

Acts (Part 2) | New Ground (Acts 8.4-25)

1. This scene begins with God's people being scattered by persecution, and the result is that the gospel spreads to those who hadn't received it. God is using circumstances to move his people to places they probably wouldn't have gone otherwise, so that others can hear the gospel.

a. Looking back on your own life, have there been any occasions in your own life where God used your circumstances to put you in a place you wouldn't have chosen otherwise? If so, how did God use that new situation as a way of advancing his Kingdom either in your life or the lives of others?

2. The Samaritan's response to God's work in their midst is joy. For those of us who are in Christ, God has worked in our lives too.

a. What are the things that most persistently threaten to steal the joy of your salvation?

3. Previously, the people of Samaria had been impressed by Simon's demonstrations of power, until they saw the power of God really show up through Philip's preaching and ministry.

a. What kind of counterfeit gospels and displays of power impress and capture our attention today?

b. Was there a particular false gospel or false power that you used to follow before Christ? How did God show you the true power of the gospel so that left those things behind and you believed in and followed Jesus instead?

4. Then the apostles showed up to pray for the new disciples in Samaria. These apostles laid their hands on them as an expression of validation and solidarity with the Samaritan Christians, and asked for the Spirit to fill them. God used this event to unify a people who were formerly at odds with one another.

a. Did you ever experience a time when a trusted Christian leader affirmed you and validated what God was doing in your life? If so, how did that impact you?

b. In what ways has being a Christian united you with people that, apart from Christ, you would probably have had nothing to do with?

5. Simon's attempt to buy the power of God reveals that his heart was still longing for power so that he could impress others. While he had professed faith in Christ, it seems that he hadn't truly understood the nature of the gospel, which is actually a

renunciation of the pursuit of power and self-aggrandizement. That is what Jesus did. He gave up in order to become a servant.

a. In what ways are we tempted today to fall into the same trap as Simon, and attempt to acquire whatever will make us appear "spiritual" and garner us respect in order to puff ourselves up?

b. How can you tell whether you are pursuing the things of God for your glory or for his?

6. Pastor Mike ended with a few implications. One of them was "we cannot redeem anything that we fear."

a. What does that mean? Have you found this to be true?

b. In what ways, and specifically in what areas, does the church tend to retreat from culture? How should it engage instead?