

## Propelled by Pain

(Acts 8:1-8)

### Introduction

1. Theme: Jesus accelerates us by the Holy Spirit to grow deeper through His family, wider in our impact for the gospel.
2. Why does God allow His people to suffer? How should we respond to it?
3. Background: [6:8-8:1]
  - a. Stephen is a humble, Spirit-filled servant of God who is the first martyr for Jesus.
  - b. A witness willing to live or die to testify to the truth that Jesus is the prophesied Messiah-King, Savior & God.

### Jesus rules over the suffering of His people [Acts 8:1-3]

1. [1-2] The outbreak of persecution
  - a. [1a] Saul: Young Pharisee lurking in the background; the villain of the story.
    - i. He holds Stephen's murderers coats, looks on in approval (literally: "likewise taking pleasure").
  - b. [1b] Stephen's death permits the unleashed rage against Jesus & the growing influence of His followers.
    - i. Christians are scattered throughout Judea & Samaria.
    - ii. Except for the 12 apostles, who dare to continue the gospel work in Jerusalem.
  - c. [2] Initial response: Men devoted to Jesus, unafraid of persecution, hold a funeral service for Steve, defying religious authorities.
    - i. The persecution is a direct result of Stephen's speech/challenge against the Sanhedrin (cf. 11:19).
  - d. Application: If your faithfulness brings trouble to the Church, you will be honored, not blamed, by those who love Jesus.
2. [3] Saul increases his hostility & assault against the Church.
  - a. "Ravaging the church": To dishonor, defile, disgrace; to simultaneously devastate & humiliate.
    - i. Synonym in English: To rape.
  - b. The gospel polarizes: Like Stephen, Saul also understands that it is incompatible with religious Judaism.
  - c. A theme of Acts: Escalating violence against Christianity & the gospel.
    - i. From warning (4:21) to flogging (5:40) to an individual killed (7:58-60) to widespread persecution.
3. Despite the terrifying upturn of violence, there is still encouragement here.
  - a. [1:8] Jesus prophesies & commissions His followers to receive the power of His Spirit & be His witnesses, starting in Jerusalem to Judea/Samaria to the end of the earth.
    - i. Here (8:1), we begin to see that fulfillment as the Church continues to experience the power of the Spirit to not only transform Jerusalem with the gospel, but spread outward through Judea & Samaria.
    - ii. What looks like defeat/setback, God uses to fulfill His will/mission through them.
    - iii. Jesus (as God and King) is sovereign & rules over all circumstances.
  - b. Big Idea: Jesus rules over the suffering of His people.
    - i. He uses their suffering to spread the gospel and manifest the Kingdom of God.
  - c. Does God want His people to suffer? No, it is the reality of living in a sin-cursed, fallen world.
    - i. The natural consequence of sin on creation/humanity is sickness, decay, suffering, death
    - ii. This includes suffering visited upon each other because of our wickedness & selfishness.
  - d. Is God powerless against our suffering? No, He is already victorious over it through the cross.
    - i. We are simply awaiting the ultimate fulfillment/abolishment of suffering/death (cf. Rev 21:4).
    - ii. He strips suffering of its power & transforms it to the glory of God & good of others.
4. Jesus uses the escalating violence against His followers to accelerate them to even greater influence/impact.
  - a. Application: What suffering/opposition do you face in life? Is it lord or is Jesus?

- b. We don't seek opposition (cf. Rom 12:18), but in the face of it, we trust Jesus as sovereign God/King, ruling over our suffering.

