

Ravaging the Church

Acts 8:1-4

What does success look like in a Church? What does God's blessing look like in a Church? Sometimes we have a very worldly concept of Church success. A lot of people are coming, plenty of money coming in, everybody's happy. Whatever it is, we have a blueprint for success in the Church and our plan is almost always different from God's plans. But the good news is God's plans are always better than ours. This morning our text is going to challenge our perception of what success and God's blessing looks like in the Church.

A Pattern

God begins an awesome work

Satan wages war against God and God's plan

God takes Satan's attacks and uses them to advance his awesome work

We see that pattern in

Creation

2 Timothy 1:9 who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began,

Personal lives

1 Pt. 5:8 Roaring lion who wants to devour us, Ro. 8:28 All things work together for the good of those who love God and are called by him (Every bad thing Satan tries to do to us only makes us run closer into the loving arms of God.)

Church

In Acts we see the Church born out of the death, burial, and ascension of Christ back to the right hand of God. Christ has anointed the Church with the power of the Holy Spirit. Thousands have been added. And we've begun to see Satan's attacks. There have been attacks from within (Ananias and Sapphira with their hypocrisy, The dispute over the Greek and Hebrew widows). But There have also been attacks from the outside. The Apostles had been arrested more than once, and they had even been beaten. And we saw how in Acts 7, Stephen was actually murdered because he was preaching the good news of Jesus Christ

That led to an all out assault of Satan through the hands of Saul

Acts 8:1-3 And Saul approved of his execution. And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. 2 Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him. 3 But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison.

Acts 9:1 But Saul, ***still breathing threats and murder*** against the disciples of the Lord,

Ravage (NIV – Destroy, KJV – made havoc) – “to treat shamefully, or with injury, to devastate, ruin.”

Perspective

Luke is writing 2 or 3 decades after this event

You and I have the benefit of nearly 2,000 years of theological reflection

Let's try to put ourselves in their shoes for just a moment...

At the time the ravaging is occurring... I don't thin the Apostle Peter is like... "All things work together for good..."

All the time in the movies – the main character and an explosion (immediately after – disoriented, confused, can't hear, vision is blurred)... I think that's how they are

Can I be honest as one of your pastors...

When I'm shepherding other people through trials...

But when I go through a trial...

Imagine you're Stephen's wife with a nursing baby...

Or you're a teenage girl and both of your parents have been locked up...

One of the Apostles and you see your sheep being ravaged...

Jesus said he was going to build his Church

But all you see is the Church being ravaged

Can you imagine the doubts and fears

"Has God forsaken us?"

"Did he really call us to this in the first place?"

"Did we do something wrong?"

Here's the thing

Our plans for the Church would never look like this. Our plans for serving Christ would always include comfort and smooth sailing.

If we had our way, worship, reaching the lost, going deeper into intimacy with Christ, bringing him honor and glory would never involve hardship and heartache.

It almost always true that the only way those good things happen are through suffering.

What about your personal life?

Some of you have been through unimaginably difficult things in your life.

Some of you are going through fiery trials right now.

Or maybe it's not some great trial, but it's just that in your life you're not where you want to be or where you had ever planned to be. And deep down in your soul you're unhappy because you're not where you want to be.

One of the things God is doing in your life is he's testing you, he's testing us to see if you're more committed to him than you are for your plans for your happiness. Are you more committed to his plans for your life or are you more committed to his? Do you trust more in your blueprints for success in in your life and the Church or have you made an idol out of yours?

Here's the thing about God. He's a lot smarter than you are. He's way more powerful. He's a lot wiser than any of us. He's a better planner. His strategy is superior. He can see the end better than we can and he's far more able to get us there than we are.

I'm going to let you in on a little secret about God, and I admit it's so difficult to accept this but... Do you realize that God is far more committed to your security, peace, and joy than you are? He's more committed to our success than we could every possibly be. And he knows that your security, peace, and joy, your success is not found in trusting or idolizing your plans, but all those things are found in him.

Thy way, not mine, O Lord, However dark it be: Lead me by Thine own hand, Choose out the path for me. Smooth let it be or rough, It will be still the best; Winding or straight, it leads Right onward to Thy Rest.

There's always an objection – The God I know would never allow this kind of suffering. The Bible's full of real life situations where God allows deep suffering and through the suffering brings about blessings so huge that you can eventually look back and see the wisdom of God's plan.

But the greatest example of this is in Jesus

Acts 2:23 this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.

Do you know what that means?

The only truly innocent human being in all of history
endured the greatest suffering in history
to bring about the greatest blessing in all of history

Our life together as a Church

God has started something amazing at The Road

The kind of gospel we believe and our vision for living it out in the world means that we are at the top of Satan's list to attack. We've already seen attacks from without and within.

What are we going to do? Give up? No, I'll tell you what we're going to do. We're going to trust, not in our own plans, but in Christ's for The Road. We are going cling to him because we know it's really him clinging to us. And we're going to be satisfied in allowing him to define success for us here, knowing that he will reach people as we trust in him and walk in faithfulness to him.