

21a ACTS

Let's begin our study of the Word of God this evening by taking a moment at the outset to go to the Lord in prayer. It gives us a chance to clear our minds and prepare our hearts and acknowledge the ministry of God's Spirit. Shall we pray? Father, we thank you for your grace and your faithfulness toward us and the fact that you have the power to cleanse us from sin.

We thank you that you have assigned us a place in your plan. You have given our lives meaning and purpose. We pray that our study of your Word tonight will help us to understand and fulfill that purpose and that potential.

We pray that our hearts will be guided as we look through your Word by the ministry of your Spirit so that we will find the truth and see its applicability to our daily lives. We pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.

We pick up our study tonight in Acts chapter 8, resuming in verse 4. Therefore, and the word therefore speaks of the persecution headed by Saul the Pharisee in Jerusalem that was wreaking havoc in the church, entering every house and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison. I suspect that your feeling is the same as mine, that we feel intense gratitude that we're not in this situation. I have no immediate fear that someone is going to break down the door and drag all of us off to prison because we're meeting for Bible study.

But that is not true in many parts of the world even today. And one of the many things that we tend to take for granted as Americans and as Christians is our great security and our great freedom. And it is something to be thankful for.

It is something that we could one day be looking back on with great longing because it isn't the case for many, many Christians in the world today. They do fear. You take a look, and it's hard.

You don't find it in the press. You have to search out the news of Christians in other countries. But if you want to have an idea, just put the phrase Shining Path in your browser and get some of the news from South America and what those guys are doing down in Peru and the mountains of South America.

But these individuals were subject to that kind of persecution from their own people and their own kind. In some cases, even their family members. This was almost akin to a civil war.

And so they were scattered. Therefore, in verse 4, those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word. The fact that they had been dispossessed and that they had been run out of town did not diminish their faith or diminish their belief in the truth.

And so they simply went elsewhere and told people about Jesus Christ and about the good news of God's redemptive plan. So, as I mentioned last week, this is like going out and finding dandelions in your yard and swatting them this way and that. All you do is spread the seeds.

And that's the way God turned cursing to blessing because He used this persecution to spread the word to people who had not heard it in places that had no way of knowing it except that these people were driven there by persecution. So now in verse 5, we start a new section tonight. This is an interesting story for several reasons.

Then Philip went down to Samaria, the city of Samaria. Why does it just introduce Philip with no other explanation? Because we've already learned about him a couple of chapters earlier when the apostles chose to delegate their window-feeding responsibilities to others. And in chapter 6, they prayed and laid hands on Stephen and Philip and then the rest of these guys.

All of these men appear to be Greek culture Christians. They are not the Hebrews, they are the Greeks. It was the Greeks who had trouble with their widow distribution and so on.

And Philip is one of these. It's important to understand this chapter, chapter 8, to know that Philip is one of the Greek style Christians. He's a Jew, but he's a Greek-ish Jew.

Philip went down to the city of Samaria. Now on the map, that's up. So why does it say he went down when on the map he's going up? Does everybody know the answer to this? In the Jewish mind, from the biblical point of view, Jerusalem is the highest point.

And if you leave Jerusalem, you're going down. So he went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them. We don't know which city exactly this was.

The city that had the official name Samaria was destroyed several hundred years earlier. It was rebuilt and given a different name. Sebaste was the name given to it.

That is the Greek form of the Latin word Augustus. And it's a long story about Herod rebuilding this and that and the other, but when this was rebuilt. But we don't think that that's the city.

It might have been the city of Sychar, S-Y-C-H-A-R. Some people think that it was Shechem. Shechem is a likely candidate.

It's just the Greek here, the best text says the city of Samaria, meaning the most prominent city, whatever that might have been. It doesn't seem to be important to the story. The multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did.

God confirmed this message to the Samaritans, and they heeded it seemingly without a lot of argumentation or debate. They didn't get into a big conflict over it. Why is that? Well, keep your finger in Acts 8 and turn with me to John chapter 4. John chapter 4. Jesus in verse 4 of that chapter says he needed to go through Samaria.

So he came to a city of Samaria which is called Sychar. Interesting, this is one of the prime candidates for the city in Acts chapter 8. Near the plot of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there.

Jesus was weary from his journey, sat by the well. It was about the sixth hour, that's noonish. A woman of Samaria came to draw water.

Jesus said, give me a drink. His disciples had gone away into the city to buy food. The woman of Samaria, etc.

