

“Faith & Power”
Acts 6:1-15

Introduction:

1. To Begin Tonight - Let's Turn In Our Bibles Together:
 - To Acts 5 - Where - In Our Journey Through Acts:
 - We Are Still In The Precincts Of:
 - The City Of Jerusalem - Where:
 - The Lord Has Proven To Be The Main-Stay:
 - For His People - No Matter What They Experienced As They Continued To Witness For The Lord!
2. If You Remember From Last Week:
 - In Acts 5 - The Environment:
 - In Which The Church Lived & Served:
 - Was Unstable!
 - So Much So, That Within Just A Few Days Time:
 - They Had A Season:
 - Of Great Comfort:
 - As - 5:14 - “Believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women!”
 - And Then:
 - They Had A Season:
 - Of Great Conflict:
 - As - 5:17-28 - “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, / And laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison!”
 - And Eventually, This Led To:
 - 5:40 - Where - In Spite Of The Counsel Of Gamaliel - Still - “They . . . called the apostles, and [beat] them, [and] commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go!”
3. But How Did The Apostle:
 - And The Early Church Respond:
 - To These Threats & Commands?
 - In The Words Of:
 - 5:29 - They Obeyed God Rather Than Man!
 - And So - We End The Chapter:
 - The Way We Began:
 - 5:41-42 - They Remained Faithful To The Lord And Continued To Witness For Him!
 - “And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name. / And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ!”
 - But The Church Would Continue:
 - To Operate In That Kind Of Atmosphere!
 - The Threat Of Persecution Loomed Over Them:
 - And Like Lightning In The Sky - It Could Strike Again:
 - In Any Place & At Any Time!
 - And - It **Would** Strike Again:
 - Very, Very Soon!
 - But Before That Strike - There Was Another Matter That Needed To Be Addressed:
 - In The Church!

* Because At The Beginning Of Acts 6 - We Find:

1. **A New Dissension In The Church!**
 - We Need To Remember That:
 - The Ancient Church:
 - Even In Its Earliest Form:
 - Was Not Perfect!
 - Because - Just Like The Church Today:
 - It Was Full Of People:
 - In Whom God Was Still Working!
 - And This Is Why:
 - We Should Not Be Shocked When We Read About:

- The Division Of The Membership!
 - In 6:1 - “And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations!”
 - Now - For The Most Part - The Church Was Still Made Up Of Jewish Believers!
 - But - Many Of Those Jews Were Born & Had Lived In Countries From All Over The World:
 - Where They Had Been Scattered!
 - And There Would Have Been Prejudices Back Then - Just Like There Are Prejudices Today:
 - Even Though They Shared The Same Nationality & Background!
 - But Now - They Were Part Of:
 - A New Family!
 - A Christian Family!
 - And Yet - Still - Some Of Those Same Prejudices Ran Deep! And:
 - The Members Who Were:
 - Of The Pure “Hebrew” Stock:
 - Who - Likely - Were Born & Had Lived In Israel Their Whole Life:
 - In Some Way “Neglected”:
 - The Members Who Were:
 - More “Grecian” Than Jewish!
 - They Had Adopted The Language & The Customs Of The Greek & Roman World In Which They Were Born & Lived!
 - And So - Even Though:
 - Sought To Do The Right Thing:
 - By Providing For The Needs:
 - Of Those Who Were The Most Vulnerable Among Them - The “Widows” Of Their Congregations!
 - Yet - This Was Not Done:
 - In An Equitable & Fair Way!
 - The Church Of Hebrew Stock:
 - Took Care Of *Their* Own!
 - And It Was Probably Pretty Easy To Do So! Jerusalem Was Their Home! But:
 - The Church Of Grecian Stock:
 - Had A Harder Time Meeting The Needs Of Their Members!
 - And So - Naturally - 6:1 - “There Arose A Murmuring!”
 - But We Are Not To Respond In These Natural Ways! We Need To Remember:
- The Duty Of The Membership!
 - Oh, How We Need To Be On The Look-Out:
 - For This Kind Of Dissension:
 - In Our Church!
 - It Is So Easy For Us:
 - To Look On Our Own Things, And Not On The Things Of Others!
 - The Early Church Needed To Learn:
 - To Look At Each Other:
 - With The Eyes Of Christ:
 - No Matter What Our Differences & No Matter What Our Backgrounds!
- Even As Paul Would Later Teach:
 - In Philippians 2:1-5 - “If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, / Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. / Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. / Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. / Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus!”
 - This Is The Duty Of The Church!
 - The Early Church Still Had A Lot To Learn!
 - And So Do We!
 - But Then - As Word Of This Dissension Reached The Ears Of The Apostles - We Read About:

2. *A New Direction In The Church!*

- 6:2-4 - “Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. / Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report,

full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. / But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word!”

