

## Who Moved My Church?

### Acts 8: 1 – 8

Here's a question for you: What would it be like to show up one Sunday morning at the corner of Bristol and Saint Clair and discover that your church is gone? Wouldn't this be shocking to you? You'd probably start asking questions like ...

What happened?

What's the meaning of this?

Who's responsible?

Who moved my church?

Even for local residents of Almont who've never ~~even~~ been inside the church, but perhaps pass it every day on their way to work, if one day they noticed the disappearance of this prominent landmark. Don't you think they too would be shocked?

Moving a church building the size and weight of FCC would be a monumental task, and most people, including myself, can't imagine such a thing ever happening. But it has happened.

Recently, I read about St. Gerard's Church in Buffalo, New York. The interesting thing about this church is that it's no longer in Buffalo. It was moved brick by brick to Norcross, Georgia. Wow, the weather's so bad in Buffalo that even churches turn into snowbirds!

Seriously though, this 800-seat century-old basilica was moved 900 miles south at the cost of 16 million dollars! Now one might think that's an extreme waste of money, but when the church realized that it would cost 40 million to build a new church, they couldn't pass up the 24 million dollar savings! Who doesn't like to save money? Sure, the church was a 1911 model, but it had low miles!

Well, someone must have caught wind of this story, and decided they could do better. The Perceton and Dreghorn Parish Church of Ayrshire, Scotland was purchased for 50,000 pounds, dismantled for 250,000 pounds, and moved 6000 miles across the ocean where it was reassembled in Japan! Take that, all you Lego fanatics! It now serves as a wedding chapel.

By the way, 300,000 pounds is nearly 400,000 US dollars. Sounds like a steal, until you factor in the shipping charge!

Now you might think that only crazy westerners would do such preposterous things as relocate a 900 - ton churches, but you'd be mistaken.

Back in the 80's, when the United States was still engaged in a cold war with the Soviet Union, Romania, a satellite country of the communist regime, had its own church-moving story.

During this time, Romania was ruled by a communist dictator who decided he wanted to radically redesign the capital city of Bucharest.

Well, when his plans became known, an engineer named Eugeniu Iordachescu devised a way to move historically significant buildings while keeping them fully intact before they could be razed by the communist government.

His team actually dug under the buildings, detached them from their foundations, and then lifted them up so that iron rails could be placed under them and subsequently moved! Amazing!

Along with 13 churches, a hospital, a bank, and an apartment building were moved in such a manner. One church weighed 745 tons and was moved 250 meters. Another church weighing 9000 tons was moved a mere 24 meters – which only amounts to about one-fourth the length of a football field!

When the apartment building was moved, it is said that some residents were still inside, which adds new meaning to the phrase, “just along for the ride”!

On a sad note, at least 22 other historical buildings in Bucharest, including churches, were demolished because the communist dictator lost patience with the moving process. As the old saying goes, progress waits for no one. I guess this saying holds true even in communist countries!

Well, enough church- moving trivia for one morning. Let's move on to a more profound question that needs to be addressed as we “re-open” church:

Namely, what or who spiritually moves a church? Or another way to say it might be, who is ultimately responsible for advancing the church forward toward its desired goal?

And by saying the word “spiritual”, I'm not discounting the physical movement of the church. When a church is spiritually moved, physical and tangible results will, more than likely, be noticed.

But even so, the question remains, who or what is the driving force behind the church moving forward - especially in terms of fulfilling God's will?

Is it the government, be it church or state? Is it our culture? The latest pandemic? A new fad? The most recent crisis that causes the greatest civil unrest? How about church attenders? who moves the Church?

Maybe another way to ask the question is, “Who gets to call the shots for the church as it attempts to fulfill God's mission into the 21<sup>st</sup> century?” The loudest voices? The ones who feel they've experienced the most injustice? How about those who have the most clout or financial resources?

