Acts 8:1-8

1 And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles.
2 And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him.
3 As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison.
4 Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word.
5 Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them.
6 And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did.
7 For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them: and many taken with palsy, and that were lame, were healed.
8 And there was great joy in that city.

INTRODUCTION

• When a church has seen no one “won” or witnessed to the Lord Jesus Christ it will be left alone by the devil.
• However, if the church is fulfilling its mission of sharing its faith with the lost then the devil will attack mightily against the church.

• What we see today in Acts chapter eight is the church being pressed by the devil the persecutor of our souls.
• But God is doing something in the church in Acts eight.
• The Lord is protecting.
• But with the Lord protecting the devil is attacking.

• Today we will study three things the Devil wants to do if we are moving forward in our mission for God.
We will also see three things God will do if we are on Mission for the sake and name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

If the enemy will come against us, and God will bless us we must ask **what is our mission?**

In John 12:32, Jesus said when He is lifted up He will draw all men unto Him.

**Our mission is to raise high the banner and name of Jesus Christ.**
  - You can bet when we do that the devil will try to curse us.
  - However God will surely bless us!!

Let’s read a few verses of Scripture first.

1 Peter 5:8 *Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:*
  - The devil must find those that he can devour.
  - He is not God who sees and knows all.
  - He must stumble around looking for those weak in the faith that are open to his attack.

Tonight, I want to show you ways that the devil wants to keep you from moving forward in your mission as an individual and as the church for Jesus Christ.

Job 1:7 *And the L ORD said unto Satan, Whence comest thou? Then Satan answered the L ORD, and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it.*
  - In other words, Where have you come from? (God didn’t really have to ask)

What was Satan’s reply?

*From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it.*
  - He has been pacing looking for someone to attack.
  - God ultimately gives him someone to focus on. Job.

Please remember this: **The devil’s power is limited to God’s permission.**

The Devil desires or wants to do these three things to you.
I. EMBARRASS YOU

• Avery’s observation: It does not matter if you fall down, as long as you pick up something from the floor when you get up.

• Acts 8:3 Paul was dragging people off to prison, how embarrassing.
• There is no embarrassment that could compare to standing before Jesus Christ having denied and rejected Him.
• Then he got saved and had to overcome his past.
  • The devil will try to use your past against you to try to get you eyes off the vision.

• Peter was embarrassed because he had failed the Lord.
• When Jesus sent the message that He had risen he had to say, “Tell my disciples, and Peter…” to get Peter to realize He had forgiven him.

II. IMPRISION YOU

With FEAR...

• FEAR…of having faith
  • Acts 8:1 And at that time there was a great persecution against the church...
    • It was those that had placed their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ that were under fire.
    • It was the intention of the devil to keep people from placing faith in Jesus. (His tool persecution)
  • Listen to Paul’s words in Acts 26:11: And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities.
  • Acts 22:4 And I persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women. (and we think we have it bad today)
  • Thanks to the power of the Spirit and the preaching of 1st
century people like Phillip we know that the devil's persecution backfired.
  o Thanks be to God we have victory in Jesus Christ!!

• **FEAR...Of sharing your faith**
  o To the world Stephen shared his faith and lost his life.
    ▪ To Stephen he lost his pain and gained everything!
  o One of the greatest lies the devil has fed to the church is that we should be afraid to share our faith because someone might reject us or persecute us or even kill us.
  o We have become too attached to the things of this world when we fear death rather than God!

• **FEAR...of the Future**
  o Remember God is in control we do not have to allow this fear to control us.
  o The devil wants us to fear for finances, family, every part of our present and future.
  o The first century Christians had a choice be controlled by fear or the Spirit of Christ!

**With Frustration**

• **Spiritually**
  o You can get weary in well doing.
  o You can get frustrated because you are not doing a ministry well.
  o The devil will try to bring condemnation because you are not praying, studying, etc...enough.
    ▪ He will antagonize you that you are not good enough.
  o He will try to get you to develop a competitive spirit.
  o He will try anything to get you eyes off the mission.

