Those who had been scattered preached the word

Acts 8:1-40

Acts 8:4

Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went.

Through today's passage, we can see that there are two kinds of people. One kind is those like Saul or Simon. Saul was someone who had the power to make a person live or die and put him or her in jail. Simon was a person who accumulated his wealth through the people who followed him and offered him money for his mysterious power. These days they are called powerful and wealthy celebrities that people line up to meet.

In contrast, there were people who had no name and had to be despised and persecuted even by close people and their communities. What, then, were the lives of these two kinds of people like? Whose life was truly joyful?

Do you know how many times the word “joy” is be found in the entire chapter of Acts 8? In Acts 8, “joy” appears once. Do you know from whom this joy comes from? What does the Bible say about those who lived joyful lives and gave joy to others? If you think in worldly and human terms, it is natural that joy should come from people like Saul and Simon, powerful and wealthy celebrities. But it didn’t come from them. Rather, joy came from Philip who was one among persecuted Christians. The Bible says that when Philip testified of Jesus Christ to a city, that whole city was full of joy.

What kind of life do you want to live? Do you want to live a joyful life and live a life that gives joy to others? How can we live that joyful life? Today, let's find out how persecuted Christians who were desperate and had nothing in their hands lived as great men of joy and victory.

1. Saul and Simon vs. persecuted Christians

Let’s see first half of verse 1. “Saul approved of their killing him” (Acts 8:1). Saul’s approval of killing Stephen became the trigger that sparked a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem. Let us consider the situation where all the believers in Jerusalem had to be scattered. What does the word “scattered” mean here? It means unexpectedly leaving their sweet homes and jobs and breaking up with loved ones, brothers and relatives. So where were they scattered? Was it a stable place? No. Not only was there no guarantee of stability, but they had to be prepared for risks of discrimination, alienation and contempt. However, to avoid persecution, they had no choice but to go there. How would the persecuted feel, having to suddenly leave their homes, their jobs, and everything?

There may be people who suffer this kind of pain. There may be times when you experience the pain of leaving something precious. Today, we do not commit any wrong actions, but we often face discrimination and contempt simply because of our belief in Jesus. In this situation, in human terms we feel truly miserable, sad, and discouraged. We could blame ourselves for doing nothing in this situation, or complain in anger about being in this unfair situation. But what did the scattered believers do instead? Look at verse 4. "Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went."

These Christians, who had to be scattered by persecution, were not caught up in sorrow, despair, or complaints. They did not sit down in self-pity. Rather, they preached the word of God to people.

Here the term "preach" means to earnestly advocate, publicly proclaim or teach. If the persecutions and difficulties they experienced controlled their lives and minds, they wouldn't be able to do this. But we can see that through the preaching they overcame it. Then what did they preach? What was it that helped them to overcome the threat of persecution, suffering and death? Let's read verse 4 and 5. "Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Messiah there."

That is the word of God. It is the Messiah Jesus Christ. The word they preached was the gospel: that Jesus died on the cross and rose again from the dead to forgive our sins and give us the new life of resurrection. At that time, Christians lost everything only because of Jesus Christ. However, what they realized when they prayed was that even when the persecutor took everything away, there was only one thing that was not taken. It was Jesus Christ and His gospel which saved them from sin and death. Jesus Messiah and his gospel were the only things precious enough to pursue as purpose of their lives. They are above all else, since they cannot be taken away by evil humans or worldly powers.

I am sometimes discouraged when I feel I have nothing. Last week, my SUV broke down in an accident. And my minivan was towed away on the highway because it overheated. When both cars broke, I felt like I had nothing to commute in, just like the early church Christians who didn't have anything. However, while I prepared today’s passage, I learned that even if I have nothing, I have one thing that the world cannot take away from me. It is Jesus, who gave his life for sinners like me and truly loved and helped me. So I was able to overcome my hard situation because I believed my Lord Jesus would help and take care of me.

We sometimes choose whether we are happy or sad based on what we possess and what we have achieved. However, even if you don't see any possessions right now and fail in this world, don't be discouraged because we have something more incredible than that. It is Jesus who paid our sins to death as our ransom before God, the Holy Judge. Innocent Jesus Christ became sin for us on the cross and died for us. “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” After three days, he rose again from the dead and gave us the free gift of forgiveness of sins and resurrection. What we are hearing now is more valuable and precious than anything else in the world that we can get and achieve. And it's an amazing value that money can't convert. Have you ever been discouraged by the fact that you haven’t accomplished anything? We don't have to be discouraged, because we are rich. We already have something very precious and valuable. We have Jesus Messiah. Do you not want to live a life of gratitude for freely possessing the most valuable and precious gift of God? There is no one who wants to live the life of a loser. When we accept and follow Jesus, we cannot live the life of a loser because Jesus won the victory against our real enemy death and gave us salvation. Jesus transfers us from death into a glorious resurrection life, from slaves of Satan into beloved children of God who can inherit the kingdom of God. We long to find something of value to dedicate our whole lives and possessions. Today's passage shows that when the persecuted believers had abandoned all their possessions and even their entire lives to live for Jesus, they had joy and power.

However, even in dedication, we want to save a little for ourselves because we love ourselves and don't want to lose ourselves. We are dubious as to whether we can get true joy when we offer everything, including our own lives. But the Bible testifies that the entire city was filled with great joy. There was healing of the demon possessed, paralyzed, grieving, and despaired when they gave up all their possessions, including their own lives, for Jesus. “For with shrieks, impure spirits came out of many, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. So there was great joy in that city. (Acts 8:7,8)” Let’s look at verse 4 again. “Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went.” What does it mean to witness the gospel wherever they went? Could they witness the gospel wherever they went without joy? No. Because they had joy when they gave their whole lives to Jesus, they could preach Jesus Messiah and the gospel wherever they went. Although they were forced to go from persecution, they had not lost joy and witnessed the gospel there. Likewise, even if we offer everything for Jesus Christ, we will not lose joy, but experience amazing joy and power. Will we be able to experience joy and power if we leave a little for ourselves? No. We experience true joy and power when we completely give ourselves to Him.

