

## **Cross Cultural**

### **Part 1 – Cross Cultural**

#### **Acts 8**

##### **Intro**

Cinco de Mayo is a day that we honor the Mexican culture and heritage. It is a holiday that celebrates the Mexican army's 1862 victory over France at the Battle of Puebla during the French-Mexican War. Oddly enough, Cinco de Mayo is more of a holiday in the United States than it is in Mexico, where it remains a relatively minor day nationally.

The Battle of Puebla, however, resonates with Americans. It's an underdog story. A comeback, if you will. Benito Juarez, president of Mexico, had recently been driven out of Veracruz. And not wanting to surrender to the French army, Juarez rallied a rag-tag group of 2,000 loyal men to take on the 6,000 well-trained French soldiers. Clearly, no one expected Juarez and his men to even put up a fight.

But by the end of the day, led by a Texas-born General, the small Mexican militia won a symbolic victory for their people. So we remember, and we celebrate – by eating tacos!

##### **The Downfall of Humanity**

The recognition and celebration of other cultures has not always been an easy journey for human kind. We have leaned toward separation and elitism instead of unity and inclusion. For whatever reason, we have a hard time accepting and loving people who are different from us – ethnically, socially, culturally, and economically.

Honestly, and unfortunately, it has been a struggle for the people of God as well. But it is not who we are supposed to be.

***There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.***

***Galatians 3:28***

Today, I want us to look at an incident that was a catalyst [a symbolic victory, if you will] that began changing the minds of the people of God toward the people of other cultures.

##### **Acts 8**

The church has started to grow, as the message of the cross is beginning to spread across Jerusalem. People are believing in this Jesus who had come to bring forgiveness and freedom to *anyone* who trusted in Him.

A man named Saul, who was from the old establishment, didn't want just *anyone* to be included in this forgiveness. In his mind, only *his people*, should be allowed to be part of this special group. He stood [in approval] and watched one of the greatest young men of the faith, Stephen, die a brutal death for speaking the truth.

Stephen's death emboldened Saul even more. He began ravaging the Church, the followers of Jesus. Saul began going house to house, arresting everyone he could find who identified with Jesus as the Messiah. This persecution drove many of the disciples outside of their hometown of Jerusalem, as they fled for their lives.

#### **8:4-6**

**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.**

Philip went to the one place no Jew thought the love and message of the cross would ever go – to Samaria. The Jews & Samaritans were as different as different could be. Technically, Samaritans were half-Jew and half-Gentile, and the Jewish people hated them for marrying into another culture. They were considered a disgrace, half-breeds. Therefore, they had nothing to do with one another.

It's why the parable Jesus told of the Good Samaritan seemed implausible. It's why Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well was so shocking. Jews and Samaritans carried a disdain for one another. Jesus, however, came to remove that separation.

When Philip went to Samaria this separation began to fade. The people, instead of running Philip out of town, received him – and received the message of the cross of Jesus Christ; that He had come to bring them peace and forgiveness as well.

#### **8:12-13**

**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.**

The entire area of Samaria had been enamored with the great signs that Simon, the town magician, could produce. They were in awe of his abilities and his persona. He had them under his control for years. For probably most of their lives, his magic was all they knew – and all they had hoped in. They simply did not know any different.

Not only did the people of Samaria begin to believe Philip and the good news of Jesus, but Simon himself was amazed and believed. We don't know whether or not Simon truly believed, in the sense that he fully repented and trusted in Jesus for everything. But the gospel, the message of the cross, was spread to regions and people it had not before.

And maybe we think, of other people, *they won't believe what I have to say about Jesus, they won't change their life, nothing will ever come of this.* And it possibly never will, but that's not our responsibility. What we are called to do is carry the message of the cross to all cultures and all people. But you will never know unless you are willing to dive into someone else's culture, into someone else's life.

### **8:14 & 25**

**Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John. 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.**

Here's what I really want us to see today. What Philip did was not normal. His people had stayed in their part of the world, in their own bubble, willingly unaware and unaffected by the lives of those around them. It literally took persecution [a threat to their own lives] for them to lift their heads and take the message of the gospel – which crosses all cultures – to other people.

What Philip did was not normal, but it was the very thing they were called to do.

The scattering of the believers [in the beginning of ch 8] was the fulfillment of the promise that the gospel would cross over cultures to reach all mankind.

***But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.***  
**Acts 1:8**

The timeframe between the promise/command in Acts 1 [to take the gospel to all cultures and all parts of the world] and the fulfillment of it in Acts 8 is anywhere from 3-5 years later.

FINALLY, the people of God are taking the message of the cross to all cultures around the world. But it took a disruption in their lives to cause them to *go*!

Sometimes we need something to drive us away from our home, from our comfort zone, from the place we thought we were supposed to stay but knew we really were not.

Sometimes it takes a disruption for us to live out the gospel in ways, and places, and to people that we know we have been called.

And, so for Philip, this became his new normal.

### **8:26-27**

**Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” This is a desert place. And he rose and went. And there was an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure. He had come to Jerusalem to worship**

Philip, who seems to be the first one to take the gospel outside of Jerusalem is now encouraged by the Spirit of God to do it again. It will slowly become the natural way of life for Philip and the rest of the people of God – listening to the Spirit of God to lead us to men and women He is sending us to.

This time Philip is sent to a man who is searching for God. The eunuch, who was not a Jew, was returning from visiting the temple in Jerusalem. As a Gentile [non-Jew] and a eunuch, this man would not have been allowed into the inner courts at the temple – not included in the *true worship* of God. He must have felt left out, less than, unworthy – relegated to outside the faith.

But he was searching for God, nonetheless. The eunuch sat in his chariot reading the book of Isaiah, the prophet.

### **8:29-31**

And the Spirit said to Philip, “Go over and join this chariot.” So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, “Do you understand what you are reading?” And he said, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

Again, the Spirit of God directed Philip to go. God scattered Philip; disrupted his plans and said *go*.

Watch this.

### **8:32-33**

Now the passage of the Scripture that he was reading was this: “Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter and like a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he opens not his mouth. In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth.”

At the exact moment that Philip showed up in this man’s life was the very moment he was most open to hearing the message of the cross. He asks Philip, *who is this about?*

Remember, the eunuch had just come from Jerusalem where he likely witnessed a lamb being slaughtered at the temple as a sacrifice for the forgiveness of sin. The High Priest would take a perfect, spotless lamb once a year and sacrifice it so the blood of that lamb would provide atonement – the payment for and wiping away of sin. And now he was reading about this lamb who was coming for all mankind.

### **8:35-36**

Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus. And as they were going along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, “See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?”

The perfect timing of God. And the willingness of man [Philip] to go across cultures to share the good news of the gospel.

***How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!”***

***Romans 10:14-15***

You and I have been sent. There is no waiting on God to send us. We have already been sent. Simply walk across the street. Down the hall in your office. Next door to your neighbor. To the locker opposite yours.

Listen for the Spirit for specific opportunities. But don’t wait - you have already been called. Don’t let it take a persecution, a scattering, or a disruption to cause you to share the message of the cross with someone else.

**The gospel crosses ALL cultures, and you are called to be the one to deliver that message!**