

The Scattering

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[0:01] If you're sat there going, oh well, maybe I should serve, but I don't know. Some of the service, sometimes I've served and it's just not really that fulfilling.! Sometimes it's just, it's not really my area of expertise.

And honestly, I'm already tired on Sundays and I have to come and give. If you're wondering in those things and thinking those things, I would like to encourage you that the Bible has you covered. As we've been looking at the book of Acts, as we've been looking at needs that have emerged, people needing food, so people have been appointed to be deacons to go and distribute the food.

The Bible has you covered in the sense that if you're thinking, oh, I need to serve and feel satisfied, the Bible has you covered in saying that actually, you've got it completely wrong. That's not why we serve.

Why we serve is because our eyes are on the Lord and that trumps everything. And you see the deacons. Honestly, what's happening? Just to recap, just to rewind your mind in Acts chapter 6. The church is growing. Only two chapters before, no one was in need. Everyone was okay. Everyone was known and seen and cared for. But only two chapters later, there are those, there are widows who aren't getting the food that they need.

[1:07] So then they say, okay, let's appoint seven people, seven deacons to go and serve to give them food. And so what do we have? We have Stephen. And that's where Gabe talked a little bit about last week.

And just Stephen put his hand up and said, well, actually he was chosen because he was a man of character and it's not a competence thing. I'll help with the food. He ends up then preaching the sermon of his life, giving a history lesson that ends up with him being killed.

That's a heart of service there. The Bible has us covered when it comes to what serving truly means. It means emptying ourselves because there's something far greater for us. And just maybe a few points, even just on the person of Stephen.

First of all, it's about character and not competence. Even though it was just to distribute food, they could have found anyone. With two arms, they could have helped. But it wasn't.

It was someone who had to be filled with the spirit, who had that character to be able to do it. Because they know that it's never just about feeding. It's never just about stacking chairs. It's about way more than that. It's about worship.

[2:07] It's about serving God with all of our hearts and our minds. And whatever we do, we are doing it as though we are doing it for God. That's how Stephen was picked. That's how Philip was picked. And also, just another thing.

You sign up to something and say, God, yes, I will do it. Who knows what you'll end up doing? Stephen signed up to distributing food, ends up preaching the gospel and giving a history lesson. And then Philip also signs up for the same thing and ends up going to Samaria, which is what we're going to look at today.

You never know. The goal, the key, the actual real fun of all of it is as you say yes to God, you don't know where he's going to take you. And then it's going to be fun in some way. But most of all, it will be glorifying to him even in the smallest of tasks.

Let's not look down on any of the tasks that we have. There aren't just two or three roles in church that need service. There are so, so many ways to be able to serve. The question is, what's God placed on your heart and how has he called you to do it?

And finally, when we're looking at serving, it's about getting to the place where it could lead to the end of yourself. Now, for Stephen, it really did end up with the end of him. But really, for us as we

serve, it's kind of saying, God, not my will, but yours.

[3:16] I'm going to empty myself to love on others because that's what you did for me. That's what service is really about. And so if you're sat there going, OK, well, I've been around here for a little while now. Well, it's getting increasingly uncomfortable.

And I'm wondering why I'm sat here. Well, actually, the next step is, hey, actually, let's join us. Join us. Help us take chairs down. Help us take chairs. Help us do whatever it is that God's called you to, because God will use that.

Serving is serving is such a key part of the Christian faith. And you just ask yourself, and we all should ask ourselves, well, what are we doing actually to serve? And you look at Stephen, and I was talking about this with our life group this last week.

And as I was just even just imagining the story, if you open up the word and you look at Acts chapter 7 at the very end, we're not even going to the bit we're going to talk about today yet.

So Stephen gives this sermon, and then he says, you stiff-necked people, you have not learned the lessons that your father has learned. Stiff-necked, I don't know what I'm saying. I don't know what I'm saying.

[4:14] And then what happens? And just the response that he gets. Danny is a drama teacher, and she was in our group, and as I was reading this together with our group, I was just imagining, this could be a really intense drama.

Like, really, you see Stephen, chapter 7, verse 54. Now when they heard these things, they were enraged, and they ground their teeth at him. Did you catch that?

They were so angry at what he was saying, that they were grinding their teeth. And then later on, it says, verse 57, and they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together at him.

