

When God Uses Suffering to Spread the Gospel

Sometimes the most difficult seasons of our lives become the very moments when God displays His power most clearly. Throughout history, we've seen how God transforms tragedy into triumph, using persecution and pain to advance His kingdom in ways we never could have imagined.

How Does God Use Persecution to Advance His Kingdom?

In Acts chapter 8, we witness a pivotal moment in church history. Following Stephen's martyrdom, a great persecution arose against the early church in Jerusalem. Led by Saul (later the apostle Paul), this campaign sought to eradicate Christianity entirely. Believers were dragged from their homes and thrown into prison.

Yet what Satan intended for evil, God used for good. The persecution that was meant to destroy the church actually caused it to spread. As believers scattered throughout Judea and Samaria, they carried the gospel message with them wherever they went.

The Scattering That Led to Spreading

The persecution of Acts 8:1 moved the church to obey the command of Acts 1:8 - to be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. These weren't trained missionaries with diplomas and formal preparation. They were ordinary believers who simply shared what Jesus Christ had done in their lives.

They didn't go out specifically to share the gospel - they shared the gospel as they went out. This is the heart of true missionary work: being a witness for Christ wherever life takes you.

What Can We Learn from Philip's Ministry in Samaria?

Philip, one of the seven chosen to serve tables in Acts 6, became a powerful evangelist when persecution scattered the believers. He went to Samaria - a place most Jews avoided due to cultural prejudices and historical tensions.

Breaking Down Cultural Barriers

The Samaritans were considered "half-breeds" by the Jews - descendants of those left behind during the Babylonian exile who had intermarried with pagan peoples. Yet Jesus had already shown a different way, treating Samaritans with dignity and love.

Philip's ministry in Samaria demonstrated that the gospel was always meant to spread cross-culturally. When people say certain groups are unreachable or unworthy, God often responds by sending revival to those very people.

Signs, Wonders, and Genuine Faith

As Philip preached Christ in Samaria, miracles followed. Unclean spirits were cast out, the paralyzed and lame were healed, and there was great joy in the city. These signs confirmed the gospel message and drew people to genuine faith in Jesus.

Why Do False Teachers Emerge When God Is Moving?

When God begins to work powerfully, the enemy doesn't sit still. In Samaria, there was a man named Simon who had previously practiced sorcery and amazed the people with his magic tricks. The people called him "the great power of God."

The Danger of Seeking Power Over the Spirit

When Simon saw the apostles laying hands on people who then received the Holy Spirit, he offered them money for this power. This revealed his true heart - he didn't desire the person of the Holy Spirit, just His power for personal gain.

Peter's response was swift and severe: "Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money." The power of God is not for sale, and positions in God's kingdom cannot be bought.

Religious Activity for Personal Gain

Simon's story warns us about using religious activity for personal advancement. True greatness in God's kingdom comes through serving others, not seeking power or influence. When our hearts aren't right before God, we may fool others, but God sees through our facade.

How Can We Examine Our Own Hearts?

Peter told Simon that his heart was not right before God and called him to repentance. This challenges us to examine our own hearts regularly. Are we pursuing holiness or excusing sinfulness? Do we truly believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior?

Dealing with Bitterness

Peter identified that Simon was "poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity." Bitterness often arises when we lose position, power, or recognition. It makes us feel justified in our anger while making us miserable.

The remedy for bitterness is found at the cross. Just as Moses threw a tree into bitter water to make it sweet, we must apply the cross to our bitter situations. The wood of the cross transforms our bitterness into the sweetness of Jesus.

What Does It Mean to Be Baptized in the Holy Spirit?

When Peter and John came to Samaria, they prayed for the believers to receive the Holy Spirit. Though they had believed the gospel and been baptized, they hadn't yet received what's called the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

This baptism empowers believers to be effective witnesses, sharing Jesus with His power to whomever God puts in front of them. God wants to use your life as a tool in His mighty hand, not as a trophy collecting dust on a shelf.

Life Application

God's power is displayed in your life as you move forward in faith, whether through painful valleys or exciting mountaintops. This week, examine your heart honestly before God. Are you trusting Him through difficult circumstances? Are you willing to step through the doors He opens for you to share His love? When the enemy tries to disrupt your faith, will you stay focused on Christ?

Ask yourself these questions: Am I pursuing positions of power and influence, or am I content to serve others? Do I harbor bitterness toward God or others that needs to be brought to the cross? Am I willing to be used by God wherever He sends me, even to people I might naturally avoid?

Remember that God hasn't given you a spirit of fear, but of power, love, and sound mind. Let Him fill you with His Spirit and use you to impact lives for His glory, knowing that He will empower you for whatever He calls you to do.