

## The Challenge of Acts 8 & 19

In this lecture we will look briefly at Acts eight and nineteen. Acts eight is important in this funnel-like collection of various ethnic groups who come to the same point of receiving God's grace and His Spirit. In chapter eight Philip in Samaria gives a very interesting description of the presentation of the Gospel. I should really spend half an hour describing the history of Samaria, but I want to at least give two little hints. The history of Samaria goes back to the Assyrian exile in 722 BC; Jewish and Gentile intermarriage led to a mixed group of people. That was one way for a superior power to subjugate its people: by drawing away gifted people and bringing in foreigners who the people did not consider very significant, and then having them intermarry. That is the sociological composition of what Samaria grew into. We know from Scripture that the Samaritans had strange ideas regarding the truth of God and worship. They were superstitious and had many magicians. Simon the sorcerer, who evidently had a great impact on the Samaritans, is one telling example, but he was not unique or exceptional. Thus there are many sociological and religious questions associated with the Samaritans. Jesus did not choose by chance to describe the story of the Good Samaritan. In using a Samaritan it was a purposeful, intentional example using a representative from an ethnic group of people that was particularly despised by the Jews. Again, just as when Jesus gave the parable of the Samaritan, we see in Acts that God does not circumvent, avoid, or jump over this particular group. There is no discrimination, but rather there is absolute equality in terms of God's love for all man; because of this the Samaritans, who are looked down upon, are included here. So the Gospel was being preached and chapter eight says that Philip proclaimed the Gospel and the Samaritans paid close attention to what Philip did and they believed Philip's message. Even Simon the sorcerer himself (Acts 8:13) believed and was baptized. This was the first presentation of the Gospel among the Samaritans and it indicated their inclusion.

The strange event that occurs here is that the outpouring of the Spirit apparently is delayed until the apostles from Jerusalem come and lay hands on the Samaritans. At that point the Spirit of God is poured out on them as well. I would like to discuss this a bit more in depth because some churches, particularly of the Pentecostal tradition, have established a theology of a second blessing primarily on this basis. This is a theology that there is a distinction between receiving the Holy Spirit and receiving the power of the Spirit. Acts chapter eight is often used as a proof text for that distinction. There are various interpretations given for Acts eight. One of the interpretations, which seems valid but which I do not think is true, is that because the Samaritans were so excited by signs and wonders, they loved to see miracles demonstrated and, as a result, quickly believed. As they believed Simon, so also they believed Philip. They followed Simon the sorcerer, and now Philip does some interesting things and they follow him. They are moved about by the winds that come, and so perhaps their faith and their conversion were not genuine. There is some merit to this interpretation because, as the narrative unfolds, it is amazing how Simon the sorcerer and the Samaritans are presented in the narrative sequence. Something is written about Simon the sorcerer, then something else about the Samaritans—something more about Simon the sorcerer, then a little more about the Samaritans. They are, in the narrative structure, soldered together so as to give the impression that they are really of one sort. I understand that argument, but I am not convinced of its truth. If it were true that they were all like Simon then the whole group of the Samaritans would have been in serious trouble. In Acts 8:22-23, when Peter comes from Jerusalem and sees Simon making financial offers to get the same kind of power and ability that Peter has, this is what he says: “May your money perish with you because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money. You have no part or share in this ministry because your heart is not right before God. Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps he will forgive you for having such a thought in your heart. For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin.” Remember how in verse 13 it says, “Simon himself believed and was baptized.” To this believing, baptized person Peter nearly says, “Go to hell.” It is tough what Peter has to say to this man who wants to manipulate God's Spirit for personal

gain. We better watch out if any of us are found seeking to manipulate God's Spirit for personal gain. Some people argue that, because Simon is in such serious trouble, his conversion may have been superficial, which could have been indicative of the conversion of the rest of the Samaritans. Thus, they argue, it was necessary for the apostles to come up and instruct the Samaritans in the true faith in Christ and then they received the Spirit. This is a possible explanation, but I am not completely convinced by it.

