

## 10.16.11 / Acts 8:1-8

**PLEASE NOTE:**

For the foreseeable future, the Curriculum Guide will be a little different from our typical format. We are trying some new approaches as we make the shift to match the schedules of the Durham and Raleigh East campuses in our weekly study of Scripture. The guide will be closely linked with the actual sermon and will include sermon notes, application questions, and a section on prayer.

**Sermon Notes**

When you look at the book of Acts up to this point, there has been growing tension between the Jewish leaders and those who are now preaching Christ (who are Jews themselves, no less, which likely adds to the tension). The religious leaders were losing both control and influence over thousands who believed in Christ as Messiah. This tension reaches a fever pitch at the end of chapter 7 where Stephen is killed by these religious leaders after he was brought before their council. While we might expect the new followers of Jesus to automatically hide their new faith out of fear for their lives, Acts 8:4 tells a very different story. Despite the danger at hand, and despite the fact that they were scattered, they “. . . went about preaching the word.” They went about preaching the gospel of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, even in the face of deadly persecution.

These were not super-Christians. Continually sharing the good news that He has brought us, regardless of circumstance, should be a marker of all who have faith in Christ. The faith of those in this passage was not dictated by their circumstances – it was the opposite: how they viewed their circumstances was dictated by their faith – to them, Jesus, and what He had done for them, was truly enough, no matter what happened next. This begs the question for us: “Do our circumstances dictate our faith, or does our faith dictate and shape how we view our circumstances?” Increasingly, we should expect the latter. In our culture, particularly in the South, it is extremely common for our involvement with anything faith-related to be relegated to a certain percentage of our life, where Jesus “gets” a certain percentage. The reality is that if Jesus only “gets” a percentage rather than the whole, then there is a big issue, because He not only gets, but in reality already possesses all authority and power over all things, and it’s more a question of whether or not we see this and live in this reality willingly.

Following Jesus, but seeking fulfillment in other things, is unhealthy and does not fully reflect discipleship in Christ. In Luke 14:33 Jesus says, “. . . any of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.” Likewise, Matthew 6:24 reminds us that we cannot serve two masters. If we say Jesus is over some areas of our lives but not everything, then we are the ones who are dictating who’s in charge of what – but. . . if He truly is Lord over all, then everything in our lives is and should be His domain. It’s worth asking ourselves the question: “Are we attracted to God because of who He is or because of what He can do for us?” God never promised you things. . . He promised you Himself. If He were to give you things, success, desired circumstances, and withhold Himself, that would not be love. The beauty of the One we serve is greater than our circumstances. Jesus isn’t simply the best choice among a list of options for making your life better. No. . . rather, with the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God is trading your idolatry for His beautiful, perfect life.

Lest this look or feel like gloom and doom, we see in what God has done for us that there is indeed good news, for we were saved from the absolute worst and then automatically given the absolute best! Romans 5:10-11 says we were ENEMIES of God, but what does God do? He gives us reconciliation. Ephesians 2:4 and 9 say we were DEAD in our trespasses, but then what does God do? He makes us alive, saves us, and then seats us in the heavenly places and

displays His endless love through us, doing all of this by HIS GRACE, doing all the work, so that NONE OF US can take the slightest bit of credit for any of it. The more that we grasp these truths, which the Spirit teaches us, the less we will attempt relegate Jesus to some frail percentage of our lives and the more we will see His complete and total authority over all.

### **Application Questions**

\*\*\*Given the nature of some of the following questions, it's recommended that you follow the explorative / revealing questions (questions 1-3) with some of the questions that re-direct our attention from ourselves back to God, who He is, and how He changes everything (questions 4-6).\*\*\*

- 1) How do you allow your circumstances to dictate / impact your faith?
- 2) What circumstances in your life lead you to think that maybe Jesus isn't enough?
- 3) Where do you claim to follow Jesus but seek fulfillment in something else?
- 4) Matthew 28:18 tells us that Jesus has complete and total authority over all things – how might a greater awareness of this fact change where you look for answers and where you seek fulfillment?
- 5) How might Jesus' authority change the way you view your current circumstances?
- 6) How might a greater awareness of who God is and what He's done for you result in your sharing the good news with others in your current circumstances?

### **Prayer**

- That the Spirit would teach us and remind us of the truths found in Luke 14:33, Matthew 6:24, Romans 5:10-11, and Ephesians 2:4 and 9
- For a greater awareness of Christ's supreme authority
- For boldness to speak the gospel in our current circumstances