

Are we Willing to Die for Jesus?

Acts 6:8-8:3

January 19, 2020

Acts Series: Taking the Message of Jesus' Kingdom Everywhere

⁸ Now Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, performed great wonders and signs among the people. ⁹ Opposition arose, however, from members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called)—Jews of Cyrene and Alexandria as well as the provinces of Cilicia and Asia—who began to argue with Stephen. ¹⁰ But they could not stand up against the wisdom the Spirit gave him as he spoke.

¹¹ Then they secretly persuaded some men to say, "We have heard Stephen speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God."

¹² So they stirred up the people and the elders and the teachers of the law. They seized Stephen and brought him before the Sanhedrin. ¹³ They produced false witnesses, who testified, "This fellow never stops speaking against this holy place and against the law. ¹⁴ For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs Moses handed down to us."

¹⁵ All who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel.



⁵⁴ When the members of the Sanhedrin heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. ⁵⁵ But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. ⁵⁶ "Look," he said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."

⁵⁷ At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, ⁵⁸ dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul.

⁵⁹ While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." ⁶⁰ Then he fell on his knees and cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he fell asleep.

8 And Saul approved of their killing him.

On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.

² Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. ³ But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison. ¹

¹ *The New International Version*. (2011): Zondervan.

1. God's Approval of Stephen

Acts 6:8-15

*"Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power,
performed great miracles and signs among the people."* Verse 8

A. God's Sign of Approval

Acts 6:8

There are early signs of approval

Great wonders not just ordinary wonders

B. The Response of Others

Acts 6:9, 10

Spirit and Wisdom

Cilicians give us a hint about a guy from that area (Saul/Paul)

The Gospel is annoying; because God is right and we are not

C. The Tactic of Deceit

Acts 6:12-15

If you can't beat'em cheat'em

2. Israel's Rejection of God

Acts 7:1-54

*You stiff-necked people! Your hearts and ears are still uncircumcised.
You are just like your ancestors: You always resist the Holy Spirit!* Acts 7:53

A. Violations of Temple and Law (Acts 6:13, 14)

Acts 7:1

Stephen is to defend those two points

B. God blesses outside of Israel and before Temple

Acts 7:2-50

Examples of disobedience to God are abundant

Temple/Tabernacle doesn't arrive until Acts 7:44-50

C. The Minor Conclusion

Acts 7:51, 52

God is not tied to a location or building

Acts 7:48

Our Ancestors refuse to obey

Acts 7:52

D. The Major Conclusion

Acts 7:52, 53

You killed the true temple (Jesus)

Acts 7:52

You do not obey the law

Acts 7:53

E. The Response

Acts 7:54

Polite applause and 'Good sermon today pastor'

3. Stephen: Rejected or Accepted?

Acts 7:55-8:3

"Look," he said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."

Acts 7:56

A. An Unfinished Sermon?

Acts 7:55-57

A bold vision of Jesus (Christology)

What would the invitation, challenge be?

God is prepared to forgive such behaviour if you recognize Jesus as your messiah and Saviour. Repent of your sins and be saved!

Not killed for having the longest sermon in the Acts

B. What would make us think that God is rejecting Stephen?

Stephen died

Believers are dispersed

Believers are detained

C. How do we know Stephen is accepted?

Doorway to Heaven and his vision of Jesus

Stephen's character reflects the character of Jesus

We meet a new character: Saul/Paul who God will transform

Are we willing to die for Jesus?

This is a question of trust and commitment to Him

This is an understanding that His will prevails over my service

Too many times we look to what Jesus will do for us rather than what we will do for Him

What attributes of Jesus are evident in our lives?

Study Questions

For your personal study or with family, a friend, mentor or Life Group

Beginning:

1. What insight, idea, question or principle from Sunday's message did you find most helpful, eye opening or troubling?
2. What are the things people are most passionate about?

Learning:

3. Read Matthew 16:21; 26:61; 27:40; Mark 14:58; 15:29; John 2:19 and Acts 6:14. There are two ideas related to 'temple', one a physical place of worship and the second is Jesus himself. What is Stephen doing with these two definitions in Acts 7?
4. Acts 7:54 prompts an immediate and extreme response. Read Luke 22:69; Daniel 7:13–14 and Acts 2:33–35; 5:31 to link the 'Son of Man' to Jesus. For Jesus to be in a favoured spot beside God would require an admission of guilt by the Sanhedrin for their death plots against Jesus.
5. Stephen's prayer 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit,' not only affirms Jesus as his "Lord," It also echoes Jesus Prayer in Luke 23:46. The prayer for the killers reflects Luke 6:27–28 and Luke 23:34. Check out other attributes of Stephen that reflect the transformation of the Spirit in him: Acts 6:3, 5, 8, 10, 15; 7: 55, 56, 59, 60; and even 8:2. What attributes would you like to see take root in your life?
6. Take a peek at a new guy in town: Acts 8:3; Galatians 1:13; and Philippians 3:6. Stephen dies for Jesus. This will impact the new guy.

Applying:

7. Look at Luke 21:15 and how this promise is kept for Stephen in Acts 7. How does this give us confidence in the face of open hostility toward our faith?
8. Thinking about death does not always come easy for us. What makes death unbearable? What makes death hopeful? 1 Corinthians 15:54-58

Praying:

9. Pray that you would increase in the attributes of Jesus in your life. Pray that if required you would be able to suffer or die for your faith.

Mentoring: Stephen dies expressing his faith in Jesus. While we may not be killed for our faith, when our time comes how could we die in such a way that honours Jesus and reflects our faith in him? Luke 9:23–26 is a call to discipleship that calls us to put Jesus first and that suffering is a part of discipleship and it draws us nearer to Jesus. This level of commitment is part of what makes our service to Him more effective. We do not avoid pain to serve Jesus we know pain may be part of our calling. Share where you have suffered loss to serve Jesus. Ponder your willingness to embrace adversity in order to faithfully discharge your service to Jesus. Who would you be willing to die for that they might come to faith in Christ?