

Foothills Christian Assembly Sermon October 23, 2022

Acts 6: 8 – 15 "The Face of an Angel"

1 Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. 2 Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. 3 "Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; 4 "but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word." 5 And the saying pleased the whole multitude. And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch, 6 whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them. 7 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.

8 And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people. 9 Then there arose some from what is called the Synagogue of the Freedmen (Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and those from Cilicia and Asia), disputing with Stephen. 10 And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke. 11 Then they secretly induced men to say, "We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God." 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. 13 They also set up false witnesses who said, "This man does not cease to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the law; 14 "for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs which Moses delivered to us." 15 And all who sat in the council, looking steadfastly at him, saw his face as the face of an angel.

1 Then the high priest said, "Are these things so?" 2 And he said, "Brethren and fathers, listen: The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Haran, 3 "and said to him, 'Get out of your country and from your relatives, and come to a land that I will show you.' 4 "Then he came out of the land of the Chaldeans and dwelt in Haran. And from there, when his father was dead, He moved him to this land in which you now dwell. 5 "And God gave him no inheritance in it, not even enough to set his foot on. But even when Abraham had no child, He promised to give it to him for a possession, and to his descendants after him. 6 "But God spoke in this way: that his descendants would dwell in a foreign land, and that they would bring them into bondage and oppress them four hundred years. 7 'And the nation to whom they will be in bondage I will judge,' said God, 'and after that they shall come out and serve Me in this place.' 8 "Then He gave him the covenant of circumcision; and so Abraham begot Isaac and circumcised him on the eighth day; and Isaac begot Jacob, and Jacob begot the twelve patriarchs.

## I. Introduction

- a. "...there was a miraculous splendor and brightness upon his countenance, like that of our Savior when he was transfigured—or, at least, that of Moses when he came down from the mount—God designing thereby to put honor upon his faithful witness and confusion upon his persecutors and judges, whose sin would be highly aggravated, and would be indeed a rebellion against the light, if, notwithstanding this, they proceeded against him. Whether he himself knew that the skin of his face shone or no we are not told; but *all that sat in the council saw it*, and probably took notice of it to one another, and an utter shame it was that when they saw, and could not but see by it that he was owned of God, they did not call him from standing at the bar to sit in the chief seat upon the bench. Wisdom and holiness make a man's face to shine, and yet these will not secure men from the greatest indignities; and no wonder, when the shining of Stephen's face could not be his protection; though it had been easy to prove that if he had been guilty of putting any dishonour upon Moses God would not thus have put Moses's honour upon him."<sup>1</sup>
- b. Acts 6: 8 – 15 "The Face of an Angel"
  - i. Stephen: full of faith and power v8
  - ii. Synagogue of the Freedmen dispute with Stephen v9
  - iii. Stephen Defeats their arguments v10
  - iv. False accusations and false arrest v11-14
  - v. Stephen: the Face of an Angel v15
  - vi. Questions to know, love and obey God

## II. Stephen: full of faith and power v8

- a. 8 And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people.
- b. Recall Stephen's description from v5 when the congregation selected him out as one of the men to oversee the daily distribution to the widows: "And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit". This commendation is particularly directed at Stephen, setting him apart as first amongst equals. His faith and walk in the Spirit were noteworthy then, and now, the Lord takes our focus once again onto Stephen's spiritual strength.
  - i. "The first named is *Stephen*, the glory of these *septemviri*, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost; he had a strong faith in the doctrine of Christ, and was full of it above most; *full of fidelity, full of courage* (so some), for he was *full of the Holy Ghost*, of his gifts and graces. He was an

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew Henry, [\*Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume\*](#) (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2089.

extraordinary man, and excelled in every thing that was good; his name signifies *a crown*.”<sup>2</sup>

