

# The Church Persecuted and Scattered

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Acts chapter 7. And we are going to begin reading at verse 59 of Acts chapter 7.! And read through chapter 8, verse 25.

While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. Then he fell on his knees and cried out, Lord, do not hold this sin against them.

When he had said this, he fell asleep. 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.

Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison.

Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Christ there. When the crowds heard Philip and saw the miraculous signs he did, they all paid close attention to what he said.

[ 1 : 1 3 ] With shrieks, evil spirits came out of many, and many paralytics and cripples were healed. And so there was great joy in that city. Now for some time, a man named Simon had practiced sorcery in the city and amazed all the people of Samaria.

He boasted that he was someone great. And all the people, both high and low, gave him their attention and exclaimed, This man is the divine power known as the great power.

They followed him because he had amazed them for a long time with his magic. But when they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God in the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.

Simon himself believed and was baptized. And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw. When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them.

When they arrived, they prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, because the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them. They had simply been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus.

[ 2 : 3 1 ] Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money and said, Give me also this ability, so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.

Peter answered, May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money. You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God.

Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps he will forgive you for having such a thought in your heart. For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin.

And Simon answered, Pray to the Lord for me, so that nothing you have said may happen to me. When they had testified and proclaimed the word of the Lord, Peter and John returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many Samaritan villages.

Well, the Lord Jesus Christ is alive, and he's busy building his church, just as he said he would. I will build my church. And he's building it through the work of the Holy Spirit and the lives and witness of his people.

[ 3 : 58 ] But Satan and his hellish crew are also real, and continues to oppose this building project. Satan seeks to tear down and destroy all that Jesus is building up.

But the outcome is and never has been uncertain, from the beginning or today. For Christ has promised, I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not be able to stand up against it.

So we come today, in our study of the book of Acts, to a new chapter. A new chapter in this war of all wars for the souls and bodies of men and women, boys and girls.

Now, Acts chapter 8 marks a new period then, a new era in the life of the church. Chapter 7 ended with the stoning of Stephen by the religious court of the Jews in Jerusalem.

And his murder becomes a pivotal point, a turning point in the church's history. Not only did it mark the first Christian martyr, it also marked and set off a period of great persecution against the whole church.

[ 5 : 14 ] Notice verse 1. On that day. Now that is the very day that Stephen was stoned. On that day, a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem.

So I have three points this morning. The first is Satan's great persecution. We see it here. Now there had been earlier rumblings of this great persecution.

There was the imprisonment of the apostles. There was the trials, the threats, the more threats, the floggings, but all of the apostles, wasn't it?

But it was the murder of Stephen that sparked a great fire of persecution against the church. This is literally a mega persecution.

That was started by Stephen's murder. Now kids, you've been to the beach and you've built your sandcastles and you've dug a moat around your castle and you've built a nice wall around the outside of your moat and then you started to fill your moat with water and you pour buckets of water into your moat.

[ 6 : 22 ] And if you're not careful, you poured one too many buckets into the moat. And what happened? Well, at the lowest place of the moat, the water began to trickle and it started to erode your wall and it cut a slice right in your wall.

But there's more water that wants out. And so what started as a trickle deepens and widens as all the water rushes through and erodes through your moat.

Well, that's how it was here in Jerusalem. Hatred against Christianity was swelling in Jerusalem. And the trickle of Stephen's blood opened up a flood of hostility and persecution so that now every Christian, not just the apostles, every Christian, male and female, is targeted for fierce persecution.

The religious leaders got away with murder and that makes them grow bolder in their work of sin like wild beasts that once they've tasted blood are not thereby satisfied but made thirsty for more.

So Luke introduces us to Satan's point man in this great persecution. He's a young man named Saul, 758. And he's there as Stephen's being stoned.

[ 7 : 51 ] And chapter 8 and verse 1 paints the gruesome picture. Saul was there giving approval to his death. The sinister smile on his face gives away his hearty agreement with all that was happening there.

And it's hard to believe that this man is the very man who will later preach Christ and even be willing to die for Jesus Christ. Who would become the greatest name in all church history and would write a fourth of our New Testaments.

But here he is with this sick pleasure in seeing Stephen stoned. And that same day a great persecution broke out against the church with him at the helm.