Another explanation for this unique and unusual event is the following: the Samaritans are a people who are despised by the Jews. They are a people who are not considered to be covered by God's grace. They are excluded. That is why the parable of the merciful Samaritan is so moving. In this parable, and in Jesus' interaction with the Samaritan woman at the well, God's plan to include the Samaritans is made evident. Why, then, would God delay the outpouring of the Spirit on the Samaritans? I think we should not follow this argument that all the Samaritans were in the same condition as Simon. Rather, we should say, "Yes, Simon is in trouble, no question about it. But the rest of the Samaritans have a sincere faith in Christ, so why would there be a delay of the outpouring of the Spirit?" I would say that in the total development of Acts, there is a clear commission of the apostles to follow through with what God is doing. They are to follow after what God is doing, witnessing God's action and authenticating what God is doing by their instructions. They have been instructed by Christ to witness to the truth of Christ and so there must be a converging of the apostolic witness to the truth of Christ and the outpouring of the Spirit. Those two must come together. And so I wonder if it is a sensible explanation for the temporary delay of the outpouring of the Spirit in Acts eight to say this: Philip did preach the Gospel, but there was the necessity of apostolic authentication, the witness of the apostles, a necessity for them to say, "This is the Gospel. Do you believe this Gospel?" They needed to follow through on what Philip had already done. There is an apostolic unique commission, and for the disciples to arrive among the Samaritans there would necessarily be a temporary delay. Then the outpouring of the Spirit would come upon the Samaritans with the coming of the apostles so as to witness to the disciples that God has included the Samaritans. The apostles came authenticating and saying, "Is this your confession?" "Yes, it is." "Then we extend to you the right hand of fellowship. We authenticate that you have the faith that Jesus taught us, that we have been brought to proclaim." That would be an explanation of a temporary delay for this outpouring. It does not establish a norm, but is meant to simply bring them to that same point that has already happened with the disciples in Jerusalem and those who believe.

There is some question as to who Philip was, whether he might have been an apostle. However, Acts 8:14 says, "When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them." I believe that the Philip who is mentioned here is Philip the Evangelist who is mentioned a little earlier in the account of Acts. I also think that the reference to the scattering of everyone except for the apostles in Jerusalem, just prior to this account, makes it likely that this is Philip the Evangelist.

It has also been asked why the Samaritans would have been baptized if they had not believed. I would say they did believe. The main question in my mind is, why is the Spirit of God not falling on them as with the household of Cornelius? With the household of Cornelius, the Spirit of God falls upon the people even before they are baptized. So why is there this delay? I try to explain that by saying that it is necessary that the apostles authenticate the Gospel message and they also needed to witness the inclusion of the Samaritans. The inclusion of the Samaritans is a major step, nearly as big as going to the impure Gentiles in chapter ten.

Another question is, "How did the apostles know that the Holy Spirit had not fallen on the Samaritans?" Perhaps we can say because there are no visible signs of the outpouring of the Spirit, like those we have

in Acts 10 with Cornelius or in Acts 19, the apostles simply did not discern the Spirit's presence. Yet another question is, "Is the apostles' coming and laying on of hands what I mean by a second blessing?" No, not directly. It is simply that there would be a basis in Acts eight for some—not for me, but for some—to differentiate coming to faith and receiving the power of the Spirit. The theology of the second blessing is that there is a temporal difference between these events. If you confess Christ you are not complete until you have had a second distinct blessing of the baptism in the power of the Holy Spirit. That is what I am trying to argue against by saying that this is a unique situation, and we need to be very careful of drawing such a general rule from a very specific event. The laying on of hands would be one way that the Spirit of God falls on people, but it is not a normative one because, in the example of the household of Cornelius, Peter simply speaks; he is even interrupted by God's Spirit being poured out.

I have also been asked if I believe that it was Peter who was uniquely authorized to authenticate because of Matthew 16. I do not think so, and particularly because of the beginning of Acts, especially chapter two. Peter does not speak alone; rather, he arises with the 11. It is as if there is this group of witnesses standing next to Peter; Peter speaks but there are these other witnesses who also bear testimony and give weight to what Peter says. So Peter, I believe, in the beginning of Acts, is the spokesperson for the apostles, just as he was during Jesus' ministry. But I do not think that he is not unique in that sense. Obviously we would have to look at the interpretation of Matthew 16 and the question of Peter as the rock. But in Acts, I see Peter functioning as a spokesperson for the apostles, all of whom had the authority and commission to authenticate with their apostolic witness.

