THE SCROLLS

The Gospel Goes Global: Every Road Leads to Mission | Acts 8:1-8

Life Lesson

The most profound lesson we can draw from the scattering of the Early Church is that God never wastes our pain, displacement, or trials; instead, He sovereignly repurposes them for His glory. When unexpected storms uproot your life, whether through a sudden job loss, a broken relationship, or a painful transition, it is deeply tempting to feel like a victim of random chaos or to believe God has forgotten you. The very disruptions we beg God to prevent are often the very means He uses to position us in our own "Samaria," calling us to bloom in the dark and bring the hope of the gospel to people and places we would never have chosen to go on our own.

Examine Scripture

Read Acts 8:1-8

As you read Scripture, slow down and ask these three questions to move from information to transformation:

1. What does this passage reveal about who God is?

2. How is God calling you to grow or change?

3. What is God leading you to do or who is He calling you to be in your everyday life?

Scattered But Not Silenced

When we read the book of Acts, we often look for the blueprints of revival. In fact, Acts 1:8 is often quoted to express church growth and evangelism: "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." This verse outlines the Book of Acts. It begins in Jerusalem, spreads to Judea, then to Samaria, and finally to the ends of the earth, which at the time meant Rome (since Rome was the center of the world and its road system reached the known world). We want the roaring wind of Pentecost, the foundations shaking, and thousands added to the church in a single day. But God's blueprints for kingdom expansion frequently include materials we would never choose to build with: heartbreak, opposition, and severe suffering.

Blood on the stones. Dust in the air. Agonized weeping echoing through the streets. If you had stood in Jerusalem on the day Stephen was martyred, you would have concluded that the Jesus "rebellion" was over. The grand, miraculous experiment of Pentecost seemed to be rapidly crumbling under the heavy, violent boot of a zealous Pharisee named Saul. The believers were terrified, frantically packing what they could carry, and fleeing into the wilderness for their lives. By all earthly metrics, it looked like an absolute defeat.

But the kingdom of God operates on a radically different economy than the kingdoms of men. What the empire of darkness calculates as extermination, the sovereign God masterfully orchestrates as expansion. The enemies of the cross thought they were sweeping away the nuisance of the Early Church, but they missed one crucial theological reality: they thought they were blowing out a candle, but they were blowing on a dandelion. The wind of their rage simply scattered the Gospel's seed.

In Acts 8:1-8, we witness one of Scripture's most profound paradoxes. We see a church in the crucible, discovering that God's greatest breakthroughs often come wrapped in our deepest heartbreak. We discover that when God's people are forcibly pushed out of their comfortable, holy huddles, the grace of Christ breaks

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through unimaginable borders. Though violently scattered, the Church resolutely refused to be silenced.

"Saul agreed with putting him to death. On that day a severe persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout the land of Judea and Samaria." (v. 1)

The chapter opens under a dark and ominous cloud. Saul of Tarsus stands over Stephen's broken body, giving his nod of approval. This single event strikes the match that sets the entire church on fire, not with the joyful flames of the Holy Spirit, but with the terrifying flames of "severe persecution."

First, we know the end of Saul's story: he becomes Paul, the greatest missionary and church planter, and, through the Holy Spirit, writes much of the New Testament. But in this moment, he is the primary witness to Stephen's execution: "Saul agreed with putting him to death" (v. 1). For a moment, this event fueled Saul's hatred for this new religion, which he saw as a heresy. It led him to begin persecuting the Church, murdering believers in hopes of extinguishing the flame. However, what was believed would scatter the Church only helped it grow.

Notice the phrase "were scattered." The Greek word Luke uses here is "diaspeirō." This is where we get the word "diaspora," but its root meaning is profoundly agricultural. It means "to scatter seed." James uses this same word in James 1:1: "James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ: To the twelve tribes dispersed abroad." The enemy thought he was destroying the church, burying it in the dirt of persecution. But he did not realize he was dealing with seeds.

Notice how the Church was scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. Again, this fulfilled Acts 1:8. The actions of Saul and the other persecutors, used by Satan in an attempt to destroy the Church, were actually used by God to fulfill the words of Jesus. The Church was forcibly expelled from its comfortable holy huddle in Jerusalem. Persecution blew the seeds of the Gospel into the Gentile world.

"Devout men buried Stephen and mourned deeply over him. Saul, however, was ravaging the church. He would enter house after house, drag off men and women, and put them in prison." (vs. 2-3)

These two verses give us a gritty, realistic view of the Christian life. Sometimes, in our rush to see the gospel's spread, we overlook the tears. Devout men wept over Stephen's death. Clearly, both his death and his life greatly influenced them. The Greek word for "mourned deeply" (kopetos) implies beating the breast in loud,

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agonizing wailing. It is not a quiet, subtle time of sadness. It is a deep, agonizing pain that results in visible, physical expressions of emotion.

God does not ask us to ignore our pain. Mourning is a deeply biblical response to this world's brokenness. You can be filled with the Holy Spirit and still weep bitterly during life's most difficult moments. Faith does not cancel out our humanity; it redeems it. In fact, God can use our darkest moments and deepest mourning to reveal the glory of the Gospel.

