

■ The First Martyr - Acts 6:8-8:8

Key Thought: Is God saying something you don't want to hear?

Welcome/Prayer:

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Review:

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Intro:

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Scripture: Acts 6:8-8:8

Acts 6:1-8:8 New International Version (NIV)

The Choosing of the Seven

6 In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenistic Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. **2** So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. **3** Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them **4** and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word."

5 This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. **6** They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. **7** So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.

- Stephen, Philip, others first chosen to "wait on tables"
- Zechariah 4:10 New King James Version (NKJV) 10 For who has despised the day of small things?

Stephen Seized

8 Now Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, performed great wonders and signs among the people. **9** Opposition arose, however, from members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called)—Jews of Cyrene and Alexandria as well as the provinces of Cilicia and Asia—who began to argue with Stephen. **10** But they could not stand up against the wisdom the Spirit gave him as he spoke.

• SPIRITUAL POTENTIAL

- Stephen seems like a super Christian
- human being like you and me
- but full of God
- Do we make wrong assumptions of our spiritual potential?
- Compare it to physical dimension? I will not be a Usain Bolt.
- But is the spiritual dimension different?
- James 5:17 New International Version (NIV) 17 Elijah was a human being, even as we are. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years.
- Our spiritual potential is only limited by our availability to God.

• *Our spiritual potential is only limited by our availability to God.*

11 Then they secretly persuaded some men to say, "We have heard Stephen speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God."

- When we allow God to fill us and use us and join Him in what He's doing we will almost certainly face opposition.

12 So they stirred up the people and the elders and the teachers of the law. They seized Stephen and brought him before the Sanhedrin. 13 They produced false witnesses, who testified, "This fellow never stops speaking against this holy place and against the law. 14 For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs Moses handed down to us." 15 All who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel.

Stephen's Speech to the Sanhedrin

7 Then the high priest asked Stephen, "Are these charges true?"

2 To this he replied: "Brothers and fathers, listen to me! The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham while he was still in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Harran. 3 'Leave your country and your people,' God said, 'and go to the land I will show you.'

4 "So he left the land of the Chaldeans and settled in Harran. After the death of his father, God sent him to this land where you are now living. 5 He gave him no inheritance here, not even enough ground to set his foot on. But God promised him that he and his descendants after him would possess the land, even though at that time Abraham had no child. 6 God spoke to him in this way: 'For four hundred years your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated. 7 But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves,' God said, 'and afterward they will come out of that country and worship me in this place.' 8 Then he gave Abraham the covenant of circumcision. And Abraham became the father of Isaac and circumcised him eight days after his birth. Later Isaac became the father of Jacob, and Jacob became the father of the twelve patriarchs.

9 "Because the patriarchs were jealous of Joseph, they sold him as a slave into Egypt. But God was with him 10 and rescued him from all his troubles. He gave Joseph wisdom and enabled him to gain the goodwill of Pharaoh king of Egypt. So Pharaoh made him ruler over Egypt and all his palace.

11 "Then a famine struck all Egypt and Canaan, bringing great suffering, and our ancestors could not find food. 12 When Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent our forefathers on their first visit. 13 On their second visit, Joseph told his brothers who he was, and Pharaoh learned about Joseph's family. 14 After this, Joseph sent for his father Jacob and his whole family, seventy-five in all. 15 Then Jacob went down to Egypt, where he and our ancestors died. 16 Their bodies were brought back to Shechem and placed in the tomb that Abraham had bought from the sons of Hamor at Shechem for a certain sum of money.

17 "As the time drew near for God to fulfill his promise to Abraham, the number of our people in Egypt had greatly increased. 18 Then 'a new king, to whom Joseph meant nothing, came to power in Egypt.' 19 He dealt treacherously with our people and oppressed our ancestors by forcing them to throw out their newborn babies so that they would die.

20 "At that time Moses was born, and he was no ordinary child. For three months he was cared for by his family. 21 When he was placed outside, Pharaoh's daughter took him and brought him up as her own son. 22 Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action.

23 "When Moses was forty years old, he decided to visit his own people, the Israelites. 24 He saw one of them being mistreated by an Egyptian, so he went to his defense and avenged him by killing the Egyptian. 25 Moses thought that his own people would realize that God was using him to rescue them, but they did not. 26 The next day Moses came upon two Israelites who were fighting. He tried to reconcile them by saying, 'Men, you are brothers; why do you want to hurt each other?'

27 "But the man who was mistreating the other pushed Moses aside and said, 'Who made you ruler and judge over us? 28 Are you thinking of killing me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday?' 29 When Moses heard this, he fled to Midian, where he settled as a foreigner and had two sons.

30 “After forty years had passed, an angel appeared to Moses in the flames of a burning bush in the desert near Mount Sinai. 31 When he saw this, he was amazed at the sight. As he went over to get a closer look, he heard the Lord say: 32 ‘I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.’ Moses trembled with fear and did not dare to look.

33 “Then the Lord said to him, ‘Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground. 34 I have indeed seen the oppression of my people in Egypt. I have heard their groaning and have come down to set them free. Now come, I will send you back to Egypt.’

35 “This is the same Moses they had rejected with the words, ‘Who made you ruler and judge?’ He was sent to be their ruler and deliverer by God himself, through the angel who appeared to him in the bush. 36 He led them out of Egypt and performed wonders and signs in Egypt, at the Red Sea and for forty years in the wilderness.

