth, he has no power at all. He is not doing any miracles at all. He is broke and makes tents to financially make ends meet. The question that must be asked is why do you think that he has all this power when in Ephesus? On the surface, it would seem that he is walking in the Spirit there, but he must not be walking in Spirit at Corinth. Even so, he says as he writes the Corinthians:

(I Corinthians 2:2) “For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.”

I came to you knowing nothing but Jesus Christ crucified. You see, in every circumstance, it is the Holy Spirit who knows exactly what the audience needs. Not you, not me. God will perform His work for those whom He is going to bring to Himself. He knows that the superstitious in Samaria are drawn to this magician. How is their mesmerized stare at this guy going to be broken? God begins to use Philip, and he performs great miracles of healing, not of showmanship but of healing which really trumps this guy. Understanding this as you look in chapter 8, Simon, the magician, was so popular that everybody kept looking at him in astonishment. If you read in verse 9: (Acts 8:9) “Now there was a certain man named Simon who formerly was practicing magic in the city and astonishing the people of Samaria, claiming to be someone great;”

You know, if you claim to be someone great, you obviously are.

(Acts 8:10) “and they all, from smallest to greatest,...”

This is basically, I would say, everybody.

(Acts 8:10b) “...were giving attention to him, saying, ‘This man is what is called the Great Power of God.’”

That is an interesting phrase, inferring that they were glued to this guy. You are seeing all this magic stuff that is happening. You are going, wow! This guy is great. This man is saying that he is “the Great Power of God.” He must be The Wizard of Oz. That is who he is.

(Acts 8:11) “And they were giving him attention because he had for a long time astonished them with his magic arts.”

He was, so to speak, blowing their mind. Hmmm? The Greek word literally means being knocked out of your wits. So we use blowing your mind. That they were blowing their minds. It is an amazing thing. But watch verse 12 which is a key point:

(Acts 8:12) “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.”

I want you to note that though Philip was performing great signs and wonders, it was the word of God that he was preaching, and that always takes preeminence. In fact, if you back up to verse 4:

(Acts 8:4) “Therefore, those who had been scattered, went about preaching the word.”

(Acts 8:5) “Philip went down to the city of Samaria and began proclaiming Christ to them.”

The Greek word used is “*Euangelizo*,” proclaiming the gospel of Christ to them.

(Acts 8:6) “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.”

Once again, just like in Hebrews 2:1-4 says, the whole purpose to the apostles for the signs and wonders was to establish the Word of God; they had no other purpose

beyond that. Certainly, God wants to heal people. There is no doubt about that. But the signs and wonders point to something. Right? The purpose of the signs and wonders is to point to the Word of God. They validate the Word of God. God was saying, “I am behind this guy.” You ask, “How do you know that God is behind this guy?” Well, they did not know. God says, “Watch Him touch that person, and watch that leprosy leave him.” You know, “Whoa, I think God is behind this guy.” Then Philip says, “Let me tell you the gospel.” And he began to proclaim the gospel. Up to this point, the only thing that Simon the magician could do was mesmerize people. The only thing that entertainment can do is make people wowed. It can blow their minds. Yet they will walk away from the stage and still be the same person. There is nothing that has changed about them. That is the weakness of entertainment. That is what the Scripture tells us. However, anything that God does, anything the Spirit of God does, will always point people to the gospel. This is the great miracle of change because it is the gospel that brings any change. If you look again in verse 12, the

statement is, “but when they **believed...**” This is in contrast to their reaction to Simon’s performances. Up to this point, they have been **attentive** to Simon. But they **believed** Philip when he preached the good news. There is the word gospel again. “...when he preached the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ.” They were being baptized. Baptized, now that is change. They were not baptized by entertainment. They were baptized which means that you are making a commitment. Baptized means that you are being initiated into a following. They were now being baptized. Why? Because they believed in the name of Jesus. This is the miracle. This is the miracle.

(Acts 8:13) “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.”

Simon the magician had not seen anything like this. Simon is greatly impressed. “They have applauded me, and I have been able to mesmerize them. But, wow! To change

people? You can change them? I could change the world. I could just...” Cannot you just hear Simon? “I could change the world. If I had this power, I could just touch them; and they would change. This is great!” So even Simon himself believed. Now the text does not say that he believed in Christ. He believed in his power. How do we know that?

(Acts 8:13) “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.”

Another way of putting it is that he focused on the signs and the great miracles. What Simon is really focused on are the signs and great miracles. He is not focused on Jesus. You will never see in the text where Simon is focused on Christ or on the gospel. He is not focused on it. He just thinks that this is really great stuff.

(Acts 8:14) “Now when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent them Peter and John,”

(Acts 8:15) “who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit.”

