

Unstoppable Gospel

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 24 September 2023

Preacher: Pastor Bart Leger

[0 : 00] We live in a world full of adversity and trials and all types of things that threaten to overwhelm us and threaten to overshadow our faith.

We may be going through some things like some financial troubles or maybe some financial trials that you and I have a difficult time with. Maybe it's caring for aging family. Maybe it's financial difficulties.

Maybe you are having more month at the end of your money and we know that things are going up. Cost of living is going up. All different types of things that you and I are going through.

Adversity and trials that we have to deal with. But they do not have to push us down.

The things that you and I go through do not have to label us and do not have to be so overwhelming in our life that we go hermit and we stop pushing forward with the gospel.

[1 : 14] If you know Jesus Christ as your Savior, if you are a follower of Jesus Christ, your life was made to matter. And if you know Jesus Christ as your Savior, you have a big God always with you no matter what you are going through.

It doesn't matter what it is. God's there with you. God's Holy Spirit is there within you. I was bullied as a child. I remember going through grade school and went pretty much all the way through grade school.

One year, a new student came in and I made friends with him. And Jimmy stood out among the rest of us.

Quite literally, he was almost a head taller than the rest of us. Jimmy could have been what you might have called a gentle giant. And so Jimmy hung around with me and my group of friends when we would go out on the playground.

Well, one day, three boys that were our nemesis, they were the ones that were always coming along and they were bullying us, calling us names.

[2 : 37] They would push us around. And I remember this day very clearly. Jimmy, very quietly, walked up to the leader of the group.

And he looked down on him. And he proceeded to push him back. It reminded me of the movies when someone is rocketed back in an explosion.

And he falls on his behind. Jimmy looks over him, shakes his head and walks off. And we followed him. And we hung around Jimmy.

We stayed by Jimmy. And you know what? My confidence soared because I knew that if Jimmy was with me, that I didn't have to be afraid.

Well, as a follower of Jesus Christ, no matter what adversity you and I go through, we can push forward, we can move forward with God's will for our life, and we can carry out God's mission.

[3 : 44] What I have seen in so many lives. What I have seen in so many lives and what I have seen even in my own life, when things go bad or when I get frustrated or when things get difficult, I tend to turn inward.

And I tend to not be doing some of the things that I know I ought to be doing. And I have my own little pity party.

And I just kind of go hermit. God created you and me. And God saved you and me for much, much more than that.

And what we're going to see this morning in God's word, and if you have your Bibles, turn with me this morning to Acts chapter number 8. And we're going to continue looking at the early church and how the early church is advancing, moving out from Jerusalem, moving into Judea and Samaria.

And what we're going to see from what these early believers did, from what these early Christians did, was they didn't let adversity stop them.

[5 : 04] And what we learn from them is adversity can advance the gospel, and the gospel brings joy. And what we're going to see as they're scattered about, we're going to see that they brought the gospel with them.

And instead of turning inward, instead of being afraid, they went out boldly, and they went out as missionaries. And they brought the gospel with them.

So let's look this morning in Acts chapter number 8. And we're going to spend most of our time in verses 4 through 8 this morning. But let's go ahead and go back to verse number 1 and see what preceded what we're going to see in verses 4 through 8.

Verse 1 of chapter number 8. Now Saul was consenting to his death. We're talking about Stephen. Stephen was one of those original seven servants who were chosen to take care of the food pantry, the food ministry, to the widows of those within the church.

[6 : 20] And these were men who were full of the Holy Spirit. They had a good reputation. And we saw from the life of Stephen that he had been performing miracles.

He was presenting the gospel. He was in a conversation that turned a little bit heated when he was in one of the Hellenistic temples, the Greek-speaking temples.

And the group that he was speaking with got upset because of what he was saying about Jesus.

And so they go and they find witnesses who will kind of skew the truth a little bit and would lie to the council.

So they go and arrest Stephen. They bring him to the council and they accuse him of blasphemy, speaking against the temple, speaking against Moses, or speaking against the patriarchs.

And Stephen gives this very long, in chapter 7, this very long dialogue, ultimately talking about giving them a history lesson, if you will.

[7 : 34] And they choose, because they were so angry at what Stephen was saying. They stopped their ears. They were gnashing their teeth like a hungry pack of gnarling wolves.

And they begin to stone Stephen. Now, we see in verse 1, we pick up that story, Saul, who would later become the apostle Paul and would become a pillar of the church, would plant churches all across Asia and other areas.

