

9/4/22 - Acts 8:4-25 - "The Prevailing & Preserving Word"

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Date: 04 September 2022

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[0 : 00] If we remember back long ago in one of the first messages we had and we shared together as we feasted on God's Word, we saw the book of Acts sort of structured in a way. And we have sermon notes that you can remind yourself all the way back when we started this series of what I'm recalling. But what I want us to recall is that verse in Acts 1.8, the verse in Acts 1.8, Jesus Christ promised to His disciples that He would send the Holy Spirit. They would receive the Holy Spirit. And when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, Jesus says, you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth. And so we see the promise that something is coming. The promise then arrived to the disciples who then were called to be the apostles. And that was in Acts 2. The promise for the disciples fell upon them. There was a little bit of a delay from when Jesus promised that to when they received that promise. And that promise began to disperse all throughout Jerusalem and within those walls in that area of Jerusalem, Judea.

And so last week we saw, though, through that spreading, Stephen, we met a table waiter that was appointed to wait on tables. And Stephen testified to the habitual rejection of the leaders of God, of God's people all throughout temple worship. And it's indicating that they had a heart problem. There was a heart problem, just as we see today last night at the Canfield Fair. And this heart was a heart of God's people all throughout the world. And that problem manifested. It took shape as the stones were flung at Stephen, breaking his body and ultimately killing him, being the first martyr in Acts of a table waiter. And today, following his death, this leads us to our time today. And the promise of God that was bound to the walls of Jerusalem and Judea is now extending further. How is it extending further?

By way of persecution. Remember last week I mentioned like it's the paradoxical wet blanket of the world that's just saying, I'm going to stop this church from doing what they're doing. And upon the same motion of throwing that wet blanket on the church, just a little fan has lit that spark and it's dispersed before that wet blanket could ever extinguish. And so we saw, however, due to the suppressing efforts last week of the unbelievers, the gospel ironically was scattered. The gospel has left Jerusalem. This is huge. It's a transition period in our series. It's a transition point in the book of Acts. And so our time today enters into the fulfillment of what Jesus Christ promised a couple pages to the left, that you will be my witnesses to the apostles, right? To Judea, all Samaria, to the ends of the earth, right? And so we're going to see that. And so going into the details of the passage, just as Lou read, thank you, Lou, we're going to find some unique workings of God. We're going to see the power of God that begins to overthrow pagan gods from their man-made thrones. We're going to see the, also unusually, the Spirit of God, the reception of the Spirit of God being delayed. Similarly to that same delay at Pentecost, which will be important. We'll get to that in a moment. And then lastly, God's promise is established again through whom? The hands of the apostles of this day, just as Jesus Christ promised. This reminds me of our candlelight service during Christmas Eve, how we start with just a couple candles. And it's like the apostles are carrying that that little flame into each border that Jesus Christ promised in Jerusalem, Samaria, to the ends of the earth, to the Gentiles. It's like they are the flame carriers, and they light that flame, and then it disperses. They light that flame, and then it disperses. We have that moment happening in the passage right now. And that's contextually significant, and we'll get into that in a moment. But it's all linking back to Acts 1.8, the promise of Jesus Christ that's unfolding in this book, a book that was written by Luke to a man named Theophilus, who commissioned him to write. This is all significant details. It's not just to give you worthless knowledge so you can pass a jeopardy question on the Bible.

[5 : 27] This is contextually rooting and grounding us into understanding Scripture. So let's begin, as Luke gives another account of another table waiter, and this guy being named Philip, of how the promise of God arrives at Samaria. And so we're going to see today, as a main point, God's glory in salvation cannot be contended with. Let's pray. Father, thank You for Your Word, something that is true, absolutely true.