You have this long conversation that we're familiar with. You get down to the disciples' return in verse 27. And they marvel that he's talking with this Samaritan woman.

But no one said, what do you seek or why are you talking with her? The woman goes into the city, tells the rest of the people, come see a man who told me all things that I ever did. Could this be the Christ in verse 29? This tells us that the Samaritans, because they believed the Pentateuch and they believed the prophecy in Deuteronomy, were looking for the prophet like unto Moses, who they were to heed. And they believed in the coming of a Messiah, just as their fellow Jews down in Jerusalem did.

So his disciples were urging him to eat. And in verse 32, Jesus said, I have food to eat of which you do not know. Therefore the disciples said to one another, has anyone brought him something to eat? Jesus said to them, and this is the point here, My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work.

Do you not say there are still four months and then comes the harvest? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for the harvest. What's he talking about? Is he talking about grain? He's talking about people. He's talking about receptivity.

He's been down giving the good news of the kingdom in Jerusalem and Judea and up in Galilee and very lukewarm response. Some people listen, many people don't. Here in Samaria, pictured and typified by the woman at the well, these people all come out and are receptive and understand what Jesus is saying.

He says, look, these fields are white for harvest. When you come back over to Acts chapter 8, this is the harvest. Jesus said, pray to the Lord of the harvest, and he will send workers into his field.

Well, here is one of those workers. Philip is uniquely qualified to speak to these people.

Why do you think that is? What do they have in common? Well, they're sort of outcast from the establishment, aren't they? The big deal establishment down in Jerusalem is Hebrew of the Hebrews.

We are the true Jews. We're not these northern tribes. We're not these Greekified Jews.

We are the real deal, and you've got to kind of belong to our club to get anywhere. Well, this dispersing of Christians, and especially the Greek-speaking Christians, the Greek culture Christians, they are sort of outcast. They are looked down on and despised in Jerusalem.

Well, so are the Samaritans. So right away, Philip has sort of a common ground with these people in Samaria. So he comes down there, and God confirms his message with these signs and miracles, and people say, well, this sounds like what was spoken of in our Bible, in our five books of Moses.

Because, look at verse 7, unclean spirits crying with a loud voice came out of many who were possessed, and many who were paralyzed and lame were healed, and there was great joy in that city. God is doing the same things for the Samaritans, exactly the same things, exactly the same degree of power that he did in Jerusalem at Pentecost and in the days following through the apostles. Philip is doing this.

God is doing it through Philip. There is an interesting construction here because it says that they believed Philip. Normally it says they believed the scripture, or they believed the gospel, or they believed on Christ.

Here it says they believed Philip. They believed the things spoken by Philip. And he is an important element in their conversion.

Without going into the gory details of Greek here, the original language emphasizes the fact that the messenger had a lot to do with the message, that it made it easier for them. You can imagine what would have happened if Peter or John had come marching from Jerusalem into the city of Samaria. All the old animosities, the bigotries, the old baggage that everybody had would have come up, and it might have interfered.

But God sent the right man at the right time. This is our first principle for this evening. If we are looking for the truth, God will send the right means at the right time for us.

And it is not the same for everybody. Sometimes we think, well, you know, the way I came to understand the gospel, or the way I came to understand the scriptures as a believer was this particular pastor, or this particular ministry, or this particular radio program, or this particular book, or whatever this thing is that impressed us and hit us. I remember going around the room one time talking to different ones that were attending our Bible study.

This has been like ten years ago. And each one was saying how they had come to believe the gospel and how they had heard it. And it was amazing the variety of ways.

Some people had practically a Damascus Road experience. Other people could not pinpoint, didn't really know. I can't really say when it happened.

I just kind of realized one day that I believed in Christ and I didn't have flights of angels or trumpets or anything. I just sort of realized that well, of course, yes, I am. And it kind of went on from there.

But there was no particular moment they could point to. It's different for different people because we are all different. Some of us are more like the Hebrews.

Some of us are more like the Greeks. Some of us are more like some of the Ethiopian dignitary. We're going to see a little bit later in this chapter.

Everyone is different. God approaches us in a way that we can most easily understand and most easily come to faith. It is optimized.

The delivery system is optimized for each and every one of us. And the thing we need to remember about that is do not assume that what worked for you must work for someone else and that the way God has chosen to bring good news to us is the only way it can be done. Now, I will tell you that in my own personal experience, in my younger days, I attended a church that had a very specific kind of worship.

