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The Christlike Deacon Ministry of Stephen; Acts 6:8-15  
GPBC  
8.16.20

Introduction – Next Sunday morning as part of our August church conference, we will nominate 4 men to serve our church as deacon for a three-year term. The office of deacon is a vital and varied role in our church. A deacon could be tasked with everything from keeping a check on building and grounds to meeting the need of a member to listening to a voiced concern to giving input on decisions in the life of the church.

From the biblical directive for deacons, they are first and foremost tasked with making sure that members are not neglected or overlooked and that if genuine physical needs arise that cannot be met otherwise, the church takes care of its members. This role is so vital, the Bible places it as one of only two biblical offices in the church, the other being the role of pastor or elder. Furthermore, just as elders must be men above reproach in their Christian character, so also must be the deacon.

These are the type of men we are praying for and looking for to serve our church here at Grassy Pond. Here in Acts 6, we believe the 7 men chosen here to minister to the widows is the beginning formation of what would later be called the deacon, or servant, of the church. It's been a couple of years now, but back in 2018 before we nominated deacons, we studied the first 7 verses of Acts 6 for two weeks. Today we pick up with vv8-15 and begin taking a closer look at one of these first deacons. A man named Stephen.

What we discover in our study of Stephen is that being a deacon is not all there is to know about Stephen. In fact, beginning with v8, we don't hear anything else about the deacon ministry of Stephen, just the deacon himself. What we see in these verses is why Stephen was chosen to be a deacon in the first place. One doesn't become a deacon when he is nominated to the position. Deacon nomination is really just observation and recognition. The church chooses men to serve the church as deacons who are already living out the faith, already serving the church. There's more to being a deacon than being a deacon. Those are the men we are searching for and nominating next week. Men like Stephen. Christlike in their example, and therefore qualified to serve.

- I. Fulfilling a Ministry Like Christ (v8)
  - a. V8 describes Stephen as a man full of grace and power. This is a man who is closely attached to the Lord and unattached to the world. He is full of grace and power. He's not full of the world. He's not full of himself. He's not full of sin. He's full of grace and power. He's full of the Spirit. He's full of Christ.
    - i. This is describing the man himself, his character, his reputation. This is who he is. In the Christian life, we are called to work, we are called to live and do great things for God, but being comes before doing. You have to be in order to do.
    - ii. Yes, he was doing great wonders and signs, but he was doing those things because he was full of grace and power.
  - b. That's actually how the Bible describes the apostles earlier in Acts 4:33. So Stephen wasn't an apostle. He wasn't an elder. He wasn't a pastor. He was simply a layman, a church member. But his walk with the Lord was a close with the Lord as any leader in the church.
    - i. Sometimes we try to make a distinction between church leaders and church members as if only church leaders are to be believers who walk closely with God. Pastors are supposed to be super Christians and church members just need to barely get by. The truth is that every believer is to walk closely with God. We all have a ministry to fulfill. God doesn't require more of a pastor or less of a church member than walking in holiness before Him.
  - c. But you know Stephen's walk with God was not the result of him trying to be super spiritual like the apostles. The truth is he and the apostles were both pursuing Christ.
    - i. Christ was full of grace and power. John 1:14 says Christ was full of grace and truth. In John 10:18 Christ says He has the authority to lay down His life and to take it up again. Christ was full of grace and power.
    - ii. Stephen was not full of himself. Stephen was not full of mimicking the apostles. Stephen was full of Christ, and so he was full of grace and power.
  - d. That's what gave rise to his great ministry. That's the source of the great wonders and signs. If we desire to do great things for God, we must be walking closely with God, unattached to the world but

clinging to Christ, unobsessed with self but possessed by God, and unimpressed with sin but zealous for His glory!