- At This Point - It Seems Like The 12 Apostles:
 - Including Matthias - Who Was Chosen Earlier In Acts To Replace Judas:
 - Met Together In Order To Help With The Administrative Details:
 - Of That New & Growing Church!
 - So - There Were:
- More Struggles!
 - And The Hands Of Those Apostles:
 - Were Full Of All These Different Kinds:
 - Of Responsibilities!
 - But After They Heard About This Dissension - Which I’m Sure They Also Dealt With By Appealing To Their New-Found Unity In Christ!
 - They Realized:
 - That The Work Was Too Much For Them:
 - To Do Alone!
 - Others Needed To Come Alongside To Help Them & Serve The Church!
 - This Reminds Us Of What Took Place:
 - In The Old Testament - When Moses:
 - Also - Took On Much More Than He Could Handle:
 - Even Though He Loved God & Loved God’s People & Wanted To Serve Both!
 - But As Moses’ Father-In-Law Pointed Out:
 - Even Though What He Was Doing Was Right, It Was Not Good - It Was Not The Best Thing For Him Or For God’s People!
 - Exodus 18:13-22 - “Moses sat to judge the people: and the people stood by Moses from the morning unto the evening. / And Moses’ father in law said unto him, The thing that thou doest is not good. / Thou wilt surely wear away, both thou, and this people that is with thee: for this thing is too heavy for thee; thou art not able to perform it thyself alone!”
 - The Apostles Recognized That - Like Moses:
 - They Needed Help - To “Bear The Burden” With Them!
 - They Needed:
 - More Servants!
 - And - Like Moses:
 - They Had The Primary Ministry Of Studying & Preaching & Teaching The Word Of God!
 - And So - We Find:

3. *A New Discharge For The Church!*

- 6:5-8 - “And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch: / Whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them. / And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith. / And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people!”
 - Here - We Find The Selection:
 - Of The First Deacons Of The Church!
 - The Word “Deacon” Simply Means “Servant!”
 - And The Congregation As A Whole:
 - Selected These Seven Men:
 - Not Primarily Because:
 - Of Their Popularity Or Their Skills In Administration!
 - But - What Were Their Primary Qualifications?
 - 6:3 - They Were To Be:
 - “Men Of Honest Report, Full Of The Holy Ghost And Wisdom!”
 - And Along With The Others:
 - There Was Stephen Who Was:
 - 6:5 - “A Man Full Of Faith And Of The Holy Ghost!”
 - We Learn From This:
 - That The Best Servants Of The Lord & Of His Church Are Those Whose:
- Testimony For The Lord:
 - Is Faithful & True!
 - “Honest Report” - In The Church & In The World!

- And Whose:
 - Trust In The Lord:
 - Is Strong!
 - We Will See The Strength Of His Faith:
 - In The Next Few Verses!
 - But Also Whose:
 - Transformation From The Lord:
 - Is Clear!
 - The Life & Work Of The Holy Spirit:
 - Is Clear & Evident In Their Daily Life!
 - These Are The Kinds Of Servants:
 - We Need - And - These Are The Kinds Of Servants:
 - The Lord Often Uses & Blesses In Unusual Ways!
 - Because - We Also Find This About Stephen In 6:8 - He Was “Full Of Faith And Power!”
 - There Is A Special Relationship:
 - Between Those Two Things!
 - Between Faith & Power!
 - Because - The More Our Faith Is In The Lord - The More The Power Of The Lord Can Manifest Itself In & Through The Church!
 - In The Ministry Of Stephen:
 - We Can See The Power Of The Lord:
 - On Full Display - Through His Faith!
 - Even When There Comes:

