

Faith Walk! - Sermon Discussion

Date : 29 September 2024

Sermon Title : Perform or Transform

Speaker : Rev Eddie Ho

Text : Acts 8

INTRODUCTION

In a story or a movie, we can often identify a main character or a hero, and they may not always be the same person. In the Book of Acts of the Apostles, we read of the many signs and wonders performed by several different heroes such as Peter, Stephen, Philip, Paul and others. While there can be many heroes in the Book of Acts, there is only one main character - the Holy Spirit who empowered all these heroes to do what was out of the ordinary.

Heroes in Acts 1-8:4

1) Peter

Peter is the hero in the first 5 chapters of Acts. After being filled with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, he spoke in tongues (Acts 2:4), gave a sermon and baptised 3000 souls (Acts 2:41), with many more being added daily. He also healed a lame beggar (Acts 3:7-8) and then preached with boldness (Acts 4:13, 29, 31) to all kinds of people including priests, teachers, rabbis and scribes in the temple courtyard despite being a fisherman, and 5000 believed in Jesus that day. (Acts 4:4) Because this embarrassed the authorities, he was arrested and warned never to preach again but upon his release, he continued to preach and perform many signs and wonders. (Acts 5:12, 16) Furthermore, Peter was like God and could read people's hearts. (Acts 5:1-11) He knew that Ananias and Sapphira had kept part of the proceeds from their land sale, so he spoke to them to give them a chance to confess and repent, but they refused and as a result dropped dead at Peter's feet.

2) Stephen

Stephen is the hero in Acts 6, a person full of faith, grace and power; the fullness of God. (Acts 6:8-15) He too preached with confidence like Peter. Unfortunately, he was killed in Acts 7 but exuded a calm confidence even when faced with a life and death situation.

3) Paul

While Saul is the villain who approved the execution of Stephen in Acts 8:1a, taking pleasure in persecuting the disciples of Jesus, Saul later had his name changed to Paul and became another hero, Paul the Apostle.

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4) Other disciples

On the day that Stephen was martyred, there arose a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem and the disciples of Christ were scattered, except the apostles. (Acts 8 (1b) Because of the persecution by Paul (Acts 8:3), the disciples were forced to leave their homes and became refugees in the surrounding regions. But wherever they went, they preached the word (Acts 8:4) and they were able to do so because they were filled with the fullness of God despite being in a hostile situation.

Philip – hero in Acts 8

Philip travelled to Samaria to preach the gospel to the Samaritans (Acts 8:5) even though Samaria was not a welcoming place for the Jews at that time. This enmity started in 721 BC, when the Assyrians conquered the Northern Israel and moved in a pagan population who intermarried with the lowest of the Jews who were left behind. The descendants of this intermarriage were the Samaritans, and the Jews viewed the Samaritans as ‘half-breed’ who were only good for being burnt up in God’s judgement (Luke 9) since they corrupted the worship of God. Despite this deep-seated prejudice and animosity, Philip (a Jew) still boldly went to Samaria and preached that Jesus (a Jew) is their Saviour because he was full of faith, grace and power.

- Though Philip was doing a precarious thing, going to a hostile land to preach Christ, being filled with the fullness of God, he preached boldly, performed signs and wonders in Samaria (Acts 8:7) and he brought much joy to the wretched and hated city. (Acts 8:8)

The power of God – To perform or transform?

As believers we should all desire this same divine power that the heroes in Acts had – to have wisdom, boldness to speak to people who do not like us, healing the sick, casting out unclean spirits, tearing down hatred, reconciling people, healing wounds and bringing joy to the last, least and lost.

Simon – a new Samaritan convert

Simon was a Samaritan who practised magic and was acknowledged by the Samaritans as someone who had “the power of God” and is “great” because he amazed them with his magic, and they paid attention to him. (Acts 8:9-11) But after Philip preached Christ to them, Simon’s followers and even Simon himself accepted Jesus Christ and were baptized. He continued to journey with Philip, saw Philip perform great miracles and was amazed. (Acts 8:12-13)

Now, the apostles who were still in Jerusalem were shocked to hear of the conversions of the Samaritans. Peter and John then travelled to Samaria and led many of those who were baptized to receive the Holy Spirit by the laying of hands for they had not been baptized with the Holy Spirit. (Acts 8:14-17) Upon seeing this, Simon offered them money to “get the same power” so that he could also lay hands on others for

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them to receive the Holy Spirit. (Acts 8:18-19) This offer was met by harsh rebuke from Peter who warned him to repent of his wickedness so he may be forgiven. (Acts 8:20-23) Simon then pleaded for none of what Peter had said to happen to him. (Acts 8:23) Peter and John then returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans. (Acts 8:25)

Despite having become a Christian by believing in Jesus, and was baptized, Simon had not been totally transformed to be Christ-like. He was still in his old form with his own thinking and habits. He still had the “main character syndrome” (to be the hero) and his old way of thinking told him that he could use money to buy the abilities that he wanted, which completely missed the point that:

Holy Spirit – The only Main Character in Acts

- All the amazing things performed in Acts were done by the Holy Spirit, not the heroes. The great things that the heroes did are gifts of the Holy Spirit.
- The purpose of Holy Spirit is not for us to perform supernatural feats but to transform us into the likeness of God’s Son; to point us to Jesus Christ. (John 15:26) To make us love Jesus and want to be like Him.