- e. Great wonders and signs of course mean miracles. Stephen was no doubt healing people in the name of Christ and the gospel. The apostolic age has passed and with it the need for miracles to attest to the truth of the gospel. We don't have miracle workers around today.
  - f. But that doesn't mean we don't have great wonders and signs among the people that point out believers who are full of grace and power. Loving and praying for your enemy is a great wonder in our day that would make people stop in their tracks. Displaying the peace of God when life gets turned upside down is a sign that people are sure to see. Oh there are wonders and signs all around us when God's people are fulfilling a ministry like Christ.
- II. Following in the Steps of Christ (vv9-14)
- a. Jesus said if anyone wishes to come after me he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me, and right here in Acts 6 we find Stephen doing that precisely. Jesus said if the world hates me, it will hate you too if you follow me. And right here in Acts 6 we find Stephen following in those divine, suffering, joyful, hopeful steps.
  - b. Ill. Child trying to walk exactly in their parent's footsteps. Stephen is following the Lord just like that. In fact, so much so, that much of what Stephen experiences mirrors the experience of Christ.
  - c. In v9 – the religious leaders opposed Stephen; it was the religious leaders who opposed Christ.
  - d. In v10 – these self-righteous leaders soon found they were not able to dispute the wisdom of Stephen.
    - i. You see it wasn't Stephen by himself against a hostile crowd. It was Stephen filled with the Spirit standing against this hostile crowd. Cf Matt 10:19-20
    - ii. BTW – in Matt 22:46 it says of the Pharisees and Sadducees who were questioning Jesus, "no one was able to answer Him a word."
  - e. In v11 they instigated men to make false accusations; in Mark 14:56 many bore false witness against Christ when He stood before the council.

- f. In v12 they stirred up the people to seize him; in Mark 15:11 the chief priests stirred up the crowd to demand the release of Barabbas and the crucifixion of Christ.
  - g. In vv13-14 they make the same accusation against Stephen they had made against Christ. Cf. Mark 14:58
    - i. Jesus said in John 2:19 “Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up.” The Bible says when He was raised from the dead, the disciples understood that He was not referring to the temple building but to the temple that was His body.
    - ii. And it happened just like Jesus said it would. They destroyed His body, and three days later He raised it again.
    - iii. And yet here they are using the same old accusations.
    - iv. Stephen is walking right in the footsteps of Jesus.
  - h. Satan doesn’t really have any new tricks. The old ones still work. The same old lies and deceptions still blind people from the truth.
  - i. If you’re going to be a Christian like Stephen, you’ll face opposition and rejection and accusation like Stephen.
  - j. If you’re going to be a deacon like Stephen, you’ll need Spirit-filled wisdom like Stephen. You’ll need to discern between concern and criticism, need and grumbling, truth and falsehood. And if you’re living for the Lord like Stephen, you may find yourself on the receiving end of opposition like Stephen.
  - k. But here’s how we face it whether deacon, pastor, or church member – we just keep following Jesus, like Stephen.
- III. Dwelling in the Presence of Christ (v15)
- a. I don’t know. This is totally conjecture on my part. But we’ve just observed 5 instances where Stephen was experiencing the very same experience as his Lord and Savior. I think just maybe by the time that 5<sup>th</sup> one rolled around, it may have dawned on Stephen that he was standing exactly where Jesus had stood.
  - b. Whatever the case may be, we do know this, an overwhelming sense of peace and comfort and faith so enveloped Stephen while he as being maliciously assaulted, that his very countenance was glowing with an undeniable, other-worldly glow.

- i. Talk about Stephen doing great wonders. That was his greatest wonder and sign of all. Ill. Some of us lose all composure if someone cuts us off in traffic.
- c. He knew Jesus was closer to him in that moment than he ever realized before, and in the very next chapter he sees his savior rise to welcome him home.
- d. No wonder his face was shining. He as getting ready to step into glory! The secret to Stephen is that he lived every day like he was getting ready to go to glory! If our eyes are on glory, our lives will glow with grace and power and maybe our faces too.

Conclusion – where do Christlike deacons come from? Christlike churches.