

Traction Gains Momentum
Week 5: Sown, not scattered

We are going through the book of Acts. It covers the time after Jesus is resurrected and ascends into heaven. He has commissioned his disciples to continue what he was doing.

He gives them his plan, which is The Great commission. And then, there's this promise from Jesus before he ascends into heaven.

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” Acts 1:8

To this point, they have been **exclusively “in Jerusalem.”** This Jesus movement has been **growing rapidly** since the original few thousand converts after Pentecost. But it has remained a Jerusalem thing. They have remained in Jerusalem **near the temple** because they are **all Jews**. The temple is the center of religious life for them. They've been doing most of the preaching and teaching about Jesus in and around the temple. **That means it's a regional movement within a particular ethnic group with the same religious cultural background.**

But what did Acts 1:8 say? It said that they would be witnesses of this, not just in Jerusalem, but also in the rest of Judea, to neighboring Samaria and to the ends of the earth. **How does something that is regional, same culture, break out into the entire world? Well they need momentum, something to propel them outward, or they might get satisfied with being what they are. But the Great Commission won't allow for that.**

If you haven't been here in recent weeks, we have found that **God is using resistance, and even persecution, to create momentum.** That sounds so strange, but the church is **continuing to grow in numbers and power in the midst of people getting arrested, beaten, and threatened.** And then **Stephen** gets murdered for telling the Jerusalem leaders that **God is working outside of Israel.**

The resistance has escalated from false arrest, threats, and beatings, to now murder. **Today, we are going to see how this is actually what God uses to propel them out of Jerusalem where they can accomplish what Jesus asked them to do.**

Here's what happens after Stephen is murdered.

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. ² Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him. ³ But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison. **Remember him?** He was the one who watched people's coats as they stoned Stephen and approved of it.

⁴ **Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word.** ⁵ Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ. ⁶ 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. ⁷ 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. ⁸ **So there was much joy in that city.** ⁹ But there was a man named Simon, who had previously practiced magic in the city and amazed the people of Samaria, saying that he himself was somebody great. ¹⁰ They all paid attention to him, from the least to the greatest, saying, "This man is the power of God that is called Great." ¹¹ And they paid attention to him because for a long time he had amazed them with his magic. ¹² **But when** they believed Philip as he preached **good news about the**

kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. ¹³ Even Simon himself believed, and after being baptized he continued with Philip. And seeing signs and great miracles^[b] performed, he was amazed.

¹⁴ Now when **the apostles at Jerusalem** heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, ¹⁵ who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, ¹⁶ for he had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ¹⁷ Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit. ¹⁸ Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, ¹⁹ saying, "Give me this power also, so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." ²⁰ But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! ²¹ You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. ²² **Repent**, therefore, of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the **intent of your heart** may be forgiven you. ²³ For I see that you are in the gall^[c] of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity." ²⁴ And Simon answered, "Pray for me to the Lord, that nothing of what you have said may come upon me."

²⁵ Now when they had testified and spoken the word of the Lord, **they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans.** Acts 8:1-25

Somehow, the worst thing that could happen became what God used to unleash the momentum that had been building in this movement. Like one of those toys that you **drag backwards** over and over, building up the tension and then you set it down and it takes off. Or a **catapult** where you pull back the arm creating all this energy that gets released as the giant boulder gets propelled at the enemy.

It seems to me that this momentum that sent these people outward **only happened because how they viewed the events that just happened.** They clearly didn't view **arrests, threats, and beating as a sign to fall back or quit.**

A way to describe this might be by asking this question. **What is the difference between being sown and being scattered?**

Sowing a seed is "To plant by being scattered." You grab a handful of seeds and you **toss them** so that they spread out over the ground and can begin to grow. It's purposeful. It's somewhat random, in that there is a sense of being cast outward, but it is to grow something.

Scattering is simply a defensive move in order to get away from danger.

The enemy intends to scatter, but God wants to sow. Sending them out for the purpose of being planted, grown, and produce a harvest.

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. Acts 8:1

Reading this, Luke uses the word "scattered" so it does sound as if the light is turned on and the roaches scattered into cracks and crevices. It's run for cover and hide.

