

## Protomartyr

### I. Slide1 Announce:

- A. **Slide2 Kelly:** Jonah Study.
- B. **Slide3a/b Brian:** Wed Night (2) things.
- C. **Slide4** Also, in the midst of all this, **Jaya** received a call from the government. *Jaya I know we are in lock down but you can go feed the Rohingya* (not allowed to by Myanmar). **Each family received an emergency food pack.** Also we sent the \$ designated for the next widows weaving training to start.
- D. **Slide5 Brian,** when are we opening? *Is this a time for **civil disobedience**, or An unprecedented time...a time to work **with** our community leaders to do what's best for us & our neighbors.*
1. **For me it is crystal clear...**My calling is to **Shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight.** (1 Pet.5:2).
    - a) A shepherd is to **lead** sheep. I cannot **lead** by someone else telling me what to do. *Whether that's another shepherd of another flock, or one of my own sheep. I'm doing my best to follow the **Chief Shepherd...**and **He** can remove me from this position whenever He desires.*
    - b) Myself, & our leaders, have been meeting, praying, doing our best to hear from God on what WE should do through all of this.
  2. **Some are saying our Governor is saying that *the church is non-essential?*** His focus is not on what we **do** as a church **but** how we **meet** as a group (it's a large gathering issue). *I'm hearing, he will be opening churches to some extent in the next week or 2?*
  3. **Civil Disobedience in the NT?** I believe is only for **the gospels sake.** Acts3,5
  4. **But what about our rights?** (1st I think there is a lot of confusion between our **civil** rights & our **biblical** rights) Sometimes Paul used his Roman citizenship (civil), sometimes he choose **not** to. **Actually, he only did twice, & both times as a last resort. [just because you have rights (civil), doesn't mean you have to use them]** (Ps: and because he **didn't** the Philippian

jailer was saved that night in prison **Acts 16**). 2nd time he used it to be able to *share the gospel* in Rome & w/Caesar. **Acts 22**

5. **When will we open our offices?** Actually our plan was this Wed, but we finally found our leak in our fire sprinkling line out front, & have to shut down all water Wed-Fri. **So we will open** the office the following Tues 26th

6. **When will we open for Modified Services?** We are listening to God's leading, assessing what is **good**, what is **right**, what is the **best time & best method** to open. *What I promise is...to lead us into this new season, assessing new ways to minister in a post COVID culture.*

a) Never in the history of the church, *has NOT being able to meet in a building* ever been a threat to *His Church*. It has only caused it to **grow** (eg. China).

(1) As one who has traveled to many oppressed countries, *multiple times*, I know 1st hand what **religious persecution** looks like. And I believe what we are going through...is **not it**.

b) **Our church never closed**. I am so proud of our church members who have risen to this challenge. And *though bummed to not be able to meet in person*, have met online in groups. **Collected 4 tons of food for our local Pantry, started making meals, delivered food to shut ins, & ministering to fearful neighbors.** *Keep it up CM!*

7. I will read again what God gave me in March when this started. **We will trust in God**. **We will** look to **Him**, not our circumstance. **We will** seek to be **generous**. **We will** watch for **God** to do something *bigger than us*. **We will** one day look back and remember **what we choose to do** during this time. **Christ > Covid** (ty Brian Kelly, CC Auckland)

E. Pray: **Jesus** you are *the light of the world*. And you called **us** to be the same. *May we be stained glass saints, You shining through us. Us reflecting beauty & color from our lives, to any who gaze upon us.*

## II. Slide6a **STEPHEN, PROTOMARTYR**

- A. *protomartyr* ['prōdō, mǎrdər] NOUN the first martyr for a cause, especially the first Christian martyr, *St. Stephen*.
- B. Henry Varley, *The world has yet to see what God can do with & for & through & in a man, who is fully & wholly consecrated to Him*. (maybe we found him? Stephen)
1. **Slide6b** 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 **Wisdom** (6:3,10). Then in **ch.7** he's full of **Scripture**, full of **courage** (7:51-56), full of **Love** (7:60).
- C. Stephen displays for us, by his **words** by his **life**, that God wants a **personal relationship** with His people.
1. 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**.
- D. In a commencement address at Harvard University 1978, *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. But **the sin of forgetting God** is not just the sin of **economics & governments**. It can be the sin of **religion** as well.
    - a) Religious people **forget God** by setting up a **religious system** in **His place**. Stephen was up against such a **system**.

