



# HICKORY GROVE

BAPTIST CHURCH

## **Life Is Mission**

January 27, 2019

Acts 8:1-8

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*1 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. 4 Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word. 5 Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ. 6 And the crowds with one accord paid attention to what was being said by Philip, when they heard him and saw the signs that he did. 7 For unclean spirits, crying out with a loud voice, came out of many who had them, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. 8 So there was much joy in that city.*

(Pastor prays)

Acts Chapter 8 opens up terribly. The church is in an all-out culture war and it's losing. We pick up mid-story. In our text, the young church has its world turned upside down. At the end of Chapter 7, in verses 59-60, one of the great leaders of the church is brutally killed. And in Chapter 8, the church is blown apart, persecuted, threatened and pushed out of society. The culture war has always been and the culture will always be as long as a church claims that Jesus is Lord. The armies of Satan will continue to declare war on us.

And that's where we have to be careful. Because it can feel good and righteous and noble to run into the mix of a culture war and post righteous Biblical truths but be knocked off mission. We have a mission that rules our approach to missions. It's the last thing Jesus told his disciples before he ascended in Acts 1:8. *8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."*

That's the mission – witnesses. Witnesses to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus and how that one historical act grants forgiveness to all who will believe. And the persecution that breaks out in Acts 8, and the terrible work conditions or family drama you're in, doesn't take you off mission. In fact, I'd like to say it like this.

## **Your Situation in Life is the Mission Field**

As the Father sent me – live sent. Let me talk about what mission means.

### **Mission Means We Never Give Up Hope**

Let me set the stage here. There is a man whose name is Saul. This is not the Old Testament Saul. This is the man who will eventually become the Apostle Paul. But look who he is here and what kind of person he is. Let's back up to Acts 7:58 when they are killing Stephen. Let's read Acts 7:58 - 8:3. *<sup>58</sup> Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul. <sup>59</sup> And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." <sup>60</sup> And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." And when he had said this, he fell asleep.*

***8** 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. <sup>2</sup> Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him. <sup>3</sup> But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison.*

Let's just concentrate on Saul. He stood and watched the brutal killing of Stephen and thought it was good. And once the bit was between his teeth, Saul helped start the persecution of Christians. Verse 3 says he was ravaging the church and forcibly removing people – men and women – from their homes and locking them up.

In chapter 9, he is still breathing out threats all the way up until the time when he is converted. Saul was a sadistic, cruel, graceless, vindictive man. He was hostile, volcanic and a rabid Christ hater. Nobody ever dreamed he would become the best friend that the church ever had. At first, no one believed him. It took Barnabas to convince the others that it really was true. And it's so sad too because most of us don't have any trouble believing the story about Judas and his betrayal because that's just how the world works. It's just

how things go. What we have trouble believing is that God can actually break into somebody's life and create such a change that the old person can hardly be recognized.

Something we have lost in our polished world is the drama of conversion. You think about the perfection of Jesus and the love of God to send Him to the cross on behalf of losers and haters and adulterers and pornographers, and when you think about the fact that the perfect Son of God died in the place of sinners, and then you see the drama of the resurrection. You people lose your minds over an overtime victory or a playoff. But I'm talking about the resurrection of the *slain Son of God*, and that same power being lasered and driven into your heart so you can believe.

Don't buy that lie that people can't change. If you believe that, then why are you here? I want you to start looking at your "problem people" with the eyes of faith and the mind of prayer that someday by the power of God, that boy's gonna turn around. He's going to wake up and see, like the prodigal son, that the food those pigs are eating is nasty and that the Father is waiting for him at the banquet table. Those of you who are professing Christ yet haven't changed, you are lying to yourselves. You're still dead in your sin. You need to turn from it and turn to Christ. And those of you who have quit praying for the wayward, remember Saul. Remember the power of God and remember that mission means we can never give up hope.

### **Mission Means We Can Never Waste Suffering**

Let's go back to the story and look away from Saul and look at the church people. See it in verses 1 and 2. *8 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.* There are a couple of things verse 2 says. They were in the middle of burying a man they loved and their hearts were already broken. And as they are mourning Stephen comes persecution. You know this. When it rains, it pours. Verse 1 says they were scattered. That word scatter comes from the Greek word for seed. It's when a sower is taking the seed and throwing it all around. They were scattered like seed.

Look what they were doing in verse 4. *4 Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word.* Preaching. That word is not the word *kerusso* which means "to proclaim." That's what you see Philip doing in verse 5. The word in verse 4 is *euangelizomenoi* which means Good News, the Gospel. Good News? Don't you think that is

ironic? Remember, these people have just been chased out of their homes. They've lost everything, they have basically become refugees and yet they are sharing Christ. All they had was Christ. Let me just make a couple of applications here if I may.

**Your Mission Included Sorrow** – Verse 2 says that some great Christian friends of Stephen mourned his loss and buried him. And people saw it. People need to see how you walk through sorrow and heartbreak, how you handle diagnosis, death and betrayal. Anybody can smile when the sun is shining. True Christianity shows the Gospel in pain. We don't weep as those who have no hope. We do weep and hurt but we trust in a good and sovereign God who loves His people and has shown that love by the death of Jesus on the cross. And your trusting in the goodness of God while you face pain is a witness.

**God is Sovereign Over Persecution** - I may have gotten this from John Piper. In the story, the death of Stephen triggers a persecution of the church in Jerusalem. And because of that persecution, the church scatters from Jerusalem to Judea and to Samaria. In Acts 1:8, that's exactly what Jesus said would happen when the Holy Spirit came on them. Listen, the enemies cannot strip the purposes of God. Persecution is inevitable but God's mission is unstoppable. In verse 4 is a description of ordinary Christians sharing the Gospel while they are being horribly mistreated. God has sovereignty and He ordains and allows the twists and turns in your life to give you opportunity to speak the Gospel to your neighbors and people you work with. In short, God has permitted your pain for the Gospel. Mission means we never give up hope. Mission means we never waste suffering.

### **Mission Means We Never Underestimate the Gospel**

To see this, let's follow Philip starting in verse 5. Look where he goes – Samaria. Jews hated Samaritans and Samaritans hated Jews, but the Gospel evaporates hate and binds us together by the blood of Jesus. That small miracle right there, Philip is probably a Hellenistic Jew who was discriminated against back in Acts 6, and yet he winds up in Samaria; forgetting all the racial barriers, stereotypes and excuses, he shares the Gospel of Christ. The power of God was there and people came to Christ.

And notice the last phrase in verse 8, *So there was much joy in that city.* It's a reminder that the Gospel of Jesus works. God loves the hurting sinners. God sent Jesus to save hurting sinners. God gave Jesus as a substitute to take the punishment that sinners deserve. God raised Jesus from the dead for sinners to have hope. Any sinner who turns from sin and by

faith believes what God has done in Christ – will be saved. The Gospel works. We never give up hope. We never waste suffering and we never underestimate the Gospel.

*(Pastor prays)*