

Acts 8:1-8 “Rejection in One City Leads to Rejoicing in Another”

So far in Acts we’ve tremendous growth.

We’ve also seen great persecution. Warnings, prison & beatings, Stephen’s stoning.

Stephen’s death becomes a catalyst to a whole new season of persecution.

- Persecution now includes the whole church
- Persecution now leads to the Gospel being shared outside of Jerusalem

I. Rejection in Jerusalem Vs. 1-3

Vs. 1a *“Saul was in hearty agreement with putting him to death”*

- **7:58** they laid aside their robes at the feet of a young man named Saul.
- Some commentaries suggest Saul was responsible for calling out the charges
- **22:20** Paul tells us *“I was standing in approval, and even guarding the cloaks of stoners”*
- **26:10** *“I cast my vote against those who were being put to death”*
- Paul also tells us later that he was given **authority** to persecute Christians.
- Another commentary suggests Paul made a conscious decision to separate himself from the general disposition of his teacher Gamaliel.
 - We learned earlier that Gamaliel was not quite as harsh toward this new movement
 - He suggested that the Sanhedrin wait to see what would happen with this movement
 - He also warned that the Sanhedrin might find themselves going against God Himself.
- Luke seems to connect this new season of the church with the unique & specific zeal of Saul
 - Luke could have just mentioned that many Christians fled Jerusalem
 - Instead, he gives us a little insight about the specific activities of Saul.
 - This clearly marks a season for the church in the Book of Acts.

“Great Persecution Arose”

Vs. 1b *“And on that day a great persecution arose against the church in Jerusalem and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea & Samaria.....”*

- Luke emphasizes that this persecution was **GREAT**.
- **Greek word is megas.** We might say that a **“Mega-persecution”** arose.
- We get a little more detail of this scattering **11:19**
 - Phoenicia, Cyprus, Antioch, & speaking to other Jews.

“All Were Scattered (Except Apostles)”

- Luke says they were ALL scattered except the apostles
- This could have been 8,000-10,000 Christians base on the numbers so far in Acts. Probably more.

Apostles May Have Remained for 2 Reasons

1. New believers could have been **“low hanging fruit”**

- **Vs. 3** *“going house to house persecuting.”*

2. Apostles were **not CALLED** to go out of Jerusalem yet.

- We’ll see next week that Peter & John were sent to Samaria to pray for new believers.
- He will also require us to sometimes wait until we have specific assignment or calling by Him.
- Remember how the Apostles found 7 worthy men to handle food.
 - The Apostles understood their first calling.

Devout Men (Mourned Stephen's Death & Buried him)

Vs. 2 *"And some devout men buried Stephen and made loud lamentation over him."*

- The law prescribed the duty of burying the bodies of executed persons, but discouraged public lamentation for them.
- So Stephen's memorial came from those who obviously disagreed with his execution.
- Luke refers to these men as "**devout**". Used 4 times in NT all by Luke.
- Typically Luke is referring to men of good reputation and dedication to God.
- These men obviously saw the corruption and egregious actions of the Sanhedrin.
- They were willing to go against the law since this was clearly an unjust stoning.

By Contrast Saul Was in Hearty Agreement, & Began Ravaging the Church

Vs. 3 *"But Saul began ravaging the church, entering house after house; and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison."*

- This represents a whole new level and dynamic of persecution.
- Previously we've seen the apostles preaching in public forums, Solomon's colonnade, the temple, the courts. They have been arrested, detained, imprisoned publicly.
- Then we see a capital punishment by the Sanhedrin
- Now we see Saul going to private homes and dragging Christians out of their homes.

Luke Bookends His Text on Scattering w/ 2 Details About Saul

- 1. Vs. 1 Saul was in hearty agreement with Stephen's death**
- 2. Vs. 3 Even though devout men mourned Stephen, Saul ravaged the church.**

- Paul referred to himself **Galatians 1:13-14** as a persecutor and one who was advancing in Judaism.
- Notice that Paul's huge concern w/ Christianity was breaking the traditions of Judaism.
- Ironically Saul was supposed to be a devout man of God.
- Saul should have recognized Jesus as the fulfillment of the long awaited promised Messiah.
- Saul's outright rejection of Christianity parallels Jerusalem's rejection.
- Ultimately, rejection of Jesus becomes a form of judgement for everyone.
- Jesus spoke in parables as a form of judgment on those who had already hardened their hearts.

