



ORCHARD ROAD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

# Bible Study

JULY

2011

MORNING & EVENING SERMONS

## GOD'S YOUNG CHURCH TELLS THE GOOD NEWS

In these four passages we see the beginnings of mission activity. We see how God uses the persecution of the church to great benefit as Philip spreads the Word in Samaria and then, for the first time, to someone who is not a Jew – the Ethiopian eunuch. We see the church at Antioch developing as a mission centre and sending out Paul and Barnabas to tell the good news in the synagogues of other cities. We see the power of the Holy Spirit guiding Paul, Timothy and Silas and forcing them to change their own plans of where to go and what to do. And, finally, we see the role of the home church in Jerusalem as Paul feels driven to return to Jerusalem before continuing his mission to the gentiles and, not least, to Rome, the heart of the Empire.

What does all this mean for us? What can we learn about missions from these accounts of the early church? How do they apply to ORPC? Are we able to hear and respond when God's Spirit speaks and instructs us?

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## ACTS 8:1-8: THE BEGINNING OF MISSION

### GENERAL SURVEY

Topic:

Key Verse:

Main Person/s:

Key Ideas and Questions:

### INTRODUCTION

The outreach of the church did not begin with obedience to the commission of Jesus to take the gospel into all the world. It did not even begin with the apostles. It began with unknown Christian men and women, who had been scattered because of persecution, and through one of the first deacons, Philip, who can be regarded as the first missionary 8:4-13. It began in hostile territory in Samaria. The first missionary story 8:26-40 is of witness to an overseas visitor. The challenge of the beginning of mission is to see missionaries as ordinary people not special people, to seize the opportunities for witness in all circumstances, and to all people within our midst. Singapore has a large foreign community from many different nations. What are the opportunities of mission here on our doorstep?

#### *1. The Background*

When we read the book of Acts it is important to realise that this is a narrative (most other N.T. books are gospels or letters – gospels, of course, include a significant narrative element; letters do not). Acts tells the story of the early church and it is best to read it as a story, seeing how the plot unfolds and what happens to the characters. There is also an important geographical aspect to the story as the action moves from place to place and it is useful to track the events on an appropriate map (most bibles have them) to see where they are happening. This study addresses events throughout Chapter 8 which, in turn, are directly related to what has just happened in Chapter 7.

- i. What has happened in Chapter 7? Summarise in your own words what took place.
- ii. Luke (the author of Acts) introduces us to someone who is later to play a very important part in the entire story of Christianity. Who is this? (7:58, 8:1a) – see also 13:9. What happened later to this person?
- iii. What started 'On that day' (v.1b)? In what way are these events connected with what had happened in ch.7?
- iv. It is likely that Stephen was executed as a result of some sort of judicial sentence. In such cases anything more than simple burial would have been forbidden by Jewish law. What are we told, and what else can we deduce about the attitude of those men who buried Stephen? (v.2)

#### *2. Scattering*

Note: the Samaritans were not considered Gentiles, but neither were they proper Jews. Supposedly there was considerable distrust and dislike between Jews and Samaritans although the events of ch.7 suggest that people were open minded and receptive (when God opened their hearts and minds) to a convincing argument. Also, elsewhere we see Luke presenting Samaritans in a favourable light. Only Luke has the story of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:30-37) and the story of the Samaritan leper (Lk 17:11-19)

As so often, persecution had exactly the opposite of the intended effect...

- i. What did those who'd been scattered do (v.4)?

- ii. Where did they go?
  
- iii. In what ways did Philip evangelise in Samaria (vv.5-7)?
  
- iv. What was the overall effect? (vv.12,14)
  
- v. What reasons can you think of for Peter and John's visit (vv.14,25)?

### *3. Philip moves on – God has more plans for Philip*

- i. Who is the next person that Philip introduces the gospel to? (v.27)
  
- ii. How can we describe this person's attitude to religion (v.27)?
  
- iii. But he is struggling to understand. What does Philip do (v.35)?
  
- iv. Compare Philip's approach to evangelising in Samaria and, now, to the Ethiopian eunuch. What are the similarities? What are the differences? What can we learn from these?

## **DISCIPLESHIP POINTERS**

The story of Saul/Paul is possibly the most remarkable conversion story in the Bible. Jesus Christ still has the power to bring others like Saul to an encounter with the living God. How did those who'd been scattered by persecution react? They told the good news (that is, the gospel) to those they met. Are you willing and equipped to do this?

What characteristics did Philip have that enabled him to evangelise so successfully?

He was prepared to share the gospel.

He was able to do signs.