- c. V5,8: full of faith
  - i. conviction of the truth of anything, belief; in the NT of a conviction or belief respecting man's relationship to God and divine things, generally with the included idea of trust and holy fervor born of faith and joined with it
  - ii. relating to God
    - 1. the conviction that God exists and is the creator and ruler of all things, the provider and bestower of eternal salvation through Christ
  - iii. relating to Christ
    - 1. a strong and welcome conviction or belief that Jesus is the Messiah, through whom we obtain eternal salvation in the kingdom of God
  - iv. the religious beliefs of Christians
    - 1. belief with the predominate idea of trust (or confidence) whether in God or in Christ, springing from faith in the same
  - v. fidelity, faithfulness
    - 1. the character of one who can be relied on
  - vi. So, by God's grace, Stephen was especially filled with faith toward God, fully trusting in Christ as the Messiah. Stephen's mind, heart and soul fixed upon God in constancy, the anchor behind the veil. And, this faith from God and in God made Stephen a faithful man, to be relied upon.
- d. V5: full of the Holy Spirit
  - i. “*full of fidelity, full of courage* (so some), for he was *full of the Holy Ghost*, of his gifts and graces. He was an extraordinary man, and excelled in every thing that was good; his name signifies *a crown*”
- e. V8: full of power (power flows from faith)
  - i. Power = δύναμις = strength, power, ability
  - ii. “He was *full of faith and power*, that is, of a strong faith, by which he was enabled to do great things. Those that are full of faith are full of power, because by faith the power of God is engaged for us. His faith did so fill him that it left no room for unbelief and made room for the influences of divine grace, so that, as the prophet speaks, he was *full of power by the*

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<sup>2</sup> Matthew Henry, [\*Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume\*](#) (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2087.

- Spirit of the Lord of hosts*, Mic. 3:8. By faith we are emptied of self, and so are filled with Christ, who is the *wisdom of God and the power of God.*<sup>3</sup>
- iii. Acts 1:8 ““But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”
  - iv. Acts 3:12 “So when Peter saw it, he responded to the people: “Men of Israel, why do you marvel at this? Or why look so intently at us, as though by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk?”
  - f. Note how being filled with faith connects with being filled with the Holy Spirit and how power flows from and connects with faith and the indwelling of God’s Spirit.
  - g. “did great wonders and signs among the people.”
    - i. Stephen was marked out by God as the Lord’s power flowed through Him. These great wonders and signs were done, not in secret, but before the eyes of the people of Jerusalem. Stephen was well known for his faith, his faithfulness, his walking in and with the Spirit, his power and the great signs and wonders done through Him as He lived in the Presence of God.
      - 1. “Being so *he did great wonders and miracles among the people*, openly, and in the sight of all; for Christ’s miracles feared not the strictest scrutiny. It is not strange that Stephen, though he was not a preacher by office, did these great wonders, for we find that these were distinct gifts of the Spirit, and divided severally, for *to one was given the working of miracles, and to another prophecy*, 1 Co. 12:10, 11. And *these signs followed* not only those that preached, but those that believed. Mk. 16:17”<sup>4</sup>
    - ii. Consider Stephen’s work in distributing the food each day. He would have been amongst the people, discovering needs of all kinds, not just lacking daily necessities. It’s likely he would have encountered sicknesses, injuries and demonic possessions.
      - 1. “Luke does not specify which “great wonders and signs” (τέρατα καὶ σημεῖα μεγάλα) happen in Stephen’s ministry. As he bears the responsibility for ministering to believers who are in need of food and clothing, he encounters needs in other areas as well—he meets people who are ill and who suffer from demonic oppression. Taking food to believers would naturally involve him

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<sup>3</sup> Matthew Henry, [\*Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume\*](#) (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2088.

<sup>4</sup> Matthew Henry, [\*Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume\*](#) (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2088.

in conversations about any difficulties and problems the believers and their relatives and friends have, conversations in which mature believers inevitably explain and confirm the revelation of God in Jesus, the significance of Jesus as Israel's Messiah and Savior, and the reality of the Holy Spirit as the transforming power of God bestowed by Jesus on those who believe in him. As Stephen meets people who suffer from illnesses and other afflictions, many are miraculously cured. The miracles that happen in Stephen's ministry are characteristic of the ministry of the Twelve (2:43; 5:12); they are God's answer to the prayers of the believers (4:30)."<sup>5</sup>

