

Acts 8:1-8
What Marks the Church? Preaching!
20180701

Demonstrate your faith in Jesus by preaching the good news!

Introduction

I want you to picture in your mind the site of an archeological dig. Some of you have maybe stood at the site of such a dig. Others of you maybe have seen pictures or documentaries of such digs. With this picture in your mind, I haven't given you any real boundaries to frame the archeological dig. But what if I said now picture that site before the first shovel of dirt has been removed. Maybe all that is present is flagging marking off the area that is to be carefully excavated. In this condition the plot has a tremendous amount of work to undergo before the treasures contained within it can be discovered, analyzed, and studied to gain more understanding as to how the earlier civilization conducted life. What usually happens in these types of scenarios is an affirmation of what is already known about an ancient people group, but occasionally new and exiting discoveries are made.

What if we were to take this method of analyzation to the church? Now of course the church is made up of God's people, so we are taking the idea of an archeological dig – but not actually bringing the excavation tools to work through this exercise. We would want to find certain traits, characteristics, to affirm that what we are looking at is truly a Christian church. What would those traits be? What marks a church as being a true church? As we look at the first 8 verses in chapter 8 we see one very clear mark of the church – and that mark is Preaching.

The proclamation of the good news of Jesus Christ is a defining mark of the church. As it should be! For if we as believers are aware of what Christ has done for us, bringing us from death to life, just as we see in John 5:24, *“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.”* we cannot but help to share this news with others. You might be thinking, “that is right, the church should preach!” But when you think that --- who do you specifically think is responsible for preaching? Nathan, Seth, and Ben here at Pillar Bible Fellowship?

I would have to say yes, we have a responsibility to preach here on Sunday mornings, but is that the only time preaching occurs? No, and we are not the only ones charged to preach the good news of Jesus Christ. If you have accepted him as your Lord and Savior it is your responsibility too. You might be saying to yourself, “but I'm afraid to do that.” I acknowledge fear can be a real obstacle.

At times we all face fears of various types. Our flesh cries out, save me! It might be from real danger, like if you have been in a near collision while driving maybe you have had the sudden hot, tingling sensation come over you, even experienced your heart racing. Maybe you have had to face fear of a different sort; getting in front of a crowd to deliver a speech, afraid of what people will think of you. Perhaps you have a fear of failing in a pursuit letting down yourself or someone who is depending on you. Another fear we face, even as believers, is how people will react to our faith being proclaimed as central to who we are. Worst of all it seems that entertaining our fears only seems to heightens our sensitivity to them all the more.

Here in the book we have been studying it is quite clear the believers have been subjected to many scenarios that would welcome a tidal wave of fear. Even in our passage today as the persecution of the church intensifies it becomes quite apparent what distinguishes true believers. They are the ones that in spite of severe threats, even witnessing the unlawful imprisonment of others, go on by demonstrating their faith in Jesus by preaching the good news. So, as we study this passage together I want you to be asking, how do I become more like the believers described in early chapters of Acts? The answer that will stand out is – Demonstrate your faith in Jesus by preaching the good news!

Persecution Breaks Out (vv1,3)

1.v1 *““And Saul approved of his execution. And there arose on that day a great persecution against...”*

a. Already in this first verse of our passage major events are taking place that require us to look closer at the circumstances that led up to this.

i. In the past three weeks we have carefully looked at the life and events surrounding Stephen that culminated in his murder by the enraged mob (7:57-58).

1. What was his offense? What did he do that was deserving of death? Stephen proclaimed Christ! His faith in Jesus was unwavering, even when faced with his own imminent death his eyes were not removed from Jesus. Jesus who was standing at the right hand of the Father ready to receive him into the heavenly kingdom (7:55).

ii. Even prior to us looking at Stephen, Gamaliel spoke to the same group when they were enraged with the apostles and wanted to kill them (5:33). And he told them basically to just wait.

