

Persecution Spreads the Gospel

Acts 8

Don Ruhl • Savage Street, Grants Pass, Oregon • March 12, In the year of our Lord, 2017

Scripture Reader and Reading: Billy Henshall – Acts 8.4–5

Song Leader and Song Suggestions: Phil Joseph – Songs to be strong and faithful

Prelude:

- I. The Jewish leaders and their followers
 - A. intensified their persecution against the preachers of Jesus of Nazareth.
 - B. That made people fearful of joining the church, but
 1. it also made people respect the church.
 2. Acts 5.13 had said,

Yet none of the rest dared join them, but the people esteemed them highly (Acts 5.13).
- II. However, things changed dramatically.
 - A. The people no longer esteemed the church highly, but
 - B. led by a zealous young man,
 1. the Jews began to persecute the church heavily,
 2. although doing so only made church spread out and preach elsewhere.
- III. The enemies of the church would find out that,

“We are not a new philosophy but a divine revelation. That’s why you can’t just exterminate us; the more you kill the more we are. The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church” (Tertullian, AD 197).

Persuasion:

- I. Acts 8.1 | Widespread Persecution

1 Now Saul was consenting to his death. At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.

A. Acts 7 shows us that more than just the apostles preached the Gospel.

B. Tertullian knew Acts 8.1 and

1. Tertullian saw its truth.

2. First, the Jews tried to persecute the church out of existence.

a) When that failed,

b) the devil used the Roman Empire, and

(1) Tertullian saw that regardless of the endless blood spilled,

(2) the church spread throughout the Empire,

(a) not only because of missionary work, but

(b) sometimes the persecution forced the church into other areas.

II. Acts 8.2 | The Burial of Stephen

2 And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him.

A. Some Christians saw that you should not weep when a Christian dies, but

1. the early church wept for Stephen.

2. I can see why they did.

a) Bold, capable speakers like him do not come along everyday.

b) First, Stephen took care of the church,

(1) as one of the seven appointed to do so (Acts 6), but then

(2) he took care of the word and announced it to the church enemies.

B. May the Lord give us more men like Stephen.

III. Acts 8.3 | Home Invasions

3 As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison.

A. Saul, with the full authority of the Jewish Council,

B. stepped opposition to the church.

1. First, the Council killed Jesus.
2. Then it arrested His preaching disciples.
3. They killed one from the church who denounced their sin.

C. Saul must have been a dream come true for the Council.

1. He did not wait for disciples of Christ to make themselves known publicly,
2. he found out where they lived, and
 - a) made home invasions, and
 - b) when he found disciples of Christ,
 - (1) Saul drug them,
 - (2) whether men or women,
 - (a) to prison.
 - (b) That went on for the present in Jerusalem.

IV. Acts 8.4 | Others Preach

4 Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word.

A. The preachers remained in Jerusalem, but

B. the persecuted members of church

1. preached wherever they went,
2. looking for new homes.

C. How often do you see

1. the preachers staying at home, and
2. the members going on mission trips?

V. Acts 8.5–13 | A New Preaching Deacon

5 Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them. 6 And the multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. 7 For unclean spirits, crying with a

loud voice, came out of many who were possessed; and many who were paralyzed and lame were healed. 8 And there was great joy in that city. 9 But there was a certain man called Simon, who previously practiced sorcery in the city and astonished the people of Samaria, claiming that he was someone great, 10 to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, "This man is the great power of God." 11 And they heeded him because he had astonished them with his sorceries for a long time. 12 But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized. 13 Then Simon himself also believed; and when he was baptized he continued with Philip, and was amazed, seeing the miracles and signs which were done.

A. Here Luke focused on the next deacon.

1. Luke listed Stephen first.
2. And Philip was second.

B. The ministry of Jesus included Samaria.

1. Therefore, the town was ripe for a Philip to come to town.
2. The people watched Philip do miracles,
 - a) just as Jesus had done,
 - b) including casting out demons out of people, and
 - c) healing the paralyzed and the lame.
 - (1) When they saw Philip doing those things,
 - (2) they wanted to listen to whatever he had to say.

