“Be a Christian on Purpose”

Acts 8:1-8

Introduction: It is natural for us to grieve after we lose a friend or loved one. In some cases it can be overwhelming, especially when it is sudden. During times like these people sometimes ask, “God, what are you doing? Why did You let this happen?” The disciples were in a similar position after Stephen was killed. What are you doing, Lord? What is Your purpose for the people of this world? What are You trying to accomplish?

Just like the disciples we must remember that God’s primary purpose is to bring people into a loving relationship with Himself. He created man for His pleasure, but a loving relationship isn’t possible between a holy God and people who have been corrupted by sin. God’s plan is to take care of our sins, make us holy, and enjoy close relationship with us. God wants to use people to accomplish this plan. God was using Stephen to connect people with Jesus. Stephen was very important and effective worker, but God’s purpose is much bigger than just one man. Stephen’s death resulted in the gospel reaching far beyond Jerusalem.  
It is important to remember that God doesn’t force people to love Him, He gives us a free will. He allows us to choose between right and wrong. As children of God we have the ability to choose to forsake our sins. When we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. When we do this we can walk in fellowship with the Lord in this life.

It is important to remember these things because God still has a plan and a purpose for His people. He still desires to work His plan through His people. That is why it is important for us to understand a few things about God’s purpose.

I. **God’s Purpose Will Always Face Opposition 8:1, 3**

1. Saul along with others in authority were actively pursuing any who believed on the name of Christ. This would have been a dangerous and no doubt frightening time to live for Christians. To be a Christian would mean a life on the run, one of constant vigilance.
2. We may not live on the lookout for the Pharisees, but we do face a real adversary, Satan. He is the great adversary and the father of lies.
3. Satan will try to discourage you by making you feel like you are not good enough.
4. Satan will try to distract God’s people from their purpose by leaving them to comfort and complacency.
5. Satan will try to sow discord by getting Christians to become bitter at one another.
6. “The devil has many tools, but a lie is the handle that fits them all.” We fail when we give attention to Satan’s lies and act on them instead of faith.
7. As Christians we are in a battle and we must remember to be vigilant at all times. God is ever with us as we seek to honor Him. True peace will never come through making choices that neglect God. We must remember that God’s purpose is greater than our desires and what is often the easier route.

**II. Sometimes God’s Plan Will Bring Us Through Suffering 8:2, 4-5**

1. Christians in Jerusalem found themselves destitute, having to leave the city or die. Friends, jobs, family, possessions, all the comforts of home had to be left behind because of their decision to trust Christ.
2. Through the suffering of these early Christians God fulfilled what we find in Acts 1:8. They went everywhere preaching the gospel.
3. They shared the gospel because it was what they were commanded to. That command has not changed, because God’s purpose has not changes. He wants to use you to invite your coworkers to church. He wants you to be willing to invite someone to church.
4. For most people this is an uncomfortable proposition. Social awkwardness as well as insecurity in the Word are major hurdles for some people. If you struggle with these you must choose to take a step forward and ask the Lord to help you to be a witness like the Christians from Jerusalem.

**III. Philip’s Preaching In Samaria Shows a Turning Point in God’s Plan 8:5-7**

1. Before this the Gospel had been open to others, but was primarily being taken to Jews, God’s chosen people. They had held a privileged position in the world, above all other nations.
2. The Jews of Jerusalem considered themselves pure. When the kingdom was divided under King Jeroboam many Israelites married foreign wives and served other Gods.
3. There had been a division between the Jews and Samaritans that was hundreds of years old.
4. Under most circumstances the Samaritans would have been avoided like the plague.
5. Phillip was able to do miracles as a sign to the lost that the power of God was upon him.
6. God is not a respecter of persons so the gospel is open to everyone regardless of: race, nationality, culture, gender, background, physical appearance, etc.
7. God’s plan is global in scale. Malachi 1:11
8. Hillcrest is blessed with much diversity in its membership, we are working to see the gospel reach everyone everywhere.

Conclusion: If you are a Christian you know that the gospel has brought many wonderful things into your life. Think of how thankful you are that someone told you about Christ. Some of you were brought to Hillcrest as children and have seen the Lord work through people here to be a blessing to you. Generations after us may not always have the religious freedoms that our country has enjoyed for so long. Commit this morning that you are going to give out a Church Tract, invite someone to church because the gospel is open to all.