Now, Saul was consenting to his death. Now, some people just view Saul as a coat rack. Saul was not just a coat rack when it came to the stoning of Stephen.

Luke says he was consenting, and that word consenting means that Saul was on track with, that he was in agreement with, and very likely Paul got involved in the stoning.

So, it said Saul was consenting, he approved of, and he was with them to his death. So, in effect, and you remember what Paul calls himself later, you may or may not remember, later in Paul's writings.

[9 : 04] He says that he is not even, he shouldn't even be an apostle because he was the least of the apostles. He considered himself a murderer. And this is where we see that coming from.

Saul was consenting to the murder of Stephen. At that time, as we said last week, the stoning of Stephen, Stephen's death unleashed a brand new impetus to the gospel.

As a matter of fact, the gospel, for the most part, was not being, the movement in the book of Acts moves from Jerusalem and the Jews and begins to move ultimately to the Gentiles.

And we're going to see today that it moves to Judea and Samaria. So, at this time, after Stephen's death, a great persecution arose against the church.

So, this persecution was more than just, you guys are bad people or we don't agree with you. They hunted them down.

[10 : 19] And the apostle Paul was hunting all of these followers of Jesus down. So, we have these believers who knew Christ, who loved Jesus, but all of a sudden they began to be hunted down.

And they move out, they scatter. This word for scatter is the same word, the diaspora. It's the same word that used for scatter seed.

Like when a farmer would go into his seed pouch and would take that seed and would scatter it around. That's exactly what God did with the early church.

He sowed them to Judea. He sowed them in Samaria. And when they went, it says here that wherever they went, they brought the gospel with them.

And so, there was a persecution and it started at Jerusalem. And they were scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria.

[11 : 24] But the apostles stayed in Jerusalem. Now, I don't think that we should maybe disparage the apostles because they stayed. I think it took a little bit of courage for them to stay in Jerusalem.

And plus, they had to make sure that the church continued to prosper. They had to make sure that they continued to lead the church. And in verse number 2 and 3, when we move to verses 2 and 3, what we're going to see is we see a drastic contrast.

Look at verse 2. And devout men carried Stephen to his burial and made great lamentation over him.

As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, dragging off men and women, committing them to prison.

And what we see, the contrast in verse number 2, we see that godly men who were mourning the death of Stephen went and took his body.

[12 : 35] And they lovingly buried him and they mourned his death. They wept and in the Jewish tradition, they lamented over Stephen, but not Saul.

Saul, angry, Saul very violently goes and ravages the church. He makes havoc of the church and says he was entering in houses.

Jesus, like no knock, he would just go in and he would enter the house. And if they were followers of the way, if they were followers of Jesus, he would grab them. And then he would haul them before the council, dragging off men and women and putting them in prison.

What this is showing us, I think it's showing us the fallen human condition. I think what it's showing us is our bent toward violence and towards intolerance toward those that we disagree with and those that we just don't like or those that may be different from us.

We are even seeing this today in racial intolerance, religious intolerance, social, even in the political arena.

[14 : 17] And who of us have not called someone or group names just because they disagree with us and disparage them, malign their character, just because they don't agree with us.

Why do we succumb often to the same things that Saul did? Because our fallen human condition, our fallen human nature.

The reason the early believers went out, didn't let adversity sour them, didn't let adversity cause them to go hermit, they decided that they would go and they would continue to preach the gospel because the why is because of what Jesus had done for them.

Jesus had done something so powerful in their life that they said, we need to go and tell everybody. Rather than calling names, rather than disparage someone we disagree with or someone that is not like us, how many of us will take the time and get to know them, take the time to show God's love to them, and to show them the power, the life-changing power that Jesus can bring in their life.

[15 : 50] Such a difference. The early church went out, not as enemies of the world, but they went out loving the world, sharing Jesus with the world.

So this is setting the stage for what we see in verse number 4. Verse number 4. Therefore, those who were, same word that we saw in verse number 1, they were sown about, they were scattered around Judea and Samaria, and as they went, those who were scattered went everywhere.

That word went carries with it the idea they went as missionaries. They didn't just change address. They didn't just change school districts.

And they didn't go just to have a better lifestyle. They went as missionaries, because it says, those who were scattered went everywhere doing what?

Preaching the word. They went everywhere preaching the word. Now, before you stop and say, well, pastor, I'm not a preacher. That's okay, because they weren't preaching.

