

## Sermon Transcript from 13<sup>th</sup> July 2025 – The Spirit Led Church

Reference: Acts 8:1-25

### Sermon TLDR

This sermon reflects on the **early Christian church**, focusing on its initial growth and challenges as depicted in the Book of Acts, particularly chapters 5 through 8. The speaker emphasizes that the early church was "**Spirit Led**," highlighting the Holy Spirit's empowerment of believers to spread the gospel despite adversity. Key themes explored include **the boldness of early Christians** in proclaiming their faith, even facing persecution and martyrdom like Stephen, and how this scattering actually facilitated the spread of Christianity beyond Jerusalem. The sermon also touches on **the importance of personal evangelism**, encouraging listeners to "gossip the gospel" in their daily lives, driven by the constant presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

### Link to the Start of the Sermon (on YouTube)

<https://youtu.be/TKG5mheoGrU?t=3247>

### Sermon Transcript

That's a very good thought to have in our mind as we reflect on our reading from this morning because God is holy and if we want to see him, we need to recognise that and come to terms with it.

I've struggled a little bit in the hot weather and Wendy's kind of nurtured me a bit, but I was made even more aware of my age. When Philip in response to an invitation to share something pointed out that my youngest grandchild has just completed her university education. It seems like yesterday that her mum received her degree from Princess Anne in the Albert Hall, but it was longer ago than that.

And it was longer ago than that of course that our reading was. We come to our third in a series of looking at the church in its beginning with the Holy Spirit in control.

We've mentioned Jim, I sent him a text message to make sure he got it sometime yesterday saying hoping he settled in and it wasn't too distressing the move. Typically, he's come back and saying, "I remember you're speaking at church on Sunday. I'll pray for the congregation." Well, he might. So, we do hope he will get settled there.

But Jim on Pentecost Sunday talked about the very beginning of the Christian church with four Ps. Privilege, the privilege that Christians have the promise that they have and the power that the Holy Spirit gives them and the message that we are to proclaim. And then a couple of weeks later, Peter came and focused on the foundation of the new church with some more peace, praise, prayer, power again of the Holy Spirit.

So perhaps I shall have to watch my Ps and Qs this morning. So here's my big cue to start with a question. How do you think of the early church? What do you think it was really like for the first believers in Jesus? Hold on to whatever thoughts you have of that because I'll ask the question at the end.

Today we will move on to the first part of Acts chapter 8. Before that, a quick summary of what's happened between where Peter left us, [that's Wendy's] Peter, and where we're going to pick the story up today. That's Acts chapters 5-7.

Although, of course, Luke did not write Acts in chapters and verses. They didn't come into being until about the 13th century. Well, that's chapters verses even later. So, it would have been just like a written book of any book which just starts at the start and finishes at the finish.

Chapter 4 as we have it has ended with the way that the early be believers lived in harmony sharing things. And a great example was shown of a man called Joseph who sold his field and handed the money over to the church leaders so that it might be shared among the believers and those who needed it to benefit.

But chapter 5 begins with someone who mimicked that but didn't quite do it properly. Ananias and Sapphira. They thought that what Joseph did was a good thing. So, Ananias went and sold his field, but he pretended that what he gave was what he got from the for the sale of the field, but he'd held something back. And his wife agreed with that message, and God struck them both dead.

That's a pretty salutary thought, isn't it? That the Holy Church finds God acting in a severe way. Our God's not to be trifled with.

Some of us at times think, well, wouldn't it be great if the church today was like the church at the early beginnings? Well, we need to be careful on that basis. The passage in CS Lewis's book, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* where Susan having recently entered Narnia and learned about Alan asked the question, "Is he safe?" And Mr. Beaver says, "Safe? Of course he's not safe. He's the king."

We need to remember that Jesus is the king and our God to is not to be trifled with.

Being a Christian shouldn't be a way of trying to live safely. We should be on the edge as we will find the early church did. So, we're told that the disciples met regularly, not in a hideaway place, not in someone's home, but right on the edge of the Jewish place of power. and prominence in the city of Jerusalem. They met in the temple porch. They shared fellowship together there. They shared the good news of Jesus together. They prayed for people who were sick and had problems who were brought to them and many of them were healed.

Active Christians right in the centre of the city and that, not surprisingly, troubled the chief priests and leaders of their religious faith and others hadn't they got rid of they thought this Jesus these people are preaching about so there was arrests there were conflict.

The first deacons are chosen because the church is beginning to sort out how it might serve people and some people are being disadvantaged. So they choose seven men who are deemed to be worthy of acting in those roles. They asked them to look after the hunger and other needs, especially of those who are widows.