We can't cast proper judgments of how to interpret it unless You give us that enlightenment in order to see the message within the pages. So, Father, draw from the well of Your Word today for Your church that we may be edified, challenged, and encouraged today. Give me power by the Holy Spirit to do so.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. I got three sections today, and a sermon titled, The Prevailing and Persevering Word. I know, you drop your phone, you're so surprised at that. So the first section we'll see is that God's promise penetrates Samaria. Luke begins to provide the record of the expansion of the gospel, as we said, for Theophilus and us today, in contrast to the activity in Samaria. So we see Philip, now in those who were scattered in verse 4, now those who were scattered went about preaching the Word. Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ. And the crowds, with one accord unified, church, paid attention to what was being said by Philip. When they heard him and saw the signs he did, they were paying attention to all of that church. And look at what was happening in verse 7.

For unclean spirits, crying out with a loud voice, came out of many who had them, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. And so there was much joy in that city.

[7 : 58] Luke's writing takes a significant interest in the people of Samaria. If you've read through the gospel of Luke, you'd pick up on this. He's very interested. I think it might be the physician.

He's interested in the outcasts, those who are hurt and broken. And Luke takes great interest in them. We see that in the Good Samaritan in Luke 10. We see it with the Samaritan leper in Luke 18. He usually takes great attention to that. And so it would be very usual of us to approach the text and see Him detailing something significant in Samaria. And so we do. And we see something, though, because the reality of the gospel entering Samaria should be as profound as the gospel leaving Jerusalem. Both of those aspects should really marvel us to our core if we look and consider how God has revealed Himself to the Israelites all throughout the Bible. It should be as profound of the gospel entering Samaria just as it is leaving Jerusalem. Samaritans were the sort of like the best among lost sheep, right? They accepted the Pentateuch as God's Word, but they rejected the prophets and other writings.

And so they were right, but they were kind of wrong in all that. They were similar to the Sadducees. And so Luke doesn't delay in highlighting the evangelization to these outcasts, these marginalized. It was his bias to begin with. It meant something to Luke. And he details their invitation to fully participate with the people of God. This is the promise of God that you will be my witnesses in all these lands, right? And knowing that they only know the Pentateuch, those are the earlier books, and so we know that they knew of a prophet like Moses who would be to come. This is Deuteronomy 18.

They would know that. They might not know the minor prophets' sort of prophetic fulfillment in Christ and all the prophecies from there, but they would be familiar with somebody coming as a greater Moses, okay? And what was the effect? Luke goes to them. He proclaims to them the Christ. He is the Messiah.

[10 : 31] And look what they do. Verse 6, and the crowds with one accord, they paid attention. Church, they listened. Yeah, they witnessed the signs to verify the authority of the message, the messenger, but there's no indication that they believed on behalf of the miracles. They believed on behalf of the message. Many exorcisms, though, were kind of like hinted like, wow, what's going on there, Luke?

Why? You spent a great deal of time explaining the supernatural phenomenon. This is like a horror movie on Netflix. Many exorcisms and healings, like, really? But could it be that the gospel is entering Satan's territory? And we see that through his writing. After describing that activity of Philip, Luke introduces us to what we'll call him a contender in Samaria. Look, in verse 9, we meet Simon.

But there was a man, Luke says, named Simon, who had previously practiced magic in the city and amazed the people of Samaria, saying that he himself was somebody great. They all paid attention to him from the least to the greatest, saying, this man is the power of God that is called great. This

is Simon the Great, church. And they paid attention to him because for a long time he had amazed them with his magic. What Simon didn't have was a message. Simon. Who's Simon? Simon was a man from Samaria. We got that.

But there's extra, like, apocrypha that can detail a little bit more of Simon's life. A lot of church fathers actually detailed who Simon was. And think about this, because when we're thinking about the recipients of the book of Acts, of Luke's record to Theophilus, they knew who Simon was. Us today, we could maybe guess some speculations, but this was Simon. This was Simon the Great. That was how he was known in this time period. He was an instrument of the devil, using sorcery to gain fame. He's a chris angel, a mind freak. He was known to actually levitate himself in Samaria to draw crowds. And history says that he was considered a god who was honored even with a statue along a river with an inscription, Simon the Holy God.

