

Acts 6: 8

8 And Stephen, full of grace and power, was performing great wonders and signs among the people. 9 But some men from what was called the Synagogue of the Freedmen, including both Cyrenians and Alexandrians, and some from Cilicia and Asia, rose up and argued with Stephen. 10 But they were unable to cope with the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking. 11 Then they secretly induced men to say, "We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God." 12 And they stirred up the people, the elders and the scribes, and they came up to him and dragged him away and brought him before the Council. 13 They put forward false witnesses who said, "This man incessantly speaks against this holy place and the Law; 14 for we have heard him say that this Nazarene, Jesus, will destroy this place and alter the customs which Moses handed down to us." 15 And fixing their gaze on him, all who were sitting in the Council saw his face like the face of an angel.

There are two words for "crown" in the New Testament. The first is the word "Diadema" which means royal crown and gives us the English word diadem. The second word for crown is "Stephanos" which means the victor's crown and we get our popular name Stephen from that word. You can inherit a diadema, but you must earn a stephanos.

Our study this morning of the life and ministry of Stephen will clearly show us why a stephanos is a crown worthy to be earned.

Last week we saw that the apostles asked 7 men be selected from the followers of Jesus who had 3 characteristics to deal with a problem that had developed within the church. Those characteristics were:

1. Men with Good Reputations
2. Men full of the Holy Spirit
3. Men full of Wisdom

One of the men chosen was Stephen. He was a Spirit-filled believer who we will see had a profound impact on the church. Notice in verse 10 it says,

10 But they (that is the unbelieving Jews) were unable to cope with the wisdom and the Spirit with which he (Stephen) was speaking.

So what do they do? Look at verse 11.

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

Was any of this true?

Look what happens.

12 And they stirred up the people, the elders and the scribes, and they came up to him and dragged him away and brought him before the Council. 13 They put forward false witnesses who said, "This man incessantly speaks against this holy place and the Law; 14 for we have heard him say that this Nazarene, Jesus, will destroy this place and alter the customs which Moses handed down to us." 15 And fixing their gaze on him, all who were sitting in the Council saw his face like the face of an angel.

Notice that the treatment of Stephen parallels the way that Jesus was treated. First, they hired false witnesses to testify against him. Then they stirred up the people who accused him of attacking the Law and the temple. Finally, after listening to his witness, we will see that they will execute him.

I love verse 15. It says his face was like the face of an angel. Did you ever walk up to a person and without even speaking to them, just by looking at them, you knew they were a Christian?

I have had that experience. They had a certain glow about them. Most Christians look like they have indigestion or some gastrointestinal bug.

But Stephen's face glowed with the love of the Lord. Who else in Scripture had a face that glowed?

Remember when Moses came down from the mountain? The Bible says his face also glowed because he had been with God. I wonder if the Sanhedrin made the connection. It was as if God was saying, "This man is not against Moses! He is like Moses – look at his face!"

In verse 1 of Chapter 7, the High Priest asks a question.

Acts 7

1 The high priest said, "Are these things so?"

When will these guys learn not to ask the accused questions?

Chapter 7 is a perfect chapter to study for those of you who have been faithfully reading all 66 in 06. Because Stephen's sermon has been called the Old Testament in one chapter by some.

Stephen reviews the history of Israel from Abraham through Solomon. But the sermon was more than a recitation of familiar facts; it was a refutation of their indictments against Stephen and a revelation of their own sins.

<TABLE EXERCISE – READ CHAPTER 7: 1 - 50>

The climax of Stephen's address cuts the hearts of his accusers. Follow along as I read verse 51 to the end.

51 You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing just as your fathers did. 52 Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? They killed those who had previously announced the coming of the righteous one, whose betrayers and murderers you have now become; 53 you who received the law as ordained by angels, and yet did not keep it."

What exactly was Stephen accusing them of?

He was saying that they were responsible for killing their own Messiah! What do you think their reaction might have been to this?

54 Now when they heard this, they were cut to the quick, and they began gnashing their teeth at him.

Literally, they began to act like animals they were so angry. Can you picture it?

Verse 55 continues.

55 But being full of the Holy Spirit, he gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; 56 and he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." 57 But they cried out with a loud voice, and covered their ears and rushed at him with one impulse. 58 When they had driven him out of the city, they began stoning him; and the witnesses laid aside their robes at the feet of a young man named Saul. 59 They went on stoning Stephen as he called on the Lord and said, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!" 60 Then falling on his knees, he cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them!" Having said this, he fell asleep.

For the Jews, what do you think the death of Stephen represented?

For the believers, what do you think the death of Stephen represented?

It was the beginning of the persecuted church which would drive the believers in all directions. What would the effect of this ultimately be?

But it was painful. Whenever I read the story of Stephen, I think about the story of Jim Elliot and his four comrades who on January 8, 1956 were also killed by the people he was trying to reach for Christ. His famous quote was, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose." What has happened to the Aucas since Jim Elliot was killed? Many of them are now Christians and followers of Jesus Christ.

