

*Missio Dei Fellowship exists to glorify God by delighting in Him and making Him known through the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

## *The Gospel Advances*

### **Acts 8:1-4**

**Keywords:** Acts 8, Suffering, Persecution, Spread of Gospel, Evangelism, Proclamation

**PowerPoint Presentation included:** none

**SermonAudio Blurb:** Persecution at times is isolated but often it begins with a flashpoint and then spreads through mob rule. This is what our passage before us describes. The death of Stephen is the beginning of intense persecution for the Church in Jerusalem. But that is not the real story. The real story is that as the people fled this persecution, they fled with the gospel on their lips. This passage shows us that the way the gospel truly advances is not through gimmicks or power-events but through faithful men and women who believe that the gospel is the only means of salvation and life and they therefore say that to those they evangelize.

#### **I. Introduction.**

- A. Read 8:1-4.
- B. We left off in Acts 7 with an extended examination of the martyrdom of Stephen and then a theology of martyrdom.
  - 1. When you read of Stephen's death you can come to a conclusion that what you have is a life that never reached its potential. A wasted life.
  - 2. But in reality you have a well-lived life for it is a life lived to the glory and service of God and for the proclamation of the gospel.
- C. We now have a short passage that serves as a transition by the writer, Luke.
  - 1. It is typical of how he writes and is helpful when you are trying to outline and get a feel for the ebb and flow of the book of Acts.
  - 2. We have here and in 7:58 our introduction to a man named Saul. This is typical of Luke to introduce someone and then come back to him shortly afterward and build more.
    - a. Stephen was introduced in passing in Acts 6 but then after other events were described, chapter 7 focuses back on him. Saul is introduced here but will be more intensely described starting in chapter 9.
    - b. Interestingly, Philip is one like Stephen. He too is mentioned in passing in Acts 6, right after Stephen. And if you note in vs 5-13 he is the one Luke develops more fully.

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- c. Never forget that the book of Acts is a book filled with transitions. And that is what we are dealing with here and this transition will extend up through chapter 15.
- 3. Note, however, vs 4 because it is central to the point of this transition.
  - a. Yes, we see the introduction of Saul, soon to become Paul.
  - b. Yes, we see persecution spread to the Church.
  - c. Yes, we even see many of them fleeing from that persecution.
  - d. But these are not the primary point. The word of Jesus Christ in the hearts of these Christians and on their lips is the point.
- D. This leads me to give some initial observations before looking more closely to our passage.

## **II. The Gospel Advances.**

- A. Today in our nation we see a level of ignorance regarding the gospel and the Christian faith.
- B. What is the Christian faith? And what is a Christian church?
  - 1. Go home today and talk about this with your family. Ask your kids what and how they would answer these two questions. Don't let it be a simple question or two, probe and ask them why and what evidence would they give and how it looks and what is right or wrong about the Christian faith and church.
  - 2. When you begin to answer these two questions you are confronted with one of two options: either the Christian faith and church is one of many options (one among equals) or they are the only option that matters.
- C. Causes of ignorance of the faith and the Church—I would suggest two:
  - 1. First, we approach it like it is of personal interest.

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2. Second, we see the Christian faith and the church as merely points of information among much information.

D. In our passage we see the intensity of the hate for the gospel and its effects.

1. In vs 1 describes how Stephen's murder becomes a flashpoint for more violence
2. The results of this persecution is seen the second half of 8:1.
  - a. The Christian began to scatter outward into the surrounding areas. Even then it was not safe as Saul, according to his own testimony, would pursue them into these areas.
  - b. But notice who did not flee, the apostles.

E. Whether people stayed or fled is not really important. What they all went with was the Word of God on their lips (4).

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1. But not only did they bring their beliefs with them but the Church went with them.
2. This verse is at the core of what we mean here at Missio Dei as being “missional.”

## III. Conclusion.

- A. Persecution arose because of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Embrace that reality and expect it.
- B. But persecution could not silence the gospel of Jesus Christ.
  1. Instead it caused the people to spread out even further with this message of life and forgiveness.
  2. And the reason is that they were not Christians in name only, but in reality. And the proof of it was that they spoke the gospel wherever they went.
- C. The challenge each of us have is that if we are silent in the good times and peaceful times, why do we think we will be faithful in the midst of persecution?
  1. Do you see the Christian faith and the church as options among many? Or the only things that are true?
  2. Do you see the Christian faith and the church as existing to meet your needs or do you see them as life because this is where the Prince of life is found?
  3. To you sitting here with just waiting for the end of the sermon. Understand that there is nothing out there that is more true or can bring life. And you know this already because you see the lies and you live in your own lies.
    - a. You may think you know better and that for you it will all turn out ok. But that is just noise you make to keep truth from running you down.
    - b. The problem with truth is that nothing can make it stop being truth. Truth simply is. Scream at it, hate it, run from it, deride it all you want. In the end it is still truth.
    - c. Jesus said it simply, “I am the way, the truth and the life. No one sees the Father but through Me.”

## Benediction

**May you go in the love of the Father resting in the fulness of His grace. May you walk in hope through the rich calling in which you have in Jesus Christ our Lord. May your power**

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**not be found in you but through the presence of the Holy Spirit. And may we all continue to grow together in true unity.**