According to the Bible, God's design and will for the church is that we, the body of believers who, in fact, make up the church, and who are committed to the true person and purpose of Jesus Christ are key players who are given both the privilege and responsibility to experience, effect and participate in God's holy mission – a mission that seeks to bring restoration, unity, and harmony to a broken, confused, and sinful world.

What mission?

After all, didn't Jesus instruct his disciples at the end of the Gospels saying, *"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you."*

When you think about it, this statement by Jesus makes very little sense if it remains detached from his next statement: *"And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."* To be sure, our authority as a church to carry out God's will only goes as far as we carry Jesus in our hearts, yielding to Him, loving Him, and obeying his voice.



By carrying out God's mandate, we help ensure that God's holy and ordained institution, the church, never becomes irrelevant or powerless, but instead, remains an irresistible force for good that is best exemplified in the life of God's Son, Jesus.

This profound truth brings us to the Book of Acts where we read about the origin of the church, the early days of its establishment, and its growth.

As you recall, God's church was established on the day of Pentecost when God unleashed his promised Holy Spirit to indwell and empower the believers as recorded by Luke in the Book of Acts chapter 2:

*“When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place (speaking of the 12 apostles including Mathias). Suddenly the sound of the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in tongues as the Spirit enabled them.”*

Now we can begin to answer the very important question...

Who moves the church?

Answer: The Same One who brought it into existence.

Does the church have a governmental hierarchy? Yes.

Does the church have a board of trustees? Check.

Deacons? check.

Church council? Check.

Pastor? Check (at least the last time I checked!)

These boards and positions may go by other names in other denominations, but you get the idea. And these organizational structures are deemed necessary and are put into place to govern the church because the church, though heavenly ordained, is earthly flawed!

And more importantly, they don't move the church. God does!

Not the most eloquent voice, not the biggest donor, not the most progressive or the most culturally engaged, or the most “woke” person in the group, not the poster-child for the group who believe they've been treated the most harshly, not the strongest, the smartest, nor the prettiest.

No! God says I will move *my* church according to *my* character to accomplish *my* purposes in *my* time.

God is never reactionary. He is proactive.

If He were reactionary, why would He wait 400 years before rescuing the Israelites from Egypt? It could have been done earlier, but He had a greater purpose in mind.

If God were reactionary, why would God wait so long before destroying the world with the flood? He could have done it sooner and avoided all the evil, heartache, and pain that preceded the flood.

And if He were reactionary, why would the Father wait so long before he sent His Son to be the perfect sacrifice for humanity's sins? Another 400 years lapsed between the last Old Testament prophet and coming of Christ called the Silent Years. Think of all the lives that would have been better off if Christ had come sooner. But God is not reactionary. He does everything according to his timetable and his purpose. He is proactive.

Listen to God's word through the prophet Isaiah from chapter 46: "I am God and there is no other. I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times what is still to come. My purpose will stand and I will do all that I please. What I have said, that will I bring about; what I have planned, that will I do."

Do these words sound like the words from someone who is unsure, indecisive or confused? Hardly! They come straight from our Lord who sees the beginning from the end, who is unaffected by the restraints of time because he is the source of time, and who has planned out every important detail our lives according to his perfect nature and loving-kindness toward us.

God continues through Isaiah saying, "I am bringing my righteousness near; it is not far away; and my salvation will not be delayed."

God moves his church in his time and in his way so his purposes will be accomplished. This is being proactive, and we can take heart in this truth because we know that as Christians, we are included in his loving, merciful, and proactive purpose. Psalm 138:8: "The Lord will fulfill his purpose for me; your love, O Lord, endures forever."

So, God moves his church in his timing according to his purposes. And we as Christians can take comfort in this truth.

But does this mean we get to sit on our hands and dig in our heels and just wait for God to move? In one sense, yes. In another sense, no.

Yes, the church must dig in its heels and not budge when we're tempted to move off the truth of who God is or pressured to comply with the world's standard of God and morality.

To the world, God is a small g God that takes on many forms, traditions and faces. To follow and express allegiance to the one true God at the expense of all these other gods is viewed as intolerant and narrow-minded.