Now do you understand why Luke probably detailed the activity of the Spirit of God coming after the Spirit of Satan? This was a spiritual war. Luke's audience would be familiar with all of that, with the details. It's like entering into Satan's city that we're ignorant of today. But nevertheless, Philip entered Satan's turf. And the gospel created quite a spectacle, as they saw not only signs and wonders, but a message of hope. Considering that Philip entered the devil's playground, might we consider why Luke includes the details of those exorcisms occurring? And what we see here is Simon's followers on Instagram and Twitter, all Simon's followers are unfollowing him. They're actually blocking him because they're so mad at the lies that they've been led down all this time, that they needed Simon when all they needed was God, the true God, who is only worthy. He's so boundless to our time and our world, we can't even inscribe something unless we create an idol in our lives. He's unchangeable.

[14:48] He's undefinable. He's undefinable. He's incomprehensible. And so what we see here is a worship shift. We have a worship shift beginning of these Samaritans turning from idols to the living God.

This is a revival happening. How? How is this happening? The Word. The message of which Philip proclaims proclaims. And what a reminder today. When we see this kind of a mix-up passage, it's used in many denominations to sort of promote this idea of signs and wonders with a message. And what a reminder for us to pay attention to what's being said, if anything, right? Regardless of what's being done.

Us in our sort of consumeristic mentalities and our frailty, we sort of see these sometimes signs and wonders and these really interesting things occurring and it draws our attention. It makes us wonder and be in awe of it. But what is the message, if there's any message other than life improvements of giving money to the miracle worker, right? Anything we encounter in this life, we need a reminder of that. Anything that we encounter that seems to replace the glory of God with man, we must beware. There's not a gray area according to Scripture. There's two roads you can travel. You're either following Satan, you're a man after Satan's heart or you're a man after God's heart. There's no gray area in that. And so if you have no message, if your miracles are detached from the message of the gospel, if there's any of that happening, we must beware.

And we see verse 12, but when they believed Philip, when the followers started following Philip as he preached the good news about the kingdom and God in the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. Even Simon, you think Simon, that guy who has this statue built after him, Simon's kind of following along with the crowd. Wow, this is pretty neat. How do I get in on this?

You know how much money I can make? Even Simon himself believed. And after being baptized, he continued with Philip. I mean, he's one of the guys, right? He's a high profile. He doesn't just sit with the least of them. You know, he sits at the throne with God's people from Jerusalem, this table waiter. And after being baptized, even Simon continued to be with Philip. And seeing signs great miracles performed, he was amazed. We might wonder what exactly, church, we might wonder what exactly is the thrust of the message, right? One thing we know is that these unbelievers heard and believed. And the earth-shattering impact that Philip had in Samaria, in the devil's playground.

[18:12] There was no reason to doubt in that. And signs verified Philip's authority to bear that message in this time period. Another table waiter just like Stephen. You see, the church, the word is like a net that goes out. And the church is called to cast that net, as the power of that net catches, who it is intended to catch. That's God's part in the deal. And we see the signs revealed authorization that you are able to cast that net, and we today rest upon the apostolic testimony in

which we, right now, cast our net today to those to hear and to be equipped today. It's simply authorization.

And so, we go into the passage, it's sort of like rising action into the second part, and we see something here, that God's promise is preserved. Not only penetrates Samaria, and we got all this going on, we got people following Philip now, even Simon himself is carrying himself along. And let's watch as this unfolds. Verse 14 says, now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, let me stop there for a moment. What did they hear? It wasn't that they saw all these signs that Philip was doing. What did they receive? Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they have received the seed. The seed is planted in their heart.

