

THE SCATTERED CHURCH

+ **SESSION IN A SENTENCE:**

Persecution did not stifle the gospel but rather served to spread the gospel as the church advanced its mission of proclaiming the gospel to all people.

+ **BACKGROUND PASSAGE:**

Acts 8

+ **SETTING:**

Back in Acts 7, Luke recorded the account of the first Christian martyr, Stephen. Saul was there to witness the execution, and persecution would only increase as the early church grew. But the Lord was not shocked by this persecution; He was still ruling and reigning over all. He had a plan and a mission to spread the gospel beyond the borders of Jerusalem. The Lord would use this persecution to further the gospel as the church continued to spread to the ends of the earth.

DAY 1

READ:

Acts 8:1-3

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Acts 8:1

NOTES



KEY DOCTRINE #29: GOD'S PLAN AND HUMAN ACTION

God's sovereignty over all of life encompasses the free actions of human beings. Proverbs 19:21 says, "Many plans are in a person's heart, but the LORD's decree will prevail." In ways we are unable to comprehend fully, the Lord's plan goes forward through the choices of human beings as moral agents. Even freely chosen sinful actions are factored into God's overarching plan, as is the case with the crucifixion of Jesus—an event both purposed by God through foreknowledge and yet also carried out by the wicked decisions of human beings (Acts 2:23). Knowing that God is working all things for the good of those who love Him (Romans 8:28), we trust in His promise to fulfill His plan, even when we do not understand our present circumstances.

In Acts 8, the early church faced an awful persecution from Saul. This persecution began to drive the church out of Jerusalem and scattered the people throughout the surrounding regions. God used this persecution to awaken the church to obey Christ's command to be His witnesses to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8).

This persecution led to gospel growth. The message of the gospel began to spread, not through some missions plan that the church at Jerusalem put together through a committee, rather the gospel spread because Christians were taking the gospel with them wherever they went.

Saul had meant this persecution for great harm toward the church; however, God was using this persecution for good. The gospel was going forth to new places so that people would come to know the eternal life that is found in Jesus Christ alone. The persecution could not keep the church from spreading the gospel.

Where is God at work in my life despite difficult circumstances?

DAY 2

READ:

Acts 8:4-8

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Acts 8:4

NOTES

The early church preached the gospel wherever they were scattered (Acts 8:4). How is it that they could go about this? How could they go about spreading the gospel? It is because they knew and believed the gospel for themselves! They knew the truth about Jesus and how it is the only message that saves. They had been devoted to the apostles' teaching (Acts 2:42), and they were devoted to spread the gospel once they were scattered. Ordinary believers took the opportunity given to them to spread the gospel. This demonstrates the great task that God has given to all believers. All believers are meant to know and share the gospel. They are called to be a witness wherever God places them.

Do you see where God has placed you as the area you are to reach others with the gospel? You have been planted where you are for the purpose of spreading the gospel. God has you where you are to be part of the kingdom of God and advance the gospel in your community. We must be a faithful witness to this truth.

How can I be more active in spreading the gospel in my immediate community?

DAY 3

READ:

Acts 8:4-8

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Acts 8:5

NOTES

Philip preaching the gospel to the Samaritans shows us how amazing it is that God and sinners can be reconciled and brought into right relationship. Christianity is not confined to one people group or nation. Christianity reaches all over the globe with the news about the one true living God.

At the beginning of the New Testament, Christianity began in Jerusalem, but its center did not stay in Jerusalem for very long. It spread throughout the world as Jesus's disciples took it with them wherever they went.

When you look at the current century, some might say the center of Christianity is in North America, but that's not true. Christianity in the twenty-first century has grown throughout the world, especially in the southern hemisphere, particularly in Africa and South America. Why is this the case? Because Christianity's message is meant to be preached all over the world. God's glory and His gospel are not confined or bound by a physical location or by country borders.

How can I be involved in the work of the gospel reaching the world?

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Let me tell you to be a soul winner is the happiest thing in this world. And with every soul you bring to Jesus Christ, you seem to get a new heaven here upon earth."¹

—Charles H. Spurgeon
(1834–1892)

DAY 4

READ:

Acts 8:4-8

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Acts 8:8

NOTES

As the church took the gospel to new places, people came to know Christ in areas where the gospel had not been preached. As Philip preached the gospel in Samaria, God worked powerfully as the Messiah was proclaimed to them (v. 5).