And one of these deacons, Stephen, preaches in the power of the Holy Spirit. Note, it wasn't Peter, it wasn't John, nor any of the other apostles. It's Stephen who's asked. He preaches a mighty sermon, and it's worth a read. Now, the consequence of that was as well as sharing how God had worked through the Jewish people through the ages and how in Jesus he was now working.

That stirred the leaders up even more so that they incite the crowd to stone Stephen to death. Sometimes the outcomes aren't quite what we would look for.

And it's that point where we first meet Saul of Tarsus. He goes along with the idea of Stephen being put to death and then he shortly after begins a crusade of getting Christians hauled out of their houses and thrown into prison. What a terrible man. And yet much of the rest of This book of acts is about him and 13 of the letters in this New Testament were written by him to new churches many of which he had set up.

Sometimes God sees things and knows the future far better than we can. And it might be that the beginnings of things are often quite the reverse of how they will end up and the way God wants them to be.

And all of this took place in Jerusalem.

But do you remember Jesus's last words in Acts chapter 1 verses 7 and 8? Jesus said before he was taken back into heaven, when the Holy Spirit comes to you, you will receive power. You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all of Judea and Samaria, and in every part of the world.

Well, here comes all Judea and Samaria. It was a promise perhaps not quite in the way that they might have expected because it begins with persecution and sharing.

I wonder how we might respond to real persecution. Would we respond how the disciples did?

I wonder how in those circumstances we might share the good news. Would we do it the way disciples did? We sometimes sing and quite rightly as we are gathered, Jesus is here. These new believers might have sung as they were scattered. Jesus they shared. As they were scattered, Jesus they shared.

There was a great wave of persecution and it had an impact. Now the people that were left behind in Jerusalem were the apostles. That's quite strange, isn't it? And it's quite contrary to the way that other worldly leaders behave. If there's a big persecution in the country of which you were the leader, the probability is that you'll be the first on the airplane to go to somewhere where there's a safe haven.

But the apostles stayed in Jerusalem and it was the rest of the new Christians who got scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. So they took their belongings and left complaining.

No, they didn't. Or not. But we're told not.

Wherever they were scattered, they told the good news of Jesus.

Sometimes we grumble about things that just impact on us a little bit and we sound anything like conquering Christians. But these believers as they were scattered, not very pleasant. They didn't go because things were good. But as they were scattered, they shared everywhere the good news of Jesus. And that's how the Holy Spirit works.

In our small groups, we've recently finished the study of the Holy Spirit. We've rediscovered or more fully discovered in some cases that we're if we're open to his influence, his power, and his presence, then he enables us to experience and share Jesus more fully. So for us too this morning, let us allow God to put us where he wants us to be and allow us to use us just where we are.

Some whispered in Judea, the place of the true Jewish people, but some to Samaria. But wherever they were, they all shared the good news of Jesus. How good are we at radiating the love of God and sharing Jesus wherever we are?

Then we read of Philip when he read it to us this morning. And we might probably miss Important point it says in the Bible, for example, Philip, he wasn't anyone special. He's just one example that Luke picked up on and wrote about in the Acts. But what an example. I wonder if there were others sharing the gospel in as powerful a way as Philip did. Was it an endemic situation?

Now already Stephen, one of the seven deacons, as I've said, has preached and he got martyred for his troubles. And now Philip also one of the seven is taken as the example of what he's doing as the believers are scattered. And it's in Samaria.

I looked at a number of translations and in the one that we had it says a city in Samaria. Other translations say the city of Samaria. So we don't really know whether it was in the major city a very long established and famous city which is the heart of Samaria or whether it was just one of many. But in that city Philip shares the good news of Jesus. That's where he had been sent to. Says he preached with healing, signs, and miracles.

People responded, put their trust in Jesus, and there were baptisms.

Almost certainly there would have been a group or team of relatively new Christians there sharing their gospel in their own way, preaching the word of often used in the Bible for telling the good news of Jesus in different ways.

It doesn't mean standing at the front of a congregation or a street marketplace and speaking. It can be in any way that we need to be careful when we talk to our next-door neighbour that we don't preach at them. We need to share the good news in a good way. And that can include gossiping the gospel.

I wonder how good we are at gossiping the gospel just in our everyday speech.

