

# Gossiping the Gospel

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- [ 0 : 0 0 ]     Seeking the Lord's blessing, let us turn back to the portion of scripture that we read together in the Acts of the Apostles and chapter 8, and we'll read from the beginning.
- And Saul was consenting unto his death, and at that time there was a great persecution against the church, which was at Jerusalem. And they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.
- And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. As for Saul, he played havoc of the church, entering into every house, and tailing men and women, committed them to prison.
- Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word. Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ unto them, and so on.
- The first four verses of this chapter introduces us to the exploits of Philip, one of the seven deacons.
- [ 1 : 1 0 ]     Luke saw the ministry of Philip as helping to pave the way for the Gentile mission. But before he comes to specifically speak of Philip's mission to Samaria, he tells us that the death of Stephen was followed by a time of great persecution, instigated by the Jewish authorities in Jerusalem against those who were sympathetic to Stephen and his views.
- For we read, Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word.
- Luke brings before us a very graphic picture of what was happening in Jerusalem among the Christian community, as homes were ransacked and men and women were dragged to prison.
- The word translated havoc there is a very strong word, meaning that there was brutality and cruelty associated with it.
- However, Luke also wants us to learn how the great commission that Jesus gave his apostles were now being fulfilled.
- [ 3 : 0 2 ]     Remember that commission which Jesus gave to his apostles. Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.
- And here we read that during this time of persecution, that Christians were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria.
- That they were scattered abroad and that they went throughout these regions everywhere preaching the word. Later on we are told that some of those who were scattered went as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antio.
- You see, up until this point, the gospel was very much confined exclusively to Jerusalem. But as a result of persecution, the gospel was now spreading abroad in accordance to the great commission given to the apostles.
- In accordance with the apostles, in accordance with the apostles, in accordance with the words of Jesus before he ascended. For he said to them, but ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost has come upon you.

[ 4 : 18 ] And ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem and all Judea and in Samaria and into the uttermost parts of the earth.

And as we look at the expansion of the gospel in the early church, we cannot but be impressed by the sovereignty of God.

By the fact that God is working out his purpose. The mystery surrounding his providence.

Stephen's martyrdom led to persecution. And the persecution led to the dispersion.

And the dispersion resulted in widespread evangelism. It resulted in the gospel being spread abroad.

[ 5 : 19 ] In Jerusalem in those days, I think there would be many who were separated from their loved ones. And some who were dragged away from their homes and put into prison.

Some who met with death. That they would ask this question. What is the purpose of God in all this?

What is the purpose of God in the martyrdom of Stephen? What is the purpose of God in persecution? How is all this going to work for good?

Well, if we, our minds go back to a very familiar story with us in the book of Genesis regarding Joseph and his brethren.

Joseph there, way back in Genesis, could say to his brothers, You thought evil against me, but God meant it unto good.

[ 6 : 25 ] Those who were persecuting the Christians were thinking evil against them. But God meant it for good. Because through the persecution, the gospel was spread abroad.

The gospel came to the Gentile world. The gospel reached places as far as Antioch. Through persecution. What is very interesting here also is that the apostles stayed in Jerusalem.

Although the reason for this is not actually given, persecution seems to have been leveled against Greek-speaking believers rather than Jews like the apostles.

So we see that the spreading of the gospel was not initially done by the apostles, but those men and women who hurriedly left their homes.

For we are told that everywhere they went, that they preached the word. The word that Luke employs here, translated preaching, could be translated they spread the good news, or they gossiped the gospel.

[ 7 : 42 ] The expansion of the gospel beyond Jerusalem were not initially done by the apostles, but by men and women who spoke of their faith to those whom they met.

One writer says, they left us missionaries rather than refugees. They were not apostles, but they were witnesses.

We are not all preachers, but we are all called to be witnesses. In the biblical sense of evangelism, every Christian is expected to have something to say about Jesus and the difference that Jesus made in their lives.

This personal experience is so very important in evangelism and spreading the word and gossiping the gospel.

It should be an example for us, for we are bound also to take the gospel with us wherever we go and speak about the good news of Jesus in our day-to-day conversation with those with whom we come into contact.

[ 9 : 04 ] One might have expected them to leave Jerusalem and to keep quiet in fear of raising more persecution in their new environment.

But how could they keep quiet? The love of Christ constrained them. Evangelism or the spreading of the gospel is not one person's work, but it is the duty of all those who have trusted in Christ, all those who have come to know God's salvation in Jesus Christ.

Here we see how God equipped ordinary men and women to tell the story of what Jesus Christ has and is doing for them.

we must not seek to find excuses not to gossip the gospel. We must not try and find excuses not to witness for Jesus Christ.

