

June 2, 2018

Reflections

ΚΟΙΝΩΝΙΑ

“Some devout men buried Stephen, and made loud lamentation over him. 3 But Saul began ravaging the church, entering house after house, and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison.”

Acts 8:2 (NASB)

Divide and Conquer

Sometimes a bad thing ends up being a good thing, even though it might not seem so at the time. As God works for good for those who love him, it may not lessen the pain, but it can provide meaning.

Why did God stand by and allow Stephen to be stoned and the early church to be scattered? One reason, I think, is that for God’s will to be done, He would need to “divide and conquer.” That is how God would use a bad thing to achieve a good thing, as we see in Acts 7:54-8:3.

When we last read about Stephen, he had just been chosen as a deacon by those in the church. As a deacon Stephen was responsible for distributing food to the widows under the church’s care. But Stephen was also preached the word, and this soon led to a confrontation with those who opposed the church. Soon Stephen’s life was in danger, but even in Stephen’s dire circumstances, the Holy Spirit had not abandoned him (Acts 7:55). As things deteriorated, Stephen saw what Jesus spoke of in Luke 22:69 and elsewhere; that the Son of Man would be glorified and return to His rightful place in heaven. This enraged the crowd further, and they began to stone Stephen. As this happened, Stephen echoed Luke 23:46, when Jesus gave up His spirit to His Father’s hands. As he died, Stephen asked God to forgive those who persecuted him, just as Jesus did. The result was that the church was persecuted and scattered. How could any of that be “good”?

Let’s be clear about something right away. There isn’t any “good” in Stephen’s death or the church’s persecution. It isn’t that those things are “good.” It’s that God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. God redeems the bad, using it for His purposes, for our edification and His glory.

It may not always be easy to see that. Jesus’ death on the cross and Stephen’s stoning were both terrible things. But both were used by God to secure the future of His people. When Jesus died, it looked like His ministry was over. But it was just beginning, because our salvation was secured, and we were given the Holy Spirit. When Stephen died, it looked the early church would wither away as the people were scattered. But it was just the beginning, because when they were scattered the gospel went with them into Judea and Samaria, just as Jesus said.

The only way the early church could hope to continue to grow was to “divide and conquer.” The persecution of the church, which was undeniably a bad thing, was used by God to accomplish His purpose. We can use that same principle—divide and conquer—to help us deal with setbacks in our ministry and move forward as a church. To do that, we will need to separate our circumstances from our service. That is easy to say but hard to do, and yet we see that at work in the life of Stephen and the reaction of the early church as they were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.

*Pray for our church plant
in Clifton Park, NY.*

Pray With Us

Jon Michaels: A co-worker Paul Blake passed away suddenly, please pray for his family and their salvation

Ellen Olson: Her brother Mark, Faith and family are re-locating to Omaha, NE. Pray for a smooth transition from Egypt to NE. Pray for the employees of Dollar General this week, that God will bless them and keep them safe.

Craig Mosher: Pray for Alicia and him as they had a miscarriage this past week. May God's peace and comfort be with them both.

Matt Olson: Donna Avery had her last round of chemotherapy. Pray for positive results, that she regains her strength, and for God's peace be with her. Kevin Butler is starting his treatment, it will not be as invasive as previously thought. Pray for healing. Continue to pray for Pastor Josh and the Clifton Park church. May they grow in faith and closer to each other. Marie Hoffman is home from the hospital, her back surgery went well. Pray for healing.

Becca Olson: A client had a heart attack and is in ICU with very little brain activity. Pray for the client's peace, the staff who care for her, and God's mercy at this difficult time.

Teresa Zema: Pray for all school staff and students as this school year comes to an end that all will have good final days.

Paula Dibble: Continue to pray for her grandson Jon and his wife Olivia for God to heal their relationship. Pray for her son James that God grants him wisdom and discernment regarding his future. Thankful for helping hands in spreading the mulch in the playground area.

*Berlin Youth Fellowship,
Monday, 6:30-8:00 pm
(grades K-12)*

Weekly Events

Women's Bible Study, Evening study Tuesdays, 7 pm in the church library.
Daytime study Wednesdays at 10 am in the church library.

Bennington YF, Wednesdays, 6 pm, at the Bennington Rec Center.

Men's Bible Study, Thursdays, 7 pm in the church library.

Upcoming Events

June Operation Christmas Child Collection: Craft items (Coloring books, crayons, markers, paints, play dough, and so on).

Serving our Neighbors: Please continue praying for the employees of the Dollar General through June 9. We will announce the next business we will be praying and collecting refreshments for on Saturday, June 9.

Streaming

Don't forget we are now streaming our service each week. You can watch live on YouTube on Saturday mornings at 10:30 am or watch it later at your convenience.