

Sunday Morning Message

July 7, 2024

Stephen – A Faithful Ambassador for Christ

Text – Acts 6:8 – 7:60

Congregational Reading – Acts 7:54 - 60

Introduction

"Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God." (2 Corinthians 5:20)

Believers are called by the Lord to represent Him as His ambassador. We are supposed to do what Jesus would do, be what Jesus wants us to be, and say what Jesus wants us to say. Here, in the remainder of chapter six and continuing all the way through chapter seven, we read about a man who was exactly what the Lord wanted, and he started out as one of the faithful deacons selected by the congregation at Jerusalem in the beginning of the chapter. He is described in these verses as being full of the Holy Ghost (Acts 6:3), full of faith and power (Acts 6:8).

The account of the execution of Stephen in the Bible bears a striking resemblance to that of the Lord Jesus Christ in that:

- 1 he was falsely accused
- 2 he was unjustly convicted
- 3 he forgave those that persecuted him

I. The Accusation (6:8 – 15)

V. 9 - Notice that these religious leaders were from a synagogue that was made up of Jews from outside of Judaea. It included "Libertines" (Λιβερτίνων from Λιβερτίνος – libertinos) or liberated or freed men. These were Jews who were descendants from Roman slaves, apparently conquered by Pompeii in 63 B.C. but had somehow received their freedom. This synagogue also included men from northern Africa, and from Asia Minor. Cilicia is the region that Saul of Tarsus came from.

V. 10 – They could not resist his wisdom. What he said made sense to them; it agreed with the Scriptures, and it was in accordance with the Old Testament prophets. The Holy Spirit was backing up what Stephen was saying and was convincing these people that Stephen

was right, and that they were wrong.

Vs. 11 - 13 – Because they could not win in an argument of the facts, they cheated. They “**suborned**” (ὑπέβαλον from ὑποβάλλω – *hypoballō*) men, meaning they coerced them, induced them, or even bribed them to say what they wanted them to. They also “**stirred up**” (v. 12), and “**set up**” false witnesses.

They bring him to the “Council” – the Sanhedren, which was made up of Sadducees and Pharisees, and was the ruling body of elders in Judaism.

Vs. 13 – 14 - Notice that Stephen was falsely accused. Jesus was falsely accused also:

"Now the chief priests, and elders, and all the council, sought false witness against Jesus, to put him to death; But found none: yea, though many false witnesses came, yet found they none. At the last came two false witnesses, And said, This fellow said, I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days. And the high priest arose, and said unto him, Answerest thou nothing? what is it which these witness against thee? But Jesus held his peace. And the high priest answered and said unto him, I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God." - (Matthew 26:59-63)

The Apostle Paul was falsely accused:

"And when the seven days were almost ended, the Jews which were of Asia, when they saw him in the temple, stirred up all the people, and laid hands on him, Crying out, Men of Israel, help: This is the man, that teacheth all men every where against the people, and the law, and this place: and further brought Greeks also into the temple, and hath polluted this holy place. (For they had seen before with him in the city Trophimus an Ephesian, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple.)" - (Acts 21:27-29)

V. 15 – Notice that Stephen’s appearance was even transformed as Moses’ was when he came down from the presence of God in Mt. Sinai (Exodus 34:29 – 35). It is interesting that he is being accused of speaking against Moses and against the Law, but here we see that God is testifying through Stephen’s face that he is like Moses.

II. The Defense (7:1 – 53)

Stephen did not answer the accusations. He did not defend himself. He preached the Bible to them. His message was a message designed to convince the people of God that they have a history of rejecting the messengers that God has sent them.

His message title could have been - “As Your Fathers Did, So Do Ye”. This message was completely designed to point out the sin of God’s people. Compare this to the messages we are hearing today in many churches.

The two elements found in this message that are absent in many of our churches today are:

1. The Bible

"I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry." - (2 Timothy 4:1-5)

2. Sin – the passage that we just read said that preaching is to reprove and rebuke. That means that the preacher must be willing to use Bible passages that specifically deal with the sins that are being committed within the congregation.