Ultimately, the preaching of the gospel produced a great amount of joy (v. 8) in the city. The same gospel that brought about persecution, as we saw in Stephen's death, produced joy in this city that Philip went to. The Word of God brings joy, even in the midst of horrific tragedy. Acts 8 began with great tragedy but ended with great joy.

Christ alone has the power to bring new life and joy out of death. That is what we see happening here in Acts 8. Christ alone has the power over persecution. Christ alone has the power over Satan and evil. Christ alone has the power to forgive sins and bring spiritual life. Christ alone has the power to bring life where there is only death. Christ alone has the power to bring light to where there was only darkness. Christ alone has the power to bring joy in the midst of persecution. Christ is reigning on His throne, and nothing will stop the advancement of the life-giving, joy-producing, God-glorifying gospel!

How has the gospel brought joy into your life this week?

DAY 5

READ:

Acts 8:26-39

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Acts 8:29-30

NOTES

This Ethiopian official had traveled all the way to Jerusalem to worship at the temple. Due to the fact that he was a Gentile and a eunuch, he would not have been allowed to enter and worship within the temple but would have stood in the Court of Gentiles. At some point—and at great expense—he purchased the scroll of Isaiah’s prophecy. The only problem was that he did not understand what it meant.

The Lord sent Philip to explain to him the Messiah to whom Isaiah 53 pointed. God sent Philip to the desert to explain to this Ethiopian official how Christ alone saves.

First, Philip approached him through the guidance of the Spirit. Philip then heard the Ethiopian reading Isaiah and simply asked if he understood what he was reading. Simple first steps of engagement are sometimes all we need to start sharing the good news of Christ. Starting where people are at is a great way to share the gospel effectively.

God is often working in ways that we do not always fully see! Through Philip’s faithful witness, this man was able to come to know the truth of Jesus and went back to Ethiopia rejoicing in his salvation (v. 39).

What are some other tips you can think of to help share the gospel effectively?

GROUP

NOTES

POINT 1: The church experiences persecution (Acts 8:1-3).

God can use anything, even persecution against His people, to advance the gospel outward.

? How do we see the gospel spreading around the world today?

Passionate devotion must be directed in the right place, and that place is in Christ Jesus.

? What are some examples of those today with misguided zeal for the Lord?

POINT 2: The church continues proclaiming Jesus (Acts 8:4-8).

KEY DOCTRINE #29: GOD'S PLAN AND HUMAN ACTION

God's sovereignty over all of life encompasses the free actions of human beings. Proverbs 19:21 says, "Many plans are in a person's heart, but the LORD's decree will prevail." In ways we are unable to comprehend fully, the Lord's plan goes forward through the choices of human beings as moral agents. Even freely chosen sinful actions are factored into God's overarching plan, as is the case with the crucifixion of Jesus—an event both purposed by God through foreknowledge and yet also carried out by the wicked decisions of human beings (Acts 2:23). Knowing that God is working all things for the good of those who love Him (Romans 8:28), we trust in His promise to fulfill His plan, even when we do not understand our present circumstances.

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"The voice of the gospel, which was being heard only in one place, is now resounding everywhere."²

—John Calvin (1509–1564)



When in our own lives do we find it hard to believe that God’s plan will prevail?

The persecuted church pushed the gospel into new areas, resulting in growth and joy.



What are some examples in your life where God brought about joy in the midst of suffering?

POINT 3: The church grows by the Spirit’s power (Acts 8:26-35).

God will always lead us to opportunities to share the gospel. We just need to obey.



Where do you have opportunities to share the gospel that you haven’t yet?

When confronted with an opportunity to share the gospel, begin with where people are at and focus on Jesus.



From Day 5: **What are some other tips you can think of to help share the gospel effectively?**

MY RESPONSE

Because we have received new life in Christ and have committed to following Him, we seek to be available and obedient to the Spirit’s prompting, able and willing to show Christ in all the Scriptures.

- **HEAD:** How can I reflect God’s desire to reach the nations in my own life?
- **HEART:** How can I praise God for His love for the world and how He brings the gospel to all people?
- **HANDS:** How can I be more aware of the work the Lord is doing in the lives of those around me?



Scan this QR code to access this session’s Scripture passages.

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

“Here you witness the obedience of Philip. He does not ask, ‘What am I supposed to do in the wilderness? Should I preach to birds or thieves or murderers?’ Instead, according to the example of Abraham, he is obedient to God.”³

–Johann Spangenberg (1484–1550)