They prayed for the Holy Spirit to substantiate this ministry. Once again, the purpose of the apostles is to lay the foundation of the church. No church really had been established. They had to lay this foundation. Therefore, God withheld the Holy Spirit until the apostles would come and validate this work that was beginning.

(Acts 8:16) “For He had not yet fallen upon them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.”

(Acts 8:17) “Then they began laying their hands on them, and they were receiving the Holy Spirit.”

(Acts 8:18) “Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was bestowed through the laying on of the apostles’ hands, he offered them money,”

He goes, “I must buy this. I have to buy this.” You realize then that, fundamentally, there is no doubt that Simon is a scam artist. He is a trickster, a peddler, as Paul will

describe in Second Corinthians 2:17. What you see in Simon is that there is a longing within those who are in showmanship to have people not only recognize them, but also to have the power of influence over them. Plus, Simon sees this as a potential moneymaker. He is a man who is just seeking power.

Scripture is giving us a foundation. In the Book of Acts, you never want to lose sight of the foundational points of establishing the church. Here is the foundation. The church can never, never, never, never, never build on entertainment. It can never build on magic. It can never build on works of power. It can never build on showmanship. It can never do that. Once the church starts building on that, it is going to be a magnet for all of the tricksters. It is going to be a magnet for all of the people who are trying to make money. This is not what the gospel is all about. That is why, as you read through the Book of Acts, you will not see miracles in every situation. You will see them sprinkled in specific areas because of the

superstition and because the Holy Spirit says, “I deem it appropriate for this to happen here. I do not deem it appropriate for this to happen there. If it happens there, it would draw people away from the gospel. You see Simon immediately going into this realm and Peter having to rebuke him.

(Acts 8:20) “But Peter said to him, ‘May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money!’”

The word that he uses for ‘thought’ is in relation to his culture. His point is that Simon had been thinking this way all his life. “You cannot think any differently, can you?” When people think about money and power, it is hard for them to think about anything else. What the Scripture is telling us is that the Spirit never changed Simon’s life. The Spirit of God never really came into this man, and his faith was not in the Spirit of God. It was in the works of power. That is why it is so important that miracles and works of power never take center stage. I would also put talent in

there. People can be very, very talented musically or whatever. If that takes center stage, people will soon come and gather around to the wow factor. But it does not change them. In some cases, it will make them jealous. In some cases, it will make them bitter; but it will not change them. What we are looking for is the Spirit of genuineness. This is why Peter hops right on this and says, “Look, this is not of God. This is not of the Holy Spirit. What the Holy Spirit is about is a genuine essence, sincerity, and truth. You are making this about showmanship.”

It is a very interesting passage because of the contrast in the two events. What we are seeing is that God in one case through the power of the Spirit used persecution to spread the gospel. In the second case, He used signs and wonders to transition people from the hypnotism of Simon to bring them to the gospel. But in both cases, it is the gospel and the power of the Spirit that is the focus. The change of the heart is the focus. One of the biggest arguments that I have against the showy kind of church service, often happening

in the evening, is that people expect to see miracles. What are you telling the Holy Spirit? You tell the Holy Spirit that the cameras start rolling at 7 p.m., so that is when He needs to be present to perform miracles? That is what you are telling the Holy Spirit? I cannot control the power of the Holy Spirit. This is what we see with Philip. If you were to talk with Philip and ask, “Philip, how are you doing this?” Philip answers, “I do not know.” You ask, “What are you talking about? How did that person get healed?” Philip looks at the person and asks, “How did you get healed?” He answers, “We touched you.” As an example, look in Acts 19. Here again, it is just an example. In Acts 19, Paul is in Ephesus. We know that it is a superstitious area. The situation is what happened when the seven sons of Sceva tried to imitate what Paul had been doing; and the demons jumped on them.

(Acts 19:17) “This became known to all, both Jews and Greeks, who lived in Ephesus; and fear fell upon them all and the name of the Lord Jesus was being magnified.”

(Acts 19:18) ”Many also of those who had believed kept coming, confessing and disclosing their practices.”

(Acts 19:19) “And many of those who practiced magic brought their books together and began burning them in the sight of all; and they counted up the price of them and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver.”

Why did they do that? Back up.

(Acts 19:11) “God was performing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, so that handkerchiefs or aprons were even carried from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out.”

This is where TV evangelists get the aprons and handkerchief thing. By sending in \$50, you can buy them. Handkerchiefs and aprons were even carried from Paul’s body. Do you think Paul is thinking, “Well, that is a good one.” They are just pulling these things off Paul and touching people who are being healed. They were being healed from diseases, and every kind of evil spirit was leaving them. The Jewish exorcists are going, “Wow. How

does he do this?” Of course, they then try to cast the demons out.

