

Acts 8:1-8

Outward Church: Samaritan Gospel

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Today I want to talk about the power of the gospel—what the gospel is and what the gospel does. I want to talk about the gospel because I think it speaks to the cultural friction and racial brokenness we are experiencing today. The gospel not only identifies the problem, but provides a solution. Here's *my thesis*:

The gospel actively crosses all racial and ethnic barriers to bring healing in Christ.

The gospel actively crosses all racial and ethnic barriers to bring healing in Christ. There are so many barriers right now. In the news we've seen lines of protestors and law enforcement, literal barriers. We hear of social, economic, and racial barriers, more barriers. We've see the split on social media among friends of different viewpoints, more barriers. What can cross these impenetrable barriers? The gospel can.

The gospel is the good news of restored relationship.

This word “gospel” means good news. But to use this word back in ancient Israel had a different meaning as it was typically used of military victories. Author Preston Sprinkle explains:

[The Roman emperors] were believed to have brought unprecedented peace to the world, which they referred to in Latin as the Pax Romana, or “peace of Rome.” Rome was known for securing such peace and justice through warfare. And whenever Roman leaders returned home from another military victory, heralds were sent throughout the empire to announce the gospel—the good news—that Rome had been victorious. *Fight: A Christian Case for Non-Violence*¹

The gospel of Rome is that the emperor has won. The gospel of Christianity is that the king has died. The gospel of Rome is that the empire is strong. The gospel of Christianity is that God is most glorified in our weakness. The gospel of Rome is that we can save ourselves. The gospel of Christianity is that nothing but the blood of Jesus can save us. The gospel is the good news that we can once more be in right relationship with God and each other through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The gospel can not only heal our relationship with God, but with each other too.

2 Corinthians 5:18-20 (NIV)

18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: 19 that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. 20 We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.

God wants to reconcile “the world” to himself— people from all races and ethnicities. As we reconcile to God it makes it possible to become reconciled to each other. We are ambassadors of reconciliation to God and to those around us (Matt 18:21-35). The gospel has the power to cross any broken relationship, God to man, rich to poor, white and black. *The gospel is the good news of restored relationship.*

Let's think about the wooden cross for a moment. Typically, when we see the cross we think of the vertical relationship. I'm made right with God through the death of Jesus Christ. But the cross has two beams, one vertical, but also one horizontal where Jesus' arms were outstretched. The vertical beam can remind us of our restored relationship with God but let's use the horizontal one to remind us that God also came to restore relationships among us. The cross points both directions—up and down, God and us, but also side to side, us and our neighbors. *The gospel is the good news of restored relationship (with God and others)*. To do this the gospel has to be resilient.

The gospel is surprisingly resilient.

This gospel is not furthered through violence done to others like Rome, but through self-sacrifice and suffering. The Jewish Supreme Court called the Sanhedrin has just executed the first Christian, the first martyr, a man named Stephen. Here's what happens next:

Acts 8:1b-3 (NIV)

...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.

Stephen's death was the spark that lit the flame of persecution. With the state's full approval a violent man named Saul went from house to house hunting men and women who professed to follow Christ. This wasn't any old persecution. Verse 1 says it was a "great persecution" (megas diogmos). He hunted them down and threw them in prison. In Galatians Paul says he violently tried to destroy the church (Gal 1:13). But he couldn't, because *the gospel is surprisingly resilient*.

I finished re-reading *The Art of Pastoring* by David Hansen this week. He talks about walking through a forest and praying. As he is walking he hears the pine trees swaying in the wind. He writes:

The trees crack and creak-loudly-as they bend in the strong wind. Imagine a large man rocking in a one-hundred-year-old year-old maple rocker on a one-hundred-year-old oak floor, and multiply the sound by a hundred trees. In forty-five years of walking in the coniferous forests of the west I've never heard anything like it. These trees are not thriving. The wood must be compromised with long fractures. Yet they are amazingly resilient against the wind. The cracks in the trunks have undoubtedly been caused by the wind, but, ironically, they also allow the trees to survive the wind.²

Our cross has cracks in it too. When we suffer, we break and stress fractures form on our souls, but if we let them, they will form us and give us the endurance we need to keep going, to keep swaying in the wind and storms. Does your cross have cracks in it? Have you suffered for Jesus? It's painful and it hurts but those cracks can help us endure. *The gospel is surprisingly resilient*.

