

Acts 8:4-12 “A Great, Spiritual Awakening”

Intro. From time to time in history, God has sent great spiritual awakenings to entire cities and even to entire countries. In such times large numbers of people are saved. Entire cities are dramatically transformed. Ungodliness such as crime, drunkenness, and foul language decreases, and righteousness and love for our fellow man increases. Our country has had at least two great awakenings. One in the 1730s and 40s and one leading up to the Civil War. One of the first of these great spiritual awakenings to occur in the New Testament is described in Acts chapter 8. It seemed just about an entire city of Samaria believed the gospel about Jesus Christ.

This morning we will learn from this chapter how we too can experience a great spiritual revival in our community. It is not going to just happen. Of course, God must do His part, but we must be spiritually prepared for it. We must meet the spiritual requirements for such a great awakening. And this passage of Scripture in Acts 8 will show us how we too can see our city awakened to the truth of God and their need of Jesus Christ.

Now first of all, I want to share with you:

I. THE REQUIREMENTS FOR A SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

Think about what preceded the great awakening in Samaria. Though prayer is not mentioned in the immediate context, we know that the early church devoted themselves to prayer (1:14; 2:42; 3:1; 4:31; 6:4). No doubt prayer had a role here, as it has in every great awakening. But we will focus on the principles that are stated in our text. First, I would conclude that:

A. A Gospel Witness Must Penetrate a Community – Notice what vv.4-5 says, “Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word.¹ Then Philip went down to *the* [a] city of Samaria and preached Christ to them.” Notice that what preceded the great awakening at Samaria was the dispersion of the saints into Samaria and other areas. 11:19 says, “Now those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch.” As believers were scattered to many different areas because of persecution, they shared the good news of Christ in those communities. As long as God’s people are isolated, remaining in our own little groups, we are not going to see a great spiritual awakening. But when we permeate society with our witness both in word and deed, then God can work to bring about a great awakening. That is why Jesus taught us to be salt and light in this world (Mt. 5:13-16). Salt must penetrate to do any good. Light must not be hidden to do any good. So whether on the job, at school, or wherever, let us be salt and light where the Lord places us.

Our youth are going to be doing this during their missional camp. That will include penetrating the local neighborhoods around the church, and inviting people to the block party and our VBS. Hopefully some gospel conversations will also take place. I want you to pray for this upcoming opportunity to witness and serve in our local community.

¹ The HCSB rightly translates this, “proclaiming the message of good news.”

Notice the particular area that Philip went to. He carried the gospel to Samaria. He was being obedient to the command of Jesus in Acts 1:8, "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." The Samaritans were the offspring of pagan settlers who replaced the Israelites that had been deported when the northern kingdom fell. The foreign settlers intermarried with the remaining Israelites and eventually abandoned their pagan religion to embrace a debased form of the Hebrew faith.

One thing that is significant about what Philip did is that he preached to a group of people who were despised and rejected by the Jews. The New Testament bears ample witness to the unfriendly relation which persisted between Jews and Samaritans. In preaching the Gospel to the Samaritans, Philip was therefore making a startling break in a deeply-ingrained racial pattern. It was a bold step he took since bad feelings existed between Jews and Samaritans.

Though most of us will tend to be a witness mainly to those of our own culture, some must go and witness to other people of other cultures. Some of us must go to those in the jails. Some must go to those in the inner cities. Some must reach the Hispanic community and other cultural groups that are becoming increasingly common among us. Philip set a great example.

Not only must we "rub shoulders" with the unbelievers of this world, but when we do so we need to offer a verbal witness to them. So for God to bring spiritual awakening to a city:

B. We Must Be Willing to Be a Messenger for God - Rom. 10:14 says, "...And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?" How would large numbers of the Samaritans believe in Christ? It only happened because Philip was willing to go there with the message of salvation.

Now I want to share a few principles about this subject.

1. It Only Takes One - Philip, apparently by himself, was used of God to evangelize a whole city. In Isa. 6:8 the Lord said, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Then Isaiah replied, "Here am I; send me." This reminds me of Rev. 3:20, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me." Most in that church were lukewarm. But if *anyone* in that church would listen to the voice of Jesus, He would surely use them. If you want to do something great for God, you can't wait on the average Christian to help you. Often you have to step out on your own to obey God. Philip started out serving as a deacon, and God kept giving him greater responsibilities and opportunities.

