

Acts 8:1 Now Saul was consenting to his death. At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. In the name of Jesus

During the darkest hours of WWII, Britain faced a critical shortage of silver for the war industries. Churchill asked if there were any possible sources of silver, however remote. "Yes," the answer came, "the churches and cathedrals have silver statues of the saints." "Well," Churchill replied, "Put the saints in circulation." God's purpose is not for you to live in a convent, wilderness cave, nor to live all your life only at Immanuel but to **"PUT THE SAINTS IN CIRCULATION."**

Acts 6:7 tells us that the Word of God had so grown in Jerusalem that even many of the priests, leaders in Jesus murder, had come to faith. Jesus gathers us in families, so we may help each other grow in faith but also calls us (1:8) to be witnesses to Him in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.

Unfortunately, Christians are also governed by the laws of physics, "a body at rest, tends to stay at rest, unless ..." So, the LORD allowed persecution to begin with Stephen's martyrdom to put the saints in circulation, so the silver would be spread around and shine in other areas. Acts 9:31 declares that thus congregations were formed throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria in "the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit." Acts 12:24 "the Word of the LORD grew and multiplied."

What an amazing perspective this provides us in regard to the martyrdom of Stephen and attacks that may come on us for confessing Christ. Jesus is ruling through these very attacks to let the silver shine. In the very shadow of death, Christ's eternal life shines more brightly: Because I live you shall live. In the fearful guilt over sin that can overwhelm all of us especially in sickness and trials, Christ's forgiving peace shines more brightly: Because I paid your penalty, your sins are fully forgiven. In the darkness of this world's troubles, Christ's protecting love shines more brightly: I will work all things for good to bring you to Myself in the mansions of Heaven. The silver shining through Stephen even sparked a smoldering ember in the heart of Saul that Jesus would soon set ablaze to shine in the world. Our Savior's shining silver sustained Stephen, faithful unto death, and can sustain you and me, so put the saints in circulation and let the silver shine.

Yet, how our flesh flees persecution and even circulation. Like a partridge that runs along the earth, as long as there is a chance of escape, and flies heavenward only when there is no other escape, so our flesh clings to this earth and tempts us to fly heavenward only when there is no other escape. The friendship of this world plucks our wings with its pleasures and tethers us to the earth with trust in earthly things until we are no longer able to fly to Jesus. How blessed then, yes, are those very persecutions and challenges that purify our silver by driving us into God's word where heaven is near to us, moving us to seize Jesus friendship, and compelling us to fly to the LORD every trouble.

People have often wondered, "Would I have the strength to be faithful unto death like Stephen?" But the very question is looking in the wrong direction. Stephen was looking up past himself and his own strength, looking up past the hurling stones, looking up to see Jesus who died for all his

sins and yours, looking up to see Jesus who arose to give him and you entry to the heavenly temple, looking up to see Jesus standing at the right hand of God to faithfully preserve him and you. Life is looking up.

Our Savior's shining silver enabled Stephen to pray, "Lord forgive them" and "receive my Spirit," faithful unto death. Still, still tho' dead he speaks, and trumpet tongued, proclaim to many awak'ning land the one availing Name. (259:2) Our Savior's shining silver can sustain you, so put the saints in circulation and let the silver shine. Amen. To God alone be the glory. John Ude Hymn 463 1,5

Acts 8:26 Now an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, saying, "Arise and go toward the south along the road which goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." This is desert. In the Name of Jesus

Have you ever heard of the so called "**Butterfly effect**?" This is the idea that: "a butterfly stirring the air in Peking can produce storm systems in New York." Certainly small causes can combine into a major effect, but it requires a uniting design, energy, and a conversion method. Since the theory of evolution has been unable to provide a viable mechanism to explain the origin of life from chaos, some have now promoted the "Butterfly effect" as the means, suggesting that the random, chaotic dissipation of energy produced life as it might a hurricane. Yet, my observation dramatically suggests there's just a little bit of a difference between the order in a hurricane and that in a living being. Further, the weather system has design, energy, and a conversion mechanism, but since evolution is starting with empty chaos, it can't provide any of these in their theory for the origin of life. But let us consider this morning another Butterfly effect in which the Designer of the Universe provides design, energy, and a conversion mechanism.

Philip was so busy preaching the gospel in a city-wide revival in Samaria that he sent a plea for help. There's no way then that he would, at this time, have left for the desert except that the Designer of the Universe stirred his wings, saying "Go." Meanwhile, the LORD had stirred some wings way down in Ethiopia, a thousand miles away, so an Ethiopian eunuch had come to Jerusalem to worship the LORD and was now returning home with a scroll of the prophet Isaiah to read on the way.

And what amazing design is evident that the Ethiopian and Philip now crossed paths in the desert. Yet, even with such a miracle, how many of us would have the nerve to approach this important man? But the Spirit stirred Philip to draw near, and he hears him reading from Isaiah 53 about the suffering of the Savior, so he could simply ask, "Do you understand what you are reading?"

And the LORD also provided the conversion mechanism. Philip explained the amazing love of Jesus that silently, willingly accepted all the accusations and scorn unjustly heaped upon Him for our sin, all the grief and agony of being crucified in our place, and all the curses and desolation of death for the sins of the world. And more, also in Isaiah: "who can declare His generation," for it didn't end at death, so no man can count its length. The LORD "shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in His hand. He shall justify many." Jesus arose from the dead to give us life.

The eunuch felt the Spirit's stirring and said, "See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?" Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he answered, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."

The Designer of the Universe can design, energize, and convert every butterfly stirring for the salvation of a soul. He is calling you to stir your wings, so thirsty souls can be refreshed in the rain showers of the gospel: "your sins are forgiven, everlasting life is yours."

Often, we don't know what to say. But we can ask: "Do you understand?" Often we're afraid. But, if the LORD can use a butterfly stirring in Ethiopia to bring a divine path crossing in the desert, He can take care of you. Stir your gospel wings so the Designer of the Universe may design, energize, and convert your butterfly stirring for saving souls in a divine path crossing. Amen. To God alone be the Glory. John Ude Hymn 360 (5-7)