

Acts 7:1-29

"Stephen Stands Trial"

The grace of God, the wisdom of God & the Spirit of God. How we need these things ruling/reigning in our lives. Because injustice, unfairness, deception & misconception happens all the time in the lives of believers.

Think about it, there is no small number of people out there that equate the word "Christian" with, "discriminatory", "hateful", "ignorant bigot", or some self-righteous goody two shoes who thinks they're just a little bit better (or maybe a whole lot) better than everyone else. Is that true of the genuine Christian community? Not at all! But it's a very common misconception. If you're a Christian than you must hate the homosexual community, or disdain anyone struggling w/gender identity? Is that true? Not at all! God's not willing that any should perish, but that *all* should come to repentance. For God so loved the world (not just the straight, heterosexual demographic) that He gave His only begotten Son.

Listen, we're *all* born w/a disposition toward sin, therefore we *all* need to be "born again" as by the Spirit of God. It's not a "gay to straight" thing, it's a "lost to saved" thing that applies to all of humanity. Our identity isn't in to be found in our gender; our identity is in *Christ*! But because of common misrepresentation, a twisting of what the word of God says, the believer is often seen in an unfair, untrue light.

We can't always control how people see us, or what they say *about* us, the way we respond (however) is *on* us. This is why we need the grace of God, the wisdom of God & the Spirit of God influencing, inspiring & leading the way we think, the things we do & the words we say.

Stephen had been seized & stood before the Sanhedrin (the Jewish Supreme court) on trial for his life for (in essence) seeking to undermine the entire Jewish faith. He was accused of speaking blasphemously against God's law, God's leaders & God's land. Blasphemy (in ancient Israel) was a capital offense... Was any of that true? No. But his words were twisted, false witnesses were hired to bring untrue allegations & accusations. He was misrepresented, lied about, treated unjustly & unfairly.

Yet what we discover w/Stephen is that he wasn't interested defending himself or in personal justification. He was interested in glorifying Jesus & presenting irrefutable clarification that He is in fact, the Messiah.

Vs 1

Just a little interesting side note, this high priest is almost certainly Caiaphas, the same high priest that presided over the trial of Jesus.

We get the impression that there was a bit of stunned silence at the end of Ch 6. There he was being accused of blasphemy, of speaking ill of all the things that Jews held as sacred & holy, yet we read that when they looked eyes on him, his face wasn't aggravated, it was angelic in its countenance. There was a "glory" about him, a peace, a strength & a confidence w/in him.

Here in Ch 7, the high priest breaks the silence & says, "How do you plead?" The question, "Are these things so?" is his way of giving Stephen the floor that he might bring clarification in light of the accusations brought against him. "If you have anything to say for yourself, now's the time."

Now; Jesus said to His disciples, *"But watch out for yourselves, for they will deliver you up to councils, and you will be beaten in the synagogues. You will be brought before rulers and kings for My sake, for a testimony to them."*¹ He was telling them that the day was coming when they would be set before powerful people (rulers & kings) because of their faithfulness to Him, & it would make for the opportunity to share & give witness of Him to them. He went on to say, *"...when they arrest you and deliver you up, do not worry beforehand, or premeditate what you will speak. But whatever is given you in that hour, speak that; for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit."*²

We've already discovered in Acts Ch 6 that Stephen was a man "full of the Holy Spirit" & now he's given the floor. & What does the Spirit lead him to do? To review & highlight the history of the nation, *not* to teach them something as though they're ignorant of the scriptures, but rather to emphasize a particular habit that the leaders of the nation have formed. That they have a pattern of resisting/refusing & *rejecting* God's ordained deliverers the 1st time, but receiving them the 2nd time.

He's also going to remind them that God has never confined Himself to a certain geographical location (like the land of Israel) & that He doesn't dwell in temples made w/hands & that His relationship w/his people has never been based upon the law, but that He had a relationship w/Abraham & all the patriarchs on the basis of grace through faith hundreds of years before the law ever even existed.

Another kind of interesting side note is that this is the longest recorded message in the entire book of Acts. It's not spoken by an apostle, or an elder... Family, God is no respecter of persons, He's simply looking for a heart that will be loyal to Him, to use for His glory.

¹ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Mk 13:9]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

² *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Mk 13:11]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Vs 2-5

Stephen is developing a principle here. A principle that demonstrates that God is One who call us *out of & into...* Out of the *old* & into the *new*. Out of the old life, into a new life w/Him. He called Ab out of where he was (out of Mesopotamia & all the religious implications therein) & into a faith-based relationship w/Him.

& Ultimately the point he's driving them toward is that even as God called Ab out of the old & into the new, He's calling *them* out of the old (Judaism) & into the new as well, a relationship w/Him that's based upon grace through faith in J.C.