That's a really hostile response. But honestly, how many of us will truly get if we went to work and told people that we went to church, that we had a faith in Jesus?

They ground their teeth at him. They covered their ears, and they ran towards him, and eventually they stoned him. And I said, Stephen is so extra here as a follower of Christ.

[5:22] He just followed Christ to a T. How did he manage to cope with the people being so angry at him? And it says in verse 55, and he was filled with the Holy Spirit. He gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing in the right hand of God.

You see, when we serve and when we face problems, we can deal with those problems when our eyes are focused on the right place. But when we serve out of the wrong place, when we're looking at the wrong thing, that's when we're like, oh, I don't have capacity for this.

I don't have the margins for this. I don't have the energy for this. But if our eyes are truly gazing towards him as Stephen was, then everything is okay. Everything makes sense.

To the point where when they stone him and he's just about to die, his final words, just to copy Jesus' words, Lord, do not hold this sin against them. Forgive them, for they know not what they do. Isn't that just so extra from Stephen? And he didn't have to say that. He just said, God, just take me. I'm done. Leave these fools. And yet he had the heart of Christ.

[6:25] Why? Because his eyes were fully focused on God. It's dramatic because as this scene was happening, we get introduced to the next character.

And I can totally see this in a movie. Because as they're stoning him, as they kill him, on the side, there's a man. And there, that man is just stood there watching.

And the people who were just filled with rage completely have lost their sense of just rationality here. They kill this Stephen. And then they go towards this other man who's standing on the side. And they lay down their garments towards him. And you're like, what is happening? Can you imagine? Can you even? I think I'm even getting goops. I'm even trying to retell this story, imagining that it's a movie. And so they go to this man on the side.

And they lay down their garments. Who is this man? How is he so important? Why is he witnessing this? And why are people now looking at him as they're murdering this other guy? Of course, this guy is Saul. And then you can just see the camera just moving over to Saul.

[7:24] And you can hear the dramatic music that happens as they look to him. And then you see the fast track of Saul. You go from him being a witness to the execution to then the next one in Acts chapter 8 verse 1.

And Saul approved of his execution. So he's a witness. And then he's an approver of this. And actually, he's the one who allowed this to happen. And you're like, who is this man? Only two verses later in 3. Actually, you see that Paul and Saul was ravaging the church and entering house after house. He dragged off men and women and committed them to prison. So he goes from witness to approver to now the one who's actually the aggressor. Who goes into people's homes and drags them out. Can you imagine the trauma and the fear of if you decide to follow Christ, that any moment Saul and the authorities will come into your home and drag you out and put you into prison.

And you're wondering, who is this man? Of course, if you look at the book of Acts, he only gets this for a chapter. And then he himself goes through the most radical transformation.

[8:35] But before we get to that, there's actually two weeks where we're going to focus on Acts chapter 8, where I find it's just fascinating to see what happens because it goes from a gathering to the scattering.

Only a few chapters before, Acts chapter 5, verse 11, after Ananias and Sapphira die, the whole church was filled with fear. The whole gathering was filled with fear.

That's where that first word comes in. And a couple of chapters later, the gathering changes form because it becomes the scattering. And we, you and I, are sat here today because of this.

Because of the scattering. And so we're going to talk about that. I'm going to be adventurous here, but I'm going to stick to principles here. We're going to read through the book of Acts chapter 8. Can I invite you to stand for the word of the Lord? 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. Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him.

[9:42] But Saul was ravaging the church and entering house after house. He dragged off men and women and committed them to prison. Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word. Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ.

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

They all paid attention to him from the least to the greatest, saying, this man is the power of God that is called great. And they paid attention to him because for a long time he had amazed them with his magic. 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.

Even Simon himself believed. And after being baptized, he continued with Philip. And seeing signs and great miracles performed, he was amazed. Now when the apostles of Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit.

[10:54] For he had not yet fallen to any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit. Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, saying, give me this power also, so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.

But Peter said to him, may your silver perish with you because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money. You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God.

Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven. For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity. And Simon answered, pray for me to the Lord, that nothing of what you have said may come upon me. 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.

This is the word of the Lord. Please take a seat. So you see the scattering is happening.

[12:00] So what happens is the church is growing and people are clearly paying notice. And then Saul, and we get the first execution, the first form of persecution is starting right here.