Sometimes We're Continually Called to Those Who Outright Reject Jesus. Sometimes Not

II. Rejoicing in Samaria Vs. 4-8

Vs. 4 *"Therefor those who had been scattered went about preaching the word."*

- I love that this is partly chicken or the egg situation. Which came first?
- They were scattered for preaching and when scattered they were preaching.
- Luke's obvious point here is that those who were being scattered to regions beyond Jerusalem and the surrounding villages were now taking the Gospel to those areas.
- More literal translation for preaching is **"bringing good tidings of the word"**
- Gospel literally means **"good news"** and this is what was being shared.
- **Acts 5:20** Angel instructed Peter & John to preach this message of *"Life"*

Luke Gives Details About Phillip in Samaria

Vs. 5-6 *"And Philip went down to the city of Samaria and began proclaiming Christ to them. And the multitudes with one accord were giving attention to what was said by Philip, as they heard and saw the signs which he was performing."*

Philip: Not the apostle Philip, but Philip from Acts 6.

Philip had shown himself **worthy** of the task to handle dispensation of food.

He was also extremely **capable of preaching** God's Word.

Acts 21:8 *"Phillip the evangelist"*

The same should be true of the offices in the church today.

While there are various skills, giftings, and callings, everyone is called to share the Good News.

Phillip's Ministry Looked a Lot Like What Apostles Prayed For in Acts 4

- **Acts 4:30** *"Give us confidence to speak boldly as you continue to do miracles through us."*
- As Philip is sharing the Gospel, God is validating the message with supernatural healing.

Jesus Had Previously Planted A Seed in Samaria

- **Read John 4:28-42**
- Isn't this a stark contrast to the verses above regarding Jerusalem?
 - A GREAT persecution arose against the church, but in Samaria the multitudes came out with one accord listening intently to what Philip had to say.

Consideration: Often times God has planted a seed or primed an audience before we have arrived, and we simply need to speak as He leads us.

In Jerusalem Believers Being Put Into Prison - Samaria Believers Are Freed from Bondage

Vs. 7 *".....many who had unclean spirits were coming out of them and shouting with a loud voice, and many who had been paralyzed and lame were healed."*

- Look at the contrast to **Vs. 3**
 - Believers are being put into prison and made captive in and near Jerusalem
 - Believers are being freed from demonic influence, and healed from being lame.
- A pharisee of pharisees who was steeped in the oracles of God and a keeper of God's Law which foreshadowed the Messiah was ignorant to the Gospel.
- An average Jew named Phillip became a gifted evangelist and healer through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Vs. 8 *"And there was much rejoicing in that city."*

Conclusion:

1. Notice that While the Gospel Was Being Persecuted and Hated in Jerusalem it was being proclaimed and embraced in Samaria.

- Do we sometimes miss how God is using closed doors in our own lives today?
- Do we sometimes get so inwardly focussed we fail to see what God is doing in another space.
- The exodus out of Jerusalem of 10,000 Christians or more must have been a huge event.
- It could have been extremely scary and maybe even depressing.
- But, we see that those who were scattered didn't appear to wallow in their conditions, but went out preaching the Word.
- Look at what we might miss if we're too focussed on our own persecution.

2. Notice that God was permitting them to see the fruit of their efforts

- Multitudes with one accord were listening to Phillip
- They saw the signs he was performing
- Many who were sick and paralyzed were being healed.
- There was much rejoicing in that City.
- **Acts 8:12** we see that many were being saved.

3. A seed had already been sown in Samaria for the Gospel

- We don't always know the part God has us functioning in when we share the Gospel
- We may simply be sowers, we may be waterers, or we may be harvesters.
- In the end it is all God's design, but He desires to use us.
- We should desire to be used.

4. God Uses Everyone

- Phillip wasn't a trained pharisee steeped in the Law or a scholarly rabbi.
- Philip had simply shown himself to be reliable, of good reputation, and worthy.