**A MISSION THAT PREVAILS OVER PERSECUTION**

**Acts 8:1-8**

**THE BIG IDEA: As Christians remain faithful in advancing the message of Jesus they can find joy even in the midst of persecution.**

**PERSECUTION \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ THE MISSION OF GOD RATHER THAN DERAILING IT**

* *“Saul agreed with putting him to death. On that day a severe persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout the land of Judea and Samaria.”* (Acts 8:1)
* *“So those who were scattered went on their way preaching the word.”* (Acts 8:4)
* **Evangelism is the task of every Christian, not just the church leaders.**
* *“How, then, can they call on Him they have not believed in? And how can they believe without hearing about Him? And how can they hear without a preacher? 15 And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written:* ***How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news.*** *16 But not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says,* ***Lord, who has believed our message?*** *17 So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the message about Christ.”* (Romans 10:14-17)
* **No Christian in the Bible was exempt from *speaking* the truth of the gospel to others, and there is no exemption for Christians today.**

**PEOPLE WHO STAND FOR TRUTH SHOULD BE \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ RATHER THAN BLAMED FOR PERSECUTION AS A RESULT**

* *“Devout men buried Stephen and mourned deeply over him.”* (Acts 8:2)
* **It can be easy to blame the leader when troubles come our way, but spirit-led believers recognize where honor is due in spite of persecution.**
* *“Don’t use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them.”* (Ephesians 4:29 NLT)
* **In a world full of attackers and critics we need to encourage and honor our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ.**

**THE UNSTOPPABLE MISSION OF GOD BRINGS \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ RATHER THAN MISERY**

* **Joy is unavoidable for those who put their trust in Jesus.**
* *“Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Messiah to them. 6 The crowds were all paying attention to what Philip said, as they listened and saw the signs he was performing. 7 For unclean spirits, crying out with a loud voice, came out of many who were possessed, and many who were paralyzed and lame were healed. 8 So there was great joy in that city.”* (Acts 8:5-8)
* **When the truth of the gospel of Jesus is proclaimed and people respond to that truth in faith, joy is experienced by the new believers as well as those who shared the gospel.**
* *“You reveal the path of life to me; in your presence is abundant joy; at your right hand are eternal pleasures.”* (Psalm 16:11)
* Jesus - *“I tell you, in the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who don’t need repentance.”* (Luke 15:7)
* **The joy that can only be known by a true Christian supersedes the troubles we face for being faithful to Christ.**

**CONNECT GROUP DISCUSSION**

**ICE-BREAKER:**

**START THINKING:**

* How are Saul and Stephen contrasted in Acts 8:1-8?
* How is Acts 8:1-8 related to Acts 1:8?
* Why did the apostles stay behind in Jerusalem while everyone else had to flee due to persecution?
* How did the persecution of Christians in Acts 8:1-8 actually lead to God’s mission advancing?

**DIGGING DEEPER:**

* In what ways are you personally challenged from this teaching on Acts 8:1-8?
* Why does it seem more common for people, even Christians, to criticize others in the faith rather than honoring them? How are you doing at honoring your fellow believers who stand for truth?
* Knowing that God’s kingdom mission will continue to prevail and actually thrive through persecution, how does this impact your view of persecution?
* What can/should you do differently as a result of this study?

**FOCUS**

* Who in your life needs to hear the truth of the Gospel? How has this message/text affected and/or inspired you to reach them?
* Who are you inviting to Church next Sunday?