



## Session Twenty

### The Book of

### Acts, Pt.4

### Acts 8:4-9:31

With chapter 8, Acts begins to narrate the beginning of the church's mission beyond Jerusalem, first through the telling of two stories about Philip (who seems to have taken Stephen's place as a church leader) followed by the seminal story of Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus.

1) Immediately, Luke tells us something very important: "...those who were scattered went from place to place, proclaiming the word" (8:4), which illustrates the seriousness with which these first Christians took their faith in general and the Great Commission in particular. Further, we should note there was nothing special about these individuals. They had no special training, no particular gifts for speaking or persuasion; they were simply followers of Jesus persecuted for their faith. But it was through the testimony of people such as these that the early church, in part, grew. I urge you to think about your own willingness to "proclaim the word," not necessarily via speaking at all but, perhaps, through how you live. Are you willing to create a strategy for yourself whereby, in appropriate and comfortable ways, you're bearing witness to the Gospel?

2) The story of Simon (8:9-25) is curious but nonetheless instructive. It is often pointed out that Simon's behavior illustrates a temptation to which all followers of Jesus can succumb: coveting religious authority/power for your own benefit. More than one church leader and congregation has fallen by giving in to such temptation. It's a reminder of just how important humility is to the Christian life. That said, can you think of instances in your own life where you've engaged in the work of the church, ostensibly to further the Kingdom, when, in fact, it was about your own self-aggrandizement?

3) It's instructive to read the story of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch (8:26-40) relative to the story about Simon that immediately precedes it. How is the eunuch different from Simon (not in anatomical terms, thank you)?

4) In terms of the spread of the Gospel and its promises to the Gentiles, what is significant about the fact the Ethiopian is a eunuch?

5) Read 9:1-31, then consider the following:

- a. There is a tendency among many Christians to think of conversion primarily in terms of individual salvation. Certainly Paul undergoes a conversion and is an heir to salvation, but what was Paul's conversion really about?
- b. What does the presence of Ananias in this story suggest about the role of others in our experience of Jesus and the Holy Spirit?
- c. Paul's conversion results in a total transformation of who and what he is as a person. At the same time, many Christians, given that they are life-long believers, have never experienced such a transformation. How, then, should we understand the relationship between faith and transformation in the Christian life?
- d. What do the details of Paul's conversion suggest about the role of community in our ability to grow in discipleship?
- e. Look again at 9:16. Suffering, obviously, was not incidental to Paul's conversion and subsequent discipleship but was, in fact, essential to both. The case can be made that we all have the greatest potential for growth as disciples in the midst of suffering. Reflecting on your own life as a follower of Jesus, why might that be so?
- f. Note that as Paul, post-conversion, became "increasingly more powerful" (9:22) the reaction against him grew stronger (9:23, 29). Why?