

Why Did They Stone Stephen? – 07/19/20

TEXT- Acts 6:8-15 *And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people. 9 Then there arose certain . . .*

INTRO – Why such hatred against a good man?

I. The Expansion of the Early Church

A. The early church experienced exponential growth

- Many followers of Jesus – Some turned back

Acts 1:8 *But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.*

At the start of the Acts it should be noted 'The Acts of the Holy Spirit', and at the end not 'The End', but 'To Be Continued...'. It's not the end of something; it's the beginning of something

- Pentecost 3000 saved and baptized - Acts 2:41
- People added daily – Acts 2:47
- 5000 saved – Acts 2:4
- Churches multiplied – Acts 9:31
- Many believed - Acts 9:42 *And it was known throughout all Joppa; and many believed in the Lord.*
- The Word of God grew - Acts 12:24 *But the word of God grew and multiplied.*
- Many priests and rulers were saved

Acts 6:7 *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.*

Acts 18:8 *And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized.*

- The gospel went to Samaria, Asia Minor and Europe

B. The early church experienced persecution

- John beheaded
- Jesus crucified
- Stephen stoned to death
- Apostles imprisoned

Acts 5:18-19 *And laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison. 19 But the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth, and said,*

- Most if not all the Apostles suffered a martyrs death.

II. The Character of Stephen

A. Full of faith and the Holy Ghost

Acts 6:5-6 *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: 6 Whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them.*

1. First deacon

2. First martyr

B. The first deacon

C. The Apostles laid their hands on him and the others

D. False witnesses testified against him

E. He preached to the Jewish leaders starting with Abraham

F. He pointed out their sinful ways

G. He saw the heavens open and saw Jesus

Acts 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, 56 And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.*

H. He was stoned and gave his testimony which affected Paul

I. He had the face of an Angel

Acts 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.*

J. He exhibited the Spirit of Christ

Acts 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.*

III. The Hatred of Stephen

1 Jn 3:11-13 *For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. 12 Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous. 13 Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you.*

A. The leaders didn't want to repent of their sin

B. Their hatred of Stephen was a hatred for God

John 15:18-19 *If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. 19 If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.*

C. There are many similarities to Jesus

D. Their hatred of Stephen was because they loved their sin

When the emperor Valens threatened Eusebuis with confiscation of all his goods, torture, banishment, or even death, the courageous Christian replied, "He needs not fear confiscation, who has nothing to lose; nor banishment, to whom heaven is his country; nor torments, when his body can be destroyed at one blow; nor death, which is the only way to set him at liberty from sin and sorrow."

John 3:19 *And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.*

CONCL – If they could extinguish the preaching of Stephen they felt they would no longer be accountable for their sin

In ancient Rome, crowds by the tens of thousands would gather in the Colosseum to watch as Christians were torn apart by wild animals. Paul Rader, commenting on his visit to this famous landmark, said, "I stood uncovered to the heavens above, where He sits for whom they gladly died, and asked myself, 'Would I, could I, die for Him tonight to get this gospel to the ends of the earth?'" Rader continued, "I prayed most fervently in that Roman arena for the spirit of a martyr, and for the working of the Holy Spirit in my heart, as He worked in Paul's heart when He brought him on his handcuffed way to Rome." Those early Christians "lived on the threshold of heaven, within a heartbeat of home, no possessions to hold them back."