

# Culture and Persecution

by Thaddeus Barnum

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of the Holy Spirit's empowerment in times of persecution and the need for the laity to be equipped and empowered to do the work of ministry.*

**Duration:** 32:03

**Scripture:** Acts 8:1

**Topics:** "Holy Spirit", "Persecution"

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## Description

This sermon emphasizes the need for the church to be empowered by the Holy Spirit to face the challenges of the world. It discusses the importance of equipping all believers for ministry, breaking down the clergy-laity divide, and empowering the entire body of Christ to go out and preach the word. The speaker calls for a return to the early church's model where all believers are anointed by the Spirit for service, highlighting the need for boldness, unity, and empowerment by the Holy Spirit in the face of persecution and cultural challenges.

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## Transcript

The words with which I'd like to address you this morning are found in the book of Acts in chapter 8. Brothers and sisters, there are times that we have got to understand our times. I want to risk this conversation with you because I believe that the Holy Spirit is speaking to this moment and this time and this service as we come to the ordination of Jim into his ministry. I don't want to miss it.

I wonder if you hear and can hear what I am hearing. There's a hurricane out there. Some of our people have already left.

The state that I come from is already evacuated in South Carolina. Schools are closed today. Cuba has been hammered right this moment.

Haiti has been hammered. They cannot stand it. And I pray as we come into our prayers at this ordination, we will lift up those in the third world that are suffering right now as we stand here.

All of us are doing our preparations. All of us have got our plans. All of us know what we're going to do as St. Matthew rolls right up the coast.

And in the midst of it, we prepare. Do we not prepare? Many of you read the book some years ago called Isaac's Storm. That is September 8th, 1900.

They didn't have what we had. And then rolled the great hurricane that took out Galveston and thousands of people died because there was no preparation. I find it extraordinary that we are at the cusp of a hurricane that we know, that we are aware of.

We've got the time to prepare. And in the midst of it, we're doing an ordination where we're asking God the Holy Spirit to fill this His servant for the work of service. Lord, fill him.

Lord Jesus, fill us. In the midst of the hurricane coming, we need the anointing and power of God the Holy Spirit upon the church. Because without this, we are going to collapse under the weight of the storm that is here.

Read the times. Know the culture that we're in. Can you not see it? What is the choice that we are living in? I ask you that.

And for that reason, I make my appeal here to Acts chapter 8 and verses 1 through 3. I shall deprive you of the glory of verse 4. And Saul, approved of his education. Fascinating interpretation. We are all schools in the marshes.

And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem. And they were all scattered. How many? They were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria except the apostles.

Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him. But Saul was ravaging the church and entering house after house. He dragged off men and women and committed them to prison.

And if we stop there, I would suggest to you that what Bishop Julian gave us yesterday would be ours. These eight most difficult words. Afflicted.

Crushed. Perplexed. Despairing.

Persecuted. Forsaken. Struck down.

Destroyed. This has always been the work of the enemy against the church. And here it is.

The persecution against Stephen. And what happens? They're all scattered. They're all scattered.

Does that remind you of anything? Do you remember when our Lord, our Savior, said to his disciples, did he not, that the shepherd is going to be struck down and what will happen to you? We'll be scattered. We'll be scattered. And you have this moment that if you finished your reading of Acts chapter 8 verse 3, you would close your Bible and say it's over.

It's over. Persecuted. Afflicted.

Crushed. Despairing. We've lost.

The people have been scattered. Stephen's death. This man named Saul who's ravaging the church.

Coming against the church. They were all scattered. They were all scattered.

And you sit there in the marvel of it and you see in John chapter 20 verse 19, you find the Jews there behind closed doors. They are locked behind closed doors because they're afraid of the Jews. That is my

concern for the church today.

We hear the rumblings outside and so we lock the doors and we have our little worship services, our fellowships together. But we're afraid of the culture so we speak the language that belongs to the Christians. We do what Christians do and we become this little group that's hidden.

Doors are locked. We're afraid of the culture. Rather than penetrating it.

Rather than being witnesses in it. We're locked like those Jews. These people were scattered.

And you feel like the church is gone. The church is dying. Until suddenly you come upon verse 4. And verse 4 changes the conversation.