To the world, following many gods or no gods, or the god who screams the loudest is so much more preferable than following the One True God. Because according to the world, abandoning our belief about our <sup>in our</sup> God will inevitably bring about the greatest amount of good for our society as a whole, so we're told.

It's the misery loves company scenario. We aren't happy, so you have no right to be happy either.

But God warns us about flip-flopping our belief system, forsaking the One true God and his righteousness for a counterfeit. Again, through the prophet Isaiah, God says in Isaiah chapter 5 ...

"Woe to those who call *evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter.*"

So we, as God's church cannot move and must not move when it comes to defending our Lord's nature and holy character, but at the same time we must be ready to move when God calls us forward to do his will.

Whether it's leaving Egypt at a moment's notice,

Crossing the Red Sea with the Pharaoh's army in our rearview mirror,

Crossing the Jordan River at flood stage before entering the Promised Land

or as we see in the 8<sup>th</sup> chapter of Acts when the church experiences its first episode of dangerous religious persecution. God calls us to move out in faith believing that wherever we move by faith, God is already there ready to meet us, protect us, provide for us, and empower us to serve, love, and testify to his Holy Name.

This is exactly what happens in Acts chapter 8. Up to this point in Acts, the church is establishing itself, settling in, and going about business as usual in Jerusalem. Meetings are being held and leadership positions are being filled. Preaching is happening. Conversions and baptisms are regular occurrences. Bible study, fellowship, and worship are commonplace. Compassionate ministries to serve the poor are established. Church discipline was even happening! Miraculous healings occurred. The church is doing church, and it was a beautiful thing.



But then Stephen, a man filled with the Spirit, preaches a bold and convicting message about the history of the Jewish people and the coming of the Messiah, and it stirs up the opposition so much that before you know it, persecution breaks out against the church, and the believers are forced to scatter - The church is moved.

Who was responsible? Who moved the church?

Stephen who stood up for the truth?

The High Priest and the Sanhedrin who couldn't bear the truth?

No! God moved His church!

Remember the Lord's instructions in Acts chapter 1? *"You will receive power when the Holy spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."*

You know what I find so fascinating and so promising about these 8 verses in Acts chapter 8? It begins with persecution and ends with joy.

*vs. 1* "On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem and all except for the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria" ...

*vs. 8* "So there was great joy in that city."

Wow! What would we give right now to have great joy in our cities?

And more importantly, what happened to change the tide so dramatically?

The answer is simple because the Bible clearly explains:

"Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed Christ there."

Did you hear that? Samaria – a place where if there was any people who felt like they weren't given a fair shake at life, Samaria is it! A people and a place where everything and everyone was viewed as second class! A place where the Jewish people avoided because of the social stigma and rampant racism, the cultural taboo.

But great joy came to them because God moved the church there! More than that He made a church there because people heard the word of God and received it with joy and were saved! They witnessed miraculous signs, the casting out of evil spirits and the healing of paralytics.

The Samaritans witnessed God moving. The Samaritans saw God's church moving in love and faith and compassion. And they believed!

But what did they believe in? This is a very important question. It's one that each of us need to ask, "Do we believe this?" and it's this ...

That God has not abandoned us. God has not forsaken us or decided that we're a lost cause. On the contrary, God made us and loves us and has a beautiful plan for us that includes the great and awesome truth no matter how far we ~~got like me~~ strayed and wandered from Him, he waits for us with open arms and calls us back.

The great and wonderful truth is that God's Son Jesus came to earth to restore our lives, to forgive us of our sins so that we can have a new and living hope with ~~God,~~ <sup>Him</sup> completely restored.

And that the outflow and overflow of this is that our broken relationships with our fellowman can also be restored. And when we realize this and accept God's love and forgiveness, we then also can forgive each other which will cause us to overflow with joy. "So there was great joy in that city."

God, help us make it so. Move your church for your glory. Amen.

*And move me, by your Holy Spirit to Love you and my Neighbor Supernaturally!*