

ACTS 8:4-8

[CONTEXT]: Previously in the Book of Acts...

- Jesus established the missional church:
 - Commissioning his disciples to be his witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.
 - Then filling them with his Spirit to make it possible.
 - And then, man, did they get after it.
 - They rejoiced in the gospel, devoted themselves to worship, fellowship, and mission, with courage and vulnerability they obeyed Jesus, dealing beautifully with conflict along the way, and the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.
- That’s everything we said this fall in a couple of paragraphs.
 - You might think, “Wow, I could have skipped it all and played golf.”
 - I’d say, “Don’t be crazy—there’s nowhere we’d rather be.”
- When we left off, a wave of persecution had broken out.
 - Stephen was martyred, and the church was dispersed—but do you remember where?
 - They left Jerusalem and found themselves scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria.
 - So persecution didn’t end the movement—it accelerated it.
 - The disciples were scattered along the exact trajectory Jesus had laid out.
 - It’s the judo of God at work...
 - Persecution became the means of gospel advance.
 - And that’s where we pick up today.

[Transition]

- Today’s passage serves as a bridge:
 - From the mission in Jerusalem...
 - To the mission in Judea and Samaria.
- And it does this by showing us four features of the missional church.
 - Four features that will play out in the next section of the book.
 - And four features we want to be true of us—that we might be the church at its best today.
- Let’s look at them together—but first, let’s bow our heads and **pray**.

[CONTENT]: Four features of the church at its best.

1. ORDINARY PEOPLE

[State]: **V4:** Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word.

- Notice that **those who were scattered** were:
 - Not the official leaders.
 - Not the impressive preachers.
 - Not the twelve.
- We know this from **8:1:** They were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, **except the apostles.**
 - The apostles stayed in Jerusalem.
 - Which means the ones preaching are not the professionals—they're ordinary men and women.
 - People with no platform.
 - People with no title.
 - Unnamed Christians with no extraordinary gifts.

**The future of the mission does not depend on a few gifted leaders.
It depends on ordinary people who speak.**

[Illustrate]: This was one of the key themes of our mission conference.

- We heard extraordinary stories of what God is doing through ordinary believers who speak.
- I think of Pasha—our Ukrainian partner who was here last week.
 - When the war broke out, he initially decided to flee with his family.
 - But on the drive out, his heart broke for those who would be left behind—and he turned the car around.
 - He's still there. With his wife. With three young children.
 - Over lunch he told me that the government has produced an app that predicts where Russian bombs are about to land.
 - Each evening he checks to see if bombs are predicted to hit his city.
 - If they are, do you know what he and his wife do?
 - They pray. And then they go to bed.
 - Can you imagine it?
 - He feels utterly powerless.
 - Utterly helpless.
 - Even to protect the lives of those he loves.
 - And yet—God is doing amazing things.
 - Pasha told me about an 84-year-old man—an atheist his entire life—who had a dream that he should go to church.
 - The next morning, he took his dog for a walk.
 - And, for some reason, his dog stopped outside of Pasha's church.
 - The old man went in. He heard the gospel. He came to faith.
 - Now he has been baptized and is following Christ.
- God does extraordinary things through ordinary believers who speak.

[Apply]: That's the point.

- The mission of the church was never meant to rest on a few gifted leaders.
- The church does not grow because professionals preach better sermons.
- From the beginning, the gospel spreads when ordinary believers speak.
- I hope that's hugely encouraging to you.
 - You don't need a platform.
 - You don't need a title.
 - You don't need extraordinary gifts—bc you already have the gift of the Spirit.
 - You're not in the stands.
 - You're not on the bench.
 - You're in the game.
 - And if you'll speak—God will do extraordinary things.

[Transition]

- The church at its best—ordinary people.
- Feature #2: Ordinary people love unlikely people.

2. UNLIKELY PEOPLE

[State]: **V5: Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ.**

- We met Philip back in chapter 6—but he's not the thing that stands out in this verse.
- The thing that stands out is Samaria.
 - To us, that might sound like a place on a map.
 - But to a first-century Jew, it meant something very different.
- There were centuries of animosity and hostility between Jews and Samaritans.
 - *"They were the people who had been in the land while the Jews had been in Babylon, and when they returned from Babylon they found themselves alongside one another"* (Wright, 127).
 - And it's safe to say, *"There was no love lost between them"* (Wright, 128).
- Samaritans were viewed as:
 - Ethnically inferior. Religiously compromised. Socially suspect.
 - Good, upstanding people avoided them.
- And yet here's Philip—sauntering into Samaria as if he hadn't received the memo that he's supposed to hate these people.
- Of course, he learned that from Jesus.
 - Remember John 4?
 - Jesus deliberately passes through Samaria, sits down at a well, and has a conversation with a disreputable woman.
- Philip is following in his footsteps—that's what the gospel does.
 - When you've been saved by grace you give up on the illusion that you're better than anyone else.
 - You lose your appetite for superiority, and you start to love unlikely people.

[Illustrate]: It's intriguing to consider what this means for us—who are the unlikely people in our lives?

