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THE BIBLE FOR LIFE
SERIES: G.O.O.D.! (Great Opportunities of Deliverance!)
Lesson 10: "A TRIUMPHANT REACTION TO TROUBLE"
Scripture: Acts 8:4
Facilitator: Aaron L. Parker

Scripture – Acts 8:4 – Now those who were scattered went from place to place, proclaiming the word.

Introduction

- Nature of Trouble
 - General – Any situation, position, circumstance, or situation of difficulty, annoyance, harassment, distress, adversity, or misfortune
 - Psychological - states of mental distress, anxiety, or emotional disturbance, often characterized by worry, cognitive impairment, or behavioral dysfunction
 - Philosophical - fundamental, persistent questions, contradictions, or intellectual puzzles that challenge existing knowledge, logic, or beliefs
 - Theological - distress, affliction, hardship, calamity, or adversity that serves as a test of faith, a means of spiritual refinement, a delusion/illusion, or a consequence of wrongdoing
- Location of Trouble
 - National
 - Global
 - Personal
 - External
 - Internal
- How should believers' reaction to trouble?
- A clue to a substantive answer to this question lies the biblical verse highlighted and pericope in which it is found.
- Story Surrounding the Verse
 - Time – mid to late 30's a. d. (c. e.),
 - The Stoning of a follower of Jesus the Christ named Stephen:
 - Full of grace and power
 - Did great wonders and signs among the people.
 - An opposing group of Jewish leaders brought charges against Stephen, saying that he taught against the ancient Jewish law of Moses thus against the Jewish God.
 - In response to these accusations, Stephen gave a long, spirit-filled defense of his actions. Starting from the Hebrew ancestor Abraham all the way through the prophets, Stephen insisted



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that Jesus was the Righteous One about whom the ancients spoke, the One whom his accusers betrayed and murdered.

- In response to Stephen's statement, the Jewish leaders became incensed and in a collective fit of rage, rush against him, and dragged him out of the city and brutally and unmercifully pummeled him with rocks until he died.
- The storyteller mentions that those who tried and executed Stephen laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul, who became a devout persecutor of the church as well; but would later become Paul, the most zealous and ambitious of the first century couriers of the gospel of Jesus the Christ.
- Except for the apostles, this incident regarding Stephen led to a scattering of the believers in Jerusalem. They began to flee for their lives into the countryside of Judea and Samaria. Our text tells us that "those who were scattered went from place to place, proclaiming the word."

The Reason for the Scattering

- As already mentioned, the scattering occurred due to persecution of believers by the Jewish authorities.
- The scattering of believers occurred because they, having been warned not to teach, preach or live Jesus, did so anyway.
- They were imprisoned, flogged, executed, and dragged from their houses, jailed, and sometimes killed, both men and women.

Expected Persecution

- Working in earnest for God brings its share of persecution. It is not always a passageway adorned with garland and sweet-scented flowers. At times laboring for the Savior comes with clutter, debris, stumbling blocks, obstacles – storms, opposition, struggle
- Matthew 10:16 – Jesus says to his disciples, "Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves."
- We are not sent out as sheep in the midst of sheep. We are not called to remain secluded in the company and safety of the faithful.
- Rather we are summoned to go forth among wolves – those who criticize, ostracize, and seek to undermine the mission to which the Redeemer calls us; those with sinister intent manifesting in morally reprehensible deeds; those who seek to infiltrate the community of Christ to steal, kill and destroy (John 10)
- "My brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of any kind, consider it nothing but joy, because you know that the testing of your faith



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produces endurance; and let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking in nothing." (James 1:2-4)

- "In the world you face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world!" (John 16:33)
- The reason for the believers' scattering was persecution that began with the trouble surrounding of Stephen.

Meaning of Scattered

- "Scattered" comes from a term (*diasperiō*) that was used to indicate the action of sowing seeds. You see, seeds at that time were not meticulously planted by dropping them into specific, pre-dug holes in the ground; rather, they were cast abroad or spread.
- The disciples were scattered like seeds. And while human persecution constituted the cause of the believers scattering, God transformed that human persecution into heavenly produce.
- Wherever this life's journey takes us, even if it brings difficulty, harms, hurt, persecution, trouble, it is incumbent upon us to serve as seeds of love, truth and righteousness, turning the world's fertile ground into the crops of Christ.

Evil Turned to Good

- Note that the scattered seed resulting from persecution, turns out to be a vehicle for God's word,
- We can draw this conclusion: God can turn something intended for evil into something designed for good.
- The example of Joseph in Genesis – "Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good...." (Genesis 50:20)

Conclusion

- The early church's reaction to the trouble arising from Stephen's execution and the Church's scattering was to go out from place to place and proclaim the word.
- This means that we will not merely weep and mourn over our loss; we shall not surrender to the onslaught of grief, fear and despair; we will not enter the unproductive realm of hatred, spite and malice, but we shall go forth and proclaim the word, and this word for us is Jesus – love and liberation for the bound