He was able to explain scripture.

His message was always Christ-centred.

## **FAMILY/GROUP MOMENTS**

Suppose, like Philip, YOU meet someone who is reading the Bible but is uncertain what it means! Could you help him or her? How would you explain the following passages?

Matt 1:20-23

John 3:3-8

Luke 4:16-19

Rom 8:35-39

Take turns to explain the meaning of these passages to the others in your family or group.

## ACTS 11:19-30, 13:1-3: THE BEGINNING OF CHURCH MISSION

### GENERAL SURVEY

Topic:

Key Verse:

Main Person/s:

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### INTRODUCTION

The church at Antioch was a result of the persecution, and the pioneer of planned mission work. The witness of the church starts to move from the Jews to the Gentiles. But again we see the initial witness is by unknown Christians. The Gentile mission did not start with Paul, but through the appointment and calling of the church. Antioch, doubtless influenced by the teaching ministry of Paul and Barnabas, became the great mission-centred church, and appointed the first missionary team of Barnabas and Paul. Paul's first missionary journey is centred very much on the preaching of the gospel and shows him working through the overseas Jewish synagogues to build up churches of believers with elders in each church. What should be our bases for missionary work, and where should the emphasis lie – planting new churches or training local leaders or working through existing churches? What sort of partnership in mission should there be?

1. Antioch the Mission Church Acts 11:19-21
  - i. What led to the Church being established in Antioch? (See also Acts 8:1-3)
  
  - ii. We are not told of any specific characters in v20, but what can we know about the 'founders' of the Antioch Church from the way they dealt with their new 'mission field'?  
  
Consider:
    - a. Who they spoke to:
  
    - b. What message they preached:
  
    - c. How they phrased their message (compare with Acts 2:36, 4:10 where Jesus is referred to as 'Jesus Christ' as opposed to this section where the reference is 'Lord Jesus'):
  
    - d. What results were looked for:
  
2. Barnabas – 'The Encourager' Acts 11:22-24
  - i. Why did the Jerusalem Church decide to send a representative to Antioch?
  
  - ii. Look at the characteristics of Barnabas and consider why these might make him a wise choice. (See also Acts 4:36-37, 9:27)

iii. Who did Barnabas choose as his co-worker and why? Though this may have been at the prompting of the Holy Spirit we are not told so by Luke, and therefore it is worth looking at what Barnabas must have already known about Saul to make him decide to train Saul as a co-worker at Antioch. (9:26-30)

a. What principles can we see in this decision? How do we;

- look for gifts in others?

- look to share God's work?

- look to build up others either as disciples or leaders?

b. In vv 21 and 24 what is the evidence that this is all God's work? What is the evidence of God's amongst the new disciples in vv.29-30?

3. Antioch the 'Sending Church' Acts 13:1-3(and verse 4)

i. How did it come about that the Antioch Church decided to send out 'missionaries'? Consider how the decision was reached. Was it primarily a personal call, a decision of the Church to 'send out' a team, or a combination? How should this affect the way we approach questions of 'commissioning'?

ii. Who in the Church was being chosen to 'go'? What roles had they had in the Church up to now? What were Barnabas and Saul to go and do? (You may wish to consider the similarity with Abraham's call in Genesis 12:1)

iii. Where do we fit into this pattern? As an individual, as a Bible Study group and even as a Church? What is our action point going to be this week?

## DISCIPLESHIP POINTERS

In this passage we meet;

- Unnamed Christians who witness (cross-culturally and otherwise) because they desire to share the Good News of Jesus with all they meet,
  - A supporting home church ready to send help and encouragement,
  - A missionary-minded Barnabas keen to train up other leaders,
  - New disciples whose lives are transformed and who want to be generous to fellow believers in need,
  - A church that is actively seeking God's will and acting on it, even though it must have been a great sacrifice to send out Barnabas and Saul, 40% of the leadership
  - And over all these, the Holy Spirit leading, prompting and confirming the work.
- (It is tempting to consider Antioch to have been the perfect Church, without all the day to day complications a 'normal' church may face. Take some time to read Galatians 2 which shows us some of the issues the Church had to deal with.)

## FAMILY/GROUP MOMENTS

'ORPC has committed itself to being a kingdom-minded church. We are grateful for those who shared the message about Jesus with us as missionaries and local Christian workers. We now want to play our part in extending God's kingdom as we show his love with our deeds and tell of it with our words.' This is a quote from the weekly bulletin at Church. Does this statement apply only to the leadership or also to the members? How is each one of us involved in this commitment, and how might we become more committed to it?

