

# Engaging the Real World

(Series: Reimagining Church; Message Eighteen)

Acts 8:1-24

## A. 2015 was the worst year for Christian Persecution

1. Christian Solidarity International says over 150,000 were murdered last year
2. Hundreds of thousands are currently imprisoned - over 70,000 in North Korea

## B. One of the Scripture passages that continues to haunt me is 1 Timothy 3:12

*"Fact is, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted."*

## STEPHEN (8:1-5)

### A. The horrific death of Stephen brought more intense persecution

1. It compelled many Christ-followers to scatter throughout the world
2. But the disciples and many Judean believers stayed and stood fast
  - a. To stand firm in the midst of persecution requires commitment
  - b. To stand firm in the midst of persecution requires courage
  - c. To stand firm in the midst of persecution requires character

### B. God used this persecution to accomplish two significant things in his church

1. He forced his church out of Jerusalem; out of its comfort zone
2. He forced his followers to depend on the gifts the Spirit had distributed

### C. These verses focus on the persecution; but don't overlook the resolve

## SAMARIA (8:5-8)

### A. The church is moving into God's mission - embracing her destiny

*"You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all of Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (1:8)*

### B. The Samaritans were Gentiles with Jewish blood running through their veins

### C. "All the Samaritans paid close attention to what he said"

1. This is clearly a move of God's Spirit. All the signs are there...
  - a. First, the Truth of God is proclaimed - "He proclaimed Christ there..."
  - b. The Power of the Gospel is evident. The Gospel (always) brings change.
  - c. The Joy of Jesus is embraced: "There was great joy in the city" (8:8)
2. These three marks always accompany the presence of the Holy Spirit

### D. The Church is on mission

1. Stephen and Philip transform the early church by simply talking about Jesus
2. Peter and John come to embrace the new Christ-followers, to assert apostolic authority over the Church, and to pray for the Spirit to come (8:15)

## SIMON (8:9-13, 18-24)

### A. Simon was a self-proclaimed "great man" who had done some amazing things and had a great following who is now was suddenly "out amazed" by Philip

### B. Just like you can identify real Christians, you can tell the counterfeit ones

#### 1. Counterfeit Christianity rests on Counterfeit Truth

*"We do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake." (2 Corinthians 4:5)*

#### 2. Counterfeit Christianity rests on a counterfeit power (8:11)

#### 3. Counterfeit Christianity provides no lasting joy (no perseverance) (8:13)

*"You have no part or share in this ministry because your heart is not right before God" (8:21)*

### C. Simon is challenged to repent - to get his heart right with God (8:22)

## SEMANTICS

### A. There is a word here we have encountered before - "homothumadon"

Cf. Acts 1:3; 4:24, 5:12, 8:6, 15:25

*"...so that you may 'homothumadon' glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 15:6)*

### B. It's a compound word we translate to sound tame: in one accord, of one mind

1. Being in one accord is not acquiescing to something so we can go home
2. *Homothumadon* is a unanimous response to something God is doing

### C. This word defines the early church following the resurrected Jesus together

1. *Homothumadon* is not compelling people into consensus
2. Behind *homothumadon* is a resurrected Jesus who continues to do what he has always done - build his kingdom
3. Behind *homothumadon* is our sold-out commitment to the resurrected Jesus,
  - a. It is what made Stephen willing to lay down his life for Jesus
  - b. It is what encouraged Philip to cross the border into Samaria
4. When you get to heaven and someone asks you "How did you give your life to Jesus?" may you have a God-honoring answer