

Church 101: Our Cross-Cultural Mission (Acts 8, 10)

Please turn in your Bibles to Acts 1, v. 8 which I said 2 weeks ago is a key verse, if not the key verse of the entire book and the outline for the church that we see in the book of Acts, witnessing first in their city and community (Jerusalem and Judea) and then also cross-culturally (Samaria and to the ends of the earth). 2 weeks ago we saw how in the early chapters of Acts the early church began where they lived, being witnesses in the public square, not only as preachers but in interacting with individuals like with a beggar, or in private meetings with those who disagreed with their message. Today we'll see outreach outside their comfort zone further, outside their culture.

I love learning about the history of the church. 2 months ago a historian by the name of Dr. Michael Haykin introduced me¹ and others at a Sacramento gathering to a name I wasn't familiar with. He really challenged me in my affection for the lost and cross-cultural outreach, and if your hearts are cold today, I pray this helps rekindle them. Samuel Pearce was born in 1766 and died in 1799, but his short life of 33 years impacted many and impacted me as I heard Dr. Haykin talk about this Baptist minister from 4 centuries ago. Samuel Pearce was not a loud or yelling preacher, but he had a passion and compassion described as 'mildness and tenderness...[when he preached] the most careless were attentive, the most prejudiced became attentive, and the coldest felt that, in spite of themselves, they began to kindle.' [may we, too]

In his memoirs, Pearce writes "All was delightful; for Christ was all and in all...communion with God was so desirable, that I was sweetly drawn to it again and again." But he was not content to keep this to himself in prayer and worship with his church while others missed sweet delight in Christ. He wrote of "love of a crucified Redeemer...attractions of the cross" and how it "compelled me to...serve him among the heathen." Gospel power fuelled his Spirit-filled heart to witness in England's cities, villages, France, the nations

In Acts 1:8 Jesus said before He went to heaven: *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.*"

In NT times religious Jews avoided Samaria like a plague literally. It was a place many tried to never set foot in and would shake the dust from their feet if they did, to not contaminate Israel with Samaritan dirt. Jews were raised to hate Samaritans like the English hated the French in Pearce's day.

Dr. Haykin said English boys in the late 1700s and early 1800s were taught literally ‘Be a good boy, love your mother, and hate the French!’ He writes: ‘Great Britain and France were locked in a titanic war, the Napoleonic War, which would last into the middle of the second decade of the next century... there was little love lost between the British and the French ... But Pearce was gripped by a far different passion than this that gripped many in Britain and France—his was the priority of the kingdom of Christ. In one of the last sermons that he ever preached ... [he quoted from Acts] “I am taught, that —of one blood God hath made all nations ... that national differences ought not to excite personal animosities...” By mid-December 1798, Pearce could not converse for more than a few minutes without losing his breath. Yet still he was thinking of the salvation of the lost. Writing to Carey around this time, he told him of a plan to take the gospel to France ... “to get five of our Ministers to agree that they will apply themselves to the French language ... then we [for he was obviously intending to be one of the five] might spend two months annually in that Country, and at least satisfy ourselves that Christianity was not lost in France... who can tell what God might do!”²

Dr. Haykin said to his dying day Samuel Pearce’s death-bed wish was to reach the French with the gospel or to die trying. It’s a fabulous example, Haykin said, of how we must love our enemies with the gospel. Rev. Pearce understood the words of Jesus in Acts 1:8 to the Jews who had been raised to hate Samaritans as their enemies, and Pearce understood the power of the Holy Spirit through the gospel to transform hate to love-motivated witness to Samaria and to the ends of the earth. It was this same power that changed the ancient world, and the modern missions movement in the days of Pearce and William Carey, and can rock our world today and reach hated terrorists.

It’s the power that can reach militant Muslims who hate Christians by a love stronger than their hate. It can also reach local Mormons or "moral" people. It transformed Peter’s racist thinking in Acts 10, which God hates, and the gospel penetrated Samaria in Acts 8 and went to Africa also in Acts 8. Let's start in Acts 8 and consider their cross-cultural mission to Samaria and to the ends of the earth, and implications and applications for us. 4 headings:

1. Samaritans
2. Africans
3. Romans
4. Americans (applications for us)

First, their cross-cultural mission to the Samaritans in Acts 8

The early church had been growing in Jerusalem, the first area mentioned in Acts 1:8. But there's an event in Acts 7 that drives them to the other regions of Judea, and Samaria: the stoning of Stephen and persecution of the church

Acts 8:1 says *'Saul approved of his execution. And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.'*

Notice the phrase "*Judea and Samaria*," right out of Acts 1:8, "*witnesses in Jerusalem and in all **Judea and Samaria** ...*" Acts 8:1 shows the advance of Acts 1:8. Persecution is what drove them outside the comfortable confines of Jerusalem and their religion to continue the commission Jesus gave them. I think persecution is coming in greater measure to the church in America and it may be what He uses to get the church here back to its mission. It's what wakes up complacent Christianity to get out of their holy huddles to seek to advance down the field, even though opponents will try to tackle them as they do. In China in the last several decades, great persecution has driven the church, not to extinction, but to expansion in amazing ways. Iran has scattered many by persecution but many Iranians are coming to Christ.