- It's natural to build circles—people with similar backgrounds, education, political instincts, social standing.
- But the gospel redraws those circles—and calls us to move toward people who aren't like us.
 - The person you assume would never be interested.
 - The coworker who seems hostile.
 - The neighbor who votes differently.
 - The family member who has rejected faith for years.
 - The refugee who lives in our community.

[Apply]: Maybe it's time for us to cross some of those boundaries—as Jesus did for us?

- And who knows—like Philip in Samaria...
- We might be surprised at what he does.

[Transition]

- The church at its best—ordinary people love unlikely people.
- Feature #3: Ordinary people love unlikely people in word and deed.

3. WORD AND DEED

[State]

- Notice what makes the crowd pay attention to Philip.
 - Remember, they were inclined to have as much hostility toward him as he was supposed to have toward them.
 - Why do they give this outsider time? What stops them in their tracks?
- **V6** says: **The crowds with one accord paid attention to what was being said by Philip, when they heard him and saw the signs that he did.**
 - Philip **spoke** the gospel to them—he proclaimed to them the Christ.
 - And he **showed** the gospel to them—**V7:**
 - Those with unclean spirits were freed.
 - The paralyzed were healed.
- Again, we could say he learned this from Jesus.
 - Ministry in the NT is always wholistic.
 - Word and deed. Truth and love. Proclamation and compassion.
- This is critical:
 - We can't just speak. Words alone sound empty.
 - We can't just act. Deeds without explanation can be misunderstood.
 - It has to be both.
- That's the pattern of the early church—the love of God made known through word and deed.

[Illustrate]: Think about how the interplay of words and deeds might work in our context.

- I remember being at lunch with a friend, and he asked our server if there was anything she would like prayer for.
 - Almost immediately, tears formed in her eyes.
 - She told us she'd been super stressed because she's a single mom, and her car kept breaking down—which was making it really difficult to get to work.
 - My friend said we'd pray for her.
 - But later, I learned he also went back to the restaurant with his wife, got the girl's number, and paid to have her car repaired.
 - She couldn't believe it, which gave him the opportunity to explain that he did it bc of how Jesus loved him in his time of need.
- I don't know what God will do next—but I know this: she heard that she is loved by God and she is curious. Why?

Bc his deeds gave his words weight.

[Apply]: Maybe that's something we could do today.

- Go looking for an opportunity to **serve** someone.
 - Bring a meal to a sick neighbor.
 - Write a card to a grieving colleague.
 - Join one of our groups serving refugees and immigrants in our community.
 - Heck—ask your server if they need prayer!
 - We're doing evangelism training with our officers right now, and that's actually one of the homework assignments we've been given.
 - Maybe you want to join us in doing that.
- And then, when the opportunity comes—**speak**.

[Transition]

- The church at its best—ordinary people love unlikely people in word and deed.
- Feature #4: When ordinary people love unlikely people in word and deed, the result is much joy.

4. MUCH JOY

[State]

- This might be my favorite verse in the whole passage.
 - What happens when the church lives out its missional call?
 - **V8: So there was much joy in that city.**
 - Not mild relief. Not polite appreciation. Not religious interest.
 - And not even just joy—MUCH JOY!
 - Through word and deed, the spiritually oppressed and physically broken Samaritans found hope and healing—and the whole city rejoiced.
- What a vision for our church...

[Illustrate]: Imagine we did that for Knoxville?

- What if Knoxville experienced much joy because our church is here?
- Imagine—
 - Homes where the love of Jesus is known and felt.
 - Neighborhoods where people know they are seen, prayed for, and cared for.
 - Schools where kids' needs are noticed and met.
 - Workplaces where Xns don't just earn paychecks, but quietly bring blessing to our city.
- Imagine we gave ourselves away so that—
 - The lonely are less alone.
 - The poor are cared for with dignity.
 - The grieving are comforted.
 - 84-year-old men get baptized.
 - And single moms drive reliable cars.
- Don't you want to be the reason our city is filled with joy?!
 - Not bc we're impressive. Not bc we're powerful. We're not.
 - But bc we love as we've been loved.

[Apply]

- And that's really the key to living this way: for us to remember how much we're loved.
 - We can't manufacture joy. We can only share it.
 - But in him there is fullness of joy.
 - Born as an ordinary person.
 - Loving the most unlikely people—that's us.
 - Through words—and through the deed of the cross—
 - Jesus has brought much joy to us.
- So now we can be that church:
 - Let's be ordinary people who love unlikely people in word and deed...
 - That there might be much joy in this city.

[CONSEQUENCE]

Who could you start with this week?

RESOURCES AND ENDNOTES

Resources

This list contains some of the resources that were used to prepare this sermon series. Check them out if you want to dig a little deeper.

- John Calvin, *Commentary Upon the Acts of the Apostles*.
- Ray Cortese, *The Mission: Clarified, Mobilized, Empowered*.
- Dennis E. Johnson, *The Message of Acts in the History of Redemption*.
- Simon J. Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary: Acts*.
- Alan Thompson, *Acts: A Commentary*.
- N. T. Wright, *Acts for Everyone—Part 1*.