

018 - Acts 6:1-15 Encouragement for Us from How Our Lord Worked Through Stephen, One of the Seven

originally preached April 8, 2012 GRBC

revisited 2021-09-26 (after the pastors' conference)

INTRODUCTION

Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is the great example of how we, His disciples, are to live. Often our thoughts return to Him, thinking

-how He prayed to God the Father,

-how He resisted temptation by use of the scriptures,

-how He looked to the scriptures for right answers to difficult questions,

-how He loved sinful people while not joining in any of their sins,

-how He honored His father and mother

-how He labored to keep His human will in line with the will of God

-how He humbled Himself to serve in the role God the Father assigned Him, even going so far as to lay down His life for us sinners

He is our great example, the one we follow all our lives.

In His care for us, our Lord Jesus also has provided us the account, in the Bible, of other men and women from whom we can learn. We read of their doubts and their faith, their sinning and their repentance, God's faithfulness to them through whatever circumstances came their way. Today we take up the history of one of the earliest disciples: Stephen, from whom we can draw direction and encouragement for our lives as the disciples of Jesus Christ.

TEXT

Acts 6:1-15

BODY

Be encouraged today in your service of Jesus Christ our Master, by considering the example of His faithful martyr, Stephen.

I. Be Encouraged By the Power of Stephen's Testimony

A. Stephen's character

1. He had a good reputation (3)
 - a. we don't know exactly what he had a good reputation for
 - b. we could say some of the things that would have been important
 - i. he promptly paid anyone who worked for him
 - ii. he was just and generous to widows and orphans, to strangers, and to the disabled
 - iii. he kept control of his tongue
2. He was full of the Holy Spirit (3)
 - a. his life showed the fruit of the Spirit
 - b. as Barnes and MacArthur, he was highly influenced or controlled by the Spirit
3. He was full of wisdom (3)
4. He was full of faith (5)
5. He was full of grace (8)
6. When a person of this character spoke, what he said had to be taken seriously. His lifestyle, his character endorsed his message.
7. APPLICATION: Understand that this is where the work of the Holy Spirit in us is taking us. See this kind of character as the goal out in front of you, and strive toward that goal.

B. Stephen's miraculous signs (Acts 6:8)

1. Stephen believed in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ; he had been baptized in the name of Jesus; now he had been chosen by the church as one of the seven servants in the church; many of Stephen's fellow Jews doubted or despised these beliefs; but by the Holy Spirit, Stephen did great wonders and signs to prove the truth of what he believed and spoke
 - a. there is never a shortage of people claiming to be speaking a message from God
 - b. so in these early days of Christ's new covenant church, the Holy Spirit enabled the apostles, and some of those they laid their hands on, to perform miraculous signs
 - c. they were signs, and what they signified was the message being preached by the one who did them
 - i. recall how Jesus had said to a lame man, "Your sins are forgiven."
 - ii. to show that it was true there is forgiveness of sins from Jesus, He miraculously made the lame man rise up and walk
 - iii. imagine how hard it would have been to criticize the beliefs of someone who would explain the gospel to you, then heal a blind man!

2. APPLICATION

- a. this kind of thing in the bible leads many people today to wish for miraculous signs to be done, or to be eager to believe those who claim they do them
- b. but the right reaction is to believe and speak what Stephen believed and spoke, not on the basis of miracles done today, but on the basis of miracles done through Stephen; because those miracles were testimony from the Holy Spirit that Stephen's message was true
- c. be encouraged knowing that the gospel you believe about Jesus Christ was shown to be true by miraculous signs done through Stephen

