

20-21 Bible Study #9

11/10/20

Current Bible Study

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Review of Last Week

- We saw Stephen's speech to the *Sanhedrin* (a summary of Old Testament Revelation History) in which he addressed:
 - The call of Abraham, his son Isaac, and the 12 patriarchs
 - The rise of Moses, the killing of an Egyptian, the flight to Midian, and the burning bush
 - The receipt of the Law, the golden calf, the Exodus to the Promised Land, the tent of meeting, and the construction of the temple
 - Then, he accused them, like their fathers, of killing the prophets
 - Finally, he concluded that Jesus of Nazareth (whom they killed) was the fulfillment of those same prophets
- This erupted into an enraged Sanhedrin who angrily dragged Stephen outside the wall where they stoned him leaving their cloaks at the feet of one *Saul of Tarsus*

Acts 8

Acts 8

- **Acts 8:1-8** *“And **Saul** was consenting to his death... So there was much joy in that city”*
 - Father said that Saul should be seen as the foreman on the job of stoning Stephen
 - The statement that the people laid their jackets at his feet does not mean that he just happened to be walking by and they asked him to watch their coats
 - It really meant that he was the overseer of the action
 - Father asked that we look at **Acts 22:20**; it states that Saul was the one who killed Stephen
 - Even though he may not have thrown any stones, he was certainly in charge of the stoning

Acts 8 (Cont)

- The rest of **Acts 8** continues by explaining the expansion of the persecution of the Church by Saul (Paul) beyond *Jerusalem* into *Judea*
- This action also led to the spreading of the Church into **Samaria** by *Deacon Philip* (listed next in the list of deacons after *Stephen*)
- Father reminded us that Stephen was dead and Philip took the banner of the early church into Samaria where he began to preach the good news
- Many Samaritans began to be converted (remember that they were Israelites who were mixed with Gentiles in a long and complex history)
- Samaria was originally the capital city of the Northern Kingdom, composed of members of the 10 tribes of Israel at the beginning of the civil war
- When they were assimilated by the Assyrians, they were mixed with five pagan nations from within the Assyrian Empire
- This means that the progression of the Church went from Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria and then on to the Gentiles

Acts 8 (Cont)

- **Acts 8:9-13; 18-25** - The story of Simon of Samaria, a magician, who tried to purchase the Holy Spirit from Peter (this led to the identification of the sin of Simony)

Acts 8 (Cont)

- **Acts 8:14-17** *“Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit; for it had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit”*
 - The next story is about *Simon* the magician from which we get the word *Simony* (more on this later)
 - We see that even though *Deacon Philip* baptized many *Samaritans*, they did not receive the Holy Spirit
 - Deacons can baptize, but they cannot confirm
 - So they invited the Apostles to come and lay their hands on the people in confirmation
 - Early on, Baptism was understood to be about death and resurrection (a new creation)

Acts 8 (Cont)

- But, the laying on of hands (*Chrismation*) was the blowing of the Holy Spirit into the nostrils of these newly created people (like what happened to Adam)
- As mentioned before, in the early church these two sacraments were always done together unless they had to wait from the arrival of an apostle
- Father pointed out that we can still see this practice in Hispanic churches in Central and South America
- Immediately after *Philip* finishes converting *Samaria*, the church began to look toward the Gentile world

Acts 8 (Cont)

- **Acts 8:26-33** *“But an angel of the Lord said to Philip...reading the prophet Isaiah...For his life is taken up from the earth”*
 - This reference to *Gaza* is in fact the same Gaza that exists today
 - This is desert road
 - Remember where it says in the **Book of Isaiah**, *“Let not the eunuch say I cannot enter into the house of the Lord”*
 - Neither a cripple nor a Gentile could enter the house of the Lord
 - But, everyone in the new covenant will be able to enter the house of the Lord
 - According to Jewish Law, a eunuch was unclean
 - A person who was crippled or had a withered hand was considered imperfect, and thus unclean and could not enter the temple to offer sacrifices

Acts 8 (Cont)

- This eunuch was a God-fearer from *Ethiopia* who was reading from **Isaiah**
- Scholars speculate that Luke gives this story to highlight that the new kingdom is open to everyone
- Philip catches up to this *Ethiopian* and asked him if he understood what he was reading (**Isaiah 53 - one of the suffering servant psalms**)
- His response was that he needed some one to teach him the meaning of the passage
- Philip joins him in chariot in order to explain the passage
- Father said that there were several important passages that are useful in attempting to convert to the faith (**Isaiah 53, Deuteronomy 18:15; Genesis 12:3; and Psalm 118**)

Acts 8 (Cont)

- **Acts 8:34-35** *“And the eunuch said to Philip. ‘About whom, prey, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?’ Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with the scripture he told him the good news of Jesus”*
 - Father asked: What should we understand when we hear about the “Good News” of Jesus?
 - We should hear the ***Kerygma*** (which is the apostolic proclamation of salvation through Jesus Christ)
 - *Kerygma* is a Greek word used in the New Testament for “preaching,” or to cry, proclaim (as a herald), announce; preach
 - This was further clarified in the next verse

The Kerygma (The Teachings of the Apostles)

- The promises of God made in the Old Testament have now been fulfilled with the coming of Jesus, the Messiah
- Jesus was anointed by God at His baptism as Messiah
- Jesus began His ministry in Galilee after His baptism
- He conducted a beneficent ministry (doing good and performing mighty works by the power of God)
- The Messiah was crucified according to the purpose of God
- He was raised from the dead and appeared to His disciples
- Jesus was exalted by God and given the name “Lord”
- He gave the Holy Spirit to form the new community of God
- He will come again for judgment and the restoration of all things
- All who hear the message should repent and be baptized