Meanwhile, the threat to the Early Church escalates: "Saul, however, was ravaging the church." The Greek word for "ravaging" (lymainomai) is a violent term. In ancient literature, it describes a wild boar uprooting a vineyard or a wild beast tearing at raw flesh. Saul was not merely arresting people; he was terrorizing them, tearing families apart, and dragging off men and women alike. Imagine the most effective soulwinner for the sake of Christ, then think of the opposite.

In fact, the Puritan pastor John Flavel wrote, "The providence of God is like Hebrew words—it can only be read backward." At the time, this seemed the absolute end of the Early Church. Yet God was preparing a beautiful paradox: the church's greatest persecutor (Saul) was about to become its greatest theologian and missionary (Paul).

"So those who were scattered went on their way preaching the word." (v. 4)

This is the hinge upon which the entire history of the Church turns. This is the moment the Church truly went global, from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. Look at the word "So." It is pivotal. Luke is demonstrating the choice these believers made. They could have chosen to scatter and remain hidden. However, they made an intentional choice. Though they were scattered, they would not be silenced. They "went on their way preaching the word" (v. 4).

But who was doing the preaching? Verse 1 tells us that "all except the apostles were scattered." Do not miss this vital detail. The apostles, the prominent leaders, the platform speakers, the ones with the theological pedigree, stayed behind in Jerusalem. The scattered people who preached the word were ordinary, everyday believers. They were merchants, mothers, tradesmen, and teenagers.

The Greek word for "preaching" here is not "kerysso" (the formal heraldic proclamation usually made by an official). It is "euangelizomai," which simply means "to announce good news." They were sharing the good news of Jesus over fences, in marketplaces, and along refugee trails. Despite persecution, they kept preaching! Charles Spurgeon, preaching on this very text, noted that the devil,

Personal Reflection

1. When the "severe winds" of hardship, career changes, or unexpected transitions blow through my life, do I default to feeling abandoned, or can I trust that my sovereign God is sowing me as a seed for His purposes?

2. Am I waiting for a pastor or "professional" to do the work of ministry, or do I see my neighborhood, workplace, and family as my God-ordained mission field?

3. Where is my "Samaria," and who are my Samaritans? What personal prejudices, comfort zones, or deep-seated bitterness is the Holy Spirit asking me to lay down for the sake of the Great Commission?

4. Do I try to ignore my pain and discomfort with false positivity, or do I bring my raw sorrow to the Lord, trusting that genuine grief and unshakable faith can catalyze sharing the Gospel?

5. The Early Church turned the world upside down because ordinary members saw themselves as full-time missionaries. Do you see yourself that way?

Commentaries

ESV Expository Commentary: John-Acts (Volume 9) by Iain M. Duguid, James M. Hamilton Jr., and Jay Sklar

Expositor's Bible Commentary (Abridged Edition): New Testament Edited by Kenneth Barker

Acts by John MacArthur

Mt. Zion's Mission

*Mt. Zion Baptist Church exists to **MAKE**, **MATURE**, and **MULTIPLY** disciples of Jesus Christ.*

by persecuting the church, acted like a man trying to put out a fire by kicking it; he only scattered the burning coals everywhere, starting a thousand new fires.

"Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Messiah to them. The crowds were all paying attention to what Philip said, as they listened and saw the signs he was performing. For unclean spirits, crying out with a loud voice, came out of many who were possessed, and many who were paralyzed and lame were healed. So there was great joy in that city." (vs. 5-8)

One of those ordinary believers was a man named Philip, who served as a deacon in Acts 6. Philip flees Jerusalem and ends up in "a city in Samaria." This holds significant theological weight. For centuries, Jews and Samaritans despised one another. The animosity was deeply racial, religious, and cultural. A proper, law-abiding Jew would never set foot in Samaria. But persecution burns away our petty prejudices. Philip does not go to Samaria with an air of superiority; he goes with intention and "proclaimed the Messiah to them" (v. 5).

The results are astounding. When the Word is preached, the Holy Spirit moves powerfully. Philip performs signs: demons flee with loud shrieks, and the paralyzed and the lame are miraculously restored. The light of Christ drives back the kingdom of darkness. And what is the ultimate result? Verse 8 offers a beautiful contrast to the deep mourning of verse 2: "So there was great joy in that city."

The Early Church father Tertullian famously declared, "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church." Saul and the religious elite believed they were digging Christianity's grave, but in the sovereign providence of God, they were simply tilling the soil. They were making way for the unstoppable seed of the gospel to take root in the most unlikely places, turning generations of bitter enemies in Samaria into eternally adopted siblings in Christ.

We serve a Savior who was crushed under God's wrath, buried in a borrowed tomb, yet burst forth in resurrection life, turning the ultimate tragedy into our eternal triumph. Because of Him, we can face the darkest days with unshakable confidence. The enemy may roar. The culture may push back. The darkness may seem overwhelming. Yet the kingdom of God will continue to advance with force. For we are the people of the risen Christ. We may be scattered, but we will never be silenced.