

Acts of Jesus – part 17

In the 1930's, the Japanese invaded what is now North Korea displacing many Koreans and they wound up in an unusual place...place where many still are today. In a country called Uzbekistan. A country that historically has been staunch Muslim. There is mounting evidence that shows that this exile of Korean people more than 70 years ago was a strategic mission move by God. What I mean is this, among the many Koreans who wound up in Uzbekistan there were strong pockets of believers. The Koreans were industrious and hardworking and within a few decades of their arrival were include in almost every aspect of Uzbek cultural life. The Korean Christians used their influence to begin bringing their Muslim friends to Christ. So effective have been the efforts of these transplanted believers that in June 2, 1990 there was held the first open air Christian meeting in the history of Muslim central Asia. A young man of Korean heritage preached to swell crowds in the middle of the staunch Muslim region.

Sometimes bad things are good things...they always are if you're a believer following God.

1. We are going to be looking at just that type of incident that took place in the early church.

--Before we take a close look at that we need to get up to speed as to where we are in the book and the history of the development of the early church so we can have a good grip on what's going on.

--**Acts 8:1** – In order to understand this verse, you must understand this verse:

--**Acts 1:8** Notice: He's not giving a command as much as He is making a prediction/prophecy.

--"You will be MY witnesses...Judea, Samaria, to the uttermost parts" and they did do that.

--Do you think it worked out the way they expected it would? (probably not!)

--This is a very important verse for many reasons, but among them is the fact that this verse essentially gives us an outline for the entire book.

--"In Jerusalem" – that phase was started at Pentecost and is in some ways coming to an end here in **8:1**.

--"In Judea and Samaria" – that phase begins here with the persecution as well as Stephen's stoning.

--"to the uttermost parts" – that phase begins here in some respects but is really punctuated with the **conversion of Paul in Ch. 9.**

2. There is a master plan developing here that we need to see.

--On a surface level, this looks bad: Acts 8:1-3 – "made havoc" is used elsewhere in Greek writings to describe someone being mangled by a wild beast.

--That can't be good can it?

--Look again at verse 1

--- Remember, a conservative estimate of the population of the church at this time is 15,000 people.

--So, 15,000 people go out sharing the gospel wherever they go. That can't be bad can it?

There were two ways a person in the church back then could have reacted to this persecution:

1. "That Stephen just really messed stuff up for us here. There are less inflammatory ways to defend the truth besides calling the whole Sanhedrin a bunch of stiff-necked rebels. Now he's gotten us all in a bunch of trouble. We've lost our homes, we've lost our livelihoods, we've lost our comfortable lifestyles. I wish some people would think before they speak!!" This just can't be good.

2. "God is sovereign and what the Sanhedrin and Saul meant for evil God means for good to reach many for the truth.

--Sometimes we forget that God, despite what the televangelists tell us, is not nearly as concerned about our comfort and much more concerned about our doing His will and being conformed into the image of His Son.

--**Comfort** and **ease** and **affluence** and **prosperity** and **safety** and **freedom** often cause tremendous inertia in the church. (Inertia is the tendency of something standing still to keep standing still or something moving to keep moving).

--The things we think would get us moving often do the opposite—make us stand even more still.

--“If we had more money; people; influence; less persecution; danger, then we’d far more effective.” Is this true?

Persecution can have a harmful effect on the church, but historically persecution hasn’t been near as harmful as prosperity.

--Prosperity has done way more damage to the church than persecution every thought about doing.

3. We forget that the church does not exist for the sake of the membership, but for the sake of the world.

--The Church lives in a tension, always has: On the one hand, it has the responsibility to nurture the Body of Christ, to build it up, to worship, pray, encourage, disciple the saved.

--On the other hand, the church does not exist for itself --- She is the army of God on mission in this world.

4. Lessons we can learn from this incident in the life of the early church.

1. We do not live by chance and coincidence, God is sovereign.

2. God works and repositions His people for the effective work of His mission.

--It’s shocking how many Christians think they are where they are for some reason other than the purposes of God.

--You are not here because of your job, your choice, some financial or professional decision you made.

--**To miss that is to really miss it!**

3. We need to develop a missionary mindset about ourselves.

--Every Christian should view all of life as a mission opportunity.

--Need to view our jobs and places in life as missionary assignments.

--Need to view any repositioning as a new assignment: Job transfers, hospital stays, new school, new neighbors, etc.

--If your job is engineering, you are not an engineer who happens to be a Christian; you’re a Christian who happens to be an engineer.

If your job is _____, you are not a _____ who happens to be a Christian; you are Christian who happens to be a _____.