

*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, Pt 2*

### **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. When we were last in our passage here in Acts I sought to provoke you into considering how you view the Christian faith and the Church.
- C. Today we return to the passage to see how and why the gospel advances in spite of great hate and persecution.

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

- A. Hate for the Gospel is the norm in this age in which we live.
  - 1. In our book the Church was born in Acts 2 and enjoyed favor with all the people early on. But then in chapters 3-4 we saw that the preaching of the gospel got the Apostles into trouble with the leaders, but the popularity that the church had at the moment restrained the leaders. In chapter 5 the Apostles were again jailed and threatened. This time they beat them as well and told them to stop preaching about Jesus. Now in chapters 7-8 there is open oppression and no one is stepping in to stop it.
  - 2. Vs 1 describes how Stephen's murder becomes a flashpoint for more violence
  - 3. The results of this persecution is seen the second half of 8:1.

# M i s s i o      D e i      F e l l o w s h i p

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

- 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.
- B. Whether people stayed or fled is not really important. What they all went with was the Word of God on their lips (4).
1. Satan and his people hate the truth. But they cannot silence truth. They can make your lips stop moving, they can harm your body. But they cannot make your mind stop knowing what is true.
  2. They were true believers who grasped that this whole thing was over what is true. In a world full of lies, they had the truth. And that changes everything.
  3. The whole of the Christian faith is based upon facts, historical facts. This is what Acts is all about. It is chronicling what was said and what happened and all of it is fact.
  4. But not only did they bring their beliefs with them but the Church went with them
  5. This verse is at the core of what we mean here at Missio Dei as being “missional.”
    - a. We go out wherever we are at and we bring the Word with us.

# M i s s i o      D e i      F e l l o w s h i p

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

- b. We do not merely believe it. We preach it. Notice the end of vs 4, “preaching” the Word. Present participle, meaning this was their habit. Is it your habit?
- C. The Gospel advances in both good and evil times.
  - 1. Paul, in his final letter before his martyrdom at the hands of the Roman government, commands Timothy to “Preach the Word.”
    - a. Such a simple command that requires no special skills to understand; and yet to this day we find people trying anything and everything other than the simple task of proclaiming, which is preaching, the Word.
    - b. In that passage (2 Timothy 4:2) he gives the two possible scenarios that Timothy, and you and I, might encounter in our life. And they sum up what all of us experience: in season or out of season. Another way of saying it is in the good times and the evil times.
    - c. Why? That is what our passage illustrates for us today. It shows us what these young Christians believed and were convinced of.
  - 2. The reason Paul gave that simple, single-minded command is that the Word of God is the only thing that can bring about a true change of heart and soul in the life of any person.
    - a. It is always easy to preach the Word in the good times. But in the hard times, the times of great spiritual deadness and coldness of hearts it becomes hard to preach it.
  - 3. However, though the Word is abandoned too quickly by too many the Word of God nonetheless moves forward.
    - a. Read in any century and there will always be those who take seriously what Paul said in Romans 1:16, “*For I am not ashamed*

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

*of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”*

- b. The book of Hebrews makes this point as well when it says, “*For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart*” (Hebrews 4:12).
  - c. The Word of God preached by the people of God is the only answer to the core problems of this age.
  - d. The number of times people thought that the idea of being convicted of something through the preaching of the Word of God was the same thing as actually repenting of something.
  - e. Our loyalty and love is always revealed in the middle of a battle, never in peace time. Show me the man or woman in the times of great difficulty and I will then show you what and in Whom they trust and follow.
4. Notice, however, how the early church functions in this passage before us (vs 3-4).
- a. The Church is no longer popular and therefore protected because of its popularity. Now, with the death of Stephen at the hands of the religious leaders, people step back from the Christians.
  - b. So men like Saul, full of rage and hate, are given a free hand to ravage the Church. This is a dark time and a time that would be frightening to anyone. And it is not surprising to see that the effect is that many fled to safer environs.
5. But it is vs 4 that is key to this whole thing. What did they take with them? What was the one non-negotiable that each of them kept close by? It was the Word of God.
- a. As they fled they did not hide the gospel. They preached it.
  - b. And through this time of evil, God means it for good. The gospel is advancing in the midst of evil.
6. Why?

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

- a. Because the gospel was most precious to those who fled. They took it with them. They shared it.
- b. It was the lost treasure and pearl of great price. What else could they do? For it held the way of life, even if it led through prison or death.

### **III. Conclusion.**

- A. Persecution arose because of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Embrace that reality and expect it. For in one way or another you will have to suffer it to some degree.
- 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."
- D. To you who stand away from Christ. To you raised to believe but you reject I ask you a simple question.

# M i s s i o      D e i      F e l l o w s h i p

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

1.      What is it that you believe and possess that is worthy to suffer and to die for?
2.      What pleasure or possession is so beautiful, so comforting and so life-changing that you cannot go anywhere without it? What do you know or possess that will never fail to bring you hope, joy, life and freedom?

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