

"The Trial of Stephen"

Part 9

Acts 6:8-7:60

**Introduction:** In the Word of God we read of Jesus being seated on the Father's right hand.

**Colossians 3:1**

*If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.*

**Hebrews 10:11-12**

<sup>11</sup> *And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins:*

<sup>12</sup> *But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God;*

**Hebrews 12:2**

<sup>2</sup> *Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

But last week in our study of Acts, Stephen testified of Jesus standing at the Father's right hand.

**Notice Acts 7:55-56**

Jesus is standing here because He is preparing to receive Stephen, the very first Christian martyr into His presence. As we looked at this last week, we were reminded that Jesus will stand to receive each of us when our appointed day to die comes.

**Psalm 73:23-25**

<sup>23</sup> *Nevertheless I am continually with thee: thou hast holden me by my right hand.*

<sup>24</sup> *Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory.*

<sup>25</sup> *Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee.*

**John 14:1-3**

*Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me.*

<sup>2</sup> *In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.*

<sup>3</sup> *And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.*

Tonight in our study we have come to the conclusion of Stephen's trial as we approach the end of Acts 7.

**"Stephen's Death"**

**Notice Acts 7:56-57**

As Stephen testified of what he was able to see as he looked into heaven those who had him on trial stopped their ears because they thought his Words were blasphemy and they did not want polluted with what Stephen was saying. As we look at this it is interesting to recall what Jesus said to those who placed Him on trial.

**Mark 14:61-62**

<sup>61</sup> *But he held his peace, and answered nothing. Again the high priest asked him, and said unto him, Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?*

<sup>62</sup> *And Jesus said, I am: and ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.*

I placed emphasis on the high priest because of how Acts 7 opens.

**Acts 7:1**

Then said the high priest, Are these things so?

This high priest was in charge of the trial of Stephen. This is probably the very same high priest Jesus was speaking to in Mark 14. His name was Caiaphas and therefore he heard this testimony from Jesus and from Stephen. But he continued to suppress the Truth.

**Notice Acts 7:58**

This stoning was completely unlawful. The Jews had no authority to carry out capital punishment. This was to be done by the Romans. This was a "lynching." It was mob violence by the Jews.

The act of stoning was very brutal. Shirley tells us what is recorded about stoning:

*"The Bible doesn't tell us exactly how people were stoned, but we do have accounts over the centuries that tell us some of the methods used. One account is given to us in the Jewish Mishnah (multiple oral Jewish traditions combined into a single work). In (Sanhedrin, ch. 6, Mishnah 4) it says this on how a person was to be stoned:*

*#1. The place of stoning was twice a man's height (with rocks below).*

*#2. One of the witnesses pushed him by the hips, [so that] he was overturned on his heart (fell face first on the rocks).*

*#3. He was then turned on his back.*

*#4. If that caused his death, he had fulfilled [his duty]; but if not, the second witness took a (large) stone and threw it on his chest.*

*#5. If he died thereby, he had done [his duty]; but if not, he [the criminal] was stoned by all Israel.*

*No one in the Bible was to be stoned unless their sin could be verified by two or more witnesses. In addition, the witness (or witnesses) were to be the first to cast a stone at the condemned, followed by all of the people (Deut 17:6-7).*

*(Also see: Deut 19:15, Num 35:30, Jn 8:17, Lev 24:14)*

*The stoning usually took place outside of the camp or city walls (Lev 24:14,23)(Num 15:35)(Acts 7:58), and was usually done by the "men of his (or her) city" (Deut 21:21)(Deut 22:21).*

*Several innocent people were stoned to death in the Bible: Stephen (Acts 7:54-60), Naboth (1 Kin 21), Zechariah (2 Chr 24:20-22).*

*Paul was stoned as well, but did not die (they thought he was dead)(Acts 14:19-20)(2 Cor 11:25).*

*The Jews sought to stone Jesus at one point for what they believed was blasphemy (Jesus claiming to be God), but He escaped them (Jn 10:22-39)."*

**Notice Acts 7:58 again.**

There was in the crowd a man named Saul who will later become the Apostle Paul. The Words of Stephen brought conviction to his heart as he witnessed the stoning and placed his approval on his death. Notice what Jesus said to Paul on the Damascus Road.