We have in our host group a lady who doesn't come to our church, Joyce, and she seems to have an uncanny knack of wherever she is at the bus stop or in the town or wherever of gossiping the gospel. If envy wasn't a sin, I would envy her. But we're all different. We all have different gifts. And for some of us it's harder. But that's nonetheless the case that we should share in whatever way we can with our friends, our neighbours, those we come across the good news of Jesus.

So, it was all plain sailing in Samaria. Well, I know it wasn't because we haven't yet met Simon. Simon the sorcerer, the man who was a magician or in some other they had powers that he could demonstrate gifts that had transfixed the people of this city for a long time, and he'd become a powerful person.

So, when the message is being brought by Stephen there's a conflict but then Simon starts following Stephen around. Goodness me, he must have been an irritant. You know what it's like when somebody does that. That wherever Stephen went to do something, there was Simon. But Simon ultimately believed and placed his trust in Jesus that there's a problem to follow.

Because what happened next was that the good news of what had happened in Samaria had reached Jerusalem and the apostles there think, "Well, that's great. We better send somebody along to see what's going on there."

So, Peter and John go to Samaria. I have no idea what sort of grape vine was in use there, but somehow or other, the news got back to where the apostles were still in Jerusalem. And Peter and John travelled to Samaria. and find out the facts and they pray so that new Christians might receive the Holy Spirit.

Just a word of warning, I don't think this establishes a set pattern of how God works in the lives of each and every one of us. In this particular place, they had trusted Jesus. They'd begun to follow him. But the Holy Spirit wasn't part of their lives until Peter and John came and prayed for them and then it happened. As I say, I don't think that is necessarily the norm.

What should be the norm is that each and every believer should have the Holy Spirit dwelling in them and empowering them. For some, it happened the moment they became a Christian. For others, there was some struggle before that became a fact. And in this case, ignorance was overcome. And the joyous news that God, the Holy Spirit, the one who would make Jesus known to his people and through them to others, was someone who would make their lives rich and alive and powerful.

So, our need is to make sure that the Holy Spirit is at work in our lives, not fitfully but constantly.

And of course, there was then the follow up problem that Simon seeing what this did in transforming lives wanted a bit of the action and was prepared to pay for it. And he had to be rebuked and put straight. We're not told what the outcome of that was. There were quite a number of people who met up with Jesus and Jesus told them what they should do. And in those cases, we don't definitely know what the final outcome was.

But I do hope Simon accepted the message that Peter and John gave him and that they too that he too received the power of the Holy Spirit, not by buying it, but by God giving himself to him and empowering him.

So, Philip's work in Samaria is done. God took him back down the south or desert road from Jerusalem to Gaza. And if I've understood the response I've got from Jeff Baines, who will be speaking to us next Sunday, he will probably pick up on that second half of the book of Acts. So, we can see that as the second instalment of this story next week.

But Philip was sent away to the road between Jerusalem and Gaza. It says of Peter and John that they went home through many Samaritan villages sharing the gospel, their mission. on the way back.

As I was preparing for this, a phrase kept coming to my mind and I thought it was a famous quote from a bishop or somebody of the 18th or 19th century. And it gives every flying moment something to keep in store. Give every flying moment something to keep in store. It seemed to me that's the way these early Christians were behaving.

So, I Googled it and I got it wrong. It's actually a line from a 19th century missionary hymn, "Work for the Night is coming when we can work no more."

The warning there that we as Christians have to work today. We as Christians have to allow the Holy Spirit to give us power today. We can't count on a tomorrow. There'll be a time when it's too late. Too late to accept Jesus as a saviour. But equally for us as Christians, too late to be able to share the good news about him. Too late to live out his life. eye for him. Give every fine moment something to keep in store. And let's work for the night that's coming when Jesus will see either here when he returns or when we're taken to be with him.

We don't know who looked after the new Christians in Samaria. I presume that there were some of those who had been dispersed there who would have helped them set up a church.

So, let's go back to that opening question. How do you think of the early church?

What was really like for the first believers in Jesus? What do you see the lesson in that for you and me today? Have we received the Holy Spirit? Are we allowing God, the Holy Spirit, to work in our lives day by day.

[Tony closes in prayer]

Our gracious father, we thank you that you have in the scriptures given us examples of how early believers in Jesus behaved and responded to the life they were set in.

Pray that you would help us to focus.

Similarly, if we've not become aware of your power living in our lives, Lord, help us to seek your Holy Spirit to make us alive in Christ and alive to neighbours with the good news.

We just ask you, Lord, to keep us true to you in all that we do.

May Jesus Christ be lived out in us day by day, moment by moment by the Holy Spirit working through us.

We pray this in Jesus' name.

Amen.