Here we see how he was using ordinary men and women, not great theologians, not trained preachers, but just ordinary men and women to tell the story of what Jesus has and is doing for them.

[ 10 : 28 ] And the great question for us today is do we feel that deep sense of obligation? Am I engaged in this kind of evangelism on a daily basis where I tell people of what Jesus Christ has and is doing for me in my life?

In chapter 4 of this book we are told of Peter and John when they stood before the highest court of the land after their case was heard and they were given the news that they are going to be released on bail.

But there was a condition upon their bail and that is that they were to keep silent. They were forbidden to speak about Jesus.

They were forbidden to gossip the gospel. And what was their response? Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God judge you for we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.

It was impossible for them to obey the condition of their bail. Impossible for them to obey the condition of their own freedom from prison.

[ 12 : 00 ] And in our ever-growing secular society the day may come when we will be told that to proclaim Jesus as the only way of salvation is a hate crime or to declare that all other forms of salvation is false will be viewed as intolerance.

But what shall our response be? If we are silent now and spreading the good news of Jesus Christ in our own personal evangelism when we have an amount of liberty to do so how shall we be when those threats come along and we are told to be silent or else to face certain consequences if we keep on proclaiming that Jesus is the only way of salvation that all other forms of salvation is false.

of course we must remember that evangelism is God's work but he uses human instruments he commands us to evangelize he commands us to spread the word he commands us to gossip the gospel J.I.

Parker writes in his book on evangelism and the sovereignty of God he says this it is necessary therefore to take the thought of human responsibility as it affects both the preacher and the hearer of the gospel very seriously indeed but we must not let it drive the thought of divine sovereignty out of our minds while we must remember that it is our responsibility to proclaim salvation we must never forget that it is God who saves our responsibility is to proclaim but it is God that saves it is God who brings men and women under the sound of the gospel and it is God who brings them to faith in Christ our evangelistic work is the instrument that he uses for this purpose but the power that saves is not in the instrument it is in the hand of the one who uses the instrument in other words

God uses men and women as instruments in order to bring salvation to sinners but it is God that saves it is God that brings salvation now what we notice about these people that we have here in Acts 8 is that they were filled with enthusiasm they were filled with enthusiasm because of the loving sacrifice of Jesus they saw the cross they saw the work of Golgotha as the supreme demonstration of God's love the length to which he was willing to go in order to win back sinners into fellowship with himself how could they withhold the proclamation of such a God from a world that was crying out in need the need moved them greatly and if

[ 15 : 59 ] I and you believe as they believed that apart from Christ there is no other way of salvation for sinners then how can we be so heartless as to keep silent surely we should look upon it as a privilege in spite of the hardships that those Christians met with they understood that it was an enormous privilege to bring the good news to others the sense of privilege gave them confidence and boldness to go out and to gossip the gospel to tell others about Jesus to tell others about their need and the sufficiency of Jesus work on Golgotha to meet with that need they were so filled with enthusiasm because of the sacrifice of Golgotha that they could not hold back maybe today maybe I and you lack that enthusiasm maybe we ought to pray to the

Lord to give us that enthusiasm to go out and to tell others about Jesus undoubtedly they were not only filled with enthusiasm but they were filled with a vision they had a vision they saw those around them as a people in great need as a people without God and without hope in this world just as Jesus saw them as sheep scattered without a shepherd wandering aimlessly in the world seeking satisfaction seeking a purpose for living and not finding it and they were concerned for them and like their saviour they reached out to them with the good news motivated by the Holy Spirit they reached out in love to the unlovely they reached out in love to the lost well do we believe that men and women boys and girls without

Christ are in a serious need or are we perfectly at peace to conclude that such are perfectly alright as they are we must not invade their privacy by telling them about our faith have we lost the conviction that it is our responsibility and great privilege that Jesus entrusts upon us to be his witnesses in this world to be his ambassadors to be his spokespersons to tell others about him and his salvation for sinners and to share with others what he has done and is doing in our life are we ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and with love and with fear let us pray for a clear vision of a needy world a needy community a needy congregation and the longing of our loving saviour to reach out to that needy community to reach out to our needy congregation to reach out to those who are without hope who are without

God those who are lost those who are on the way to destruction those who are on the way to hell to reach them with the gospel through his church we are not to isolate ourselves because God has purposed has willed has decreed that his purpose of salvation will be conveyed to others through his church through his people another important thing that they knew and we have to remember also is the presence of Christ with us Jesus is not just a mere figure of long ago but our contemporary this was the fear among the disciples when