John the Baptist spoke out against the sin of King Herod in his adulterous relationship with Herod’s brother, Philip’s, wife.

Paul spoke out against the sin of a man in Corinth - [Turn to 1 Corinthian 5](#)

Here in our text, Stephen is pointing out that these religious leaders of Israel have rejected the very Messiah sent from God that they had been praying for and waiting for.

III. The Sentence (7:54 – 60)

Stephen never got the chance to finish his defense. Had he gotten the opportunity to finish his sermon, he may have pleaded for them to repent and turn to the Lord.

The people were so overcome with conviction that they became very angry. They actually “gnashed” (ἔβρουχον from βρύχω – brychō, meaning “to bite,” or at the least were “gritting” their teeth)

The same thing happened back in Acts 5:

"Then the high priest rose up, and all they that were with him, (which is the sect of the

Sadducees,) and were filled with indignation," - (Acts 5:17)

Anger is an indication that the Word of God and the Spirit of God are moving in the hearts of the hearers. Anger is a work of the flesh. It is the flesh's attempt to revolt against the Spirit of God.

Sorrow is another result from conviction. When it comes to preaching against sin, anger may lead to sorrow, and sorrow can bring about repentance.

"For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death." - (2 Corinthians 7:10)

If repentance never comes, however, judgment will come:

"And the word of the LORD came unto Zechariah, saying, Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, Execute true judgment, and shew mercy and compassions every man to his brother: And oppress not the widow, nor the fatherless, the stranger, nor the poor; and let none of you imagine evil against his brother in your heart. But they refused to hearken, and pulled away the shoulder, and stopped their ears, that they should not hear. Yea, they made their hearts as an adamant stone, lest they should hear the law, and the words which the LORD of hosts hath sent in his spirit by the former prophets: therefore came a great wrath from the LORD of hosts. Therefore it is come to pass, that as he cried, and they would not hear; so they cried, and I would not hear, saith the LORD of hosts: But I scattered them with a whirlwind among all the nations whom they knew not. Thus the land was desolate after them, that no man passed through nor returned: for they laid the pleasant land desolate." - (Zechariah 7:8-14)

Notice, however, that as strong as the preaching was, Stephen's love for these people is clearly demonstrated by his reaction to them.

Stephen's prayer for forgiveness is just like what Jesus prayed:

"Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment, and cast lots." - (Luke 23:34)

Notice the contrast here between Stephen and his accusers. He is full of peace, love, and forgiveness for his enemies. They are full of anger, bitterness, and hatred. Stephen was completely controlled by the Holy Spirit of God, and these religious leaders are completely out of control.

Concluding Thoughts

1. Stephen faithfully completed the tasks that God had given him as a deacon.
2. Stephen fearlessly defended his faith in Christ to an antagonistic group of religious leaders who should have known better.
3. Stephen fortunately got to see a glimpse of his Savior while still dealing with his enemies on earth, and then he went to be with Him in Heaven.

He fell asleep, meaning he died, and when he died, his spirit was taken immediately to Heaven.

"6 Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord: 7 (For we walk by faith, not by sight:) 8 We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord." (2 Corinthians 5:6-8)

4. Stephen famously introduced Christ to a young man named Saul.

Illustration – Stephen was taken from the earth as a young man. He had plenty of life left in him when he died, but God had other plans:

In 1948, Aucas martyr Jim Elliot wrote in his journal, "I seek not a long life, but a full one, like You, Lord Jesus." Two years later, he wrote: "I must not think it strange if God takes in youth those whom I would have kept on earth till they were older. God is peopling Eternity, and I must not restrict Him to old men and women."

Like Stephen, Jim Elliot and his four comrades were called on January 8, 1956, to "people Eternity" as they were slain by the people they were seeking to reach. What has happened to the Aucas since then is proof that the blood of the martyrs is indeed the seed of the church. Many Aucas are now Christians.

"Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life" (Rev. 2:10).¹

¹ Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 433.