



**Acts – Can I get a Witness?**  
**Wk. 24 Persecution and Proclamation**  
**By Pastor Jody May 03/12/2023**

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**Acts 8:1-8 ESV**

**Saul Ravages the Church**

**8** And Saul approved of his execution.

And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. <sup>2</sup>Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him. <sup>3</sup>But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison.

**Philip Proclaims Christ in Samaria**

<sup>4</sup>Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word. <sup>5</sup>Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ. <sup>6</sup>And the crowds with one accord paid attention to what was being said by Philip, when they heard him and saw the signs that he did. <sup>7</sup>For unclean spirits, crying out with a loud voice, came out of many who had them, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. <sup>8</sup>So there was much joy in that city.

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**[INTRODUCTION]**

As some of you noticed this week, we have been having an early spring, rain + warm weather has equaled a pollen explosion! Even though it's not always fun it tells me that it is time to get to work outside. Before our field grass starts demanding a weekly cutting, we, the church, had to get on top of some of our long-discussed plans. One of those was to remove the old barn out back for several reasons (wild coyote den, temporary homeless shelter and bathroom, Tetanus staging area, drug paraphilia collection, and a magnet for our students to explore) so we needed a tool that could get it done. We rented a bigger version of a Bobcat this past week and not only removed the barn, we removed a lot of brush and as you see took down our parking lot to make level and usable ground. The two main culprits in all this activity was Glenn and myself.

I wanted to tell you about that machine, I was not much of a fan. Yes, it is a little fun taking things down and wrecking them, but it came with a cost. The



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way you drive a Bobcat is by using two levers, one that provides forward and backward movement and the other controls the bucket and arms. Glenn and I discovered after the first day, first the controls were backwards from other machines we had operated, and this was a brand-new machine which made it very touchy. That by the end of the first day I was lying in bed and discovered I had sea legs, so I was literally rocked to sleep.

I discovered a lot of that motion is because when you are trying to level earth, keeping it straight, and not just gouging ground, you have to use both joysticks at the same time. And I noticed that to remove trees you need more than the bucket; you need the power and movement of a heavy machine (W+M). The more force applied in motion PLUS the more force in the movement of the bucket all equaling the greater impact and speed of the clearing process. Less speed in the machine the less bucket impact you had and the faster you drove and the more comfortable you became with the machine the quicker the work went. Both **Mass/Force of the machine + Maneuverability/Strength of the bucket** arms are related in such a way that when you increased one it caused the effectiveness of the other to rise.

In the end it changed the landscape of our property, molding it to become more friendly in its' usage. Much in the same way God uses **the witness of the church** to mold His Kingdom into the shape He wants. You see, we are His tool, His excavator that He uses to carve out narrow paths unto righteousness, that He uses to clean out den's of sinful past behavior, to even be so poetic in the words of the prophet

**Isaiah 40:3 ESV**

A voice cries:

"In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD;  
**make straight** in the desert a **highway** for our God.

This tool, what we call the church will be the main tool applied until Christ Jesus' return. It has **two main control arms** that are very different in their functions but when applied rightly produce **great evangelistic work**. Let me introduce you to the function of these controls.



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**8** And Saul approved of his execution.

And there arose on that day a great **persecution**

The first one we have is **Persecution**: διωγμός (*diōgmos*), οὐ (*ou*), ὁ (*ho*): n.masc.; ≡ Str 1375—LN 39.45 **persecution**, harassment, oppression<sup>1</sup>

It is the unlikely driving force behind the spread of the Gospel. This is the Mass and power that fuels the machine, the witness of the church, to get her moving. Again, Jesus makes note that when it is applied that the false church, the **so-called Christians will flee**, they can't take the pressure.

**Mark 4:17 ESV (from the parable of the seed among the road)**

<sup>17</sup> And they (false church) have no root in themselves, but endure for a while; then, when tribulation or **persecution** arises on account of the word, immediately they **fall away**.

You're witnessing that in America right now. It was reported by the Cultural Research Center or Barna Research in the **American Worldview Inventory 2023 that the Incidence of Biblical Worldview Shows Significant Change Since the Start of the Pandemic from 6% in 2020 to 4% in 2023. That's a reduction of 6.6 million people in America with a biblical worldview over the last 3 years.**<sup>2</sup> Persecution is starting to separate the wheat from the chaff, congrats to all in here, you made the cut.

As well Jesus goes on to say that those who **don't flee** reap the reward of eternal life, gaining an eternal family, but that also comes through persecution.

**Mark 10:30 ESV**

<sup>30</sup> who (the true church) will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with **persecutions**, and in the age to come eternal life.