### III. **Slide7 STEPHEN, WHERE YOU GOING WITH THIS?** (60 verses?)

- A. We met Stephen last chapter. Raised up as a *deacon* to help serve in the benevolence ministry of the church. Got in a *dispute* with guys from the Freedmen synagogue. He **outwits them**. They lie & have him seized on trumped up charges & brought b4 the Sanhedrin. *Are these things so/true?* He uses the opportunity to preach.
- B. So, why does Stephen think he can *educate* the **Sanhedrin** on the OT story?

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

1. They were as familiar w/it as he, **but** here he gives his apologia/defense in such a way as to **draw lessons from it** *which they had never learned or even noticed*.
  - a) **Eg.** It's **you & I** hearing for years the scripture *Be still & know that I am God*. And thinking it meant some *mystical quietness*, when in fact the whole verse gives us the context *Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations/ethnos, I will be exalted in the earth!* Ps.46:10
  - b) **So, what did they miss?**

#### IV. Slide8 3 MAIN IDEAS

1. **The Land** (2-16) - the Jews were convinced **the land** was God's greatest gift to them. **This is where God lived and worked** (almost like a tribal god)
  - a) So Stephen denied that God was *tied to any land*. **Actually showing that God worked in their lives much more *outside* the promised land than *within*.**  
It was to *a landless Abraham* that God gave the promises to Israel.
2. **The Law/Moses** (17-43) - Moses was the great giver of the law. **Yet**, they constantly disobeyed him?
  - a) Stephen's speaks of Moses' career, **longer** and **fuller** than his account of the others, **because** he had been *accused of speaking against Moses* (6:11,13). **He leaves his judges in no doubt of his *immense respect* for Moses' **leadership and lawgiving.****
  - b) Interesting from 1-43 there is *not a word of temple, not a word of sacrifice*.
    - (1) Chrysostom says, the *holy ground* at the *burning bush* was *far more wonderful...than...the Holy of Holies*, **for** God is nowhere said to have appeared in the inner sanctuary in Jerusalem **as** he did in the burning bush. (presence there, **but** not *face to face*) [Midian/Saudi Arabia]
      - (a) **So** what you & I learn from Moses is that ***God is everywhere present' and that the holy place is there wherever God may be.***

3. **The Tabernacle** (44-50) - God allowed the temple to be built by Solomon, because the Jews demanded it. **But** God himself was *satisfied* with the *nomadic life* of the **Tabernacle**.
- Here he points out the God of Israel is *a pilgrim God*, who is not restricted to any one place.
  - 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.

## V. Slide9 4 MAJOR EPOCHS with 4 MAJOR CHARACTERS

- A. What Stephen did was to pick out **4 major epochs** of Israel's history, dominated by **4 major characters**.<sup>2</sup>
- Abraham** and the patriarchal age (2-8).
  - Joseph** and the Egyptian exile (9-19).
  - Moses**, the Exodus and the wilderness wanderings (20-44).  
[divides into 3, 40-year periods, vs.23,30,36]
    - 1<sup>st</sup>** 40 years he was down in **Egypt** (vs. 20-22). *God promoted him.*
    - 2<sup>nd</sup>** 40 years Fled to **Midian** (vs. 23-29). *God prepared him.*
    - Final** 40 years led the children of Israel in the **wilderness** (30-36). *God empowered him.*
    - 40 yrs** is a long time to wait for a mission. **Yet when God delays, He is not inactive.**
      - This is when He **prepares** His instruments **& matures** our strength.
    - God is never in a hurry.** He spends **years** preparing those He plans to greatly use. [There is a **reason/purpose/end plan** behind every lesson]
  - David and Solomon**, and the establishment of the monarchy (45-50).
    - What connects the 4 is that in *none of them* was God's presence *limited* to any particular place. **On the contrary**, the God of the OT was **the living God**, a **God on the move and on the march**, who was always **calling his people out to fresh adventures**, **and always accompanying & directing** them as they went.

<sup>2</sup> John Stott, *The Message of Acts*, Acts7.