## ACTS 16: 1-10: THE BEGINNING OF MISSION TO THE WEST

### GENERAL SURVEY

Topic:

Key Verse:

Main Person/s:

Key Ideas and Questions:

### INTRODUCTION

We sometimes forget that Christianity in origin comes from Asia (albeit west Asia). It is not a western or European religion. The gospel was brought to Europe. The vision of Paul to come over to Europe comes after a time of conflict concerning personnel between Paul and Barnabas. Paul now teams up with Timothy and Silas. Notice how God uses the crosscultural experience of Timothy and Paul at this new mission advance. Paul continues to use the synagogues or places of prayer as the bases for his preaching and teaching, but he now concentrates on the big cities. His strategy is not to go to the small towns and villages but the great cultural, political and economic cities: Athens, Corinth, Ephesus. Has this strategy relevance today with the rise of mega cities across the world? What is our missionary image today?

#### 1. Discipleship (1-5)

In the preceding chapter, we have seen Paul and Barnabas disagreeing over John Mark and thereafter they go their separate ways. (Acts 15:36-41). Paul sets out with Silas but soon God provides Paul with a further helper who is to feature prominently in New Testament writings: Timothy.

a. What does this passage tell us about (a) Timothy's background (v.1) and (b) how others saw him? Would these things help or hinder them in their mission work? Discuss.

b. We learn more about Timothy in the book 2 Timothy. What are some spiritual characteristics we see in Timothy which make him a good servant of the Lord? What can you do to develop these characteristics in your own life? (2 Tim 1:4-7, 13-14; 2:1-5)

c. What can we learn from Paul's discipleship of Timothy?  
How can we teach and prepare others to serve the Lord faithfully?

#### 2. Trusting God in Mission Challenges – The call to Macedonia (6-10)

a. List the places Paul and his companions travel to preach the gospel. Find these on a map and check the distances. Where do they end this part of their journey and how far is this from Antioch where they started?

b. How does Paul become aware that God refuses to let them go to Bithynia?  
What can we learn from Paul's approach in seeking God's will? Who is controlling this 'mission trip'? (v.7)

- c. God has other plans. What happens next to re-direct Paul and his team? (v.9)
  
- d. How do they respond to this sudden change?
  
- e. From this study, what can you draw from the understanding that obedience to God can mean upheavals and other challenges? How can you overcome challenges without being distracted by them?

## DISCIPLESHIP POINTERS

Timothy was 'well spoken of' by the Christians in Lystra and Iconium. How would others in the ORPC congregation speak of you?

In this short passage we read of the Spirit speaking to Paul on at least three occasions. Do you know when God's Holy Spirit is speaking to you? It is only by a life of prayer, worship, service and by studying and obeying God's Word that you will be able to hear and understand the Spirit speaking to you.

When you do hear the Holy Spirit speak are you ready to change your plans as immediately and drastically as Paul did? What do you think Silas and Timothy thought of Paul's vision and what it meant for their plans?

## FAMILY/GROUP MOMENTS

Pray for your group/family to be led by God's Spirit as well as to be Christ-centred. What is the Spirit calling you to do? Missions is for everyone. To what missions is YOUR group or YOUR family called?

Read the following passage from *My Utmost for His Highest* by Oswald Chambers, entitled 'The Method of Missions'

*"Go therefore, and make disciples of all the nations." Matthew 28:19*

Jesus Christ did not say "Go and save souls" (the salvation of souls is the supernatural work of God), but He said, "Go... make disciples of all the nations..." Yet you cannot make disciples unless you are a disciple yourself. When the disciples returned from their first mission, they were filled with joy because the demons were subject to them. But Jesus said in effect, "Don't rejoice in successful service - the great secret of joy is that you are the right relationship with Me" (see Lk. 10:17-20). The missionary's great essential is remaining true to the call of God, and realizing that his one and only purpose is to disciple men and women to Jesus. Remember that there is a passion for souls that does not come from God, but from our desire to make converts to our point of view.

The challenge to the missionary does not come from the fact that people are difficult to bring to salvation, that backsliders are difficult to reclaim, or that there is a barrier of callous indifference. No, the challenge comes from the perspective of the missionary's own personal relationship with Jesus Christ – "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" (Mt. 9:28).

Our Lord unwaveringly asks us that question, and it confronts us in every individual situation we encounter. The one great challenge to us is - do I know my Risen Lord? Do I know the power of His indwelling Spirit? Am I wise enough in God's sight, but foolish enough according to the wisdom of the world, to trust in what Jesus Christ has said? Or am I abandoning the great supernatural position of limitless confidence in Christ Jesus, which is really God's only call for a missionary? If I follow any other method, I depart altogether from the methods prescribed by our Lord – "All authority has been given to Me. . . Go therefore..." (Mt. 28:18-19).