The gospel actively crosses barriers

The gospel is active two ways:

1. The gospel is *active* according to God's plan.

Remember what Jesus told the disciples right before he ascended into heaven at the beginning of Acts?

Acts 1:8 (NIV) But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Jesus always intended for the gospel to go beyond Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria. Now because of the persecution verse 1 tells us the believers “were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.” God’s plan is unfolding. God always intended for the gospel to be a cross-cultural/racial/ethnic message (Gen 12:2-3). *The gospel is active according to God’s plan.*

2. The gospel is *actively* shared by those who believe.

Acts 8:4 (NIV) Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went.

These believers didn’t waste their persecution. Instead, the Holy Spirit worked through their suffering to drive them out and share the gospel message with those who didn’t yet know Christ. *The gospel actively crosses barriers according to God’s plan and as it is actively shared by those who believe.*

What happens when you’re not active? You gain the covid-15. That’s 15 extra pounds from sitting around all day at home and having so much access to the fridge. Food is meant to give us the energy we need to do something, but if we don’t do anything, we just store it up. The gospel is similar. God designed the gospel to actively drive us out across barriers to share him with others. I ask myself, “Am I a lean Christian? Am I an active witness? Or do I have a little extra fuel to burn off?” I’ve gained the gospel-15. I have fuel to burn. *The gospel actively crosses barriers.* What type of barriers?

The gospel crosses racial and ethnic barriers in Christ’s name.

The story picks up with Philip, one of the seven the apostles appointed to take care of the Greek speaking widows back in Jerusalem (Acts 6:5). Turns out God had other plans for Philip.

Acts 8:5-6 (NIV) 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.

The Samaritans are different than the Jews but not really Gentiles (non-Jews).³ When the northern kingdom of Israel was defeated by the Assyrians in 722 BC, the Assyrians relocated foreigners to live in and around that region, mixing in with the Israelites not taken into captivity. The Jews thought of them as “half breeds.”⁴ These culturally different people refused to worship at the temple in Jerusalem and built a separate temple. They only followed the first five books of the Hebrew Bible, the *Pentateuch*. Even Jesus’ disciples hated the Samaritans. When a Samaritan village didn’t welcome him, James and John asked Jesus if he wanted them to call down fire from heaven and consume them, but Jesus rebuked them (Luke 9:52-56).

Much of Acts and Paul’s letters deal with racial tensions in the early church between Jew and Gentile. The Bible speaks over and over to the gospel uniting believers across racial and ethnic barriers. We’re all the human race, so the idea of “race” is kind of unhelpful (*One Blood*).⁵ But what I mean by race is black, white, Asian, Latino, Indian, etc. Ethnicity is more specific. I’m German Irish but not Italian. A black person may identify as African American or Haitian or Nigerian. If you’re Asian, you may think of yourself more as Chinese, Korean, or some other Asian ethnicity. What’s the one thing that can unite us all so that we appreciate and encourage each other’s cultural differences? Jesus.

Despite the cultural and religious differences, Philip still finds a way to share Jesus. The Samaritans believed in a coming figure called the “ta’eb” or “restorer.”⁶ The Jews called him the Messiah. Moses prophesied:

Deuteronomy 18:15 (NIV) The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him.

Even when Jesus talked with the Samaritan woman at the well, she spoke of the restorer, the Messiah.

John 4:25-26, 39a (NIV)

25 The woman said, “I know that Messiah” (called Christ) “is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.”

26 Then Jesus declared, “I, the one speaking to you—I am he.”

39 Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman’s testimony...

When Philip went to Samaria what did he do? He “proclaimed the Messiah.” He talked about the restorer. Then he performed miracles to verify that Jesus was him. *The gospel crosses racial and ethnic barriers in Christ’s name*. Why does it cross these barriers?

The gospel brings healing.