[17 : 04] Well, you say, well, pastor, that's what the word in my Bible says. That word that's in your Bible is the word from which we get the English word evangelize. So they went out evangelizing.

They went out sharing the gospel, and they went out evangelizing the word. The word here has the sense of the word word here is the sense of the content of the message.

So the early believers went out as missionaries everywhere they went, and they shared the good news of the gospel of Jesus.

They went out, and they evangelized their neighbors. They evangelized those that they came into contact with, with the good news of the gospel.

Jesus died on the cross for their sin. Jesus rose again the third day. So they were scattered. The first thing we see is the believers responded to adversity by advancing the gospel.

[18 : 19] Adversity came into their life. They were persecuted. Life became difficult for them. So they said, well, why don't we go out as missionaries to a new place?

And as they did, they were advancing the gospel. Acts chapter 1, verse 8, Jesus had told them, that you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost part of the world.

What is verse 4 saying? They were following Jesus' commands. They were taking the gospel, and they became his witnesses to Judea.

And then we're going to see in Philip that he takes the gospel to Samaria. So therefore, they went, they scattered, they were evangelizing everyone that they came into contact with.

They were taking the time to go out and share Jesus with those around them. They could have had the attitude that, you know, things are getting difficult, and, you know, I'm just going to retreat into my shell, and I'm not going to, I'm just going to lay low.

[19 : 41] And I've heard of this in companies where maybe there's a shake, maybe there's a takeover, or maybe there's a shake-up in the company, and people will say, you know what?

I just kept my head down. And maybe if they didn't see me, I wouldn't get fired, or I wouldn't get demoted. And so, you know what? I just kept my head down.

I didn't make any noise. I didn't make any waves. And I was just waiting it out. Well, that's not the way the early followers of Jesus did.

See, they could have retreated. They could have gone all hermit and say, you know what? We're just going to go have our, you know, our church among ourselves, and we're going to stay within, you know, our four walls, and you know what?

We're just not going to make any noise. But what did they do? As they went, as they scattered, they evangelized their community. They evangelized their world around them.

[20 : 38] Who of us has not had the temptation just to go silent? Sometimes we think, well, you know what? I don't know what I'll say. You know, I haven't been a Christian long enough.

And so I don't think I'm qualified to share my faith with someone else. You know, I may not know as much as that person that's sitting across the aisle from me because they've been a Christian for 30 years.

You know, I've been a Christian for a year, two years, three years. You know, I just don't know what I'll do. I don't know what I will say. But I don't know what I'll do.

We may be tempted to do that. I know I am. When things get frustrating or maybe when people don't act like I think they should, you know, I have my own little pity party.

And I get up some days and it's like, you know what? Oh, I don't feel like going into the office. You know, I just don't feel like working on my sermon today because I'm just, oh.

[22 : 03] You know, maybe it's time to retire. You know, oh, maybe I have my own little pity party. And who have I been listening to? I've been listening to Satan.

Exactly. Because what Satan and Saul were trying to accomplish through persecution, God used to advance the gospel.

Isn't that amazing? What Satan said, I am going to put this to rest. Saul is thinking, you know what? This is a hard way.

They are totally against what we were taught in the Old Testament. And this Jesus is not the Messiah. And they wanted to silence them.

They wanted to eradicate all those Christians. We've learned all down through history. Different cultures, different leaders have taken God's word and burned them.

[23 : 03] Have taken God's word completely out of the culture, the physical Bibles. What happened? God used that persecution. God used that to fan the flames of the fire that was already within those who were followers of Jesus.

And there were some who said, before they take it, I'll memorize it. You know, I will memorize God's word. And by the way, we're going to be doing some memorization. We're going to be helping our clubbers in Awana with their memorization.

And so adults, we're going to be memorizing too. And it's going to be fun, believe me. And so what Satan meant to eradicate the gospel, God was using to advance it.

And it's amazing how that works. So there are times when I listen to Satan. There are times when I listen to my flesh and I say, you know what? Oh, a trial or an adversity or something comes up.

You and I, if you're followers of Jesus, were made, our lives were made to matter, and your life can change the world.

[24 : 19] Just those 12 apostles and the early believers turned their world upside down. So these early believers responded to adversity by advancing the gospel.

Next, what we see in verse 5, now we see another one of these servants that we saw in Acts chapter number 6. Well, Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, Stephen went out and preached the gospel. Stephen went out and worked miracles. And people were getting saved. Well, Philip was another one of these men who went beyond his initial ministry.