Verse 4 changes the entire conversation. Sometimes I wonder if the preaching of Acts 8, 1-4 has been left for those preachers who are preaching in the days of the Hitlers, of the Edomites, of the great barbarians that have risen into power trying to strengthen the church. But I wonder, is it too early to preach on this text? Are we going to be able to have ears to hear what this says? Because I suggest to you verse 4 is everything.

Now those who were scattered. Who were scattered? All were scattered. Those who were scattered, they went about preaching the world.

They are mad. What are they doing? If they do what Stephen does, what will happen to them? Stone them. So why are they doing this? Isn't this the ordination sermon that Paul gave? Do you know when Paul gave his ordination sermon? It is the story of 2 Timothy.

I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race. I have kept the faith.

He is passing the mantle of the Spirit of God upon his son. But what does he say to his son? In chapter 1, verse 6, verse 7, that area. For this reason, I remind you to kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands.

For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, of fear. He did not give us a spirit of timidity. In verse 4 of Acts 8, I would think that they would be scared.

They would be afraid. They would be scattered because of fear. No, no.

He has given us a spirit of love, of power, and of sound mind. Or as Calvin interpreted that word, of sobriety. Clearly not in Anglican.

Yes. Oh, it is true. Welcome to the Reformed.

Yes. Sobriety. Yes.

But he has given us the Spirit of God, not in timidity, but in power. And that is the explanation I find. That is the exposition of Acts chapter 8 verse 4. This all, they knew something about the spirit of power.

There is no other way to describe it. In the face of Stephen's death. In the face of persecutions.

In the face of Paul ravaging the church. What is going on? These people, these common people. Common people are preaching the word.

They are preaching the word. Do they go to seminary? They are preaching the word. Say, how is this possible? Because isn't the fact amazing to you that in verse 2 we are finding that they are scattered to Judea and Samaria.

Where have we heard that before? Judea and Samaria. And the rest of the world. Sorry? And the commission of Jesus.

You read the Bible. Commission of Jesus. Hallelujah.

And you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you. And you shall be my witnesses. To the nations.

To Jerusalem. To Judea and Samaria. And to the outermost parts of Congo beach.

Yes. The thing that is amazing about this conversation then is that you can go back to Acts chapter 8 and verse 1. Sorry. Sorry.

Yes. Acts chapter 1 verse 8. What you are going to find in this context is that the Spirit of God. Listen to this.

He is not. He didn't. So he didn't have a meeting.

Come up with a vision statement. And a mission statement. And then have a how we are going to do mission like to the Roman Empire.

And have a strategic plan. He did not do a CEO moment. He used persecution to scatter the church with the gospel light of Jesus.

He used persecution. He used persecution to do this. Not strategic planning.

He used persecution. Now this is the thing that undergirds this for a moment. I had thought that chapter 1 verse 8 belonged to the apostles.

He is speaking to the apostles. You will find the context. You already know this.

In verses 1 through 7 you are going to find that Jesus, our Lord, is speaking to the apostles. And he is telling them that the promise of the Father, which you heard from me, John baptized with water. You will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.

Not any days from now he is speaking to the apostles. And there is no question about it. The order of the apostles.

And there is criteria for the order of the apostles. You will find that in verse 22. It is very clear.

Verse 21. Verse 22. That there is criteria as they choose the replacement of Judas to be able to take up the office of the apostle.

And you got this. In the scriptures. The clear understanding of eldership that begins to be recognized.

The disciples to the apostles. To the deacons. You begin to see it emerging.

The order of the elders. But the question I have got then is the spirit of God coming upon them only. Look at chapter 2 verse 1. When the day of Pentecost arrived they were all together.

Who beat the all? All. Yes. And so you got up in chapter 1 verse 15.

There were at least 120 that were gathered together. And they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind.

And it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as a fire appeared to them and rested on? All. On each one of them.

On all. And listen to verse 4. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit. They were all given this unction.

And I would give to you. That is my only word for the context of this preparing of Bishop Bennet's servant. And of the ordination coming.

This anointing. This spirit of God ordaining us has come upon all. Look at chapter 2. As Peter quotes from Joel.