And what happens, they are dragged away into prisons, away from their homes. So the next thing is they start to scatter. The word scatter actually in Greek has the same root word as the word diaspora.

So basically the Christians start to spread. This is interesting because this is basically the start. It's activating phase two of the mission of Christianity. If it wasn't for this moment, you could argue that maybe we're not sat here today as Christians.

That's how important this is. Tim Keller actually says this. He said, actually, before Jesus flew off into the sky in Acts 1, he said, you'll be my witnesses to Jerusalem, to Judea, to Samaria and to the ends of the world.

But the apostles just stayed in Jerusalem. And they stayed in Jerusalem and they were slow to leave Jerusalem because really they had the upper room, they had the prayer room, they had the gathering.

[13:01] It was all pretty comfortable. So they were like, you know what, let's just stay put here until we're told otherwise. And so then what we see is that actually persecution is the thing that causes them to activate into phase two.

Don't you and I have that same thing? It's more comfortable until someone forces us to do something else. It's more comfortable to stay in one place until an external force comes in to actually push us, to nudge us in the right direction.

John Stott says this. The persecution in Jerusalem was neither an accident nor a tragedy. It was the strategy of the Lord of the harvest to thrust out his reapers into the ripe fields.

It was a painful but necessary dispersal for the sake of the mission. It was Tertullian who also said the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.

How often do you and I think about that? That we are sat right here knowing Jesus because someone died for us. Not even Jesus.

[14:05] Of course, that's the most important one. But someone laid down their life. For us to be here. I don't know whether we think about that enough.

And I'm not saying it just in the way that, well, let's just guilt trip ourselves into following Jesus.

That's not what it is. But I think we take for granted what we have here. But when we remember that actually people gave their lives for this.

And it wasn't just even in this book. There are people here in this room who come from places where actually there are people still dying for the good news of Jesus right now.

When Joe was 17, he went to Uganda and he got to experience a whole different life of the Christian faith and mission there. You look at Latin America and you look at the hostility towards the church for the longest time.

You look at just anywhere around the world, you will find places where actually persecution is still happening right now. Yet we sat here for some reason, the most comfortable of us here.

[15:12] And yet somehow we struggle to live the faith the most. Isn't that just strange? It's strange for me. The persecution doesn't stop proclamation.

In fact, if anything, it helps. Because so often we need that nudging out of our comfort zones.

Forget going to another country, which Erica, Aidan, Godfrey, you guys are all going to at the end of September to the Congo.

That, that's uncomfortable. Is there a 12-hour bus ride on top of the flights that you guys are going to do? That's going to be uncomfortable. And people are doing that.

And you're saying, okay, I'm not really doing much. I want to encourage you that actually there are people in this church that are scattering, that are doing those things already. And that is uncomfortable. But you know what else is uncomfortable?

Not just sharing the gospel in Congo, but also sharing the gospel in Soho Club. That is uncomfortable too. You see, the question isn't actually where we're going to do this.

[16:15] It's actually where our heart is right now. You can find opportunities. Yes, actually, trips like going to the Congo will be transformational.

Not just for the people there, but also for the people going. But there are opportunities right here as well. You see, as they're scattering, it says it, chapter 8, verse 1.

And they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. So actually, it's possible to remain uncomfortable, but still stay exactly where you are. In fact, it was actually important for the apostles to say in Jerusalem, just to kind of act as the stronghold of this is,

we're not going anywhere.

Can you imagine just what's happening there? The church is growing. The apostles are still preaching. The deacons are helping and serving. And of course, at the moment people are dragged to prisons. They're like, okay, you guys go.

Just go. Philip, go. We're going to stay put. And it's fascinating because as you look at how they go, it's actually the heart. It was just as uncomfortable for the apostles as it would be for the people who were scattering.

[17 : 18] But you see, the heart is the thing. Time and time again. If you're sat here going, oh, I don't know whether I should do this for God. The answer is yes, go. Let me just keep it simple for you. You look at Abraham.

You look at Moses. You look at Jonah. You see that the answer usually is, get out of your comfort zone. This isn't rocket science. This is a cheesy magnet quote that we'll see anyway.

Just go. Get out of your comfort zone. And that's when you'll start swimming in the deep. And that's when you'll start feeling the goodness of God and the faithfulness of God. You staying at home on your couch, you won't be able to feel the goodness of God.