Jesus announced that he was going to leave them but he assured them I will not leave you comfortless I will come to you in the great commission he promised lo I am with you always even unto the end of the world it is important for us to remember the presence of Christ with us through the spirit as we gossip the gospel as we witness to others we are not on our own Christ is with us through his spirit there are many facets to spreading the word to gossiping the gospel to evangelism but in our passage we find that the priority of the word for we read they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word when Luke speaks of the mission of

[ 22 : 08 ] Philip he begins by saying then Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ unto them it is apparent from the repeated sermons that we have scattered through the book of Acts the priority that they gave to the word of God not only in preaching but in personal evangelism these were people who were very well versed in the Old Testament and the fulfillment in Jesus Paul's letter to the Ephesians reminds us that the sword of the spirit is the word of God later on in this chapter we see that it was the word that broke down the centuries old prejudice of the Samaritans and brought them to the feet of Jesus brought the people of Samaria to the feet of Jesus what broke down the prejudice that they had against the Jews it was the word of

God now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God at the end of the chapter we see that the word in the mouth of Philip expounded brought the treasure of Ethiopia to Christ there is this emphasis this focus upon the word of God later on in chapter 13 we read that when Paul preached the word at Antioch giving an overview of the history of Israel and making a powerful application of it that he was invited to preach the following week and so we read and the next Sabbath day came also the whole city together to hear the word of God the importance of coming together where the word of God has been expounded and to go out and to share that with others the apostles gave themselves to prayer and the word if people are spiritually hungry there is nothing in the world that satisfies them except the word of

God if they are entangled in the things of the world there is nothing in the world that can bring liberation to them like the word of God God's word is food it is light it is a sword it is a fire it is the supreme instrument of Christian growth when faithfully expounded that is why the apostles gave it such priority and that's why we have to give ourselves over to prayer and the word of God why we have to give it priority and why we have to give the preaching of the gospel priority in our life and in our community life what was central to the witness of those people and the preaching of Philip what was their specific message well it was the presentation of

Jesus Christ through his word they were telling of what Jesus had done and was doing for them and Philip was preaching Christ to the people of Samaria Jesus as the fulfillment of prophecy and of types Jesus as the fulfillment of all the Old Testament prophecies and types Jesus as Lord and Christ Jesus as crucified and risen Jesus as the divine son of God who became man in order to save sinners it is more than to present the teaching and example of Jesus although that is included but it is to present Jesus with reference to his saving work upon the cross to preach and to speak of Jesus Christ and him crucified was that not what Paul wanted to know at Corinth he didn't want to know any other gossip at

Corinth but Jesus Christ and him crucified the person who suffered that he might bring us to God he is only it is only through him and and that we can come to God only through him that we can have salvation he is the only through whom and through whom alone we can come to put our trust in God according to his own claim for he himself said I am the way the truth and the life no one comes to the father except through me through our witness and the preaching of the word of Jesus Christ we must exhort a people to accept Jesus as their saviour he is our only hope without him we are lost and to bring that into our community into our congregation to bring that to our homes to our families to our husbands to our wives to our children to bring that to everyone with whom we come into contact our gospel message is about

[ 28 : 03 ] Christ and him crucified it is a message about man's sin and God's grace it is a message about human guilt and divine forgiveness a message about the new birth the new life through the Holy Spirit well what effect did this have on the people well in chapter 11 we are told by Luke now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that rose about Stephen travelled as far as Venice and Cyprus and Antioch preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only and some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene which when they were come to Antioch speaking to the Christians preaching the Lord Jesus and the hand of the Lord was with them and a great number believed and turned unto the Lord through the preaching of the word through the witness of these ordinary men and women many turned into the

Lord that is our personal responsibility if we have tasted that the Lord is gracious if we have tasted of the salvation of the Lord it is our responsibility to bring that message to others to bring that message to others to water it without prayers the seed of the word that they may come to believe and to turn unto the Lord what effect has the gospel of Jesus Christ made in your life the gospel is for sinners just as you are the hymn writer Joseph Hart puts the gospel invitation like this into one of the hymns that he wrote and I will in conclusion I will read this hymn to you and listen very carefully to the words because it brings the gospel what is the gospel to you he says come ye sinners poor and needy weak and wounded sick and sore righteous sinners sinners

Jesus came to call agonizing in the garden lo your maker prostrate lies on the bloody tree behold him hear him cry before he dies it is finished it is finished it is finished sinner will this not suffice lo the incarnate God ascending pleads the merit of his blood venture on him venture fleary let no other trust intrude none but Jesus none but Jesus none but Jesus can do helpless sinners good and the Lord bless our thoughts let us pray