Study of Acts – Discussion Notes Chapter 8

Introduction

Our study of the book of Acts has been informative and challenging. It has challenged our theology and the depth of our relationship with Christ and the Holy Spirit.

Throughout Acts, we have seen certain principals that have remained consistent. These principals are firm and undeniable in our study. We find them clearly evident in every chapter of Acts.

1. God has a determined will that cannot be stopped – it is to build the Kingdom of God. We see evidence of this again in chapter 8 (read 1:8, 8:4-5, 12, 8:1-4).
2. The Kingdom of God is not the universe of God’s creation but the Lordship (reign) of Jesus Christ in one’s heart.
3. In order to experience the reign of Christ in our heart, we must be willing to surrender completely to Him. Experiencing the power of our salvation and the power of the Holy Spirit requires surrender to the Holy Spirit.
4. The Holy Spirit is non-other than Christ himself, returned to dwell in the hearts of believers.

With a cursory read, chapter 8 appears to be lacking the excitement and action of the previous chapters we have studied to date. But when one looks closely, there are very challenging lessons to be learned. At the end of chapter 8 you will find three very personal spiritual questions that you may have never explored in the past.

Discussion

1. Preaching the right thing

What was Philip preaching to the people of Samaria (vs. 5)? Philip was preaching Christ. It is Christ and Christ only that can bring new life to a convert. Preaching Christ is the basic purpose of any ministry. Charles Spurgeon said, “We have a great need for Christ and a great Christ for our needs.”

Philip came to Samaria with one passion and one purpose; to preach Christ. Someone put it this way, “Preaching Christ is introducing others to a Friend who has changed your life.” All preaching should lead to the Man of Galilee, the Lamb of God, the resurrected Savior, Jesus Christ.

Philip preached about the kingdom of God, His reign and rule in our lives. Acceptance of Christ as our Savior will not last long unless He is made Lord of every facet and every relationship of our lives.

People will flounder without purpose if they do not surrender and allow Christ to reign in their life.

2. Believing vs. Surrendering

Introducing people to Christ without sharing the secret of Christian growth and victory is like recruiting a soldier and sending him into battle without training and without a weapon. The moment a person becomes a believer, he or she is free of one set of problems but inherits another. A Christian must now must face living the new life in an evil and tempting world. For that we need the power of the presence of Jesus Christ; the Holy Spirit.

Very often, people make a profession of faith because they are looking for a quick fix to their problems. But there is a difference between just believing in Christ and genuinely surrendering to Christ. Luke gives us a perfect example in his account of a man named Simon.
*Do you believe Simon was actually saved (vs. 9-13)?*

Samaria was a town of people embroiled in sorcery and Simon had learned how to profit from such activity. Luke gives us some clues into the person of Simon. In verse 9 he says Simon “claimed to be somebody great.” And in verse 13 he tells us that Simon was astounded by “the signs and great miracles that were being performed.”

We will read in a moment the real motivation behind Simon’s belief. We will see a bit of Simon in our own relationship with Christ. But first let’s read the rest of the story.

*Why did the Peter and John go to Samaria (vs. 14-17)?*

Though the Samaritans believed and were being baptized, there was one important element of their conversion that was lacking; the Holy Spirit. Peter and John knew that the people could not live the new life in Christ without the indwelling of Him; the Holy Spirit. They had the influence of Christ and the faith in Christ but they did not have the power of Him living in and through them.

Some people want to take this text and make a complete theology of it. They claim exclusivity of the Holy Spirit to the apostles and those touched by them through the centuries, thus claiming it as limited to their denomination. There is no evidence that the only way to receive the Holy Spirit is in this manner. God simply chose to impart the Holy Spirit on the Samaritans through Peter and John.

The greater lesson to be learned here is the danger of preaching salvation without including teaching about the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. If we are not careful, we will produce converted people who are born again but have no power to live the new life. I believe we have a generation of church members today who are toiling through life by their own power without the power of the Holy Spirit.

There is a direct relationship between living by the Holy Spirit and surrendering to the Lordship of Christ. Remember, they are the trinity; one in the same. We will discuss more on the subject of surrendering as we look further at the heart of Simon.

3. The danger of Simony

*What did Simon covet and how did he try to get it (vs. 18-24)?*

Simon liked what he saw. Simon was not fixed on Christ; he was fixed on the miracles and signs he was seeing. He did not covet a deeper walk with Christ; he coveted the powers of those who did have the surrendered walk in Christ. He coveted what he could gain if he could acquire such power.

*Someone please lookup the meaning of the world “simony”.* It is defined as: “The making of profit out of sacred things. The sin of buying or selling sacred things. The practice of buying or selling spiritual or church benefits such as pardons, relics, preferments.”

