



RESULTS NOT TYPICAL
Acts 18:1-25

Since Christmas – the American people have been bombarded with commercials from Jenny Craig, Weight Watchers, Nutrisystem, Dr. Oz, the Ab exercises showing how we can lose weight, shed those unwanted pounds, and develop those six pack abs. Yes, if we will only sign up today – we can be trim and fit in just 60 days for only \$59.95

To further entice us – they parade before us celebrities and others with those before and after photos of those who have used the product with great results.

However, if you have a pair of high-powered binoculars – you can see three little words in very tiny, micro-print usually near the end of the ad. Those three little words read: **“Results not typical.”**

For the past 9 months we have been studying and preaching our way through the book of the Acts of the Apostles. We have seen some amazing and miraculous results from this rag-time army of Apostles and disciples of Jesus Christ. There is a reason that the results of their ministry and missional efforts have been extraordinary. It is the work and empowerment of the Holy Spirit. If we compare the book of Acts with the church in the 21st century we might say, “Results not typical.”

However, the same Holy Spirit that propelled the church forward then – is still operative today. Without the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit the church would have died in Jerusalem – and never reached “Judea – Samaria – and the uttermost parts of the world.” It was the Holy Spirit that took a confused band of believers – and turned them into a band of believers who were accused of turning the world upside down. So if the results are typical – or not typical – you know why. A young woman once shared that the only time she ever heard the words ‘Holy Spirit’ was in the pastor’s benediction – which only half the congregation heard because they left during the closing hymn to get to the restaurant on time before the church crowd got there. (Hum).

The late Dr. Halford E. Luccock – a well-known United Methodist pastor and professor wrote in the 1930’s, “It is easy for a church to have all its forms in order – and its pedigree intact – and yet lack the present life of God. Many a church fellowship bears the name of Christian though it is without the gift of the Holy Spirit. The presence or absence of the Holy Spirit is connected to the power or impotence of a church.”¹

As we open our lesson today we see that Stephen has been martyred for the faith by Saul and his gang before Paul's conversion. However, Stephen's last words – like Jesus – were "Father, forgive them." These words eventually led to the conversion of Saul of Tarsus to the Apostle Paul. St. Augustine years later would write "The church owes Paul to the prayers of Saint Stephen." Results not typical. We would probably have begun to immediately initiate a plot of deadly revenge – that would have spiraled into violence for the next century. However, Saint Stephen – anointed by the power of the Holy Spirit – could bring about 'results not typical because he did not live by human reasoning and thought.

Yes, "Stephen's final prayer is a model for us all – in that he gave to God all he was. Jesus was the single and final reason for all Stephen did. When Stephen gave up his life – it was not for Paul – but for his Savior.

Stephen did not look or listen for the opinions of the crowd. He was a simple servant who looked to his master and was confident of his reception in heaven.²

With Saul breathing violence down upon the church family - many of the believers (except the apostles) were driven out of the city into the safer regions of Samaria and Judea.

Saul thought he had forced them to become political refugees – but God transformed them into missionaries. When this opposition arises – God uses this as an opportunity to fulfill his purposes which are found in **Acts 1:8**, and **Matthew 28:19-20**. God is sovereign – not Saul. Saul – who later becomes Paul – the missionary to the very Gentiles and Samaritans whom he was killing - would write: "God works all things to the good for those believe and are called according to his purposes." So, God uses Saul's rage to propel the gospel message to Samaria. In a sense his plan backfired on him. In the church house there is a saying, 'When men try to rule – God has the power to overrule.' We see God in his sovereignty scatters the seeds of faith that take root in Samaria - and brings forth a harvest. We are told in **John 12:24**, "When a seed falls into the earth it dies – and if it dies it will bear much fruit."

While Saint Stephen was the first martyr for the faith – he was not the last. I know it might shock you – but there were more Christians martyred for the faith in the 20th century than in any time of history. Despite what evolutionists teach – the human race is not evolving into a greater life form.

Let me share with you an example of how the persecution of a missionary actually allowed the faith to be planted in a region where the name of Jesus – and the gospel had never been heard. Jim Elliot was a boy who loved Jesus.

One day a friend of his parent's asked him if he was going to be a preacher when he grew up. "**I don't know,**" Jim replied, "but I would like to tell someone about Jesus that never heard of him before."

Jim Elliott and four other evangelical Christians were working in Ecuador, South America. They felt called to attempt to evangelize the Waodini tribe known as Operation Auca. On January 8, 1956, the entire team was speared to death by warrior of this fearsome tribe. LIFE Magazine and Reader's Digest picked up the story. It sparked a noticeable increase in those who volunteered for the mission field. In short, the missional effort took root – and exists to this very day. Nate Saint was the pilot of the plane which landed the missionary team. He was one of the five killed on January 8, 1956. They had a son, Steven Saint. The family stayed in the area for many years. Steve – age 10 – went to live with the tribe that had killed his father and friends. During that time two of his father's killers had converted to Christianity. One of them became a pastor. In June, 1965, Steve was baptized into the Christian faith by them.³ Results not typical – unless you are under the power of the Holy Spirit. Islam and other religions just can't make claims like that! You cannot accomplish work like this – unless you are covered by the shed blood of Jesus Christ – and filled with the power of the Holy Spirit. If you are having trouble forgiving someone – and your results are just as typical as the world – then you need to submit yourself to the authority of God's word – and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. You and I cannot do it by ourselves. It is not in us – it must be Christ in us.

