

Ministry of The Holy Spirit
Persecution and Preaching
Acts 8:1-8

Last time...Acts 7, a pivotal chapter in the history of the Church

Stephen, filled with the Holy Spirit,

- confronted evil men with the Sword of the Spirit, the Word of God
- shared a prophetic lesson on the history of Israel as it related to the Messiah
- twice echoed his Lord Jesus Christ
 - Receive my spirit
 - Lay not this sin to their charge
- was killed by those consumed with hatred and fear

Thus far in the Book of Acts, the witness of the Living God by Jesus Christ was continued by Spirit-filled Peter and John and then Spirit-filled Stephen

And the witness will be continued further and farther by a young man holding the cloaks of the evil men stoning Stephen

But in the meantime...

This time...Stephen's witness sparks a wave of persecution against the Church in Jerusalem
However, the persecution backfires

As in the days when David was establishing his kingdom, there were men that had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do (1 Chron 12:32), so must we be in these days before the King, the Son of David, establishes His kingdom
i.e. understand the times, to know what the Church ought to do

v1 Saul was consenting...great persecution...scattered:

The young man holding the stoners' cloaks, Saul of Tarsus, was gratified,
very pleased with, the killing of Stephen, an innocent man

And the prophetic words of Jesus come to life

John 16:1-3 These things have I spoken unto you, that ye should not be offended. They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service. And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor me

Saul is a murderer

Matt 5:21-22a Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment

Rom 1:29-32

Saul would later be inspired by the Holy Spirit to give testimony of his actions against the Body of Christ

Acts 26:9-11 I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against *them*. And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled *them* to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted *them* even unto strange cities
(while in prison)

1 Cor 15:9 For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God

Gal 1:13-14 For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it: And profited in the Jews' religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers

Phil 3:6 Concerning zeal, persecuting the church
(while in prison)

What was God's response to such murderous hatred?

Gal 1:15-16a But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called *me* by his grace, to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen

God's grace changes everything

But here in Acts 8, Stephen's witness to the religious establishment sent them over the edge

Acts 7:54, 57-59a

And now, in their minds, it is "Game on!"

No more "hands-off" and waiting (Acts 5:38)

Action: A great persecution against the Church in Jerusalem
Reaction: Christian missionaries go to Judea and Samaria...Step 2 of the Great Commission (Acts 1:8)

The prophetic Word in Mal 1:11 starts

For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same my name *shall be* great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense (prayer) *shall be* offered unto my name, and a pure offering: for my name *shall be* great among the heathen, saith the LORD of hosts.

The fuel used by God to move the Church: persecution by the world
As foretold by Jesus

Matt 10:23a *But when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another*

The apostles however, hold down the fort in Jerusalem

v2 devout men...great lamentation:

Men who were not afraid to stand up, to do the right thing, and to be counted with Stephen, retrieve and bury his body

The 1st Christian martyr is mourned

Even though Jesus

- received Stephen's spirit (Acts 7:59b-60)
- said *I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die* (John 11:25-26)
- said *Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life* (John 5:24)

the brethren mourned over the separation from Stephen by physical death

Michael and Cheryl LaBaw...their daughter
Rachelle Sheets...Jordan, her father, her mother
Ken Brenden, Carol, Cathy, Robyn...their brother

With the natural (lamentation/mourning of soul)
comes the supernatural (comfort of spirit from the God of all comfort)

v3 Saul...havock...haling:

Action: Saul, with great zeal but not according to knowledge, being ignorant of God's righteousness (Rom 10:2-3),

- made havock of the Church in Jerusalem...soiled, insulted, mistreated
- haling men and women...trailed followers of Jesus Christ into their homes and dragged them of to (Jewish) prison

The persecution is by the Jews (Religion),
not the Romans (Gov't),
not yet

How was faith in Jesus Christ rewarded on earth (in Jerusalem at this point)?

With harassment and prison sentences

Which demands we take a sober moment to consider our situation

If the brethren in Jerusalem could endure martyrdom and prison for their faith,
can we not endure wearing face masks?

Inseparable from this virus is confusion

So much is not known...or not told

So much information contradicts other information

Expert medical opinions vary widely once go beyond
common sense

- wash your hands
- don't touch your eyes or mouth
- "elbow" a cough or sneeze
- if you don't feel well, stay home

Clarity is NOT a part of coronavirus but confusion is...
including the effectiveness of face masks

I'm not sure what to believe

But I know Who to believe

I chose to believe God and His Word, for it is certain

Rom 13:1-5

1 Peter 2:13-16

Therefore, I wear a face mask when I'm out and about and so should all
the Church

The Gov't has not prohibited our preaching of the Gospel or our teaching
of Jesus Christ

The Gov't has not told us to deny/renounce Jesus Christ or face death

If the Gov't did command us to not preach and teach and deny,
we would defy the Gov't and obey Jesus Christ

Acts 4:19-20

Acts 5:29

The Church may be being hindered during this virus situation, but it is not
being persecuted

If for the name of Jesus Christ

- Stephen can lay down his life
- Brethren can be driven out of their homes into other places
- Brethren can be hunted and imprisoned

surely we can wear a face mask in public when social distancing cannot be
maintained

All we need is a touch of God upon our heart

Phil 2:14-15 Do all things without murmurings and disputings:
That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of
God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and
perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in
the world

(from prison)

Let's not confuse heart murmurs with murmuring hearts
A murmuring heart is never pleasing to our Father

v4 Therefore...preaching the Word:

Action (v3): Saul made havock and was trailing men and women and dragging
them to prison

Reaction: The believers moved out and preached the Word of God

Driven from their homes and their jobs...their lives...the persecuted believers
did not

- find a safe place to hide in Jerusalem
- go underground
- deny their faith
- remain silent

They went as missionaries to share the Gospel with people who had not heard it

- preaching the Word of God
 - 1 Cor 15:1-4
 - 1 Cor 2:2
 - Neh 8:8 giving the clear sense, causing people to understand
 - John 5:39
- laying down their lives, losing their lives in order to gain them

As they did in Jerusalem, they now do in Judea and Samaria
The Word of God increased (Acts 6:7) as the “borders” of the Gospel expanded
This is the “Rom 8:28” of persecution

The enemies of the Cross, thru force and violence, intended to silence the Church.
God’s plan was the exact opposite, so the scattered Church is anything but silent.
Persecution does not reduce exposure to the Gospel, it increases it.