They've come to know Jesus Christ. This is revival going on. They sent to them Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Spirit. For He, the Holy Spirit, being a person, He had not fallen on any of them. But they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. How was God's promise preserved by God? Not allowing these new converts to experience that instantaneous reception of the Holy Spirit, just as Ephesians 1.13 tells us, that in Him, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and in Him, whom you also believed, you were sealed and promised the Holy Spirit, what is occurring here? With these new converts? Well, what was happening is a preservative act of God in not only Jerusalem, but all the land surrounding. And so the apostles, being those light carriers, those flame bearers, right? Without the apostles carrying and personally delivering the Holy Spirit, the person of the Holy Spirit from Jerusalem, just as it were, and Samaria could very well jeopardize the conversion among these outcasts. They might, it was culturally bound. It was situationally bound. It was contextually bound. Acts 1.8 bound to come from the apostles, as was promised from Jesus. And within the statement of faith of many Pentecostal denominations around our, even our area, there's a cross-reference emphasized of how believers are actually filled with the Holy Spirit and sort of fail to identify the inconsistencies of, that that emphasis holds. And it's dangerous in that, because sadly, many denominations have been informed upon overemphasized. And they have been informed upon overemphasizing what Luke is not emphasizing. What he's, what is happening here is that it's the error of overemphasis, because even overemphasis is adding to Scripture, and they in turn have lost the message of the Bible, lost the message of Luke, lost the message of Jesus, lost the Holy Spirit. And so, I have a lot of love for other people of other denominations, and many of them do truly love Jesus. And it comes down to interpretive challenges within these texts, and we should be able to love them and still love them, but I can tell them that they got this wrong.

[22 : 53] They got this wrong. They are prescribing what the Bible is describing. And so, instead of what Luke is describing as an act of the sovereign God who delays the reception of the Holy Spirit, similar to the arrival of the Holy Spirit in Pentecost in Jerusalem, something else is happening here. They fail to identify those shifts in theme and the shift in writing. Why was it delayed? Well, I can tell you what, it was not a blueprint for another denomination, another separation of people who got Scripture right and people who got Scripture wrong, but it's a blueprint of God's promise of Jesus Christ. It's not a blueprint for a denomination. Luke dramatically details God's Spirit breaching geographical, cultural walls. This is beautiful. Peter, who is given the keys of heaven as Jesus gave, breaches those walls as he ushers in the Holy Spirit's reception. You see, God went to great lengths to preserve and to protect the gospel and those who receive it. Think about how active God is in this, in protecting any manipulation that could occur from Mr. Simon the sorcerer, Simon the great. Think about how great of a length that God has gone to protect those converts to truly receive their conversion, to know and be assured of their conversion as the apostles, Peter and John, come personally, heralds of the Holy Spirit, and it was dispersed from there on. How can you ever question, if you have been a Christian for any length of time, that God will not continue to preserve and protect you in your faith too? Ephesians 1.13 tells you that you were sealed. You can't unseal a seal. God is immutable. Once God has given a gift, we see that in this passage. It's a gift. If it's a gift, it's free. There's no contingencies. God has given you a gift. How much more will you be kept in your faith? And so we see things get a little bit tense here in verse 17. Then they laid hands on them in verse 17, and they received the Holy Spirit.

Praise God. Now, when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, saying, give me this power also, so that anyone on whom I lay my

hands may receive the Holy Spirit. But Peter said to him, I don't think he was too kind here. Peter said to him, may your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money. You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. repent, repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity. Oh, the depths of Simon's pride that are just pulling, tense in his life.

He sees the gift of God, but he sees possibly his own gain from it. What's happening here? I want us to know some things. That God delayed the reception of the Holy Spirit at this time, and the moment these believers were filled, they were noticeably changed and empowered for service to God. It could have been speaking in other languages. It could have been maybe them prophesying and all sorts of things. We don't know necessarily how Simon saw it, but what we know is that he did see something that he wanted for money. And so, one commentator says that this verse does not support the false notion that Christians receive the Holy Spirit sort of secondary to their initial salvation.

[27 : 37] This was a transitional period, church, transitional period in which confirmation by the apostles was necessary to verify the inclusion of a new group of people into the church. Because of the animosity that existed between Jews and Samaritans, it was essential for the Samaritans to receive the spirits in the presence of the leaders of the Jerusalem church for the purpose of maintaining a unified church.

