

*Acts: The Spirit, the Church and the Spread of God's Word*

## **The First Christian Martyr**

**Acts 6:7 – 8:4**

*Grace Fellowship Church, Pastor Brad Bigney, July 21, 2019*

### **I. The Word of God Has Always Been Spread by the People of God**

**Acts 6:7-8, 10** “Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith. And Stephen, full of grace and power, did great wonder and signs among the people... And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke.”

**Acts 1:8** “... you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

Stephen's sermon, that looked like a failure, launched the spread of the Gospel all over the world.

### **II. The People of God Don't Always Get to See the Power of God at Work through His Word**

#### **A. Even If You Win a Debate You Might Still Lose the Crowd**

**Acts 6:10** “And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke.”

**Acts 6:12** “And they stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes; and they came upon him, seized him, and brought him to the council.”

You can win a debate and still lose the crowd because the crowd by nature does not want to accept the message of God's Word.

#### **B. When They Cannot Refute the Truth of God's Word They'll Sometimes Twist the Words of God's People**

**Acts 6:13-14** “They also set up false witnesses who said, ‘This man does not cease to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the law; for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs which Moses delivered to us.’”

They were twisting and misunderstanding what Jesus meant and what Stephen meant. Stephen was not against the temple or the law, but was simply proclaiming the fulfillment of it all in our Savior, Jesus.

### C. Even When They're Convicted by God's Word They Sometimes Just Lash Out at God's People

**Acts 7:54, 57** "When they heard these things they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with their teeth... Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord."

They react violently because this message dismantles their worldview and displaces their authority - which makes them feel undone, terrified and infuriated.

**Matthew 27:23** "... But they cried out all the more, saying, 'Let Him be crucified!'"

### D. What Looks like Failure and Loss to Us is often What God Uses to Launch a Revival for Him

Stephen's death is a pivotal point in the book of Acts because it led to an explosion of life. However, it did not look like it on the day that he died.

**Acts 8:3** "As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison."

**Acts 8:1** "... At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria..."

**Acts 1:8** "... and you shall be My witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

God is going to do through us what He's called us to do... But He often does it in ways that we would never choose.

**Acts 11:19** "Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch..."

**Acts 7:58** "... And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul."

**Acts 8:1** "Now Saul was consenting to his death..."

Although Stephen saw no converts on the day he died, his powerful sermon planted a seed of truth in Saul that God used to transform him and then rock the world with this Gospel message!

Don't ever judge the success of what God's called you to do by the immediate fruit you can see on the day you do it.

**III. While the World Might Reject Us Our Savior Accepts Us and Stands Ready to Receive Us into His Glory!**

**Acts 7:55-56** “But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and said, ‘Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!’”

**Mark 14:62** “I AM; and you shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power, and coming with the clouds of heaven”

To know that your Savior is at the right hand of the Father and is for you—regardless of who or what is against you—should be a great comfort to every one of us.

**See Romans 8:31-39**

Stephen is not the real hero in the book of Acts or in the Bible. He is simply following the example of our Savior Jesus.

Only Jesus, through his death, has purchased for us freedom and forgiveness of our sins so that we can be made right with the God of the universe!