

*“Dying To Please God!”*

## 1. **Intro:**

- 1.1. Henry Varley said, “The world has yet to see what God can do **with & for & through & in** a man, who is **fully & wholly** consecrated to Him.” (Stephen!!!)
  - 1.1.1. **It says of Stephen he was:** full of **faith(6:5)**; full of **Grace(6:8)**; full of **Power(6:8)**; full of **Light(6:15)**; full of **Scripture(ch.7)**; full of **Wisdom(6:3,10)**; full of **courage(7:51-56)**; full of **Love(7:60)**.
- 1.2. Stephen reminds us so eloquently, by his **words by his life**: God wants a personal relationship with His people. Not a system, nor a dead religion. **He wants you!** He wants to be your God & friend. He wants a partnership with His creatures! He wants them to **love him & enjoy Him forever!**
- 1.3. In a commencement address at Harvard University, *Alexander Solzhenitsyn* tried to summarize the root problem facing **Capitalism & Marxism**. He said that the trouble w/**both** systems is that **men have forgotten God**. One system does it by its *materialistic philosophy*; the other system by its *materialist economy*.<sup>1</sup>
  - 1.3.1. But “*the sin of forgetting God*” is not just the sin of **economics & governments**. It can be the sin of **religion** as well!
    - 1.3.1.1. Religious people forget God by setting up a **religious system** in His place!!!
    - 1.3.1.2. Stephen was up against such a system!

## 2. **DYING TO PLEASE GOD! (6:8-7:60)**

- 2.1. **STEPHEN!** (8-15)
- 2.2. (8) From **serving tables** to **doing miracles** –
  - 2.2.1. In the parable of Talents, in Mt.25:21, Jesus said, “**Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!**”
  - 2.2.2. Being faithful in the **little** things, in the **small** things, the Lord honors!
  - 2.2.3. D.L.Moody, “There are many of us that are willing to do **great things** for the Lord; but few of us are willing to do **little things**.”
- 2.3. (9) **The Synagogue of the Freedmen** – According to the Talmud, Jerusalem had **480** synagogues at the time.
  - 2.3.1. **Freedmen** – may have referred to their identity as former slaves, or descendants of captives taken from Palestine during the Dispersion.

<sup>1</sup> The Acts of God; George & Donald Sweeting; pg.59.

- 2.4. (10) This will make more sense when you hear his argument for His Messiah.
- 2.4.1. His message was so reasonable & he could defend it so well, that he won all the arguments.
- 2.5. (11-15) Well they thought, if you can't beat em...Lie!
- 2.6. The *unbelievers* treated **Stephen** the way the *Sanhedrin* treated **Jesus**.
- 2.6.1. They arrested him on trumped-up charges & hired false witnesses.
- 2.7. (13) **Blasphemous words against the law** – The council was **behind the times** as the law had been **nailed to the cross!**
- 2.7.1. Col.2:14 “having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross.”
- 2.7.2. **The veil** had been torn & in a few years both the **Temple** & the **City** would be gone, & **Hosea 3:4** would be fulfilled, “For the Israelites will live many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred stones, without ephod or idol.” Then what?
- 2.8. (15) This reminds me of *Charles Spurgeon* when he was training young ministers he said to his students, “When you talk about **heaven** let your face light up with a heavenly glory. When you tell about **hell**, your everyday face will do.”
- 2.9. Interesting, they said **Stephen** was opposing **Moses**, but he had a **shining face** just like Moses! (Ex.34)
- 2.9.1. Q: Is this what your face looks like when someone's lying about you?
- 2.9.2. Here's the true sign of God's presence!
- 2.10. Shine, Stephen...shine!
- 2.10.1. Phil.2:15 “among whom you shine as lights in the world,”
- 2.10.2. “Don't expect God to use you as a **lighthouse** somewhere else, if He can't use you as a **candle** where you are!”
- 2.11. **But what did they mean the face of an angel?** [not fat pink winged/babies with *bow & arrows*]
- 2.11.1. Scripture shows an angelic face as something to be **feared!**
- 2.11.2. The angel who appeared to **Manoah** was said to of been “**very awesome/terrible!**”
- 2.11.3. When **Moses** face shone they were **afraid to come near him!** Ex.34:35
- 2.11.4. The **angel** that appeared at the tomb was explained “**like lightening!**”
- 2.11.5. Maybe we can picture Stephen's face as expressing **both strength & sweetness!**
- 2.12. **ABRAHAM!** (7:1-8)
- 2.13. **Are these things true** – in our present day court system, “How do you plead **guilty**, or **not guilty?**”