When v. 1 says the church was "scattered," it uses a word for scattering seed to be planted, or sowing seed. Saul and the Sanhedrin and the scribes and Pharisees wanted the Christian church to go, but Jesus wanted them to grow so He scattered them like seed and planted them to fulfill His words in Mt 16:18 *'I will build My church'* and Mt 28:19 *'Go and make disciples of all nations...'* or that can be translated literally, *'as you're going, make disciples'*

Look at v. 4 *Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word.*

That's a Greek word that's transliterated 'evangelize,' they were scattered and as they were going, wherever God planted them, they *evangelized* with His Word. He's not talking about the apostles as v. 1 says they didn't scatter with these. This verse isn't talking about pastors or preachers, this is talking about people like you, this is the church, it says *'those who were scattered went about evangelizing'* or one version says *'proclaiming the good news of the word.'* The same verb is used in v. 35 for a one-on-one conversation, so don't think of preaching in a church service here, this is the word *evangelize* for everyday sharing with one or with a group from the Word about Christ.

⁵ *Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ*

Philip was not an apostle. He wasn't part of the 3-year intensive training of the original 12 disciples with Jesus, or any evangelism training course that we know of. All we know about Philip from Acts 6 is that he was full of the Spirit and wisdom and was chosen by the church to be one of the 7 servants who cared for widows, what we would call deacons today, so the apostles could devote themselves to the ministry of the Word. And it says as a result of this ministry, the church grew, and even many Jewish priests got saved.

Boice: 'It is interesting that he was a layman. It has always seemed to me ... people who have been particularly effective in telling others about Christ have been laymen. We usually think [paid] ministers are to be evangelists, and certainly there are ministers who are evangelists. But my experience has been that those who are most effective as evangelists are laypeople.

Although some ministers are evangelists, the chief task of [Sunday] ministry is not evangelism. [Eph 4:11-12 says evangelists and pastors and teachers are given to equip the church to do the work of ministry, including evangelism. So Boice says they are to] teach the Bible so that those in the church...can exercise their gift (whatever gift they have) in reaching others³

Now remember, Samaria was a place so hated by even saved Jews, that two of them in Lk 9 asked Jesus if they could call down fire to kill Samaritans. Jesus rebuked them, then in Lk 10 tells a story of the Good Samaritan, and it's the Samaritan who is the hero of that story and who fulfills God's law of love to a neighbor, a Jewish man in need. The other religious Jews avoided the man but the Samaritan was good in cross-cultural counter-cultural ways. In Lk 17, Jesus heals a Samaritan who then praises God and worships Jesus at His feet, and Jesus praises the faith of this Samaritan, not the Jews there. Now Luke, who also wrote Acts, highlights again a Savior for Samaritans.

It was cross-cultural and counter-cultural for a Jew to go to Samaria, as Jn 4 tells us '*for Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.*' But Jesus first revealed Himself as the Christ to a '*a woman from Samaria*' who was surprised that a Jew would talk to her (v. 7-9). Samaritans and Jews had deep hostility going back to the Assyrian captivity when some Jews left behind in Israel married foreigners, and their descendants who lived in Samaria were of mixed blood so Jews later considered Samaritans half-breeds (ethnically and spiritually). Samaritans and Jews were both descended from Jacob, as the woman said to Jesus (v. 12) and they both believed the same first 5 books of the Bible, but the Samaritans rejected the rest of the OT, and had a counterfeit temple set up on Mount Gerizim, a competing religion, an alternate sacrificial system.