 Then what about those who did not have Jesus and the gospel but had everything? The Bible speaks of Saul and Simon as representatives of such people in Acts chapter 8. And they testify of life in the absence of Jesus even though they have everything.

First, Saul. Who was Saul at that time? Look at verse 3.

“But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison.” Saul wandered from house to house and had the power and status to put anyone in jail. But what was his state of mind as he forced people day and night into jail, pulling both men and women to the ground? Was he filled with laughter and joy? No. His heart would have been filled with hatred and murder. This is the state of a person who has the power and status of the world but does not have Jesus. Hate, anger, and murder in our hearts cannot be solved by ourselves. When we don’t have Jesus, we can even become those who disobey God and persecute God. And not only do we lose joy when we live without Jesus and seek power and glory, but we have no choice but to live in eternal judgment forever. Christians were imprisoned without power, but their hearts were filled with joy and praise. How can this be? This was because Jesus was among them. By His power they were free from the evil spirit of hate, anger, and murder. A truly powerful person is not determined by their position and authority in the world, but by the presence of Jesus is in our hearts.

Second, Simon. Who was Simon? Let's look at verse 9 through 11.

**"**Now for some time a man named Simon had practiced sorcery in the city and amazed all the people of Samaria. He boasted that he was someone great,and all the people, both high and low, gave him their attention and exclaimed, “This man is rightly called the Great Power of God.” They followed him because he had amazed them for a long time with his sorcery." Simon was a celebrity who was popular for his mysterious ability and followed by many people. He was like a movie star or a rock star who surprises people with a tremendous and amazing talent. He was a man of tremendous wealth and popularity, and he was envied by people. He seemed to lack nothing in popularity and wealth at his time, but what was Simon's inner condition when Jesus was absent? Look at verse 23. "For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin." Simon was suffering as a slave to sin without freedom, with so much afflicted envy and covetousness to satisfy his ambitions. Simon might have believed that he could do anything with money. He even thought that he could buy God's gift, the salvation and power of the Holy Spirit, to be admired by the people forever. Likewise, these days people think money can buy anything, even our salvation and the happiness for our souls. So people think they are happy with money. But Peter is speaking clearly to Simon, who had this idea, and to us living in this age. "May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money!...Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord in the hope that he may forgive you for having such a thought in your heart.For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin." Apostle Peter proclaimed that it is a sin to believe that money can do anything, including buying God's gift and our happiness. How are money and the slavery to sin linked to each other? If we live with that thought, we are enslaved by money and envious of those who have it. When money becomes our primary value rather than God and his kingdom, we live the life of a slave to it. Even if we do wicked things for money, we don't even realize it without fearing God. It's like Simon trying to buy God's gifts for money. Even when he does something very wrong, he doesn't realize it's wrong. Slavery to money keeps us from seeing the gospel of God and the true value of His kingdom.

These days people consider money as the highest value. In this age of materialism, worldly people cannot understand how much God loves one sinner, so much that he gave His only begotten Son. But his heart has an incredible value and meaning that money cannot afford. How much does God value one person and want to save him?

2. One person's importance

There is one Ethiopian eunuch from Acts 8: 26 through the end of this chapter. We may wonder why this one Gentile, Ethiopian came out suddenly.

At that time, the Jews treated the Gentiles like dogs and pigs, and regarded it as a very serious unclean sin if they entered a Gentile’s home or ate with him. But God valued this Gentile Ethiopian eunuch more than the whole world, and sent Philip to ride in his chariot and preach the gospel.

This shows that God values ​​even one Gentile person and is willing to sacrifice anything for one person. Through the Ethiopian eunuch, we can know God's desire to save the whole world including the Gentiles.

Through the Gentile Ethiopian, we can learn that in this world there must be someone who really wants to seek the truth and the savior Jesus, even though he has never heard the Gospel or the name of Jesus. God uses a man who knows and obeys his heart like Philip to search for sinners. If we are willing to join and obey God's heart, we can clearly see how God entrusts lost sheep to us, regardless of our ability or our condition.

As I prepared this message, I thought that I had nothing but a grumpy heart. But I repented of that thought, because I am the richest man in the world. I have a precious and valuable thing the world cannot give, and that is the gospel and Messiah Jesus. I also compared myself to the early Christians who were persecuted. I wondered whether I could, like them, give up everything for Jesus and the gospel, and give thanks despite persecution.

What is my true life purpose and goal? Is it money or self achievement? Or is it my Lord Jesus Christ? I deeply think of whom I live for. If I do it for me and the world, I have no choice but to live as a slave to a sin. But I came to believe that if I lived for Jesus, not for me and the world, I would have real joy. I will be able to overcome my sinful and perishable world and myself by Jesus being in me. I pray that this year will be a year of experiencing true joy no matter what the sacrifice is, by gaining and witnessing the most valuable and precious Jesus.

In conclusion, human history has disappeared by persecution and death. But the gospel of God’s only-begotten Son Jesus Christ, who came down to the lowliest manger in human form and died and rose again for our sins, never disappears. Even if human beings try to stop and get rid of it, persecution turns into a good work that saves more people. Therefore, we pray that we can believe and testify that Messiah Jesus and the gospel has the true value and meaning to save others and lead many wandering people to our Heavenly Father in Heaven.