- 2.14. This trial provided a forum for Stephen to speak with **passion & persuasion** in the triumph of the Spirit.
- 2.14.1. Stephen's speech is important in understanding the way in which the gospel moved from its **Jewish** beginnings to a **Gentile** world.
- 2.14.2. God is not "tied down to a land"(i.e. Israel) though He gave that as a blessing to the Jews.
- 2.14.2.1. God worked in their lives much more **outside** the Promised Land than **within**.
- 2.14.2.2. Think of the "landless" **Abraham**(in Mesopotamia); **Moses** in the wilderness; the **Joseph** down in Egypt; **Esther** in Persia; **Daniel, Jeremiah & Ezekiel** in Babylon.
- 2.15. The Jews tended to think that God is a **tribal God**, "the God of Israel, His chosen people."
- 2.15.1. From this **Jewish Nationalistic point of view**, access to God could only be attained through **the priests** in Jerusalem & **the sacrifices** in the Jewish Temple. [Multiple **synagogues** were not *substitutes* for the **Temple**, only *reflections* of it]
- 2.15.2. From **Stephen's Biblical view point**, he realized God was **not** a tribal God, but was Sovereign over the whole universe.
- 2.15.2.1. He was not only God of **Israel**, but of **every nation** on earth!
- 2.16. Stephen knew the **Temple & Law** were **valid**, yet not the **exclusive** means of finding God. (a person doesn't need to become a Jew in order to get to God!)
- 2.16.1.1. He is paving the way here for the **Samaritans & the Gentiles**.
- 2.17. Note 2 indirect references to Samaria:
- 2.17.1. (16) **Shechem** [which is in Samaria]
- 2.17.2. (37) **A prophet like me** [only Messianic prophecy that the Samaritans had accepted]
- 2.18. He knew the **Samaritans** would never accept worship at the **Jewish Temple** as a precondition for salvation through Jesus as Messiah.
- 2.18.1. Here Stephen **contextualizes** the gospel for the Samaritans!
- 2.18.2. There was nothing wrong with the Temple(he himself worshiped there) – but *cross-culturally* it was **excess baggage** if loaded onto the simple gospel of repentance for sin, & faith in Jesus Christ.
- 2.19. **JOSEPH!** (9-16)
- 2.20. God **protected** Joseph the prisoner in Egypt (9): God was always with him.
- 2.21. God **promoted** Joseph to prime minister over Egypt (10–16): God gave him favor with Pharaoh.
- 2.22. **MOSES!** (17-36)
- 2.23. (34) **Now come** – **Now?** (after 40 years...now?)
- 2.24. **1<sup>st</sup>** 40 years he was down in Egypt (vs. 20-22). **God promoted him.**
- 2.25. **2<sup>nd</sup>** 40 years Fled to Midian (vs. 23-29). **God prepared him.**

- 2.26. **Final** 40 years led the children of Israel in the wilderness (30-36). **God empowered him.**
- 2.27. **40 yrs is a long time to wait for a mission! Yet when God delays, He is not inactive!**
- 2.27.1. This is when He **prepares** His instruments & **matures** our strength.
- 2.28. **God is never in a hurry.** He spends **years** preparing those He plans to greatly use.
- 2.28.1. Sometimes he uses the **fires** of **prolonged pain** (like Joseph's long trial)
- 2.28.2. There is a **reason** behind every lesson!
- 2.29. **God is in the process of educating us for future service & greater blessings.**
- 2.29.1. And if we have gained the qualities that make us ready for a **throne**, nothing will keep us from it, once His timing is right.
- 2.29.2. He is **never late...learn to wait!**
- 2.29.3. **The second, minute, & hour hand** must all point to the precise moment for action!
- 2.30. Never refuse **God's incubator** to form you in His image!
- 2.30.1. **Broiled Steaks** – took them out too soon (too red in center).
- 2.30.1.1. Don't come out of His incubator too soon!
- 2.31. **ISRAELS REBELS!** (37-43)
- 2.32. Esp. vs.39.
- 2.33. **TABERNACLE!** (44-50)
- 2.34. **The portable tabernacle** in the wilderness, which also was **outside** the Holy Land, could be used **any place** to bring people into contact with God!
- 2.35. (50) The main thrust of Stephen's message is that Israel always **resisted** the truth & **rejected** the deliverers God sent to them.
- 2.35.1. They opposed **Moses** & repeatedly wanted to return to Egypt.
- 2.35.2. They opposed **Joseph** & he later became their redeemer.
- 2.35.3. They rejected **the many prophets** God sent to warn them & call them back to His way.
- 2.35.4. Finally, they rejected **their own Messiah**, & crucified Him.<sup>2</sup>
- 2.36. Israel's history reveals the **patience** of God, & the **hardness** of man's heart.
- 2.36.1. But it also reveals **a ray of hope**: Israel **rejected** their deliverers the **1<sup>st</sup> time**, but **accepted** them the **2<sup>nd</sup> time**.
- 2.36.2. That was true of **Moses & Joseph** & it will be true of **Jesus** when He returns.
- 2.37. **PERSONAL INDICTMENT!** (51-53)
- 2.38. His speech climaxed by accusing them of denying **God's prophets, Spirit, & Messiah.**
- 2.38.1. They are **heathens at heart** and **deaf to the truth** (51).
- 2.38.2. They **betrayed** and **murdered** their own Messiah (52).
- 2.38.3. They are **deliberately disobeying** God's laws (53).