In Jn 4 *'The woman said to him, "...Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship."*
²¹ *Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship..."* [and Jesus explained to her true worship is in spirit and in truth, it's not about a place, it's about a person, and He revealed Himself to her as that Person, as the Christ. In Acts 8 the hour comes in greater ways, Christ is revealed and more worship Him]

In v. 12 Samaritans are saved: *But when they believed Philip as he preached good news* ['evangelized' is the Greek word again] *about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women*

Jesus had told them to 'go,' or 'as you're going, make disciples of all nations, baptizing and teaching them to obey all that I commanded.' That's what this verse describes *as they were going* from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria as a first step to the ends of the earth, they made disciples, baptized them and taught the King's commands for His kingdom. In Acts 1 they asked about Israel's future kingdom. His reply: Acts 1:8 is their kingdom task now, not to deny their God-fixed future kingdom role, but to clarify their present role

Look at v. 14: *Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John,* ¹⁵ *who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit ...* [that's the same John who earlier wanted to pray down fire on Samaritans, but the gospel changed him to now pray down God's Spirit of grace on Samaritans]
²⁵ *Now when they had testified* [root word 'witness' from 1:8] *and spoken the word of the Lord* [word for normal speaking], *they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel to* [or 'evangelizing'] *many villages of the Samaritans.*

Evangelizing includes not only preaching, but being a witness and speaking the Word of God in normal conversation, too, as one of the words in v. 25 means. And v. 26-40 show a one-on-one evangelism conversation example:
²⁶ *Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza."* [place on news] *This is a desert place.* ²⁷ *And he rose and went. And there was an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure. He had come to Jerusalem to worship* ²⁸ *and was returning, seated in his chariot, and he was reading the prophet Isaiah.*

This takes us from Samaritans (1st point) to Africans (our 2nd point)

In this same area that's been on the news so much lately, south of Jerusalem to Gaza, the way from Israel to Egypt and the rest of Africa, Peter is sent to an important man from one of Africa's most important regions, a royal court official for her majesty herself (in today's terms, her 'chief financial officer')

Daniel Hays in his scholarly book on *A Biblical Theology of Race*, writes: 'the Greeks used the term "Ethiopia" as a general term to refer to everything south of Egypt, i.e., all of black Africa. However, most of their contact with Black Africans (Ethiopians) was with people from the ancient kingdom of Cush. [Candace] was a Black queen ruling over the Black African nation known earlier in history as Cush. Likewise the home and ethnicity of the Ethiopian eunuch in the story is clear; he is a Black African ... [and also] He was also from a region that lay outside the limits of the Roman Empire.'⁴

So unlike the Samaritans, he had no ethnic connection to Jacob or Israel. In several ancient Greek sources, Cush or Ethiopia represents 'the ends of the earth,'⁵ and so literally in one chapter the gospel witness of the early church is about to go '*to Samaria and to the ends of the earth*' [starting with Africa]

The end of v. 27 says he had come to Jerusalem to worship. Why would this African top official from the Ethiopian government come hundreds of miles across the desert to worship with Jews and to read the Jewish Scriptures? Of course we can answer with the sovereignty of God in salvation in this story, but we might also answer with the Scriptures from another story in Esther. 3 years ago this month I was in Ethiopia for an overnight layover and I wrote a blog entry titled *Scriptural Reflections on Ethiopia from Ethiopia*, where I talked about this nation mentioned often in the OT (literal Hebrew 'Cush').⁶

Esther 8 tells us Ethiopia was part of the kingdom that Mordecai the Jew was given leadership over and people in these lands became Jews and some celebrated Jewish feasts (8:9, 8:17, 9:27-32). Now hundreds of years later in the providence of God there are still ethnic Africans following the faith of Israel, with some access to OT scrolls, some making pilgrimages to feasts. Acts 2:10 mentions *proselytes* from African nations who came to Jerusalem for the Pentecost feast (*proselytes* were non-ethnic Jews converting to Israel and Acts 2:10-11 mentions ethnic Africans and Arabs there for Pentecost). Another African from Cyrene there for Passover carried Christ's cross. But the African man in Acts 8 is a eunuch, so he can't be a full Jewish convert. In the book of Jeremiah there's an interesting parallel with an African man named Ebed-Melech who was also an Ethiopian and he was also a eunuch.

He was also saved through a Jew's witness at a time when many Israelites were hostile to God's truth (Jeremiah 38-39), much like Acts 8. Ethiopians were known for their dark skin as Jeremiah wrote, perhaps with his friend in mind: "*Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard its spots?*" (13:23). But God sees the heart, as the prophet also says: "*Are you not as the sons of Ethiopia to Me, O sons of Israel?*" *Declares the LORD.*' (Amos 9:7 NKJV)

It's like the kids sing downstairs 'red, brown, yellow, black and white, they are precious in His sight, Jesus loves the little children of the world.' Amen. God's heart for darker-skinned Ethiopians has always been the same as His heart for lighter-skinned or middle-brown skinned Israelites. It's interesting that very chapter I just quoted is quoted from in Acts 15 to affirm Gentiles becoming full members of the church is what God prophesied to Israel. This is not just providence in Acts 8 or predestination, it's prophecy. Ezekiel 38 lists Ethiopia among nations who would come to know the Lord (v. 5, 23). That's about to happen in Acts 8 with a son of Ethiopia by a son of Israel.