The pastor would stand up and read a scripture. Then he would go back to the Hebrew or the Greek and give every single word, parse all of the words, tell you their relationship in the sentence and spend a lot of time in the original language, give a, quote, corrected translation, and then proceed to do detailed exegesis and detailed categorical studies out of one or more of those words and one or more of those concepts that came out of each verse. Well, people that are bent in strange directions like I am think that that's great.

But there's other people that just kind of get lost in the funhouse and say, well, you know, I'll check out and take a little mental trip here and come back when you get to the punchline and just leave off all of the aorist active indicatives and the prepositional phrases and the word studies on various words and the history of this from Liddell and Scott's Greek lexicon that is, I've got a copy if you ever want to see it at the house. Laying on its side, it is, I would say, a good six inches thick, maybe more and would read you every point out of the article in there on whatever Greek word. Well, that is what sparked my interest.

That's what got me to pay close attention to what was in the word of God. But there's people that would, that would drive them to the far side of the planet. They would go become a Buddhist before they would go through that kind of intellectual torture.

But there developed an attitude within a subgroup of that type of church where people were saying, you know, if you don't like this method of study, you're just really not very spiritual. You just don't really have an interest. You're not on fire for the Lord if you don't want to sit there and listen to all of the parsings and the gory details of the language and get down into the nitty gritty of it and take copious notes.

And if your notebook's not as fat as mine, then you're just not as spiritual as me. And there was this sort of spiritual clickishness. Well, we are the ones who have the secret light.

We've got the guy who shines the big original language flashlight on the word of God. And so we know things that nobody else knows. And it became kind of like these Hebrews in Jerusalem.

Well, we're the big cheese. We know it all. And all you Greeks and Ethiopians and the rest of you all out there, you're just, you can't rise to the snuff level that we are at.

That's what they mean when they say you're not up to snuff. It's the snuff level. So, isn't it great to see God not sending any of the Twelve.

He sends Philip who's a deacon. Deacons are the waiters. The guys who break up the bread and divide up the stuff for the widows.

God sends Philip to Samaria, the place where a lot of the Jews wouldn't have wanted to go anyway. Ah, there's no good people in Samaria. A lot of Jews wouldn't even walk through Samaria.

They'd take the long way around, go across the Jordan, go up to Galilee, come back across, and not even go through Samaria because they thought it polluted them. But God knew that the fields were white for harvest, just like Jesus said in John 4. And so He sent the right man who would not be an issue, who wouldn't get in the way of the message. People could listen to Philip and just pay attention to what he was saying and the confirming signs that God gave.

We need to give that freedom to God for others. There are people, the last thing in the world you would want to do is give them a tape of one of our Bible classes. It might just scare them to death.

It might drive them insane. Maybe my personality just would be like sandpaper on their nerves. We need to be sensitive to the fact that God will provide in the right time and the right way.

We need to be ready to give an answer when someone asks us. We need to be ready to supply whatever amount of truth we can communicate, but don't think that God doesn't have a lot of arrows in His quiver, that He doesn't have a lot of ways of speaking to

people, and we need to let people have the freedom to receive the truth whatever way God wants to deliver it. That's what's going on here.

Now, look at verse 9. In this city of the Samaritans, there was a certain man called Simon who previously practiced sorcery in the city. And this word in Greek is Magios, M-A-G-E-O-S basically, which is derived from the ancient order of the Magi, the same Magi that came to visit Jesus, the same Magi that lived in Chaldea way back in the days of Daniel. Now, it doesn't mean that Simon was a Chaldean or that he was a member of the Magi with a capital M, but the knowledge of the Magi and their secret wisdom and their insight into mysterious things lent their name to anything mysterious and unexplainable all the way down to the present.

We talk about someone who is a magician who does magic tricks. This goes all the way back to the Magi, clear back to the days of Daniel, circa 580 B.C. So, he is practicing Magi-ism, if you will. Astonishing the people of Samaria, claiming that he was someone great.

And of course, you now have a contrast because here's Simon wandering around with his bag of tricks, impressing people that he's the great one. And here comes Philip, very unassuming, Greek-speaking Jew, and he preaches the word of Christ and God confirms it with genuine supernatural signs. So, this inevitably is going to come to a clash.

Everyone gave heed to this Simon from the least to the greatest, saying, this man is the great power of God or represents the great power of God. He's got some unique aspect. Notice it's God with a capital G because they believe in the one God up in Samaria.