1. Theudas – but when he was killed his followers dispersed (5:36).

2. Judas the Galilean and when he perished his followers scattered (5:37).

3. If this plan was of God it would not be able to be overthrown (5:39), reminding us of what Jesus said to Peter in **Matt. 16:18** when he said the gates of hell would not prevail against his church.

b. This brings us back to our current verse, v1 where we see recorded that a great persecution arose against the church. What is it that happens? Gamaliel mentioned others who when hardship came disbanded. Here initially we see the words recorded that they were all scattered!

i. But where were they scattered too? Judea and Samaria. Remember **Acts 1:8**? *“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”*

ii.v3. *“But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women....”*

c. Something has changed in Jerusalem, earlier attempts at this kind of persecution were untenable. Here we see Saul, upon the heels of approving of Stephen’s murder leading this assault against the church.

i. I say something has changed, because in previous attempts to bring harm against the apostles the leaders were afraid because of the people. After Peter and John healed the lame man the rulers of the people wanted to harm them, but found no way to punish them because of the people (4:21).

d. Now Saul is ravaging the church, he is determined to see the church destroyed. Can you imagine being there – part of the Jerusalem church? Just a short time earlier enjoying what we consider the best of church life. Regular fellowship, worship, apostles teaching, witnessing healing, multitudes of people being converted, loving care being demonstrated to the point that no one did without.

i. What are the believers to do now? Give up their faith in Jesus? Impossible. Go to prison, many did. The rest are said to have scattered.

ii. Is this really part of God’s plan? Luke is providing us with a historical narrative of what is happening, and church I want to recognize even in this horrific account of persecution God is sovereign over the affairs of man.

1.Revelation 6:9-11

iii. God has ordained his own, he knows the names of those that are written in the Lamb's book of life. In addition to knowing those who will die for him, he knows the deeds of those left to live, if they are faithful witnesses.

1. Do not forget God even planned greater things for the chief instigator of this persecution, Saul who will later be converted to become a follower of Christ will eventually follow those who are scattered and strengthen the churches that get started by their witness.

Transition: Here we see persecution breaks out against the church, but it is not outside of God's plan of redemption, it in fact is advancing his plan. Even though the desire of the persecutors is to see the church disappear, it is causing the good news of the gospel to spread – because as we will see these believers demonstrate their faith in Jesus by preaching the good news!

Preaching Pours Out (vv4-6)

1. The believers are sold out for Christ. They did not sell out to comfort by leaving Jerusalem, rather they took drastic action to leave the place where the persecution was most concentrated. They were rightly afraid of losing their freedom and even possibly losing their lives. But in this section we will plainly see they don't go into hiding. Instead, they demonstrate their faith in Jesus by preaching the good news!

v4 *“Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word.”*

a. This is astounding to think about and a testimony to their zeal for Jesus. They cannot stay in Jerusalem because of their faith in Jesus and the persecution it is bringing upon them -- so they leave. They are scattered. They don't abandon the faith, they cannot! Far from abandoning their faith, they share it!

i. The surrounding areas of Judea and Samaria would have known about the persecution taking place in Jerusalem. Peter when he was confronted on the night of Jesus' arrest denied knowing the man. This is different, filled with the Holy Spirit, these Christians are preaching the word.

b. So, back to earlier when we were considering together the characteristics of the church, and what we would find if we were to search through the remnants of an earlier people group that we were suspecting might be a church, I said one clear mark would be preaching. Here the early church historian Luke records the church went about preaching the word.

1. Who is doing this preaching? In **v4** it simply says those who were scattered.

ii. How would this play out here? Brothers and Sisters, this is the portion of the text that I have labored over the most during my last few weeks of study. The early church was in all likelihood less than a year old. The apostles it says in **v1** were not scattered throughout Judea and Samaria, meaning they remained in Jerusalem. That means those who were preaching the word were sold out for Christ – worthy of the name Christians.

1. We have been a regular gathering body of believers since the spring of 2012. Over six years for those of us who have been with the church since then. Many have joined the church since that time, but most have been with us for over a year. If the scenario in our country changed drastically, causing us to flee as these early Christians fled. Would you go into Canada or Mexico preaching the word?

2. Are you sold out for Christ? If you are not sold out for Christ, what is keeping you back? I, along with the other elders would like to know. We want to be effective disciple makers.

3. Are you equipped with a solid base? If you don't feel equipped, how are we failing you or how are you failing to grow yourself? Once again, I, along with the other elders would like to know. We want to be effective ministers of the gospel and the truth contained in God's word.

c. These Jerusalem believers didn't decide to preach the gospel when they were forced to flee their homes. This was their established pattern upon being converted to Christianity. That means that as they went about conducting their lives, working their jobs, playing with other kids, interacting with the neighbors they were sharing the good news of Jesus Christ. The best news ever had been made known to them and they went about making it known to others.

i. Does this describe us? I admit, I am much more comfortable preaching the gospel right here. It is harder when I put on my flight suit and boots.

ii. Is that the same for you when you walk through the doors of the school you work at, or sit behind the desk in your office?