2. You Need Not Be an Ordained Preacher - Being an apostle or ordained preacher is not required. This Philip in Acts is not the apostle with the same name (Mk. 3:18). He was one of the seven deacons selected in Acts 6. He was probably just a layman. The Church made Philip a deacon, but Christ sent him out as an evangelist.

3. You Must be Committed - According to Acts 6:3, Philip was a man who was filled with the Holy Spirit and wisdom. He had a good reputation as a Christian. His committed life, his Christian character, explains why Philip became such a great witness for Jesus Christ. And if God is going to use you and me, we must be filled with the Spirit, and committed to the Lord like Philip was.

But what are we to say to them? That leads me to my next point:

C. We Must Have the Right Message - What message did Philip preach? He had worked to minister to the needs of the widows. Did his message focus on social responsibilities? I don't think

so. Did he preach politics, giving out some political solution to the problems in Samaria? No! Did he preach the truthfulness of Judaism vs. the errors of Samaritan religion? (see John 4:20-22). I don't think so.

Well what was the focus of his message? His message was Christ-centered. Notice that v.5 says, "Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them." He preached Christ because as Peter had said in Acts 4:12, "For there is no other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." He did not preach politics, he preached a person: Christ! He did not preach a creed or about a church; he preached Christ. Often we talk more about our church than our Christ! Philip sets a fine example for us. His message focused on Jesus Christ.

So what in particular did Philip preach about Jesus Christ? Well from Philip's example we learn what we should share about Jesus Christ:

1. Jesus Is the Messiah - Literally, it should be translated in v.5, "he preached to them the Messiah." There was a good reason why Philip focused on presenting Jesus as the Messiah. From John 4 we know that the Samaritans were interested in the coming of the Messiah. The Samaritans only believed in the first five books of Moses, but he prophesied in Deut. 18:15, "The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear." After hearing Jesus, the woman at the well went to her own people, told them what Jesus had done and then said, "Is not this the Christ?" (v.29). The Messiah is the substance of the Divine promises, the foundation of the hope of salvation from sin. Philip seems to have built on this hope when he preached the Messiah there. He must have said something like, "The Messiah has come! Jesus of Nazareth, who preached here, died for our sins, but rose again the third day. He is alive!" The hope of the world is Jesus Christ and we must tell them about Him.

2. Jesus Is King – Notice that v.12 says that Philip "...preached the things concerning the kingdom of God..." In order to have a kingdom, you must have a king. Who is this King? Jesus the Messiah is also Jesus the King. In salvation Jesus must become our Lord and King. And His Kingdom is not a reign over the Jews only, but over all people who accept Him as Savior and Lord. A Christian is one who places himself under the authority of Jesus as King.

Does He rule over your life? Have you made Him Lord of your life? Nothing is going to be right in your life until Jesus is truly Lord over your life.

D. There Must Be Receptivity – Luke says in v.6, "And the multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip..." The Word of God cannot bear fruit if it is not received. Those who ignore it will not benefit from it. Those who hear it but do not take it to heart will not benefit from it. So one requirement for a spiritual awakening is that large numbers of people begin to "give heed" to God's Word.

Now there are two sides to this. On the one hand, we must do not anything that will hinder receptivity to the gospel. 1 Cor. 10:32 says, "Give no offense, either to the Jews or to the Greeks or to the church of God." While we must not change the gospel, we must also be careful not to hinder receptivity to the gospel by our own actions.

Yet we also need to pray that God will awaken unbelievers and cause them to be receptive to the gospel. One reason we are not experiencing a great awakening, a great revival in our community is that too many people are ignoring God's Word. Probably less than 20% of our American population is in a church service on any given Sunday morning.² Not all of those are even hearing the Word of God, and fewer are heeding the Word of God.

² https://www.huffingtonpost.com/steve-mcswain/why-nobody-wants-to-go-to_b_4086016.html (accessed 6/22/18).

So what do people need to do? Large numbers of people need to give heed to God's message. "Heeded" literally means, "to hold to." You must listen to it attentively and hold on to it by remembering and applying it to your own life.

