

Acts 8:1-8

D1 1-3

Saul begins to persecute and imprison church leaders, scattering them throughout Judea and Samaria

D2 4-8

Philip proclaims Christ to an attentive Samaritan city and they rejoice

Subject Sentence

Saul's persecution leads to Christ's proclamation throughout Judea and Samaria

Aim

Cause the audience to learn that persecution may scatter the church but faithful believers who continue to proclaim Christ will produce new believers.

Transition: Last week we saw the stoning to death of Stephen. Stephen gave an excellent summary of the role of the Jewish nation as God's chosen people. It was the Jewish people who were to be used to bring the fallen world back to God through their relationship with God and the special revelation that was given to them. This special relationship was to culminate with the presentation of the Messiah, Jesus the Christ. However, like they had done many times before they rejected the message and messenger of God and they had Jesus murdered, cementing their rejection God's plan and ushered in a new era for the Church, an era of persecution.

Prayer

Slide1 Saul's persecution scatters the church

Read verse 1

Who was this Saul? We have enough from Scripture to paint a pretty clear picture of who he was. We know his birth place was Tarsus of Cilicia. He was the son of a Pharisee. He was a Roman citizen. Acts 22:3 tells us he was educated by Gamaliel in Jerusalem. Saul would have been in a group of Jewish children being train in leadership and in the Law of God, but Saul set himself

apart. He was a devoted Pharisee as he matured. He was a Hebrew among Hebrew's. He was to be admired for his faith and his actions and adherence to the Law. When we use the Law as our measuring stick, Saul was blameless. If we placed a caption by his picture in the Pharisee year book everyone would have agreed he was the most promising next great Jewish leader and man of faith. His zeal for the Law made him the most committed to the persecution of the church. It was this passion that allowed him to attack the church and its people with a clear conscience. He was doing this for God! Or at least he thought.

Here in verse one we see Saul's approval of the execution of Stephen and the length he will go to stop the growing movement of believers. Saul is perfectly comfortable imprisoning, torturing and putting people to death if they do not renounce their belief in Jesus. But God has different plans. Many times is scripture what man means for harm or evil God uses for good and we see it here, almost as a side note, "they were scattered". The word for scattered is one comes from the sowing of seeds. Jesus had called them to be His witness' in Judea and Samaria, to plant the seeds of His word and Saul put the Lord's plan into action. You can't make this stuff up. The intent from Saul was to destroy and stop the movement and at some level his is the number one reason it spread at the time it did.

Verse 2 read

Just as Joseph of Arimathea took the proper steps to bury Jesus, we are told devout men buried Stephan and mourn deeply the death of a righteous man.

Verse 3 read

In biblical studies you look for transition words and “but” is such a word. While devout men, men who have not only God’s word in their hearts but are full of the spirit of God, care deeply for a devout friend Saul carries on his attack on the church. The term “ravaging” is one that is used to describe a wild boar as he destroys a vineyard. Saul attacks the church, one house at a time ripping people, men and women from their homes and placing them in prison. Saul has the backing and authority to do this from the Jewish leadership as a whole. He has the green light to imprison, beat and even put to death anyone who will not renounce their faith.

I had hope to pull off a skit where I would have one or two of you hauled out of here...our security leader Steve Lyons didn’t think it was such a good look for our security team so I pulled the idea. But can we even imagine what that would have been like? We have enjoyed significant protections and freedoms for nearly 250 years here in the United States. I cannot even imagine some authority

coming in and taking me away for teaching Gods word here today. They can in other places and face it regularly.

In china a pastor protested the removal of the cross from his church and was charged with crimes against the state and imprisoned for 5 years. Another pastor faced up to 15 years for calling on the government of China to uphold stances on religious freedoms. Members of his church had their houses raided, were arrested and place in custody, nearly 150 of them. Once released many of them were banned from their home towns, lost their jobs and were evicted from their homes. This was a very limited search folks.

But you might say that's China...

Alberta Canada, pastor was jailed for a month for not complying with the Covid orders. In his statement before the court he said this, "I'm simply here in obedience to Christ that has put me at odds with the law.

But that's Canada...

