

2023 Theme - Focus On What Matters

Sermon Series - The Book of Acts/God's Plan for His Church

Sermon Title - Preach It!

Sermon Text - Acts 8:1-4

Sermon Presenter - Pastor Larry

Introduction

As we think about the folks around the world who face persecution just for believing in Jesus and wanting to share their faith, we will look back at the New Testament Church and how they were persecuted and scattered all over the known world. The fact that they were faithful to share their faith even under persecution and after being scattered is evidenced by you and I here today! Thank God for their faithfulness!! Let's pray and we'll discover the means by which the early Christians preached the Gospel, the Good News of Jesus, with the world reaching all the way down to us! Pray!

We're going to read our text for today found in Acts 8:1-8:4, so go ahead and turn there. I preached a message for Andrew on this text when he was sick three Sundays ago. Today we will focus on verse 4 using passages of Scripture written after the church was scattered due to persecution. And our text starts with the horrible act of persecution, the stoning of Stephen. Our writer, Luke, tells us in Acts 1...

Acts 8:1 And Saul was there, giving approval to his death. On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.

Acts 8:2 Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him.

Acts 8:3 But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison.

Acts 8:4 Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went.

Now let's focus on that last verse...

Acts 8:4 Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went.

"Those who had been scattered" were "all except the Apostles." Those who had been scattered were the people of the New Testament Church and it says they preached the word wherever they went. In other words, it was not just the preachers who preached, but the people. So just what does it mean to preach? Where does that word even come from? According to the Online Etymology Dictionary, it originates from the Latin word meaning to proclaim publicly, or to announce. According to the Lexham Bible Dictionary preaching is...

"PREACHING The act of proclaiming a theological message. Generally involves the conveyance of some truth related to God or Scripture with inherent significance to the audience for whom the act is being done."

And I love the way The Holman Bible Dictionary defines preaching...

“Human presentation through the Holy Spirit’s power of God’s acts of salvation through Jesus Christ. True Christian preaching interprets the meaning of God’s acts into contemporary contexts. A sermon becomes God’s word to us only as God’s servant reconstitutes the past realities of the biblical revelation into vital present experience.”

Now, those are the technical definitions of preaching and they are good and true, but there’s some other ways to break it down and explain what preaching is. And we have some young scholars who Lacey interviewed to get their opinion. So let’s hear from some of them on their definition of a preacher...

Video Clip #1 - Definition of preacher? 0:00 - 1:24

I’m so proud of our kids and their love for Jesus. And we’re going to hear from them three more times in our message today! But as they shared their thoughts on the definition of a preacher it begs the question: How do people preach if they are not preachers? But that’s what happened in our story today! Those who were not professional preachers, or preachers who preached to make a living, preached by the way they were living! So let me say it again, those who didn’t preach to make a living, preached by the way they were living. And let me say this, if a person only preaches to make a living and they don’t live what they preach, that’s a major problem and one of the reasons some people in the world don’t want to have anything to do with church, because they’ve only witnessed hypocrisy. Now let me be quick to say again, as I have said recently, there are no perfect preachers, but if a preacher is not genuinely trying to practice what he preaches, that’s just wrong and God won’t bless that kind of preaching! So, let me get off my soap box and say this. The ordinary people of God who were scattered because of persecution, preached the good news of Jesus everywhere they went with their lives. And how did they do that? They preached with...

