

The Church That Jesus Is Building.
The Scattered Church - Pastor Roger Ridley
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Ecclesiastes 3:1 reminds us, *“To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven.”* In verse 2, it goes on to say that there is *“a time to plant.”*

One of my favorite Bible stories, and I would assume yours as well, is the parable of the seeds told by Jesus in Mark 4. There, He tells of a sower who went out and began to scatter his seeds across the earth. As the seed fell on different kinds of soil, it brought forth different results. But as it fell on good soil it grew and produced a great harvest.

For the past couple of weeks, we have considered the planting of the Church in Jerusalem. For approximately eight years, Jerusalem was the center of everything that was happening with the Church of Jesus Christ. There the Church was planted among Jewish people of all nations. And there, those people began to grow, mature, and reproduce. In the first six chapters of the book of Acts, we see a Church that is developing and becoming strong.

However, it was never the intent of Christ for His Church to stay in one place and simply get bigger and bigger. One church, no matter how big, how well-developed, and healthy it is, can not do the work of multiple churches spread across the world. The plan of Christ was always for the planting of multiple churches. Remember what He said to the apostles in Matthew 28:19, *“Go ye into all the world.”* Or in Acts 1:8, *“And ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.”*

Our Lord’s plan was bigger than the Jerusalem Church. It included many churches scattered across the world: in different nations, different communities, and different neighborhoods.

The scattering of the Church, from Jerusalem, is therefore, the next key event in the development of the Church of Jesus Christ. It is described for us in Acts 8:1-4...

The word *scattered* used in verses 1 and 4, comes from a Greek word that was specifically used for the scattering of seeds, to plant them for a future harvest. With that in mind, I want to share with you this morning, **three seeds** that Christ used in the early expansion of His Church.

Seed # 1. The Blood Of The First Martyr.

As I already mentioned, in the first six chapters of Acts, the church in Jerusalem was growing. On the Day of Pentecost, 3000 were saved. In Acts 4:4, another 5000 men were saved, and added to the church. In Acts 5:14, it just says multitudes of both men and

women were being added. The rapid growth of this first church, in the city of Jerusalem, is beyond my comprehension. In chapter 6, they were further organized and continued to grow, but in chapter 7, something horrible happened.

Stephen, one of the outstanding leaders in the Jerusalem Church, became the first martyr. Full of anger, screaming as loud as they could, using the largest stones they could find, his enemies stoned him to death outside the walls of the city. Look at Acts 7:54-60...

You have to admire the response of that godly man. With the flashing of angry teeth before him, he looked to Jesus. And as those men carried him out of the city, and plummeted his body with stones, he asked Jesus to forgive them. What a standard he set for every martyr in the Church since. And what an example he is to each of us, when faced with opposition. Instead of returning anger for anger, and blow for blow, we look to Jesus, and ask Him to forgive those that would do us harm.

There, outside of Jerusalem, Stephen, a great man of God, died.

Suddenly, that dynamic church, with men and women trained in the apostle's doctrine, were shaken and scattered like seed in the Sower's hand. We read about it in Acts 8:1...

This appeared to be a life-ending event for the Church that Jesus began on the Day of Pentecost. Overnight, it seemed that everything was lost. However, this tragic event became the greatest turning point in the early expansion of the church.

It has often been said that the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church. Looking back through the pages of Church history, every time, the Church has been persecuted, and men, women, and children have died for the faith, instead of stopping the Church, as intended, persecution only helped to spread it. If you have never taken the time to read any of the stories, do yourself a favor, set aside some time, get a book like Foxe's Book Of Martyrs, and read it. You will be blessed, and you will be challenged in your walk with Christ.

Stephen's martyrdom was horrible. It was sad, as godly men carried and buried his body, and made great lamentation over him.

Stephen's martyrdom was also like a spark, which fanned even greater persecution. Verse 1 tells us "*at that time*", literally "*from that day*", a great persecution erupted against the church. Maybe you have seen some of the specials about sharks on television, and how spilt blood will sometimes cause them to go into a frenzy. That's kind of what happened in Jerusalem. The spilling of Stephen's blood created a frenzy of persecution.

But Stephen's martyrdom was also a seed. Because of his death, and the persecution which followed, the Church was scattered like the seed in the parable of Christ, and it brought forth a hundredfold.

Was this how the Lord intended for His Church to spread? I personally don't think so. Jesus had already established the pattern before the Church even began. The Church was to spread, across the world, through the responsible witness of Spirit-filled Christians.