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<sup>1</sup> Swanson, J. (1997). [Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Greek \(New Testament\)](#) (electronic ed.). Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.arizonachristian.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/CRC\\_AWVI2023\\_Release1.pdf](https://www.arizonachristian.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/CRC_AWVI2023_Release1.pdf)



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Persecution is powerful tool that the Lord allows the world to use, to clean out the church and to help shape the landscape of what is the true Kingdom of God.

The second controlling arm on this tool is **Proclamation**:

<sup>5</sup>Philip went down to the city of Samaria and **proclaimed** to them the Christ. κήρυσσω (*kēryssō*). vb. **to preach or proclaim**. Refers to publicly preaching or proclaiming a message.<sup>3</sup> Proclamation is what carves out the path, it is what removes the sin, it is the more maneuverable side of this tool.

This preaching or message is the proclamation by the church, and as we learned last Sunday, there is a new authority on earth, it's Jesus who sits at God's right hand and all things are under His control. It is the job of the church to do so.

**Acts 10:42 ESV**

<sup>42</sup>And he **commanded us to preach** to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead.

Now here's how this works, you have noticed in Acts already that what they were saying many people were not going to like; **there is a man now that judges the living and dead for God**. Think of what has just happened with the Jews in Jerusalem, we know how that ended with Stephen. Now they were about to go everywhere into areas where other gods were worshipped, and they were still to preach this message. Not only that, but they were also going to go into other areas proclaiming things that would rub people wrong that would get them noticed by the nasty Romans and possibly perceived as a threat to their governance, which it eventually did. And yet, this is still the plan of God, this did not surprise Him, this was His purposeful intent.

**[MAIN POINT]**

And here is what you will begin to notice today, and you'll see it through the rest of the NT as well **(MP)**:

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<sup>3</sup> Kugler, C. (2014). [Gospel](#). D. Mangum, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, & R. Hurst (Eds.), *Lexham Theological Wordbook*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.



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**The more the church proclaimed the Gospel the more they were persecuted, and the more they were persecuted, the more they proclaimed the Gospel.**

What we are discovering is that in God's wisdom He made a way by which the evangelism of the world, *Matthew 28:19 the command to make disciples*, would come about through empowering His church with a never-ending fuel supply. **The more His church was to be persecuted the louder and bolder they would become.** Now let's go back to our text and look at the beginning of this cycle with the igniting spark of Stephen's Martyrdom last week.

We will start with Persecution this week and notice three different aspects that came about because of Stephen's death and then we will introduce a man named Phillip this week and look at three aspects of Proclamation.

**Persecution** the Mass and Force applied to the church.

## **1. Scattering**

### **Saul Ravages the Church**

**8** And Saul approved of his execution.

And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all **scattered** throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.

Scattering, is an agricultural term, simply to pick up and cast out. The church was **run out of town** as if they were all criminals. These people have worn out their welcome and that is because they are not necessarily residents of Jerusalem. This was a culmination of the Jews from Acts 2 & 5 that would have been out of towners but had temporarily relocated to Jerusalem when they joined the church. These are also folks that were visiting the Temple on Holiday scholars believe. They were made to go back into the surrounding countryside and even into Samaria.



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The **Apostles were left alone**. It seems the Sanhedrin did not want to push their luck. The Apostles had already gone through their trial and their only charge was not to do things in Jesus' name. The Sanhedrin does not want to give them the witness stand anymore most likely at this point to gain sympathy from the people. They are going to have to learn to live with them.

But the power that was there in the church, right before Stephen's death has now been diminished. They had come together having all things in **common**; Holiness, Obedience, and Joy. That's a dangerous combination that has instilled FEAR in the hearts of those that want to keep control, and that's where the action of Scattering in Persecution comes from – FEAR.

### [CHALLENGE + APPLICATION]

I know it's hard for all of us to witness the hand of persecution against each other. This past week Onan had sent me a link on **Early Rain Covenant Church** in China<sup>4</sup> that has been scattered since December 2018 when their pastor was arrested and imprisoned. They just met for the first time this past week since then, when again they were accosted by Chinese police. While we must pray for the witness and testimony of Early Rain Church, we must **also pray** for **those that persecute** them for they too are driven by fear of a tyrannical leader of a Communistic Regime.

### Matthew 5:44-45 ESV

But I say to you, Love your enemies and **pray for those who persecute you**, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

We Pray for them for God is demonstrating His care over them as He provides for them the same good things, He provides for you. We too were lost as they were lost, we too were controlled by our **FEARs** and therefore let us remember that by God's Grace alone can they escape it.