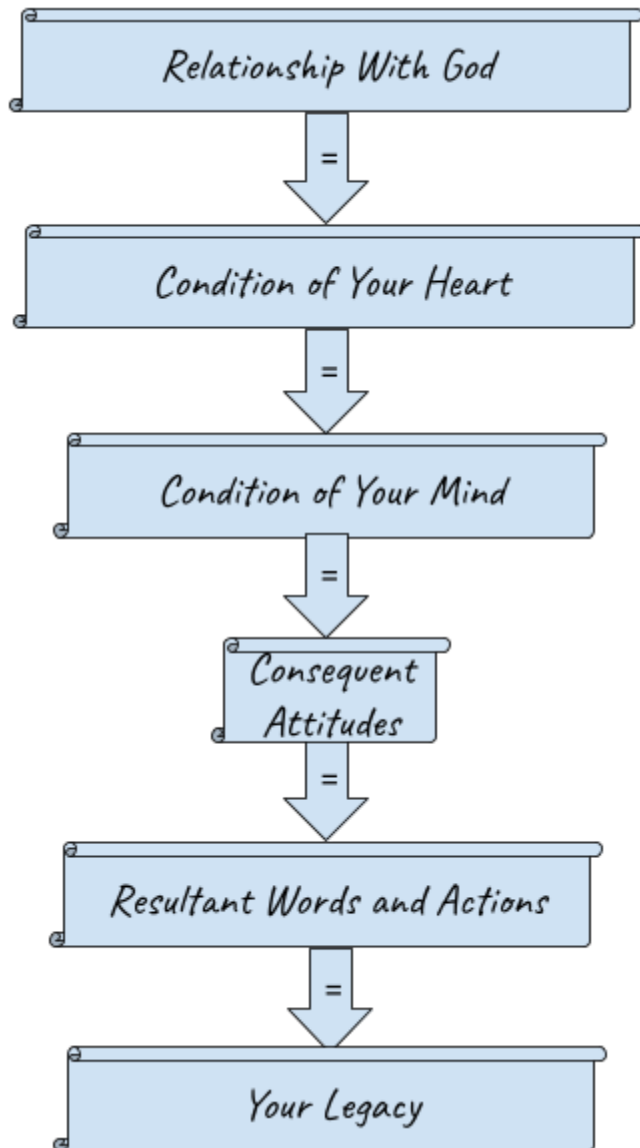
Their Attitude, Their Words, Their Actions, and Their Legacy

If you are a Christian you preach a sermon every day! The question is...

“Is it a good sermon, or a bad sermon?”

“Is it helpful or hurtful?”

What makes it good or bad? To figure this out we have to zoom in and examine what inspires your sermon. This is what makes it good or bad. Let’s look at a chart that may help explain what I’m trying to say. Your...



So we must understand how important our relationship is with God when it comes to our life's message. If we want what we preach with our lives to be good, and even awesome, we must realize just how vital our personal relationship with God is. Not just that we accepted Him as our Savior way back when, but that our relationship with Him is where it needs to be now. In other words, our fellowship with God must be up to date, fresh, alive, not stagnant, and ever growing! The reason is this...Our ongoing relationship with God affects the condition of our heart, and our heart affects the condition of our mind, and our mind affects the kind of attitudes we have and in case you didn't know it, your attitude, good or bad, impacts the resultant words and actions you say and do! So let me say a quick word about the importance of having a heart that is right with God and in constant fellowship with God! This walk with God should be the inspiration behind your life's message and the motivation for what you preach with your life's attitudes, words, actions and legacy.

1. Your walk with God is the inspiration behind what you preach!

The Psalmist spoke these powerful words...

Psalm 119:1 Blessed are those whose ways are blameless, who walk according to the law of the LORD.

Psalm 119:2 Blessed are those who keep his statutes and seek him with all their heart—

And I love the verse to this song found in Isaiah 26...

Isaiah 26:3 You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you.

Isaiah 26:4 Trust in the LORD forever, for the LORD, the LORD himself, is the Rock eternal.

In the King James Version it says...

Isaiah 26:3 Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, Whose mind is stayed on thee: Because he trusteth in thee.

So the bottom line is this: If you want a steadfast mind, you need to keep your mind stayed, fixed and focused on The Lord God Almighty! Remember our theme for this whole series is "Focus on What Matters!" And I love what the Psalmist went on to say in Psalm 119...

Psalm 119:5 Oh, that my ways were steadfast in obeying your decrees!