**Acts 9:4-5**

*<sup>4</sup> And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?*

*<sup>5</sup> And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.*

The interesting thing here is that Stephen did not know Saul. He did not know he would become the Apostle to the Gentiles. Stephen had no idea how God would use his Words to change a man who would be used by God to change the world.

**Application:**

This should be a great encouragement for all of us. When we speak the Truth, we have no idea how God will use it. When we hand out a Gospel tract, we do not know who will eventually read it and how God will choose to use it.

**Isaiah 55:8-11**

*<sup>8</sup> For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD.*

*<sup>9</sup> For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.*

*<sup>10</sup> For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater:*

*<sup>11</sup> So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.*

Stephen was stoned to death but not before he made a mark on the man Saul. Notice the words of Whitcomb on these thoughts:

*"It is quite possible that much of the information about Stephen's preaching and martyrdom was given to Luke by Paul, as this event and the words of Stephen were so*

pressed into his memory. Luke used various sources, under God's direction, and Paul, a close companion of Luke, could have provided many of these details."

**Notice Acts 7:59-60**

Stephen's last Words echo the Words of Jesus Christ on the cross.

Stephen said, "**Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.**"

Now notice what Jesus said.

**Luke 23:46**

<sup>46</sup> 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.

Stephen also said, "**Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.**"

Notice what Jesus said.

**Luke 23:34**

<sup>34</sup> Then said Jesus, Father, **forgive them; for they know not what they do.** And they parted his raiment, and cast lots.

Stephen was being obedient even in the face of death when he prayed, "**Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.**"

Notice what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount.

**Matthew 5:43-44**

<sup>43</sup> Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy.

<sup>44</sup> But I say unto you, **Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;**

The Lord answered Stephen's prayer because we know at least one out of the group who was saved and that was Saul.

Now let me show you a different response by a man who was stoned in the old testament.

**2 Chronicles 24:20-22**

<sup>20</sup> And the Spirit of God came upon Zechariah the son of Jehoiada the priest, which stood above the people, and said unto them, Thus saith God, Why transgress ye the

*commandments of the LORD, that ye cannot prosper? because ye have forsaken the LORD, he hath also forsaken you.*

*<sup>21</sup> And they conspired against him, and stoned him with stones at the commandment of the king in the court of the house of the LORD.*

*<sup>22</sup> Thus Joash the king remembered not the kindness which Jehoiada his father had done to him, but slew his son. And when he died, he said, The LORD look upon it, and require it.*

The prayers of Zechariah and Stephen are both Biblical prayers. Zechariah committed his murderers to the Lord because vengeance belongs to the Lord. Stephen prayed for forgiveness for his murderers because God's grace is greater than all of our sin.

**Notice Acts 7:60 again.**

At the end of this verse we are told that Stephen "fell asleep." What a peaceful way to bring such a brutal event to a close! The Bible often refers to the believer's death as sleep because just like a person who sleeps will eventually awake so the believer will one day be resurrected.

**Conclusion:**

*Notice the words of Woodbridge:*

*"His coolness in the face of danger was amazing: the howling, seething multitude seemed unable to raise the temperature of his spirit. His consistency in the presence of confusion was remarkable: he met an incensed mob with unhurried logic. His courage in the midst of growling foes was unsurpassed: he denounced them fearlessly for their sins. His charity was beautiful in the hour of death: he remembered his executioners' destiny. His countenance was angelic in a sea of scowling faces: he had learned his secret well. It was the secret of the Saviour's presence. Stephen knew that Christ abides in the hearts of His own. He will never leave nor forsake them. Even amid circumstances which might seem to blast all human hopes, He dwells within to bless. Man may oppress or ridicule or misunderstand. But Christ is able to keep His dear ones in perfect peace. "Lo, I am with you always" (Matt. 28:20) is not a vague promise. It is a present reality. Many children of God have not entered into their inheritance in this matter. They remain fretful and worried. The story of Stephen gives them the cue they need. It is the Holy Spirit who enables the believer to realize Christ's presence. It is He who sheds abroad the love of the Saviour and implements that love to our needs. Stephen was prepared for suffering because he was "full of the Holy Spirit." The Lord Jesus is wondrously near and dear to those who are yielded to the Spirit."*