The origin of the word “simony” goes back to Simon the magician and sorcerer found in chapter 8 of Acts. In today’s terminology, simony refers to the desire to have the life Christ promises without the surrender of all of life to Him. But Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life” John 14:6

The account of Simon alerts us to the danger believing in Christ but being unwilling to surrender to Him. Simon wanted the power of the Holy Spirit to add to his bag of tricks; so much so that he foolishly offered to pay money for it.

*What was Peter’s response to Simon’s offer (vs. 20-23)?* Peter affirms that Simon has completely missed the understanding of the cross. He doesn’t get it. He has no part or portion in the matter of salvation and his heart is not in the right place with God. Then Peter calls on Simon to repent.
Does Simon heed Peter’s warning and repent (vs. 24)?

You can imagine a pause between what Peter said and Simon’s response. Peter boldly and strongly tells Simon his faith is phony; he has no part in the things of God. Peter then waits for an expression of repentance and a desire for an authentic experience with Christ.

But Simon’s response indicates he intends to continue in a direction he knows is wrong. Simon sidestepped the challenge to repent and asked Peter to pray that none of this would be true. Simon did not receive the blessing of genuine salvation or the fullness of the Holy Spirit.

After hearing Philip’s message of salvation and Peter’s admonishment, Simon was still in charge of Simon. Christ was not the Lord of Simon’s life and thus the experience was void of meaning and life change. Simon was the same old Simon living in a city that was no longer fascinated by his magic.

4. The beauty of obedience (vs. 27-40)

For Philip to go to Samaria and preach was a huge step in his spiritual growth. The Jews despised Samaritans and saw them as low-class half-breeds. When the northern kingdom fell in 722 B.C., many Jews were carried off to Assyria. Some intermarried with Assyrians and their offspring became known as the Samaritans.

But for Philip, obedience to the Holy Spirit and his love for Christ superseded his prejudices. Philip has much to teach us about obedience to the leadership of the Holy Spirit. Because of his willingness to surrender to the Holy Spirit, God miraculously used him to build His kingdom. Acts tells us not only did Philip preach to the lowly Samaritans, the Holy Spirit lead him to share the good news with other people quite different from him. God leads Philip down the road to Gaza to encounter an Ethiopian eunuch; an African. Notice Philip did not hesitate, he arose and went.

The Holy Spirit leads Philip to someone who is searching for answers. We need not wait until we find someone with a sign around their neck that reads, “I need Jesus!” The Holy Spirit will lead us to those who are ready to receive Christ. The Holy Spirit guided Philip in what to say and the result was a quite surprising convert.

Now the gospel was spread to another group of people and a completely different country. Ethiopia now had a Christian secretary of the treasury because of Philip’s obedience.

Philip put no limitations on where and to whom he would go in the name of the Lord. Too often we want to screen everything God has for us. If the guidance of the Holy Spirit does not fit what we consider to be practical and prudent, we dismiss it. We need to learn to want what God wants. If we surrender and are willing, God will help us to want what He wants for us.

Conclusion

Chapter 8 should prompt us to ask deep questions about our own spiritual relationship with God.

1. Have I limited my spiritual relationship with Christ to simply believing or do I seek the Holy Spirit to dwell within me?
2. Have I limited my spiritual commitment to Christ or do I genuinely and completely surrender to Him as Lord of my life?
3. Am I obedient to the leadership of the Holy Spirit or do I require that I be in control of what happens in my life?
Further Thoughts – Acts 8

In Acts, we have learned about four principals we must understand.

1. God has a determined will that cannot be stopped – it is to build the Kingdom of God.

2. The Kingdom of God is not the universe of God’s creation but the Lordship (reign) of Jesus Christ in one’s heart.

3. In order to experience the reign of Christ in our heart, we must be willing to surrender completely to Him. Experiencing the power of our salvation and the power of the Holy Spirit requires surrender to the Holy Spirit.

4. The Holy Spirit is non-other than Christ himself, returned to dwell in the hearts of believers.

Chapter 8 should prompt us to ask deep questions about our own spiritual relationship with God. Prayerfully ask yourself these questions.

1. Have I limited my spiritual relationship with Christ to simply believing, or do I seek the Holy Spirit to dwell within me?

2. Have I limited my spiritual commitment to Christ or do I genuinely and completely surrender to Him as Lord of my life?

3. Am I obedient to the leadership of the Holy Spirit or do I require that I be in control of what happens in my life?

“We have a great need for Christ and a great Christ for our needs.” Charles Spurgeon