

Abiding Fruit

Informing the Mind & Inflaming the Heart

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The Good News About Jesus

Acts 8:35

The Book of Acts was written by Luke. It continues the work he began in his Gospel. The Gospel of Luke was concerned to deal with the life of the Lord Jesus Christ in terms of his ministry (all that Jesus began to do and teach – Acts 1:1). The Book of Acts is concerned with the work of the Apostles as commissioned by Jesus. The Apostles were eye-witnesses of Christ after His Resurrection, and they received a commission from the Lord to further testify to what He had done. The Apostle Paul was added to the original group of twelve disciples since he too saw the risen Christ and received a commission from Him

The Book of Acts is about the early Church, and as such provides us with an historical account of the Church in Jerusalem, in Samaria and to the Gentiles. Half of the book deals with the Church in Jerusalem and Judea under the Apostles. The other half is about the life of the Apostle Paul. It was Peter's responsibility to first bring the Gospel to the Gentiles in Acts 10 where he saw Cornelius, the Roman centurion saved. The church at Antioch to which eventually the Apostle Paul would be brought by Barnabas also did a great deal of work among the Gentiles.

One of the great evangelists of the early church was Philip, not to be confused with the Apostle by the same name (see Acts 6:5). He was second to Stephen in terms of ability and influence, and once the death of Stephen had occurred, Philip assumed a prominent role in the early Church. He was a man of good repute, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom (6:3). It was Philip who first preached the Word in Samaria as a result of the intense persecution brought by Saul of Tarsus against the Church (8:1, 4, 5). Philip also possessed the gift to perform miracles and signs (8:6, 7, 13). Eventually Philip would make his home in Caesarea (8:40; 21:8, 9) where he lived with his four daughters.

In Acts 8:26 – 40, we have the account of the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch. It is in connection with the eunuch that Luke explains what Philip preached to him. He told him the good news about Jesus. This is what the Book of Acts is all about. It does not matter which chapter you consider – it is all about the good news. What is the good news? First of all, the good news is good news. It is not bad news. It is not shallow news. It is not untrue news. It is good news. Secondly, it is good news about Jesus. It is news about the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. The wonderful accounts in the Gospels of what Jesus did during His life are just as crucial and as important as His death on the Cross. His death on the Cross would have meant nothing at all, if the facts concerning Jesus as recounted by the Gospel writers were not true. Therefore those who attempt to downplay, ignore or refuse to believe that Jesus is God the Son truly do ignore the facts as portrayed in the Gospels. This is why they tamper with the Bible and say that it does not mean what it says. By doing this to the Word of God, they do not offer good news. In fact, they have no good news then to offer. It is precisely because the accounts recorded for us are true that we have good news. The Apostles knew it too. They had lived with Christ – they were eye-witnesses of His glory and majesty. Thirdly, good news is not good news if kept to oneself. This is what motivates the Apostles and the early Church. They had good news to share. Fourth, the good news was life changing. This kind of good news would cease to be good news if it did not deliver what it promised. Fifth, this good news never changes. This is so unlike our daily news – one moment you think you have the facts (good), the next, those facts have changed and they're bad. Not so, with the good news about Jesus. It never changes – it is

perfect. What is glorious about the good news as we see in Philip's use of it, is that it is grounded in Scripture, and indeed, is the fulfillment of Scripture.

In order to tell the Ethiopian eunuch the good news about Jesus, Philip expounds to him from the Old Testament passage of Isaiah 53:7, 8, because he has heard the eunuch reading from Isaiah (8:28 – 32). It is clear that Philip knew his Old Testament because he recognizes the passage by hearing the Scripture read by the eunuch. Since he had been prompted by the Spirit to join the eunuch's chariot, Philip understands that there was some purpose for him to do so. He opens his conversation with the eunuch by asking him, if he understood what he was reading. The eunuch confesses his ignorance (vs. 31), and invites Philip to explain the Scripture to him. It is clear that the eunuch is seeking to understand the mind of Isaiah by the questions he asks Philip (vs. 34). This allows Philip the immediate privilege to preach the good news about Jesus.

The good news is Scripture because Scripture is about Jesus. Holy Scripture without Jesus is not Holy Scripture and therefore is not good news. It seems to me to be abundantly clear that critical scholars, liberal theologians and social gospellers are deceived precisely because they tamper with Jesus and Scripture. They therefore, have no authority or right to claim that their news is good news. How can it be good? For one reason, it is their gospel and not the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Apostles were not asked by Jesus to debate whether the good news was in fact good news. They were required only to bear witness to it. They were to receive it, believe it, accept it, and proclaim it. This is what sets Bible-believing Christians (is there any other kind?) from all others. This is what separated Jesus from the Pharisees – He bore witness to the truth. This is what separated the disciples from Judas. This is what separated the Apostles and Paul from the Jews. This is what separates the believer from the unbeliever.

The good news is powerful because it brings new life. Not only is justification necessary in order to see God, but so too is sanctification. Without holiness no man shall see the Lord (Heb. 12:14). The eunuch experienced Jesus Christ on his way home. He obeyed the good news by believing. He obeyed the good news by being baptized. He obeyed the good news by going on his way rejoicing – as a new creature in Christ.

The Book of Acts is full of these life-changing events. The early Church grew in grace and knowledge simply due to the life of Jesus in them. The conversion of Saul of Tarsus and the life of the Apostle Paul towers majestically over the book. In his life we see and experience the good news and its power. We see Christ change a man who so utterly opposed Him.

This is what the good news about Jesus does. It changes us. But it is not so much the good news that does this – rather it is Christ Himself who does this. Just as we recognize that faith is necessary to believe, yet it is not faith that saves us. It is Christ who saves us through faith, and even more particularly, it is Jesus alone who saves us. This is why the good news must be believed and received. So what are my responsibilities? They surely must be the same as Philip's. What are your responsibilities? They are the same as Philip's. *Draw near to the chariot* (8:29) implies that we must be sensitive to the Spirit's direction. The Holy Spirit desires to promote the glory of Christ.

It was Philip who preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ (8:12) and people believed. What did we believe? It was the good news about Jesus. It was not different good news for each of us, but the same good news for all of us. It was Paul who preached this same good news to the Jews in Antioch Pisidia (Acts 13:32) which was described as being that which God had promised to the fathers and was now fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus from the dead. This good news speaks of the Savior who saves sinners. That's good news!