Not for that long anyway, because you'll just fall asleep. But go. Get out of your comfort zone. And you see, and actually you can see Philip's heart here.

Verse 4, it says this. Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word. Let me just stop there for a second. If I was part of a church, then this church started growing.

[18 : 17] And then people that I know are getting dragged into prison from their own homes. And I have to run for my life. I don't know if I'm, the next thing I'm doing is to continue to preach the word.

I'm going to be like, you know what? And I can rationalize this. You know what? There is, it's hot outside. If there's pressure outside. Let me just go and lay low for a while. Actually, people are trying to catch us.

Why don't we just lay low for a while and just stay quiet for a second? Can you imagine if they did that? We wouldn't be here. These guys were pushed out of their homes, pushed out of Jerusalem. Philip here, he goes to Samaria, which actually is a whole other story.

Because the Samaritans were not friends to the Jews. In fact, they were political and religious rivals. That's why you have the story of the good Samaritan in Luke 15. Because Jesus is saying, these two groups of people hate each other.

But we're going to have to help each other. You see, John 4, the woman at the well. What's that? That's in Samaria. Jesus is making a point and saying, I will go through this place. Because I want to show you that even them, even them, even people that you Jews hate, these are still my children.

[19 : 23] So Philip leaves his home, leaves Jerusalem, and goes to Samaria. And what does he do? He does not lay low. He does not stay quiet. He keeps preaching the word of God.

At that moment, I'm just like, oh. That's courage. The apostles stay in Jerusalem as courage, too. And we just have to ask God, each of us, and go, do you want me to stay? Or do you want me to go?

But either way, my heart is trusting in you. I want to make myself uncomfortable in the Congo, or at the Soho Club in Central Admiralty, wherever it is. Lord, can I live in a way that you are actually real?

And Philip does this. And he goes, and he shares. And it's fascinating. Things happen. Unclean spirits crying out with a loud voice. They come out of many. Many who were paralyzed or lame were healed.

And then verse 8, it says this. And there was much joy in the city. I have a theory. Those of us who have been Christians for a long time, we actually forget what it was like when we didn't have God.

[20 : 26] If you've come to Christ recently, you're like, hey, I remember. I remember the aimlessness, the lack of hope I had in my life. But for those of us who have grown up in the church, you're like, oh, things aren't going right now.

And I'm just kind of. But actually, there's a world outside that is desperate for hope. That is paralyzed with fear.

People who don't feel as though they have a future. And we forget that. Honestly, as I was preparing this message yesterday, I was sat in a coffee shop and two obnoxious, loud men were behind me talking.

And they were just talking about just kind of showing off to each other and what they did over the weekend and how much money they made and this and that. And you could smell the insecurity. You could smell the hopelessness that was there, yet they just couldn't admit it to each other. And there was part of me, which, again, I lacked courage. I just wanted to turn around and go, do you know Jesus? He will solve all of your problems. You two are just pretending to like each other because you think this will help you further your career in some way.

[21:32] But can I tell you that actually your career isn't going to be the thing that satisfies you and lasts? If I had the courage of Philip, I would have just turned around in that moment. But I did not. I carried on preparing my sermon.

But we forget. We actually forget what it's like. And you see, when it actually happens, when you actually share the good news with people, you'll realize that there is joy. One of the pastors that you heard me quote a lot is a pastor called Tim Keller who's in New York.

He found very quickly that if he wants to preach the good news, he has to tap into what the bad news is for that group of people. And in New York, he decided that's where his church was. In New York, the issue was idols.

The issue was the bad news was idols, people putting their faith in money, in sex, in power, in career. And so he realized that was where he needed to tackle. Because, again, I've said this before.

In order for us to fully appreciate the good news, we have to understand that there is bad news. If we have to truly understand that Jesus is the solution, we first need to know what the problem is.

[22:37] Right? That's how we do it. That's how we share the good news. So even as I'm talking now, I'm thinking, okay, as a gathering here, as we seek to try and scatter, what do we need to do? What's the message that we need to hold in our hearts to take to people so that they would have joy, that they can be released?

Again, it was our group that was talking about sometimes we think that actually the Christian faith and being a Christian is boring and unfulfilled and you don't get to do all these things. But if we could just tell people that this is where we find purpose, this is where we find hope, it's not in what they're trying to do.