iii. How about those of you who have a place in the community that is open for commerce? Has that space been purposed for kingdom work?

d. Church, hear my heart. We cannot live our lives however we think the world would accept us, and then come here on a Sunday and speak poorly about the world. It is God who has put us here to be the salt and the light. When we come together that is what we need to be encouraging each other in. I don't want to just keep doing the same thing if it is not strengthening our faith in Christ to the point where we naturally preach him as we go.

e. Persecution broke out and from that the believers couldn't stop the preaching from pouring out. All those who were scattered we just spent time looking at, but we also have recorded a specific account about a man named Philip. **v5** *"Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ."*

f. Philip went down to the city of Samaria and there he proclaimed to them the Christ. Philip proclaimed the Messiah. God's plan of redemption is made fully known through his Son Jesus, many people groups around the world await some type of savior. But just as we saw in **Acts 4:12** which says, *"And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."* Philip is preaching that name by which the people must be saved.

g.vv6-7, *"And the crowds with one accord paid attention to what was being said by Philip...."*

h. Philip, without hesitation, demonstrated his faith in Jesus by preaching the good news! He was compelled to do so and the people were ready to hear the good news. Just as God validated the ministry of his Son and the ministry of others with miracles, we see that occur here in Samaria.

i. The result was that those whom God called to that place actively paid attention, they actively heard, and they actively saw the proofs provided. The church in Jerusalem was faithful in exercising the mark of the church associated with preaching.

Transition: As we wrap up this portion on Preaching Poured Out, in our last point we will investigate the two outcomes provided in this passage regarding preaching the truth.

Posthumous Plays Out (vv2,7)

i.v2 *“Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him.”*

i. Unless you survive until Christ’s return you will likely face death. Stephen was murdered. He died with his gaze firmly fixed upon Christ and knowing his own great forgiveness was provided by Jesus he requested that same forgiveness to be granted to his persecutors (7:60).

j. How are you preparing for your death? What will be said about you when you are gone? Will people be glad to see you go? Will your loved one’s be angry with God that you died?

k. This is a topic that is very near to many of us in the room right now. So many of us have experienced loss recently. I know of one family that even was attending a funeral service this past week.

i. When our world is rocked by death, I say that because it is jarring, I want to remind you that death is the consequence of sin. **Romans 5:12**, *“Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned—”*

d. For that reason, all of us here, aside from Christ’s return - will face death. Stephen died a violent death, and yet the account of his death is one of his peaceful entry into heaven. He had been saved by Christ. Jesus stood at the right hand of the Father ready to welcome his servant Stephen directly into heaven.

e. What does the passage say about those who buried him? They made great lamentation. He was safe in the arms of Christ, but the followers of Jesus who were left on earth were broken hearted.

f. Weeping and sobbing over the loss of him.

i. Listen, in the past I have asked God to make me a rock when facing the death of loved ones. Thinking that being stable for others would be what is most loving for them. Have you ever thought like that? **Romans 12:15** *“weep with those who weep.”*

g. Here in our passage we see great lamentation. Mourning is natural, because death is not natural. It has come about because of sin, and we suffer greatly under the consequence of it.

h. Although we suffer, that doesn’t mean we are without hope. That is why we see the practice of burial as the standard practice of the Christian and before the Christian of the Jew.

i. Messiah has come through the Jewish people, many of them are still waiting for the Messiah.

j. He is the hope they long for and we know him, he is Jesus.

k. Believers in Christ, pass directly into his presence. Not even fully tasting death, for Christ died for us.

l. But upon his return we are to be reunited with our resurrected bodies, just as our Lord forever resides in heaven with his resurrected body.

i. Have you heard this before, that historically Christians have been buried as a sign of our hope in Christ? I had not been exposed to this growing up in the church. I instead adopted a whatever is cheapest idea of what to do with my remains, and that meant cremation. But if the burial of our body is a sign of our hope in Christ what does willingly subjecting it to fire say?

ii.v8 *“So there was much joy in that city.”* It was in this city of Samaria that Philip proclaimed Christ. They received the message, and the result was much joy.

m. Stephen's death caused those who knew him to make great lamentation over him (8:2). From the time of Stephen's death, the normal life of the church in Jerusalem was forever changed. But it also caused the life in this city of Samaria to be forever changed. Changed to the point where Luke can record that much joy was in that city.