Grieving godly men had barely laid the last shovel of dirt on Stephen's grave before Saul began to destroy the church. You see that in verse 3?

Saul he's clearly the driving force behind this great persecution. Some have even thought that that's what marked him out of having the coats of the men throwing the stones laid at his feet.

[ 9 : 08 ] That it was showing he was the ringleader of this stoning. Here we see it's clearly him who gives impetus to this persecution. Saul began to destroy the church.

Can you see him there in the background at the burial of Stephen? Noting each one who attended the funeral. Following them home to see where they lived. With other henchmen helping him identify the whereabouts of these followers of the despised Nazarene.

And then following up with door-to-door not evangelism door-to-door persecution. Hunting them down pulling them out of their houses. The word is a very strong word.

Forcibly dragging men and women off to prison. Tearing them out of the hands of their children. Leaving them the children behind as orphans.

This is a new low in the depths to which the enemies of the gospel have stooped. Yes, Saul this religious Pharisee saw Christians as blaspheming God's holy name because they worshiped Jesus as God whom to Saul was just a man and who did deserve to die a cursed death on the cross for his claims to be God.

[ 10 : 29 ] And he's angry that Christians like Stephen were not zealous for the Jewish traditions and the temple. So all the while as he's doing this great persecution he's thinking that he's serving God.

Saul is the one stoking the fires of this great persecution. Later he'll even take the persecution to foreign lands and seek those that fled there.

Here he is breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples and he's not afraid to follow up on those murderous threats. He confesses later I persecuted the followers of this way to their death.

Not just to prison to their death. And again he says I was a persecutor and a violent man. So we need to get the picture right.

This Saul of Tarsus was not shy about shedding the blood of Christians. Well his aim in this great persecution is clear.

[ 11 : 37 ] He's out to destroy the church. Saul began to destroy the church that is to ravage it. It's the same word of what a wild beast does to the body of its prey.

Its prey. Indeed he began in good earnest to destroy the church and would have succeeded had not Jesus Christ intervened for his bride.

Now notice the effect that this persecution had on the church at Jerusalem. Verse 1 tells us that all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.

Just like a wolf that comes into the barnyard and all the chickens scatter. When Saul began this bloody persecution thousands of Christians left everything behind and fled for their lives.

Now there's much debate as to why the apostles stayed in Jerusalem when the greater part of them all fled. Were they tolerated because they had the praise of the common people for whom they worked many miracles?

[ 12 : 48 ] Did they go into hiding? Were they courageous to stick it out and not run from their post? Well, we're not sure. And when the Bible doesn't tell us we might as well not spend a lot of time trying to figure it out.

Let's see what the Bible does tell us about this persecution. What it tells us is that everybody else ran for it. And homeless life on the run was not easy for these followers of Christ as they left behind houses and lands and properties often to be confiscated.

And all that they had was what they had on their backs and could carry. Much like the refugees that we see leaving their homeland. This is the picture that we're given.

Satan's great persecution against the church of Christ. And it seems like the gates of hell have the church on the ropes and is about to finish her off. But then we stop and we think about things that we know for sure.

What do we know for sure? Well, Jesus said that the gates of hell will not be able to stand up against the church that he is building. Satan is on the leash of our Jesus, the head of the church.

[ 14 : 11 ] And the Lord Jesus had brought apostles out of jail before, hadn't he? and he will do the same later in chapter 12 for Peter saving his life. Jesus clearly could have rescued Stephen from this stoning and could have rescued the whole church from this great persecution.

But the fact is he didn't. He didn't. He allows his beloved disciples to be treated as sheep for the slaughter, as rabbits to be hunted.

And we wonder why. What's up here? Why is he letting Saul begin to destroy his church? Well, it must be something big.

Because precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his people. He doesn't just give up his people for nothing. And then we come to see that Satan's great persecution was made to fulfill Christ's greater purpose.

And that's our second point. Christ's greater purpose. Verse 4 says, those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. Of course.

[ 15 : 28 ] Do you see it now? This persecution and scattering of the church is not going to frustrate Christ's eternal plan for building his church. It is rather going to be his chosen way of fulfilling it.

what did Jesus told his disciples? Do not leave Jerusalem but wait for the promise of my father, the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

And then you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem but not just there and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

And for seven chapters we have seen the apostles and the church bearing witness of Jesus Christ in Jerusalem, the capital of Judea. And under the power of the Holy Spirit we've seen their great success.