Ab did nothing to solicit God's attention. God's calling of him was based solely upon His grace. But He was calling Ab out, into a new walk/relationship w/Him. It had nothing to do w/where he was at (he wasn't in the Promised Land, he was in Babylon). He worshiped God w/out the presence of a tabernacle or a temple & the law didn't even exist. The relationship was one of grace through faith.

But notice in Vs 3 that Ab was instructed to get out of his country & from his relatives. God was calling him to a life separated unto Him, not a life of isolation, but a life of sanctification. Just as He calls out to you & to me & says, "*Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you.*"³ You were at one time *in* the world, but God has called you out *of* the world that you might be set apart to Him. & We're to love Him supremely; above *anything* or *anyone* else.

God told him that He would bring him into a land that He would show him... Now I want to point two things out at this point. #1 Ab believed God, "he (Vs 4) came out of the land of the Chaldeans." He was a man of faith, he believed God, therefore he *obeyed* God. Listen to me, faith (believing God) always leads to obeying God. If I'm not willing to obey God, that testifies of me that I really don't *believe* God. Belief leads to obedience.

So... God was calling Ab out of darkness into light; not because he obeyed the law, not because he was circumcised, not because he worshipped in a temple (all those things were 100's & 100's of yrs later), it was a "by grace through faith" relationship that he experienced & enjoyed.

However; I want you to see this (it's the 2nd thing). Did Ab have "perfect" faith? Did he obey God perfectly? Not at all. To me this is a real encouragement. Abraham (the father of faith) didn't begin as a giant of faith & perfect obedience. It had to be developed in him, God was patient w/him, even as it has to be developed in us & God is patient w/us.

³ [The New King James Version](#). (1982). [2 Co 6:17]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Abraham is an example of one who *grew* in faith and obedience. God told him to get out of his land... Check. He said to come out from his relatives... he didn't do that. He grabbed his father & his nephew Lot & stopped off in Haran. & Notice it wasn't until his father died that God picked up where they'd left off & began to deal w/him again. Ultimately, he had to separate from Lot as well...

Now; Ab's partial obedience didn't annul the promise did it? No. We might say that the promise was "put on hold" until he was ready to obey completely. & I don't know, perhaps there's some of you here today & God has spoken to your heart about something He wants to do *for* you, but it's going to require some measure of obedience *from* you. Truth be told, you haven't obeyed God... & You fear that God has taken away the promise. He would be completely just to do so, wouldn't He? When the Lord says, "If you do 'this' than I'll do ___" & then we don't do what He's instructed us to do, God would be completely just to simply say, "That's fine, than I'm not going to do this for you either." **But generally speaking (I can't speak in terms of absolutes), but generally speaking that's not God's pattern. Generally, our lack of obedience results in God saying, "Ok, we're just going to hit the 'pause' button on the fulfillment of this in your life until you're ready to obey." That's what He did for Ab, He put the promise on hold until He obeyed, separating from his family (his father/nephew) & moving forward as instructed.**

But again, (to belabor the point) Stephen is showing them how it really shouldn't be a surprise to them that God would call us *out of* something of old & *into* something better.

Btw, I hope you're picking up on a pattern as we make our way through the book of Acts & that is this, the people God uses are people who are grounded *in* & have a good working knowledge *of* His word. Stephen *knew* the word of God!

It's not uncommon at all for people to base their faith on "what they think" is true. & You'll hear them say things like, "Well, I don't think God would send anyone to hell." Or, "I don't believe that sex outside of marriage is wrong. How could something that seems so right be so wrong?" On & on it goes, right? But let me just say (w/all due respect), it really doesn't matter what you "think". & To that I would add, it doesn't matter what I think either! What matters is what does God's word say.

When we stand before God, we're not going to be judged based upon our opinion. He's going to hold us to the standard of His word, not our thoughts... & He has shown you, Oh man, what is good & what the Lord requires of you... it's all in His word.

Paul instructed Timothy, *"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work."*⁴ We have a responsibility to know God's word, to believe God's word & to obey God's word... Belief leads to obedience. Ab believed God, He obeyed God (He walked by faith, [Vs 5] even when he had no child & no plot of ground to call his own).

Vs 6-8

So let's take note of the fact that though the ultimate result of the promise would be incredible, not every part along the way would be easy. Yet God tells Ab these things to assure him that He knows how to take care of & protect His people.

Too often we think that because we've given our lives to God that we should be exempt from problems, from pain & tough times. The nation of Israel was put through the fire but God was w/them, able to protect them & fulfill His promise to them. In this world we will have tribulation, but be of good cheer, Christ has overcome the world.