Verse 17. And in the last days it shall be God declares that I will pour out my spirit on? All. And your young men and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy.

Your young men shall see visions. Your old men shall dream dreams. Verse 21.

And it will come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. Verse 38 and 39. Repent and be baptized.

Every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ. For the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

For the promise is for you and for your children. And for? All. All who are far off.

Chapter 4 of Acts. Verse 31. Chapter 4 verse 31.

And when they had prayed. The place in which they were gathered together was shaken. And they were? All.

Oh, you haven't gotten to verse 31 yet. Are you slow? All. All.

They were all filled. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit. And continued to speak the word of God with boldness.

How do we speak the word of God with boldness? How do we do it? We've got to talk about the person that got the Holy Spirit. Do we not? And the resting of him upon the church. Here it is.

Keep on going. Chapter 5. You'll find this. I love the particularities of this in verse 32.

Chapter 5, 32. For we are witnesses to these things. And so is the Holy Spirit.

Whom God has given to those who obey. I love that particularity. Again, one more time.

And I'm done with this. Chapter 10. When poor Peter was trying to do his best to understand the crossing into the threshold of the Gentile home.

And he began to share the good news of this gospel with the Gentiles. And out it comes in verse 44. While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all.

All who heard. And out came the gifts of the Spirit of God upon the church. There's no question we've got fellowship.

And there's no question we've got this dangling conversation. It is time to have it. There is a division in our church that is unbecoming to our rule.

It has been with us for centuries. How many of you know that when you've got a pattern in your life, it is hard to break? When there is a pattern that goes back maybe decades in your life, and you know it's not right, but you continue to do what you do even though you know it's not right, and you teach others it's not right. You've got the right principle, but the practice is all messed up.

All messed up. And that division is quite simple. And it's rooted in our family.

And it's the distinction between clergy and laity. Laity. What does the word laity mean? We say it all the time, do we not? The gifts of God.

So the clergy don't receive it. The ministers minister. And the congregation congregates.

I've been invited to go speak at a conference. It is disparaging the fact that our laity, only 20% of them are engaged. They do the giving, they do the working, the 80% need encouragement.

And that's what they're asking you to come and do. Help the laity. This conversation is deprived of health.

It is not healthy to have that kind of engagement. Why? Because this separation is killing us. It's been for centuries, and it's killing us.

We teach something altogether different, do we not? Listen to the words that come out of Paul's mouth. For we speak the truth in love, do we not? And you'll find this in chapter 4 of Ephesians. Speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into him who is the head, even Christ.

From whom the whole body being fitted and held together by what? Every joint supplies. According to the proper working of each individual part. For the building up of the body into love.

For the building up of itself in love. We need all parts to work. That's what he's saying.

Jesus is head of the church. Thank you, Jesus. Are you a senior pastor? Excellent.

Who's head of your church? Jesus. Are you a rector of your church? Who's head of the church? Jesus. Somebody's got to say it.

I am a senior pastor, but I am not head of this church. We actually believe that Jesus is head of this church. We actually believe that the presidency of the spirit of God is the one who leads us and guides us and directs us.

We, growing up in the church that we grew up in, we had a list of those who were the, as Bishop Julian pointed out yesterday, or Monday from 2 Corinthians 4, we're called bondservants for Jesus Christ. We preach not ourselves, but Jesus as Lord and ourselves as your... Clarency. Clarency! That's what we have in our bulletins.

Clarency! Boom! All the lists, the names, the titles were awesome. In our... Anyway. But in our bulletin, it said this.

Ministers. Colon. The entire congregation.

Why? Because they're trying to take this stronghold down. We need the body of Christ to be the body of Christ to be healthy. This professionalism is killing us.

And now is the time to talk about it. Because that storm is on the horizon. Our people need to be equipped for the generation that we are living in.

And we have got to start talking about the person of God, the Holy Spirit. Empowering. The ordination belongs to the people of God.

Yes, we do these ordinations to separate the elders. Absolutely. A hundred percent.

But why are we not ordaining? Which is, by the way, the doctrine of confirmation in its origin, in my judgment. It is the confirming of the baptismal. Yes.