(Acts 19:15) “And the evil spirit answered and said to them, ‘I recognize Jesus, and I know about Paul, but who are you?’”

(Acts 19:16) “And the man, in whom was the evil spirit, leaped on them and subdued all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.”

It is a different story. But as we return to Acts chapter 8, we see the Spirit of God doing what He deems to be necessary in order to save that person’s soul. Whether it is Philip or whether it is those who have been scattered abroad, they have one responsibility. What is it? To proclaim the gospel. Whatever setting that we are in, whether it be persecutions or grand works of miracles, in everything, God's name should be proclaimed. Was Simon wanting to be baptized to serve the power of Christ? He was baptized, but I think one of the points that is conveyed is that the Holy Spirit

was not within any of them until the apostles came. Once again, the Book of Acts is revealing the beginnings of all these things, just like Genesis reveals the beginning of things. Acts is demonstrating to us that people can be baptized but not saved. They can go through the whole “nine yards” if they would like. But unless the heart is changed, there is nothing real that happens. It is not the water that changes the person. It is the heart. As we look at verse 26 through the end of the chapter, we follow Philip a step further; a divine moving happens. We saw tribulation and trials at the beginning of the chapter. We see great works and power and wonders in the second part.

But now, God is saying, “Move on.” Now let me just say this. It is very important, just like with the works of wonder, that we do not try to fabricate it. We do not try to duplicate it. We do not try to make it look like something that it really is not. If God is speaking to you, then He is speaking to you. It is irrefutable. It is unarguable. If God is moving you, He is moving you. There is nothing else I could do. I cannot take

credit for it. You cannot take credit for it. It is God. It is very important that you and I do not try to fabricate miracles because that is lying against the Holy Spirit. It is very important that we do not try to push people into things because that would be a kind of tribulation that we would try to invent. If we think that the person needs some hardship, we start kicking them around. The point is that it is not our responsibility to fabricate this, and it is not our responsibility to say that God is talking to us. “You think God is talking to you?” “Yes. I think He is telling me do this.” “Are you sure?” “I would not say it if it was not true.” Remember that it was Ananias and Saphira who were struck dead because they were lying against the Holy Spirit. The one thing that God wants in the church is to be separate from that whole Judaism. We not too long ago went through Matthew 23, right?” Woe to you Pharisees, hypocrites, scribes--over and over again. It was very clear to me that God does not like liars. As it says in John 8:44, Satan is the father of lies. Let's put it another way. One thing God does not want His church to be is disingenuous.

God wants you to be real. There are times when you and I may come to church even though we are not feeling well. We are just not feeling well. There are times when I am not really feeling loving. I am not feeling the love. It would be inappropriate for me to walk around with a fake smile on my face. I think I ought to be civil, and I should not slap any of you. But it would be inappropriate for me to be fake. God does not want you to be fake. Come clean. Quit worrying about being real, get on your knees and ask God's forgiveness. I have to get right with God. Sometimes you just need a little time. Let me just get right here. Do not excuse yourself by thinking, "This is me." Neither does God want us to be vague. The church was never called to be unreal. The one thing we all have in common is that we are all sinners in need of a Savior. If we can all be real about that, everything will be well. But the minute we stand over to the side in the corner and say, "God, I thank You that I am not like that guy," we get into a realm that is very distasteful to God. God says, "You are lying to Me, you are lying to everybody else, and I do not want you playing church."

We now come to the end of Chapter 8. I have often found this passage extremely interesting. The word of the Lord came to Philip.

(Acts 8:26) “But an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip saying, ‘Get up and go south to the road that descends from Jerusalem to Gaza’ (This is a desert road.)”

The angel says, “You need to go this way.” I can understand the need for an audible voice because what God is going to tell Philip is to go to the desert to preach the gospel. It would take something amazingly substantial for me to go to a desert where there is nobody and where there is no water. I would like to hear a voice on that one. So I can understand that. Can you? What is the parenthetical phrase in the verse? This is a desert land. This is a desert road. Yes, I would need a voice. There are certain things you need a voice for, you know. “Go dive forty feet into the ocean, and I will give you something there.” I would like to hear a voice on that one, especially if there were sharks gathering around.

(Acts 8:27) “So he got up and went; and there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure; and he had come to Jerusalem to worship.”