4. ***A New Danger For The Church!***

- 6:9-15 - “Then there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called the synagogue of the Libertines, and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and of Asia, disputing with Stephen. / And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake. / Then they suborned men, which said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and against God. / And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council, / And set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law: / For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us. / And all that sat in the council, looking stedfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel!”
 - No Longer Was It Just The Apostles:
 - Who Faced Danger - Now It Was:
 - The Church As A Whole!
 - And Members Like Stephen!
 - There Were New Arguments:
 - Against Him:
 - As Different Groups Of Jews:
 - Banded Together:
 - 6:9 - “Disputing With Stephen!”
 - It Seems As If:
 - These Different Synagogues:
 - Normally Disputed With Each Other!
 - Because Of Their Different Theologies & Different Backgrounds!
 - But - Just Like The Pharisees & The Sadducees & The Herodians United Their Forces Against Jesus:
 - These Jews United Their Forces Against Stephen!
 - But To No Avail!
 - Because:
 - Stephen Was Still “Full Of Faith And Power!”
 - And So - 6:10 - “And They Were Not Able To Resist The Wisdom And The Spirit By Which He Spoke!”
 - God Was With Stephen & His Words - Because He Trusted In The Lord! But Then:
 - There Were New Accusations:
 - Against Him!
 - But Really Not All That New!
 - They Said - “We Have Heard Him Speak Blasphemous Words Against Moses!”

- And Again - We See Striking Parallels In Stephen's Life With What Happened To Jesus!
- But Even Their Accusations Were To No Avail!
 - Because Stephen Was Still "Full Of Faith And Power!"
 - And So - 6:15 - "And All That Sat In The Council, Looking Stedfastly On Him, Saw His Face As It Had Been The Face Of An Angel!"
- This Does Not Mean:
 - That Stephen's Face Started Shining Brightly:
 - As The Time When Jesus Was Transfigured On The Mountain!
 - It Simply Records The Reaction Of The Council As They Saw Stephen's Face In The Midst Of The Raging False Allegations & Accusations Against Him!
- Albert Barnes - "It is not meant that there was anything 'miraculous' in the case of Stephen, but it is language that denotes calmness, dignity, and confidence in God, all of which were so marked on his countenance that it impressed them with clear proofs of his innocence and piety!"

Conclusion:

1. But Then - As Stephen Is Standing There:
 - Before All The Council Of The Sanhedrin:
 - Just As the Apostles Were - Likely Just Days Before:
 - We Read In The Next Chapter - In 7:1 - "Then said the high priest, Are these things so?"
 - And God Gave Stephen:
 - The Same Opportunity He Gave:
 - Peter & John & Other Apostles:
 - To Share The Message Of The Gospel One More Time!
 - Which We Will Look At Next Week!
2. But For Tonight:
 - I Want Us To Think About:
 - How God Was Able To Use This Man:
 - Stephen - Because He Was:
 - 6:8 - "Full Of Faith And Power!"
 - Now - The "Power" That Is Mentioned Here:
 - Was Not Power On His Part!
 - It Was The Power Of God:
 - In & Through Stephen!
 - But - How Could & Why Did God Use Stephen To Display His Great Power?
 - Because He Was "Full Of Faith!"
 - And God's Grace!
 - "It was not the intellect, or the eloquence, or the activity of St. Stephen which made him powerful among the people and crowned his labours with success. It was his abundant grace. Eloquence and learning, active days and laborious nights, are good and necessary things. But these will be utterly useless and ineffective apart from Christ and the power of His grace. To this busy age these words convey a useful warning that the best organisations and schemes will be useless to produce Stephen's power, unless Stephen's grace be found there as well." (G. T. Stokes)
 - In Order For Us To Experience:
 - The Power Of Stephen:
 - We Need To Possess The Faith & Grace:
 - Of Stephen As Well!
 - So - Let Us Be "Full" In Our Faith & Confidence In The Lord!

Grace Baptist Church
Stephen Elmer, Pastor
 4245 North 200 West
 Greenfield, Indiana 46140
 317-326-2362
www.sermonaudio.com/wordofgrace
www.growatgrace.org
pastor-elmer@hotmail.com