In Zeph 3:9 God promised to bring purified worship from the nations in the future: '*That all of them may call on the name of the LORD, To serve Him shoulder to shoulder. From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia My worshipers...*' That's about to happen as shoulder to shoulder with Philip, a man from the rivers of Ethiopia is about to call on the name of the Lord in true worship! I was named after this Philip and hope to share this to an Ethiopian some day

Psalms 68:31 prophesied Ethiopia would soon stretch out hands to God, and that's about to happen as an Ethiopian points to water asking to be baptized. Psalm 87:4 prophesied a day when Ethiopians and other Africans and Arabs would know God and would be treated by God just as Jewish-born believers –and that's about to happen with this eunuch who could never be a full Jew, but he's about to become a full Christian to bring Christianity to Ethiopia.⁷

By laws of Judaism, a eunuch couldn't become a full-fledged Jew and was restricted as to where and how he could worship. But this man had means to have a chariot, to make the long journey, and to purchase an Isaiah scroll to read on his long journey back, probably in Greek, the smart guys tell us. As an African reading Isaiah's book, certain sections probably stood out to him

- chapter 11 said nations would seek Messiah, even Cush/Ethiopia
- chapter 18 speaks of a land beyond the rivers of Ethiopia or Cush, and how some would come with offerings to worship with Israel
- chapters 40-52 talk of salvation for nations, but he's stuck in Isa 53

²⁹ *And the Spirit said to Philip, “Go over and join this chariot.”* ³⁰ *So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, “Do you understand what you are reading?”* ³¹ *And he said, “How can I, unless someone guides me?”* *And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.*

³² *Now the passage of the Scripture that he was reading was this: “Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter and like a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he opens not his mouth.”* ³³ *In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth.”* ³⁴ *And the eunuch said to Philip, “About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?”* ³⁵ *Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus. [same word 'evangelized' we've seen several times, and we can guess Philip was talking about what Jesus said in Mt 28:19 in v. 36]* ³⁶ *And as they were going along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, “See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?”*

So Philip the Jew with a black man barred from membership in Judaism has the privilege of baptizing this new believer in Christ into the body of Christ. One writer said this story of the first black brother in Christ shows ‘barriers have been removed, hindrances to the spread of the gospel to all people. In this case a double barrier of both physical and racial prejudice had fallen.’⁸ Before the gospel goes to the Romans, it goes to the ends of the earth with an African eunuch. Long before going to Europe, it goes to Africa first. It’s growing rapidly in Africa again, and we need to pray for and support them.

The gospel didn’t stop with Samaritans, or Africans, **#3 is the Romans ...**

Look at Acts 10 and for the sake of time I’m going to assume this story is familiar to you, if not I encourage you to read it later. It’s when Peter sees a vision of creatures considered unclean to Jews that separated them from the Gentiles, but God pronounced them clean, removing a Jew-Gentile barrier. Harry Ironside tells the story of his dying father meditating on this passage, and as “father was dying, he kept muttering something...thinking about this vision, thinking about the sheet full of animals. [Dad] was saying, ‘A great sheet and wild beasts and, and, and...’ He couldn’t quite finish [the verse]. A friend bent over and whispered, ‘John, it says *creeping things*’ (KJV). ‘Oh yes,’ he said. ‘That’s how I got in. Just a poor good-for-nothing *creeping thing*, but I got in--saved by grace.’”⁹ [He got Peter’s point in Acts 15:9-11]

In Acts 10:34 Peter says: *Truly I understand that God shows no partiality,*

³⁵ *but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him ... [and Peter gives the truths of the gospel and says of Christ down in v. 43] To him all the prophets bear witness that **everyone who believes** in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”*⁴⁴
*While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word.*⁴⁵ *And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles.*⁴⁶ *For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter declared,*⁴⁷ *“Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?”*⁴⁸ *And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus*

...

This amazed the Jews with Peter, apparently because these Gentiles were able to miraculously speak Hebrew or Aramaic tongues fluently, not just some random syllables (tongues is just old English for languages). Back in Acts 2, Spirit-filled Galilean Jews were able to speak 'dialects' they hadn't studied that people of other nations recognized, now it happens in reverse, so the unmistakable conclusion is: these Gentiles have the Spirit like us! It proved Gentiles could be saved and have the Spirit without circumcision or ceremonies of Jewish Law. So they were baptized right then and there. This proves baptism doesn't save, it's because they were saved he baptized them.

