

²⁰ Peter answered: “May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money! ²¹ You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God. ²² Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord in the hope that he may forgive you for having such a thought in your heart. ²³ For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin.”

²⁴ Then Simon answered, “Pray to the Lord for me so that nothing you have said may happen to me.”

1. How does Luke describe the Samaritan’s reception of the gospel? How does this add to our understanding of the gospel as it is described in this passage?
2. Peter challenged his audience on Pentecost, ““Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.” He followed the charge with the promise, “And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38).” Why do you think God delays sending the Spirit in this particular instance?
3. What does Simon’s response to the reception of the Spirit, the laying on of hands, tell you about his initial profession of faith?
4. Simon’s request is met with a robust rebuke from Peter. Why is Simon’s request so outrageous?
5. What are some of the ways we attempt to co-opt the power of God for personal gain and personal glory rather than humbly submitting to his will for our lives?
6. What is the appropriate response when we find ourselves pursuing God for personal gain?

THE GOSPEL CONTINUES TO PROSPER (v. 25)

The story begins with Phillip taking his cues from Peter and John by preaching the gospel; it ends with Peter and John taking their cue from Phillip by proclaiming the word of the Lord to the Samaritans.

²⁵ After they had further proclaimed the word of the Lord and testified about Jesus, Peter and John returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many Samaritan villages.

1. How would you describe the early church’s commitment to proclaiming Christ?
2. How would you describe our commitment to proclaiming Christ?
3. What are some practical ways we can deepen our commitment to proclaiming Christ to our generation?



At one time or another we’ve all muttered beneath our breath (or perhaps even out loud), “Wow! This is really hard!” Maybe we were frustrated with a project that looked so much easier on YouTube. Or maybe we were in the middle of an athletic milestone like running a half marathon or summiting one of Colorado’s famous fourteeners. Chances are that there was a lot more at stake. You may have been in a relationship that was slowly unraveling or dealing with an unexpected job loss and the prospect of financial ruin. Maybe you were watching a teenage son or daughter make some tragic life choices. Life can be difficult and there have been times when all of us wanted to throw our hands in the air and give up.

Interestingly enough there is an underlying assumption that following Christ should make our lives easier. If we have enough faith and are doing all the right things, we should experience life with minimal pain, tragedy or discomfort.

You would have had a hard time convincing the very early church that following Christ made life easier. Things would have been much easier for them if they had stayed home, blended in, and kept quiet. But the gospel would not allow them the luxury. The gospel compelled them to stand out, speak up and challenge the idolatrous assumptions of their generation. Nothing could be more dangerous, or uncomfortable, or thrilling. Following Christ certainly made their lives richer, but it never made their life easier.

As we continue the story of the early church, things are getting hard. Really hard. One of their leading teachers has been falsely accused, dragged to the edge of the city and stoned. It is now open season on believers of all shapes, sizes and genders. They are being harassed, arrested, imprisoned and displaced from their homes. Many are fleeing the city. The comfortable existence they had known a few short months earlier, is now a thing of the past. While there is unspeakable joy in knowing and following Christ, it does not come without cost.

Luke wants us to realize, however, that in spite of fierce opposition, the message of Christ is breaking new ground, demolishing old strong holds and setting people free.

THE GOSPEL IS CHALLENGED (vv. 1-5)

Following Stephen's death, a great persecution breaks out against the church. A young man named Saul is at the center of the persecution. The unintended consequences of Saul's persecution is that the gospel begins to flourish beyond the boundaries of Jerusalem. Soon the gospel will even grip the heart of Saul.

On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. ² Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. ³ But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison. ⁴ Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went.

1. This is the third mention of Saul in three paragraphs. Why do you think Luke goes out of his way to highlight Saul's persecution of the early church?
2. What were the unintended consequences of Saul's attack on the church?
3. What does this tell us about how God is at work in the difficulties we experience?

THE GOSPEL BREAKS NEW GROUND (vv. 5-13)

Jews hated Samaritans. There are no two ways about it. The Samaritans were the remnant of the ten tribes of Israel that broke away from Judea shortly after the death of Solomon. They revived the worship of the golden calf (while simultaneously adopting a number of Canaanite deities) and created their own centers of worship. They were often at war with Judah. When they were defeated by the Assyrians they intermarried with their neighbors and were not considered ritually or racially pure enough to participate in the rebuilding of the temple. When they returned to the worship of the one true God, they set up a rival temple on Mount Gerazim. The Jews later destroyed the temple and ransacked their capital city. Most devout Jews would not travel through Samaria in fear of contamination. If they had to make the journey they would quickly shake the dust off their clothes after they crossed the border. Jesus had been a notable exception to the rule. Now Phillip follows in his footsteps. The gospel is breaking new ground as Phillip proclaims the Messiah in Samaria.

⁵ Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Messiah there. ⁶ When the crowds heard Philip and saw the signs he performed, they all paid close attention to what he said. ⁷ For with shrieks, impure spirits came out of many, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. ⁸ So there was great joy in that city.

⁹ Now for some time a man named Simon had practiced sorcery in the city and amazed all the people of Samaria. He boasted that he was someone great, ¹⁰ and all the people, both high and low, gave him their attention and exclaimed, "This man is rightly called the Great Power of God." ¹¹ They followed him because he had amazed them for a long time with his sorcery. ¹² But when they believed Philip as he proclaimed the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. ¹³ Simon himself believed and was baptized. And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw.

1. Luke describes Phillip's message as a proclamation of "the Messiah (v. 5)" and "the good news of the kingdom of God (v. 12)."
 - a. What does Phillip mean when he describes Jesus as "Messiah?"
 - b. What does he mean when he proclaims "the kingdom of God?"
 - c. How should these two concepts enlarge our understanding of the gospel?
2. How are the signs and wonders Phillip performed a demonstration of the gospel he proclaimed?
3. Luke paints a deliberate contrast between "Simon the Sorcerer" and "Phillip." How are the two messages polar opposite of the other?
4. How is the gospel breaking new ground, when the Samaritans respond to it's message?

THE GOSPEL ENCOUNTERS NEW CHALLENGES (vv. 14-24)

As the gospel breaks new ground, it encounters new challenges. The first and most important question to be resolved is "Will the Samaritans be received in the community of believers on equal footing with their Judean brothers and sisters?" The issue is quickly resolved by their reception of the Holy Spirit. The next question is, "How will the gospel stack up against the paganism of the Gentile world?" Peter meets the challenge head on when he confronts Simon, sundering his motives and tactics.

¹⁴ When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to Samaria. ¹⁵ When they arrived, they prayed for the new believers there that they might receive the Holy Spirit, ¹⁶ because the Holy Spirit had not yet come on any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ¹⁷ Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

¹⁸ When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money ¹⁹ and said, "Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit."