

10/18/15

Acts 8:1-8

The Big Picture

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. Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him. But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison. Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word. Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ. 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. 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. So there was much joy in that city.

(Pastor Prays)

In the blink of an eye, your world can get turned upside down.

What you thought was going okay has actually gotten worse. A bout with depression takes a really dark turn, a health issue becomes an actual health crisis, or a poisonous relationship becomes an abusive relationship, then turns into a bad marriage and a messy divorce. And, like a sore on the inside of your mouth that you keep biting or a scab on your elbow you keep tearing off, the sound and the pain is all you can think about. It's all you see, so you get myopic, short-sighted, you can't seem to see past the pain, and the pain makes it hard for you to see the big picture and the big picture is what your life is all about. It's what your life is really about.

In our text, the young church has the world turned upside down. Stephen died in Acts 7:59 and the church is blown apart in Acts 8:1. The brokenhearted, Godly men bury this friend Stephen and in v. 3, the church is being stamped out. Even the women are being thrown in jail and mistreated, and the normal Christian life becomes a means of survival. We are going to witness a man named Philip who has been ripped from his home. One of his best friends Stephen is killed and, in the middle of his pain and loss and confusion, he decides to keep moving and is being used by God and I'm convinced it's not just Philip who needs to keep moving and being used by God. It's you. God has created you for a tremendous Gospel cause and whether you live long or short, whether you are in pain or health, you can be used for the God's Glory. It's a consuming life.

The Gospel Life is a Consuming Life

Let's talk about what that looks like.

Living the Gospel Might Be Costly

It very well could mean you sacrifice, give something up, and that's what's happening in the text. Let's pick up the story in Chapter 7 & 8. Chapter 7:59-60, a young man named Stephen is killed for witnessing. You can read about it in v. 59-60 of Chapter 7. *And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." 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.* Stephen dies a martyr's death to the Glory of God and when you pick up the story in Chapter 8, the enemies of the Gospel are rooting out believers. v. 1a says *And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem,* And the truth of the matter is, if you live as a Christian, you live in a conspicuous way. It will genuinely be costly as many of you are finding out more and more. V. 1 tells us that as they were being run out of their homes, they were being scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria. They would lose their homes, land communities, their friends, and their comfort and would be forced into fleeing. Their faith in Jesus Christ became costly. And I really think this is one of the areas where we have missed the boat. In the church, for so long, we have made everything so easy and in doing so, we have produced marshmallow Christians that melt when they're thrown into the fire. I think that is why we have 12,000 people on our church role, many of whom couldn't care less about Hickory Grove not to mention the Gospel. Listen, Christianity, as the Bible presents it, means something. The Gospel of Jesus changes a man so that he views Jesus as the Pearl of Great Price. He can say with Paul, "For me to live is Christ and to die is gain." At Hickory Grove, we're not preaching a cotton candy Gospel so you can skip through life with a bluebird on your shoulder. The Gospel of Jesus is a Gospel you give up everything for. Paul said it like this in Philippians 3:7-8:

But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ.

When you become a person of conviction, sold out and all in for the Gospel, it can be costly. The Jim Elliot quote sums it up best. He was a missionary killed for the Gospel by the Huaorani Indians on January 8, 1956. Six and one-half years earlier, on October 28, 1949, a 21-year-old Jim Elliot wrote in his journal: "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose." We know that living the Gospel life is a consuming life. But it can be costly.

Living the Gospel Might be Confusing

When you read v. 1, you see people being run out of their homes. Now in v. 3, Saul began ravaging the church, entering house after house and dragging off men and women. He put them in prison. I'm sure it was confusing to people, creating more questions than answers and maybe some of the same questions you have. "I gave my life to Christ. I

love Jesus! I try to do what is right and these terrible things keep happening and it just doesn't make sense."

I think of some of you who have faced loss and tragedy. Why does God do the mysterious and sometimes painful things He does? In the text, God used persecution to create the greatest missionary movement the world would ever know:

(Acts 1:8) 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 was Acts 1:8; now read Acts 8:1:

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,

Now, I don't know what you are facing or why you are facing it. I don't know what kind of doubts you are having or what kind of discouragement you are carrying, but I want you to get the bigger picture of your life. A picture that goes beyond yourself and onto the purpose of the Gospel as lived out in your life. Every one of the difficulties you face is a platform for the Gospel. With every struggle, you give a witness of what you believe by how you handle your struggle. Remember what Paul said in Romans 8:28: [And] *we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.*

Gospel living is a consuming life. It can be costly and it can be confusing.

Living the Gospel Will Be Compelling

Look what the church members did who were being thrown out of their homes. Let's read v. 4: *Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word.* The word "scattered" comes from the Greek word for "seed." It's the idea of the sower taking seed and throwing it all around. They were scattered like seed.

V. 4 says they were preaching. That word is not "*kerusso*," which means "to proclaim." That's what Philip did in verse 5. This word is "*Euaggelizo*" which means "to proclaim the Good News." The Gospel. Good News? Isn't that ironic? Remember, the people have just been chased out of their homes. They've lost everything. They're refugees but they are not complaining. V. 4 says they are sharing the Gospel.

One of the amazing things about being born again is that it changes you in such a way that even your misfortune becomes a platform for you to share what Jesus Christ has done in your life. In fact, v. 5 tells us that the Gospel is so compelling it blows right through other learned prejudices in life. *Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ.* Philip's venture into Samaria was a radical step. It was a racial step. But he was compelled by the Gospel to forsake old prejudices and embrace all people in the name of Jesus. Compelling. Let me tell you something else about living the Gospel.

Living the Gospel is Captivating

Verse 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.*

The people had never heard or seen anything like Philip and it captivated them. He didn't seek relevance. He didn't try to engage the culture. He stood by the power of the Holy Spirit and gave them Jesus Christ as the one who could save them from their sins. I don't think the problem with the church is relevance. I think it's passion. Our people are not gripped by the Gospel and are not living out extreme lives in the name of Jesus. If we were, the world around would stop and look.

David Hume was a renowned Scottish philosopher and historian in the 1700's. He was also a Deist. He didn't believe in Jesus Christ and didn't believe the Bible to be God's Word, but he would travel 20 miles to hear George Whitefield preach.

About 5 o'clock one morning, he was going down the street in London and ran right into another man who said, "Aren't you David Hume?" "Yes." "Where are you going at this early hour?" "I'm going to hear George Whitefield preach," Hume replied. "You don't believe a word Whitefield preaches," the man said. "No, I don't," Hume answered, "But he does."

Even an unbeliever was captivated by a life lived for the Gospel. When John Wesley was asked why people came to hear him preach, he reportedly said, "I light myself on fire and people come to watch me burn." Living the Gospel is captivating and there are people even here today who could be classified as "Riding the fence." Listen, there is no riding the fence! That's a myth. Either you believe in Jesus Christ and radically worship him or you don't. You are either born again and a child of God or you will one day hear the words, "Depart from me, I never knew you."

The Gospel always gives evidence. Jesus said you will know a tree by its fruit. Verse 8 in the text tells us the people's response to the Gospel: *So there was much joy in that city.* Why did they rejoice? The great adventure of a changed life.

- Living the Gospel might be costly.
- Living the Gospel can be confusing.
- Living the Gospel is always compelling.
- Living the Gospel will be captivating.

The Gospel –
God who created man, who sinned. Jesus came as substitute and faith should be our response.

(Pastor rays)