### **In suffering, proclaim Jesus even more [Acts 8:4-8]**

1. [4-5] The believers' response to the first great persecution of the Church.
  - a. They do not complain about their situation, retaliate against persecutors, nor blame/grow bitter against God.
  - b. [4] Despite the violent persecution, they engage in the same activity as Stephen: Preach Word about Jesus.
    - i. They live out the primacy/importance of preaching about Jesus (cf. 6:2,4).
  - c. [5] We're reintroduced to Philip.
    - i. Like Stephen, another Greek-speaking Jew; 1 of the 7 selected to run the compassion ministry (6:5).
    - ii. Driven from Jerusalem, He travels to the main city of Samaria (Shechem at the foot of Mt. Gerizim?)
    - iii. His ministry/service not limited to waiting tables, but also proclaiming Jesus to the Samaritans.
  - d. Application: Your ministry is not simply performing tasks, but also to proclaim Jesus.
    - i. That Jesus lived a sinless life, died in our place for our sin, rose to be our Savior, & rules as resurrected Lord & true God.
  - e. In suffering, we have the opportunity to proclaim Jesus all the more.
    - i. It's easy to tell people Jesus is our hope/joy/life when things go well, but what about in suffering?
    - ii. In our suffering, people see if Jesus' transformative work/life are real or not, in us.
2. [6-7] The Holy Spirit continues to work powerfully through them in their faithfulness.
  - a. [6] The crowds are mesmerized & transformed by hearing the good news about Jesus from the mouths of witnesses who consider it important enough to testify to this truth even in the face of persecution.
  - b. [7] Miraculous freedom & healing through the Holy Spirit & gospel accompany the proclamation of Jesus.
  - c. Application: As we remain faithful & obedient to Jesus in suffering, we experience God's power & presence.
    - i. Suffering strip away excess baggage of comfort, security, entitlement & selfishness to fully access the power of the Holy Spirit God has placed in us.
    - ii. We are often too busy running from pain, when we should be running toward Jesus in obedience.
    - iii. The times we experience God the most or the most power/fruit in our lives is when we continue to obey & proclaim Jesus in the midst of loss, suffering, pain & opposition.
3. [8] Result: Much joy in the city, as people hear about & experience Jesus.
  - a. The same Word that brought persecution also brings joy.
    - i. The joy it brings is greater & longer than the trouble it brings; the trade-off is worth it.
  - b. Jesus alone has power to deliver from Satan/evil, to heal (now & ultimately at the resurrection), to forgive sin.
    - i. If we have Jesus, then no matter how severe the persecution/suffering in life, we have hope/joy.
  - c. There are people in your marketplace have not had Jesus proclaimed to them.
    - i. Some will reject you (cf. John 15:18), but some will experience the greatest joy of their lives because you introduced the most important truth/relationship to them in Jesus.
    - ii. Like Jesus, the Holy Spirit will empower you to look past pain, to see the joy ahead in others' salvation (cf. Heb 11:2).
  - d. Application: In the midst of your suffering, is Jesus proclaimed?
    - i. Is Jesus proclaimed through your attitudes, choices, words, actions, living out His ways at home or in the marketplace, even when your circumstances are full of opposition/suffering?
    - ii. Illustration: Kristy's use of video/blogs during chemotherapy to reveal/proclaim Jesus.

### **Conclusion**

1. When pain enters your life, you can either let it stop you/detour you, or propel you forward in faith.
  - a. You can be propelled forward to trust Jesus' sovereignty and experience His power in/through you.
2. Current opposition Satan uses to discourage/derail people at The Crossing:
  - a. Application: Family & marriage conflicts are our #1 area of opposition.
    - i. Do you trust Jesus as sovereign over your home life, even ruling over opposition/suffering here?
    - ii. We need to stop rationalizing/criticizing, start trust Jesus as Lord over our selves/home, & look at the planks in our own eye vs. the speck in others' (cf. Matt 7:1-5; Jas 4:1-3).
    - iii. Then, proclaim Jesus to family members we're in conflict with through our attitude/humility (Eph 5:21), our confession of wrongs (Jas 5:16), offering grace/forgiveness (Matt 18:32-33); kind words/actions.
  - b. Application: As our church changes to reflect Jesus' mission for us to cross generations & cultures together in Christ, locally & ethnically, there will be opposition; both from within & without.

- i. You will oppose Jesus' gospel work here if you try to fit Jesus into a compartment of your life, vs. Jesus is Lord, worthy to give all that I am/have, even if I have to suffer/sacrifice.
  - ii. You will oppose Jesus' gospel work here if you have a consumer mentality: "What can Jesus give me?" Vs. "How can I serve Jesus & others?"
  - iii. You will oppose Jesus' gospel work here if you are religious & worship traditions as an idol, vs. being willing to change & grow as God leads us.
- c. When we fail to trust Jesus as Lord over all (including suffering), when opposition/pain come, we'll make excuses to opt out. But if Jesus is true God over our lives, we will trust/follow Him, no matter the cost, to the glory of God and the good of others.