

been baptized, but they had not received the infilling of the Holy Spirit. Why the difference? While we don't know exactly why; God had the apostles go down and personally pray for and lay hands upon a group of people that they had earlier despised. It is possible that God wanted to mend the relational wounds that existed between the Jews and Samaritans. As Peter and John came and laid hands on the Samaritan believers, they bestowed blessing upon them. Such an act would reveal that there existed no animosity between them and another confirmation of the powerful transformation that took place when a person surrenders to Jesus. We study the Bible in order to know God but then attempt to fit him into our theory or formula. The problem is that God rarely worked the same way twice. Jesus is always necessary, but the way that we meet Jesus and are filled with the Holy Spirit is often diverse. All of our testimonies of encouraging Jesus are different, revealing the great creativity of our God.

Saturday, November 19, 2011

Daily theme: Some want the power more than relationship with God.

Questions

Read Acts 8:18-24

1. Why did Peter rebuke Simon?
2. What did Simon's refusal to pray reveal about him?

Consider

As Peter and John laid hands on people so that they would be filled with the Holy Spirit, Simon saw something that appealed to him. He was not interested in receiving the Holy Spirit but he was in getting the power to lay hands on people so that they would receive the Holy Spirit. Every Christian should desire the Holy Spirit. We are commanded to be filled with the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:18). However Simon merely wanted power. He had enjoyed power and even though he had professed faith and had submitted to baptism, Peter's words revealed that he had not repented. Peter told him to repent of his wicked desires. Simon reveals that it is possible to go through the motions of praying the sinner's prayer and being baptized, but not really entering into a relationship with Jesus and having sins forgiven. Simon's response to Peter further revealed his spiritual condition. A person who had come to know Jesus would have repented, because he would have been concerned about his actions creating a barrier between him and God. However, Simon was more concerned about the punishment Peter said would take place. Simon's failure to repent revealed that he was not interested in God, just avoiding a negative future. He had failed to comprehend what the Gospel was all about. He reminds us of Ahaz in Isaiah 7. Ahaz was one of the wicked kings of Judah. God in his grace revealed that he would protect Ahaz and Judah from his enemies. So God told Isaiah to tell Ahaz to ask for a sign, but proud Ahaz refused to do, so God gave him a sign himself. Ahaz claimed that he would not put God to the test, but his response revealed a rebellious and disobedient heart. Simon had the same type of proud and disobedient heart. Peter told him what he needed to do, but Simon immediately refused.

The Spirit uses difficulty to produce amazing results.

Acts 8:1-24

Sermon Series: You will be my witnesses.

Devotional Notes November 14-19, 2011

Monday, November 14, 2011

Daily theme: Persecution led to kingdom expansion.

Questions

Read Acts 8:1-3

1. Why didn't the apostles leave Jerusalem?
2. What did this passage reveal about Saul?

Consider

Although Jesus told the apostles that they would be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8), the apostles remained in Jerusalem when many others were scattered. We know that all the church was not scattered, because there were still those in Jerusalem whom Paul dragged to prison. Luke's words mean that many were scattered all over the region of Judea and even Samaria. There are several possible explanations for the apostles remaining in Jerusalem. By remaining they would encourage by their presence those believers who were also in Jerusalem. Also by remaining they communicated the message that they believed Jesus would protect them through Saul's persecution. Conversely by fleeing Jerusalem they would have communicated the impression that they were afraid or that Jesus was not strong enough to take care of them. Many do not realize that the person called Saul in Acts 7:58 and 8:1-3, is the apostle Paul who wrote much of the New Testament. We can make several observations regarding Saul from these verses and other passages. From Acts 7:58 we know that he was present at the killing of Stephen. According to Acts 8:1, he was in complete agreement. Not only was he in complete agreement, but he was passionately opposed to those who followed Jesus (Acts 8:3). According to Acts 9:1, Luke wrote that Paul breathed murder and threats against followers of Jesus. In remembering his actions, Paul was quite clear on his emotional state during this period of his life. In Acts 22:19 Paul declared that he would go from one synagogue to another looking for Jesus followers to imprison and beat. Before Agrippa Paul declared that he thought he had to do many hostile things against Jesus followers, by putting them in prison and voting to put them to death. He went to synagogues in foreign cities in order to imprison them and force them to blaspheme. Paul himself concluded that he was furiously enraged at them (Acts 26:9-11). When Paul opposed Jesus, he was violently passionate against Jesus' followers.

Tuesday, November 15, 2011

Daily theme: The gospel even went to enemies.

