Abstract

Philip, a Hellenistic Jew, preached the gospel to the Samaritans who were despised by the Jews. The Samaritans were oppressed by evil spirits. They suffered from various kinds of diseases and were in the bondage of Simon the magus. The Samaritans lived in a pluralistic religious community. The confrontation of this community with the gospel produced visible results: people were healed and delivered. Believers were baptized and there was great joy in the city. Transformation took place because Philip preached Christ. This seems to have been the apostolic pattern. The same Christ-centered preaching and communication of the gospel should be followed by ministers of the gospel in today’s pluralistic religious world.

1. Introduction

The Christian church started on the day of Pentecost, within a Jewish context. On that day, Peter preached a very strong message to his Jewish audience. The climax of his message was in Acts 2:36: ‘Therefore let all the house of Israel know beyond a doubt that God has made this Jesus whom you crucified both Lord and Christ.’ The focus of the first sermon of the early church was on the person of Jesus Christ. Peter’s audience was Jewish people, who knew the Scriptures. It was therefore easy for him to explain what happened based on Old Testament passages that the Jews accepted as God’s word. However, it had to be clear in the mind of all those who heard him that Jesus Christ was glorified by God. All the arguments in Peter’s message were in support of that fact.

The Jewish leaders did not accept the Jesus–Messiah-centred message of the early church. They responded first by ordering the apostles ‘not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus’s (Acts 4:18). Notwithstanding their order, the disciples continued to teach about Jesus. The Jewish leaders therefore ‘laid hands on the apostles and put them in a public jail’ (Acts 5:18). The disciples responded by telling them that they had no intention to stop speaking about the Christ. This called for a third kind of response from the Jewish leaders: ‘They summoned the apostles and had them beaten. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus and released them’ (Acts 5:40).

The fourth and final step went beyond speaking, imprisoning, and beating. Stephen was stoned to death.

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