B. Now if **Mesopotamia** was the surprising context in which God appeared to Abraham. **Egypt** was the equally surprising scene of God's dealings with **Joseph** (9-19). 6 times in 7vs. Stephen repeats the word **Egypt**, as if to make sure that his hearers have grasped its significance. [13 in ch.]

1. From Mesopotamia, to Egypt, to Midian, to Trans-Jordan (**wilderness**), into Israel. **And now shhhhh...**The gospel is on the **move** again from its Jewish beginnings to the **Samaritans** & to the **Gentile** world.

C. Note 2 indirect references to **Samaria**:

1. (16) **Shechem** = Samaria. (37) **A prophet like me** [this was the **only Messianic prophecy** that **the Samaritans** had accepted]

a) Stephen knew the **Samaritans** would never accept worship at the **Jewish Temple** as a precondition for salvation through Jesus as Messiah.

(1) So Stephen **contextualizes** the gospel for the Samaritans.

(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**.

## VI. Slide10a **STEPHEN'S REBUKE (51-53)** (read)

A. That the Jews **rejected the gospel** should be no surprise. Stephen asserted that they had **rejected** the word of God throughout their history as God's chosen people.

1. **Slide10b** They are **heathens at heart** and **deaf to the truth** (51).

2. They **betrayed** and **murdered** their own Messiah (52).

3. They are **deliberately disobeying** God's laws (53).

## VII. Slide11 **STEPHEN STONED (54-60)** (read)

A. (54) No time for an altar call...as he's abruptly **cut off**.

1. Before the Roman soldiers could be alerted, they drag him off, & threw him into a **stoning pit**, & quickly bludgeon him to death.

2. His enemies couldn't silence him **intellectually**, so they decided to take their only viable recourse & silence him **physically**.

- a) Can't **beat** em...**then beat** em.
- B. (56) **Jesus *standing*** - always sitting.
- C. (57) What was the **trigger** for **violence**? That he called them **stiff-necked & uncircumcised in heart & ears**? **Nope!**
1. It was when he said (56) **Jesus was standing on the right hand of God (i.e. alive!)**, this would show the Christians as **right** in the sight of God... this was just **too much** for them.
- D. (60) **He fell asleep** - F.F. Bruce called it, *an unexpectedly beautiful and peaceful description of so brutal a death.*
1. **Sleep** - because death for **all believers** is only the sleep of body & the **awakening of the soul with Christ in glory.**
  2. I believe **this** is called **religious persecution!**

## VIII.Slide12a **STEPHEN**

- A. The name **Stephen** [*stephanos*] **a crown.** *Be faithful, even to the point of death, & I will give you **the crown of life**.* Rev.2:10
- B. 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.
1. Protomartyr yes, **but** what Luke emphasizes is *the vital role Stephen played* in the development of **the worldwide Christian mission** through **both** his **teaching** and his **death.**
- C. **Slide12b** Stephen died, not in **fear** and **despair**, **but** in **Victory.**
1. 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. [discreetly introduced, vs.58]
- D. **Wait**, what did **God do** for the martyr Stephen when he was being stoned to death?
1. **Think about it, God, why didn't you step in?** He **didn't** send an angel to **deliver** him in his hour of agony. **But** God did enable Stephen to say **Lord, do not hold this against them.**

2. In working this miracle of **forgiveness** in the heart of Steven, God did **more than** if He had sent a Legion of angels to deliver him.
  3. *It is human to hold a grudge, but it is Christ-like to forgive.*
    - a) Can you find it in your heart to pardon & pray for those who have *trespassed against you?*
    - b) **2 Christian men** living in a *senior living facility* had been quarreling for many years. When one was finally upon what he believed to be his **deathbed**, called the other and said, *John, I forgive you for what you have **said and done** against me over the years, **and** I want you to do the same for **me**.* The other with tears said *that he would*. For a moment a faraway look came into the eyes of the man lying in the bed, **and** then he said with some spirit, *but John, if I get better, **this doesn't count!*** (laugh track, ha!)
    - c) Remember those wise words, *When you **bury the hatchet** **don't** leave the **handle sticking out**.*
- E. **Slide13** Lk.6:27,28 *love your enemies! **Do good** to those who hate you. **Bless** those who curse you. **Pray for** those who hurt you.*