## ACTS 21: 1-19: THE 'BEGINNING OF THE END' MISSION TO JERUSALEM

### GENERAL SURVEY

Topic:

Key Verse:

Main Person/s:

Key Ideas and Questions:

### INTRODUCTION

Jerusalem always had a key place in Paul's thinking as the mother church. After his conversion he went up to Jerusalem to meet the leading apostles. When there was a great famine there, he organised a great relief collection for the Jerusalem church. When the great debate on circumcision threatened to divide the church, he and Barnabas were appointed to go to the Council of Jerusalem. At this time Paul appeared convinced of the necessity to go to Jerusalem. He wants to be there for Pentecost - perhaps the anniversary celebrations! He brushes aside all attempts to stop him going. The need to go to Jerusalem has the compulsion of God about it, similar to Jesus' determination to go to Jerusalem. So Paul is driven back to the birthplace and centre of Christianity but through that is given the opportunity to reach out to the birthplace and centre of the Roman Empire; his letter to the Romans is probably the most influential New Testament letter. What is the importance of our roots to our mission? Is mission an activity of the church or the compulsive driving force of the church? What do we understand by the words "The church exists by mission, as fire by burning"?

Paul reported in Jerusalem God's deeds among the Gentiles despite the following warnings.

#### *A. Disciples at Tyre urged Paul not to go to Jerusalem (1-6)*

- i. What was Paul's ministry given by God? See Rom. 11:13-14, 15:25-26
- ii. To what extent did Paul know of what would become of him? Acts 19:21, 20:22-23
- iii. How did Paul respond to the pleas of the disciples at Tyre? vv.4-6, 1 Thes. 5:19-21

#### *Ponder*

Have you recently arrived at any decisions contrary to advice you have received? How might this lesson improve your decision-making process as a Christian?

#### *B. Agabus prophesied Paul would be handed over to the Gentiles (7-14)*

- i. Nearer to Jerusalem at Caesarea, what additional warning did Paul receive? v. 11
- ii. What was Paul's perspective in relation to this warning? How is this important? v. 13, Rom. 8:38-39
- iii. What did the group do in v. 14? (Note: a more helpful translation of "gave up" in v. 14 would be that given by NASB as "fell silent" with the connotation of holding peace.)

### *Consider*

If you were to write a purpose statement for your life, what would it be? To what extent is your life lived in the name of the Lord Jesus?

### *C. Paul reported God's deeds among the Gentiles to Jerusalem's elders (15-19)*

- i. Whom was Paul hosted by in Jerusalem, and why? v. 16
- ii. What did Paul report to James and all the elders? v. 19; see also Acts 15:19-20
- iii. What other things did Paul achieve on this trip, and beyond? (v. 20, 24; 23:11)

### *Reflect*

To what extent do you share your life (and home) to communicate and reach out to others? From this lesson, why do you think this is necessary for all Christians?

## **DISCIPLESHIP POINTERS**

The Holy Spirit guides all believers to fulfil God's will for them in the following three ways:

### **A. Godly discernment**

Paul comprehended his calling and reminds us to discern (or test) what is being communicated to us. We can test this by assessing whether (i) it is consistent with what the Bible says, and (ii) will it please God or us more. As was seen in Paul's case, encountering obstacles did not mean God was not pleased. How well have you exercised your freedom to choose?

### **B. Godly acceptance**

Human understanding is finite, and entrusting difficult circumstances to God demonstrates an inner peace that God is in absolute control. Being prayerful and supportive for someone who has exercised godly discernment (as above) may be the most practical demonstration of faith in God. How well have you demonstrated godly acceptance?

### **C. Godly ambition**

Rather than asking God to underwrite our life's decisions, we should be mindful that the chief end of humanity is to glorify God and enjoy him forever. Paul demonstrated that the giving and receiving of care and providing accountability should be an integral part of a Christian life. How does your life compare?

In Acts 21, there was a reversal of the Great Commission as believers in Jerusalem benefited from the support and encouragement of hearing about God's work among the Gentiles. How may you begin to open your mind and heart to reach out beyond your church, so God may multiply his ministry through your church? (Is. 55:10-11)

## **FAMILY/GROUP MOMENTS**

Before the year's end, prayerfully consider and support as a group an existing mission or missionary in your church.

Write a journal (or otherwise record) your impressions, then share your thoughts about what God is accomplishing through you and other group members.