• **Marriage**
  o Sometimes you have disagreements within your marriage and it affects your spiritual walk with God.
  o Sometimes we get out of the roles God has placed us in and it
affects us spiritually.
  o When we are not right in our marriage it takes our eyes off the mission.

• **Relationships**
  o Sometimes you will encounter problems within your family.
    ▪ Kids
    ▪ In-laws
    ▪ Brothers and Sisters
  o Sometimes you have issues with neighbors or friends.

• **Job**
  o Sometimes we have issues on our job.
  o The devil will attack us through bosses and other employees to get our eyes off the mission.

III. **EMBALM YOU**

• The Enemy wants you defeated
• The Enemy wants you dead.
  o Jesus’ Death
  o Stephen’s Death

• He wants you to kill your Spirit, because until you are gone you can be an effective witness for God.

In contrast to what the devil wants to do I want you to see what God will do if you will be on mission for Him and His kingdom.

I. **ENCOURAGE YOU**

• Many years ago a young mid-western lawyer suffered from such deep depression that his friends thought it best to keep all knives and razors out of his reach. He questioned his life’s calling and the prudence of even attempting to follow it through. During this time he wrote, "I am now the most miserable man living. Whether I shall ever be better, I cannot tell. I awfully forebode I shall not." But somehow, from somewhere, Abraham Lincoln received the encouragement he needed,
and the achievements of his life thoroughly vindicated his bout with discouragement.

- The devil will try to discourage you by trying to embarrass you, imprison you, and embalm you.
- But remember that Jesus raised from the dead on the third day and that power is available to you as well.

- 1st century preachers pressed on
- 1st century persecution simply propagated the Gospel.

II. EMPOWER YOU

- Remember we fight a spiritual battle
- Remember we fight with spiritual weapons
- Remember we have a spirit of power and victory

- 1 John 4:4 *Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them:* (false prophets) *because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.*
  - If you know 1 John chapter 4 this is where we are told to test the spirits.
- Only those who confess Jesus has come in the flesh is from God.
- We have this spirit of power and victory because Jesus came down!!!

III. ENRICH YOU (fill you up with joy)

- 1 John 1:4 *And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full.*
- 2 John 12 *Having many things to write unto you, I would not write with paper and ink: but I trust to come unto you, and speak face to face, that our joy may be full.*

- Oh when you come face to face with Jesus having confessed your sins and accepted His forgiveness your Joy can never more be turned to sorrow.
- So then how does God enrich us with this Joy?

**With His Favor** (Synonym for God’s Grace)
• Proverbs 8:35 *For whoso findeth me findeth life, and shall obtain favour of the LORD.*

• God’s favor is his pleasure, delight, favor, goodwill, acceptance, will.

• 23 Psalm the Lord is My Shepherd
  o His protection (His rod) a stick about a meter long with a knob at the end of it.
  o His direction (His staff) looking similar to a modern day cane.
  o God’s plan has always been to direct and protect all of mankind.

**With His Fellowship**

• It was in fellowship with God that Noah built the Ark
• It was in fellowship with God before the burning bush that Moses was strengthened to go to Pharaoh.
• It was in fellowship with God that Elijah heard the still small voice
• It was in fellowship with God that Jonah was spit out of the whale.
• It was in fellowship with God that Stephen was stoned to death.

• **God will not only strengthen your life through fellowship He will lengthen your life with His kingship.**

• When Jesus returns in Glory and finally destroys forever the final enemies death and hell.
• We will live forever with our blessed Lord Jesus Christ.
• So we will share in His future.

**With His Future**

• Ruler of all creation
• Restorer of all creation

• You either share in Jesus’ future or the Devils furnace the lake of fire.

**CLOSING**

• The devil desires nothing more than to destroy the church of Jesus Christ.
• Since He can’t destroy it he will try to defeat as many Christians as possible.
• Don’t give in!

- When we lift up Jesus in our lives and in the life of our church persecution will come.
- The devil will attack often using the religious to attack the redeemed.

- But we can be encouraged that those that went before us were able to continue on.
- So too can we!

- We can be empowered by the spirit if we will allow Him to fill us.
- And we can hope in the future returning of our blessed Lord Jesus Christ!
- We can accomplish our Mission lifting up the Lord Jesus Christ!