But the Jerusalem church was like paradise, and no one wanted to leave. It took a great tragedy to get the church to do what it was already supposed to be doing.

The same thing often happens in our churches, and in our lives today. Something bad happens, and we, and the church, begin to do what we should have been doing all along. Let's not wait for something bad to happen to us, or someone we love, to be the responsible, Spirit-filled Christians, the Lord still expects us to be. Let's always be looking out, and moving into the fields that the Lord says are already white for harvest. That means sharing the gospel with others, making disciples of others, and planting other churches.

Seed # 2. The Persecutor Of The Church.

Both Acts 7:58, and Acts 8:1-4, introduce us to a man that is to become a key figure in the expansion of the Church. That's why I do not hesitate to refer to him as a seed. He is introduced to us as a young man by the name of Saul.

These verses tell us two things about Saul: First, he was present at the stoning of Stephen, and consented unto his death. This wasn't something he heard about, he was there, and he enjoyed it. Every stone that struck the body of Stephen, he felt was well deserved. And apparently, it made him want to see more. Because, second, we are told that he became the persecutor of the Church. Look again at verse 3...

The word *havoc* means that the church was in confusion and disorder. He was breaking down doors, and he was hauling men and women off to prison.

Acts 9:1-2 gives us further insight into the activities of this man...

Saul was not satisfied with just slaughtering and scattering the sheep of God in Jerusalem, he pursued them as well. His desire was to completely eradicate any remnant of the Church. Imagine, as Christians, confused about what was happening, were fleeing Jerusalem, Saul was chasing them down.

Again, the future of the Church appeared to be bleak. How could the Church withstand such a blood-thirsty persecutor? It's interesting how the Lord is able to work, and accomplish His will in the worst of circumstances, and how He is able to do the same in the worst of individuals. Look at Acts 9:3-6...

Saul, the persecutor of the Church, the persecutor of Jesus Christ, became a seed in the hands of the Lord for great growth in the Church. To Ananias, the Lord said, concerning Saul, in Acts 9:15, "*He is a chosen vessel unto Me, to bear My name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel.*"

Jesus was going to take Saul, the persecutor of the Church, and transform him into Paul, the Apostle, who, through three missionary journeys, would take the gospel, and start churches throughout the Mediterranean World.

Have you ever felt like you were in a hopeless situation? Certainly, it could not be any

worst that that experienced by the early Christians in the Jerusalem church. And yet, the Lord was working in both the circumstances, and in Saul, to bring about great blessing. As Joseph said to his brothers in Genesis 50:20, “*Ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive.*”

The Lord is still working with impossible circumstances and people, to bring about great good.

Seed # 3. The Church Scattered Abroad.

Under the circumstances, with the death of Stephen, and the havoc created by Saul, Acts 8:4 is very encouraging...

Though they were confused, though their circumstances were against them, though they were scattered like seeds in the wind, those Christians that made up the Church of Jerusalem, proclaimed the Word of God everywhere they went.

The circumstances we face, and the moves we make, do not change the truth of God’s Word. It makes a life-changing difference no matter where we are.

When the Jerusalem Church was scattered, where do you think the people went?

Let’s go back, and read Acts 2:5-12...

I told you, when we studied this passage, that it was the seed of worldwide evangelism. I meant it. In Acts 8:4, we witness that seed disbursed back to those same areas where those people originally came from.

Now look at Acts 11:19-21...

Although this is just a summary, what it tells us is that the people that were scattered, traveled back to their homes, and there, they shared the gospel, and people were saved.

I want to broaden your thinking just a little bit more. As you read through the rest of the book of Acts, and you follow Paul, the Apostle, who was Saul, the Persecutor, through his three missionary journeys, where does Paul, under the leading of the Holy Spirit, plant churches? It is in those same places, where the hearts of people were already being prepared with the truth of God’s Word.

That’s exciting to me! ***The Lord was building His Church all along!*** It didn’t matter that the first believers got distracted, and satisfied where they were. It didn’t matter that a great enemy of the Church was raised up. It didn’t matter that terrible persecution broke out against God’s people. Jesus was still building His Church. In fact, His plan was never disrupted. It unfolded as He had planned from the beginning. Remember what He said to His apostles at the start, “*I will build My Church, and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it.*”

Conclusion - In Mark 4:3, Jesus said that “*a sower went out to sow.*” The seeds he cast

fell in different places. That which fell on good ground brought *“forth fruit, some thirty fold, some sixty, and some an hundred.”*

The death of Stephen, the persecution of Saul, and the scattering of the Church of Jerusalem, were all seeds that fell on good ground, and are still producing fruit today.