i. The message that Philip was able to proclaim is the message of salvation in Jesus. He was able to share with the inhabitants of that city that the weight of their sin was dealt with in Christ and they could have freedom from the eternal consequences of their sin if they put their faith in Jesus. They didn't have to make a certain type of sacrifice for the freedom, Christ already made the perfect sacrifice. They didn't have to follow the law perfectly, Christ already did that too. They just had to receive the work of Christ as sufficient for their salvation and place their faith firmly in him.

ii. The result was much joy in that city.

n. When was the last time you strolled through Hood River and thought this city is full of joy? What about any of the surrounding cities and towns? Much joy found in those?

o. Church these are the cities and towns God has placed us in, so never mind being able to preach if placed in exile, like I mentioned before. How do we preach right here? We demonstrate our faith in Jesus by preaching the good news! What does our preaching say about our faith? Church, what do you want it to say about our faith?

Transition: I think by shifting our focus here at the end to what our friends are doing up north with their ministry might serve us well and help give us some direction.

Conclusion

In the latest newsletter James and Shannon sent out they recount a story that speaks volumes to what God is doing through them in the village of Grayling. By all accounts it would be safe to say that James and his family are outsiders to the isolated village of Grayling Alaska. Learning about what takes place in that village, how people interact, what is important, cultural practices, even building relationships has been taking literally years.

It has been toilsome, even discouraging at times. So, sharing with you a story about them returning to the house and discovering a thief had taken some of the valuable tools that had been stored there may seem odd, until you hear the outcome. They found the shed there in Grayling where they stored fuel, a chainsaw, and even a snow machine had been broken into. The thief had made away with the fuel, the chainsaw, and even the engine to the snow machine.

What were they to do in this situation? Take it as a definite sign that they are not welcome in Grayling? Receive the criminal act against them as validation that all their preaching of the good news has gone in one ear and out the other? No, they made it known to the village and the chief. Trusting God for the outcome. Within a few days the stolen engine was left where it could be discovered, and ultimately returned to them.

Church, are you picturing this scene. James and Shannon along with their family are outsiders. The God they serve is largely a mystery to the people of Grayling, or at least he was a few years ago. But they have been faithfully demonstrating their faith in Jesus by preaching the good news as often as they can be with the people of Grayling. They are purposefully living their lives in such a way that they can be observed while they are in the village. This is the lesson I want us to take from our friends. We have to do likewise here, in our places of work, school, and living. If we want to demonstrate our faith in Jesus by preaching the good news we will have to invest in developing relationships and over time the opportunity will be present to boldly proclaim the truth just as all those who were scattered from Jerusalem, proclaimed Christ wherever they went.

Family

Table Talk



July 1, 2018

Family Discussion

1. You may or may not be aware of how Christians are treated in other parts of the world; your parents can talk to you about some appropriate examples. In the book of Acts the believers were treated in such a harsh manner that they had to leave Jerusalem. Can you put yourself in the shoes of those early Christians?
2. Does the scattering of the Jerusalem believers seem like the end of Christianity? Do you remember the broader commands given to the disciples by Jesus before he ascended into heaven?
3. While the church was together in Jerusalem, many accounts are given in Acts of the public testimonies of the Apostles and Stephen. What do you notice about what the broader church is doing upon being scattered? How can you be preparing and exercising a preaching ministry even now?

GOD'S TRUTH

Demonstrate your faith in Jesus by preaching the good news!

Key Verse

"preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching."

2 Timothy 4:2 (ESV)

TABLE READING

Lead your kids into
God's Word...

1. Acts 8:1,3, Matthew 12:9-16
2. Matthew 28:16-19, Mark 16:15, Acts 1:8
3. Acts 8:4-5, 2 Timothy 4:1-8, 1 Peter 3:13-15



Scripture Memory: Acts 9:31

"AND THESE WORDS THAT I COMMAND YOU TODAY SHALL BE ON YOUR HEART. YOU SHALL TEACH THEM DILIGENTLY TO YOUR CHILDREN, AND SHALL TALK OF THEM WHEN YOU SIT IN YOUR HOUSE, AND WHEN YOU WALK BY THE WAY, AND WHEN YOU LIE DOWN, AND WHEN YOU RISE. YOU SHALL BIND THEM AS A SIGN ON YOUR HAND, AND THEY SHALL BE AS FRONTLETS BETWEEN YOUR EYES. YOU SHALL WRITE THEM ON THE DOORPOSTS OF YOUR HOUSE AND ON YOUR GATES." - DEUTERONOMY 6:6-9 (ESV)