And he goes out evangelizing as well. Verse 5, Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria. Both geographically, he's going down.

Now, Samaria was a place where Jews, they stayed away from. The Samaritans, those who were in Samaria, they were Jews who were captured by Assyria back in 732 B.C.

[25 : 40] And they had deported them. They had brought others in. They intermarried with Gentiles. And so they became a whole new people group.

They were Jew, mixed Jew and Gentile. They had their own temple. They had their own priest, their own worship system. They even had their own place to worship.

And the Samaritans did not fraternize with the Jews. And neither the Jews with the Samaritans. Matter of fact, if a Jew wanted to go further, they took the long route around just so they wouldn't step on Samaritan soil.

But Philip says he went down to the city of Samaria and he preached Christ.

Philip brings the gospel to the Samaritans. And so Philip goes down and he preaches. But this word preach is a different word than what the, you know, we could call them the laity.

[26 : 49] We could call them the believers within the church. They went out and they evangelized. Philip went out and the word that's used here in the original is the word for a herald.

To go out and to cry loudly and to cry publicly. Philip was like the town crier. You know, you hear these, read these books and you see the older movies.

And there was a town crier would go out, hear ye, hear ye, hear ye. And they would read a proclamation out loud in this city. That's what Philip did. Philip went out and Philip became a proclaimer of the gospel.

Philip went out and proclaimed, heralded the gospel to the city of Samaria. So he is going out.

He is proclaiming. He is sharing his faith. But I want you to notice what is he proclaiming? Philip went down to the city of Samaria and he heralded.

[27 : 59] He preached what? He didn't preach Methodist theology to them. He didn't preach Baptist theology or any other ology.

But Jesus. I want us to know that our churches will never save anyone. No charismatic, and I use that term for a really great orator.

You know, no pastor's personality, no preacher's personality are going to bring people to heaven. And none of our programs will ever bring people everlasting life.

Only Jesus. Only Jesus. So when we go out, you know, we don't use, like Paul said, you know, we don't use high-sounding words.

We don't use philosophy. Now there's a place for something that we call apologetics. And that is simply that we use logic from God's Word to talk to people who are prone to resonate with that type of approach.

[29 : 08] But when we go out, we're just talking about Jesus. So Philip goes out and he heralds, he talks to the city about Jesus.

Talks to the city about what Jesus did on the cross for them. He rose again the third day, and that's his message. Do you realize that that's your message?

When adversity strikes, when things are difficult, when you're afraid that someone is going to put you down, when you're afraid that someone is going to call you names or maybe shun you, they won't be your friend anymore.

There are some that I know of, my own family, who shunned my family when we first came to know Jesus Christ as our Savior. Literally would not talk to us. Had nothing to do with us.

We're finally now, over 40 years later, maybe beginning, they're beginning to listen a little bit. So we don't allow persecution, we don't allow opposition to silence us, but we continue to share our faith.

[30 : 17] So all you need to know is, let me put it this way, if you knew enough about Jesus to trust him as your Savior, you know enough to lead someone to Christ. Isn't that it?

If you know that Jesus died for your sins, you know that he rose again on the third day, you know enough to lead another person to Jesus.

And so adversity can advance the gospel, and the gospel brings joy.

We'll see that in a moment. So Philip goes down, and he's the herald, he preaches Jesus to them, and the multitudes, verse 6, with one accord, heeded the things spoken by Philip.

They listened intently. They heeded his words. They paid attention to his words. They adhered to his words. He came to Samaria preaching Jesus, heralding Jesus, proclaiming Jesus.

[31 : 23] They listened to the message, and they liked what they heard. They paid attention, and they adhered to the word.

How? With one accord. Or unanimously. As a whole, they began to understand what Jesus had done for them.

So the multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip. I want you to notice this. Hearing and seeing the miracles which he did, goes on in verse 7, for unclean spirits, crying with a loud voice, came out of many who were possessed, and many who were paralyzed, and the lame were healed.

But I want you to notice that a miracle never saved anybody. A miracle never gave anyone eternal life.

But how did they respond? They saw the miracles, yes. But he says they were hearing. Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

[32 : 39] So when we take God's word, and we present it to someone who may not have a relationship with God, when we take God's word, and we present it to someone that does not have a relationship with him, God and the power of God's word, God's word is living.