On the day that the Holy Spirit came on to his church and filled them 3,000 on that day were added to the church. New converts to Christ.

[ 16 : 35 ] Chapter 4 the number grew to 5,000 men. Chapter 5 more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number. Chapter 6 the number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly including a large number of priests.

Right here in Jerusalem the very place where just months before the Lord Jesus Christ had been nailed to the cross and here he is building his church there.

but on the divine calendar it's now time to move on out of Jerusalem with the gospel and to be his witnesses in all Judea and Samaria.

Now how will the Lord Jesus do this? How will he move them out from Jerusalem into all Judea and Samaria? And here's where we see that God's ways are not our ways.

if this had been in the hands of the elders of grace fellowship we probably would have commissioned several apostles if we lived back then. There were living apostles.

[ 17 : 41 ] There were twelve of them there. We would have commissioned several apostles and sent them out with the prayers and support of the church back home. And so they would go out and make disciples elsewhere.

But we see the Lord Jesus working in a different manner here. In fact in so different a manner that we might miss what he's doing. He leaves the twelve apostles in Jerusalem for the moment and he ordains a great persecution to scatter all the rest of his church.

So severe that all except the apostles are scattered. And notice where? throughout Judea and Samaria. Does that ring a bell? That's Acts 1.8.

You'll be my witnesses not only in Jerusalem but also in Judea, all Judea and Samaria. That's where they all were scattered. They're off. In other words the Lord Jesus Christ knows how to get them there.

He orders up a great persecution under Saul, bloodthirsty Saul. And we wonder perhaps had they lingered in Jerusalem too long.

[ 18 : 56 ] Yes, they'd been told to wait in Jerusalem until the promised Holy Spirit who would empower them. But that had been some time ago and they're still here in Jerusalem.

And in this scattering persecution the Lord Jesus is saying it's time. It's time to move on now. Let's roll church.

And off they went. The Lord Jesus knows how to move even a sluggish church into obedience to his commands scattered by the persecution throughout Judea and Samaria in fulfillment of his purpose and plan to win converts there.

Verse 4 tells us that those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. Now the word therefore preached is not the formal preaching of officially ordained preachers.

It's rather a word of the common believers gospelizing the word proclaiming the good news of Jesus wherever they went. So some of them show up at the village market and one of the vendors there says say aren't you the new family in town?

[ 20 : 13 ] And it wasn't long before they were telling them why it was that they left Jerusalem and what Jesus Christ had done for their souls.

It was every member of the church a witness for Christ in every conceivable place. Now I ask you is that not the fruit of the Holy Spirit empowering his church for witness filling them so much with love for their new neighbors that they would do them the greatest good of all and give them the saving gospel of Jesus Christ.

Even Samaritans that were so despised by the Jews Samaritan neighbors the Holy Spirit fills them with such meekness fills the church with such meekness that they bow to God's difficult providence in their life.

Folks it wasn't easy to be scattered. You think if this afternoon on this day this same day you get home you pack up because you're leaving and you're leaving behind everything and it may be confiscated.

It's not going to be easy to live a life on the run and yet the Holy Spirit fills them with such meekness that they're not found grouching and complaining and grumbling about how hard it is to be a Christian.

[ 21 : 46 ] No woe is me no singing of the blues rather they're sounding out the good news about Jesus not moping about their losses but telling of their gains in Christ how he has made them eternally rich and I ask you is that not the work of the Spirit of Christ moving his church out in gospel witness that their persecution did not become something to turn them inward to licking their wounds and self pity but kept them turned outward upon their neighbors upon these new people that needed to know their Savior I wonder if we're as ready to speak of Christ in the middle of our troubles these were a church and this was a church in troubles and they spoke the word of the gospel wherever they went that's what the Spirit of God can do to a people may we pray for such in our own hearts notice the effect of the great persecution then it scattered them before the sound of the gospel was heard in one place in Jerusalem now it's being sounded out in throughout all Judea and Samaria they were scattered it's the same word that's used of a farmer what he does with seed on a plowed field he scatters it and isn't that interesting that the church is scattered and as they're scattered the seed of the gospel is scattered as well that Jesus

