

Introduce the Psalm --

We live in an Dark and Ugly world - We live with a righteous Anger -- And a Great Hope --

**Psa 94:1 O LORD, God of vengeance, O God of vengeance, shine forth!**

**Psa 94:2 Rise up, O judge of the earth; repay to the proud what they deserve!**

**Psa 94:3 O LORD, how long shall the wicked, how long shall the wicked exult?**

**Psa 94:4 They pour out their arrogant words; all the evildoers boast.**

**Psa 94:5 They crush your people, O LORD, and afflict your heritage.**

**Psa 94:6 They kill the widow and the sojourner, and murder the fatherless;**

**Psa 94:7 and they say, "The LORD does not see; the God of Jacob does not perceive."**

**Psa 94:8 Understand, O dullest of the people! Fools, when will you be wise?**

**Psa 94:9 He who planted the ear, does he not hear? He who formed the eye, does he not see?**

**Psa 94:10 He who disciplines the nations, does he not rebuke? He who teaches man knowledge--**

**Psa 94:11 the LORD--knows the thoughts of man, that they are but a breath.**

**Psa 94:12 Blessed is the man whom you discipline, O LORD, and whom you teach out of your law,**

**Psa 94:13 to give him rest from days of trouble, until a pit is dug for the wicked.**

**Psa 94:14 For the LORD will not forsake his people; he will not abandon his heritage;**

**Psa 94:15 for justice will return to the righteous, and all the upright in heart will follow it.**

**Psa 94:16 Who rises up for me against the wicked? Who stands up for me against evildoers?**

**Psa 94:17 If the LORD had not been my help, my soul**

would soon have lived in the land of silence.

**Psa 94:18** When I thought, "My foot slips," your steadfast love, O LORD, held me up.

**Psa 94:19** When the cares of my heart are many, your consolations cheer my soul.

**Psa 94:20** Can wicked rulers be allied with you, those who frame injustice by statute?

**Psa 94:21** They band together against the life of the righteous and condemn the innocent to death.

**Psa 94:22** But the LORD has become my stronghold, and my God the rock of my refuge.

**Psa 94:23** He will bring back on them their iniquity and wipe them out for their wickedness; the LORD our God will wipe them out.

## ACTS 8

So as we left in Acts 7, Stephen gave a rousing indictment against the Sanhedrin, and they became so Angry they stoned him to death.

Stephen's heart was fixed on Jesus however, and he prayed for their forgiveness even as they killed him. As we look back over the book of Acts so far, we see a very courageous Church. I think at the heart, these Christians Cherished Jesus above all other things. There was no threat that could keep them away from preaching about God's love. As Stephen looked above the angry Mob, he could see Jesus at the right hand of God.

As we move into Acts 8, we pick up the ending of that story:

**1 And Saul approved of his execution. And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.**

**2 Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him.**

**3 But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison.**

**4 Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word.**

We read these verses and see great tragedy. A Godly man killed for being a Godly man - The church being persecuted - Christians fleeing as refugees from the Holy land.

Verse 2 tells us that there was a great Lamentation over Stephen's death. By devout men- We should not quash our anger - our pain. God gave us those emotions. I believe he wants us to see and feel and understand how messed up the world is. Too often, I think we avoid the pain. We try to numb ourselves to it. We try to rationalize it away. We are not going to be better than Jesus. Jesus wept. Isaiah 53:3 describes him as **a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief**. Now we shouldn't grieve for Stephen so much, as he is in a much better place. We should grieve our world. Our despair at the state of this current world will heighten our longing for the new one.

But this is the key of the explosion of the church - **Those who where scattered went about preaching the word**. God does not take away our suffering, but he gives our suffering purpose.

This passage is the first mention of Saul of Tarsus in the bible. We learn a lot more about him in the next few chapters. He is from the Tribe of Benjamin. Interestingly, there is another fellow from the tribe of Benjamin named Saul, and as I thought about it, He had quite a similar role.

Saul was the first king of Israel. He lost his position because he worshiped God in unprescribed ways. 1 Samuel 13 tell the story:

**5 And the Philistines mustered to fight with Israel, thirty thousand chariots and six thousand horsemen and troops**

like the sand on the seashore in multitude. They came up and encamped in Michmash, to the east of Beth-aven.

**6** When the men of Israel saw that they were in trouble (for the people were hard pressed), the people hid themselves in caves and in holes and in rocks and in tombs and in cisterns,

**7** and some Hebrews crossed the fords of the Jordan to the land of Gad and Gilead. Saul was still at Gilgal, and all the people followed him trembling.

