

Living the Story

A Study through Scripture

Introduction:

A couple of verses in Scripture shape our understanding of being a “missionary.” First, we know the Great Commission in Matthew 28, to go into all the world. We also, if we have read the book of Acts, know about the missionary journeys of Paul, which begin in Acts 13. (I recognize there are many other passages about sharing our faith, but these tend to be foundational in our understanding of the command to go and the way we often go.)

I am fascinated, however, with a statement in Acts 8, which seems to be a better description of how the early church spread: wherever people went, they shared the good news of Jesus.

I wonder how well we share the good news wherever we go. What places that we frequent have we shared the good news? In which ones have we not?

Summary of the Text:

As with last week’s lesson, to fully understand the text for today, you have to have read the entire section we are looking at in *The Story*. Acts 6 tells of a man who was full of the Holy Spirit (count the number of times he is described in this way) being selected to be one of the ones who helped distribute bread for the widows.

Because he was full of the Spirit, he was able to out-argue (Acts 6.9-10) the Jews, who seized him and in chapter 7, he defends himself against the charges against him. What follows is a complete overview of the working of God throughout Jewish history. His accusers would have identified with these actions and in fact, would have affirmed the words of Stephen; right up until the point he calls them stiff-necked people. When he accuses the Jews of killing the “Righteous One,” it is too much for them to take and they stone him.

In 8.1, we have an introductory note (Luke is good about introducing his characters before they become major players in his narrative) about Saul, who approves of Stephen’s killing. Even reading this statement seems to paint dark clouds on the horizon. There is an ominous feel to the text, which is confirmed in the latter half of the verse: a great persecution breaks out against the church and everyone except the apostles are scattered. In verse 2, we discover that Saul is going from house to house and although it does not say so here, but things Paul—as he is later known—says later lead us to believe he was not just imprisoning people, but murdering them as well.

So what are we to make of this time in the history of the church? The song “Troublesome Times Are Here” seems appropriate, doesn’t it? While we could spend some time looking at why and how the persecution transpired here, I think of greater importance is the fact that there was resistance to the gospel. A movement that seemed to be making great strides earlier in the book of Acts has suddenly met a roadblock. Just how debilitating was this obstacle?

Not very, it turns out. In fact, the gospel spread greater during the time of persecution than any other time, perhaps, in church history. Why? Because as people moved to avoid the persecution, they continued to tell the good news of Jesus wherever they went. There was a constant in their lives: the sharing of the good news of Jesus. It didn’t matter where they were or even why they had to be there, they were going to share the story of what God had done through his son.

I think the implications for us are fairly obvious. At times, I have talked to people who feel they are in between the horns of a dilemma, with the command of Matthew 28 on one side and the organized journeys of Paul on the other.

LESSON #30

Date: 04/14/2013

Text: Acts 8.1-4

The Story: Chapter 28

The Big Picture: If people began to tell you that you could no longer tell the story of God, would it make you stop ... or would it make you tell the story all that much more?

Materials Needed: none

They strive to fulfill the commission, but feel compelled to have a plan or some sort of structure to go about sharing their faith.

We recently were discussing Jule Miller filmstrips during a staff meeting (they are now on DVD, by the way). Some of our staff had never heard of them, which surprised others of us because of the fact those filmstrips were such a staple of sharing of our faith for so many people. The church in Acts did not have such a tool, they simply told of what God had done for them through Jesus.

I believe we need to talk about Jesus more. Not develop programmatic methods for sharing. Not even structured reading or study schedules. I think we need to simply see each moment in our life differently because of the power of salvation we have through the cross. Once we can do that, we then simply share about God's work through Jesus and how that changes everything.

Preparing for the Group Time:

When is the last time you talked about what God has done for you through Jesus? When is the last time you have even thought in those terms?

Living the Story

Lesson #30
Text: Acts 8.1-4

Lesson Outline:

Ask your group if anyone has ever been accused of “telling that story all the time?” The best way to do this may be to ask a family member to share a story that another family member shares. (Our family members tend to be the ones who hear them the most!) Then ask: why do you share that story so often? What is so important or significant about that story that you continue to return to it?

Read Acts 8.1-4.

Ask the discussion questions.

Close with a time of prayer.

Discussion Questions:

If you had been a new convert in the early church, how do you think you would have reacted to the persecution we read about in Acts 8? How do you think that would have changed how you go about “living out” your faith?

Are you surprised at the way the early church reacted to this persecution? Why or why not?

We all know the importance of sharing our faith and the Great Commission command to go into the world making disciples. Describe a time or an example when you have seen—perhaps even been a part of—that happen effectively. Why do you think it was so effective?

How does the time you mention above compare to what you see the followers of Jesus do in Acts 8? Why do you think there are differences (if there are) and why are those differences significant?

How often do you share the story of what God has done through Jesus to people you come in contact with? Think about the people you see on a consistent basis. How many of them have heard you talk about the story of God?

In what ways can we see the story of God more in our daily lives? In what ways can we encourage one another to share that story more with others?

For the Children:

I love hearing our children talk about what God has done for us through Jesus. I would encourage you to spend some time asking the children to tell you the story of Jesus. Let them pick what they want to share and what is significant about Jesus. I think we will learn much about the importance of Jesus through the things they choose to mention.

Living the Story:

This week, your challenge is to think more consistently about the story of God’s salvation seen through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Everything you do is shaped by that story, whether you articulate it or not. Try to think of the ways your life is different because of that story, and then, share that story with the people you come in contact with—especially those with whom you interact on a regular basis.

Next Week:

Next week we begin looking at the book of Acts, chapters 13-16. We will still be in *The Story* chapter 29.