## 2. Lamenting

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<sup>4</sup>[https://www.facebook.com/prayforearlyrain/?paipv=0&eav=Afb35Ft0gau4bbacNQzFUe2Zm62IYxXLKSJnLEfoeWB1\\_g0VzoRaxAK1llpUABN7Xds&\\_rdr](https://www.facebook.com/prayforearlyrain/?paipv=0&eav=Afb35Ft0gau4bbacNQzFUe2Zm62IYxXLKSJnLEfoeWB1_g0VzoRaxAK1llpUABN7Xds&_rdr).



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<sup>2</sup>**Devout men** buried Stephen and made **great lamentation** over him.

Devout Men, this was the same way the first converted men were described back in Acts 2:5. <sup>5</sup>*Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven.* Those devout men when they heard the gospel the HS used their knowledge of the law and their affections towards God to open their ears to Peter's preaching of the Gospel and they were saved. **Devout men are God fearers, law observers, good men, not necessarily converted** but they had a **good chance** of it when confronted with the gospel.

The persecuted **do find sympathy** among those outside the church, these were men that knew Stephen, knew his work, and saw that his actions came from a heart that loved God. They saw in Stephen's treatment, for the **sake of widows**, an unfair and unjust event. This caused them to have a **great lament**, which comes from the witnessing of **UNFAIR TREATMENT**. Luke is careful to point out that their **grieving was very public**, people noticed it, he noticed it. They weren't concerned what the Sanhedrin nor the Hellenistic Pharisee types thought.

Persecution does bring out those people who empathize with the cause of the Gospel and the testimony of those persecuted opens **special places in the hearts** of those that **fear God**.

Some of these men perhaps became future members of the church of Jerusalem as the Hellenistic Jews had to flee. One can only think about the future leader of the church in Jerusalem James, the brother of Jesus, who would have witnessed a man die for Jesus and His teachings when he would not. Witnessing the persecution of the church is how God opens the hearts of the spiritually dead.

### **3. Ravaging**

<sup>3</sup>But Saul was **ravaging** the church, and entering house after house, he **dragged off** men and women and committed them to prison.





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Saul directly attacks what the church had come to love, being with one another. He **RAVAGES** the church meaning to injure on purpose severely with the intent to ruin. It was an action done with the desire to destroy, not to ever see it rise up again. Paul breaks down doors, disrupts families, drags off his fellow countrymen without trial, and places them in prison. Prisons that were run by an angry Sanhedrin that could control food and visitation privileges.

This type of persecution is what we all hate to see. When someone **uses governmental authority** established to protect you, that was supplied by your taxes, is now turned against one without provocation. I know you are in agreement with me, that no matter who you are, no one in this room likes to see the weaponizing of the federal government against any of its' people.

**[GOSPEL]**

Yet we have seen pastors dragged to prison over the last few years, we have seen churches sued for disagreements, we have seen the DOJ used as a means to enforce coercion. I know to us this is really infuriating but even though it is wrong, God's Goodness and His Grace prevails, for Jesus taught us there is **still blessing** even **in persecution**:

**Matthew 10:10-12 ESV**

<sup>10</sup>"Blessed are those who are **persecuted** for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the **kingdom of heaven**.

<sup>11</sup>"Blessed are you when others revile you and **persecute** you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. <sup>12</sup>Rejoice and be glad, for your **reward is great in heaven**, for so they **persecuted** the prophets who were before you.

Friends the Gospel takes into account that **God's people will be persecuted** but the **automatic response** of our Father is to **reward us** in ways that the world cannot touch.

- Being persecuted for Jesus means you have found the Kingdom.
- Being persecuted for Jesus means you have a reason to rejoice even when people revile you.





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- Being persecuted for Jesus means God has started accruing your rewards in heaven where neither moth nor rust can touch it.

Persecution becomes a **reward-based program**, it's not about how much you are losing anymore but about **how much you are gaining**. Again, our God takes an evil thing and turns it to our good! Now let's look and see how He also uses Proclamation, the other lever if you will, to recreate this world into His Kingdom.

**Back to our main point this morning:**

So far, we have seen that from the intense desire of Proclamation the Persecution of the church began, but now we are going to see how that persecution actually contributed to the proclamation for the church.

**Proclamation** the Maneuverability and strength of the church.

**1. Preaching**

**Philip Proclaims Christ in Samaria**

<sup>4</sup> Now those who were scattered went about **preaching** the word.