Christ might have a harvest among all Judea and Samaria and the light that had been shining in Jerusalem is now scattered into a thousand points of light bringing the light of Jesus to new places of darkness Jesus knows how to do that how to get the light to the dark places he even uses persecution to do it I dare say that this prisoner that's just been released from Iran took some light into a dark place in prison that would not have otherwise seen the light because he was taken as prisoner that's sobering it teaches us there's something more important to Christ than the Christians ease it is his mission that's what's more important the souls of men and these believers embraced that purpose and that mission with courage and obedience let us do the same now here's the big lesson in point two that what

Satan uses to destroy the church of Christ is actually made to further it it's not just that Christ continues to build his church in spite of Satan's persecution that's true enough and we see it throughout the book of Acts but what we see here is even more spectacular it is that Christ takes Satan's own persecution and he uses that for the furtherance of the gospel and to build his church in new places he makes the devil himself to expand the church by his efforts to destroy it and I say that must be especially galling to the devil not only that his well laid plans are frustrated and defeated but that his plans and actions are actually made to contribute to the success of Christ in his church in the early 1700s in England God saved a young man named George Whitefield and called him to preach the good news of Jesus Christ he'd been a very religious young man and when

I say that I'm not kidding we go into his room and we see him praying for hours he's reading his Bible he's fasting he's caring for the poor visiting prisoners reading the Bible to them but don't be surprised when I tell you he was not saved he was trying to save himself and now we follow him into the market and there he is and there's the rotten fruit basket and it's just about for free you just give a few shillings and you can have that and he's buying that stuff and he's taking the money he's saved instead of buying the good stuff and he's giving it to the poor but don't you be deceived and think that he's a Christian for he's no more saved than a billy goat no he's that's George Whitefield trying to save his soul trying to do one more good thing that will be enough to make up for all of his sins but it was all to no avail he could not do enough good to take away one of his sins and finally he completely went out of himself and was totally despairing of saving himself and threw all that he was upon the mercy of

God in Jesus Christ and God saved him he was born again he trusted in Christ and now he had to tell others about his Savior he was trained and ordained as a church of England minister and he began preaching on the necessity of the new birth oh dear church member don't think that because you were in the church and baptized and a member and do this and that that you're a Christian I tell you unless you've been born again you will never see the kingdom of God and he's preaching the new birth the absolute necessity to have a new heart a new nature given it's not enough to be religious and people were converted and born again and started flocking to hear him well it wasn't long before he met with Satan's opposition and persecution and the worst of it came from the church of England ministers and if you can just see some of the parallels to what we've seen in the book of

[ 28 : 11 ] Acts where did the persecution come from it was the religious leaders of the Jews and here are these church of England ministers jealous of his popularity who's this young guy they were jealous of him and the crowds coming to hear they were offended by his teaching on the new birth telling their congregations that they shouldn't think they're saved just because they go to church every week and stirring up trouble and so they sought to discredit him started spreading lies about him saying he was a fanatic and more and more ministers refused to let him preach in their buildings so Whitfield began to think of new ways to bring the gospel to sinners and he started thinking of open air preaching Howell Harris was doing it down in Wales and with great success but this sort of thing was just not done in proper England if you know and even some of Whitfield's friends told him it was a crazy idea a mad notion

Whitfield was not to be put off by them and eventually he declared the churches are closed against me but bless God the fields are open now why did George Whitfield go to the fields because the churches were closed because the persecution against him was so hot he was not allowed to preach in the church buildings and so he is scattered into the open fields where far greater numbers of sinners heard the gospel than ever would have entered a church building sometimes five ten thousand sometimes twenty thirty thousand even sometimes sixty to eighty thousand in one time hearing the gospel in the fields and Whitfield would then bring along Charles and John Wesley and others and introduce them to field preaching and many were saved do you see what

Jesus was doing three hundred years ago in England the same thing he was doing two thousand years ago in Jerusalem he was using the hostile persecution of Satan to further the building of his church it is Christ using an unwitting Satan to fulfill his own eternal plan and it happens more often than Satan would like to admit as memorialized in that famous line from church history that the blood of the martyrs is not the end of the church but the seed of the church that their blood just becomes seed to cause more and more to come to Christ what Satan means for good Christ works for good Satan's attempts to destroy the church are used by Christ to promote it that's Christ defeating Satan with his own weapon David had a man like that in his mighty men list

