

Life Group Notes
Sunday 28 April 2019

Speaker: Owen Hylton
Series: INVITED
Title: The World & My Table
Passage: Acts 8

It is important to talk about the world in which we live. There is still much prejudice and hostility and suspicion and miscommunication. The church can and should be different. It is Jesus who is building us into a people for the glory of God.

God has always got a plan. He is relentlessly committed to his own promises. He always had the nations in view – always as far back as Abraham. In Acts 1:8 we see that his purpose was for the gospel to go to “Samaria and the Ends of the Earth.” But for the first few chapters of Acts, this doesn’t happen.

In chapter 8, we see persecution and suffering for the gospel’s sake. Stephen is killed, and the people are scattered. But without the persecution, the gospel may never have reached Samaria. The church was happy in Jerusalem. It’s at that point that the world gets invited to the table. The advance of the gospel often comes through suffering.

Samaritans were rivals/ enemies. And there was great joy in the city. Mourning in Jerusalem, but joy in the Samaria. Philip faces Simon the magic man. We don’t read about magicians in Jerusalem. Philip meets a challenge he’s never met before. The gospel exposes Simon’s magic - the gospel exposes things and challenges them.

The Holy Spirit moves Phillip on again. Ethiopia was known as “the ends of the earth.” One might have thought that the Ethiopian would have been the furthest away from God, but in reality he’s the closest. People you sometimes think are the furthest away might actually be the closest to God. He’s open to the gospel.

The gospel moves across every boundary in this story. The gospel is not a cultural message. The gospel brings you into relationship with people who are not like you.

So why did it take the persecution of the church to take the gospel outside and beyond Jerusalem?

- Perhaps they lacked understanding of what Jesus was asking them to do.
- Maybe they were just comfortable. For lots of people, comfort is a driver. Sometimes we don’t step in because we are comfortable.
- People stick to their own. That is natural and normal, but it’s not necessarily gospel. There are lots of things that are normal and natural, but not necessarily right. We have to challenge ourselves on this. We miss something of the display of his wonderful grace when we stick to our own.
- Cultural blindness. But they didn’t know they were blind until they met other people who loved Jesus but do it differently.

What can we learn?

- God’s work requires:
 - His own initiative. Line up with what God’s doing.
 - Our obedience. Follow his leading
 - Responsive hearts.
- The gospel is not bound by culture, so please don’t bind it.
- Different groups of people will face different roadblocks.

What can we do differently?

- The *INVITED* series must be more than a strategic way to try and embrace diversity. It must find its source and power in God. Only then will it be fruitful. If it is God’s work, the fruitfulness could be way beyond what you can imagine.
- Be obedient to what God is doing – dive in!
- Don’t limit what God can do. Trust him. It’s bigger than you think. The world needs to see what God can do.

Questions for application

1. In the story, do you identify with Phillip or with the Ethiopian, and why?
2. *“People stick to their own. That is natural and normal, but it’s not necessarily gospel.”* Do you agree?
3. What does it mean for you to “step in to what God is doing?” How can you line up with God’s plan?
4. Why do you think the Jerusalem church was so slow to share the gospel with non-Jews?
5. How do you feel about the church undertaking the *INVITED* journey? Why do you think diversity is a gospel issue?