**The Source of Joy**

 *Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him.****3****But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison.*

***4****Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word.****5****Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ.****6****And the crowds with one accord paid attention to what was being said by Philip, when they heard him and saw the signs that he did.****7****For unclean spirits, crying out with a loud voice, came out of many who had them, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed.****8****So there was much joy in that city. (Acts 8:2-8, ESV)*

 The joy of the church comes from doing the work of Christ. Greetings dearly beloved as we talk today about the source of joy in the church. God has called us to service, but not to slavery. We are the children of God, called to serve, but not by force, but rather in love and joy. The goal of today’s message is to highlight the joy of the church then, and then see the message that comes to us from that picture of the church. Again, the church’s joy comes from doing Christ’s work. Let’s see how that is…

 The joy of the church is great when Christ is preached, and His works are done in her (the church). If we look closely at the passage in question, we notice that it begins with the death and burial of Stephen. He was not supposed to get an official and honorable burial, because he was condemnable according to then Jewish law and was not worthy of a proper burial. The atmosphere within the church was not only affected by that event, but also by Saul’s destructive and ravaging activities. However, the focus of those who were serving actively was still bringing fruit. Philip went to Samaria in the first organized work of the Gospel for the Gentiles in the Christian church. Until that time, the church’s activities were curtailed to Jerusalem and the surrounding villages. Through his work, the church began to manifest that which Christ had said about the Gospel spreading until the ends of the earth. It is notable that Philip did not just speak, but he also found receptivity from that unlikely place. In fact, they received him so where that his ministry was a great success not only through the preaching, but also through exorcism and healing portions of his ministry. It was because of all that, that the church had great joy in Samaria.

 As a third-century man was anticipating death, he penned these last words to a friend: "It's a bad world, an incredibly bad world. But I have discovered in the midst of it a quiet and holy people who have learned a great secret. They have found a joy which is a thousand times better than any pleasure of our sinful life. They are despised and persecuted, but they care not. They are masters of their souls. They have overcome the world. These people are the Christians--and I am one of them."

 Our faith-life, which is usually more often expressed during church gatherings, is called to that same great joy in the Lord. Yes, the Christians then could have focused on the death of Stephen or some other negative reality. They could have lived in fear from the news that they were receiving about Saul who was roaming around throwing some of the believers in jail. However, in the face of all that, Philip continued his work, and the Lord performed miracles through it.

 Today is a good time to continue forwards with the work of the Lord and to preach Christ, instead of to analyze the source of the next persecution or obstacle to that work. The church back then had joy because God did the same works among them as He did when Jesus was still ministering, and also because they, in turn, continued to be about his business as a church.

 Today’s ministries need not be different. We preach the same Christ; the same Christ is alive, and if He caused joy in that church, He is able to do the same with us today, especially in those churches that are in the active work of evangelism still.

 We are called to rejoice in the works of the Lord. Those works are evangelism, but not only that- in addition, they are the ministry of healing, driving out evil and all works that bring people closer to Christ.

 Therefore, if you are enjoying the above-named victories in your ministry, I ask you to share those testimonies with us. If you are not, then I invite you to create opportunities for yourself to evangelize and to pray for others within your circles. The works of God are what bring joy to the church. May the Lord give us that hunger to see His works done.

 The Lord bless you all. Amen.