Acts 8 (Cont)

- **Acts 8:36-40** *“And as they went along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, see here is water! What is to prevent me being baptized?...and passing on he preached the gospel to all the towns till he came to Caesarea”*
 - Father suggested that most people see this passage as a bit of a disjunction
 - After Philip preached the good news, they see some water and the *Ethiopian* wants to be baptized
 - What is the connection?
 - Father said that this was the whole point for if we look at Philip’s preaching it was a baptismal homily

Acts 9

Acts 9

- **Acts 9:1-19** *“But Saul, who was still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord,...For several days he was with the disciples at **Damascus**”*
 - Father focused on the word “way” in this passage
 - This was one of the early designations for Christianity (along with *Nazareans*)
 - It is hard to know exactly why they used this term
 - There are a few references to the Old Testament to include:
 - The way back to the tree of life
 - The way back to the garden
 - The way of the Lord (Make straight the way of the Lord for the return of God to His people)
 - Jesus also said: “I am the way to the Father”, and “I am the way the truth and the life”

Acts 9 (Cont)

- Father pointed out that Saul was going to *Damascus* (a town north of Jerusalem with a large Jewish population) seeking followers of this new way
- At this point, there were no *Gentiles* joining the church
- Christianity was still a Jewish thing and the church had been dragging its feet as they could not decide what to do with the *Gentiles*
- All the converts were Jews (and proselytes to Judaism), and *Samaritans* (who were part of the people of Israel and still circumcising their sons and practicing kosher)
- Initially, the early church thought that they would have to require the *Gentiles* to convert to Judaism before joining them
- This was why *Saul* went to *Damascus* (as there were so many Jews living there who had been infected by this new movement)

Acts 9 (Cont)

- On his way, he was struck down by a great light (it is highly unlikely that he was riding a horse, but this impacted our understanding of the story due to the painting of Caravaggio) hears a voice saying, “Saul, Saul why do you persecute me?”
- Saul asked, “who are you Lord?”
- The voice responded: “I am Jesus whom you are persecuting”
- Paul will understand from here on in some mystical way that *Stephen* and all baptized Christians are the body of Jesus on earth
- Jesus was the head and they were the members of His body
- This concept is found throughout the *Pauline Epistles*
- Eventually, *Saul* was led into *Damascus* in a state of blindness
- Then, the Lord called *Ananias*, a local Christian to go and lay his hands on *Saul*
- Once the scales fell from his eyes, he was baptized into the new way!

Acts 9 (Cont)

- **Acts 9:20-26** *“And in the synagogues immediately he proclaimed Jesus,...for they did not believe that he was a disciple”*
 - *Saul* then goes into the synagogue and immediately proclaims Jesus as the son of God
 - Some would believe that a 1st century Jew hearing this in the synagogue would believe that he was proclaiming Jesus as God
 - Father pointed out that this was not what was being said
 - In fact, he attested that Jesus was the Christ
 - Two of the titles for the King of *Israel* from **Samuel 7 & 16** were that he would be the King of *Jerusalem* and in the line of David
 - He would be called the “Christ” because both *King David* and *King Solomon* were anointed (*Christed* or *Messiahed*)

Acts 9 (Cont)

- Father pointed out that there were a number of times in the Old Testament where a king was referred to as the Christ or the Messiah
- Also, the king was referred to as “son of God”
- The term “son of God” (as seen in **Deuteronomy** and **Exodus 4**) was used when speaking of the people of Israel
- But, this specific title was reserved for the king himself because *David* received the promise that his sons would be called God’s sons (**2nd Samuel 7**)
- Thus, we can see what is going on in this passage
- Father clarified that he was not trying to say that Jesus was not God, but he wants us to hear the scripture in the way a first century Jew would have understood it
- This is part of the healing the modern church needs in order to return to early Christianity
- Jesus of *Nazareth* according to *Paul*, was seen in the 1st Century as the king (messiah) that they had long-awaited

Acts 9 (Cont)

- **Acts 9:27-31** *“But one of us took him, and brought him to the apostles and declared to them how on the road he had seen the Lord,... and in the comfort of the Holt Spirit it was multiplied”*
 - When *Paul* got to Jerusalem, he spoke in a *Hellenist* synagogue because he was a Greek-speaking Jew from Tarsus
 - Like *Timothy*, he argued that Jesus of *Nazareth* was the actual Messiah that they had been waiting for
 - His audience rejected his message and wanted to kill him so the apostles decided to send him home to *Tarsus*

Acts 9 (Cont)

- **Acts 9:32-39** *“Now as Peter went here and there among them all, he came down also to the saints that lived at Liddia....made while she was with them”*
 - Again, *Peter* healed him in the name of Jesus and then traveled to *Joppa* which was a small Jewish fishing village
 - There, he found *Tabitha* who was a disciple and Jewish Christian
 - *Tabitha* was Aramaic for “gazelle,” which was translated into Greek as Dorcas
 - She was full of good works and acts of charity
 - After falling sick, she died and Peter came and healed her

Acts 9 (Cont)

- **Acts 9:40-43** *“But Peter put them all outside and knelt down and prayed;...And he stayed in Joppa many days with one Simon the Tanner”*
 - Father pointed out that Mark uses a similar Aramaic phrase, *“Tabitha cume”* which most likely was preserved to show that Peter was living the life of Jesus
 - This indicated that these early Christians were a representation of Jesus on earth
 - We will now turn to **Acts 10**