**8** He waited seven days, the time appointed by Samuel. But Samuel did not come to Gilgal, and the people were scattering from him.

**9** So Saul said, "Bring the burnt offering here to me, and the peace offerings." And he offered the burnt offering.

**10** As soon as he had finished offering the burnt offering, behold, Samuel came. And Saul went out to meet him and greet him.

**11** Samuel said, "What have you done?" And Saul said, "When I saw that the people were scattering from me, and that you did not come within the days appointed, and that the Philistines had mustered at Michmash,

**12** I said, 'Now the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal, and I have not sought the favor of the LORD.' So I forced myself, and offered the burnt offering."

**13** And Samuel said to Saul, "You have done foolishly. You have not kept the command of the LORD your God, with which he commanded you. For then the LORD would have established your kingdom over Israel forever.

**14** But now your kingdom shall not continue. The LORD has sought out a man after his own heart, and the LORD has commanded him to be prince over his people, because you have not kept what the LORD commanded you."

There is a difference between a sacrifice and a bribe. Sacrifice should be a celebration of who God is, and what he does. Saul's sacrifice was a bribe - Not trusting God, but figuring that God could be bought..

Saul is replaced by King David - a Man after God's own heart. David trusted God in amazing ways - and as a young warrior delivered Israel's people from their enemies. Saul's response was Jealousy and persecution.. Hunting David down for a couple decades.

Some folks will say that Paul was always zealous for God - just misdirected. I don't really buy that. If he where zealous for God, he would have found him.. I believe he, like the Sanhedrin was jealous for his tradition.

When we look at Saul of Tarsus, and compare him to his distant Uncle - It is interesting to see that they performed a very similar function.. The Saul's both persecuted those who worshiped God, so that the love and dependence on God could become even stronger. If it weren't for Saul, Son of Kish, we wouldn't have many of the Psalms. If we didn't have Saul of Tarsus, perhaps the church wouldn't have spread to the ends of the earth.

**5 Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ.**

**6 And the crowds with one accord paid attention to what was being said by Philip when they heard him and saw the signs that he did.**

**7 For unclean spirits, crying out with a loud voice, came out of many who had them, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed.**

**8 So there was much joy in that city.**

Samaria - not a popular place with the Jews. 2 Kings 17 tells us the story. These folks were Gentiles - imported by the Assyrians, and had adopted kinda a synchronous religion with Israel.. After the Assyrians imported foreigners to occupy the land held by the northern empire of Israel, Lions kept eating the occupiers.. Assyria got tired of this, and sent back some captured priests to teach the new occupants how to appease Israel's God. These Gentiles continued to worship their own idols,

but also tossed God a bone once and a while..

The devout Jews would travel days out of their way to avoid cutting across Samaria - But in John 4 we saw that Jesus went through Samaria, and ministered to the woman at the well. As such, Samaria was a convenient place for the Christian refugees to flee. The more zealous a Jew was, the less likely they were to want to be anywhere near Samaria.

God had planned this Acts 1:8 **"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."**

We saw Peter witnessing to the Jews in Jerusalem in Acts 2, By Acts 6, It appears that the Gospel has spread to other parts of Judea, (The Greek neighborhoods) Now we see it moving into the Samaria, and by the end of the chapter, we will see it begin to spread to the ends of the earth.

Samaria is at the halfway point. They have the head knowledge, but they lack the commitment. Really I suspect most of America is like this as well.. 76% of Americans claim to be Christian, but if anywhere near that amount were striving to be living sacrifices, the world would be a very different place. I think many times we are willing to label ourselves Christians, and to subscribe to Christian morality, except in exceptional circumstances where it is inconvenient - (Usually circumstances like our own).

**9 But there was a man named Simon, who had previously practiced magic in the city and amazed the people of Samaria, saying that he himself was somebody great.**

**10 They all paid attention to him, from the least to the greatest, saying, "This man is the power of God that is called Great."**

**11 And they paid attention to him because for a long time he had amazed them with his magic.**

**12 But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.**

**13 Even Simon himself believed, and after being baptized he continued with Philip. And seeing signs and great miracles performed, he was amazed.**

Magic is a bit of a tricky subject - There is no doubt that the Bible warns against Sorcery and witchcraft. Many modern western folks don't believe in magic, so when I address it as being a real force, that can be practiced, I am likely to lose some of you.

I suspect that there are two different kinds - one is the slight of hand, and counting tricks that people use to make something appear to be amazing, when it really isn't all that amazing.

The other would be conjuring Demonic powers to effect people's perceptions of reality.. The enemy is real, and he surrounds us in lies. He is happy to have us believe in anything other than an all powerful, all loving, almighty God. As we are immersed in His lies, it becomes difficult to differentiate what is real and what is lies.

