

Theme: As You Are Going: The Church on Mission (Mt 28:16-20)

Title: – No Retreat - Acts 8:4-25

Aim: Philip & the Church continued the mission despite opposition.

Intro: The word “retreat” is defined as “an act of moving back or w/drawing.” An army might “w/draw from an enemy force as a result of their superior power or after a defeat.” In war retreat may be a legitimate military movement, protecting the troops & strategically maneuvering for better position. Sometimes it may be the best thing to do. However, the Church as a whole has never retreated from its mission to take the gospel to the world, tho there may be some individual examples. God has not allowed it, & He never will. Theme: As you are going: the Church on mission. Stephen was a great example of the Church on mission. He was sold out to Christ, was “full of grace & (Holy Spirit) power...doing great wonders & signs...” (Acts 6:8). Thru the ministry of the apostles & the newly appointed deacons (Stephen among them), “The number of disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem & a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith” (Acts 6:7). But then, as we have seen, Stephen was opposed, as the apostles had been. Not being able to gain much ground disputing w/Stephen, his opposition arranged false accusations against him, leading to his death as the 1st Christian martyr. That also led to believers being arrested & put in jail. What effect would that have on the Church? Things were getting very serious. Maybe they should back off for a while, or maybe this Christianity was not worth the risk. Was it time for retreat? God had other things in mind. Philip is a great example. Acts 8:4-25 [READ]. I) The disciples were **SCATTERED** (except the apostles). The apostles rightfully considered it their responsibility to stay in Jerusalem & maintain a center for the Church & a place from which they could go out in ministry. But Luke records that “all” the rest – however many they were, were scattered, dispersed “throughout the regions of Judea & Samaria.” They really were running for their lives. They became refugees, tho surely some of them had relatives in those areas where they could live. We would understand if they just sort of blended into the fabric of their

surroundings & laid low, at least for a while. At that point it was dangerous to be a Christ-follower. It's that way in much of the world today for many – dangerous to be a Christian. It may become that way for us, even soon. But note what these disciples of Christ did. ***“Those who were scattered went about preaching the word!”*** They didn't hide, tho Saul & others were “ravaging the Church,” They were still on mission. They were doing a great job in Jerusalem, spreading the gospel, but Jesus had said ***“You shall be My witnesses in Jerusalem & in all Judea & Samaria & to the ends of the earth.”*** Notice where they were scattered. I believe God used the opposition to move His Church out/forward. They didn't change their tactics; they preached the gospel in Jerusalem & continued to preach the gospel in Judea & Samaria. As they were going, the Church was on mission. Said it before, but we who believe should realize that God has strategically put us where He wants to use us – in our neighborhoods/towns, at our jobs, on the little league field, the grocery store, etc. As we go, let us live out & share our faith, preach the gospel. As said, Philip is a great example. This is not Philip the apostle, but Philip the deacon. He was aptly called “the evangelist,” & we will get to know him this week & next. He purposely ***“went down to the city of Samaria & proclaimed to them the Christ.”***

II) **SAMARIA** the city was the capital of Samaria the territory. While Judea was the territory around Jerusalem, Samaria was north. We know that Jesus led His disciples thru Samaria, confronting their prejudices. There He encountered the woman at the well (John 4) & changed her life, as well as many in her town of Sychar. We recall that Samaritans were generally know as half-breeds, the offspring of Jews left in Israel during the exile & those foreign captives settled in Israel by Babylon. Generally speaking, they weren't liked or accepted by the Jews, & the feeling was mutual. But Jesus changed that for His followers, & Philip was intent on fulfilling the Great Commission. Acts 1:8 was being fulfilled. Faithful Philip was being greatly used by God, working miracles thru him that gave credence to the truth of the gospel. ***“There was much joy in that city”*** as many came to faith in Christ. If we will be obedient as Philip was, God will use us to reach others as He used Philip, just an ordinary man given over to Jesus. One of those who saw