Psalm 119:6 Then I would not be put to shame when I consider all your commands.

Psalm 119:7 I will praise you with an upright heart as I learn your righteous laws.

Psalm 119:8 I will obey your decrees; do not utterly forsake me.

Psalm 119:9 How can a young person stay on the path of purity? By living according to your word.

Psalm 119:10 I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands.

Psalm 119:11 I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.

Do we have that kind of passion and desire to fellowship with God and to bring glory to God? Our fellowship with God, whether good or bad, affects our minds because it determines what we allow into our minds through our eyes and ears and how that goes on to affect everything else in our lives. Our attitudes, our words, our actions, our relationships with others and our legacy. And let me say this, you can have the right theology, the right doctrine, and the right truth, but if your heart's not right, and you have no integrity, and no genuine love for God and others, then your message will fall on deaf ears because what you're doing will speak so loudly, your words will not be heard, or they will be outright rejected! In other words...

For our life's message to be good it must flow out of a strong relationship with God so we can...

2. Preach it with attitude!

And when I say attitude, I mean a Christ-like attitude, and not a condescending, I'm better than you, or judgemental attitude, but a humble, I truly care about you attitude! And I love what our kid's answers to the question of "what does it take to be a preacher?" tells us about what our attitude should be.

[Video Clip #2 - What does it take to be a preacher? 1:24 - 3:44](#)

So good! Being kind, not harsh, talking about God, believing in God, and being nice to other people!

Paul put it this way...

Eph 4:17 So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking.

Eph 4:18 They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts.

Eph 4:19 Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more.

Eph 4:20 You, however, did not come to know Christ that way.

Eph 4:21 Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus.

Eph 4:22 You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires;

Eph 4:23 to be made new in the attitude of your minds;

Eph 4:24 and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

He also said...

Phil 2:5 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus...

What was Jesus' attitude! John Maxwell put it this way in his book "The Winning Attitude." Jesus was...

Selfless – He put others before Himself

Secure – He had nothing to prove

Submissive – He submitted to the Father's will

Sure – He knew His purpose (to seek and to save that which is lost)

John Maxwell, The Winning Attitude (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1993), 15.

Maxwell went on to make these extremely important observations...

Our attitude determines our approach to life
Our attitude determines our relationships with people
Our attitude is the major difference between success and failure
Our attitude at the beginning of a task will affect its outcome more than anything else
Our attitude can turn our problems into blessings (David and Goliath)
Our attitude is not automatically good just because we are Christians

John Maxwell, *The Winning Attitude* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1993) 26-34.

Maxwell then talked about things that affect our attitude, which he called...

ATTITUDE AFFECTORS

Your Personality
Your Environment (family, job, finances)
Your Self-image
Your Image in the Eyes of Others
Your peers

John Maxwell, *The Winning Attitude* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1993), 62-74.

And I've added this very important attitude affector

Your walk with God

Which we saw in our chart. You see, God is your most important peer! He's the One you should be hanging out with more than anyone else! Why?

For our message to be good it must flow out of a strong relationship with God so we can...

3. Preach it with words!

What we say is important. The kids had some thoughts on this...

[Video Clip #3 - If you were a preacher what would you tell them? 3:44 - 6:36](#)

Paul the Apostle said...

1 Cor 2:13 This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words.

The Psalmist said...

Psa 19:14 May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer.

The writer of Proverbs said...

Prov 4:20 My son, pay attention to what I say; listen closely to my words.

Prov 4:21 Do not let them out of your sight, keep them within your heart;

Prov 4:22 for they are life to those who find them and health to a man's whole body.

Prov 4:23 Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.

Prov 4:24 Put away perversity from your mouth; keep corrupt talk far from your lips.

Prov 5:1 My son, pay attention to my wisdom, listen well to my words of insight,

Prov 5:2 that you may maintain discretion and your lips may preserve knowledge.

