

NEWS FLASH!

A LOOK INTO ACTS: TRIALS + PERSECUTION

INTRO // Illustration about a time in your life when you received news....most of the time people will say “do you want the good news first or the bad news?”

- Most of us will ask for the bad news first so we can feel better about receiving the good news at the end!
- In our scripture tonight, we are faced with 2 realities.....bad news + good news.
- Tonight I am going to give you bad news....and GOOD NEWS!

BACKGROUND//

- Immense persecution has begun for Christians throughout the Roman Empire.
- In the previous chapter, we see Stephen has just DIED for the sake of the gospel.
- This was the first time where Christians as a WHOLE were beginning to be persecuted. Before this, we see individuals persecuted but now anyone who claims Christ is being persecuted.
- At this point in Acts, the disciples + many believers have scattered all throughout the regions due to physical religious persecution.
- This brings us to our reading!

Scripture // Acts 8:4-13

“4 But the believers who were scattered preached the Good News about Jesus wherever they went. 5 Philip, for example, went to the city of Samaria and told the people there about the Messiah. 6 Crowds listened intently to Philip because they were eager to hear his message and see the miraculous signs he did. 7 Many evil^[a] spirits were cast out, screaming as they left their victims. And many who had been paralyzed or lame were healed. 8 So there was great joy in that city.

9 A man named Simon had been a sorcerer there for many years, amazing the people of Samaria and claiming to be someone great. 10 Everyone, from the least to the greatest, often spoke of him as “the Great One—the Power of God.” 11 They listened closely to him because for a long time he had astounded them with his magic.

12 But now the people believed Philip’s message of Good News concerning the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ. As a result, many men and women

were baptized. 13 Then Simon himself believed and was baptized. He began following Philip wherever he went, and he was amazed by the signs and great miracles Philip performed.”

1. Bad News: Trials + Persecution Will Come....

- a. We are never promised a perfect life.
 - i. Because Adam + Eve entered the chat, now sin is in the world (lol)
 - ii. Because we serve a loving God who would never FORCE a relationship with him, we have free will which means sometimes people CHOOSE to live apart from His word.
 - iii. Ultimately this means that bad things happen....even to, by the world's standards, morally 'good' people.
- b. We are never promised an easy road.
 - i. In John, we see Jesus literally tell us in this world we WILL have trouble...
 - ii. Jesus himself faced much persecution before his crucifixion because of his 'radical' teachings and claims.
- c. If you are a follower of Christ sitting in this room, you have most likely received some form of persecution for your faith...
 - i. Persecution is NOT only subject to death....
 - ii. Persecution can be social isolation, being mocked or made fun of for the sake of the gospel, etc....
 - iii. Jesus suffered for his father's namesake and as we become more like him we shall too face hardship in the name of the gospel.

2. BUT THE GOSPEL IS STILL GOOD NEWS!

- a. Even in the midst of persecution, the Gospel is still GOOD NEWS!
 - i. The joy of the Gospel is that your circumstances change, but HIS Narrative NEVER will.
 - ii. It is an honor to give our lives for the Gospel just as Christ gave his life for us!
- b. The joy of the Gospel is that it allows us to change our identity from sufferer to follower.....
 - i. We see in scripture that Phillip ministered wherever he went, and those that were in suffering began to receive the message of hope and they became followers....
 - 1. PEOPLE ARE HUNGRY FOR GOOD NEWS!

- ii. You are not designed to be left in suffering, but you are build to endure through the power of the cross and the message of hope you bear!
 - iii. Christ has already endured our sin and suffering when he said it is finished, but now we get to reflect his power as we share hope in our suffering.
- c. The power of the Gospel is that you may experience fear, but you do not have to live in it.
 - i. We look at this passage in Scripture and it seems like they scattered out of fear; however, if you look closer you will see a different meaning.
 - ii. There are 2 different words for the idea 'scattered' in the Greek language.
 - 1. One is used for the idea of making something 'disappear'
 - 2. The other, which is being used within this passage, is used for the idea of planting or sowing seeds.
 - iii. The church did not scatter in fear...instead in the midst of fear they went out and continued the mission of Christ, which is that ALL WILL KNOW!

HOW DO I WALK IN THE MIDST OF PERSECUTION?

1. You must be fully devoted to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
 - a. Phillip did not have the option to pick and choose what he WANTED to believe about Jesus and his gospel.....
 - b. When suffering comes, we MUST cling fully to the Word of God and allow it to be our strength!
2. You must keep your eyes on the Cross!
 - a. Just as Jesus endured much suffering, persecution, and betrayal it never deterred him from his mission.....to carry his cross bringing freedom to all who choose to believe.
 - b. We must keep our eyes on the mission.....carry our cross and take on the identity of Christ who IS our Hope in Suffering....
 - i. Paul instructs the church in 1 Corinthians to follow him as he follows Christ.
 - ii. In the same way, Phillip is showing those around him how to carry the gospel in the midst of persecution.

3. You must Scatter.....

- a. Abide in the Lord's presence and allow him to give you the strength not to scatter in fear, but to continue to sow seeds of the Gospel wherever you go.

The end result of persecution against the church will always result in God getting the glory.

- d. The enemy wanted to kill the church; however, it only served to spread the message of the Gospel further!
- e. Those who spread the Gospel were not formal preachers, teachers, or trained missionaries. They were simple people, transformed through the Gospel that simply spoke of him wherever they went!

The enemy can try to silence the messenger, but he can NEVER silence the message.....

ALTAR

- Fully devote your life to the Gospel withholding nothing!
- There may be students in the room experiencing trials, persecution, or even grief. Have time for them to pray with other leaders and be encouraged in the Lord!
- Give students time to put Jesus back in his rightful place in his life.
- Pray for boldness to live a holy life in the midst of trial + persecution.