What happens with Simon? As far as we know, he never truly understands the Gospel. He was concerned about his own life and gain. He was not concerned about the truth of the Gospel and the glory of God. May that never happen with us because I know I am often still so concerned with myself. From Acts we do not know what happens with Simon the sorcerer.

What about the apostolic authentication? Is that unique to this particular section? The apostolic authentication, I think, is more continuous. We find that in Acts 10; Peter, one of the apostles, authenticates the transfer of the Gospel to God-fearing Gentiles. Also in the beginning parts of Acts in Jerusalem it is the apostolic group who gives authentication. We find it repeated in Acts 8 and in Acts 19, so I would say there is certain continuity there.

The apostolic authentication does not have to be repeated with every particular church and every ethnic group. Representative groups are illustrated—how they came into faith. Then the rest of the assumption is apostolic authentication in some way, clarity of the Gospel in some way, and receiving of the Spirit in some way. That is not focused on. What is focused on is that these major groups, these representative groups, are being brought in. They stand as a representative of the whole group of all kinds of people out there who are now brought in. I do not think it is the purpose of Acts to show what is happening in every case. The purpose is simply to display, in a representative way, that the Samaritans and the other groups are a part of the people of God. There are people from the Samaritans joining and coming into the people of God and it is apostolically authenticated.

What was speaking in tongues—what did that signify in chapter 10? I do not see any indication after Pentecost that suddenly speaking in tongues, which is spoken of in Acts two, changes to indiscernible language or speaking, so I would say that what is begun in Acts two is carried through. The definition of tongues in Acts two is "dialectal language." So I would say, in Acts 10, there is this same kind of a manifestation. It could be a demonstration of the Gentile people speaking a language that Peter has testified to. I would also say we should not think of it as being so cloistered that those speaking would be in a separate room where nobody could listen or hear. If you look at the architecture of houses of the

period, they were open in such a way that people could actually hear their testimony. So I think there is a lot of parallelism between Pentecost in Acts two and the event in chapter ten.

A good question is, “Why the delay of the outpouring of the Spirit?” Why could it not be that they received the Spirit of God and then later on the Apostles authenticated? This is a fair question and I do not have a clear answer. I am mainly trying to explain the phenomenon here. The delay makes some sense because the Samaritans were a particularly tender issue, and it makes sense that there would be a particular effort, on the part of God's kindness, to bring the apostolic witness and the outpouring of the Spirit together. It seems that He would want to do that for the sake of the apostles (and the other people who would hear about it) so that they would know beyond a doubt that the Samaritans were to be included.

Are we still experiencing delay in our society? I am sure there are many different experiences. I am very cautious with looking at experiences today and trying to identify Scriptural explanations. I do not think we should experience today the same kind of delay that the Samaritans did. I do not think there is a basis for it because in this situation there was a particular reason for the delay, both in Acts 8 and Acts 19. But I even have my questions about Acts 19. I have given you an explanation of why I do not think there is a differentiation between coming to faith in Christ and receiving the Spirit of God. One other thing that I would like to mention, which is a little complicated, is that all references to the work of the Spirit in Acts use seven or eight different verbs to describe that work: the outpouring of the Spirit, receiving of the Spirit, baptism in the Holy Spirit, being filled in the Holy Spirit, and God pouring out His Spirit. I believe that all these verbs are synonymous, describing one thing rather than differentiating between receiving the Spirit of God on the one hand and receiving the power of the Spirit on the other. I think when you do a careful analysis of the vocabulary used you will find that they are synonyms. They all describe one thing: the outpouring of the Spirit. These different verbs are used to describe the outpouring of the Spirit from different perspectives. For example, when the verb “outpouring” is used, the work of the Spirit is being described from the perspective of God. “Receiving the Spirit” is used when the description is from the perspective of man. They are different perspectives, but it is one event that is being described. There is a book called *Baptism in the Holy Spirit*, by J. D. G. Dunn, that is a very conscientious and detailed exegetical study on this.

I think it is possible that there is a special significance of the apostles laying their hands on the Samaritans as a sort of fulfillment of Jesus’ ministry to the Samaritans—actually physically including the Samaritans. However, I do not want to elevate the laying on of hands as normative. But I think it as a very tender type of transfer, especially in this circumstance, because the Samaritans were considered by the Jews to be unclean; thus, for the apostles to lay hands on them is an amazing affirmation of the Samaritans’ cleanliness in Christ. The uncleanness of the Samaritans and Gentiles is a big issue in Acts chapters 10 and 11. Peter goes through much agony before he actually enters the house of the unclean centurion. It is amazing how often he defiles himself before he actually preaches the Gospel. He becomes so dirty according to Jewish purity laws that he has no hope of getting back out. It is amazing when you look at these stages. So yes, I think that the laying on of hands is significant.