I commend you for gathering with us to hear God's Word. Are you giving heed to God's Word spoken through song and preaching? You should, for this is *God's* Word. Paul said in 1 Thess. 2:13, "For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe."

Now there was a reason why so many Samaritans paid so much attention to the Word of God. V.6 says that they "heeded the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did." He, like Stephen, was used of God to perform mighty miracles, even though they were not apostles. Notice the particular examples mentioned in v.7, "For unclean spirits, crying with a loud voice, came out of many who were possessed; and many who were paralyzed and lame were healed." His preaching was accompanied with miraculous good works. So when the Holy Spirit worked mightily, there was a great awakening among the people. That is the way it was in Paul's ministry. When he went to Corinth, he could later write, "...the testimony of Christ was confirmed among you" (1:6). In the New Testament period, the preaching of the word was often accompanied by confirmation of that message by miracles. Note in v.6 the use of the word "signs." In the ministry of Philip these mighty works were external signs confirming the message that he announced. If no miracles had been performed by Philip, the superstitious Samaritans could easily have concluded that he represented something inferior to Simon the magician that we will read about later. For example, the signs that Moses did had to be superior to those of the magicians of Egypt.

How would this apply today? As I have studied the great awakenings of the past 300 years, I do not read of similar types of miracles. I believe that certain types of miracles were unique to the apostolic period, as indicated in 2 Cor. 12:12. But God is still working miracles today. But today they are more of a spiritual nature. The preaching of the gospel is confirmed when lives are transformed by the power of God. People will start paying attention to God's Word when they hear that God is doing great things in the lives of people. For example, a sinner overcomes sinful habits; homes are put back together, alcoholics are set free, people are saved and filled with love, joy and peace, etc. For my preaching to be really effective, it must produce results in the lives of my audience, and people will notice.

When I was about 16 years old, I became interested in God's Word when I saw the way God was changing the lives of some of my friends. The same thing will happen as people in our midst are saved and transformed.

Now these miracles had a dual purpose. They not only confirmed the truth of Philip's message, but they were also good works that benefited the people who were healed. So we can apply this by saying that we should do good works to benefit people, to open their hearts to us and our message, but the primary emphasis is on the fact that the gospel must be shared before anyone will be saved and transformed. What is important about a sign is not the sign itself, but the message of the sign.

Are you willing to do your part in seeing much larger numbers of people turning to the Lord and being saved? Will you penetrate the community? Will you share the gospel message, focusing on Christ? Well, to motivate us to do these things, I want us to see what God will do when a great awakening takes place. Consider with me:

II. THE RESULTS OF A SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

We should pray and work for a great awakening in our community because of the following wonderful results that could occur:

A. God Will Give a Harvest of Souls – In v.6 we see that a multitude of people heard and heeded the Gospel. He must have been preaching in a large city of Samaria.³ No doubt many out of that multitude were saved. Then we read in v.12, “But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.” Luke says “both men and women were baptized.” Women tend to be more open to the Christian gospel, but one sign of a great awaking is when many men also turn to Christ. It is also generally true that in great spiritual awakenings, many young people turn to Christ.

B. Many Will Follow Christ in Baptism – Again, v.12 says that “they were baptized.” If your faith is real, you will openly confess your faith in Christ and follow Him in baptism. Not everyone who is baptized is truly saved, but how can you have any confidence in your salvation if you have not obeyed Jesus in the matter of baptism? Christ commanded baptism as one of the first steps in discipleship (Mt. 28:19). Have you been baptized?

In our Southern Baptist Convention of over 47,000 churches, baptisms are at a 70-year low, down almost half of what they were just 20 years ago. This is in spite of the fact that we have more churches than ever. We need revival! We need a great awakening.

Another result of a great spiritual awakening is:

C. Liberation of the People – Jesus said in Jn. 8:34, “Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin.” But He also said in v.32 of that chapter, “And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” Look at the countries in the world that are the most free, and you will find that they have had great spiritual awakenings some time in their past.

Notice that Christ set them free:

1. From Demonic Possession or Influence - V.7 says, “For unclean spirits, crying with a loud voice, came out of many who were possessed....” In 2 Timothy 2:26 Paul warns of “the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will.” So many people are taken captive by the devil. Millions have had their lives ruined with drug and alcohol addictions, as well as other addictions, such as immorality and gambling. Jesus came to set people free. When great awakenings take place, taverns and bars lose business.