As we begin to move into this topic of Proclamation, please notice who is doing the preaching - **those who were scattered**. The proclamation of the gospel is never about the work of one person it is all of **'OUR'** work. We are all called to spread the good news, and the church in the ancient world did just that!

**[CHALLENGE + APPLICATION]**

Here's what they came to learn through their scattering, their dispersion, and so should we, **Every setback** should be viewed as an opportunity to preach the Gospel.

These good folks had been kicked out of heaven on earth, those that had recanted their Judaism in a call to be baptized in the name of a Messiah the Sanhedrin would not recognize. These people thought that they had entered into a new heaven on earth but now that vision had been pulled out from



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under them. Instead of **complaining** about the loss of income, time, and money they commit to being obedient to Jesus' command and they begin their job to preach to the nations. Can you imagine thousands of people flood the Palestine countryside looking for homes and employment. Everywhere they would go they **Gossiped the Gospel** (Michael Green). Every new relationship whether it was a landlord, an employer, or new business partner, all these relationships came with whispers of the Messiah they had found.

**[CHALLENGE + APPLICATION]**

Family, how we doing with that? Are we caught up in thinking we lost too much? Are we complaining or blaming others over our disappointments of not being where we wanted to be in life? OR Have we been gossiping the Gospel to those we come in contact with? Family I know it is so easy to be bitter, been there and done that, but don't you waste one more moment of time, because wherever you are at this moment is exactly where God determined you would be, and you were **put there to spread the gospel, not complain about life.**

Allow the fruit of disappointment and even persecution to run your life into opportunities for ministry not gripe sessions over what you have lost. God has so much more in store for you if we will only practice our faith.

Alright enough about us, who is this Phillip?

**Acts 6:3-5**

<sup>3</sup>Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of **good repute**, full of the **Spirit** and of **wisdom**, whom we will appoint to this duty... <sup>5</sup>And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and **Philip**, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch.

Philip like Stephen was picked to do the physical duties of the church, and he too was full of the Spirit and of wisdom, and BTW good repute means the **people like him**. That means it is a good idea for the church to elevate leaders that the people like and have a good reputation, character and



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personality goes a long way in helping lead ministries, and as we see here function on the run. Well, where was Phillip running to?

<sup>5</sup>Philip went down to the city of **Samaria** and **proclaimed** to them the Christ.

Why Samaria, it's not Jewish and as a matter of fact they didn't like the Jewish people that much.

**Acts 1:8 ESV**

<sup>8</sup>But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and **Samaria**, and to the end of the earth."

Ok got it, **Jesus called it**, it was His will, Phillip was sent there by the Spirit for the one at the right hand of God willed it. Actually, it is a good strategy for Jesus had set this up already:

- John 4:7-26 He met a woman that had come to the well there.
- Luke 12:11-19 He healed a leper from there when Jewish ones heeded Him not.
- Luke 10:25-37 He taught the parable of the good Samaritan.

The Samaritans you see **believed** in the **Messiah too**. They were half Jews that had wanted to share in the blessings of Abraham. When you read recently that when Ezra came back home to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, they were the ones that wanted to help and they were denied. This rubbed them wrong. They actually built their own temple that got destroyed when the Romans pushed through Palestine and now the Jews looked down their noses at them as an inferior race whenever they got the chance.

Phillip and the Samaritans should have **mixed like oil and water** so what happened?

<sup>6</sup>And the crowds with one accord paid attention to what was being said by Philip, when they **heard him** and **saw the signs** that he did.

Phillip went back to Samaria with love and devotion in his face. He talked about a man, that they would remember, that removed Phillip's distrust of



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these people. He talked about Jesus, who wanted all men to give up their bickering about old hates and injustices and instead make a new family established by Jesus' Grace and paid for by His blood for the sins on both sides. The Samaritans not only heard the conviction of the Gospel, but they saw the works and believed!

**[GOSPEL]**

You see family, you know what the answer is to ethnic injustices, to cultural divides, to years of ignoring your neighbor because of skin colors? It is not reparations, it is not the establishment of equity, forced social reprogramming, it is the message of the Cross that says **no one pays anything** but all are cleared by the power of the blood of the Son of God. He has paid for ALL past wrongs, and he has now made it possible for enemies to overlook past grievances and love each other. Philip the enemy of Samaritans now stands before them as an equal sinner in need of a Savior/they were now united by their need and love of Jesus!