So now in **verse 4** we see Philip the Deacon emerges as Philip the Evangelist. Philip in **Acts 21:8** is the only person called an evangelist in the New Testament.

Philip is driven out by the persecution – north into Samaria. Jesus in **John 4** had prepared the soil for this planting and harvest.

Please remember there is bitter hatred and racial hostility between the Jews and the Samaritans. It would take a miracle to produce 'results not typical' in this territory.

However in **Acts 6:3** we are told he was full of wisdom and spirit. His preaching was well received in **verse 6**. We see in **verse 7** – along with his preaching – he performed signs and wonders – including exorcisms and healing the paralyzed and lame.⁴ I wish I could make that claim. All I seem to do is put people to sleep.

So impressive were the signs he performed that even Simon Magus – the self-promoting Jewish magician who had dazzled the Samaritans with his magical feats – believed and was baptized.⁵

Bruce Springsteen – who recently sang at the Super Bowl halftime show – once sang, "Everyone has a hungry heart." Jesus offered 'living water' to a five-time loser at the well as a symbol of the hunger in the hearts of all people. As Philip preached he proclaimed Jesus as the Messiah to the Samaritans and he found great hunger for God – despite all the human made walls and boundaries that existed. A revival breaks out in Samaria – which scholars call today the 'Samaritan Pentecost.' The gospel had been welcomed by the Samaritans – but would the Samaritans be welcomed by the Jews? God had a special way to address this issue. For reasons known only to the triune God – God withheld his Spirit until the Jewish Apostle arrived in **verse 15** – and validated the

work of Philip – in the laying on of hands. This allowed relationships to be birthed and nurtured that had not taken place for centuries. Now with the laying on of hands – and the giving of the Spirit – the church was one. Results not typical – but needed and wanted in the 21st century.

We all know that racial hatred and prejudice are tough nuts to crack. It is tough to break this vicious cycle. The late George Wallace, former Governor of Alabama – was a white racist and segregationist for most of his life. He also was a United Methodist. Many of you remember when he was paralyzed by an assassin's bullet. One night he came under the Holy Spirit's conviction about his sin of racism. He knew he had to ask forgiveness for his actions and policies. Congressman John Lewis of Georgia (still serving) was one of the great leaders of the Civil Rights movement. As a young man he was one of the leaders in the march from Selma to Montgomery. Governor Wallace ordered his troops to beat back the marchers. The skull of John Lewis was cracked open. He was near death. He was beaten and attacked by dogs on other occasions.

One day – Governor Wallace called John Lewis and asked if he would please come back to Alabama to see him. John Lewis accepted the invitation. When they were together – Governor Wallace repented of his actions – with tears running down his face. Governor Wallace said, “John, I need your forgiveness. Can you find it in your heart to forgive me?” John Lewis – a devout Christian – said, “Yes, Governor, I can and do forgive you.” Then George asked John, “Do you think God has it in his heart to forgive me?” The Congressman said, “Governor, of that reality I am even more certain.” I believe Max Lucado is right when he shared, “The key to forgiving others is to quit focusing on what others did to you – and start focusing on what God did for you at the cross.” Only this will produce ‘results not typical.’

This past week one of the officers who smashed the skull of John Lewis came forward to apologize and ask for forgiveness. It seems he went to his pastor – and his pastor, using the Bible, showed him that racism was evil and straight from the pit of hell. He also requested a meeting with John Lewis. Once again, John Lewis forgave him.

Now, quickly I want to talk about Simon Magus in **verses 9-23**. Simon represents all those down the corridors of time who wanted to have the Spirit – but did not want the Holy Spirit to have them. Dwight Moody would often teach – “The issue is not if you have a monopoly on the Holy Spirit – but if the Holy Spirit has the monopoly on you.” We know from **John 3** that nobody controls the Holy Spirit. A true salvation experience always involves the head and heart. To be born from above does mean to be formed from above as well.

These past six months in America we have seen from Wall Street – to Main Street – to the church house how greed and money has ruined and been the downfall of many. So the Simon Magus story is as up-to-date at the morning newspaper.

Yes, “Simon treated the gift of God as something that could be used, traded, and purchased. He would never have committed this sin had he truly and deeply believed in God. If he had presented himself before God as a worshiper – giving himself in humility and service – it would never have entered his mind to try to take God’s gift and make a profession of using it. For the Holy Spirit is not a power to be manipulated - but a power to be obeyed.”⁶

So Philip, John, Peter, Jim Elliot, Steve Saint, and John Lewis exalted Christ – obeyed the Holy Spirit – thus they produced **“results not typical.”**

May we go and do likewise.

Amen and amen.

Reverend Eric S. Ritz

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ENDNOTES

¹ Halford E. Luccock, **THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES**, New York: Harper and Brothers, 1942, page 145.

²Eugene H. Peterson, **CONVERSATIONS: The Message Bible with its Translator**, NavPress, Colorado Springs, Co., Colorado Springs, CO, 2007, page 694.

³ www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Steve_Saint, accessed 2/09/09.
www.crossroad.to/Victory/stories/missionary/11-auca.htm, accessed 2/09/-09.

⁴Fred B. Craddock, [et.al], **“Preaching Through the Christian Year, YEAR C,”** Trinity Press International, first edition, 1994, Valley Forge, PA, page 75.

⁵Ibid, Craddock, page 75.

⁶ Eugene H. Peterson, op.cit, page 1695.