Luke could have used a **general term** for scattering, but instead, he used **"diaspeiro" which means "to scatter, as seed is scattered on the ground."**

What the enemy wanted to use to persecute, to scatter, fragment, weaken, and eventually destroy; God used to spread people like seeds who could be planted in different

places so they could multiply. **What the enemy meant for evil, God caused good to come from it.**

For these new disciples of Jesus to be sown and not scattered, they have to view what has happened to them through God's perspective. If they don't, then they will view it as the enemy scattering them. We know that they went preaching, that means that... **They see God redeeming injustice.**

Was it an injustice that an innocent man was interrogated, drug outside the city, where I assume no one would come to his aide, and murdered in a brutal way? Yes, it absolutely was and God wept along with those who loved Stephen.

So what does it mean for God to redeem injustice? The word "redeem" means to take something back in exchange for payment. To buy back something from another. **Jesus' death was the payment made to buy back something evil and use it for something good.** Redeem also means to **take something that is bad and use it for good.**

This is something these people could see. How do I know? **Because they allowed themselves to be planted, not scattered, hiding in the shadows.** How do I know they were planted because they started to produce growth by preaching wherever they landed?

"The people went as **missionaries** more than as **refugees.**" Everett Harrison 263

The enemy did not contain this because they thought that scattering would cause it to stall, and then simply go away. **They feared addition, when they should have feared multiplication.** Instead of **one big church** that they might have been able to contain in Jerusalem, they unwittingly caused **many churches to spread** across the world.

We are here because of God redeeming injustice and people being able to see that that was what was really happening.

Here's what these people understood. **And I want you to know, my dear brothers and sisters, that everything that has happened to me here has helped to spread the Good News.** **Philippians 1:12 NLT** **This is Paul in prison, not for stealing, drug trafficking, murder, terrorism, extortion,** but for preaching that Jesus was dead and is now alive and it is **only through him** that we can find **forgiveness, hope, and eternal life.** I would call that injustice. Paul's perspective and understanding that **he has been planted in Rome** as a prisoner so that he could **write letters** that we are still reading.

Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, **to make the word of God fully known,** **Colossians 1:24-25 ESV**

To rejoice in suffering means that Paul believed that God was redeeming what he was going through. He knew he was being sown, not scattered.

¹⁰ **I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,** **Philippians 3:10 NIV**
For Paul and these people in Acts it was not just the situation that was being redeemed through this injustice, it was their very lives. They were getting to know their savior at an even deeper level because they were suffering these injustices. **Sharing in his suffering is an aspect of knowing the one who suffered for them.**

Not having this perspective is one of the main reasons people in our culture fall away or are repelled from faith in Jesus. They cannot see how God wants to purchase, through the blood of Jesus, the horrible thing happening to them and use it for good.

Do you have that kind of perspective on life? If you don't, let me encourage you to **start practicing it**. Start **looking for God redeeming the things** that have happened to you. If you don't, then you most likely will get scattered, not sown. **If nothing really bad has happened** to you yet, then look at how this has happened in scripture and in the lives of people you can see right here.

I cannot talk about this without speaking about how God has done this with the worst thing that has happened to my family and to me.

- Robin has gone back to get a Masters Degree and is helping people in a new way as a therapist.
- Hannah returned to her faith and has worked with kids at Warner Camp and now teaching virtues in schools.
- Josiah did the two things he swore he would never do; go to a Christian college and lead worship.
- Dietrich has someone to model his life after, as he becomes a leader who influences his peers for Christ.
- I like the person I am becoming because God is redeeming the death of my son Quinten. **Was it injustice, yes? Horrible injustice.**

These missionaries being sown outside of Jerusalem also were seeing that... **The environment is right for the gospel to spread rapidly.**

Let's look at their environment.

- ✓ Persecution.
- ✓ Left the **safety of our large supportive community** to go to a strange place.
- ✓ Have only been under the **apostles teaching** for a short time so we are poorly prepared for this.
- ✓ We are **mostly second-generation converts**, not the original ones who followed Jesus before his death and resurrection **or who were in that room when the Holy Spirit came in power.**

Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word. Acts 8:4

Were we totally prepared to sow seeds in the mall? Deb, did you feel totally prepared to be the pastor of the mall? (**ten people who will pray persistently for her all month.**) **And yet the gospel is being shared, discipleship is happening.** The culture of the mall is changing. And, yes, the young ladies who work in Victoria's Secret love Cultivate, our coffee and know Deb by name.