37 “This is the Moses who told the Israelites, ‘God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your own people.’ 38 He was in the assembly in the wilderness, with the angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and with our ancestors; and he received living words to pass on to us.

39 “But our ancestors refused to obey him. Instead, they rejected him and in their hearts turned back to Egypt. 40 They told Aaron, ‘Make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who led us out of Egypt—we don’t know what has happened to him!’ 41 That was the time they made an idol in the form of a calf. They brought sacrifices to it and reveled in what their own hands had made. 42 But God turned away from them and gave them over to the worship of the sun, moon and stars. This agrees with what is written in the book of the prophets:

“‘Did you bring me sacrifices and offerings
forty years in the wilderness, people of Israel?

43 You have taken up the tabernacle of Molek
and the star of your god Rephan,
the idols you made to worship.

Therefore I will send you into exile’ beyond Babylon.

44 “Our ancestors had the tabernacle of the covenant law with them in the wilderness. It had been made as God directed Moses, according to the pattern he had seen. 45 After receiving the tabernacle, our ancestors under Joshua brought it with them when they took the land from the nations God drove out before them. It remained in the land until the time of David, 46 who enjoyed God’s favor and asked that he might provide a dwelling place for the God of Jacob. 47 But it was Solomon who built a house for him.

48 “However, the Most High does not live in houses made by human hands. As the prophet says:

49 “‘Heaven is my throne,
and the earth is my footstool.
What kind of house will you build for me?
says the Lord.

Or where will my resting place be?

50 Has not my hand made all these things?”

51 “You stiff-necked people! Your hearts and ears are still uncircumcised. You are just like your ancestors: You always resist the Holy Spirit! 52 Was there ever a prophet your ancestors did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him— 53 you who have received the law that was given through angels but have not obeyed it.”

● TRUTH, LOVE, AND ANGER

- Connects their shared history through
- Abraham, Isaac, Jacob,
- Joseph, Moses, "but our ancestors refused to obey him..."
- "you are just like your ancestors ...
- "resist the Holy Spirit"
- "received the Law, but have not obeyed it"

- Godly anger: tries to connect with them, but has to give them the truth that they were rejecting Jesus. Ephesians 4:26 New International Version (NIV) 26 “In your anger do not sin”

The Stoning of Stephen

54 When the members of the Sanhedrin heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. 55 But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. 56 “Look,” he said, “I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.”

- Knew Who to look to ... in all of life, perhaps especially in times of opposition.
- Max Lucado story of young Matthew Huffman in my Inspiration Study Bible NKJV Acts 7

57 At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, 58 dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul.

59 While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” 60 Then he fell on his knees and cried out, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” When he had said this, he fell asleep.

- Godly Anger: cared for the eternity of those killing him, those he rebuked.

8 And Saul approved of their killing him.

The Church Persecuted and Scattered

On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. 2 Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. 3 But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison.

- Ungodly Anger:
 - produced false witnesses
 - stirred up opposition
 - approved of Stephen's killing
 - attempted to destroy church
 - dragged off to prison
 - focused on destruction
- Our Anger:
 - What or who angers us?
 - Ephesians 4:26 New International Version (NIV) 26 “In your anger do not sin”:
 - Are my motives truth and love ...
 - 1 Peter 3:15-16 New International Version (NIV) 15 But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect,
 - Or are my motives destruction?
 - In our anger, am I resisting God?
 - James 1:19-20 New International Version (NIV) Listening and Doing 19 My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, 20 because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.

- *What is driving my anger, truth and love or destruction? “In your anger do not sin.”*

• CHURCH

- Sometimes “religion” keeps us from hearing what God is saying.
- God had given Stephen a message for the religious leaders.
- they weren’t the least bit interested. For one thing they were too angry.

- Also, they loved their religion more than they loved God (6:13-14).
- There's nothing wrong with appreciating your church and its traditions. But watch out if they become too important to you.
- We're too angry (6:8-10)
- Is your anger hiding a struggle with God?
- Is God saying something you don't want to hear?
- We love our "religion" more than God (6:13-14)
- Is your church and its traditions interfering with your relationship with God?
- Our "religion" is to be a means, not an end in itself Church is a tool not the goal.
- *Is God saying something you don't want to hear?*
- *Church is a tool, not the goal.*

Philip in Samaria

4 Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. 5 Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Messiah there. 6 When the crowds heard Philip and saw the signs he performed, they all paid close attention to what he said. 7 For with shrieks, impure spirits came out of many, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. 8 So there was great joy in that city.

- **TALKING ABOUT JESUS WITH OTHERS**
- Persecution increased
- Evangelism / Proclamation increased
- Some are called to stay
- Some are called to go
- Believers should be ready to share with any who may be seeking.
- How will we know unless we try? Scatter some seed Look for someone of peace.
- *How will we know if someone is seeking God unless we try to talk about Him?*

Challenge:

- *Our spiritual potential is only limited by our availability to God.*
- *What is driving my anger, truth and love or destruction? "In your anger do not sin."*
- *Is God saying something you don't want to hear?*
- *Church is a tool, not the goal.*
- *How will we know if someone is seeking God unless we try to talk about Him?*

Prayer:

Prayer for spiritual potential, anger, church, persecuted church, and mission work here and there

Benediction:

He is above you to watch over you
 He is beneath you to lift you up
 He is before you to guide you
 He is behind you to keep you from falling and to catch you in grace when you do
 He is beside you to encourage you and
 He is within you to fill you with his love (peace, joy, strength, etc)