

Approaching God

Read this portion of Psalm 14 and begin with an opening prayer

The fool says in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, their deeds are vile; there is now one who does good. Oh that salvation for Israel would come out of Zion! When the Lord restores the fortunes of his people, let Jacob rejoice and Israel be glad (Psalm 14:1,7)

In the Bible, foolishness means having a self-centeredness that blinds & destroys. A foolish person wants no one to have a say over them, so they ignore God. Some of this rebellion exists in every heart. Every sin we commit is a kind of practical atheism - acting as if God were not there. That also means belief in God must be a gift from God. Are there places of unbelief in your heart right now? Take a minute to thank him for faith and to help you overcome any unbelief.

Acts 8:4-25

Passage Introduction:

The open persecution of the church in Jerusalem forced it to scatter across the regions of Judea and Samaria (8:1). Christians throughout the city, except for the apostles, ran for their lives. Many had joined the congregation on the day of Pentecost through the preaching of the Peter. Now, under heavy opposition, they were being driven out, scattered, and even killed. And yet, the persecution of the church only served God's purposes for the expansion of his kingdom and the advance of the gospel. The enemies of Stephen tried to shut down the gospel through violence, but God uses their wickedness to expand the reach of the gospel!

Bible Reading, Study & Meditation

Start with Engaging the Text: Take a few minutes to highlight, circle, or underline key words.

My Notes:

Acts 8:4-25 - 4 Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. **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

My Notes:

vs. 23: carries the sense of “now I perceive your true state”. The best way, then to read v.13, is that Simon was intellectually convinced of the truth of Christ, but there was no real change of heart, no new birth.

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. **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.” **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.” **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.

Questions for Reflection & Meditation

- What are the main things that seem important and noteworthy in this passage? What were some of the positive things that happened as a result of Stephen’s death.
- What does this passage reveal about the nature of the gospel and what is required for those receive it?
- The message of the gospel was received “with much joy” (vs 8) in Samaria. Recall your own conversion. How did you experience the joy of discovering who Jesus was and coming under his rule? How might you recall that joy each day, so that it continues to be a mark of your life?

Key Takeaway:

Choose the verse or truth that is most striking and/or helpful to you today. Paraphrase the thought or verse in your own words.

Close in Prayer:

This section marks a decisive moment in Jesus' mission plan: the gospel has now gone to the Samaritans! Thank God for the fact that the risen Christ wants all people to be saved. Ask him to place this desire in your heart as well.