Example --- Eastern Meditation, Self Hypnosis, Eastern medicine.

I suspect that Simon was practicing some more Occultist magic. This magic is easily passed from one person to another. It is kinda like introducing a two friends. They have a good conversation or two, and suddenly they are connected and they call each other directly. I think Demonic channels are like this as well. I can introduce you to my demon friend Perhaps by amazing you with a warm tingling feeling - via illicit Drugs - illicit images - I give you a craving - and when you leave your conversation goes on once you leave.. Satan is happy to have his legions keep you distracted and occupied with his counterfeits.

**14 Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that**

**Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John,  
15 who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit,  
16 for he had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.  
17 Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit.**

This is an interesting and widely debated chunk of scripture. Many folks believe that when you believe, you receive the holy spirit. Others believe that when you are baptized you receive the Holy Spirit. Both of these theories seem to be disputed by this scripture. The scriptures said that they believed, and that they where baptized, but the Spirit had not fallen on them.

Most of the older commentaries put these Samaritans in the category of Christians. They received Joy, believed, where baptized.

Some suggest that this was a one time delay -- God wanted to make sure that Peter and John endorsed the entry of the Gentile Samaritans into the fellowship.

Others suggest that they didn't really believe- At least not in a saving way. The scriptures say that they believed *Phillip*. Romans 8:9 tells us that **"Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him."** Probably the strongest evidence for this we find in the following verses with Simon the Sorcerer.

**18 Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money,**

Interesting point here.. Simon saw that the Spirit was given by the laying on of the apostles' hands. How did he see this? My assumption is that it was apparent through the outward display of

tongues.. The Scripture doesn't explicitly say this, but there are some similar incidents where it does say that the gift of the holy spirit was accompanied by the speaking of tongues.

[He offered them money]

**19 saying, "Give me this power also, so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit."**

**20 But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money!"**

**21 You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God.**

**22 Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you.**

**23 For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity."**

**24 And Simon answered, "Pray for me to the Lord, that nothing of what you have said may come upon me."**

**25 Now when they had testified and spoken the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans.**

Simon's Sin was quite similar to King Saul's. God is not a vending machine. God's gifts are to be obtained and used with a humble heart.

There is a very hard teaching buried in this passage. Belief in the facts of Jesus life is not really enough. Your Heart must be right before God. Remember James 2:19? **"You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!"** If you are using God as a stepping stone to another Idol, you are not worshiping God, but your are worshiping an idol.

Too often I think that we sell Jesus based on what he can do for you. He will make your family stronger, he will make your kids behave, He will free us from our addictions he will give you a community that will love and support you. Perhaps he will give

you the capability to heal, and he will give you words to amaze an audience. -- He very well may do these things, but that is not why we worship him. We worship him because he is worthy of Worship. He is enough.

This is what Simon did. Before he met the apostles, He was in the business of amazing people. After he was amazed by them, the wanted to be able to amaze people so he offered sacrifices in order to obtain this gift. The sacrifices where not about Giving his life to Jesus, and becoming who Jesus wanted him to be, it was about using Jesus to Make Simon who Simon wanted to be..

**26 Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." This is a desert place.**

**27 And he rose and went. And there was an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure. He had come to Jerusalem to worship**

**28 and was returning, seated in his chariot, and he was reading the prophet Isaiah.**

Sometimes God sends us to go someplace that we don't normally go - It is important to recognize that this is not the only way that was should be evangelizing. Evangelizing is a everyday activity We don't need to wait for an angel to tell us what to do.

That doesn't mean that we should discount the supernatural call. God calls people in supernatural ways.

**29 And the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over and join this chariot."**

**30 So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?"**

**31 And he said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.**

**32 Now the passage of the Scripture that he was reading was this: "Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter and like a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he opens not his mouth.**

**33 In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth."**

**34 And the eunuch said to Philip, "About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?"**

**35 Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus.**

**36 And as they were going along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, "See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?"**

**37 [And Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he replied, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."]**

**38 And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him.**

**39 And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing.**

**40 But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through he preached the gospel to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.**

Origen Tertullian Augustine all prominent N African Christian.

Philip took his charter as a christian seriously.. We too should remember:

Matt 28

**18 And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.**

**19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,**

**20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."**

If you are a new Christian, learn about Jesus. Study God's word. Isaiah 53 is a really good place to start, as it was written 700 years before Jesus. You have to be know Jesus before you can share him, but once you know him, Live a new life! Serve! Go and make disciples of all nations!