It will bring them joy. So let me ask you, and I'll genuinely pick on some people just to kind of raise the heart rate a little bit here. What's the idol in Hong Kong? What are the idols that you see?

Think about the people that you are surrounded by. What are some of the struggles in Hong Kong that you can see? What's the bad news in Hong Kong that we can preach good news into?

Nathan, can I start with you? What's the bad news? No time. No time. The poverty of time is true. We're just incredibly busy.

[23:43] And I'm learning to ask myself, okay, what does that even mean for me? Why am I so busy? Why am I filling my schedule with these things? The people that I'm filling my schedule with, why am I meeting them?

What's it for? What are the things that I'm trying to do? What am I doing them for? And then to let the good news penetrate that. Actually, there are some people that, quite frankly, I don't need to be as worried about. I don't need to. I need to prioritize to the right people.

Because Jesus is free. And sometimes we feel as though we have to do everything. Right? But it's Christ who does it and not us. So what does that look like? The poverty of time. That's a good one. Any other things that come up? Aidan, you're hiding your face in the Bible. So maybe I'll ask you. What's an idol for Hong Kong? Work. Work. Tell me more.

What does that mean? I think you're expected to sacrifice a lot of things for your job.

[24:40] Yeah. You're expected to sacrifice a lot of things for your job in Hong Kong. And so a lot of the decisions that you have to make are based around the demands that you have at work.

That either your boss actually has or the ones that you just perceive they have. And therefore, that just changes your life in every way. Work. And of course, work is the thing. And when work isn't going well, it threatens our identity.

You know, I'm Trevor and I'm a doctor. And if that's not going well, then actually that threatens my identity. Ironically, I think Trevor seems to be okay with this situation. For those of us who know him well.

But our occupation ties so deeply into our identity. That's an idol. So then when you preach the good news to that, you say, hey, actually, you are way beyond what you do for a living.

That isn't why you're loved. That isn't why you're accepted. You don't have to prove your existence to your boss or to your colleagues. Because, quite frankly, your job title right now will not end up on your grave.

[25 : 40] Right. Work. One more. I'm going to go into that side of the room over there. Scanning, scanning, scanning. Mark, what have you got?

Mental health. Mental health. Mental health. What do you think is the cause of mental health problems in Hong Kong? High stress environment.

Poor living conditions. No space. No time. To even process. And maybe we're part of a culture that doesn't even know how to process. If you're just sitting in front of someone and saying, actually, I'm feeling stressed.

We don't even know what to do with that. We don't even know how to ask each other about those kinds of things. And so the good news there that Jesus is the comforter, that actually he sees the deepest parts of us, that he knows what we're going through, that we can cast our anxieties onto him because he cares for us.

That's good news. We need to be aware of what the bad news is surrounding us. And I think it's different with every culture. It's different with every city. But when you know what the bad news is, you are then able to actually share what the good news is.

[26 : 48] And when they understand the good news, then there will be joy in the city. And they will be freed from looking at ourselves. I was so touched by our prayer this morning before service. And Aaron led us in this wonderful time of repentance, which doesn't sound fun.

I get it. But it was just us saying to God, just forgive us, God. And it was just forgive us, God, of just our self-centeredness, of just focusing on ourselves. And I need to prove.

I need to seek to prove. And just repenting of that. And the freedom that comes from that is incredible. Should we be willing to repent of it? And it's funny.

It's really a fascinating account that happens after this. And it's in verse 9. But there was a man named Simon. Simon the Great is who we can see is called here. Simon the Magician.

Now, we don't know actually whether he was a master of the dark arts or whether he was actually just someone who was just doing sleight of hand and was able to kind of trick people. But either way, hype was growing around him. He could get a following because people were amazed at some of the magic tricks that he could do.

[27 : 50] And so what happens here is, it's funny. And he is saying that he himself was somebody great. They all paid attention to him. And then they said again, this man is the power of God that is called great. So we'll just call him Simon the Great.

And they paid attention to him for a long time because for a long time he could amaze them with their magic. But when Philip comes in, now Philip doesn't try and compete with him with magic tricks. Philip simply comes and preaches the good news of the kingdom of God.