Did you notice in verse 58 who was the witness to Stephen's death?

It was Saul who later became the apostle Paul. I'm sure he never forgot what he had seen that day. And I am equally sure that Stephen was a willing servant to give up what he could not keep to gain that which he could not lose.

The death of a saint is an incredible thing. The Bible says in Ps 116:15 "Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of His godly ones.

And when a loved one dies, we don't grieve as those who have no hope. I'd like to close this morning with one of my favorite stories. It is the story of a home coming.

John Todd was born in Rutland, Vermont. His family later moved to the village of Killingsworth and there at a very early age, John had both his mother and his father die leaving the 6 children with no one to take care of them. The relatives wondered what to do, and they decided to parcel them out to various friends and family members. One dear and loving aunt took John.

Charles Alan tells the moving story of the trip and subsequent events that transpired on the trip that this 7 year old boy took on the night he was to go to live, forever separated from his family, with his aunt.

A servant was sent on a horse to pick up John one evening. John sat up on the horse and rode with the servant. The following conversation took place.

It was nightfall, and John said, "Will she be there?"

Ah, yeah - she'll be there waitin' up for ya.

Will I like living with her?

My son, you've fallen into good hands.

Will she love me?

Oh, she has a big heart.

Will I have my own room, will she let me keep a puppy?

She's got everything all set, son, she even has some surprises for ya. You see, when we get out of these here woods, you'll see her candle in the window.

Sure enough, out in the clearing, there was a candle in the window, and there stood that dear woman in the doorway. She reached up, and lifted that tired and bewildered little lad down from the horse and hugged and kissed him and said, "Welcome home, John." Inside there was a big fire burning in the fireplace and a hot supper on the stove. He ate a little and she carried him into his new room and sat beside him until he fell asleep.

John Todd grew up to be a great minister of the gospel. But it was there with his aunt that he grew up. It was always a place of enchantment for him. It awed him that such a replacement for him existed. He left a house of death and she had given him a second home.

Years later, long after he had moved away, the now aging aunt, sometimes losing her memory, wrote a letter to John to tell him that death was near and in the letter she wondered what was to become of her. This is what he wrote to her.

My dear aunt,

Years ago, when I was a boy, I left a house of death, not knowing what was to become of me or where I was to go. I didn't know whether anyone cared or whether it was the end for me. The ride was long and the servant was encouraging. Finally, he pointed out your candle to me and there we were, in the yard and there you stood, embracing me and taking me by the hand into my own room that you had made up for me. Even after all these years, I still can't believe it. You did all that for me, I was expected, and I felt so welcomed and safe in that room. It was my room.

Now it's your turn to go and as one who has tried it out, I want to let you know someone is waiting up for you. Your room is all ready, the light is on, and the door is open. As you ride into the yard, don't worry aunty, you are expected. I know. I once saw God standing in your doorway, long ago.

Table Leaders Guide. Leaders, **PLEASE FOLLOW THIS FORMAT.**

SAY to the Group:

“Stephen begins his sermon with the history of Abraham. Would someone read verses 2 through verse 8 for us?”

Let someone at the table read the following:

2 and he said, "Hear me, brethren and fathers! The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran, 3 and said to him, 'Leave your country and your relatives, and come into the land that I will show you.' 4 Then he left the land of the Chaldeans and settled in Haran. From there, after his father died, God had him move to this country in which you are now living. 5 but he gave him no inheritance in it, not even a foot of ground, and yet, even when he had no child, he promised that he would give it to him as a possession, and to his descendants after him. 6 but God spoke to this effect, that his descendants would be aliens in a foreign land, and that they would be enslaved and mistreated for four hundred years. 7 'And whatever nation to which they will be in bondage I myself will judge,' said God, 'and after that they will come out and serve me in this place.' 8 and He gave him the covenant of circumcision; and so Abraham became the father of Isaac, and circumcised him on the eighth day; and Isaac became the father of Jacob, and Jacob of the twelve patriarchs.

SAY:

Thank you. The Jews greatly revered Abraham and prided themselves in being his children. But they confused being his physical descendants with being his spiritual descendants. Next we read about Joseph. Would someone else read verses 9 through 16?

Let someone else at the table read the following:

9 The patriarchs became jealous of Joseph and sold him into Egypt. Yet God was with him, 10 and rescued him from all his afflictions, and granted him favor and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and he made him governor over Egypt and all his household.

11 Now a famine came over all Egypt and Canaan, and great affliction with it, and our fathers could find no food. 12 But when Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent our fathers there the first time. 13 On the second visit Joseph made himself known to his brothers, and Joseph's family was disclosed to Pharaoh. 14 Then Joseph sent word and invited Jacob his father and all his relatives to come to him, seventy-five persons in all. 15 And Jacob went down to Egypt and there he and our fathers died. 16 From there they were removed to Shechem and laid in the tomb which Abraham had purchased for a sum of money from the sons of Hamor in Shechem.

