

DATE: August 31, 2008

TEXT: Acts 6:8-7:16

TITLE: "Stephen I"



This week and next week I am going to do one of my favorite things... I am going to preach on a person. For me, it is when we study the individuals in Scripture that the Word really comes alive. We are going to look at Stephen. This week we will actually look at the man and see an example of man of faith, an example that we can follow.

The name Stephen is a magnificent name. In Greek it is literally Stephanos, and means crown. Greek has two words for Crown. One is diadem. We sing of this when we say "bring forth the royal diadem and crown him Lord of all." The second word for crown in Greek is Stephanos. A Stephanos was placed on the head of an Olympic victor. Today we give out Gold Medals... They used to give out a Stephanos... a crown. It a crown, not inherited but achieved. A crown of achievement.

This morning we will look at 4 lessons on Stephen and allow the Word of God to come alive.

**Lesson # 1** Notice that every positive quality of Stephen was attributed to God.

Acts 6:5 & 8 states.....5This 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.....8Now Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people.

Stephen, a man of faith. A man filled with the Holy Spirit. A man full of God's grace and power. Stephen is not pictured as being naturally great and multi- talented. Stephen is pictured as an ordinary guy. A man not unlike you or me. The lesson is this... God is constantly calling and using ordinary people. David was a Shepherd. Peter was a fisherman. You and I are ordinary people. God gives His faith, His Holy Spirit, His grace, and His power. Isaiah 41:10 states **"so do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."**

Philippians 3: 14 tells us **"I can do all things through Him who gives me strength."**

These promises in scripture were not written just for Stephen... they were written for you and for me. We and do all things by the power and strength of Christ in our lives.

Do you know who the best Sunday School teachers are? Those men and women who know they can't do it, but that these children need to be loved and they need to hear about the

love of God, so they have learned to rely upon Christ. This is true for all servants of Christ.

People say to me **"I can't do that...I don't know how"** They say **"I can't teach" or "I can't lead a Bible study" or "I can't pray in public" or "I can't share my faith" or I can't preach"** I then reply **"That's perfect...you are just right for that service to Christ."**

If you never allow God to lead you... If you always say "no" to service of the Lord, you will never discover the power of the Holy Spirit. You will never discover the strength that He gives to you. Stephen was great because he was crowned for the achievement of surrender

**Lesson # 2** Notice that Stephen was able to defend his faith READ verse 6:10

**10but they could not stand up against his wisdom or the Spirit by whom he spoke**

There is a belief that is held by many non-Christians, and sadly, even by many Christians.

It is believed that Christianity can not be intellectually defended. It's just a matter of faith. To be a Christian you have to shut down a portion of your brain and just have faith. This is one of the great lies of our society. It was started by a man named Soreen Kierkegaard about 100 years ago. Kierkegaard is the father of Existentialism. He speaks about a "blind leap of faith" in order

to be a Christian. You live in the world by reason and you are religious by faith. What this has done, on the practical level is divorced the church from the world. People believe you function in the work place by reason and come to church and give up your reason and just have faith. This result is the separation of worlds. We have our political worlds and our work worlds and our school worlds that are separate from our Christian worlds. This is impossible. Remember Christianity is something we are not something we do. I am a Christian parent. I am a Christian worker. You may be a Christian student or a Christian teacher or a Christian steel worker. We must not separate our worlds.

Our text is saying that Stephen, by using wisdom, the greek word for rational thinking, and the Spirit, presented a defense of his faith that was irrefutable.

I believe the heart pumps blood to keep me alive... a belief based on observation.

I believe George Washington lived 235 years ago and was the first President of our country. I believe this because of observable historical evidence.

I believe Jesus Christ lived 2000 years ago and claimed to be God and demonstrated that

claim by his actions. I believe this is an historical observable fact.

Stephen proclaimed the truth. 1 Peter 3:15 states "**But in your hearts set apart 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.**"

Are you in obedience to this command? Are you prepared to give others the reason for your faith? Can you share your love of Christ with others?

**Lesson # 3** Stephen demonstrates that being a follower of Jesus Christ is clearly seen by others.

READ verse 6:15

**All who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel.**

There is no such thing as a secret Christian. When Christ is Lord of our lives it is seen by all. Galatians 2:20 states

**I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ Jesus lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God.**

A few years ago I was in a Bennigans restaurant in Mississippi with a group of Christian men during one of my Study Leaves. We were laughing and having a good time. Our waitress came up to the table, it was not real busy so she said .."let me tell you this joke I heard." We said..."that's great but we do want it to be a clean joke." She said.. "I don't know any clean jokes." We politely explained that we were Christians and did not want to hear any off-color jokes. That waitress watched us all evening. She came over a few times to share some small talk... but then after we had finished our meal, she came to our table, sat down and for half an hour, as she waited for a large group to arrive that she was assigned to, we talked about faith and the love of Jesus Christ. She spoke about her loneliness, about her break up with a boyfriend, about her half-hearted suicide attempt.. Melissa, that evening heard the gospel of Christ. When we were ready to leave we took Melisa name and address and put her in touch with a local couple who ministered to her.

Being a Christian must show in our lives. I used to hate it when conversation would change when I entered a room. People knew I was a minister so they would clean up the

conversation. I don't hate that any more... I as a Christian should stand for Jesus Christ. My presence as a Christian should affect behavior. This is true with me not because I am a minister... it is true because I am a Christian. The same is true with you as a Christian. We do not need to come across as judgmental or holier than thou... we just need to come across as people who love our Lord Jesus.

**Finally Lesson # 4** Notice the tool Stephen used to defend his faith. Stephen was immersed in Scripture. In Chapter 7 there are 69 scripture references. I read some this week, I'll read the rest next week.

In 6:14 Stephen was accused of "changing the customs of the people". This was a serious charge. People can believe almost anything they want, just don't change the customs. The worship of customs often replaces the worship of Christ. Let me say in the past few weeks I have seen that this is not true in our church. The changes we have made in the past few weeks have gone remarkably smooth...thank you. You have shown a desire to worship the Lord and not fall into the habit of defending customs.

Stephen grounded all that he said in scripture. He states that scripture is the basis of faith, not custom. Custom in and of itself is not bad. Custom allows us to be comfortable and form patterns for life and that is important... but custom must always be subject to scripture. Stephen was a man of the Word.

We have had to look at the great man, Stephen. We have seen that he was a common man who had learned to surrender to Christ and rely upon God's power. We have seen that Stephen was able to reasonably defend this faith. He could answer those who questioned him concerning his love of Christ. Third, we saw that the faith in Christ of Stephen was clearly evident to all around him. We must be lamps of faith in a dark world. Finally, we say that Stephen was a man of Scripture.... who molded his customs to fit the Word of God.

Are you like Stephen? Are you "crowned with the righteousness of God"?

AMEN