

Great Persecution

Acts 8:1-8

- Stephen has just been stoned for His proclamation of Christ
- We find a man named Saul approved of his execution
- He is the first martyr of the church
- And persecution of Christians in Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria would continue
- This is where we find ourselves in today's passage of scripture

- It is a passage that may start us thinking about how we would react in such circumstances
- Leaders in our church violently attacked
- Brothers and sisters under threat of prison - or worse
- Any and all believers in Christ targeted by authorities

- These are difficult, but quite common threats to God's people throughout history
- We can learn from their example in the eight verses we'll address today

- How exactly did they cope with "Great Persecution?"
- Which is our theme of the day from Acts 8:1-8

- The final scene in Acts 7 is Stephen's stoning
- We find one of the men responsible in the first verse of chapter eight
- Not long after the birth of Christ's church, His followers are under threat

- Let's read our entire passage of the day for context
- Then take a closer look at each verse...

Acts 8:1-8

1 And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles.

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

3 As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison.

4 Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word.

5 Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them.

6 And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did.

7 For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed.

8 And there was great joy in that city.

- Saul "made havock of the church"
- But the work of the church continued
- Preaching continued

- Christ's disciples carried out His will
- And cities experienced "great joy" thanks to the power of the Holy Spirit
- Let's take a look at each verse...

Acts 8:1

1 And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles.

- There is some important context about Saul here
- Which will help us have a proper view of him as the book continues
- He is neck-deep in the persecution at Jerusalem
- And will take the persecution on the road in coming days
- So, the disciples do as we might expect: they scatter
- And we assume they scatter out of fear and for safety at first glance
- But learn a few verses later they have other motivations too
- The story of Stephen carries on in the next verse...

Acts 8:2

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

- Men who had reverence for God buried Stephen
- They mourned greatly
- He was one of the church's first deacons
- A person of great integrity and full of the Holy Ghost
- And he died unjustly
- Only because he told the truth and made a stand for Christ
- But he angered those who hated Jesus
- Those who held to tradition above Bible truth
- And they killed him
- The hatred for Christ and His followers continued...

Acts 8:3

3 As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison.

- This phrase "he made havock" means to "treat shamefully or with injury, to ravage, devastate, ruin"
- He went from house to house

- Dragging out both men and women
- Throwing them into prison

- Keep in mind, this is not for any criminal activity
- But for what they believed
- For the Savior they embraced

- And again, we're told they scattered...

Acts 8:4

4 Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word.

- They didn't just scatter to find safety
- They didn't keep a low profile
- They didn't censor themselves

- Rather, they continued their great commission ministry
- Preaching in the name of Jesus
- The name that got them in trouble from whence they fled

- This is the life of a true disciple of Christ in times of persecution
- Escaping threat, not simply to preserve life, but to continue ministry

- Philip continued his ministry too...

Acts 8:5

5 Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them.

- He continued preaching Christ, despite the threat
- And many heard him and saw what God empowered him to do...

Acts 8:6-7

6 And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did.

7 For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed.

- Philip's words were given extra weight because of the miracles
- God prepared him to carry out these miracles at this time
- To reach those God intended for him to reach

- Many were delivered from demons
- And even more were healed from their diseases
- And their disabilities

- They gave heed to Philip's words
- God was blessing his ministry
- And the city of Samaria was altered for the better...

Acts 8:8

8 And there was great joy in that city.

- As with any people (any city) that embraces Christ
- Joy arrived immediately after
- He brings great joy

- In this passage we learn, among other things, that persecution is meant to stop the church
- But it often mobilizes the church and her people
- It moves us to new cities to proclaim His saving power and great grace

- That is certainly what happened in Acts 8
- And it made a monumental difference in lives

- We don't know what our future holds
- But we must commit to ongoing ministry
- No matter the obstacles

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