It's powerful. It's sharper than a two-edged sword. It can pierce into our very heart of hearts, and it can divide us, and it can show us what we're really like and what we really need.

We are lost without a savior. That's the power of God's word. And so the believers scattered. They responded to adversity by advancing the gospel.

Philip goes out, and he heralds Jesus. He brings the gospel to the Samaritans. They heard the gospel, and how did they respond?

We see that in verse number 8. And there was great joy in that city. The city responded to the good news of Jesus with joy.

[34 : 00] But not just joy, with great joy. And so the city is so glad to hear this good news of Jesus, and I'm sure they were glad for getting their demon-possessed family members and getting people healed, but I believe it's a full package.

They were so excited that God had come to Samaria. You know, great things happen when Jesus is in the house. Amen? Great things happen when Jesus comes into our life.

Great things happen. Now, it doesn't mean it's going to be a bed of roses. It doesn't mean things are going to be, you know, all exciting. And, you know, there are a whole lot of mundane days in the Christian life.

Just work. Just work. Hard work. Going out. Sharing the gospel. Doing good. Showing love. Showing empathy to others. Loving others. Taking care of our family. Going to work. Making enough money to pay our bills. To feed our family. You know, on and on and on and on and on.

[35 : 15] But when we know Jesus Christ, he brings into our life a power. He brings into our life something that we could never do on our own.

I want you to know that our adversity, your adversity, the trials in your life don't have to pull you down. Because you've got a big God. You've got a big Jesus right there with you wherever you go on the playground of life.

He is there with you. Because you know Jesus as your Savior. Because God's Holy Spirit is within you.

You are a super conqueror. Super conquering. World changing. Victor. In your life.

That's what God does. In our lives. So the city responded with great joy. How should we respond when someone gets saved? We ought to get excited.

[36 : 23] We ought to get so excited when someone comes to know Jesus. And I want to put this out there. What if? Now I know a lot of churches are very time conscious.

And they want to make sure their roast doesn't burn in the oven. They want to make sure that we get home at a decent time. And the preacher doesn't preach more than 40 minutes.

Lord forbid it's an hour. And so many are worried that if service goes too long, the Methodists are going to beat them to the restaurant.

But what if one Sunday people start coming and saying, I want to know Jesus. And the service goes 15 minutes long.

And people keep coming. The service goes 30 minutes long. And people keep coming. And the service goes an hour long. And people keep coming. Oh my word.

[37 : 32] We would have a hope. The greatest revival. Because we would be so excited. Heaven would be rejoicing. And we would be right there with them. We would be right there with the angels in heaven.

Rejoicing over souls that are being saved. And that's exactly what was happening. The city had great joy because the gospel had come to them.

No matter what happens in our life, Jesus is with us. If you know Christ as your Savior. No matter what adversity you and I go through, we don't have to pull into our shell.

How will we respond when things get difficult? Will we pull into our shell and hide? Will we take our toys and go home because things got difficult?

Or are we going to, as these early believers, say, you know what? I'm not going to let adversity shut me up. I'm not going to let trouble and trials cause me to just go home and just be me and my family.

[38 : 44] I'm going to allow God to take this. And I'm going to allow adversity to advance the gospel.

And the gospel brings great joy. So don't let adversity get you down. Why? Because we have a big Jesus.

We have a big Savior with us everywhere we go. Let's pray. Our Father, we thank you for your goodness. Father, we thank you for loving us so much that we have nothing to be anxious over. You've told us not to worry. But instead, bring it to you in prayer. And your peace, which surpasses all understanding, will guard our minds.

We'll take our minds captive and guard it. And so we don't have to worry about what might happen, what could happen.

[39 : 57] That we know that you will work all things out for your good, no matter what happens in our life. We thank you, Lord. We thank you, Father, for what you're going to do.

I pray, Lord, that you would unify us in the mission of advancing your kingdom. I pray, Heavenly Father, that you would help us to come together to love one another more and more every day. I pray, Lord God, that as the early church, that they would meet together, socialize together. That they would be caring for one another.

That we would be caring for one another. Father, that we would be able to come together to worship you. Come together to be refilled.

That we would come together to encourage one another. To build one another up so that we can go out into this cold, cruel world. And advance the gospel.

[40 : 54] Even in the midst of adversity. And trials and troubles and financial and family and relationships. Lord, that we would not let you down. That we would continue to advance the gospel.

We pray all of this in Jesus' name.