

## Promises for All People – Persecuted Church, Acts 8:1-8, 11/10/2019

*SermonTalk is an optional resource for Connect Group Leaders who desire to help their group underscore and apply key concepts from the sermon the previous week. The format and questions are just a menu from which you can choose or use as a foundation for further questions more specific to your group members. The material written in bold are Pastor Jerimiah's key points for our focus.*

- The topic of the “bullying epidemic” is more than a regular conversation point. It is also a website, a book, a conference, and more. Bullying is injustice. When adult believers see another adult being bullied, how should we respond?
- If that injustice is more widespread, perhaps a whole group of people are at the receiving end of injustice. What are different ways that the Church can respond to injustice when we see a people group being targeted?

Last week, UBC joined with churches across the globe to pray for persecuted Christians throughout the world. Religious persecution does not tend to be something that we, in the United States, see or experience on a large scale. However, we can still lean into identifying with those believers who are being hurt and those who are hurting. There is an **importance of empathy. We must learn what it means to empathize with our brothers and sisters. This can come through shared experiences or from the simple fact that they are brothers and sisters. But we must never grow insensitive to the plight of others.**

- What stands out for you as you consider the daily life of Christians who are persecuted?
- Based on what you know, how can churches support believers in this situation?
- What have you heard of or seen someone do that made a difference in these situations?

Last week, a list of 10 ways to pray for the persecuted Christian family was passed out. We were asked to pray regularly for those who are on the receiving end of injustice. Before we begin looking at Acts 8, let's take time out to pray specifically for our brothers and sisters in Christ. We will take a few points from the sheet that was given out. “Pray our brothers and sisters will

- Sense God's presence (Heb. 13:5)
- Be granted wisdom in covert ministry work (Acts 9:23-25)
- Boldly share the gospel (Acts 4:29)

The current sermon series focuses on Promises For All God's People. Last week's focus was on Acts 8. The church was growing in mighty ways. And with a great movement of the Holy Spirit comes a great persecution.

**Acts 8:1-8** *<sup>1</sup>And Saul approved of their killing him. On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. <sup>2</sup>Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. <sup>3</sup>But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison. <sup>4</sup>Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. <sup>5</sup>Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Messiah there. <sup>6</sup>When the crowds heard Philip and saw the signs he performed, they all paid close*

*attention to what he said. <sup>7</sup>For with shrieks, impure spirits came out of many, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. <sup>8</sup>So there was great joy in that city.*

For the early believers in Acts, a complete life change is the immediate, inevitable reality of their world. The people were persecuted and then they were scattered. In considering this passage, Pastor Jerimiah points to four key points. Read through each point, ask your group to identify where that is found in scripture

**1. Persecution is the mark of the church. We follow a Savior who was beaten, broken and wounded for us. He tells us if he was persecuted then so will the church. An impact of persecution results in scattering. We must be mindful of the refugee in our midst, never forgetting it was through the lips of refugees that the Gospel was carried beyond the city of Jerusalem.**

- When is it helpful to remember that Jesus was persecuted?
- The reminder that it is the lips of refugees that carries the gospel is a pointed reminder. What opportunities do you/we have to listen to believers from other countries share their experience of Christ?

**2. We mourn death's intrusion into our lives. The first response to persecution/pain/suffering is to mourn. Mourning strengthens our witness in ways that helps us communicate to the rest of the world that death should not be and it needs to be overcome.**

- How does this counteract the stance that Christians should not mourn because we have the hope of heaven?
- What about life/society today causes you to mourn because of the intrusion of sin in our lives?

**3. We never grow silent. Those that were scattered preached wherever they went. Have we? Silence is not an option. How are we speaking the truth that Jesus is the messiah wherever we go?**

- What would you tell a college student the key to living and speaking your faith at work and social situations?
- Who are some people that you see speaking the truth that Jesus is the messiah? What do you admire most about their boldness?

**4. Great Joy is still a reality. Joy filled the city in Samaria through Phillip's teaching. Though we face suffering/persecution and death's intrusion, we can still sing songs of joy.**

- Who would tell about an experience where joy sustained them through times of difficulty?
- What helps believers choose joy over complaining and discouragement?

### **Application:**

Hope has a big impact on people who are living through persecution. We see it in the scriptures. And we see it today for the persecuted church. There is hope that suffering will be rewarded. One of the reasons we gather each Sunday is to remind each other of the hope of the gospel and its power to change lives.

- God is at work in mighty ways and that inspires hope. What hope can you share with our group of His mighty work?
- What work is God doing in your life that you would like us to lift in prayer?
- Where or to whom is God guiding you to speak and to speak boldly?