**Acts 6:8-15 Stephen: A wonderful example of Christlikeness – Part 2**

Ill: Houts Spiritual workshop questionnaire – Martyrdom

Wait HS – Pentecost – 3000/5000…Daily distribution – choose 7…

* **Good reputation** – **full of HS** and **Wisdom –** All Hellenists [*Grecian Jews*]
* Peter & Paul [Chief: Apostles – Jews/Gentiles…
  + Many others: Then: Stephen, Philip, and many still today
  + focus’ on Stephen – “Chunk of Chapter 6 & Whole chapter 7

Now: Stephen “Hellenist Synagogue” – arrested & stoned…

* + Why? Because he obeyed God…rather than man!
* Tertullian – “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church”
* Last week: Stephen excellent example: Christlikeness
  + Full of Faith
  + Full of HS
  + Full of Grace
  + Full of Power [signs & wonders]
  + Wisdom

Today: Continue Part 2 – introduced to Stephen – see why he was arrested…

* Next week – EASTER
* Following week – dig into his sermon before Sanhedrin

**8**And Stephen, full of grace and power, was doing great wonders and signs among the people. **9**Then some of those who belonged to the synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called), and of the Cyrenians, and of the Alexandrians, and of those from Cilicia and Asia, rose up and disputed with Stephen. **10**But they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking. **11**Then they secretly instigated men who said, “We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God.” **12**And they stirred up the people and the elders and the scribes, and they came upon him and seized him and brought him before the council, **13**and they set up false witnesses who said, “This man never ceases to speak words against this holy place and the law, **14**for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and will change the customs that Moses delivered to us.” **15**And gazing at him, all who sat in the council saw that his face was like the face of an angel. – **Acts 6:8-15 Brock**

Ill: *Bernstein bears…Brussel spouts*

Next week: Easter - then Stephen sermon…skip to his *last words* and the reaction of the Sanhedrin.

**51**“You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. **52**Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered, **53**you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it.”

**54**Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth at him. **55**But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. **56**And he said, “Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.” **57**But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together at him. **58**Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul. **59**And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” **60**And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

**8**And Saul approved of his execution.

And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. **2**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. – **Acts 7:51-8:4 Paul**

Tertullian was a 2nd century Christian – from Tunisia

The blood of the Martyrs is the seed of the Church – **TertullianKristi**

* Stephen dies - church surges in witness…

Over 1000 years after Tertullian…

“God has so ordered the church from the very beginning that death is the way to life, and the cross the way to victory.” – **John Calvin Vincent**

Where on earth did Calvin get an idea like that from?

**23**And he said to all, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. **24**For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. **25**For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself? **26**For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels. – **Luke 9:23-26 Stuart**

Stephen is a wonderful example was unashamed of **Jesus** *and* **His Words**…

Jesus is the WORD – you cannot separate Jesus and His Words

* World – ***Jesus I like***…it’s his follows…
* They don’t like what we ‘say / teach / believe – “JESUS’ WORDS!!!”

That’s why Jesus said…

**18**“If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. **19**If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. **20**Remember the word that I said to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. - **John 15:18-20 Lance**

Jesus is not saying that the world is a hateful place…in general.

* Even the ‘nicest of people’ – but they **HATE Truth**!!!

**19**And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. **20**For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. – **John 3:19-20 Lucy**

Mean? You will be hated if you proclaim the gospel (Jesus [*the despised One*] is that message)

* No…no…no…Jesus we like [not biblical Jesus] – non-judgmental
* What the world means by ‘Judgmental’ – Stop insisting on truth – *be flexible!*

Sermon on Mt: Adultery – Murder – Divorce – eye for eye [turn other check] – forgive – stop worrying

Enter by the Narrow gate – Lord, Lord… [***Flexible or Narrow?]***

* That is why we can NEVER…NEVER…adjust the gospel to make is more *palatable* to the world
* Gospel Truth NEVER will be accepted – if it is not *accepted by Faith* [HS] – it will be rejected as ‘judgmental’ – Narrow

Ap. Paul said…

Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted – **2 Timothy 3:12 Alex**

**Stephen** was a wonderful example of godliness…

* man full of grace – ***Charis*** [Loving kindness] – this is a clear attribute of God…
* World – Judgmental [Matt]

**51**“You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. – **Acts 7:51 Heidi**

These very same words God uses of the nation of Israel…

* Stiff necked: Ex – Duet – Neh. [an ox / donkey – refuses to be bridled/yoked…
* OT – [Jer.] – uncircumcised hearts/ears [only God can do that] – dull of hearing/unclean
* Resisting the HS – Blasphemy – unpardonable sin…
* Before Stephen ‘falls asleep’ – *Don’t hold this sin…* [Jesus…] – hated him!