Someone just happened to be driving through the desert at this particular time on this particular spot. What are the odds of that happening? It gets more bizarre because Philip was a Jew. We are clear on that. Up to this point, the Jews have been saved. This man is an Egyptian. You know what Egyptians did? They put the Israelites in bondage. The last time we really had a relationship with these guys, it seems to me they were trying to drown us somewhere around the Red Sea. I do not really have fond memories of the Egyptians. Yes, he was Ethiopian, but Ethiopia was part of the Egyptian realm. He is a representative of the queen. You almost have to be in a desert and in a situation where this is the only person around. God says that we are going to go to the desert. We are going to find somebody. Can you imagine being in a large group of people with a hundred

Jews and an Egyptian and a Roman? To whom would you start ministering? The Jews. If you take away the Jews, and there is only an Egyptian and a Roman, you probably would go to the Roman. Now get rid of the Roman, and there is only an Egyptian. Philip has to know to whom he is supposed to talk. It must be this Egyptian.

(Acts 8:29) “Then the Spirit said to Philip, “Go up and join this chariot.””

What we have is a divine movement that really is inexplicable but is undeniable. The Spirit of God is moving sometimes through circumstances, sometimes through great works of power, sometimes He just speaks to you and says, “Go.” It just becomes so clear. Sonny and I were talking today. We are getting ready for a funeral. I asked Sonny, “Do you have a closing song?” He said, “I think you will probably give that to me.” I said, “Well, I was thinking of one in particular, so, if you put this one in, maybe we can talk to Kay and just make sure. But I did not see it on her list.” I said, “I am going to be talking about Bertha’s walk

with the Lord. I just really feel like that “*Trust and Obey when we walk with the Lord in the light of His Word*” is a good way to close. He pulled out one of those sheets and said, “The closing song is *Trust and Obey*. Did you talk to them?” I said, “No, I did not talk to them.” There are certain things that God does that you just say, you know what? That was what God wanted us to do. There was an affirmation in my heart already that God just cements. This Ethiopian is riding in his chariot, and the Spirit of God says, “Go run beside him.” Philip then runs beside him. I do not know how fast the chariot is going, but I am pretty sure that it is moving at a pretty good clip. Running as fast as that horse is trotting would be quite a task, especially in the desert heat. Philip obeys, of course. Remember that Philip’s name means lover of horses? Maybe that has something to do with it? Here he is running beside the chariot, and he sees this guy reading the scroll while he is riding. What are the odds of that happening? Right? Something with pictures, especially if it is a guy. No, it is

Isaiah 53, of all the texts that he could be reading. Where did he get a copy of this?

(Acts 8:30) “Philip ran up and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet, and said, ‘Do you understand what you are reading?’”

(Acts 8:31) “And he said, ‘Well, how could I unless somebody guides me?’ And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.”

Of course, come on board. I do not know if he asked him right away to come on board, or he might have just seen Philip. “You will not be able to talk to me that way. You better come up here.” Philip gets into the chariot with the Ethiopian, and he starts explaining to him from these things that this is the Christ. You want to hear another miracle? Remember where they are?

(Acts 8:36) “As they went along the road, they came to some water; and the eunuch said, ‘Look! Water!’...”

“Water? Are you sure?” “Yes. I am sure; it is not a mirage. It is water.”

(Acts 8:36b) “What prevents me from being baptized?”

“Nothing.” One text adds:

(Acts 8:37) “And Philip said, ‘If you believe with all your heart, you may.’ And he answered and said, ‘I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.’”

What are the odds? The very Egyptians who were trying to drown the Jews are now being put under water by the Jews. However, the Jews are bringing them back up that they might be saved. Talk about a twist, a divine hand. The Spirit of God knew that man when he was down in Egypt and knew that this man had a searching heart and, “by George,” He was going to get somebody to him if He had to fly him there. I think Philip will fly, will he not?

(Acts 8:39) “When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; and the eunuch no longer saw him, but went on his way rejoicing.”

Philip will “fly away” and go to another place. It is as if the Spirit of God says, “We are done here. Let's go. You look a little tired. We will let you fly United Airlines on this one.” God just takes him away. What God is demonstrating to us is wonderful. He is able to change everything, to move everything into the perfect scenario, so that you might bring a person to Him. All you need to do is to be ready to give that gospel message. God is doing everything else. Do not try to invent this. You could not invent this anyway. Do not go out tomorrow in the desert looking for an Ethiopian eunuch. You are not going to find one. If you do, it will probably be too late. However, I do know this. God is working in your life right now, and God is working in the life of the church. The only thing that you and I need to do is to be right with God, and God is going to orchestrate your life to be at the right place at the right time to present the gospel. That is what He has us doing.

Prayer

Father, I want to give You thanks again for this chapter in the Book of Acts that really establishes for us that it is the Spirit of God Who directs us in the place that we need to be at the time that we need to be there as our heart is right with You and as we are doing the right things. You are working in the life of the church through difficulties, through stress, through tribulation, through loss, through sorrow, through grief, through great days of miracles and powers and wonders, through speaking to our hearts. You are leading us and directing us. We give You thanks in Jesus' name. Amen.