C. Receiving healing for the body,

1. they were ready to receive healing for the spirit.
2. No wonder Luke says the city had great joy.

D. There had even been a man there named Simon,

1. who amazed people with their sorcery, and
2. all the Samaritans had claimed that Simon was the great power of God.

E. However, when Philip arrived in town

1. with real miracles,
2. the people knew that he had the real deal.
 - a) Therefore, they believed what he said about
 - (1) the Kingdom of God and
 - (2) the name of Jesus Christ, and
 - b) that led them to baptism,
 - (1) which is the way to have part
 - (2) in the kingdom and in Jesus.

F. Simon knew he was fake.

1. Therefore, he knew that Philip performed genuine miracles.
2. Simon also believed then and submitted to baptism.

VI. Acts 8.14–17 | The Holy Spirit from the Apostles

14 Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them, 15 who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. 16 For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. 17 Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

A. The church was still in its beginning stages, and

1. the New Testament had not yet been written.
2. They needed something extra to establish them.

B. Therefore, the apostles in Jerusalem sent the great team of Peter and John

1. to pray for the Samaritans to receive the Holy Spirit, and
2. to lay their hands on the Samaritans that they might receive the Spirit.
 - a) They had received the indwelling of the Spirit, but
 - b) they did not have the ability to work miracles,
 - (1) something that they would need

(2) as they helped the church to get established.

VII. Acts 8.18–24 | Simony

18 And when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money, 19 saying, "Give me this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit." 20 But Peter said to him, "Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money! 21 You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God. 22 Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you. 23 For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity." 24 Then Simon answered and said, "Pray to the Lord for me, that none of the things which you have spoken may come upon me."

A. Simon again knew that what he had done was fake, but

1. he knew that Philip, and Peter and John did genuine miracles.
2. However, what he noticed with the two apostles,
 - a) was that when they laid hands on people,
 - b) they received the ability to work miracles.

B. Simon had made a lot of money with his sorcery,

1. so he offered Peter and John money
2. that he might have the ability that they had.
 - a) Thus, was born the sin of simony.
 - b) That is not a problem now, because
 - (1) holding a leadership position in the church is not that esteemed.
 - (2) However, in later centuries it would be, and
 - (a) men sought position
 - (b) by paying for it.

C. Peter rebuked Simon severely, for

1. his heart was not right in the sight of God.

D. When Simon asked for Peter's prayers,

1. he did what we do for the invitation.

VIII. Acts 8.25 | The Apostles Preach Some More

25 So when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans.

IX. Acts 8.26–39 | The Conversion of a Government Official

26 Now an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, saying, “Arise and go toward the south along the road which goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” This is desert. 27 So he arose and went. And behold, a man of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under Candace the queen of the Ethiopians, who had charge of all her treasury, and had come to Jerusalem to worship, 28 was returning. And sitting in his chariot, he was reading Isaiah the prophet. 29 Then the Spirit said to Philip, “Go near and overtake this chariot.” 30 So Philip ran to him, and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, “Do you understand what you are reading?” 31 And he said, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” And he asked Philip to come up and sit with him. 32 The place in the Scripture which he read was this:

“He was led as a sheep to the slaughter;
And as a lamb before its shearer is silent,
So He opened not His mouth.

33 In His humiliation His justice was taken away,
And who will declare His generation?
For His life is taken from the earth.”

34 So the eunuch answered Philip and said, “I ask you, of whom does the prophet say this, of himself or of some other man?” 35 Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him. 36 Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, “See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?” 37 Then Philip said, “If you believe with all your heart, you may.” And he answered and said, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.” 38 So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him. 39 Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing.

X.

40 But Philip was found at Azotus. And passing through, he preached in all the cities till he came to Caesarea.

Exhortation:

I. First Point