It is bringing in the body of Christ. Yes. But it is meant to be the empowering of the Spirit.

How many of our people for confirmation are literally knowing that they're coming to ask what Jim is asking for today. Anoint me for service. Our children.

Our generation coming up. Our college students need to know the power of God, the Holy Spirit. When they're going into the culture that we're going into.

Because we're going into storm. Don't you know that? We are going into storm. Our preacher that we grew up under had a famous sermon.

And it was called the calm sermon. The calm. The calm sermon.

Because King James helped give this root and meaning when it came time to talk about Ephesians 4, 11 and following. Here's the calm. And calmers are critical, are they not? Careful where you put your calm.

And he gave his church what? Apostles? And prophets? And evangelists? And pastors? And teachers? For the perfecting of the saints? Calm. For the work of service? Calm. For the edifying of the body of Christ.

Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers, what do they do? Three things. They perfect the saints. They do the work of service all day.

For the edifying of the body of Christ. He said to us as we were growing up, this great calm sermon. That calm has deceived us for centuries.

Watch out for the calm. Because it builds the professional class. The people of God watch as the professionals do all the work of ministry.

Take the calm out. And it reads like this. Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers.

They are given for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry. Who does the work of the ministry? The saints. Calm.

He was so classic. He had all the stories that made us roar and laugh. I can do this with you.

There is a couple in New York City, 1930s. He sends his wife off to England. And off she goes.

And she finds this piece of jewelry that I died for. It is so expensive. And she loves it.

She sends a Western Union telegram back to her husband. I want to buy this. How much does it cost? Can I buy it? And he writes back in his most beautiful, beautiful language.

No price too high. No. No price too high.

No price too high. No. Calm.

Price too high. So she bought it. Oh, the comma does wonders to our minds.

We are being clawed with the life of God to the people of God. And we are the claws. I'm not going to give the full gravity of this.

I will only sketch it for you. You know this. You teach this.

but I want to see it in light of his perspective, that Jesus faced the clog man himself, the brilliant lawyer who rises up and says, tell me, teacher, how to inherit eternal life. Fascinating question. Because the 72 had just come off the field, and they're like massively rejoicing, because they have been anointed with God, the Holy Spirit, the common people, the common 72.

And they came back, and they were like, this is Luke 10. Oh my lord, it works. And Jesus is like, wait, wait, wait, wait, wait, wait.

Don't rejoice that it works. Rejoice that your name is written in heaven. You know, that gentle perspective, perspective, perspective.

But then Jesus, rejoicing in the Holy Spirit, he says, father, I thank you, I praise you, that you have revealed these things, not to the wise and learned, but to the children. You've revealed it to the children. And up stands the brilliant man.

Perfect timing. The clog man arises. And so Jesus gives him milk.

So tell me, he says, how do you inherit eternal life? Inherit. Fascinating. That there's something that we can do to inherit eternal life, which is not now, but to come.

And they're coming off the field in life, already in life, giving life. OK, tell me what the Bible says, Jesus retorts back. He says, well, love the Lord your God, love your partners, and love your neighbor as yourself.

And Jesus said, yeah, go do that, and you will live. He didn't say, go do that, and one day you'll have eternal life. He said, you do that, and you'll live.

Which turns the teaching right upside down. And then he tells a story of the clog man and his cohorts, who see the dead body on the side of the road. And the prejudice is here, because we know nothing about the near-dead body.

We know nothing about him. Don't know if he qualifies to receive anointing of oil, because is he a Samaritan? Is he a Roman pagan? Is he messed up? We have to evaluate before we administer grace, right? And so Jesus shows Mr. Clog Man his two cohorts. They see, and they pass by him, because they are clogged, unable to give life.

And then he brings out of nowhere a man for whom we have prejudice. Because Samaritans, whom Jews have no dealings with, they have wrong doctrine. They have wrong doctrine.

But he's living the two commandments. Allah. He sees.

He has compassion. He's moved. He acts, and healing grace pours out, and comes, and flows, and threshes.

And that's it. That's it, isn't it? That's the unclogging. The unclogged man, he's out giving life.

You're all talking about it. He's actually doing it. He's actually come to give sacrificial life, so that this man, this man who is dead, this man might live.

