

**“The Seed Of The Church”**  
**Acts 7:54 - 8:3**

**Introduction:**

1. Let's Turn Back In Our Bibles Tonight:
  - To Acts 7 - As We Continue Our Sunday Night:
    - “Journey Through Acts!”
    - Where - Last Sunday - We Explored:
      - The Longest Recorded Message In The Book Of Acts:
        - Preached - Not By Peter Or By Paul - But By One Of The First Deacons Of The Church:
          - Stephen!
2. Who - As He Stood Before The Great Jewish Sanhedrin:
  - Reminded Them Of:
    - The Unfailing Purposes Of God:
      - Through Their Own History!
  - But - Even Though Those Jewish Men:
    - **Knew** Their History:
      - They Were Still **Condemned** To Repeat It!
3. Because - Just As Their Fore-Fathers:
  - Had Rejected God & His Messengers:
    - Over And Over Again:
      - They Did Too!
        - When They Betrayed & Murdered The Lord Jesus Christ - Who **Was** The Messiah Promised To Them **Throughout** Their History!
  - Well - After Stephen Confronted Them:
    - With Their Crime:
      - How Did They Respond?
        - 7:54 - “When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth!”
  - Even Though They Heard & Stephen's Words:
    - And Even Understood His Point:
      - There Was No Remorse!
      - There Was No Repentance!
      - And - For Stephen - There Was No Chance!
4. It Was Tertullian:
  - A Pastor & Theologian - Who Was Born:
    - Just A Little More Than 100 Years From The Time Of Stephen:
      - Who Wrote That - “The Blood Of The Martyrs Is The Seed Of The Church!”
      - He Recognized - Even 100 Relatively Short Years After The Very First Martyrdom:
        - That God Would Use The Persecution & The Martyrdom Of His People:
          - For Their Own Growth & For His Glory!
  - Even As Joseph Recognized:
    - When He Was Back In Egypt:
      - In Genesis 50:20 - “But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good!”
5. Well - Stephen:
  - Was About To Become That First Martyr!
  - He Probably Did Not Realize:
    - That He Was About To Say:
      - His Last Words - And:
        - Breathe His Last Breath!
  - But The Lord Did Something:
    - For Stephen - To Prepare Him:
      - And Us - For What Was To Come!
6. And So - That Is Why:
  - We Read What Happens Next:
    - 7:55-60 - “But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, / 56 And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and

the Son of man standing on the right hand of God. / 57 Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, / 58 And cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul. / 59 And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. / 60 And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep!"

\* The Traditional Site Of Where Stephen Was Martyred Is Now Under A Church - Greek Orthodox Church Of St. Stephen - Kidron Valley!

- At First - We Might Think:

- What A Sad Ending:

- For Such A Promising Member Of That Early Church!

- In 8:2 - We Even Read "And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him!"

- It Is Likely That There Were Even Some Non-Christians Who Thought Highly Of Stephen & Did Not Agree With What Took Place!

7. But - In Those Final Moments:

- Of Stephen's Life:

- I Believe God Strengthened Him:

- And Prepared Him For His Death!

- And Through His Experience - The Lord Gives Us A Glimpse At What He Has For Us As Well!

- So - I'd Like For Us To First:

**I. Look At What Stephen Saw!**

- Just Before He Was Thrust Out Of The City!

- Look At What He Saw!

- In 7:55-56 - "But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, / And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God!"

- The Lord Gave This Vision Of Heaven:

- As A Help:

- For Stephen!

- The Lord Jesus - In His Grace:

- Wanted To Prepare Him:

- For His Departure From This World!

- So - The Lord Opened The Heavens:

- To Him - So That He Could See:

- The Unseen! And So That The Invisible:

- Could Become Visible To Him!

- Now - Even Though The Testimony:

- Of This Heavenly Vision Is Amazing:

- The Timing Of This Heavenly Vision:

- Is Even More Astounding!

- Because - It Took Place:

- When He Was Still In The Temple & While Stephen Was Still Standing Before The Sanhedrin!

- He Had Just Finished His Message!

- And I Think He Was As Surprised As We Would Have Been!

- But The **Lord** Knew What Was About To Happen:

- To His Faithful Servant!

- And He Wanted This Vision To Help Him Through What Would Happen Next!

- It Seems Clear:

- That Noone Else Saw What He Saw!

- But This Vision Wasn't For Them!

- It Was Also Meant By The Lord:

- As A Hope:

- For Stephen!

- He Could Know That:

- His Testimony About Jesus:

- Was True!

- What Stephen Saw That Day:
  - Was An Echo Of What:
    - Jesus Himself Saw!
      - Even When He Was Baptized In The Jordan River By His Cousin John!
  - In Matthew 3:16-17 - “And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: / And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased!”
    - What Jesus Saw:
      - From His Father:
        - Encouraged Him At The Beginning Of His Ministry!
    - What Stephen Saw:
      - From His Savior:
        - Encouraged Him At The End!
- As We Look At What Stephen Saw:
  - Remember To Keep Looking To:
    - The **One** Stephen Saw:
      - For The Help & The Hope You Need:
        - As You Continue In Your Service For The Lord!
    - Keep “Looking Unto Jesus, The Author & Finisher Of Our Faith!”
      - Because One Day - Your Faith Will Be Made Sight, “The Clouds Be Rolled Back As A Scroll!”
      - And You Too Will See What Stephen Saw!
        - The Lord Jesus Himself Welcoming You Home!