<sup>2</sup> Warren Wiersbe; With The Word; pg.711

- 2.39. **PROTO-MARTYR!** (54-60) [Proto-martyr = 1<sup>st</sup> in long line of “*martyrs of Jesus*”]
- 2.40. (54) No time for an altar call...as he’s abruptly cut off.
- 2.40.1. Before the Roman soldiers could be alerted, they drag him off, & throw him into a stoning pit, & quickly bludgeon him to death.
- 2.40.2. His enemies couldn’t silence him **intellectually**, so they decided to take their only viable recourse & silence him **physically**.
- 2.40.2.1. **Can’t beat em...then beat em!**
- 2.41. (55) He gazed into heaven – He looked **up**, **not back** to the cross.
- 2.41.1. We fellowship with a *living, exalted, reigning, coming* Lord!
- 2.41.2. **Poem:** It is not **looking back** down the list of years,  
To see failures, sins, temptations, follies, fears,...and tears;  
Nor is it **looking on**, with hope all bright & fair,  
To meet, so often, bitter disappointment there,...and care.  
No, it is **looking up**, a living Christ to see,  
And leaning calmly, Lord, and, oh, so trustingly on Thee.<sup>3</sup>
- 2.42. (57) What was the trigger for violence? That he called them **stiff-necked & uncircumcised in heart & ears?** **Nope!**
- 2.42.1. It was when he said vs.56 – “If **Jesus** was standing on the right hand of God, this would show the Christians **right** in the sight of God”...this was just **too much** for them!
- 2.43. (58) Maybe this victorious death, was the human agency God used in **Saul’s** life that conquered Saul’s heart, to become the worlds greatest Christian missionary.
- 2.44. (56,59) Both quotes are from Jesus during His ministry.
- 2.45. (60) Stephen’s death was the 3<sup>rd</sup> murder in Israel’s history that became a turning point in God’s dealings w/the nation:
- 2.45.1. They had rejected **the Father** when they allowed **John the Baptist** to be slain.
- 2.45.2. They had rejected **the Son** when they asked for **Jesus** to be crucified.
- 2.45.3. And now they had rejected **the H.S.** here wit **Stephen’s** death.<sup>4</sup>
- 2.46. **He fell asleep** – because **death** for all believers is only *the sleep of body & the awakening of the soul* with Christ in glory!
- 2.47. The name **Stephen** {*stephanos*} “**a crown**”.
- 2.47.1. **Be faithful, even to the point of death, & I will give you the crown of life.** Rev.2:10
- 2.48. **Stephen** *servicing, shining, sharing, suffering,...shining!*
- 2.48.1. Full of **faith**(6:5); full of **Grace**(6:8); full of **Power**(6:8); full of **Light**(6:15); full of **Scripture**(ch.7); full of **Wisdom**(6:3,10); full of **courage**(7:51-56); full of **Love**(7:60).
- 2.49. Stephen’s death was **not the end!** - His death was **another phase** in the beginning of a **new community** that God was bringing into existence.

<sup>3</sup> S.T.F.(?); Griffith Thomas; Luke; pg.135

<sup>4</sup> Warren Wiersbe; With The Word; pg.712