III. Synagogue of the Freedmen dispute with Stephen v9

- a. 9 Then there arose some from what is called the Synagogue of the Freedmen (Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and those from Cilicia and Asia), disputing with Stephen.
- b. Now, the Church faces a new threat. Another wing of apostate Judaism arises from the Jews whose origins are from outside Jerusalem. Hellenized Jews. From Lybia, Egypt, southeastern Turkey (Cilicia), (Tarsus is in Cilicia. Tarsus was Saul's hometown), and western Turkey (Asia).
  - i. "The opponents who settled and worshiped in Jerusalem came from a wide range of locations. It is discussed whether this is one synagogue with a variety of nationalities or a group that emerges from several synagogues. Most likely either one or two synagogues are meant. Cyrenians came from northern Africa, and the Alexandrians came from Egypt (Cyrenians: six times in the NT: ...Alexandrians: Acts 6:9–10; 18:24). Cilicians came from the northeastern Mediterranean and areas such as Tarsus (eight times in the NT: ...). Might Paul have participated? Of those mentioned here, Asia is by far the most discussed region in the NT (eighteen times: ...These Jews stand up in opposition to dispute with Stephen. Asian Jews will also form strong opposition to Paul later in Acts."<sup>6</sup>
- c. Dispute
  - i. to seek or examine together
  - ii. in the NT to discuss, dispute, question

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<sup>5</sup> Eckhard J. Schnabel, [Acts](#), Expanded Digital Edition., Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), Ac 6:8.

<sup>6</sup> Darrell L. Bock, [Acts](#), Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 270–271.

- iii. “The verb for “disputing” (συζητέω, *syzēteō*) is also used to describe how Jesus was challenged (Mark 1:27; 8:11; 9:10, 14, 16; 12:28; Luke 22:23; 24:15–16; Acts 6:9–10; 9:28–29).”<sup>7</sup>

#### IV. Stephen Defeats their arguments v10

- a. 10 And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke.
- b. Christ indwells His servant Stephen by the Holy Spirit. So, it’s as if Jesus is speaking. Just like none of Christ’s opponents were able to resist His wisdom, none of the opponents of His Church, filled with His Spirit, will be able to resist His Divinely bestowed wisdom. Heaven’s wisdom treads the world’s wisdom underfoot.
  - i. “As Stephen engaged these diaspora Jews in debate, he experienced the fulfillment of Jesus’ promise in Luke 21:15 to give to his disciples “words (στόμα) and a wisdom (σοφία) that none of your adversaries will be able to resist (ἀντιστῆναι) or contradict.” Stephen also experienced the answer to the prayers of the believers in Acts 4:29–30, who asked God for boldness in the proclamation of the word of God.”<sup>8</sup>

#### V. False accusations and false arrest v11-14

- a. 11 Then they secretly induced men to say, "We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God." 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. 13 They also set up false witnesses who said, "This man does not cease to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the law; 14 "for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs which Moses delivered to us."
- b. Just like with Jesus, the adversaries cannot overcome with truth and reason, so they, in their rebellion, must resort to lies and abuse of power.
- c. False arrest via false accusations via suborning false witnesses
  - i. Suborning false witnesses (v11, v13)
    - 1. “*They stirred up the people* against him, that, if the sanhedrim should still think fit (according to Gamaliel’s advice) to let him alone, yet they might run him down by a popular rage and tumult; they also found means to stir up the elders and scribes against him, that, if the people should countenance and protect him, they might prevail by authority”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Darrell L. Bock, [Acts](#), Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 271.

<sup>8</sup> Eckhard J. Schnabel, [Acts](#), Expanded Digital Edition., Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), Ac 6:10.

<sup>9</sup> Matthew Henry, [Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume](#) (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2088.

- ii. "We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God."
- iii. "This man does not cease to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the law; 14 "for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs which Moses delivered to us."
- iv. Blasphemy accusation: against Moses, God, Jerusalem (the temple), and the Law
- v. Jesus will destroy this place: the coming destruction of AD70 Christ foretold in Lk 21.
- vi. Change the customs of Moses: a twisting of Stephen's words
- vii. "Authentic Christian preaching annoys people who hear but refuse to understand or accept the gospel. If this was true for Jesus, for Peter, for Stephen, and for other Christian leaders in the early church, it will be true for any genuine preaching of the gospel. If "contextualization" means that the gospel message is adapted to such an extent that everyone agrees, then it is no longer the word of God which challenges sinners about their sin and which promises salvation through faith in Jesus, the crucified, risen, and exalted Messiah. In countries in which freedom of speech is enshrined in the constitution, such opposition to the preaching of the gospel will not result in legal action. But there will be opposition nevertheless."<sup>10</sup>