Note: That is why Satan switched strategies in the 4th century when he
“joined” the Church in Rome
(Rev 2...Smyrna then Pergamos and Thyatira)

v5-7 Philip...preached Christ...gave heed:

Among the brethren in Jerusalem scattered by the great persecution is
Philip aka the Evangelist
Acts 6:5 one of the 7 Spirit-filled ministers of the Daily Distribution
Acts 21:8 we entered into the house of Philip the evangelist, which
was *one* of the seven

Philip went...was led by the Holy Spirit...to the city of Samaria,
down in elevation and north of Jerusalem
Samaria is the former capital city of Israel during the Divided Kingdom,
a city repopulated by the Assyrians with Gentiles...
despised by the Jews

Jesus was near this city in John 4 (Sychar), bearing much fruit

Not silenced in Jerusalem, Philip is not silent in Samaria

Action: Philip

- preached Christ, the promised Messiah (Luke 24:44-47)
- did “greater works” (John 14:12, Acts 1:1)

Reaction: the people of Samaria

- with one accord...unanimously
- gave heed...paid close attention
- heard/understood the words Philip spoke...the Gospel
Rom 10:17
- witnessed the miracles (evidence of the truth of the words) the
Holy Spirit did thru Philip...who is not an apostle
 - spiritual deliverance and healing
 - physical deliverance and healing
 - in the name of Jesus Christ

Yet another “Gen 50:20” by the Sovereign God

v8 great joy in that city:

Action: The Kingdom of God came near unto them (Luke 10:2-9, 16a)

Reaction: great joy...during a time of cruel oppressive rule by the Roman Empire

Application

1. General

- a. From Church history (to be learned from, not to be re-written),
prosperity is more dangerous to the Body's health than is adversity/tribulation

2 Cor 12:7-10 And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, **My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.** Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.

(as individuals, we need to "own" these words...

God's strength in adversity!)

Laodicea (Rev 3:14-17) vs Smyrna (Rev 2:8-10) and Philadelphia (Rev 3:8-10)
(as a fellowship, we need to "own" these words)

- b. The person God uses

Philip was not an apostle...God did miracles using him

i.e. miracles were not the exclusive "territory" of the apostles, therefore
miracles and the gifts of the Spirit did not cease with the apostles

God uses ordinary people to do His work, not special/elite people (1 Cor 1:18-31)

The apostles were not "elites", they were common people...fishermen,
tax collectors, etc

The Holy Spirit in and upon them made them extraordinary

God has put a calling on my life to serve Him and you as a pastor/teacher

But He desires to use each and every one of us in His work in the world

The Holy Spirit in and upon ordinary "whosoever will believe" makes
all the children of God extraordinary

The Lord is looking for hearts willing and available to be used by
His Spirit; I pray He sees one in each of us!

2. Specific to understanding the times, to know what the Church ought to do (1 Chron 12:32a)

a. Persecution

As was true for the Jews (Ex 1:11-12), it is true for the Church throughout its time of witness on earth

John 15:20a Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you

(hours before the Cross)

Acts 14:22 Confirming the souls of the disciples, *and* exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God

(after he was stoned and left for dead)

Phil 1:29 For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake

(from prison)

2 Tim 3:11-12 Persecutions, afflictions, which came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra; what persecutions I endured: but out of *them* all the Lord delivered me. Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.

(from prison, last words)

Fear not, little flock!

1 John 4:4

Rom 8:31

2 Kings 6:15-17

Job 9:1-12 man cannot fight God and win

A dose of persecution might just be what the Church in USA needs to get moving, to know the time is far spent, to know the time that it is high time to awake out of sleep

By the power of the Holy Spirit, the awakened and emboldened Church would “scatter” and preach Christ...and God’s grace would change countless lives for all eternity

b. At the mid-point of 2020

As evil men and seducers wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived (2 Tim 3:13), we see

- lawlessness rising
- ignorance blossoming and boasting
- evil getting bolder and bolder
- a nation convulsing and perhaps unravelling,
 - seeking the demise of the lawkeepers and the protection of lawbreakers
 - destruction/vandalism/tearing down of historical monuments
 - of Confederate generals \
 - of Union generals \ ALL imperfect men
 - of Abolitionists /
 - of Presidents /
 - of Jesus Christ ONLY perfect Man

what will happen to the messengers of Light, Love, order, and hope as we move toward and beyond the next election?

We are not yet persecuted, but we are mocked and held with contempt by a significant and vocal portion of the population

What is needed in these days in this confused, fearful, hopeless, and miserable nation?

NOT a political movement or rhetoric

NOT a social movement or activism

NOT a movement to re-write history (the past simply cannot be changed)

But a spiritual movement...a movement of the Holy Spirit

- where the Word/Gospel is preached and Jesus Christ is taught
- where repentance is given and received
- where a revival of dead, hateful hearts breaks forth

Because where the Gospel is preached and given heed, there is great joy

Rom 10:8-17

Who is available?

Who will "Is 6:8"?