Peter, Stephen and Philip wanted to be like Jesus, but Simon wanted to be like Peter, to do great and amazing things like the hero and so be the main character. Simon thought the Holy Spirit is a tool to make him great and so missed the point.

Heroes after the Book of Acts?

Peter is the hero in the first half of the Book of Acts and Paul is the hero in the second half, but the book ends abruptly on Paul’s imprisonment in Rome, with no proper ending; as if there is to be a sequel:

He lived there two years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance. (Acts 28:30-31)

The Holy Spirit, the main character of the Book of Acts lives on after the book ends. More heroes will come into the story, ongoing for more than 2000 years with the same main character. Today, the church is given the same mandate as the apostles, to make disciples intentionally to continue the story of Acts. We can only do this when are filled with the fullness of God; by surrendering to Him, acknowledging our weaknesses, repenting of all our sins, and allowing the Holy Spirit to mould and transform us and bear fruit, so we may be Christ-like. To also allow the Holy Spirit to use us to be His mouthpiece and use our hands to bless and touch lives.

CONCLUSION

Let us not be distracted by the gifts of the Spirit but instead desire the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5) so God can use us for His purpose of pointing people to Jesus.

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A. Review Sermon Application

Purpose: Reflect on how you have been embodying God's truth.

- 1a. How successful have you been in fulfilling what you/your group had committed to do for the last FaithWalk!?
- 1b. What were some challenges you faced and what would you like to celebrate?

2. As believers, we should all desire the same divine power that the heroes in Acts had.
 - a. Do you sincerely desire to have this same power in your life?
 - b. What are 3 things you would do with this same power?

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B. Relate Sermon Content

Purpose: Relate with the Truth and Resolve for Transformation.

3. Invite someone to read Acts 8 aloud.
 - a. Why do you think it is only right to attribute what the scattered disciples did in Acts 8:4 to the empowerment of the Holy Spirit?
 - b. Philip, as one of the scattered disciples, went to preach in Samaria.
 - (i) Why is it amazing that Simon the magician and his followers believed in Jesus Christ and were baptized?
 - (ii) What does this tell you about God?
 - c. Simon offered Peter and John money to “get the same power” so that he could also lay hands on others for them to receive the Holy Spirit. (Acts 8:18-19)
 - (i) What could be some reasons for Simon to make such a request?
 - (ii) What does this tell you about man?

- 4a. When do you seek the divine power of the Holy Spirit in your life? Do you always experience this power working in your life?
- 4b. Is your seeking aligned to God’s purpose of giving us the Holy Spirit?
- 4c.
 - (i) What is/are one/some area(s) of your life that you need the power of the Holy Spirit to transform so you may bear the fruit of the Spirit?
 - (ii) How can your group members encourage or help you to achieve 4c(i) above?

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C. Testimonies, Prayers and Action

Purpose: Give glory to God, seek Him and embody His Word.

5. Share your testimony on how you had been empowered by the Holy Spirit in **one of these** below, giving glory to God and why you think God empowered you:

To have wisdom; boldness to speak to people who do not like you; healing the sick; casting out unclean spirits; tearing down hatred; reconciling people; healing wounds; bringing joy to the last, least and lost or to be moulded and transformed to be Christ-like.

OR

Give thanks to God that when we fully surrender to Him and repent of our iniquities and seek His Spirit's transformation, He will transform us into the likeness of Christ, however wretched our old self may be.

6. With a partner, humble yourselves before God to confess and repent if you had desired the Holy Spirit for performance instead of transformation. Commit to yield yourself to allow the Holy Spirit to mould and transform you to be like Christ, always seeking only the purpose and will of God.

Pray also for our church to be surrendered as a community of believers for God to use us to transform lives, ours included, and change the world.

Optional items:

Suggested worship songs:

1. This is Amazing Grace – Phil Wickham
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rjXjkbODrro&ab_channel=PhilWickhamVEVO
2. Christ is Enough – Hillsong
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o7hy6WBI7TM&ab_channel=PatrickPhiaphakdy
3. Spirit of the Living God – Emmaus Music
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=19i72kDhm1U&ab_channel=EmmausMusic

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