

The Highway of Holiness - Faith in the Face of Persecution

Introduction

In today's passages of scripture we will look at what is commonly known as the martyrdom of Stephen. As we will see this morning, Stephen was martyred for his obedience to the Word of God and his faithfulness in preaching the Gospel in the face of persecution.

1. Who are the Persecuted?

- a. **V3-5.** Stephen's selection amongst the believers reveals that he was special and called out specifically for a purpose.
- b. He was one of seven men out of the early church (~at least 5,000 as per Acts 4:4) that were selected for this early form of the office of deacon.

1. Qualifications

- a. of good reputation and above reproach
- b. confirmed as being full of faith (which gave him grace) and of the Holy Spirit.
- c. not ashamed to proclaim the Gospel
- d. would have to be courageous.

2. Why will we be persecuted?

- a. Because Jesus said we would in John 15.
- b. V8. We are not to be hidden away in a holy huddle somewhere afraid to walk outside.

3. The Christian response to Persecution

- a. Stephen even in his last moments before being dragged away to certain death was concentrating on Jesus. (Heb 12:2).
- b. Act Like Jesus Acted (1 Peter 2:21-23)
 - 1. Always with Love for the Lost Souls: (Matt 5:44)
 - 2. Having Confidence in His Justice (Rom 12:19)
 - 3. With Mercy & Grace (Rom 12:20-21)
 - 4. With Restraint & Forbearance (Matthew 5:38-41)

4. The Eternal Impact

- a. Christ can save the persecutor! In Paul's case, the persecutor became the persecuted after his conversion on the Damascus road.
- b. the power of God cannot be stopped and the spreading of the Gospel will go on, until the whole world hears and Christ returns.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

It is the words of Christ that divide the true believer from the unbeliever, so people should examine their spiritual condition to see if they are *true* disciples of Christ.

1. Why are Stephen's listeners so enraged with his message? Why are so many enraged with our gospel message today?

2. What is one event of persecution you had to endure in your life?

3. Peter's speech in Acts led to mass conversion, while Stephen's led to his death. What does that teach about success in service to God?

Rev. Bernie Diaz
Pastor, Christ Community Church
www.christcomchurch.org
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