

Lesson 2: *Faithful Amid Persecution*

Tuesday, April 9, 2024

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Throughout the early centuries of Christianity, the Christian church grew rapidly, despite imprisonment, torture, and persecution. Faithful believers, totally committed to Christ, filled with the Holy Spirit, proclaimed His Word with power; lives were changed, and tens of thousands were converted.

Read Acts 2:41; Acts 4:4, 31; Acts 5:42; and Acts 8:1–8. What do these verses teach us about the challenges the New Testament church faced and also why it grew so rapidly?

⁴¹Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added *to them*.—**Acts 2:41**

⁴However, many of those who heard the word believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand... ³¹And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.—**Acts 4:4, 31**

⁴²And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus *as* the Christ.—**Acts 5:42**

Now Saul was consenting to his death. At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. ²And devout men carried Stephen *to his burial*, and made great lamentation over him.

³As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing *them* to prison.

⁴Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word. ⁵Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria and

preached Christ to them. ⁶ And the multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. ⁷ For unclean spirits, crying with a loud voice, came out of many who were possessed; and many who were paralyzed and lame were healed. ⁸ And there was great joy in that city.—**Acts 8:1-8**

The disciples faced threats (*Acts 4:17*), imprisonment (*Acts 5:17, 18*), persecution (*Acts 8:1*), and death itself (*Acts 7:59, Acts 12:2*), yet in the power of the Holy Spirit courageously proclaimed the resurrected Christ, and churches multiplied throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria (*Acts 9:31*).

The bastions of hell were shaken. The shackles of Satan were broken. Pagan superstition crumbled before the power of the resurrected Christ. The gospel triumphed in the face of overwhelming odds. The disciples no longer cowered in the upper room. Fear danced away like a fading shadow.

Instead, faith filled the disciples' hearts. One glimpse of their resurrected Lord changed their lives. Jesus gave them a new reason for living. Our Lord had not only given them the Great Commission (*Mark 16:15*), but He had given them the great promise, “ ‘But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth’ ” (*Acts 1:8, NKJV*).

¹⁰ Blessed *are* those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹ Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. ¹² Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great *is* your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.—**Matthew 5:10-12**

Paul's example of faith amid persecution:

²² Are they Hebrews? So *am* I. Are they Israelites? So *am* I. Are they the seed of Abraham? So *am* I. ²³ Are they ministers of Christ?—I speak as a fool—I *am* more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. ²⁴ From the Jews five times I received forty *stripes* minus one. ²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was

shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; ²⁶ *in* journeys often, *in* perils of waters, *in* perils of robbers, *in* perils of *my own* countrymen, *in* perils of the Gentiles, *in* perils in the city, *in* perils in the wilderness, *in* perils in the sea, *in* perils among false brethren; ²⁷ in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness— ²⁸ besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches.—**2 Corinthians 11:22-28**

“But if Not...”

16 Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego answered and said to the king, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. 17 If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. 18 **But if not**, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up.”—**Daniel 3:16-18**

Purpose and Blessings through the persecutions...

² My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, ³ knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. ⁴ But let patience have *its* perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.—**James 1:2-4**

³ And not only *that*, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; ⁴ and perseverance, character; and character, hope.—**Romans 5:3, 4**

¹² Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; ¹³ but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ’s sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy...¹⁶ Yet if *anyone suffers* as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter...¹⁹ Therefore let those who

suffer according to the will of God commit their souls *to Him* in doing good, as to a faithful Creator.—**1 Peter 4:12,13, 16, 19**

⁶In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, ⁷that the genuineness of your faith, *being* much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, ⁸whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see *Him*, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, ⁹receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of *your* souls.—**1 Peter 1:6-9**

¹⁰For You, O God, have tested us;

You have refined us as silver is refined.

¹¹You brought us into the net;

You laid affliction on our backs.

¹²You have caused men to ride over our heads;

We went through fire and through water;

But You brought us out to rich *fulfillment*.—**Psalms 66:10-12**