And they heeded him because he had astonished them with his sorceries for a long time. And this, I think, he was a practitioner, one of the early practitioners of the same kind of thing the Egyptian magicians did. Sleight of hand, he was the David Copperfield of Samaria.

He was the Houdini and the fill-in-the-blank-your-favorite magician. He had a lot of people fooled. But, when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized and Simon himself also believed.

And when he was baptized, he continued with Philip and was amazed seeing the miracles and signs which were done. And, of course, he's genuinely amazed because there's no sleight of hand involved. There's no stooges in the audience.

There's no fake crippled people hired ahead of time who then stand up and throw their crutches away. It's the real deal. And Simon is just fascinating because he has been a counterfeit of what is now present in reality.

And he believes it. He is a believer. Now, one of the funniest things to me, and again, I'm

a twisted hairpin, but one of the funny things to me is to go and read the commentaries of godly men who are trying to interpret the Book of Acts and they say, because it says, Pistou, it says, Simon himself also believed.

It's the very same word used for everybody else believing, but they just can't bring themselves to believe that he was actually a believer because of what's going to happen here in the story. And because he's been a sorcerer and he's going to be told some things by Peter later on. And they say, well, he couldn't have been a real believer, but the Bible says, Pistou, he believed.

And so the gymnastics and the contortions and the wincing and the squirming that goes on, it just makes you want to bust out laughing because if the Bible says a thing, then it's just so. Get over it. Deal with it.

Draw your interpretation and application from that. Don't squirm around and say, well, it can't really say what it says. He is a believer.

Simon the magician is a Christian. He'll be in heaven. So you just... But why is this? Why do people struggle with this so much? For the same reason they struggle with Romans chapter 2. For the same reason they struggle with the egregious judgments of the people who are outside the gates of the new Jerusalem.

People don't want to believe that if you're a Christian, bad things can happen. That you can be judged. That you can be condemned.

That you can lose in a big way. Just having your ticket, your fire insurance, doesn't mean that you aren't going to have bad things happen. Well, people think, well, if he's saved, how can Peter ever condemn him? Because look at this.

Look at verse 14. When the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them, who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. For as yet he had fallen upon none of them.

They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Now, here is a doubly challenging fact. Can you see why? Why is this a problem for us in terms of understanding? Well, Philip has preached the Gospel.

Stay with me now. I see eyelids going to half-mast here. Pay attention.

If you don't get anything else, get this. Because this is why we're not Catholics. Okay? I'm afraid you might slip into Catholicism if you don't get this, so pay attention.

Philip went up there and preached the Gospel, right? You with me so far? He said, Christ has come. It tells us right here. He preached the kingdom of God in the name of Jesus

Christ in verse 12.

And the Samaritans said, Amen, yes, brother, and believed. They believed in Jesus. So now they're Christians, right? They heard the preaching and they believed.

But, as yet, in verse 16, the Holy Spirit had not fallen on them. Now, we believe, and Scripture teaches elsewhere, that when you hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and you say, yes, I know I am a lost, hell-bound sinner. I cannot do anything about my loss and hopeless condition.

I deserve condemnation. But God has made this offer of salvation. I take it.

I want that. I want the blood of Jesus Christ to wash me clean and cleanse me. Yes, Lord, be my Savior.

When you do that, simultaneously, about 36 separate things happen. One of which is, God sends the Holy Spirit. He seals us into Christ with the Holy Spirit.

These people believed and they didn't get the Holy Spirit. Now, this is a problem. Does this still happen? Catholics think this is the case.

Did you ever hear something called confirmation? Well, there you go. Separate. Did you ever hear of the Charismatics talking about the second blessing? You can believe and you have sort of a weak-kneed presence of the Spirit.

But after you get to a certain place and have enough faith, then you get the second blessing. And you speak in tongues and you exert miraculous gifts. And they go to this passage.

And they say, see, it's one thing to be saved. It's something else to have the Spirit. And the laying on of hands of the priest in the Catholic Church, which is what John and Peter are going to do, this is confirmation.

Once they got confirmed by the Pope here, because they think Peter was the Pope already. Once they get confirmed, then they've got everything that's coming to them as Christians. But they kind of had to wait on it.

So, we need to figure this out. This is not just something we can gloss over because what if we're wrong? What if we need the Pope to lay hands on us? We better get there quick because he doesn't look like he's long for this earth. Poor John Paul.

I've never seen such a pathetic looking individual in all my life. They put that hat on his head and he can't even hold it up. And I feel genuinely bad for him because I know he's got Parkinson's and two or three other things.

