



**Sermon Text:** Acts 8:1-4

*Sermon Date:* November 19, 2017

Like a sudden summer storm, the church of Jerusalem is drenched in persecution and suffering. We walked through our text in three stages and concluded seeing three important points.

### **THE CHURCH SUFFERS**

With Stephen's death the dam of restraint breaks and a flood of hatred and harassment drowns the church in Jerusalem. Saul makes it his aim to destroy the church. Like a wild beast ripping apart its prey, he ravages the church. The church is hunted and hated. Christians are thrown in prison. They are forced to blaspheme the name of Christ, and those who refused are put to death (see Acts 22:19-20; Acts 26:9-11; Galatians 1:13).

### **THE CHURCH SCATTERS**

As a result of the escalating persecution, much of the church is scattered throughout the surrounding regions. They become refugees—losing homes, fields, friends, and possessions. They walk away from everything except the gospel. One reason Luke mentions Stephen's burial (v2) is because he wants us to know that the church wasn't fleeing cowardly. They never wavered in their commitment to the gospel.

### **THE GOSPEL SPREADS**

The church runs for their lives, but they do not run from the gospel—they run for the gospel and with the gospel. Luke says, "Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word." John Stott says, Satan's "attack had the opposite effect to what he intended. Instead of smothering the gospel, persecution succeeded only in spreading it." The church suffers, the church scatters, but even then, the gospel spreads!

### **TAKEAWAYS**

1. **God works all things for good.** The good news of God's sovereignty is that not only is God good in suffering, but that He does good through suffering. The suffering of the church was the means by which God accomplished the Great Commission. While we can't immediately see God's good hand in our pain and suffering, by faith we trust that He is always working all things for good—even the worst of things.
2. **God saves even the worst sinners.** Who would have imagined that the same man who persecutes the church would miraculously become its greatest missionary? God saves Saul, he later testifies, so that "Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life" (1 Timothy 1:15-16). In other words, if God can save Saul, then He can save anyone. May this truth always inspire us to share the gospel.
3. **The gospel spreads through ordinary Christians.** The men and women who scattered throughout Judea and Samaria were ordinary Christians. They weren't apostles or super saints, just normal people. They simply shared the gospel wherever they went. May we follow their example. James Montgomery Boice challengingly asks, "Is that true of you? Wherever you find yourself—whether scattered by work or family or education or some other means—have you considered yourself planted in that place? Have you put down roots and born fruit for Jesus Christ?"

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. What stood out to you from the sermon and the biblical text from this Sunday?
2. Do you really believe that God works all things for good in your life? How should this truth transform the way you respond to difficulty?
3. Do you consider yourself "planted" by God in the places you find yourself? How can you put down roots and bear fruit for Jesus where you are?