\* I Also Want You To:

**2. Listen To What Stephen Said!**

- Even As He Was Suffering Blow After Blow From The Stones Being Hurlled Upon His Body!
  - Listen To What He Said!
    - In 7:57-59 - “Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, / And cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man’s feet, whose name was Saul. / And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!”
      - These Words Of Stephen Reveal To Us:
  - A Great Confidence In The Lord!
    - The Vision The Lord Gave Him:
      - Did What He Intended To Do!
        - It Strengthened His Faith:
          - In Jesus!
    - Because He Had Seen Jesus:
      - In Heaven - He Had No Doubt:
        - As To The Reality:
          - Of Jesus!
      - And - He Had No Doubt:
        - As To The Resurrection:
          - Of Jesus!
    - He Was Alive & Ready To Receive Him!
      - These Words Also Reveal To Us:
  - A Great Courage From The Lord!
    - I’m Sure The Pain He Experienced:
      - Was Excruciating!
        - Not Just The Pain:
          - From The Stones!
        - But The Pain:
          - From Their Rejection Of The Lord, His Message & His Messenger Once Again!
    - But Instead Of:
      - Turning Back - He Pressed On!
        - He Could Have Said - As Paul Would Say Later - “I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that

day!” (2 Timothy 1:2)

- What Stephen Said That Day:
  - Was An Echo Of What:
    - Jesus Himself Said!
      - Even As He Was Suffering On The Cross:
        - For Our Sins!
  - In Luke 23:46 - “And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost!”
    - Jesus Could Die:
      - Because He Knew That His Mission Was Complete!
        - And So Could Stephen!
- As We Listen To What Stephen Said:
  - We Might Wonder:
    - Would I Have That Kind Of Confidence In & Courage From The Lord:
      - If I Was In His Shoes?
  - It Is True:
    - It Would Take Great Confidence & Great Courage:
      - To Die For The Lord!
        - But - It Takes Confidence & Courage:
          - To Live For The Lord As Well!
  - Do Not Save These Words:
    - For Your Dying Breath!
      - Say These Words:
        - With Every Breath!
    - Lord Jesus:
      - I Commit Myself To You!
        - Not Just My Death - But My Life And My All!

\* I Also Want You To:

**3. *Learn From What Stephen Shared!***

- Through The Words Formed By His Final Breath!
    - Learn From What He Shared!
      - In 7:60 - “And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep!”
        - At The Moment Of His Death, Stephen Shared:
  - The Grace & The Forgiveness Of God:
    - With His Own Murderers!
      - His Greatest Desire:
        - Was Not For Justice:
          - But For Mercy:
            - And For An Opening Of Their Hearts:
              - To The Truth!
  - After All - He Too Had Been One Of Those:
    - Who Betrayed Jesus:
      - And Murdered Jesus:
        - With His Own Sin!
    - He Too Had Been One Of Them!
      - Who Stubbornly Resisted & Rejected:
        - The Work Of Christ:
          - Until The Lord Opened His Eyes & Regenerated His Heart To Believe!
- What Stephen Shared That Day:
  - Was An Echo Of What:
    - Jesus Himself Shared!
      - Even As He Was About To Die!
  - In Luke 23:34 - “Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do!”
    - Jesus Did Not Come To Condemn:
      - Because - We Were “Condemned Already!”

- No - Jesus Came:
  - To “Seek And To Save That Which Was Lost” & To “Give His Life A Ransom For Many!”

**Conclusion:**

1. The End Of Acts 7 Ends With Stephen’s Death:
  - 7:60 - “And when he had said this, he fell asleep!”
  - But - This Is Still Not The End Of The Story!
    - Remember - Resistance To The Lord & His Purposes Is Futile!
  - And So In:
    - 8:1-4 - “And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles. / And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. / As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison. / Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word!”
2. The Blood Of The First Martyr:
  - Stephen - God Used To Turn Into The Seed:
    - Of The Church!
      - Because The Christians Who Dwelt In Jerusalem:
        - “Were” - Now - “Scattered Abroad” - And “Went Every Where Preaching The Word!”
    - And Where Did They Go?
      - 8:1 - “They Were All Scattered Abroad Throughout The Regions Of Judaea And Samaria!”
      - Isn’t This Exactly Where Jesus Told His Disciples:
        - To Go - Back In 1:8? “Ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth!”
    - So - It Was Time For The Church:
      - To Move On To The Next Stage:
        - Of Her Mission!
          - But - The Opposition Would Continue As Well!
            - Because - We Are Also Introduced To A Man Named Saul - Who Continued “To Make Havock Of The Church!” (1:3)
4. Even Though The Times In Which We Live:
  - Are Not Quite Like What The Early Church:
    - Was Facing In Those Days:
  - Let Us Remember:
    - What Stephen Saw & What Stephen Said & What Stephen Shared:
      - So That We Might Have The Same Confidence & Courage:
        - To Serve The Lord - No Matter What The Cost!
    - The “Blood Of The Martyrs” May Be:
      - The Seed Of The Church!
        - But Our Life & Service For The Lord:
          - Is Its Fruit!

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