That's it. And that there is only one name that is great. And that name is Jesus. And what happens? Everyone starts believing in Philip. Not in Philip himself, but in the message that Philip was carrying. Even Simon himself believed, which is great. And you think, oh, great. The master of the dark arts, the magician, ends up following Jesus.

But we see that everything isn't quite as it seems. Because you see in verse 13, it says this, and seeing signs and great miracles, he performed he was amazed. Simon, sadly, wasn't attracted to just the power of Jesus and the message of the kingdom of God.

[28 : 54] He was attracted by the good things, the tricks that Philip could do. People were getting healed. And Simon's like, I want in on that. I want that kind of power.

Because that'll be good. Because that will be a moneymaker. And so that's what he says. During the same time, I'm just going to go through the story because I just think it's a really fun story to hear about. In verse 14, now when the apostles of Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John.

Bear in mind, the apostles were still in Jerusalem, holding down the fort, laying low, of course, but very uncomfortable in their own comfortable place. And then they hear that their enemy territory, their enemy country is starting to receive the gospel.

So they're like, okay, we must go check it out. And when they go and check it out, they see them. In verse 15, who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. Verse 16, for he had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord

Jesus.

Pause there for a second. Just a teeny bit of theology. When you accept Jesus, you already have the Holy Spirit. 1 Corinthians says this, that actually the fact that you can even profess a faith in the Lord Jesus and say that he is Lord already says that the Holy Spirit is in you.

[30:05] Okay. But for some reason, there is an exception here that there are people who say they will follow Jesus, but as the scripture says here, but the Holy Spirit had not yet fallen on them.

The question is why? For everyone else, even for us, the moment you can say that Jesus is Lord, you can be sure you don't need to guess whether the Holy Spirit is in you.

The Holy Spirit is already in you. The fact that you can even say that, but for some reason it's not happened here yet. Why? The reason, again, I think is because of racism and discrimination.

As I just said, the Jews did not like the Samaritans. In fact, the Jews didn't really like anyone else full stop. They were just a prideful group that just looked down on everyone else because they were God's chosen people.

And I think the reason why God says, actually, Peter and John, I need you to see this. I need you to see that actually my Holy Spirit is for everyone, not even just for you.

[31:02] It's for everyone. So he deliberately holds back so that Peter and John can see so that they can confirm that actually the gospel is not just for the Jews, but also for the Gentiles, also for the non-Jews.

And so when they arrive, they see, boom, the Holy Spirit then comes down on them. And then again, signs, crazy things happen from here. It's fascinating because Peter doesn't actually learn yet.

You see two chapters later, he's still racist. He's still discriminating. And it's just, if you don't feel like you're a great person, I hope the Bible encourages you. It is filled with people who are not that great, that God uses.

If you're like, oh, James, I know, I don't serve with the right heart. I don't seek him with the right heart. I don't scatter with the right heart. Don't worry. For every Philip, there's a Peter. And Peter wasn't the smartest, kindest person.

And yet God chooses to hold back the Holy Spirit. And so when Peter and John actually show up in Samaria, they see, whoa, it's for these guys too. And that begins Peter's journey, slow journey of learning that the gospel is for everyone.

[32:06] And it's just this incredible scene. And that moment, Simon is just amazed. If you've grown up in the charismatic church at all and you've seen some of the things that can happen, you can imagine where Simon is. He's like, what?

People are falling down. People are getting healed. There's gold dust falling down from the sky. Do you know how much money all of this can make? So then he goes to Peter and John. He says, hey, can I give you some money?

Can I buy this power? Is really what he's saying. And then Peter just comes down hard on him. I mean, it says, verse 20, may your silver perish with you.

The modern translation of that is to hell with your money. To hell with your money. You think you can buy this? You think you can trick people to have the power so you can have power over them? That's not how this works, my friend.

He says, may your silver perish with you. Because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money. You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God.

[33:03] Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity. Just like that just comes straight out of this.

That's just a bomb that's flying towards Simon. From Peter. Again, ironic, isn't it? But Peter, now filled with the spirit, is a new man. And he's not holding back. And just when you think, well, Peter, that's really a bit harsh.

Again, just rewind a little bit context here. Chapter 5. There was that married couple that tried to trick the church. And saying, hey, can we be part of this, the inner circle?

If we sell our land, but we'll keep a bit of money for ourselves. And what happens to them? They die. On the spot. So in some ways, if you understand the context, Peter's actually giving this guy a chance.

