

## **Wednesday with the Word**

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### **How Do You Handle the Inevitable: Persecution is the Order of the Day Acts 8:1- 8**

#### **Acts 1:8 - Key Verse**

8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

#### **Structure of the Book of Acts**

I. You Will Be My Witnesses in Jerusalem

I. Acts 1:15-8:3

II. **You Will Be My Witnesses in All Judea and Samaria**

I. **Acts 8:4-11:18 (Church persecuted)**

III. You Will Be My Witnesses to the Ends of the Earth

I. Acts 11:19-28:31

#### **Opening Questions:**

What do you do (or would you do) when folk attack you, talk about you, put you down and make you feel bad for doing what is right?

How does it make you feel when people treat you wrong?

How do you respond when people treat you wrong?

#### **Here is the point of tonight's lesson:**

- If you are serving the Lord and doing what God has called you to do you will be persecuted.
- The persecution isn't about you but rather it is about the devil trying to stop what God is trying to do in you and through you.
- **What makes or breaks us is not the persecution but rather how we respond to it. We can choose our response!**
- We have to respond to it in a way that allows us to be who we are at our core and not let what folk do to us get us out of God's will for our life!

#### **The Book of Acts**

Where are we in the story?

The church is leaving Jerusalem and they are now taking the gospel to Judea and Samaria. They are doing what Jesus has commanded them to do and how are they being received by the powers that be?

### **What has just happened to Stephen?**

#### **Acts 7:54 - 60**

**54** When they heard these things, they became enraged and ground their teeth at Stephen. **55** But filled with the Holy Spirit, he gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. **56** "Look," he said, "I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!" **57** But they covered their ears, and with a loud shout all rushed together against him. **58** Then they dragged him out of the city and began to stone him; and the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul. **59** While they were stoning Stephen, he prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." **60** Then he knelt down and cried out in a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he died.

How did Stephen respond to those who were persecuting / literally killing him?

Could you have done what Stephen did?

Do you regularly respond the way Stephen did when folk attack you?

What is our natural tendency / fleshly response when folk attack us?

### **Acts 8:1- 8 Contemporary English Version**

**1-2** Saul approved the stoning of Stephen. Some faithful followers of the Lord buried Stephen and mourned very much for him.

#### **Saul Persecutes the Church**

At that time the church in Jerusalem suffered terribly. All of the Lord's followers, except the apostles, were scattered everywhere in Judea and Samaria. **3** Saul started making a lot of trouble for the church. He went from house to house, arresting men and women and putting them in jail.

#### **The Good News Is Preached in Samaria**

**4** The Lord's followers who had been scattered went from place to place, telling the good news. **5** Philip went to the city of Samaria and told the people about Christ. **6** They crowded around Philip because they were eager to hear what he was saying and to see him work miracles. **7** Many people with evil spirits were healed, and the spirits went out of them with a shout. A lot of crippled and lame people were also healed. **8** Everyone in that city was very glad because of what was happening. CEV

## **Acts 8:1-8 New Revised Standard Version**

**1** And Saul approved of their killing him.

### **Saul Persecutes the Church**

That day a severe persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout the countryside of Judea and Samaria.

**2** Devout men buried Stephen and made loud lamentation over him. **3** But Saul was ravaging the church by entering house after house; dragging off both men and women, he committed them to prison.

### **Philip Preaches in Samaria**

**4** Now those who were scattered went from place to place, proclaiming the word.

**5** Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed the Messiah to them. **6** The crowds with one accord listened eagerly to what was said by Philip, hearing and seeing the signs that he did, **7** for unclean spirits, crying with loud shrieks, came out of many who were possessed; and many others who were paralyzed or lame were cured. **8** So there was great joy in that city. NRSV

### **Acts 8:1b**

That day a severe persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout the countryside of Judea and Samaria.

This is interesting. Why weren't the apostles scattered?

Why were they not attacked?

What was it about them that they remained intact stayed in the city and continued the work?

Why weren't they afraid and running scared?

The first thing we see here is when you are attacked, when the work of God is under attack don't panic. Don't run scared. Don't react! There is nothing to be afraid of! Stay focused and keep on doing what God has called and equipped you to do!

How do we do this? How do we stay focused? - Focused biblically based prayer!

What do you pray?

### **Psalm 5**

Trust in God for Deliverance from Enemies

**To the leader: for the flutes. A Psalm of David.**

**1**

Give ear to my words, O Lord;  
give heed to my sighing.

**2**

Listen to the sound of my cry,  
my King and my God,

for to you I pray.

**3**

O Lord, in the morning you hear my voice;  
in the morning I plead my case to you, and watch.

**4**

For you are not a God who delights in wickedness;  
evil will not sojourn with you.

**5**

The boastful will not stand before your eyes;  
you hate all evildoers.

