

When Persecution is a Blessing – Acts 8:1-8

Vs. 1 - **“And Saul (a Jew) approved of his (Stephen’s) execution.”**

How could Saul & the people of God approve of such an evil act?

O come, O come Emmanuel and ransom the captive hearts of Israel!

Stephen was the 1st of many martyrs, & his death sparked a wildfire of persecution. And it was Saul who was fanning this flame!

Saul was far more than just a spectator giving his approval at Stephen’s execution - **“And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul.”** - Acts 7:58 Saul was the ringleader!

It gets worse in Ch. 8 - **“Saul was ravaging the church, & entering house after house, he dragged off men & women and committed them to prison.”** – Vs. 3

The persecution of Christians under Saul was now spreading beyond the apostles, to any man or woman who claimed to be a follower of Jesus!

Things were not looking good for this newly established church, but the more Saul tried to put an end to Christianity, the more it grew!

Why? Because God’s purposes cannot be thwarted! **Matt. 16:18**

Jesus had declared God’s purpose to the apostles (Acts 1:8), **“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, & you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem & in all Judea & Samaria & to the end of the earth.”**

This was God’s plan, and even now amidst the persecution, God was at work fulfilling His plan by creating **Movement, Momentum, & Multiplication!**

- The movement of the Holy Spirit was creating movement in His followers!

But His followers were still all in Jerusalem!

- The momentum generated by Jesus’ resurrection was creating momentum in the proclamation of the gospel!

But the message had not yet gone beyond the city!

- The multiplication of God’s people on the day of Pentecost was producing a multiplication effect at an exponential rate!

But those included in those number were only Jews!

This is where the persecution under Saul became a blessing - it produced a scattering of those who were followers of Jesus away from Jerusalem!

It forced them out, and look at what it produced - **“Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word.”** Vs. 4

The Greek word here for “scattered” implies being scattered for the purpose of planting! God was uprooting His people in order to plant them elsewhere! And He used Saul’s persecution to do it!

Sometimes when we don’t move when/where God calls us to, He will do whatever is necessary to get us to where He wants us to be! Examples

Where might God be calling you that you have been unwilling to go?

God will overcome your resistance at some point, no matter what it takes!

In planting them elsewhere it further fulfilled the purpose of God in Acts 1:8

It also provided the opportunity for the gospel to be preached by more than just the apostles! Vs. 1 tells us that the apostles stayed in Jerusalem!

“Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ.” – Vs. 5 Philip was a layman, one of the 7 selected to serve tables!

God’s intent for building His Church includes more than just the clergy representing Him & being His witnesses in this world. We are all called to proclaim Christ wherever He has planted us!

For Philip, God planted him in Samaria, enemy territory. God planted him there because God intended to save people in Samaria!

God may intend to save people at your work, school, on your team, etc. That is why He planted you there! *Are you being a Philip where God has you?*

Philip, unlike Saul, went and loved His enemies and shared Christ with them, and God blessed that – as a result, Vs. 8 **“there was much joy in that city!”**

God used Philip to take the good news of Christ beyond the walls of Jerusalem!

God also used Saul to do the same, through Saul’s hatred & desire to destroy!

God’s purpose of movement, momentum & multiplication for His Church will be fulfilled. The question is what role will you play in it? Be a Philip, not a Saul!

7-22-18 When Persecution is a Blessing – Acts 8:1-8

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