God in the Chronicle 2 Samuel he had one named Benaiah who performed great exploits for his king once he struck down a huge Egyptian in a most remarkable way the huge Egyptian had a spear Benaiah had only a club a big stick he was clearly outgunned but no matter he snatched the spear out of the Egyptian's hand and killed him with his own spear no wonder David made him the head of his body guard he knows how to kill an enemy with his own weapon and by the way was not King David found beheading a Philistine giant with the giant's own sword that's what Jesus David's greater son is doing in Acts chapter 8 it's something our mighty captain Jesus continues to do in the war of the ages taking the worst Satan can do against us and making it to serve our good and the glory and good of his church and his glory

I should say he makes even the wrath of men to praise him and the remainder he restrains I ask you church is he not to be adored and praised for such exploits don't you love and admire our king for this you see Christ church was never meant to stay in Jerusalem it was never meant to be a Jewish thing alone a private club just for Jews no it must spread out to every nation under heaven as Jesus said and persecution from Satan becomes his instrument to hurry the gospel on its way so Satan's persecution fulfills Christ's greater purpose Luke gives us two examples from the life of Philip this Philip is one of the seven deacons chosen to look after the widows in Jerusalem and he too was scattered by the persecution we find him in all places in a city in

[ 33 : 27 ] Samaria and that brings us to the last point Samaria is amazing converts so the church is scattered and we have one Philip an example!

given Samaria was a territory between Judea and Galilee and such were the relations between Jews and Samaritans that very often the Jews would go around Samaria rather than travel through it remember in John Ford we learned that they did not associate with one another such was their hostility because 700 years later the Assyrians had come and conquered the northern kingdom and this area of Samaria and had taken the people into exile and had shipped some of their pagan people into that area and the Jews that remained there intermarried with them and they came up with their own religion and it was a little mixture of Judaism and paganism and they had their own temple on Mount Gerizim that competed with the temple of God in Jerusalem and so they were half breeds!

despised by the Jews Samaritans in other words the Samaritan city is not a likely place for a Jew like Philip to find converts to the church of Jesus Christ due to the years of prejudice between these two groups but there's an even greater obstacle to the gospel and it's the fact that the whole city was under the spell of Satan's servant Simon the sorcerer he held them in amazement with a mixture of magic and black magic supernatural power of the demons seems to be involved and it wasn't just a few of the gullible folks in town rather it's all the people both high and low educated and uneducated rich and poor together they were mesmerized by this Simon the sorcerer and they gave him their attention and they listened to what he said as if he's channeling truth from

God and they confessed him as the power the great power that channels divine power and truth and this wasn't just something of a recent thing something that excites for a moment and then it's gone no they all had followed him for a long time amazed at his magic and on top of all of this we find many people in the city were demon possessed actually given over to Satan who took control of their body and personality so if ever there was a place not likely for gospel success it was this city of Samaria not the sort of place that church growth gurus would select as the next place to plant a church this is where Satan has his seat it's his territory the whole city is in his lap nothing promising here and yet it is in this city that Philip having been chased out of Jerusalem comes into town as the ambassador of Jesus Christ and he's not alone because the unseen

Christ is with him as he promised to be as his church is making disciples of all the nations until the end of the age and so Philip proclaimed the Christ there what was his message don't know everything but I know this Jesus Christ was at the center that's the sum and substance of his message he preached Christ there and he was given power to perform miraculous signs casting out demons from many healing the paralytics and crippled and something amazing happened those who for a long time had given their attention to Simon the sorcerer are now said in verse six to all pay close attention to what Philip is saying and what he was saying about Christ furthermore verse 12 tells us they believed what

[ 37 : 40 ] Philip was saying about Christ and believing they were baptized even Simon were told believed and was baptized more on him next week but let's not miss the point amazing conversion swept through this city of Samaria that had previously been deceived by the devil and held captive by his power and lies these are the greatest miracles that Jesus Christ is performing even to this very day he is saving sinners and so the law is going out and the word of the Lord is going out from Jerusalem as Micah and Isaiah had prophesied and then last don't miss the results of this gospel transformation the gospel comes to this city what's the result!