The delay also revealed the Samaritans need to come under apostolic authority. The same transitional event occurred, we're going to see that in Acts 10, when the Gentiles then receive the Holy Spirit and Cornelius' house begin to speak in tongues. We'll see that in a few weeks. But why is Luke including this? Because Simon, at this point, yeah, he's arguably not a Christian, or maybe he is a Christian who's struggling. We're not going to debate that, but what we do know is that he saw something that he wanted that was outside of what the Bible mandated for him. He is the antonym in Luke's story and his account of what the church looked like in Acts 2, 41 through 47, where they were charitable, where they cared for the needs of others. Simon was the antonym of that. He wanted things for himself. So he was arguably a convert, but he definitely had a thorn in his flesh. But don't we all?

Power. Wanting me to be the center of it all, even after believing. And sadly, those who claim in their apostolic authority today, in our modern day today, that their apostolic authority was granted by some subjective spiritual enlightenment where they were taken into the clouds and all this stuff in a dream. I've seen more cults start with that sort of enlightenment. And they become blinded to the foundation that Scripture has already set based on apostolic authority. And this is huge, because the saddest part of all, those who believe that they are apostles today have very much less in common with Peter and John and much more in common with Simon and Simon's heart and his need for power and authority.

I mean, don't you love when somebody introduces themselves as Apostle Bob? Gives you a reason to exercise and run the other way. Or maybe engage if you really want to get into a confrontation and engage in a conversation about it.

[30 : 29] But the gospel, as heralded by the apostolic body in Samaria and us today through the Word, protects us even in our day today from those apostles, those imposters in the church, those who sort of, they have message that sounds like they're reading the horoscope from the Sunday paper more than a prescription from God's Word. This is so vitally true.

And unfortunately sad in our day today. The promise of God is to receive mercy, not money. God's grace cannot be prostituted. God's grace was never intended to be trafficked by man.

And repentance is not only needed, it's required. And most of all, we have the Word of God, apostolic testimony, apostolic testimony, apostolic authority bound for us today with the special revelation. And all we need is the foundation of the church, Jesus Christ, the cornerstone.

This is what we rest on, church. We don't, we're not duped. Don't be picked off because you can't spot a counterfeit. Last section, and then we'll wrap up our time today, is the third section, God's promise prevailed. You might find it interesting that I say that, and I'll try to qualify it in a moment. We see in the verse, verse 24, and Simon answered, pray for me to the Lord.

What's he asking? To intercede for him. The apostolic body. Intercede for him. That nothing of what you say, you have said, may come upon me. I don't know what sounds like repentance than that.

[32 : 33] And 25, now when they had testified and spoken the Word of God, Word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem preaching the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans. The gospel has spread according to Jesus Christ's promise. Some might argue if Simon was truly saved and judge him based on his fruit of his life and hunger for sin. I kind of double down and say, have we forgotten what we've been saved from?

Have you forgotten the thorn in your flesh? And even Saul, after his conversion, he had this struggle in his life that was ongoing as a Christian. And I know many Christians who love the Lord will be received, I believe, who have struggles in their lives. And that hunger for sin. Have we forgotten our own sin that we have been saved from? You see, sin qualifies us to be in Christ, doesn't it?

And our repentance, when we do sin, validates that we are truly in Christ. And Simon shows remorse here. If it was genuine, it's between Simon and God. If your faith, if my faith is genuine, it's between an individual and God. God knows the heart. Simon is not only an example of an imposter of power today, but also maybe that of an immature Christian as well, who is unwilling to completely surrender their life to Jesus Christ. Simon, we have to remember, he's a new believer. He's a new convert. Of course, he'd probably struggle with some sin, especially having a statue named after him, right? Simon's early in that sanctification process, as we all once were. And for Simon, verse 24 makes it clear that while many other Pentecostal denominations are kind of making their blueprint for their next denomination and everything, we see that God's promise prevailed just as Jesus promised, right? God's promise prevailed by breaching borders. God's promise prevailed by authentic reception and authentic conversion. God's promise prevailed by restoring outcasts to the family of God. And God's promise prevailed by triumphing in Simon's repentance. Think about the gate as Peter and John entered the temple and that lame man was sitting, just as that disabled man is still joyfully probably praising at this time. Just as he testifies, just as all these healed Christians in Samaria are testifying, God is restoring. God's promise has prevailed. So, if you're maybe with us today and you're just like, I kind of feel forgotten. I'd probably have more in common with the Samaritans than any of those converts. I've been living my life in complete disobedience. My heart is corrupt. I've never made it a profession of faith, but now something is making sense. And you don't know what is going on, but something is making sense and a switch has flipped in your life. Might you be encouraged that as you are coming to the awareness of God's Word in your life, that God has not forgotten you. God has not forgotten you. He did not forget the Samaritans. But He is asking you to turn, to repent from your idols and turn to the living God and receive forgiveness. This is the promise of God that has exited the temple of Jerusalem and entered the temple of flesh. It's the promise that has exited the temple of Jerusalem and entered the walls of Steel Valley Church at 801 Wick Avenue. We see the promise still prevailing even in our lives today. So as we close, God has made so many promises to His people.