In Acts 11:2 circumcised Jews confront Peter for eating with uncircumcised Gentiles, but he explains to them the vision and what happened. 11:18 says *When they heard these things they fell silent, and they glorified God, saying, “Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life.”* This was a huge turning point because in the OT Gentiles could be saved as they became Jews (circumcision, ceremonies, submitting to the Law). Now the Spirit shows without any of those things or any works, people are saved by grace at the moment of repentant faith in Christ, and before even baptism

Not only Africans, but now Romans, and some Greco-Roman Hellenists (of Greek culture) would be reached by Africans in 11:20: *But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and **Cyrene** [N. Africa] on coming to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists also, preaching the Lord Jesus.*²¹ *And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord.* Then in Acts 13 another African from Cyrene becomes a key leader in the church: ¹*Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger [Latin nickname for a black man], Lucius of Cyrene [Africa], Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.*

It seems minorities were in the majority of the leadership of the church in Antioch, even a Roman once close to Herod! The gospel had penetrated! If the gospel penetrates a community it will show up in the church, its leaders.

So let's move from Samaritans, Africans, Romans, to today, us Americans...
3 applications, 3 words, 3 categories of application: praise, pray, and obey

1st praise: we should praise God. We should respond like they responded in 11:18 when they heard of other nations repenting, they rejoiced. We should rejoice too, as we see these things in Scripture, God's plan for Samaritans, Africans, Romans, and Americans. As we see God bring different cultures into His church, as we see a diversity of ethnicities brought together in unity in the church, we should give God glory like Acts 11:18. We should long to see every church reflect the diversity of its community and love it when that happens and look forward to Rev. 7 praise with every tribe, tongue or nation

I find it exciting to see how much of that has been happening in Bible times, and how much it's happening in our times. The African continent is seeing the gospel reach it again like never before anywhere in history. Let's praise God as we hear of what He's doing cross-culturally and across the ocean.

2nd application: pray. Pray for God to stir your heart to love the lost even in counter-cultural ways, like where we started with Samuel Pearce, loving his enemies the French, and longing to share the gospel with them. Do we long to be able to share the gospel with Arabs? Does 'the war on terror' mean it's ok if we don't care much for people who look like they might be from "one of those" countries? Or maybe you have a hang-up with other ethnicities because of something in your past or whatever. Pray for God to change you and give you opportunity to get to know and help one come to know Christ.

Do any of us have a heart to evangelize Hispanics or the homeless or to do a ministry for the handicapped? Would they feel welcome here? Would others not like us feel, would you make them feel welcome? For some of us, we don't even realize our prejudice or our preferences for people like us, but we need to pray and pursue people not like us with Christ's love. We don't have a lot of different colors of skin in this community but every community has different cultures and sub-cultures (how we dress, how we school our kids, what our socio-economic status is, or the size or stage of our family, old vs. young, etc., and we all tend to gravitate towards people more like us). But let's pray for God's help to reach out beyond our culture or comfort zone.

And as we pray, the last application is obey. Jesus told us to make disciples in our community and cross-culturally, to go into all the world. And as we go, wherever in the world God has placed us, He has planted us to bear fruit and to be a witness in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, Shingle Springs, Sac-town and beyond. We gather to worship and scatter to witness. And if we stay in our holy huddle, Christ may bring persecution to wake us up to our mission and to shake us out of our complacency and comfort zone and culture zone to other cultures around us. May we obey like Philip when the Spirit moves us to witness to another. As we talk about Scripture, may we like Philip ask if they understand what they're reading or what we're saying (not assume it's clear). You don't have to preach at them, just share one-on-one in a normal voice and conversation from your personality about the person of Christ.

¹ Michael Haykin, "A Mind Wholly Given Up to God: The Piety of Samuel Pearce," notes from Reformed Baptist Seminary module at Immanuel Baptist Church, Sacramento.

² <http://www.andrewfullercenter.org/files/being-baptist-and-being-calvinist.pdf>

³ James Boice, *Acts*, p. 134.

⁴ Daniel Hays, *From Every Tribe and Tongue: A Biblical Theology of Race*, p. 174.

⁵ Ben Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 290.

⁶ <http://lifeatthelaytons.blogspot.com/2011/08/biblical-meditations-from-ethiopia-and.html>

⁷ Eusebius and Irenaeus mention a tradition of an Ethiopian Christian church through him.

⁸ J.B. Polhill, *Acts*, p. 226.

⁹ H.A. Ironside, *Lectures on the Book of Acts*, p. 250.