He's saying, hey, repent. Turn back. It's not too late. I can see in your, wouldn't that just terrify you? I can see in your heart that you are just so bitter. That you have such a need to prove to people that you are great.

[34:06] Repent. I don't know, guys. I think about Simon and I think, am I like Simon? That do I go to God? Because God, I hope, will answer my prayers.

So that my family will be safe and healthy. And they'll grow up. And they'll grow taller than me. And be more successful than me. And that you'll keep them from harm, God. And you'll give me what I want.

Do I go to God for those reasons? I don't know. I think sometimes I do. Sometimes, like Simon, I mistake the gift as a giver. And I go to the giver because I really just want the gifts.

I don't know whether that's the case for you. But Peter here is saying, it's repent. You're coming at this from all. Your money. Your money's not going to do anything in this.

I don't have money. But I have the power that comes from Jesus. Repent, is what he's saying. And honestly, even after that lecture, I don't know. I don't know if Simon gets it. Because at the end, verse 24, he says this.

[35:10] After Peter completely lays it on him, he says, Simon says, pray for me to the Lord that nothing of what you have said may come upon me. What's he saying?

Oh, please don't let that happen to me. And it makes me think, do I do that sometimes? Sometimes I go to God because I want the good things. Sometimes I go to God because I'm afraid of the bad things.

Do you have that? Oh, you're guilty. I haven't read the Bible today. Something bad might happen to me. Can you see that we've completely misunderstood the heart of God, who God even is?

That we're not going to God for the good things. And just because we don't go to him doesn't mean automatically there are bad things. Jesus himself, when he was here, said the sun shines on the righteous and the unrighteous.

The rain falls on the righteous and the unrighteous. That's not what it's about. He just wants us to know him, to reach out to him. And that's it. Can we want him for him?

[36:07] And can we acknowledge that even when we don't, that's okay. It doesn't mean he's going to then pour out judgment onto us and kill us. Talking to a good friend about this. And I love the heart because he was like, oh, not really been going to God because I'm trying to learn to not go to God only when I want something from him.

And I was like, oh, that's such a nice thing to say, right? God, I don't want to just use you. And then I think I had a bit of a realization and a revelation.

I was like, you know what? I think God is so gracious. He wants us to go to him even if it's just when we want him. It's just who he is. Sometimes our conception of him is just wrong because of that.

And I gave the example of my third child, MJ, who actually doesn't really like me that much.

Probably because he looks too much like me and he's blaming me for the hairstyle. And he doesn't really, the moment his mother's around, that's it.

I'm just dead to him. And I'm just like, this is bold guy. Don't worry, I don't need therapy. I'm okay.

And I was thinking about him and I was like, okay, when she's around or quite frankly, when anyone else is around, he doesn't really come to me for anything unless there literally is no one.

[37:21] It's just me and the bookshelf. And then he'll look at me. He wants something. He'll look at me. And then he'll go, I literally have no one else. It's just the bold guy who can help me with this.

At that moment, and I ask this question to my group, at that moment, do I want him to come to me or not? I've got to say the answer is yes. Even if he's using me in that one instance, the fact that he reaches out to me, the fact that he needs, he knows he needs my help and wants to be with me just for those two seconds as I hold him and lift him up to the thing that he actually wants.

I want it. I think that's the heart of the father. I think that's the heart of the father, that he is so gracious and compassionate, so desiring for a relationship with us that he just wants us to reach out.

Now, of course, at some point, I hope that we grow out of the stage of just going to him just for the stuff. I hope that at some stage, Micah and I will be friends where we sit and we have a beer and he comes and just talks to me about life.

I hope that's the case. But until then, if he's just coming to me just because he wants something from me, that's okay. The question for us as we continue to mature as followers of Christ is, well,

where's my heart in this, God?

[38:42] Am I only spending time with you because I'm afraid of the guilt of not spending time with you? Then, you know, we don't want that. It's like me going to my physio and only being forced there because he's guilt-tripping me to go and I actually don't really like him and I don't really want to be there.

I don't really want to grow. So that's, no, I actually like my physio and I want to spend time with him. And that's where the joy comes from. And so I hope we don't have either the fear of, actually, the consequences of not wanting him.