the miracles & heard the message of the gospel thru Philip, & responded, was III) **SIMON** the Magician. Luke recorded that he “had previously practiced magic...& amazed the people...saying that he himself was somebody great.” Simon had a measure of fame among the people, who not only thought that his magic was power from God but that he was “the power of God that is called Great.” Note that Luke said that Simon “previously practiced magic” & “amazed the people.” We don’t know if his magic/sorcery had lost its splendor, but he was one who used magic to, in David Gudzik’s words, “prey on the ignorance & superstitions of common people.” Any power that he had was from Satan, not God. The people paid attention to him because he had amazed them w/magic. But it seems that, hearing the gospel, the people were captured by the truth & love of God & were baptized, men & women. Luke wrote that “Simon himself believed” & was baptized & stayed in the company of Philip. Simon the amazer was amazed as he saw God at work thru Philip. But Simon is an example of what can happen when we are on mission for Christ. As we share the gospel & live out our faith, there are those who may enthusiastically embrace the message of Christ & even are baptized, but may not be true believers. Was Simon saved or not? Gudzik wrote: “Up to Acts 8:13 there is nothing to indicate that Simon’s belief was false or insincere. Yet it will be tested by his conduct and response over time. The apostles heard of the success of the gospel in Samaria & sent Peter & John to make sure the teaching was complete & fully understood. They prayed for the people to receive the Holy Spirit & as they laid hands on them those converts received the Holy Spirit. We’ll get back to that. But Simon, seeing this, wanted it for himself – not necessarily the Holy Spirit, but the power to convey the Spirit onto others by the laying on of hands. He offered Peter & John money to give him that power. Peter rebuked him: “May your money perish w/you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God.” Then he said that Simon had “no part nor lot in this matter” & called him to repent of his wickedness/sin & pray for forgiveness. “You are in the gall of bitterness & in the bond of iniquity.” G. Campbell Morgan wrote that Simon’s sin was “a desire to possess spiritual power for personal ends.” Simon asked Peter & John to pray for him that he would not perish w/his

money & be lost. It's strange that Luke didn't say he fell on his knees & repented right then & asked God forgiveness, which he surely would receive thru Christ. Peter & John could pray for him, but they couldn't repent for him. Nor can others repent for us or us for them. God doesn't have grandchildren or nieces & nephews – only children. The point is, as we go, as we are on mission, as we share the gospel, there will be those who make a profession but don't truly believe. And there will be charlatans who want to take advantage of the gospel for their own gain. Let's not be like that, but it's not up to us who is saved or not; only God saves. It's between that person & God. Our mission is to do what Philip did – preach the word, share our faith. But what about this matter of the IV) **SPIRIT** & the laying on of hands? Doesn't Acts 2:38 give the promise that if we repent & are baptized in the name of Jesus, we will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit? Were these folks not saved until Peter & John came & laid hands on them & then they received the Holy Spirit? Don't think that's so. Is the receiving of the Holy Spirit a subsequent experience? Some would say so, & I can respect that, but don't really think so. I believe what God had in mind was the idea of continuity w/the apostles & the Church up to this point. I believe God wanted the apostles involved to maintain unity in this still young Church & bring these Samaritan believers under the apostles' leadership & connect them w/believers throughout. I also think, however, that this points out the importance to teach, 1st Christ, but also the Holy Spirit. Many believers are ignorant of the Holy Spirit, who is our source of power. Jesus lives in us how? By His Spirit w/in. We need to give way to the Spirit w/in & allow Him to lead us in our Christian walk & work. Note what Peter & John (the big 2) did after they “had testified & spoken the word of the Lord” to these new believers: “they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans.” As they were going, probably tired from their journey & ministry, they still sought to make disciples. So, today, now is not the time for us to retreat or slink into our safehouses. We have work to do. Let us follow Peter & John & Philip's examples. As we are going, day by day, let us be a church on mission.