

022 - Acts 7:51-8:2 Stephen the Martyr
2012-05-13

Scripture Reading: 2 Chronicles 24:17-21

Confession of Sin: from Daniel 9

"O Lord, great and awesome God, we have sinned and committed iniquity, we have done wickedly and rebelled. Neither have we heeded Your servants the prophets, who spoke in Your name. To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness, though we have rebelled against Him. O Lord, according to all Your righteousness, I pray, let Your anger and Your fury be turned away; for we do not present our supplications before You because of our righteous deeds, but because of Your great mercies. O Lord, hear! O Lord, forgive!"

Sermon: "Stephen the Martyr" Acts 7:51-8:2

Benediction: Matthew 5:11-12

INTRODUCTION

In the time when the early church in Jerusalem needed men to help take care of the many poor widows, Stephen was chosen by the church as a man of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom. The apostles prayed for him and laid their hands on him, appointing him to the work of a deacon. Stephen also performed miraculous signs, as he was full of faith and the power of the Holy Spirit. When he was opposed by some of the Jews, He won debates with them, proving that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah, the Christ. In all these things He was a witness for Christ, testifying in word and deed that Jesus Christ died for sinners, rose again, ascended to heaven, and will come again. But when Stephen had been a witness for Christ in all these ways, he was killed by the Jewish sanhedrin, a combination of church and state government.

The Greek word that the New Testament uses for "witness" is the word *martoos*. In Revelation 2:13, the Lord Jesus Himself used this word to refer to a man named Antipas, who was killed for being His witness

Revelation 2:13 ". . . you hold fast to My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days in which Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was killed . . .

And so, the word "martyr" is used by the church to mean one who bears witness for the Lord Jesus Christ and is killed for it. Stephen was the first follower of Jesus Christ to be so killed for bearing witness to His resurrection and Lordship.

Today we will read the account of Stephen's martyrdom, and draw lessons from it for our own witness to Jesus Christ. You will see in this account that when you are a witness for our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, you cannot know what people will do, but you can know with certainty what the Lord Jesus will do.

Read the text: Acts 7:51-8:2

BODY

When you are a witness for our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, you will be tempted to place great importance on how people respond to you, but you cannot know what people will do, but you can know with certainty what the Lord Jesus will do

I. When you are a witness for Christ by speaking His perfect law to sinners, you can't know how they will react to you; when you bear witness that what they have done is wrong, and that in

their sinfulness they have killed the Lord Jesus, you can't know what they will do (7:52-54)

-sometimes they won't really listen

-sometimes they won't be interested

-sometimes they won't seem to be affected

-but sometimes people are cut to the heart by someone bearing witness to the law of Christ 54

-the Word of God is like a two-edged sword

-the people on the day of Pentecost were cut to the heart by the law of God, and asked to men preaching, "What shall we do?"

-the people on this day were cut to the heart by the law of Christ, and began to gnash their teeth at Stephen, the man speaking the law of Christ to them

II. When you are a witness for Christ by living according to His commands by His Spirit within you, you can't know what people will do (7:55a)

-we have read of Stephen that he was full of the Holy Spirit, and it is repeated here in verse 55

-he had a good reputation, was full of wisdom, and was assigned to help take care of poor widows

-Generally, if you bear witness to Christ by living according to His commands, things will go well with you in this life. That is the matter of the book of Proverbs; also, Paul writes of those who honor their parents, that things will go well with them

-But sometimes, if you are a witness for Christ by living according to His commands, by His Spirit within you, people will react very badly to you. You might be betrayed and abandoned by those closest to you, like Jesus Himself was. You might be taken to court on false charges like Stephen was here. You might have to flee from your native country, like the Christians did from Jerusalem (8:1). You might even be killed.

III. When you are a witness for Christ by telling sinners of His Resurrection, you can't know what people will do (7:55b-59a)

-when Paul spoke of the resurrection of Jesus to the philosophers in Athens, they politely told him they were done listening to him

-when King Agrippa heard about the resurrection of Jesus, he was almost, but not quite persuaded to become a Christian

-when the household of Cornelius was told the good news of the resurrection of Jesus, all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit before Peter was even finished preaching

-the people on this day went into a violent rage

-they cried out loudly

-they stopped their ears

-they ran at Stephen in a mob

-they threw him out of the city

-they laid their outer garments down

-and they threw stones at Stephen until he died

IV. When you are a witness for Christ, you can know with certainty what He will do

A. He will help you know what to say

1. Jesus had promised this

Luke 12:11-12 "Now when they bring you to the synagogues and magistrates and authorities, do not worry about how or what you should answer, or what you should say. (12) For the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say."

2. Stephen's masterful speech gives evidence of this

B. He will reign over the whole situation (7:56)

- 1. do not expect a vision; you don't need it; you can read it here
- C. He will receive your spirit if it costs you your life (7:59)
- D. He will use your witness to save sinners (8:1)
 - 1. in this case he used Stephen's witness
 - a. to spread the gospel beyond Jerusalem
 - b. to convert Saul, who would be an apostles of Jesus Christ
 - c. to do immeasurable good for His kingdom, as people through the centuries have read this story
 - 2. in your case, you may see how the Lord uses your witness, or you may not
- E. He will cause devout people to lament your death (8:2)
- F. He will bear witness for you to God the Father

CONCLUSION

Matthew 10:32-39 "Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. (33) But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven. (34) "Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. (35) For I have come to 'SET A MAN AGAINST HIS FATHER, A DAUGHTER AGAINST HER MOTHER, AND A DAUGHTER-IN-LAW AGAINST HER MOTHER-IN-LAW'; (36) and 'A MAN'S ENEMIES WILL BE THOSE OF HIS OWN HOUSEHOLD.' (37) He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. (38) And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. (39) He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it.

JRY: We don't need to see the vision. We can know the situation because Stephen saw it.

Dan 7:13-14 "I was watching in the night visions, And behold, One like the Son of Man, Coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, And they brought Him near before Him. (14) Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, Which shall not pass away, And His kingdom the one Which shall not be destroyed.

Matthew 5:11-12 "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. (12) Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Revelation 6:9-11 When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held. (10) And they cried

with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" (11) Then a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed.

JRY:

Your self-made religion is not pleasing to God

You are law breakers