C. Stephen's preaching

- a. some Jews rose up and disputed with Stephen
 - i. from the Synagogue of the Freedmen
 - ii. Cyrenians and Alexandrians
 - iii. those from Cilicia and Asia
- b. they were not able to resist Stephen's message
 - i. it was full of wisdom
 - a. it was factually accurate
 - b. it was true to the scriptures
 - c. it was reasonable
 - ii. it was by the Holy Spirit
 - a. the truth always has something of the power of the Holy Spirit in it
 - b. when the truths contained in the scriptures are put forth, the Holy Spirit never fails to make those truths fulfill the purpose for which He sent them forth
 - c. in this case, it seems the Holy Spirit gave an extra measure of potency to the message Stephen was proclaiming
- c. APPLICATION We sometimes have opportunity to speak to others about Jesus Christ
- d. APPLICATION What do we want in the church? powerful preaching
 - i. pray for this
 - ii. support this

Be encouraged by the power of Stephen's testimony

II. Be Encouraged By the Opposition to Stephen's Ministry

A. People spread lies about him

1. "he blasphemes Moses and God"
2. blaspheme:
 - a. this means literally "speak evil"
 - b. to speak impiously of God
3. it is patently false that Stephen spoke blasphemously of Moses and God

B. They stirred up several groups to oppose him

1. the people (clever that they knew they needed to do this; note how the people did not stop the stoning)
2. the elders
3. the scribes

C. They seized him and brought him to the council

1. this used to seem foreign to us, like something we never would face in this country
2. now it doesn't seem so far away anymore; we are thankful this has not been going on right here where we live; but it sure seems to be encroaching

D. They brought false witnesses to lie about the implications of his doctrines

1. they may have correctly summarized his teachings (14)
 - a. Jesus will destroy this place (temple)
 - b. Jesus will change the customs which Moses delivered to us
2. but they lied about what those teachings amounted to
 - a. they said these things amounted to blasphemy
 - b. but they actually honored God and Moses
3. think about how Stephen would have meant these things
 - a. as to the destruction of the temple: for 1500 years, the tabernacle and the temple have been the place where sinful man can be reconciled to holy God through the sacrifice of innocent blood offered by priests; but a building made of stone cannot really contain God; an offering of animal blood by priests who are themselves sinful can never really atone for people's sins; an atonement cover made of gold sprinkled with blood cannot really hide people's lawbreaking and covenant breaking from God; but now the perfect God-Man, Jesus the Christ has come; in Him all that the temple stood for is made reality; He is the tabernacle and the temple where God really can reside; His is the innocent blood that really can atone for sin; He is the perfect priest who can mediate between sinful man and holy God; He is a cover for the ark of the covenant that truly can hide our lawbreaking from the eyes of God; and so, since all that the temple has stood for is now accomplished in Jesus Christ, the physical building is obsolete; within one generation it will be torn down; and all who insist on worshiping in the temple instead of in Jesus Christ will be destroyed with it; this is not blasphemy against God, or Moses, or the temple, but the highest form of praise to God, and honor to Moses, and glory to the temple!

b. as to the customs delivered by Moses: for these same 1500 years, there had been a long, detailed list of ceremonies that Yahweh had commanded Israel to obey in His worship; they had to go up to the temple three times each year for festivals, extra sabbath days; they had to sacrifice cattle, sheep, goats, birds, wine, and grain on the altar; they had to go to human priests for atonement from sin; they had to wear certain clothes, abstain from certain foods, perform ceremonial washings; and all of this was a burden, that Peter said neither they nor their fathers had been able to bear; but now all that these things represented was fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ; the covenant that required all these things had grown old, had become obsolete, had been superceded by a New Covenant, and was ready to vanish away completely; to declare this is not to blaspheme God, but to praise Him!

E. APPLICATION

1. it is painful to do what is right in the service of Jesus Christ, then have people mad at you about it, to have people even hate you for it
2. to have people tell lies about you because they oppose your service to Jesus Christ is very hurtful
3. take heart! the very best of our Lord's disciples have received this treatment from people around them; remember that our Lord Jesus said

Matthew 5:10-12 Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11 "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. 12 Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Be encouraged by the power of Stephen's testimony

Be encouraged by the opposition to Stephen's ministry

III. Be Encouraged By the Peaceful Expression on Stephen's Face

A. Stephen was called in front of the council because he was proclaiming

1. that the temple was to be destroyed by Jesus Christ
2. the old ceremonies from Moses were abrogated by Jesus Christ