Persecution had pushed Philip out of town, but it was where exactly God had wanted Him, to bring the good news to people that wanted the same thing, **a way to escape their insignificance in this world. Persecution had enabled the proclamation for the Samaritans that Salvation is here.**

**2. Cleansing**

<sup>6</sup>And the crowds with one accord paid attention to what was being said by Philip, when they heard him and saw the signs that he did. <sup>7</sup>For **unclean spirits**, crying out with a loud voice, **came out** of many who had them,

Philip started doing what the Samaritans could not do themselves, and what Jesus had been doing for the Jews for years, the driving out of the hounds of hell out of His new purchased people. You see the need wasn't about who's ethnicity was more important it was spiritual in nature. Demons had been infiltrating these cousins of the Jews and had kept many of them in bondage to sin. That's **how demons work** they **influence your mind** to **sink deeper into a sin** you are susceptible to negating the ability to get closer to God.



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Philip was rescuing people from demonic influences that unless he rescued them, they physically could not hear the Gospel. BTW this is an example supplied to us in scripture why Salvation is a Sovereign gift of Grace and not a man-contrived act of will. Cleansing a community of demonic activity is a demonstration of the desire of God to get to a people, the Samaritans eyes were being opened to the fact that **God DID love them**, and the God that came to their ancestors were now coming to them! They could stop trying to conceive a way to get God into their land, as Stephen pointed out God goes where He wants, and He was traveling via His dispersed church.

**Persecution had led to the cleansing of Samaria, for God had left the temple in Jerusalem and had come to Samaria to proclaim His desire for His people!**

### **3. Healing**

and many who were paralyzed or lame were **healed**.<sup>8</sup> So there was **much joy** in that city.

Along with the Preaching and Cleansing there was Healing. All thing things that accompanied the ministry of Jesus was now accompanying the ministry of Philip. He was preaching with the authority of Christ, He was casting out demons in Jesus' authority, and now He was miraculously healing in the name of Jesus, the healer. Then the result was **there was much JOY!**

*χαρά* (*chara*). n. **joy**. *The experience of gladness*.<sup>5</sup> In the NT this word for joy was often used in conjunction with the reception of an eschatological Salvation, that means this joy is what happened when people realized that their prayers had been answered for Salvation, and the Samaritans had received that on this day in history in Jesus' name!

Can you imagine that day the woman from the well and all the people she had gotten to come to talk to Jesus, they called on Him to SAVE them and that's

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<sup>5</sup> Litwak, K. D. (2014). [Joy](#). D. Mangum, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, & R. Hurst (Eds.), *Lexham Theological Wordbook*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.



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what a Samaritan always wanted, to be accepted into God's family, finally happened that day!

You see over for 1000 years, under the leadership of Jeroboam, these people had been under the wrath of God. They had endured harsh rule, chaotic government, had been harassed by Assyrian, Syrians, and Egyptians alike, lost their land and mixed in other cultures far away to return to a land that had been given to the enemy. They were a broken people that had been looking for a way to reconnect to God and they had been shut out by the Jews and used as a measuring stick for all that wasn't Holy. **God came back to them, not because they deserved it** but because He is a steadfast and loving God that keeps offering Salvation to His people.

**[CHALLENGE + APPLICATION]**

Family, that is all we want, isn't it? To belong somewhere, to know that someone loves us and there is nothing we can do to drive them away. That was the answer then and it is still the answer for today. The world is desperately looking for someone to save them, to give them hope, to make them not just feel they belong but to know they belong, and that all comes through the sacrifice of Jesus that paid for our adoption to be sons of God.

None of the Samaritans joy would have happened if not for the force of **Persecution**. It is the thing that drives the church outside her four walls, it is what makes us excited to **Proclaim** with others that we may not want to share with normally.

**The more the church proclaimed the Gospel the more they were persecuted, and the more they were persecuted, the more they proclaimed the Gospel.**

HCC are we a little convicted today, are we complaining a little too much about what we have lost or are we ready to accept that wherever we are is because God wants us to tell people that Salvation has come to them. Let us all look at the opportunities in front of us, not as a consequence of something lost, but as an opportunity to share the Gospel.



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Perhaps that is what you need to hear today. God wants you, He wants you to hear that His Son has paid the price, He wants you to know His incredible love for you. Are you ready to rejoice today in what you have found in Jesus? Let's go to Him today and thank Him for the gift of His Son.

**[PRAYER]**

**[COMMUNION]**

**[BENEDICTION]**

Go in the name of the Father, that has allowed the persecution of His loved ones so that we can proclaim His goodness to those that are His.

Go in the name of the Son, that endured the persecution of those that hated Him, so that He could proclaim His love for us on the cross.

Go in the name and power of the Holy Spirit, that will help us endure our persecution so that we may proclaim this good news to the world.