VI. Stephen: the Face of an Angel v15

- a. 15 And all who sat in the council, looking steadfastly at him, saw his face as the face of an angel.
- b. The face of an angel
  - i. So, here we have another scene before the Sanhedrin. This time, the council is already stirred up by lies, reminding us of when Jesus was before them. We recall the gentle and mild demeanor of Christ as He was before His false accusers. Now, we see Stephen shining with the glory of Christ. What is meant by this "face of an angel"?
  - ii. Surely, at least, Stephen is calm, poised and with a joyful demeanor because he is dwelling in God's Presence inwardly.
    - 1. "Perhaps it intimates no more than that he had an extraordinarily pleasant, cheerful countenance, and there was not in it the least sign either of fear for himself or anger at his persecutors. He looked as if he had never been better pleased in his life than he was now when he was called out to bear his testimony to the gospel of Christ, thus publicly, and stood fair for the crown of

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<sup>10</sup> Eckhard J. Schnabel, [Acts](#), Expanded Digital Edition., Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), Ac 6:8–7:1.

martyrdom. Such an undisturbed serenity, such an undaunted courage, and such an unaccountable mixture of mildness and majesty, there was in his countenance, that every one said he looked like an angel; enough surely to convince the Sadducees that there are angels, when they saw before their eyes an incarnate angel”<sup>11</sup>

- iii. In addition, perhaps Stephen’s countenance shone because he was in God’s Diving Presence even outwardly. Note 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, 56 and said, "Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!"
  1. “It should rather seem that there was a miraculous splendour and brightness upon his countenance, like that of our Saviour when he was transfigured—or, at least, that of Moses when he came down from the mount—God designing thereby to put honour upon his faithful witness and confusion upon his persecutors and judges, whose sin would be highly aggravated, and would be indeed a rebellion against the light, if, notwithstanding this, they proceeded against him. Whether he himself knew that the skin of his face shone or no we are not told; but *all that sat in the council saw it*, and probably took notice of it to one another, and an arrant shame it was that when they saw, and could not but see by it that he was owned of God, they did not call him from standing at the bar to sit in the chief seat upon the bench. Wisdom and holiness make a man’s face to shine, and yet these will not secure men from the greatest indignities; and no wonder, when the shining of Stephen’s face could not be his protection; though it had been easy to prove that if he had been guilty of putting any dishonour upon Moses God would not thus have put Moses’s honour upon him.”<sup>12</sup>

VII. Questions to know, love and obey God

- a. What is the state of your heart? How is your hunger for the Lord? So foundational. Have you become dull-hearted toward the Lord? Complacent? Apathetic?
- b. Do you know the joy of communing with the Lord? Personally. Family. Church. Moment-by-moment.

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<sup>11</sup> Matthew Henry, [\*Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume\*](#) (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2089.

<sup>12</sup> Matthew Henry, [\*Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume\*](#) (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2089.



c. Application verses

- i. Ps 27: 7-10 "Hear, O LORD, when I cry with my voice! Have mercy also upon me, and answer me. 8 When You said, "Seek My face," My heart said to You, "Your face, LORD, I will seek." 9 Do not hide Your face from me; Do not turn Your servant away in anger; You have been my help; Do not leave me nor forsake me, O God of my salvation. 10 When my father and my mother forsake me, Then the LORD will take care of me."
  1. Are you seeking the Lord's Face? Do you rejoice that your Father in Heaven invites you to be so close to Him? Before His Face?
  2. Do you rejoice that your Father in heaven will never forsake you? He will always take care of you.
- ii. Ps 73:25-28 "Whom have I in heaven [but You]? And [there is] none upon earth [that] I desire besides You. 26 My flesh and my heart fail; [But] God [is] the strength of my heart and my portion forever. 27 For indeed, those who are far from You shall perish; You have destroyed all those who desert You for harlotry. 28 But [it is] good for me to draw near to God; I have put my trust in the Lord GOD, That I may declare all Your works."
  1. Do you have a "mighty longing after God"? or a "lack of holy desire"? (Tozer Pursuit of God)
  2. Does your heart say, "it is good for me to draw near to God"?
- iii. Ps 105:4 "Seek the LORD and His strength; Seek His face evermore!"
  1. "I have tasted Thy goodness and desire more!" – Pursuit of God
- iv. To shine like Stephen, we must feast on the Lord like Stephen.