2. From False Religion and Ungodly Leaders – We read about this in vv.9-11. Simon had a powerful grip over the people of Samaria. He practiced “magic,” the most degraded form of religion in the Hellenistic age. It perhaps was a mixture of fraud and demonic power, under the guise of religion. And from v.10 we see that he was considered to be divinely empowered, if not a god himself. The word “power” was much used in antiquity, sometimes as a synonym for Deity (Mk. 14:62). The people obeyed him, from the least to the greatest. Who could deliver them from such a man? Only Christ. By the way, this is the first time Christianity had sharp confrontation with gross superstition and cultism.

When Christ sets us free from sin, this will result in:

³ “Samaria” does not have the definite article, so the HCSB translates v.5, “Philip went down to a city in Samaria....”

D. Joy – In v.8 we read, “And there was great joy in that city.” We are not told the exact reason for the joy, but joy is always a result of revival. Usually there are tears of sorrow for sin (James 4:8-9) and then tears of joy for forgiveness and the presence of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22). No doubt seeing God work in such miraculous ways brought joy to the people. God is not a kill-joy. He wants to bring joy into your life, a joy that no man can take away (Jn. 16:22b). He wants us to rejoice in the Lord always (Phil. 4:4).

And when there is joy, there will be:

E. Singing – This is not specifically mentioned here, but another common result of a great awakening is increased singing among God’s people. The fullness of the presence of God will put a song in your heart! (Eph. 5:18-19). Show me a church that has dead singing and I will show you a church that is not awakened, but dead! If you can’t sing, at least make a “joyful noise” unto the Lord.

Conclusion: In 1904 a young coal miner named Evan Roberts led what came to be known as the great Welsh revival. God had imparted a burning vision for spiritual revival in his heart. Though only 26 years old, Evan Roberts had no time for youthful entertainment and pleasure. Day and night without ceasing, he prayed, wept and sighed for a great spiritual awakening. Then he was used of God as he preached and led revival services all over Wales. These services often lasted for hours. As a result of the great revival, he described what happen. “The earnings of workmen, instead of being squandered on drink and vice, were now bringing great joy to their families. Outstanding debts were being paid by thousands of young converts. Restitution was the order of the day. The gambling and alcohol business lost their trade and the theaters closed down from lack of patronage. Football [rugby] during this time was forgotten by both players and fans, though nothing was mentioned from the pulpits about it. The people had new lives and new interests.... The man-made denominational barriers completely collapsed as believers and pastors worshipped their majestic Lord together.” One of the outstanding features of the revival was the confession of sin, not among the unsaved only, but among the saved. All were broken down and melted before the cross of Christ. Great singing was another result of that revival.⁴

We can see such results if we will meet the requirements. May we more earnestly pray for revival, first in our own church, and then may it spread to other churches. Let us penetrate our community with the gospel and good works. We have an opportunity in July to do that with VBS and our upcoming block party.

You have heard the gospel of Jesus Christ today. If you have not yet repented of your sins, and turned to Jesus in faith, why not do so today. And if you have not been baptized, though you say you are a believer in Jesus, why not present yourself for baptism today? May God begin revival in our church today!

Sources: F.F. Bruce, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Book of the Acts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1954); H. Leo Eddleman, *An Exegetical and Practical Commentary on Acts* (Dallas: Books of Life Publishers, 1974); Ajith Fernando, *The NIV Application Commentary: Acts* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998); Oliver B. Greene, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Vol. 1 (Greenville, SC: The Gospel Hour, Inc., 1968); Everett F. Harrison, *Acts: The Expanding Church* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1975); H.A. Ironside, *Acts* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers 1943); John MacArthur, Jr., *How to Handle Persecution: Study Notes on Acts 4:1-32, 8:1-8, 16:19-40* (Panorama City, CA: Word of Grace Communications, 1985); Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture*, Vol. 11 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977 reprint); Paul L. Maier, *First Christians: Pentecost and the Spread of Christianity*

⁴ From <http://www.watchword.org/smithers/ww25a.html>.

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