**When All Else Fails:** obtain an unfaltering faith in Christ

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| Date | Place | Acts 6:8-15 | God will fight for you, you need only be still | 30 min |

**BUMPER and Introduction:**

Attn: “Josh, We are living the book of Acts.” – Shannon Popp. Recap my view of baptisms on Sunday. What an honor to be on front lines of God’s great battle for souls
Them: We have been studying Acts; today we will see the heat turned up on one man.

Relv: Why should I care about Stephen? 1. He died for this. You care more about fantasy football, the Bachelor and TV shows – and no one dies. It is at least 10,000x more imp. (2)Killing happening in book of Acts, so this is key to see why they were mad, (3) longest recorded sermon in Acts (nxt wk) and a significant character, so Luke wants you to listen

Struct: **Today I want to look at the passage** and understand it as Luke would have intended for us to read it, and **then we will apply it to our lives**. 2 parts, not layered.

**Prayer and Please turn with me to Acts 6:8-15, found on page \_\_\_\_**

**Explain the Story of Acts 6 –** *Read all 7 verses of 6:8-15*

* **Acts 6:1-7:** The work of the church was growing as the number was growing. The Apostles were committed to **prayer and the Word** so they appointed 7 to care for c.
* **In this chap we see the (1) peace, (2) preaching** and the **(3) death** of Stephen.
* **Mini-series called “Stoned”** b/c in his time they killed by throwing stones for certain sins, one of which was “Blasphemy” of which they were accusing him.

**Who was Stephen?**

* **A Jew that accepted Christ** and was a part of the early Church in Jerusalem.
* **He was one of the first appointed “Deacons”** – the 7 to car for widows & needy
	+ **One of the greatest servants –** “Stephen’s Ministry”. Reminds me of many of you – Pete (Mark Peterson), Mike – loved baptizing, Jerry Nagel, Mr. Korff, etc.
* **Look at 6:5 –** only one of the 7 given a descript. of character. Nicolaus - a statement about being converted, but **S.’s statement gives a glimpse of soul not just status**.
	+ **“Of faith and of the Holy Spirit” –** This made me think of Billy Graham. He was described as having great faith and an anointing of the HS. Same for S.
* **Preached one of the longest sermons we have recorded in the NT** and for sure in the book of Acts. Luke felt it was important for us to know what he said.
* **Saul (later Paul) approved of His death.** and **one of first Christian Martyrs.**
* **He finished well.** They say you know if a person lived well by seeing how they finished—we see Stephen praying to Jesus even as he was being stoned. Powerful.

**IN VS 8 we see he was “Full of Grace and Power” and doing signs and wonders:**

* The idea here that he was **full of grace and power** parallel to the Apostle’s power
	+ Not sure what being “full of grace” meant (no other occurrences), probably that he understood the grace of Christ. He was able to be gracious with other people.
* **Power of God was confirmed in the signs and wonders he did.** Free bible study lesson: whenever we see signs & wonders they are usually to point to the pwr of God
* **Stephen was the first person outside of the Apostles** mentioned to be doing this.
* **Jesus promised** this to them in **Acts 1:8, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”**
* **Stephen fully grasped the promises of Christ and did something with them.** We don’t always do that; rather: Good promise, I will keep trying in my own efforts.

**vv. 9-10 - The Jewish leaders from all over were upset with what he was doing, so they disputed with him but couldn’t win**

* **The synagogue of freedmen** were slaves or prisoners from foreign lands that had been freed and chose to stay committed to the Jewish faith. They (or father’s) were released some 70 years prior from slavery and now roman citizens.
* **Those from Cilicia** may have been from the same Synagogue as Saul.
* **Those from Asia** would also been traveling to Jer. A widespread of Jewish leaders.
	+ **Why I like this detail:** they were all 1st hand witnesses that would go back and tell the story of Stephen and wrk of God to their cities and people. So God!
* **We don’t know the exact conversation or points of conflict** but we can guess that it was about the Law of Moses (define) and the Temple (ref. vs. 13).
* **Vs 10 - No matter the subject, Stephen was making great impact and God was with Him.** His words and they were articulate, spirit-led and laced with wisdom.

Jesus had promised the help of the Holy Spirit in **Luke 12:11-12, “[11] And when they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, do not be anxious about how you should defend yourself or what you should say, [12] for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say.”**

He promised wisdom in **Luke 21:12-15, “[12] But before all this they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name's sake. [13] This will be your opportunity to bear witness. [14] Settle it therefore in your minds not to meditate beforehand how to answer, [15] for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict.”**

**There was no way to win with Stephen**. His case was too strong, so the resulted to tools of manipulation and lies to try to accuse him. **They did the same thing w Christ.**

**vv. 11-14 - The leaders tried to falsely accuse him**

**They hired or wheeled power to get people to say that he was speaking blasphemy against God and Moses**. They probably used this line of attack:

1. **Against Moses because he was proclaiming that JC fulfilled the Law**. Righteousness is not on our own would have sounded crazy/liberal and scandalous.
2. **He challenge the temple order** b/c he was proclaiming “J of Naz destroy and rebuild” (v.14) and this was (1) attacking their believed access to God, (2) their job.
* **Secretly instigated** (*hypoballō*) making false suggestions, putting words someone’s mouth
* **Accused him of “Blasphemy”** — the profane use of Israel’s God. Could be the utterance of his name on the Day of Atonement or some wider senses. They said he used the language of God (Law, temple) in the wrong way by relating it to JC.
* **When the Elders and scribes seized him** I have to wonder if he was scared. Did he realize his life nearing the end? Did he say, *oh this is what JC meant.* How was he feeling?

