

Living into the Unexpected (Acts 8:1-25)

Last week we talked about the fact that sometimes life feels like God isn't doing anything you'd like Him to be doing and that He doesn't seem anywhere to be found

- But last week's text reminded us that God is always with us and always working in our lives (aware?)
- This week, we learn that God often works in our lives in unexpected ways

Here we meet a man named Saul

- He was partially responsible for Stephen's death (v. 1) and personally responsible for the persecution of many other Christians (v. 3)
- This man Saul, will become the Apostle Paul! We will leave that for the next chapter (unexpected!)

I want us to see what is going on here with the church (important for us and how we understand ourselves & live)

- Recall the great commission (**Matthew 28:19, NASB**)
- Recall the pouring out of the Spirit in the beginning of Acts and what Jesus said about it (**Acts 1:8, NLT**)
- **Map** (the areas they were supposed to go)
 - But, up until this point, they have simply stayed in Jerusalem
 - They have not been **fully obedient** to the call of Jesus and the work of the Spirit in them
 - So, Jesus will allow His church to experience a trial that that moves them into His will (**Acts 8:1b, NIV**)

So the church **gathered** in Jerusalem became the church **scattered** throughout Samaria

- This idea becomes part of the self-understanding of the church
- We **gather to worship** and we **scatter on mission** (not a building) (scatter locally and globally) (always)
- Living this rhythm
 - **Acts 8:4 & 8, NIV**
 - Scattered = **Preached the word wherever they went**
 - Result = **Great joy** (I have been praying that for the coastlands since July 2, 2005)

Notice, **God used adversity** to get His people living the way they ought to (and much good came from it)

- Think about your own life... is there anything you are facing that may be the loving hand of God trying to get you moving in the right direction? (think hard... pray... re-examine)
 - (It can be complicate because God is using evil and human folly. I.e. God is sovereign)
 - We must learn to see God's bigger purposes in the things that happen to us
 - "**What you intended as evil against me, God intended for good**" –Joseph in Genesis 50:20
 - What hard thing in your life does God intend for good? (**Romans 8:28**)
 - And what is that good?
 - The example of reality and our lease...

That, and the outbreak of persecution here in chapter 8, are examples of God using unexpected means to get His people living into His vision for them

Unexpected things are to be expected from God

- David
- Gideon
- Rahab
- Zaccheus
- The woman at the well
- Matthew the tax collector
- Paul the Apostle
- Etc, etc, etc

Let's see two more examples of God moving in unexpected ways in people's lives here

- **See verses 9-13**
 - An unexpected convert
 - (who should you be praying for?) (that crazy guy yesterday)
- **See verses 14-17**
 - An unexpected person ministering in an unexpected place (**Luke 9:51-54, NASB**) (**Map**)
 - (what prejudice should you be repenting of?)
 - John was fully on board with Jesus' mission—His heart had been changed (**Acts 8:25, NIV**)

If we aren't experiencing unexpected, uncomfortable scenarios that lead to good I wonder if we are really following Jesus (the Spirit)

- I.e. If everything is always as expected and as comfortable as desired... are we really allowing God to move in and through us?
- Is there anyway it seems God may be challenging your expectations?)

One of the ways God confronts our expectations and comforts is through sanctification

- The process of becoming more like Jesus (a work of the Spirit)
- In becoming more like Jesus we find ourselves living in greater consonance with His kingdom
- His kingdom is an upside down one
 - All our previous kingdoms function according to the axioms of power, influence, ascent and gain
 - But the Kingdom of Jesus is one of **humility, submission, service** and **sacrifice**

Notice the kingdom Simon the Sorcerer had been living into (**Acts 8:9-11, NIV**)

- He believes the gospel and is transferred to a new kingdom (he is a new creation)
- But, the axioms he has been living into and out of have to be **confronted** (sanctification)
- **See Acts 8:18-24**
 - The power and principles Simon lived by were being challenged by a greater power and new way
 - But, he was still stuck in the old principles and ways (cf. "give me also this ability")
 - Peter responds in a way that helps us (**Acts 8:21 & 23, NIV**)
 - Simon's **heart was not right** and he was full of **bitterness** and **captive to sin**
 - Greek word **bitterness** here **denotes wickedness, highly offensive to God**¹
 - I.e. The **sin** he was **captive to** was the sin of self glorification
 - Peter told him to "**repent of this wickedness**"
 - To reject the ways of the old kingdom and embrace the ways of the New Kingdom
 - This can be hard as they are deeply engrained (even hard to spot)
 - We often wonder how we can live in this world if we don't play by its rules
 - The book of Acts is confirming that such an endeavor is not easy (killed Stephen)

So, God helps us...

- By giving us stories like this that can function as a mirror (Simon was in it for himself—his own glory)
- By giving us His Spirit (in and upon)

Application:

1. And, be asking God how He is working, perhaps unexpectedly, in, around and through you
 - (He is always with you and working in your life)
2. Today repent of living for the wrong kingdom axioms and for yourself and own glory
3. Begin to live out the scattered life of the church... (when you walk out those doors today)
4. Ask to be filled with the Spirit (get prayed for)

¹ Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*, electronic ed. (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000).
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