B. The false witnesses characterized Stephen's gospel message as blasphemy

C. He was standing in just the situation Jesus Himself had been in a short time before

D. This is a combination of circumstances that one would think to be very distressing to Stephen

1. he is falsely accused of dishonoring God
2. he is facing likely beating or even death

E. Yet when the council looked on Stephen, his face looked like the face of an angel!

F. Did it miraculously glow like the face of Moses, whom the false witnesses said he was blaspheming? If so, this was a refuting by the Holy Spirit of the false accusation

G. It seems to me that the idea is of peace and calm that so characterized Stephen that his face looked utterly serene; the stories handed down by those who saw angels would have described them as looking eminently peaceful; and here Stephen's face looked just that way

H. APPLICATION

1. Oh, how convicting to me! When pressed by the least persecution or rejection, my face contorts with the anger, disappointment, grief, sadness, or gloom of disappointed self-love!

a. they don't accept my message---woe is me!

b. all others are unfaithful, and I am the only one left---boo hoo!

2. Yet, oh how encouraging to me, seeing another disciple who, in his hour of persecution, conducted himself so much more as is becoming for a disciple of Jesus Christ. Let me instead of all this moaning, have the face of an angel, glowing from near contact with God, figuratively speaking; calm and peaceful from the assurance that the Holy Spirit of Christ is in me, and that my gospel message of Jesus Christ instead of the temple; Jesus Christ instead of old covenant ceremony, is not blasphemy, but the very best kind of good news for sinners!

CONCLUSION

Be encouraged today in your service of Jesus Christ our Master, by considering the example of His faithful martyr, Stephen.

Be encouraged by the power of Stephen's testimony

Be encouraged by the opposition to Stephen's ministry

Be encouraged by the peaceful expression on Stephen's face

Rita - Prelude

Rita - Trinity 437 "Christ, Of All My Hopes the Ground"

Allison - Trinity 734 "Jehovah, My God"

Allison - Trinity 713 "I Am Thine, O Lord"

Dillon - Call to Worship and Opening Prayer - Psalm 7:17

Andrew - Scripture Reading - Isaiah 12:1-6

Stephen - Congregational Prayer

“full of the Holy Spirit”

Barnes:

eminently under the influence of the Holy Spirit

MacArthur:

controlled by

Gill:

the sense is, that Stephen was continually telling the people, that in a little time their temple would be destroyed, and an end be put to temple worship, and to all the rituals and ceremonies of the law of Moses

there was such a calmness and serenity in it, which showed his innocence and unconsciousness of guilt; and such a beauty and glory upon it, that he looked as lovely and amiable as the angels of God, who when they appeared to men, it was in very glorious and splendid forms: his face might shine as Moses's did, when he came down from the mount; or in some degree as Christ's did at his transfiguration; and this might, as it ought to have been, taken as an acquittance of him by God, from the charge of blasphemy, either against God or Moses

JRY:

I find it interesting, and, I suppose, encouraging that we are still opposed today for saying that the temple is destroyed and the law of Moses abrogated.

Scripture Reading: Psalm 27

Confession of Sin: Hebrews 9:13-14

Sermon: The Spirit By Which He Spoke Acts 6:8-15

Benediction: Psalm 27:14

Acts 6:8-15 And Stephen, full of ~~faith~~ grace and power, did great wonders and signs among the people. (9) Then there arose some from what is called the Synagogue of the Freedmen, and of the Cyrenians and Alexandrians, and those from Cilicia and Asia, disputing with Stephen. (10) And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke. (11) Then they secretly induced men to say, "We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God." (12) And they stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes; and they came upon him, seized him, and brought him to the council. (13) They also set up false witnesses who said, "This man does not cease to speak blasphemous 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 change the customs which Moses delivered to us." (15) And all who sat in the council, looking steadfastly at him, saw his face as the face of an angel.