A pastor in San Jose California was fined one million dollars for holding indoor services during the pandemic in violation of the state and county health codes. In Thousand Oaks California a temporary restraining order was place on a church and it could only hold out door services. John MacArthur was sued by Los Angeles County for holding in person, indoor worship.

Now please understand I am not here to make a statement about Covid and its impact on the world. What I am forced to reflect on is the biblical stance of letting nothing keep me from my relationship with God, to not forsake the gathering of believers, and the biblical position of obedience to authorities that are placed there by God. My point is this. We are not somehow separated from or immune to having our freedoms and liberties to worship God taken from us as we might have once thought. We cannot think it only happens in some other place in the world.

Application: Be prepared for persecution, don't let it surprise you.

## Division 2

### Slide Philip proclaims Christ to a Samaritan City

Verse 4 and 5 read

As persecution, of the church in Jerusalem developed, the disciples scattered throughout the neighboring regions. As they did this they continued to preach the word, the good news about Jesus Christ is in view here as the brought the word of God to those outside of Jerusalem.

Philip is our highlighted evangelist in this section. We first met him in chapter 6. He is one of the chosen men to bring unity and direction to the conflict that developed over food service between the non-Hellenistic Jews and the Hellenistic Jews. The apostles needed to keep their focus on the preaching of the word of God so they instructed the other disciples to choose seven men that where of good repute, full of the Spirt and of wisdom. Philip met that criterion.

Philip headed to Samaria to proclaim the Christ, the Messiah to them. We do not have a good idea of what city Philip went to and scripture may just be giving us a general region or area. The Samaritans were a mixture of Jew and Gentile as a result of the Assyrian captivity. As worshipers of God they built their own temple, had their own priesthood and opposed fraternization with the Jews. They believed in the authority of the Pentateuch, the first

five books of the Bible, and thus had many of the same beliefs as the Jews. One key one was they were looking for a personal Messiah and thought He would be like Moses. While this gives Philip a common belief to allow a connection to his audience we must not overlook that the disciples were prevented from going to this people group initially. Perhaps it is Philip's heritage, a Hellenistic Jew, that gave him a greater willingness to go to this mixed group a willingness that was not part of the character and outlook of the disciples initially. Philip went to the group that God was now calling or sending him to and he faithfully proclaimed the Christ, the Messiah to them.

Verse 6-8 read

These verses give us the details of this Samaritan expansion. We see crowds that paid attention to the words Philip spoke to them; they would have been crazy if they did not. The truth of Philip's words, were verified or authenticated with miraculous signs. Samaritans who were possessed by spirits were healed, the lame and paralyzed received the use of their limbs again or even for the first time. Philip had the right words and the power to match.



In preparation for this morning I kept coming back to 3 ideas or words in these final verses.

1) The first two fit together well and that is preaching of the Word and proclaiming the Christ. What did these mean? The literal translation here is to proclaim the good news. The Gospel is in full view here. Since the fall of man God has been working out the redemption of His creation, of man. Throughout the scriptures there are reference, predictions and prophecies about Jesus, the Messiah, the Christ. It is Good news that God has provided the way to Him. The penalty of sin has been paid and it was pain in full by His Son, Jesus Christ and He is available to all who believe.

2) Joy in the city. How is it that a whole city has joy? I just did not understand this. One answer is one that takes a different mindset than many of us have. We come here today with a basic understanding of the substitution of Jesus for ourselves. He took the penalty that we deserved. But can you imagine if you were a religious person and your belief system was one of doing enough work to be right before God. Did I do enough right things to outweigh my wrongs? What a burden! Philip now teaches them that the Messiah has come and offers the free gift of Grace to

those who believe in the work that Jesus did...that would be joyous, that would lift a crushing burden to someone who was honestly seeking to please God. But still I had the confusion about a city being Joy filled. So I turned to my nephew, who is a pastor and a bit of a Hebrew Scholar. My idea of a city was one of current times. Millions in the greater Tucson area. Jeff, my nephew, told me the cities at this time would have been much smaller. They would have been made up of 40-70 family units (Honduras). So most cities would have been a 1000 people or so and many even smaller. So you can see how the word of God could change a city and do so easily.

Application: God's truth spreads when we are faithful to the truth and committed to His plan.