so there was! joy! joy! great joy is the result of trusting in Christ entering his kingdom sharing in the blessings of his reign having your sins forgiven living under the darkness and fear the guilt and gloom of Satan's kingdom they now enter into the light and joy of Christ's kingdom so we don't want to miss the results of the gospel it's great joy great joy but don't miss the cost either notice it was great joy in Samaria why is Philip in Samaria great persecution to what end that there might be great joy in Samaria there's something sobering in the extent to which Christ will go with his people in order to bring his joy of salvation to sinners many were made sorrowful by the deaths of five missionaries in a jungle in

Ecuador in January of 1956 made sorrowful by lives lost so that Alka Indians might be made joyful forever and ever Stephen murdered the church scattered so that Samaritan sinners might be made glad forever and ever it's not the eternal joy of sinners worth the temporal loss to the church when our savior who for the joy set before him endured the cross scoring its shame and sat down at the right hand of God it's worth it he says to bring many sons to glory the shame the pain the cross it's worth it my great pain for your great joy so you consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men so that you will not grow weary and lose heart to spread the gospel of

Jesus is to spread true joy and that's the heart the church receives from our savior Jesus it's a heart that's made glad by the good news of forgiveness of sins and and that prays and wants the nations to be made glad and to sing for joy willing to endure hardship even persecution and death if it will but end in his ways being made known on earth and his salvation among all nations my lost friend let me say to you that Jesus is not the enemy of your joy Satan is sin is you are you yourself the greatest enemy to true joy Satan wants you forever damned by your sins and

Jesus Christ knows best how to make his creatures happy by saving them from their sins blessings abound where he reigns the prisoner leaps to lose his chains the prisoner and the weary find eternal rest and all the sons of want are blessed come to Jesus it's not just it's not enough just to pay attention the people in Samaria did more than pay attention they believed you must come to this Christ and forget any of your good deeds see them as what they are splendid sins and come and cast all your hope on Jesus and he will make you glad with a joy that lasts forever so what have we seen today we've seen the first great persecution that broke out against the church and it was by no mean the last great persecution against her many have followed since down through the ages bloody persecutions all over the earth and if we in the

[ 42 : 37 ] U.S. have been exempted from these bloody persecutions that's the exception to the rule not the rule and if I read my Bible correctly we are to expect even greater persecutions against the church before Jesus returns but let this first great persecution of the church comfort us as we see the enemy's rage is just the instrument by which our sovereign Jesus brings victory to his church and expands it the persecution and rage of Satan is just the means by which he brings to pass his own eternal plan and purpose dear Christian our times are in his hands nail pierced hands hands that have loved us from everlasting to everlasting our omnipotent Jesus reigns on earth is not his equal he must win the battle his kingdom is forever so

Saul began to destroy the church but the church shall never perish why because her dear lord to defend to guide sustain and cherish is with her to the end though there be those that hate her and false sons in her pale like Simon the sorcerer against or foe or traitor she ever shall prevail so this is your God church this is your captain your conquering captain courage then the message from headquarters is still let's roll it's still keep moving on out no retreat no rest there are yet nations to be made glad there are sinners to yet be brought to joy near and far oh church arise off the couch out of the easy chair out of your homes into the fray hear the call of Christ your captain we have a hymn like that in our grace hymns and we'll use it as our challenge with the word that we've received this morning number nine in our grace hymns oh church arise and put your armor on hear the call of

Christ our captain let's stand as we sing to one another and stir each other to our savior's words let's talk to him a risen crucified reigning Christ we we bow before you we take courage from you we are humbled at our sins and our slowness to move out with the gospel we're humbled at how our troubles often turn us inward in self pity and we forget about the greater work that you have called us to that the gospel might go to every creature under heaven so forgive us and wash us and cleanse us and fill us with your holy spirit thank you for what saints have told of the work of Christ in their day thank you that you inspired Luke to write down this record in church history of ordinary people just like us with families husbands and wives children homes jobs and we see what happens to them when persecution scatters them and threatens them and takes their lives and separates them and we find them speaking of

Christ wherever they went and it just encourages us Lord to know that weak people can be made strong by your spirit come to us then in our weakness fill us with this same spirit and give us that same heart to endure all things for the sake of the elect that they might share in this great salvation salvation so send your people on their way with courage and faith in you thank you that you died and rose again and are coming again in judgment bring others to yourself this day add them to your church and receive all glory for it we pray in Jesus name amen as