SAY:

Stephen points out to the Jews that Joseph was not recognized the first time the brothers came to visit. It was the second visit when the brothers bowed down to Joseph. Likewise Israel rejected Jesus when He came to them the first time but when He comes again, they will recognize Him and receive Him as King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Next, we learn about Moses. Would someone read verses 17 through 44?

Let a different reader at the table read the following:

17 But as the time of the promise was approaching which God had assured to Abraham, the people increased and multiplied in Egypt, 18 until there arose another king over Egypt who knew nothing about Joseph. 19 It was he who took shrewd advantage of our race and mistreated our fathers so that they would expose their infants and they would not survive. 20 It was at this time that Moses was born; and he was lovely in the sight of God, and he was nurtured three months in his father's home. 21 And after he had been set outside, Pharaoh's daughter took him away and nurtured him as her own son. 22 Moses was educated in all the learning of the Egyptians, and he was a man of power in words and deeds. 23 But when he was approaching the age of forty, it entered his mind to visit his brethren, the sons of Israel. 24 And when he saw one of them being treated unjustly, he defended him and took vengeance for the oppressed by striking down the Egyptian. 25 And he supposed that his brethren

understood that God was granting them deliverance through him, but they did not understand. 26 On the following day he appeared to them as they were fighting together, and he tried to reconcile them in peace, saying, 'Men, you are brethren, why do you injure one another?' 27 But the one who was injuring his neighbor pushed him away, saying, 'Who made you a ruler and judge over us? 28 You do not mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday, do you?' 29 At this remark, Moses fled and became an alien in the land of Midian, where he became the father of two sons. 30 After forty years had passed, an angel appeared to him in the wilderness of Mount Sinai, in the flame of a burning thorn bush. 31 When Moses saw it, he marveled at the sight; and as he approached to look more closely, there came the voice of the Lord: 32 'I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob.' Moses shook with fear and would not venture to look. 33 But the Lord said to him, 'Take off the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground. 34 I have certainly seen the oppression of My people in Egypt and have heard their groans, and I have come down to rescue them; come now, and I will send you to Egypt.' 35 This Moses whom they disowned, saying, 'Who made you a ruler and a judge?' is the one whom God sent to be both a ruler and a deliverer with the help of the angel who appeared to him in the thorn bush. 36 This man led them out, performing wonders and signs in the land of Egypt and in the Red Sea and in the wilderness for forty years. 37 This is the Moses who said to the sons of Israel, 'God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brethren.' 38 This is the one who was in the congregation in the wilderness together with the angel who was speaking to him on Mount Sinai, and who was with our fathers; and he received living oracles to pass on to you. 39 Our fathers were unwilling to be obedient to him, but repudiated him and in their hearts turned back to Egypt, 40 saying to Aaron, 'Make for us gods who will go before us; for this Moses who led us out of the land of Egypt — we do not know what happened to him.' 41 At that time they made a calf and brought a sacrifice to the idol, and were rejoicing in the works of their hands. 42 But God turned away and delivered them up to serve the host of heaven; as it is written in the book of the prophets, 'It was not to me that you offered victims and sacrifices forty years in the wilderness, was it, O house of Israel? 43 You also took along the tabernacle of Moloch and the Star of the god Rompha, the images which you made to worship. I also will remove you beyond Babylon.'

44 Our fathers had the tabernacle of testimony in the wilderness, just as he who spoke to Moses directed him to make it according to the pattern which he had seen.

SAY:

The charges against Stephen were that he broke the Law of Moses but the truth was that the Jews through their history had turned their backs on God and continually broke the Law God had given to Moses. Stephen was pointing that out very simply and very clearly.

Stephen finishes his message by quoting the prophets in a strongly worded indictment of his accusers. Would someone read verse 45 through 51?

Let a different reader at the table read the following:

45 And having received it in their turn, our fathers brought it in with Joshua upon dispossessing the nations whom God drove out before our fathers, until the time of David. 46 David found favor in God's sight, and asked that he might find a dwelling place for the God of Jacob. 47 But it was Solomon who built a house for him. 48 However, the Most High does not dwell in houses made by human hands; as the prophet says: 49 "Heaven is my throne, and earth is the footstool of my feet; what kind of house will you build for me?" says the Lord, 'or what place is there for my repose?' 50 'Was it not my hand which made all these things?'

SAY:

Stephen points out that had the nation heeded their own prophets, they would have escaped the horrors of the Babylonian siege and the destruction of their city and temple. He points out that even Solomon recognized the truth that God did not live in buildings.

DISCUSS:

1. Why do you think Stephen went through this history lesson?
2. Knowing that confronting the Jews would cause Stephen personal life and possibly even his life, why do you suppose he was willing to

risk everything? Do you think he thought they would repent? Or were there other reasons?