Words can tear down or words can build up. People hear what you say. What are you saying? Where are you getting the words you speak? What do you base the sermon of your life on? If it's not based on the unchanging truth of God's Word, then it will be a confusing message. If it's not based on Biblical principles then it won't stand up under the scrutiny of the microscope. Trust me, when you preach, there is a microscope. Your kids will use the microscope when they get to be teenagers, and maybe way before then! They will point out microscopic discrepancies and flaws in your message and life. Of course, there's no such thing as a perfect parent, and parents deserve some grace, but if your life's message is not based on God's truth then your authority simply falls to the level of man's opinion and everybody's got opinions these days! As parents and as Christians, we need something greater than our personal opinion to base our message on!

Why base our message on the Bible? Paul tells us in 2 Timothy...

2 Tim 3:16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,

2 Tim 3:17 so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Now I must remind you that for our message to be good it must flow out of a strong relationship with God so we can...

4. Preach it with actions!

James put it this way...

James 1:22 Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.

James 2:14 What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him?

James 2:15 Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food.

James 2:16 If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it?

James 2:17 In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

We are not saved by our good works, but if we have a saving faith in Jesus it will influence what we will and won't do. Again, none of us are perfect, but we must understand that our actions really do have a powerful influence, good or bad! Let me illustrate. Hold your right hand up like this. Now, I want you to touch your chin...Okay, how many of you touched your nose? People are more likely to follow what you do than what you say! Are your actions speaking so loudly that people can't hear a word you are saying! Put your money where your mouth is! Walk you talk! Practice what you preach! You've heard the saying "Monkey see, Monkey do!" It can be cute when little kids try to copy something they see someone else doing, but it's not cute when they get older and copy the really bad behaviors they've seen in others. Here's a true statement: what is tolerated in one generation is embraced by the next and taken to extremes in the next. I remember thinking, after the drug experiments of the 60's turned out so tragic, and so many young people died, that the next generation would learn from it and walk a different path, but they didn't, they followed. The drug problem in America has never, ever, been worse. When I was a teenager, my Dad was in San Francisco on a work trip for the Army Corp of Engineers. He was staying in a 15 story hotel. There was a young man in the room next to him who was tripping out on LSD and jumped out of the window. My dad told me this..."Son, evidently he thought he could fly." My dad was so worried about me because of my rebellion and because of the friends I was hanging out with. He went on to say this to me...

"Son, please be careful that you don't follow your friends into these things. I just care so much for you." And you know what, I'm so thankful for the fact that my mom and dad lived what they preached! Again, there are no perfect parents, but my Mom and dad didn't curse, smoke, drink, abuse drugs! They were and are still, God loving, God respecting folks that truly live what they believe. God knew I needed strong examples or I would have never made it out of the teen years! In fact this leads us to our final point for today. For our message to be good it must flow out of a strong relationship with God so we can...

5. Preach it with your legacy!

Psa 78:1 A maskil of Asaph. O my people, hear my teaching; listen to the words of my mouth.

Psa 78:2 I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter hidden things, things from of old--

Psa 78:3 what we have heard and known, what our fathers have told us.

Psa 78:4 We will not hide them from their children; we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD, his power, and the wonders he has done.

Psa 78:5 He decreed statutes for Jacob and established the law in Israel, which he commanded our forefathers to teach their children,

Psa 78:6 so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children.

Psa 78:7 Then they would put their trust in God and would not forget his deeds but would keep his commands.

Folks, I can't take anything from this world with me, but I can leave something behind. My legacy, the message of my life! What message will you leave behind? If your message has not

been a good one, it's not too late to let Christ inspire you to develop a new message. A message of truth, a message of hope, a message of life. Now, I'm going to let our children have the last word, because they have some powerful advice for us as they share how they would encourage others to preach! If you need to pray with me or one of our counselors we'll be in the back! Now, listen to this good advice for the New Year...

[Video Clip #4 - How would you encourage people to preach? 6:36 - 8:17](#)