

Speaking the Truth in Love

Acts 7; Coast Community Church; Pastor Earl Miles; 7-3-2022

The Book of Acts (John 8:31-32)

History of the Early Church: The book of Acts is a history of the spread of the gospel truth throughout the Roman empire after the ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Our Mission of Mercy: It is a reminder of our mission as Christians: to bear witness to Jesus Christ as the only Lord and Savior.

Darkness Hates the Light: It is also a reminder that the light of the gospel is naturally resisted and rejected by those who love darkness.

His Powerful Presence: It is an encouragement to remember the promise of our Lord who said that He would be with us as we seek to make disciples who receive the Light and trust and obey Him.

The Defense of Stephen (Acts 7:1)

Stephen is one of the 7 ordained to manage the ministry to the widows. Stephen is empowered to work miracles and speak convincingly for Christ. Stephen could not be defeated in a debate so they decided to employ false witnesses to get rid of him. Stephen is accused of blasphemy (a capital crime) by speaking against (Acts 6:11-14):

God (an accusation he addresses by talking about Abraham and Joseph)

Moses (an accusation he addresses by talking about Moses and the Exodus)

Law (an accusation he addresses by talking about Moses and the giving of the Law)

Temple or 'holy place' (an accusation he addresses by talking about the tabernacle and temple and the Israelites in the wilderness)

The Lord Jesus did not defend Himself before His accusers for the sake of love. Stephen did defend himself before His accusers for the sake of love. - 1 Peter 3:13-18

A Promised Possession to the Seed of Abraham (Acts 7:2-5)

Stephen starts his defense by reminding them of the promise of God. This promise to the seed of Abraham is both collective and individual. (Galatians 3:16-19) This promised land is ultimately a promise of the world. (Romans 4:13) This promise of the world is actually a promise of a new world. (2 Peter 3:10-13)

Through the Rejection and Exaltation of Joseph (Acts 7:6-16)

Stephen begins to highlight how God has worked to fulfill that promise by highlighting the experience of Joseph. Our sufferings are not necessarily an indication of God's displeasure and distance from us. (Job 4:7-8; Eliphaz's false accusation against Job) The experience of Joseph is a foreshadowing of Christ's humiliation and exaltation. (Philippians 2:5-11)

Through the Rejection and Exaltation of Moses (Acts 7:17-41)

Stephen continues to highlight how God has worked to fulfill that promise by noting the experience of Moses. Jesus is the Prophet like Moses that God promised to send. (Matthew 5:21-

22) We often do not see God's deliverance for us in the people and circumstances God sends our way. (Jeremiah 7:25-26)

Through the Rejection and Exaltation of God's Presence (Acts 7:42-50)

Stephen concludes his defense by arguing that their devotion to the Temple is not really a devotion to God. Jesus is the fulfillment of all that the tabernacle and Temple pictured and the actual Dwelling of God on earth! (John 1:14; 2:19) We are prone to worship the creation even though the Creator is manifesting His presence to us. (Romans 1:25)

The Merciful Rebuke (Acts 7:51-53)

Stephen moves to application by extending a merciful rebuke to his *hearers* and convicting them of the things that they accuse him of. The hard truth is that we resist God's call upon our lives like those before us and are not unlike those we try to distance ourselves from. (Matthew 23:29-33) But we can't find mercy until we see our need. (Luke 18:9-14)

The Merciful Prayer (Acts 7:54-60)

Those listening to Stephen are enraged but Stephen shows his heart in all he said by praying that God would have mercy on them even as they are stoning him to death! We are to leave justice to God and desire mercy for, and show mercy to, those who sin against us. (Romans 12:14-21)

A History Lesson

Acts 7 records Stephen's defense of himself, his testimony to God's mercy in their history and his conviction of his accusers before he becomes the first Christian martyr. We have to be careful of rewriting history lest we fail to see our need for forgiveness and reconciliation and change.

The Principle of Humiliation and Exaltation

This is a defense of faith in Jesus in light of the reality of how God has worked in the nation of Israel: through faithful testimony, humiliation/ rejection and exaltation. God works to fulfill His promises through the humiliation/rejection and exaltation of Christ and His people.

To Seek and Save the Lost

In Jesus, God is fulfilling His promises to Abraham and his descendants through the rejection of Joseph and the rejection of Moses and the rejection of the tabernacle/temple of God, all of which ultimately points to Jesus and His rejection and exaltation. The pattern is one of rejection and exaltation for the Messiah and His people in light of their testimony to the truth. (Mark 10:23-27) God calls us all to bear witness to Jesus before an unbelieving and hostile world through:

Prayer: *Are you praying for the lost people you know?*

Personal Relationships: *Are you spending time with lost people?*

Practical Service: *Are you seeking to meet the needs of lost people?*

Public Venues: *Are you using public forums to share the gospel?*

Particular Giftings: *Are you using your talents and giftings and circumstances to connect with and share the gospel with lost people?*