But here's the point. What is this teaching us? Keep in mind, what did we say at the

outset of this study? This is the book of Acts. This is a transitional time.

God does special things in a time of transition that are not normative. They're not the rule that is going to be applied ever after. Now, I've been present when lots of people accepted Christ as their Savior and I never saw the Holy Spirit descend like a tongue of fire and land on their head.

Never seen that. Not even once. People got healed.

Lepers got cleansed. Demons got cast out. I've been a Christian a long, long time and I've never yet seen that happen.

These are transitional things. These are sign things that happen. God is making a point here.

Well, we need to figure out what the point is, don't we? Because the point will have application even though the means does not. So what is the point? Well, Philip is the Greekified Jew who came up there and preached the gospel to them, right? Jesus told the apostles, you will be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem and Judea and in Samaria. You, 11, Peter, Andrew, James, John, Bartholomew, Thaddeus, all the rest of these guys, you will be witnesses to me in Samaria, Jesus said, right? Who is the official first generation, first century witness of Jesus Christ? Who walked with Him? Who ate with Him? Who saw Him die? Who saw His empty grave? Who saw His resurrected body? Who saw Him ascend into heaven? Who are the first witnesses to the Jews? Who preaches on the day of Pentecost and thereafter? It's Peter and John and Andrew and James and the rest of these guys.

You have not truly gotten the message. You haven't truly gotten the witness until you get it from those that Jesus commissioned. Yes, Philip can tell them the news.

And yes, they can believe and ascent. But until they have gotten the witness in this first generation from Peter and John, it's not the official gospel. And they don't truly receive and truly believe and truly get entered into the church until they hear the apostolic witness.

Now, this is tough. What if one of them died before Peter and John got there? Well, I don't think any of them did. But there is a two-fold purpose in this.

The first purpose is to confirm that the apostles are the official preachers. Philip is a deacon. Philip can do a lot of things.

We're going to see him evangelize in Ethiopian and Peter and John never show up here pretty quick. So, it doesn't mean that if you don't hear one of the eleven, you can't get saved. Stephen gives a witness.

And I'm sure some people in the crowd probably believed what Stephen had to say. And these men are going to go forth. So, why do they not get the Spirit until Peter and John arrive and lay hands on them? Because this is the first of a kind.

This is the first ministry to the Samaritans. And this gives it the official sanction. Nobody can come back later and say, well, this is a weird offshoot.

This is a cult. This isn't the real deal. This never had the blessing of the apostles in the Jerusalem church.

Because it does. And God confirms that it is for real and this connects them back to Jerusalem and back to the apostles because God withholds the gift of the Spirit until Peter and John get there. This links them to Pentecost.

This links them to the apostolic ministry. God doesn't wait to do this every single time. But this first witness, this first incursion, this first response in Samaria from the preaching of Philip, God does sort of a double whammy here.

He gives them a left and then a right. He goes in with Philip, who is the acceptable messenger, who is the way that they can hear the message without prejudice and without bias and come to understand it. Once Philip has opened the door, given them the message, and they have believed, now there's an entirely different kind of reception when Peter and John show up.

Now, these people who have believed understand that this is a new thing. The old prejudices and the old biases and the old racism and all the rest of this is set aside because the first foot has already been put in the door by Philip. Now God can send Peter and John up there to give them the apostolic witness, to put the apostolic seal of approval on the Samaritan response and the Samaritan church, if you will.

And so God is working a purpose. It goes both directions. It gives an entree to Peter and John that they could not have had before Philip came.

And it also puts God's stamp of approval, the Holy Spirit's stamp of approval, on the fact that the Samaritans get the exact same treatment from God as the Hebrew Jews. We already saw the Greek culture Jews get the same thing as the Hebrew Jews. Now we're seeing the Samaritan Jews.

You shall be witnesses unto me. Acts 1.8 Both in Jerusalem and Judea and in Samaria. The apostolic witness, you don't have to have an apostolic witness beyond Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria.

Remember, we straighten out the translation of that Acts 1.8. You don't have to send an apostle to every part of the earth. But the apostles are the witnesses. Jesus commanded it.

Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria. So, they are prepped. They have a grasp.

They understand. They assent. But it is not until the apostles come as the eyewitnesses to the Lord and lay hands on them that God sends the Holy Spirit.

This isn't something Peter and John did. It isn't something Philip planned. This is something God did.