**6**

You destroy those who speak lies;  
the Lord abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful.

**7**

But I, through the abundance of your steadfast love,  
will enter your house,  
I will bow down toward your holy temple  
in awe of you.

**8**

Lead me, O Lord, in your righteousness  
because of my enemies;  
make your way straight before me.

**9**

For there is no truth in their mouths;  
their hearts are destruction;  
their throats are open graves;  
they flatter with their tongues.

**10**

Make them bear their guilt, O God;  
let them fall by their own counsels;  
because of their many transgressions cast them out,  
for they have rebelled against you.

**11**

But let all who take refuge in you rejoice;  
let them ever sing for joy.  
Spread your protection over them,  
so that those who love your name may exult in you.

**12**

For you bless the righteous, O Lord;  
you cover them with favor as with a shield.

You are covered! This is a prayer you can pray when persecution comes. This is something you can hold onto because it is coming.

**Psalm 31**

Prayer and Praise for Deliverance from Enemies

**To the leader. A Psalm of David.**

**1**

In you, O Lord, **I seek refuge;**  
do not let me ever be put to shame;  
in your righteousness deliver me.

**2**

**Incline your ear to me;**  
**rescue me speedily.**

Be a rock of refuge for me,  
a strong fortress to save me.

**Acts 8:2-3**

**2** Devout men buried Stephen and made loud lamentation over him. **3** But Saul was ravaging the church by entering house after house; dragging off both men and women, he committed them to prison.

There is a boldness in those who attack you.

They will come at you, enter your house, you scared space and attack you.

They know how to get to you, upset and unsettle you.

They know how get you out of character.

They distract you, attack you and metaphorically lock you up. They put you in a type of prison.

**How do should we respond those who attack us in our home, in our private space?**

**Acts 8:4-5**

**4** Now those who were scattered went from place to place, proclaiming the word.

**5** Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed the Messiah to them.

What did Philip do? How did Philip respond to the persecution?

Did Philip stop doing what God had called him to do?

How do you think Philip was able to keep on keeping on?

What sustained him?

If you stop doing what you are called to because of the attack you will be miserable and out of the will of God. If you keep on doing what you are called to do in the midst

of the attack it will give you peace and you will be in the will of God. You will be protected by God. You will grow in God and your faith will mature in the process.

How do we respond in addition to praying and doing what we are called to do?

### **Matthew 5:43-45**

**43** “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ **44** But I say to you, **Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,** **45** so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous.

I wonder if Philip went back to this lesson?

Jesus was preparing them for what was to come. Rest in the presence of your enemies. When you pray for them, like Stephen did, it frees you from being in bondage in their presence. This does not mean that you let them treat you any kind of way, we can push back in LOVE!

What this means is you pray for them and pray that they will see the errors in their ways. You pray for them to turn. You pray for them because that they don't know what they are doing and or who they are messing with. They are fighting not you, but they are fighting the God in you. They aren't your enemies they are God's enemies.

### **Psalm 25:21-22**

#### **21**

If your enemies are hungry, give them bread to eat;  
and if they are thirsty, give them water to drink; (this does not have to be in your house)

#### **22**

for you will heap coals of fire on their heads,  
and the Lord will reward you.

When you stay in character and love them that hate you, while not allowing them to abuse you, you are fighting back with love and love always wins. These seems weird and like it will not work but that is how God is. God subtracts to add and God divides to multiply (think about all the famous feeding stories in the Gospels).

Are weapons are not worldly. We can't fight the way the world fights. Our weapon is love. Why?

### **1 John 4:7-8**

**7** Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. **8** Whoever does not love does not know God, **for God is love.**

When we love we are employing the very presence, essence and power of God in the fight that we find ourselves. God is love. When we love we in the power of God.

### **Romans 12:9-21**

**9** Let love be **genuine**; hate what is evil, **hold fast to what is good**;

**10** love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor.

**11** Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord.

**12** Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer.

**13** Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

**14** Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.

**15** Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.

**16** Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are.

**17** Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all.

**18** If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

**19** Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."

**20** No, "if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads."

**21** Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

We win when we genuinely love and keep on doing what God has called us to do. We win we can love those hate us and attempt to use us. Now, we aren't to let people abuse us, we shouldn't tolerate abuse in any context. When and if we find ourselves dealing with we are to address, free ourselves from it while praying in the process.

### **Luke 6:27-28**

**27** "But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you,

**28** bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.

Which one of your enemies are you praying for?

Who are you praying for that gets under your skin and you can't stand them?

Who are you praying for who when they come into your presence you get an attitude, you can't stand them and they can't stand you?

Who are you praying for?

What is the devil trying to stop you from doing?

Who is persecuting you, pestering you and trying to stop you from doing what God wants to do through you?