

20:20 Vision Ministries – Devotions by Roger Browning

Week 37 (September 6-12, 2015)

God's call to ministry can come at some very unusual times. For the next few weeks, let's examine some of those whose lives took a sudden and unexpected turn.

Sunday, September 6 (read Acts 8:1-8)

Those who had been scattered preached the Word wherever they went. (Acts 8:4)

Today's text follows the coverage of the stoning of Stephen, one of the original seven deacons (see Acts 6:5). Saul guards the clothes for the men who stone Stephen and gives his total approval (v. 1a & 7:58b). Led by Saul, whom you know as the apostle Paul, "a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem" (v. 1b). Why would God allow the early church to go through this violent time? The answer is in the printed verse above (v. 4): Those who have to flee Jerusalem carry the gospel to other cities! Philip, another of the seven deacons, goes down to a city in Samaria and starts a great revival. God performs miracles through the faith and message of Philip, and the city is filled with joy (v. 5-8). We will follow his story in tomorrow's devotion.

Monday, September 7 (read Acts 8:9-13)

Simon himself believed and was baptized. And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw. (Acts 8:13)

One of the most prominent citizens in the Samaritan town is a **sorcerer** named Simon. As the kids of today say, "He is a legend in his own mind" (v. 9). He amazes the local people with his devil-inspired display of magic (v. 10-11). When Philip arrives, however, a spiritual revival breaks out and men and women respond to the message of salvation, following through with a Christian baptism (v. 12). Simon also believes and is baptized, but if you look closely at v. 13, you can see a danger sign. Do you see it? Simon follows the **preacher** instead of God, and he walks by **sight**, not by faith (see 2 Corinthians 5:7). Many church members follow the same pattern. When the preacher leaves the church, they leave as well. Be sure that you are following Jesus only. He alone will determine when it is time to move on!

Tuesday, September 8 (read Acts 8:14-17)

Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. (Acts 8:17)

The Jews of that day hated Samaritans because they were half-breeds (ref. 2 Kings 17:24-41). Jesus makes them heroes, however, in the stories He tells to show the Jewish people (and us) that His love extends to all races (see Luke 10:25-37). In establishing His Church, God wants **everyone** to know that He is no respecter of persons (see Romans 2:11). I think the church in Jerusalem sends Peter and John because these disciples are suspicious of the new converts, afraid that they will contaminate the Body of Christ (v. 14). God replicates the original miracle of Pentecost recorded in Acts 2:1-13 when the believers in the Upper Room received the Spirit, proving that **anyone** is welcome to become a part of the Family of God (v. 15-17). Have you created a barrier in your church for those who want to come to Christ? If so, I pray that you will see the Holy Spirit perform a miracle so that you can understand that God is not willing that **anyone** should perish, but that **everyone** will come to repentance (see 2 Peter 3:9).

Wednesday, September 9 (read Acts 8:18-25)

Peter answered: "May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money!" (Acts 8:20)

In Monday's devotion, we saw a warning that Simon may not be a genuine convert. In today's text, he is fascinated at the power of the apostles from Jerusalem, so he offers some of his precious money so that he can be given their gift (v. 18-19). He has no understanding of the gift that God gives to **anyone** who repents and is baptized in the Name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of all sins (ref. Acts 2:38). Like so many church members today, Simon thinks he can buy God off with his generous giving. It doesn't take much imagination to understand where Simon can go with his money based on Peter's exclamation (v. 20). The apostle tells Simon what he needs to do in order to be truly saved (v. 21-23). Eternity will tell whether Simon truly repents with the words recorded in v. 24. Meanwhile, now that God has removed the prejudices from Peter and John, they preach the gospel in many Samaritan towns on their way back to Jerusalem (v. 25).

Thursday, September 10 (read Acts 8:26-29)

The Spirit told Philip, "Go to that chariot and stay near it." (Acts 8:29)

What a shocking passage today's text is! Doesn't God know that there is a great revival happening in Samaria? Why would he send his evangelist out on a road in a **desert**? Philip doesn't ask those questions, however; instead, he willingly obeys the angel's command (v. 26-27a). Having prepared the **messenger**, now God prepares the **recipient**. An Ethiopian eunuch is returning home from a trip to Jerusalem, where he had gone **to worship**, even though he has very little knowledge of God's Word. He "happens to be" reading from the book of Isaiah, from the most important Old Testament text which prophesies the death and resurrection of the coming Messiah (v. 30). Is God awesome or what? Is His timing Perfect?

Friday, September 11 (read Acts 8:30-35)

Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. "Do you understand what you are reading?" Philip asked. (Acts 8:30)

What a great way to begin a conversation (v. 30)! The eunuch admits that he is clueless and needs someone to help him (v. 31). I love to be invited into a home to explain God's Word to a hungry soul, especially when he is already reading from the best possible passage to explain the plan of salvation (v. 32-33). The eunuch's question is all Philip needs to present the gospel (v. 34). Note that the evangelist begins "with that very passage of Scripture and (tells) him the good news about Jesus" (v. 35). Don't go into a person's home with your agenda. Like Philip, allow the Spirit to tell you where the listener currently is in his spiritual journey so that you can lead him/her to understand the gospel.

Saturday, September 12 (read Acts 8:36-40)

As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptized?" (Acts 8:36)

The eunuch had gone into Jerusalem to worship the **unknown** god, but he will arrive back in Ethiopia with the true God living in his heart! Water in the desert? Do you think God takes care of all details? Verse 37 does not appear in the oldest manuscripts, but it is a given that those being baptized must make a profession of faith (see N.I.V. footnote). My favorite part of the story comes next. God supernaturally removes the preacher from the eunuch's life and sends the new convert back home with Jesus living in his heart. Best of all, the Lord sends Philip home to enjoy his family. The next time he appears in Scripture, the evangelist is raising his four daughters, all of whom have been given the gift of prophecy (ref. Acts 21:8-9). Wow!