**9**Then some of those who belonged to the synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called), and of the Cyrenians, and of the Alexandrians, and of those from Cilicia and Asia, rose up and disputed with Stephen. **10**But they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking. – **Acts 6:9-10 Kathy**

Stephen goes to his own kind – Hellenistic Synagogue/s [mission field]

* 63BC - Roman General Pompey – Jewish to Rome [slaves] – freedom=came back
* 10 men made a synagogue [500 in Jerusalem]
* Also: Cyrerians [Libya] / Alexandria [Cap. Egypt] – Cilicia [Tarsus] – Turkey today.
* Scholars: Not sure: 1 or 5

Ill: **Bridge**… ----- Luke introduces: Steven as a Bridge…*transition* from Peter [choses] to Paul [executes].

Hellenistic Jew - [*Jew with Gentile culture/language*]

Hellenists - Can’t answer Stephen’s arguments – full of Wisdom – Faith = ‘Courage’

* Not an invited – guest speaker - Spoke up w/Gospel
* J of Naz – fulfillment OT – Messiah –@ Passover [killed: He is true Passover Lamb]
* Like Disciples- mind opened to understand scriptures… [Christ in OT]
* They Couldn’t not – refute his argument [wisdom & Spirit]

So what do people do if they can’t win a debate? – [attack the person]

**10**But they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking. **11**Then they secretly instigated men who said, “We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God.” **12**And they stirred up the people and the elders and the scribes, and they came upon him and seized him and brought him before the council, **13**and they set up false witnesses who said, “This man never ceases to speak words against this holy place and the law, **14**for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and will change the customs that Moses delivered to us.” **– Acts 6:10-14 Mike**

Notice 3 things:

1. Disputed [argued: Got nowhere, his argument was too strong: TRUE!
2. Began a smear campaign – secretly persuaded people to lie
3. Brought the liars to court – false witnesses

Satanic! See it today in our courts…

* most NB…exactly the same accusations / false witnesses against Jesus.

**First charge:** Never ceases to speak against this holy place --- Temple & it’s holy place.

* Likely quoted Jesus: Twisted & misunderstood [*not judgmental* – just truth twisted…]
* Herod’s Temple [46 yrs. to build] – 3 days [death & resurrection] – He is the Temple
* Offering doves/Lambs/oxen – Altar [priests] – redundant = FULFILLED!!!

Veil was torn – worthless/useless ---- AD 70 destroyed

Ill: Yom Kippur

**Second charge:** Disrespects the Law of Moses

Possible Stephen [like JC] had little regard for the scribal law [twisted – man-made]

* But: God’s Law – handed down by Moses [highest regard]
* Christ is the fulfilment of that Law [lifted up in highest honor] vs. corrupts scribes/pharisees

**17**“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. **18**For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. **19**Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. – **Matthew 5:17-19 Barbara**

This is what Jesus said…this is therefore what Stephen said…

* But unbelievers will always twist and misunderstand TRUTH [always!]

So, like his Savior, Stephen is misinterpreted, accused of Blasphemy – by Blasphemers.

See the world will never…ever…embrace the true gospel…true church…true Jesus…

* They may appreciate its ‘morality’ / ‘kindness to poor’ / opposition to legalism
* But it will never embrace the Truth – unless God ‘transforms’ the heart
  + I wonder how often - Ap. Paul thought about this incident [after he was converted]

So here was Stephen – sounded by 70 Sanhedrin – others…mocking…lying [Full of Courage]

Last verse…

And gazing at him, all who sat in the council saw that his face was like the face of an angel. – **Acts 6:15 Hannah**

Mean? – Know he had amazing composure in light of his overwhelming circumstance

* Calm – compassionate – steadfast – honest – bold…

What does an angel’s face look like? “dunno”

* Do know – where ever angel [there is light] – reflect light of God
* Better question: Who else ever had a face that reflected – radiance of God’s light?

When Moses came down from Mount Sinai, with the two tablets of the testimony in his hand as he came down from the mountain, Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God – **Exodus 34:29 Matt**

Like Moses, Stephen’s face reflected the glory of the Lord

* This was a mark of God’s divine favor on him
* In the end – looked up & saw: Glory of the Lord Jesus Christ!

As he was condemned for Blasphemy by blasphemers – He shone with the glory of God.

* Can we be like Stephen? [not physically glowing] – all called to be shining lights…

Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him. – **James 1:12 Jonathan**

What does the name Stephen mean? – *Victors Wreath* or *Crown* = Reward / honor

Remember what Missionary Jim Elliot said…Martyred in 1956…

“he is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.” – **Jim Elliot** **Ralph**

God is still looking for Jim Elliot’s and Stephen’s today…

**10**Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life. - **Revelation 2:10 Jacques**