Ok, Stephen takes us from Ab, to Isaac, to Jacob, & it was Jacob (also known as Israel) who had 12 sons who became the patriarchs of the nation.

Vs 9-16

As you can probably see there's a lot in here but what we want to see primarily is the fact that at 1st Joseph was resisted, refused & rejected by his brothers. They delivered him up because of envy (which is exactly what the gospels say of Jesus). They didn't recognize him the 1st time, but the 2nd time, he was revealed to them & they received him as their deliverer.

We see that Stephen continues to emphasize the presence of God w/Joseph throughout all of his life. He didn't need to go to the temple to be close to God, he wasn't in the land of Israel, he was in Egypt, yet God was w/him, giving favor & wisdom to him.

& Joseph is an incredible (obviously inspired) example that Stephen uses because in many ways he's a picture/foreshadowing of Christ in the O.T. He was beloved of his father, he was hated by his brothers, delivered up because of envy, sold for silver, he was humbled as a servant, falsely accused, paid for sins he didn't commit & was exalted to a place of honor (to Pharaoh's right hand, the most powerful throne on earth). He wasn't recognized by his brothers the 1st time but revealed himself to them the 2nd time.

⁴ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (2 Ti 3:16-17). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Having been rejected he took a gentile bride. God took what was meant for evil against him & used it for good to bring salvation to the world (during the worldwide famine).

His story is incredible, you can read of it from about Gen 37 through the end of the book. The one whom God had raised up to save them was despised & rejected, later revealed & received (just as Jesus will be revealed to & received by Israel as well [Zech 12:10, 13:6]).

Vs 17-22

Again we note the faithfulness of God to His word. He'd given Ab a word of prophecy about his descendants & the time was drawing near. The children of Israel had grown from 75 people to around 2 million. So there arose another Pharaoh over Egypt who didn't know Joseph, didn't regard anything Joseph had done for the nation & fearing an uprising he issued a command that all baby boys be aborted, (exposed) put to death...

At this time, Moses was born (no temple, no law, yet pleasing to God). His mother not willing to put him to death actually made a mini ark, covered a basket in pitch, placed it in the reeds of the river. Pharaoh's daughter came to the river to bathe, saw the basket & rescued the baby, raised him as her own (called him Moses). He was given all the perks & privileges of royalty, learned in the best schools, taught from the top military advisors.

Vs 23-29

Are you picking up what Stephen is putting down here? There was a mad man who sought to kill all the male children when Jesus was born as well. But Jesus was rescued. Moses stepped down from all the perks & privileges of royalty, visiting his brethren because of his concern for their bondage, he wanted to free them. Jesus stepped down out of the throne room of heaven, coming to this earth because of His love & compassion for humanity, trapped in the bondage/slavery of sin that He might deliver us.

But when He came to His own, His own did not receive Him, they rejected Him. Said, "Who made You a ruler & a judge over us?" They refused his offer of deliverance. So he went away, while he was gone he took a Gentile bride (even as Jesus took a Gentile bride—the church).

But listen; as our time winds down & wraps up, here's the take away that we are so grateful for & encouraged by. Our God is a God of grace & mercy, who pursues us unrelentingly. We can look at the patriarchs of Israel & say, "How could you reject Joseph like that?"

We can look at the nation trapped in bondage & think, “How could you be so blind to your deliverer?” We can look at Israel’s leaders & go, “Why would you ever reject God’s offer of forgiveness & righteousness by grace through faith in J.C.?” “Why would you refuse to be called out of the old & into the new covenant in Christ?”

But how many of us refused Jesus, resisted Jesus, rejected Jesus... not just once, but perhaps time & time again throughout our lives? But God, in His great love for us, His unwavering pursuit to save us, never gave up on us... Is there a “last call” so to speak? A last time God will make the offer? Sure there is... “When is that?” I don’t know, but it’s altogether possible to die in our sins, to leave this planet having rejected the Savior of the world; even J.C.

Let’s pray & thank God for His unrelenting love, His grace & mercy toward our lives & if you’ve not received His love & forgiveness, then believe on Jesus today, turn from your sin & be reconciled to God, don’t reject Him, receive Him.

Prayer Points:

God we’re so grateful for the fact that You didn’t give up on us. You continued to hold the door open for us, calling us out of death & into life. Out of condemnation (being in bondage to sin) & into salvation (through faith in J.C.). You are the God of 2nd chances, 3rd chances, opportunity again & again, we can’t love You, thank You, or praise You enough. Take our lives, use us for Your glory.

Why reject Him today? If He’s calling you, respond, receive Him... Into your heart, into your life, repent, change your mind about where you’re at & where you need to be. Remember, belief leads to obedience... give your life to J.C.