

Sing before the service: Psalm 138:1

Our help is in the Name of the Lord who made heaven and earth.

Beloved, grace and peace be to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ through the mighty working of God the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

Psalm of praise: 51:6

Prayer

Psalm 30:1

Scripture reading: Acts 8

Scripture text: Acts 8:4

Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went.
(Acts 8:4 NIV-UK)

To whom have you preached my gospel so that he could be converted to Me? This is what the Lord is going to ask us.

The Lord Jesus gave a command to his church before He ascended to heaven. The disciples stood before Him on behalf of the entire church when He said:

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. (Matthew 28:19-20a NIV-UK)

Nobody gives a command without checking that the command has actually been executed.

- No less a person than the Lord.
- This is why every one of us will be called to account in this regard.

Now we might say that the Lord said this to the apostles and therefore only office-bearers would have to answer to this call. Hence, let's see which people actually obeyed this command.

In Jerusalem the church leaders continued bearing malice towards the Christians.

- Stephen was stoned. Saul witnessed it – he had to look after the clothes of the men who stoned Stephen.

And from there the persecution continued.

- Members of the church were chased in their homes and arrested.
- Hence they could no longer stay in Jerusalem.
- So they fled to Judea and Samaria.

Apparently, no persecution had occurred in those two towns yet. Now it is clear to see the hand of the Lord in this matter.

- He clearly commanded his people to spread the gospel among all nations, but they did not do it.
- They stayed in Jerusalem.
- In principle they were making the same mistake as the people who built the tower of Babel. **Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth."**(Genesis 11:4)

Hence, in principle, the Lord acts in the same way.

- He scattered them.
- In this case the Lord decided that the Christians would be persecuted so that they had to flee Jerusalem. Then they could preach the gospel wherever they went.

So the Lord Himself saw to it that the gospel would be spread, even if He had to punish the believers for their unwillingness to do what He had commanded them to do.

In this passage we read about something very important.

- The Bible states specifically that the apostles stayed behind in Jerusalem.
- It was probably in the interest of those believers who stayed behind in Jerusalem – this we don't know. The Bible does not tell us why.

But we direct our attention to the believers who fled Jerusalem and went to Judea and Samaria. What did they do? They preached the gospel.

These people were of a wonderful disposition.

- They were not dissatisfied about the fact that they did not receive pastoral visits.
- They also did not stop going to church because the distance to church was too great.
- They took responsibility and started working to spread the gospel.

This is the kind of positive attitude we should all be motivated by.

- A true believer should be so full of Christ that it overflows – he tells everybody about Jesus Christ.
- He is not trying to convert everybody – this is the work of the Holy Spirit – but he testifies in word and deed. At all hours of the day he tells of the blessing of the Lord and his wonderful goodness, but also warning that one should act according to the Lord's commands.

This is the way we should act. This command to spread the gospel is not outdated.

- We have so much to tell others who do not believe, or those who do believe but are spiritually fast asleep!
- We don't have to be like a soapbox preacher stopping every person. We simply have to live correctly and, when an opportunity offers itself, speak about the Lord and his grace and love. The Lord will do the rest.

When a person hears the gospel, something happens to that person.

- Either the person believes, serves the Lord whole-heartedly and cannot stop thanking Him for all his mercy,
- Or he does not believe. (Maybe we could add those indifferent believers and those half-hearted believers?)

Fact of the matter is that the gospel moves a person into a certain direction.

- In this passage we read about the people who believed and had to flee because of their faith.
- They grabbed the opportunity and established more churches.
- Others were so annoyed by the faith of these believers that they started to persecute them and kill them.

The people who fled preached the gospel on their way.

- As a result of their testimony the Lord converts the people who heard the gospel.
- So many people converted to faith in Jesus Christ as a result of the believers who had fled Jerusalem – the number of converts is almost unbelievable!

- The next thing the apostles in Jerusalem heard was that all the people of Samaria had become Christians!

They immediately sent Peter and Johan as ministers to these people.

- A church was established without an elder or a minister's doing.
- Just imagine the power of the Holy Spirit that manifested itself in Samaria!
- Members of the church established a church and soon they had two ministers!

Then the Lord mentions one exceptional person. His name was Philip.

- He was one of the seven men who had been chosen to serve.
- In Acts 6:5 we read about these seven men who were chosen as deacons – Stephen, Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas

Philip, being one of the believers who had fled Jerusalem, went to the city of Samaria.

- He told the people about the Messiah.
- This is all he did – nothing sensational.

The Lord so greatly blessed Philip's preaching that

- paralysed or lame were healed,
- many evil spirits were cast out, and
- there was great joy in that city.
- Even Simon, who had been a sorcerer there for many years, claiming to be someone great, believed and was baptised. He followed Philip everywhere and was astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw

Every one of us should also be a source of such strength.

Fact is, however, that it is not really happening among us.

- This should not make us feel that we would not even try.
- We must just do our utmost best with our own faith and our personal religious life.
- We are not so bad that we cannot improve – we receive so much grace from God!

Also, it is not impossible for us to acquire an attitude reflecting the fact that God and his kingdom take priority in our lives.

- It is possible, but then we must put in a lot of effort.
- This is also why we celebrate the Lord's Supper.
 - Here the Lord confirms that propitiation was made for all our weaknesses and sins and that all was forgiven.
- Filled with the power of the Holy Spirit we can continue to live and to believe!

God has put us on the road ahead.

- Hence we should have made much more progress on this road of knowledge and becoming holy than those first Christians who fled Jerusalem and established another church.

The Lord did so much for us to give us this gospel of salvation!

- The Son of God came to earth to die in the most disgraceful way one can imagine.
- This happened so that we can enjoy the privilege of knowing that we belong to God inalienably.
- We must deal with this gospel in a majestic way – we may not hide it.

We must realise that we who are in the church are God's chosen people.

- Hence we must realise, experience and preach predestination in all its grace.
- We must be so impressed by its immense greatness that our hearts should always be filled with jubilation about it.
- Just think about it: I belong to the Lord. The hereafter is a beautiful place and I am going to be there. Even in death the Lord protects me!

What more can we wish for? These things already are so great that they are completely beyond our human comprehension. We must think about these so that we can obtain more joy from life.

In Acts 1:8 Jesus says:

. . . you will be my witnesses . . .

It's us! We must preach the gospel in a true and living faith!

There are so many things that keep us from preaching the gospel.

- We, the Reformed people, have many reservations in our doctrine that are not always correct.
- We think only people of the sects walk around testifying.
- This is not true! We must also do it! But we must do it the right way!

Another reservation is overcaution.

- We often hide behind excuses such as:
 - I'd rather keep quiet, because I could cause a lot of trouble!
 - I rather keep quiet about these things, because I'm not so good at talking.

But the Bible teaches us something different. Mark 13 teaches us that we should never worry about what to say. The Holy Spirit will give us the strength.

We may not hide behind our weaknesses, because the Lord works through us.

- Let us be instruments of God who live joyfully and reflect righteousness and speak of the salvation and atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- Let us better ourselves, because if the Lord had given these people (new believers) all that grace, how much more have we received – we who have enjoyed the power of the Holy Spirit since our childhood!

Amen.

Closing prayer

Closing hymn: Psalm 68:15

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.

Amen.

Dr MJ du Plessis
Reformed Church Bellville
Date: 16 November 2008