Acts 8:7-8 (NIV) 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.

The gospel brings spiritual, physical, and emotional healing. The gospel brings whole-life healing. The gospel not only brings reconciliation with God (2 Cor 5:17-21), the gospel brings reconciliation between Jew and Samaritan, long hated enemies made one in Christ. The gospel impacts the city as the city is filled with joy. When we share the gospel message as we work to bring healing, it will bless our communities with joy. I believe we as the church can help bring healing where our world sees only barriers.

- I have a pastor friend who is both the chaplain of our state troopers and is deeply broken-hearted for the black community. The gospel doesn’t pit one against the other but can unite us in Christ.
- The gospel can reach across social and economic barriers. I don’t remember where I read it but one author imagined a janitor discipling the CEO of a corporation. The gospel can do it.
- The gospel can reconcile those with different points of view on Social Media. Before I try to take the speck out of my brother or sister’s eye, I first confess the tree trunk in my own (Matt 7:5).

The gospel brings healing. My thesis is this:

The gospel actively crosses all racial and ethnic barriers to bring healing in Christ.

I entitled this sermon the *Samaritan Gospel* because the gospel isn’t just for Jews, and it’s not just for Gentiles, the gospel is for Samaritans, the culturally alienated. God wants to heal all peoples. I believe God uses us to cross racial and ethnic barriers to share the gospel and bring healing. **How can we help?**

1. We believe the gospel is for healing.

We start by simply believing in Jesus. He is the one who crossed all racial and ethnic barriers as he left the glories of heaven to step into a human body, becoming a baby boy in Bethlehem. He did this so he could bring us healing, so that he could forgive us of our sins and bind up our wounds.

2. We pray for and put ourselves in cross-cultural situations.

Maybe you're seeing all the unrest in our culture and wondering what you can do about it. We can pray. We pray for opportunities to cross racial and ethnic barriers to share the love of Christ with others. In my own life, I'm convicted that I don't have many friends that look or speak differently than me. The ones I do have I don't see very often. The Lord is calling me to be more intentional about forming relationships that are racially and ethnically different than me. The Lord is encouraging me to listen more than I talk in these cross-cultural relationships, to ask good questions. We pray for opportunities to be around people that look, think, and speak differently than us. Then when God puts us there, we see how the gospel can heal.

3. We expect God to work.

Just like God moved the gospel message out of Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria, we expect God will keep breaking down barriers and moving the gospel forward. God is going to do it. We read about it in the last book of the Bible.

Revelation 7:9-10 (NIV) 9 After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. 10 And they cried out in a loud voice:

“Salvation belongs to our God,
who sits on the throne,
and to the Lamb.”

The gospel actively crosses all racial and ethnic barriers to bring healing in Christ.

Romans 15:13 (NIV) May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Pastor [Jonathan Romig](#) preached this message at Cornerstone Congregational Church. You can download a PDF copy of this sermon above, which includes endnotes and references, or share it through [Apple podcasts](#) or [Google Play Music](#). Read the [story of our church here](#).

Discussion Questions

1. What is the gospel?
2. How is the gospel of Christianity different than the world's "good news"?
3. Is the gospel active or passive? How so?
4. What does it mean for the gospel to cross racial and ethnic barriers?
5. How does Jesus carry cross-culturally?
6. What type of healing does the gospel bring?
7. How can you be more intentional about cross-cultural relationships?

¹ Sprinkle, Preston. *Fight: A Christian Case for Non-Violence*. David C. Cook. Kindle Edition.

² David J. Hansen. *The Art of Pastoring: Ministry Without All the Answers* (Kindle Locations 2153-2157). Kindle Edition.

³ Arnold, Clinton E.. *Acts* (Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary) (p. 62). Zondervan Academic. Kindle Edition.

⁴ Arnold, Clinton E.. *Acts* (Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary) (p. 64). Zondervan Academic. Kindle Edition.

⁵ Perkins, John. *One Blood: Parting Words to the Church on Race and Love* (p. 17). Moody Publishers. Kindle Edition.

⁶ Tyndale Commentary: Acts 8:5