And there, Jesus is trying to rescue the clogged man and unclog him. So he might see that we are to have life, have that life abundantly, and give what we've been given to those in need. And this has been the story of Reformation from the beginning.

This is fine. I don't care about what you think in all of its details over a coffee of the ins and outs of the Reformation, because everybody knows that when it did happen, God used jars of clay. It wasn't a perfect Reformation.

But up he rose, a voice saying, the priesthood belongs to all believers. He rose up to snatch the gospel preaching out of a language, Latin, that nobody common knew, so that the plow boy and the handmaid could hear the gospel. So that the unclogging could happen, that they might hear, that they might know, that they might be part of the team of Acts 8.4, all of them out to preach the word of God.

The plow boy, the handmaid, the milkmaid, all of them out to preach the word of God. Is that not what we're called to do? From the least of us to the greatest of us, who actually is the least of us, are we not called to ask for the power of God, the Holy Spirit, to unclog us? Who has a calling to ministry? How do we know the calling to ministry? Who has it? Who has it? All. Who are the priests that have asked us into the presence of the Lord? Who is it? Who is it that we are to equip for the work of service? Who is it to receive the empowerment of God, the Holy Spirit, that is meant for the body of Christ, that we might turn around and bring life everywhere we go? That every Sunday, if you have a deacon in your church, let us go forth into the world rejoicing in the power of God, the Holy Spirit.

Scatter, friends, and preach the word. Scatter, friends, for we are a chosen people. We are a royal priesthood.

We are a holy nation. We are a people belonging to God that we may declare the praises of him who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once we had not received mercy, now we receive mercy.

Once we are not a people, now we are the people of God. Leus! When does the division stop? And allow the people of God to have the life of God, to be equipped for the work of service that would be building up with the body of Christ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature that belongs to the fullness of Christ. So we are no longer children, tossed to and fro by ways, by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness and deceitful scheming.

But speaking the truth of love, we are to grow up into him who is the head, even Christ, from whom the entire body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies. You don't know my people. They don't have time.

Everybody has got time. According to the working of each individual part, I need you on my team. I need you to know that the Spirit of God has come upon me.

I am your God's servant for Jesus' sake. We are here as clergy, sabbath time, apostles, prophets, bishops, pastors and teachers, eldership. We are here for the equipping of the body of Christ that they may be ordained with the power of the Spirit.

Am I wrong about this? They may be ordained by the Spirit of God to be able to go out into a culture that is facing a storm. They need to get ready. The church, are we going to hide or are we going to go out? All of it rests on this question of who is the person of God, the Holy Spirit.

How are we practicing ecclesiology in our church? Are we exalting ourselves and just simply helping these people by pastoring them? Or are we equipping them for the work of service before the hurricane comes, before the storm comes that is going to take our next generation out? It is time for the church to be strong. And the way to have the church be strong is to go back to the beginning in real life. All! That's the commandment of our Lord, our Savior to this great task of great commission.

All are called to be anointed and filled with God the Holy Spirit in order for us to be able to reach the world. Lord, scatter us. And it doesn't matter about your persecutions.

Your persecutions look at church history. They own strengthens. Take down Stephen and we grow.

Idi Amin, go ahead and put the gun in Janani Luwum, the Archbishop of Uganda's mouth, in February 1977 because watch what's going to happen to Uganda the moment you kill him. The blood of the martyrs is done. Always has been.

Don't mess with us. But we are timid. Are we not? Church is timid.

Behind closed doors. Afraid. If they persecute you, they may not persecute you.

It has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on Him but also to suffer for Him. Granted to you to not only believe on Him unto salvation. But it's been granted to you also to suffer for Him.

Maybe the sermon is too early for us. Maybe we have to have the hurricane come a little closer. When are we going to get down to business? Empower our Christians not just with the saving message of our

Savior.

Empowering of the Spirit so our sixth graders can go to the class and pray with the love of Jesus. Our high schoolers can go in and be unafraid of the conversations that are happening. Because they know who they are at the age of 13.

That's our job. To equip the saints differently. To equip the saints for the work of service.

For all of us are called priests.

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