I think it is possible that there is significance in the fact that the apostles authenticate the church in Samaria to emphasize that there is one church rather many that have different rankings (with the Jerusalem church coming first and then the Samaritan church). But I see that as a sub-point to the leading point of there being one authentic Gospel and one witness to the truth of that Gospel. By necessity, that then leads to one church. This one church is based not on there being one value or one structure, but on one Gospel, one testimony that is normative and valid for all. There is one way to God—this is a little tough for Jews to hear, but very nice for Gentiles to hear.

In Acts, speaking in tongues is one manifestation of the Spirit of God coming upon people. However, it is amazing that you do not find speaking in tongues frequently emphasized, so I am a little hesitant on that point. The main consistent principle in Acts is that everybody receives the Spirit of God. I can go back to that and look at Acts 2:38. We know from other parts of Scripture that one way you can tell whether a person has the Holy Spirit is when they confess Jesus Christ as Lord and believe.

Acts 8 and 19 are the only texts in Acts where there may be a distinction between believing in Christ and receiving the Spirit of God. There does seem to be a possible distinction in chapter eight, but as we have discussed, I do not see that as being normative. On the other hand, I do not think there is such a distinction in Acts 19. In 19:1-ff we read about disciples: “While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples and asked them, ‘Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?’” Thus Paul is asking if the work of God is complete in their hearts and lives. The account continues, “They answered, ‘No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.’ So Paul asks, ‘Then what baptism did you receive?’ ‘John's baptism,’ they replied.” This account takes place in Ephesus, in Asia Minor. This is a setting that is very distinct from Samaria and Jerusalem. We know that in Ephesus there was the famous Artemis Temple with its cult of fertility worship. There were all kinds of strange things going on in that city.

Luke's account tells us that there were some people there who had heard of John the Baptist and who had responded to his call to repent and return to the Lord. The disciples have made some movement towards the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. However, what you need to be careful about is that when you read, “disciples,” that does not necessarily mean, “disciples of Christ.” In this context, perhaps these men were disciples of John. They may have been associated with Christians, but I think their answer that they received John's baptism makes it clear that, far from having been brought in contact with the Gospel of Jesus Christ, they had only had some exposure to John the Baptist. Thus what Paul is doing here is bringing them from the place of John's baptism to the message of the Gospel by telling the disciples: “[John] told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus.’ On hearing this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus.” In Acts, when it says, “into the name of,” it indicates an identification with the person of Jesus himself. So to be baptized in the name of Jesus is not only a reference to the rite of water baptism, but also an indication of an association with Christ Himself, having been brought into that relationship through the work of God. The passage further reads that “When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied. There were about 12 men in all.”

Therefore, with regards to this possible distinction between believing in Christ and receiving the Spirit, I do not believe that Acts 19 is as significant of a challenge as Acts 8. But, based on the explanations I have given you, I would reject that distinction in Acts 8, and I do not think that Acts 19 even presents that challenge; there it seems to be a deficiency of instruction in the basics of the Gospel before Paul comes, then Paul instructs them in the Gospel and they believe.

I think the reference to Apollos in Acts 18:24 is important: “[Apollos] was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the scriptures. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John.” However, I still wonder what it really means with regards to where Apollos was spiritually. We do know that he needed further instruction, and I wonder if the reference in this context is that he was ardently speaking about the fact that, on the basis of the Old Testament, Jesus is the promised Messiah. Perhaps he did not necessarily believe in the personal work of Christ on his behalf, but perhaps he went through Scripture and said, “Psalm two refers to Jesus as the Messiah. Psalm 110 refers to the Messiah. Isaiah 53 refers to

the Messiah.” Perhaps he was able to go through Scripture in that way, but had not necessarily applied that to himself. If so, that would be something that Aquila and Priscilla would have had to bring to Apollos. There is some deficiency in his knowledge of “the way of God;” we know that from 18:26, and I would wonder what that deficiency actually was.