God has made so many promises to His people. God will never change. God will deliver you. God will restore you. God will never leave you. And we see that God is faithful. God is always at work. [37 : 24] God's love perseveres. God's mercy is everlasting. God's promises will never fail. God's Word will endure forever. What does He give us? God gives us new life. He cancels the record of sin in our lives.

He hears our cries. He cares for you. How do we experience His promises today as it were in Samaria, as it were in Jerusalem? Christ. Jesus Christ. How do you receive Christ? Through conversion.

Through the work of the Holy Spirit in your heart. Turning from idols. So a couple things. I want us to be grounded and reminded in our faith today. Faithful conversions are a consequence of God's faithfulness.

working through the power of His Word. We can differ on non-essentials of baptism, mode of baptism, of infant baptism, and things like that, especially when it has nothing to do with conversion and regeneration by the Spirit of God. We can disagree on the issues of the colors of the carpet. You can see that we took care of that issue really, really quickly in our church sanctuary. He's got rid of the carpet. We can disagree on all of these things. But one thing we cannot forget, that we cannot disagree on, which is essential, is the means of which God saves today.

[38 : 59] Faith comes by hearing, and hearing the Word of Christ. Not hearing some encouraging horoscope apostles standing up. We can get into something about itching ears back in the minor prophets.

It's not seeing the signs and the wonders. It's not, oh, he's speaking in another language. No. That is how wolves get in the church to draw God's people away from Christ.

Faith comes by hearing, and hearing the Word of Christ. And so, we can also with that be warned, not all professions of faith are authentic. We know that. Not all the seeds that were scattered in the parable of the sower fell on fertile soil. But trusting in the sufficient and authoritative Word of God, we have the apostolic authority to call one another to repentance upon the bad fruit in our lives.

When all of a sudden, we start making statues with our name on it next to the Mahoning River, you know, that would be cause that we have the apostolic authority to call that out.

Brent, I think it's time. That padded room has your name on it. It's time to put you in there. No sculptures. Okay? The sermon wasn't that good. So, regardless of what your mother says, right?

We must remember the call to cooperate in the church, to confront sin in a restorative manner as not to distort the gospel, right? It's the most loving thing that Peter did for Simon.

It's the most loving thing that we can do for one another today. And also, be encouraged. Because if you lack joy in your life, I know a lot of people, when Les is saying at the beginning, like, you know, we should be smiling and joyful and everything. Well, I know some of us here, the last thing we're probably doing is smiling. Last thing we're doing is probably having joy because of the heaviness of life, but we do have a reason to be joyful, even if we are in lament.

[41 : 20] So, if you lack joy in your life, we know where to find it. It's the mark of gospel reception. It cannot, yeah, we have these battles in this life and these struggles and dark times and seasons, but we don't have an excuse to not know where to find joy.

John Piper encouraged me once through a sermon, not personally, I'm not that, I didn't have the statue yet, but he mentions at that time, when you struggle with joy, to just open your word and don't leave your word until you leave with joy. Don't have joy? Keep going. Don't have it? Keep going. We have every reason to be grounded upon the word. We have every reason to be warned of wolves.

We have every reason to be encouraged to joy. The promise has come from Samaria to Youngstown, Ohio. Not only that, it's come to 801 Wick Avenue. This is a reason to rejoice. Let's pray.