

## Great Stories of the Bible - 07/10/22

### Stoning of Stephen

**TEXT- Acts 6:1-15** *And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations. Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables.*

**Acts 7:54-60** *When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth. But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God,*

**INTRO – The previous chapters inform us of the tremendous growth of the church since the day of Pentecost.**

The deeply spiritual nature of the church is seen by the Christian communism that developed in it. Men had all things common. With the growth of the church comes problems. Without strong mature believers the system was ineffective. The unity of the church was in danger.

**Murmuring soon developed.** Acts 6:1 *And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations*

It is worthy of note that the first two dangers to the early Church, **hypocrisy and division**, arose from the distribution of its charities.

In the developing argument of the Book of Acts, the sermon and the stoning of Stephen is very significant. It is a transition point, as we can see, marking the end of one era and the beginning of another. It is the end of the “Jerusalem phase” and the beginning of the “Samaritan phase.” Soon, with the conversion of Saul, the gospel will spread to the “**remotest part of the earth.**”

**Acts 11:19** *Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only.*

### I. Stephen's Character

- They showed to whom the work should be committed. They directed the disciples to look out seven men among them.
  - (1) “Of good report”—so that, to begin with, they would receive the approval of everyone. The apostles went upon the principle of never putting a doubtful man into an important office.

- (2) “Full of the Spirit”—so that their godliness might be apparent. Men full of the Spirit would not be likely to do injustice through partiality—or become defaulters.

- (3) “And of wisdom”—so that the funds would be wisely disbursed.

- (4) He “saw the glory of God”

**Stephen** – The first Christian martyr, was the chief of the seven, (commonly called, *Deacons*), appointed to rectify the complaints in the early Church of Jerusalem, made by the Hellenistic against the Hebrew Christians. His Greek name indicates his own Hellenistic origin. His importance is evidenced by the phrases: “*full of faith and of the Holy Ghost,*” Acts 6:5; “*full of grace and power,*” Acts 6:8; irresistible “*spirit and wisdom,*” Acts 6:10; “*full of the Holy Ghost.*” Acts 7:55.

Notice the “**great wonders and miracles that he did.**”

### II. Stephen's Preaching

- A. He recognized the authority of Moses and his lineage
- B. He reminded them of the past behavior of Jewish leaders
- C. He testified of the power of God

**The simplest explanation for the mighty power which Stephen possessed was that the sovereign God had purposed to make him an apostle, in His own time, and in His own way.**

- (1) **This sermon is the longest recorded sermon in the Book of Acts.**

Stephen's sermon is twice as long as Peter's sermon delivered at Pentecost (Acts 2:14-36).

- (2) **The sermon is not a defense but a response to the charges against him.** If anything, Stephen's words are an indictment, not a defense. It is Stephen's answer to the question posed by the chief priest, “**Are these things so?**” (7:1)? The charges leveled against Stephen had to do with “**this holy place**” and the “**customs handed down by Moses.**” These are two of the major themes in Stephen's sermon.

- (3) **Stephen's message is** focused on the coming judgment of God on Israel, Jerusalem, and the temple. The charge against him was that he spoke against “**this holy place.**”

- (4) **Stephen's sermon is Scriptural.** Much of the sermon is a direct quotation of Old Testament texts. Virtually all of the rest of Stephen's words, as recorded in 7:2-50, are Stephen's summation of Scripture. His conclusion was but an application of these Scriptures to his accusers.

- (5) **Stephen's sermon was Spirit-filled. Stephen was described as a man who was “full of the Spirit and of wisdom” (6:3) and also as a man “full of faith and the Holy Spirit” (6:5).** Finally, he was described as “full of



grace and power” (6:8). His opponents were unable to refute the “wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking” (6:10). His face shown like the face of an angel” (6:15). At the time of his death he was said to be “full of the Holy Spirit” (7:55).

**(6) The sermon of Stephen supplies us with some details which the Old Testament does not supply.** For example, Stephen tells us that Moses was “*a man of power in words and deeds*” (7:22).

**(7) In spite of the fact that Stephen’s sermon had a very strong message of divine judgment, it was motivated by a loving and gracious spirit.** Stephen was “full of grace. He was not an “angry young preacher,” He was a man who loved his listeners, who prayed for their forgiveness and salvation. Paul was a delayed answer to this prayer.

**(8) The history of Israel bears out the fact that much of the life of the Jews was spent outside of the land; and, (2) that for all their smug self-righteousness, Israel had always shown themselves to be rebels against Moses and against the Law which was given through him.**

### III. Stephen’s Death

What an illustration we have here of “dying grace.” The death of Stephen can rightly be called, “Spirit-filled dying.” I have heard many speak of being “Spirit-filled,” but few speak of it in the context of death. Stephen’s death, because it was experienced by a “Spirit-filled” man, is a model for all saints to desire to follow in their hour of death.

Stephen repeated almost the same words with which, Jesus had given up his life on the cross, “*O Lord Jesus receive my spirit.*”

He cried “*Lord, lay not this sin to their charge*” and instantly sank upon the ground,

He was buried by Hellenists and proselytes to which he belonged.

**The men laid their clothes at the feet of Saul of Tarsus**

On Sept. 5, 1651, a crowd gathered around the whipping post in Boston to watch the flogging. Obadiah Holmes asked to speak, but Magistrate Increase Nowell refused. Holmes spoke anyway, saying he was about to shed his blood for what he believed. Nowell said it was no time for debate.

“I am to suffer for ... the Word of God and testimony of Jesus Christ,” said Obadiah Holmes. “No, it is for your error and going about to seduce the people,” Nowell said. The two men continued to debate as the executioner tore off Holmes’ clothes. Then the executioner tied him to the whipping post and lashed him 30 times with a three-corded whip. When the whipping ended, a bleeding, panting Obadiah Holmes said, You have struck me as with roses. The whipping left his skin so raw and painful he couldn’t lie down, but rested on his knees and elbows for days.

**CONCL- From the history of Stephen we learn: —**

**Holding to truth provokes antagonism;** holiness and sin are mutually repellent; love and selfishness are the opposites of each other; and sooner or later the followers of the one will come into collision with the other.

Even so the **antagonism of our spiritual adversaries is valuable**, in that it brings forth anew those traits of Christian character and points of Christian doctrine which otherwise would have been unobserved.

**The peacefulness of the believer’s death.** “When he had said this, he fell asleep.” These words tell of the peace that was in the martyr’s heart.

No wonder Stephen, a man who was “**full of faith and the Holy Spirit,**” did not fear death and did not worship the physical temple in Jerusalem. He was a man who “saw” a better temple and whose hope was not earthly. He was free to die, as were the saints of old, because of His faith in God and the promises which were sure to come. May we be more like this great man of old whose life and ministry were short but significant.

Polycarp was a disciple of the Apostle John and an early church leader whose life ended when he refused to betray his Lord. Asked one last time to disavow his Christ, the old man replied, “Eighty and six years have I served Him, and He has done me no wrong. How can I speak evil of my King who saved me?”