Do you believe that the environment is right for the gospel to spread right now?

- ✓ Post Christian culture.
- ✓ Divisive political climate.
- ✓ People who are rich but not happy.
- ✓ People who are rushed and stressed and anxious.
- ✓ People who are trying to find fulfillment in things that don't last.

Let's build a big fort around our people so that we don't get sullied by this culture and hunker down until we die or Jesus comes back. No, we are to be bridges and build bridges.

The Great Commission begins with "Go"!

For them to be sown, not scattered, they had to know that... **The first^t generation sends the second generation.**

...and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles...Phillip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ. Acts 8:1b & 5

Did you notice who stayed and who was sent out? The first generation people, the apostles stayed while Phillip and other second generation people went out preaching.

The role of Peter and John are not to initiate the ministry, but to verify it. (14) They come to lay hands on them so that they could receive the Holy Spirit, which is the power to now do what was done for them. Then Samaritans received the Holy Spirit.

Think about the magnitude of what has just happened. Those who we considered lost, apostate, on the outside looking in, now have salvation, but also power.

The Samaritans had their own temple and refused to participate in the rebuilding of the Jerusalem temple. There was great animosity. **The woman at the well** brought up the two temples issue almost immediately with Jesus. Earlier, Judeans had **conquered Samaria and destroyed their temple.** The Romans freed them when they conquered Palestine. **How big is it for them to receive the Holy Spirit and the ok from leaders coming from Jerusalem.** And how big was it for those leaders to open up relations with formerly despised Samaritans.

Peter and John see that what is happening in Samaria is real. But it gets better; **they follow the lead of their junior partners** who have gone to Samaria first by preaching as they return to Jerusalem. It didn't matter that they didn't start this. They joined in. **In verse 25 it says, "Now when they had testified and spoken the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans."**

This is the beginning of the story where the **second generation is focused upon, Stephen, Phillip, and Paul.**

Think about how quickly to second generation has been sent. Were they ready?

"Actually, passing the baton is not something that happens when a leader comes close to retirement age. It is the result of an attitude that is cultivated early in one's leadership—the willingness to learn, especially from younger creative people." 277

This year we are going to help you better understand that you are called to go in most cases to where you already are and that next generation. That begins with the **"Come and**

See Class” this spring. Like Philip, you will go to Samaria where I won't go, the elders won't go, our staff won't go.

We are also going to add something new. We are going to start discipling people who can replicate themselves in others. **You will not need Peter and John** to go alongside you. You will do it the way God wired you to do it in the place he has sent you. **You will go to Samaria, I won't, the elders won't and staff won't.** But like Peter and John, we will encourage, give feedback, confirm, what is happening, and yes, learn from you.

Remember our goal is to “Be a bridge, Build a bridge” and that means that we become a church of disciples who make disciples to the **third and fourth generation.** But to get to three and four, you have to unleash number two.

And what is the result of these people understanding that they have been sown, not planted? That they see God **redeeming injustice**, that the **environment is right** for rapid growth, that the **first generation will send the second.** The end result of that is that the momentum that has been building gets released... **Their chains have been broken.**

The chain that was Jerusalem has been snapped and the chain of fear, mistrust, and animosity toward outsiders, or Jews has been snapped. They had to be **willing to change** in order to do what God commanded them to do.

The chain that kept them **tied to the temple** was now broken, **unleashing this momentum.**

What the enemy had designed to scatter them and ultimately destroy them, God used to sow them like seeds that will grow and spread. A virus that can heal is no longer quarantined, but is beginning to spread as they come in contact with Samaritans and then many others.

Ultimately, their ability to obey the Great Commission and Acts 1:8 comes down to being able to see the difference between scattering and sowing, and that God in his goodness was sowing them.

Are you being sown by God or scattered by the enemy? Have you responded to the gospel, repented, believed, and began following?

Steps of obedience

1. **Pray daily, “Father, help me to be fully present today where you have sown me.”**
2. **Renew my mind with 2 Corinthians 12:8-10**

⁸ Three different times I begged the Lord to take it away. ⁹ Each time he said, “My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness.” So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me. ¹⁰ That’s why I take pleasure in my weaknesses, and in the insults, hardships, persecutions, and troubles that I suffer for Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

3. **Take notice of who is moving toward me or toward Jesus.**

What is the difference between...