God says, I am going to tie you to the apostolic ministry. I am going to tie you to Pentecost. I am going to authenticate you.

I am going to validate you. I am going to legitimize you by withholding the Spirit until Peter and John come and lay on hands. Laying on of hands is commissioning.

It is blessing. It is transfer. It is legitimization.

Does this make sense? Do you understand what God is doing here? No one can ever say the Samaritans aren't really Christians. Well, you never heard an apostle. You were never blessed by an apostle.

You weren't there at Pentecost. You are an offshoot. You are a second class, sort of a cult type Christian.

They can't say that. Peter and John have been there and God sent the Holy Spirit. Nobody can argue with that.

Well, they laid hands on them and the Holy Spirit was given. When Simon saw this in verse 18 that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money. We are going to talk about this after the break in terms of Simon and his whole racket.

But this tells us something about the nature of the receiving of the Spirit. Now, we could have an unbeliever in this room who hears my short summary of the Gospel a few minutes ago and says, you know, that makes sense to me. I think I'll put my trust in that.

I'm going to accept Christ as my Savior. I'm going to put my faith in Him for my salvation. The Holy Spirit would come.

36 things would happen to that person and you and I might be completely unaware because there's no visible sign. Whatever the Holy Spirit did here was visible because Simon saw it and wanted to buy it. And so this tells us once again that there are unique things that happen in this first generation, this first wave of the Gospel spreading forward.

And when the Holy Spirit comes on someone, there are extraordinary supernatural signs. These people spoke in other languages. These people experienced extraordinary,

supernatural manifestations of the presence of the Spirit.

And that's what impressed Simon. Simon said, you know, I've got my bag of tricks and I sent off and got the Houdini kit and I can do these little sleight of hand things, but this is the real deal. Look at this supernatural power.

I've got to have this. Then I won't have to be a fake anymore. So when the Holy Spirit came, it was manifest.

It was visible and evident both to Peter and John who can now go back to Jerusalem and say, Brethren, let me tell you what happened in Samaria. God blessed the Samaritans. Do you think the Jerusalem church would be likely to listen to the witness of Philip as a Greek-ish Jew coming back and saying, Hey, I was talking to the Samaritans and God blessed them.

And they say, Ah, you're a Greek-ish Jew. We hardly stand you guys to begin with. If Peter and John come back, there's no arguing.

Who tops Peter and John? On the testimony of two or three, a thing is established, right? So Peter, John, and Philip come back to the Jerusalem church and say, We were in Samaria and God sent Him the Spirit. End of question. End of story.

So all of this is God's working together, the inclusion of the Samaritans into the church. And this is easing people into the notion that the gospel is going to spread beyond the group they thought it was going to. We might think that we're in an exclusive blessed group.

And I'm here to tell you, God is constantly widening His sphere. And He is constantly working in places where some of us don't want to think He's working. And where we don't think He could be working.

God is at work in a lot of denominations and a lot of churches that we would be horrified to go to their worship service. God's not horrified. God says, you know, there might be 80% dead wood here.

There might be 90% dead wood here. But there is a remnant. There is some living spiritual material here.

And I will work with whatever is alive. I will work with whatever response there is. So, what's our big lesson for this first session? Do not quickly dismiss any ministry, any group, anything that has any semblance of the truth of God, the life of God, the people of God.

Do not be hasty to dismiss it and say, well, it's not like what I'm in. It's not like what I'm used to. They don't believe everything I believe.

So God cannot be at work there. You might be surprised. What we need to do is pray for the remnant.

Pray for the truth. Pray for the life that is there that God can use it and expand it and convert it and reflect His glory in it and that He will do the same for us. Just as He does in our life, He doesn't wait for us to be perfect before He uses us.

We've got a lot of dead wood ourselves. The same is true in a group. The same is true in a community.

So be tolerant. If anyone ought to be tolerant and be flexible, if we think that we're maybe the more mature believer, well then, the onus is on us. The responsibility is ours as the stronger brother to bear with the weaker, right? So what a tragedy to be constantly driving them away and be of no help and no use and no encouragement because all we see is the flaws.

Remember the ministry of Philip. Remember the Samaritans. Remember that God authenticated them.

God blessed them as a testimony to the Jerusalem church. Don't be hasty. Don't be judging.

Don't think there's no good thing that can happen in Samaria. That's why God separated those two things. Let's pause here and take a break.

When we come back, we're going to see something even more interesting about old Simon the magician.