But I also hope that we don't have this thing of we just want him just because it'll help us feel better. If we go to church on Sunday and tick off that box, then we'll feel better this week. That's not what it is. But then come.

It's all about, it's all about the heart. But the question for us is, do we have that? Can we ask ourselves that question? Do we truly want Jesus for Jesus? I was preaching in the Chinese side a couple of weeks ago and I asked a really extreme stupid question.

And I asked, and it's tied in with work. And it was, for your children, would you either, would you rather, I mean, this game is always a terrible game. Would you rather have your child be the CEO of HSBC but not know God or be the janitor of HSBC but then know God and love God?

[39:57] Of course, someone comes up to me, well, can I have both? I'm like, well, yeah, yeah, sure. You can be a janitor and not know God. That's fine. That's up to you.

But man, I asked that question and it dug me deep in my heart. Because if I'm honest, it'll be nice to have the wealth and the health.

And we go to God and we think, we're going to God for him, but actually we're going to God for all the things that we think he can give us. The blessings that he can pour out to us. Not realizing that he himself is the actual gift. And it's in him that we have purpose.

It's in him we have hope. Do we understand that? Now, honestly, this is where I'll finish. You might sit there and go, yeah, I'm not there. Jesus is not my single focus. He is not, as Psalm 27 says, the one thing I ask for and the one thing I seek.

That I can't sit and gaze upon his beauty for all of my days because singing worship songs for three songs is too long for me. Forget all of my days. That's hard. And I'm here to say, I think that's okay.

[41:04] The very desire to please God is what pleases God. You can say, God, I don't think I love you yet. I don't think I want you yet, but I want to want you and I want to love you. And I want you to be my soul and only focus in life.

I want to surrender all the other things to you because I want to only trust in you. Jesus, I just want you. And I think he'll be gracious and he'll hear.

So long as we surrender and we repent. And each time we're like, oh, there is. There's the flesh again. There's me wanting to seek approval. There's me wanting to climb up the ladder.

There's me wanting to prove to that person. And as long as we are aware of that and we go, God, give it back to you every day. Just give this back to you. I think he's gracious and compassionate. I think all he wants is just relationship with us. And it doesn't matter whether we have this or have this. The Apostle Paul says this, I've learned a secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need.

[42:09] I can do all things through him who strengthens me. That's what that passage is about. It's like, I don't know. Whether I have a lot or little, it doesn't matter. I press on toward the goal of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

That's all I want. That's all I care for. Jesus, give me you. If you give me everything else and you're not there, it's not going to be worth it. Can we have that in our hearts?

Can we not be like Simon the Great? Can we not try to be great ourselves and recognize there is only really one great person and the greatest of all emptied himself, laid down his own life, took the form of a servant for us.

And died for us. Even death on a cross for us. When we understand that, that we were forgiven, that we were supposed to be on that cross, then we can be like Stephen and be so extra.

And just say, it doesn't matter because my eyes are just gazing towards you. And then we can be like Stephen and be asked to serve food and rice for people.

[43:12] And then suddenly be called upon to preach. It doesn't matter. I'm praying that we would have the right heart to serve. We would have the right heart to scatter. And we would have the right

heart to seek.

Would you join me in that prayer of saying, Jesus, I just want you. Or if you're not there yet, then you say, Jesus, I just want to want to want you.

I'm going to invite the band now to just help us respond. And for us to spend just a little bit of a moment just to still ourselves before God, because actually the busyness is a very real thing.

The noise, the work is a very real thing. And when you have those things, you just become so distracted by the noise, so numbed by the busyness. We don't spend that time sitting and going, Jesus, search my heart, test my thoughts.

If there is anything that is not right, lead me on the way everlasting. Right now, the same opportunity that was given to Simon is given to us.

[44:20] To search our hearts and say, God, I just want you for you. No fear, no pride. Just you for you. What good is it?

What good is it for us to gain the whole world and lose the one thing that is the most important? A relationship with you.

You, Jesus, we are all we want. As a church, you are all we want.

And so we make room for you. We serve, we scatter, we seek you. With single-minded devotion.

We thank you a lot. Thank you. We got together this morning. Would you lead us? That our time with you this week doesn't just stop here. That you would be part of every dinner, every lunch, every work shift.

[45:53] Every dinner party. Lord, we just want you. Thank you, Lord. In your name we pray. Amen.