Questions

Read Acts 8:4-5

1. How did good come about from Saul's persecution?
2. Why did Luke focus on the gospel proclamation to the Samaritans?

Consider

What Saul intended did not come about. He went from synagogue to synagogue and from house to house with the intent of destroying the church. Ironically he found himself in the exact situation that his teacher/mentor, Gamaliel, warned in Acts 5:39. By persecuting the followers of Jesus, Paul worked against God and didn't realize it. His persecution led to a scattering of the believers, much like seed getting scattered all over a field. Through Saul's evil acts against the church, God caused the church to spread to unprecedented levels. Saul became an example of what he would write years later to the Romans. "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose." (Romans 8:28). Although the believers went all over Judea, Luke focused on one area in particular, Samaria, and the ministry of one man, Philip. Through Philip God took his kingdom to the next level of expansion. For a Jew to take the gospel to Samaria, something major would have to happen. In John 4, John described the situation between Jews and Samaritans; they didn't associate with one another (John 4:9). This is a bit like we find in our contemporary society where different ethnic groups avoid one another by living in different areas, shopping in different stores, worshiping in different churches. Between the Jews and Samaritans there was antipathy and hostility. They didn't like one another and went out of their way to avoid one another. For Philip to take the gospel of Jesus to the Samaritans was extraordinary. Jesus said that his followers would be witnesses even to the Samaritans. Philip was the first to do so, fulfilling Jesus' prophetic word. Philip's action reveals the unity of the gospel. Jesus died for all men, so the gospel should go out to all men, not just a select few.

Wednesday, November 16, 2011

Daily theme: Signs brought rejoicing to the people.

Questions

Read Acts 8:6-8

1. Why did the Samaritans listen to a Jew like Philip?
2. How did what Philip do fulfill prophecy?

Consider

Typically when a foreigner comes and starts teaching something new he doesn't receive much of an audience, but to Philip the Samaritans listened. Their response causes us to ask the question why they would listen to an ordinary Jew like Philip, particularly when they didn't like Jews. As the gospel goes out, signs and wonders accompany the message as a confirmation of what is being spoken. Philip didn't only communicate the gospel, but his message was confirmed by signs and wonders. Luke described what happened. People were set free as demons were removed from their lives. The lame and paralyzed walked. Philip again revealed that the ordinary followers of Jesus would do what Jesus did (John 14:12). Like Stephen, Philip was an ordinary guy. He wasn't an apostle like Peter or John. He was an average guy, just the type of person that God uses. As Philip healed the lame and cast out demons, he fulfilled what Jesus had declared would be done, when John's disciples came to confirm that Jesus was the Messiah. On that

occasion, Jesus quoted two passages Isaiah 35:5-6 and Isaiah 61:1-2. Jesus revealed he was the Messiah by fulfilling those prophetic words, then Philip confirmed that Jesus was the Messiah, by doing the same thing in Jesus' name.

Thursday, November 17, 2011

Daily theme: The gospel has more power than that in which the people trust.

Questions

Read Acts 8:9-13

1. Why was a man like Simon with so much power astonished?
2. What might have happened if Philip had just proclaimed the gospel, but did no signs and wonders?

Consider

The Samaritans were not a people unaccustomed to seeing powerful works accomplished. A man named Simon had done such works in their presence and had impressed them to the extent that he had acquired the title of "the Great Power of God". According to the Samaritans, Simon was a man from God, because of what he had been able to do by his magic arts. The phrase "magic arts, refers to powers done with demonic powers. It was common knowledge that such power existed. Simon used such power to deceive. The Jews had accused Jesus of using demonic powers to heal (Matthew 12:24). Jesus reminded them that his message proved that he could not possibly be healing people with demonic powers, because his ministry went counter to Satan's domain. However Simon's powers built up Satan's domain. When Philip arrived a situation arose similar to Moses and Aaron's arrival in Egypt. There was power displayed, but the power that Philip demonstrated was greater than that which Simon practiced. Therefore the people believed Philip's message and left Simon's. Philip's signs and wonders were so powerful that even Simon was astonished. Simon's reaction raises the question of what might have happened if Philip had not done signs and wonders. It is quite likely that the people would not have any reason to believe what Philip taught. People are pragmatic. They follow what works for them. If Simon had the power to make their life better, then they followed Simon. If Philip had just displayed a good and logical argument, the people quite likely would not have believed him. The gospel is more than a worldview, a religion or a philosophy. It is the good news that transforms a person's life; it will set him free from that which enslaves him (Galatians 5:1). If the gospel does not change lives then something is missing.

Friday, November 18, 2011

Daily theme: God sent the apostles to bless the enemies with the Holy Spirit.

Questions

Read Acts 8:14-17

1. Why didn't God just give the Samaritans the Holy Spirit like he had done with the Jews and would do later with the Gentiles?
2. What does this story teach us about God?

Consider

In Acts 2, while the 120 worshiped and prayed, the Holy Spirit came upon them. In Acts 10 as Cornelius and his family listened to Peter explain the gospel, the Holy Spirit just came upon them. However the Samaritans had believed, they'd