**VS 13 – I want to point out that Luke called them “False” witnesses.** The use of false witnesses is reminiscent of what happened at Jesus’ trial (Matt. 26:59–60) and confirms Jesus’ prediction that his followers would be persecuted as he was (John 15:18–21).

**DON’T MISS the theological significance that the false witnesses missed (in vs 14):**

* **The temple is the place (OT) where a sacrifice was made so that an unholy people could commune with a holy God.** This was no longer a place, it was now a person!
* **Let’s say that Stephen really was speaking about the temple being destroyed,** he was emphasizing that we now have direct access to God through JC. The destroying and rebuilding was done in JC’s Death and Res. but the dismantling of the temple practices and dependence upon the law was going to be a process. **It required embracing Christ and letting go our own efforts of righteousness.** WE MUST DO THIS TOO!
* **So they were saying “he is speaking against the Holy Place.” NO He is speaking of a holier place – the only means by which we are saved and have access to God.**
	+ **Orthodox Jews walk around in black grieving the temple –** *Cheer up! A greater temple has come! We have access to God with no sacrifice or righteousness on our own. Just believe!*
* **Jesus himself said, “[6] I tell you, something greater than the temple is here. [7] And if you had known what this means, ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the guiltless.” – Matt. 12:6-7**
	+ **JC is quoting** Hosea 6:6, “I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.” – This was God’s heart, the Jews had missed it

**v. 15 - God gave visual proof that God was with him**

* Apparently was **a visible manifestation of the brightness of the glory of God** on Stephen’s face. A gift of God to show his vindication of uprightness in front of all.
* **The face of an angel** is a rare phrase in the NT. This is the description of a person who is close to God and reflects some of his glory as a result of being in his presence
	+ **Exodus 34:29, “[29] 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.”**
* **This had happened to Paul too later in Acts**. Imagine these battered and gauntly looking men now having the face of an angel. Authors’ best way of describing it.

**Lessons for our life**

**When we stand for truth, God is on our side**

* **God is truth**: There are no lies within Him. We must strand for HIS truth in all things—the Gospel of JC. But we must also stand for truth because we know lies are from Satan only, the father of lies. When we stand for truth, we are on God’s side.
* We **must love the world in deed & truth**, 1 Jn 3:18. He give us power, like Stephen
* **Our peace comes by knowing “We belong to truth.”** 1 Jn 3:19, **“By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him; for whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything.”**
* **The HS is our friendly companion to give us the courage, strength, peace and assurance** we need to walk in truth, **“by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us.” – 1 John 3:24**

**THE LORD WILL FIGHT FOR YOU, YOU NEED ONLY BE STILL.** *(ex 14:14)*

* **Stephen was in trouble yet** in vs. vs 10 we are told “**they could not withstand the wisdom and spirit with which he was speaking**” and in vs. 15 that “**his face was like the face of an angel.**”
	+ **He was still and God showed up**. He didn’t panic, freak out, write a frantic wall post, blog post, tweet, or last wishes letter. **He was just still while God worked.**
* **This reminded me of the story in Exodus 14** (tell it). In the midst of their anger at Moses and God, they forgot that God had brought them there. Moses says to them, “God will fight for you, you need only be “Silent” (esv) or “still” (niv).
	+ **I do this too –** I look at the circumstances while shaking a fist at God. Yet the correct response is to believe God is in control and to yearn more for righteousness than the next right step.
	+ **We must stop thinking about what we are going to do next and rather just be righteous and trust that God is on our side.**
* **We do this by prayer, knowing God’s word, relying God’s sovereignty (mercy and grace)** more than our own actions or righteousness. **“Be still and know God.”**

“But Stephen died, so God didn’t protect him.” No, He did use him greatly and the outcome is God’s to determine. **No matter the outcome, God is still God.**

*(communion trans)* **We are given access to God by the temple being destroyed**

* **Remember that the curtain was torn at the crucifixion?** That was a clear sign that there was nothing between God and man. JC gave us direct access to God.
* John the apostle has a vision of heaven in **Revelation 21:22–23, he says, "And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb."**
* Piper on Jesus Destroying the Temple: **“Jesus destroyed the temple the way the rising sun destroys the need for streetlights and headlights. He destroyed the temple the way a descending reality destroys its shadow**.”
* **And so today we have the reality**: JC has come into the world to forgive sins once and for all, to be our go-between forever and ever, and to reveal the glory of God.
* **This is what Stephen died for. May God help us to see it the way he saw it, and cherish Jesus our new temple more than anything in the world.**
* (Speaking of the bread and juice) **this is a meal about cherishing a God who cherished you enough to send his Son so that you could be reconciled.**