



TEACH

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 18, 2018

Acts 7:1-8

The account of Stephen being stoned in front of the counsel is a powerful story. Here is a man who is living the empowered life of a disciple. According to scripture, he is full of faith and power and does wonders and signs.

Because of this:

- Because of this, he's arrested and brought before the counsel
- No crime had been committed and no one had been hurt (quite the opposite)
- False witnesses are produced and he is falsely accused

His defense becomes an incredible outline of their history with God from the beginning. His discourse is not intended to be a rebuke; it's actually history lesson. Stephen is reminding the Jews about whom they are.

God's covenanted people:

- Stephen was reminding them of God's covenant with them
- He traces their history from Abram all the way to Jesus
- This confirms God's ongoing promises to them

The message is clear but it's not always what we think it is. Often we think it's a rebuke or a scolding but it's really a reminder about God's interaction with them as a people.

The message is clear; God keeps His word because He is in covenant with us.

1. The calling Abram out of Mesopotamia and Haran

Genesis 11:27-12:5

- This contains the first contact that we see in scripture toward Abram
- It also contains the first stage of God's covenant with the Israelites

2. The promise of a people and the inheritance of the Promised Land

Genesis 13:14-18

- The promise was for a people and a place to call home
- This was the first stage from being nomads to becoming residents in a land

3. The age of covenant between God and Abram

Genesis 15 – Genesis 50

- This entire portion of scripture is about God's contract with Abram
- It includes a name change to Abraham (father of a multitude)
- It includes the son of promise (Isaac not Ishmael)
- It includes the rise of Jacob to becoming Israel and the twelve patriarchs
- It includes the relocation to Egypt and their prosperity in Goshen

4. The descent into slavery and the birth of a nation

(Exodus and Joshua)

- Exodus chronicles the descent into slavery and the leadership of Moses to deliver them
- Joshua chronicles the crossover into the Promised Land and the development of a nation
- This includes the wars, rebellions and allotments of tribal territory

Stephen's whole address is about the faithfulness of God to fulfill His promises.

The problem wasn't that God was no longer for them, because His promises were sure. The problem was that the whole nation was in rebellion to the Spirit of God. This is where the problem was and this is what they couldn't or wouldn't hear.

Stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears:

Acts 7:51-60

They all knew that what he was saying was true, but they wouldn't face their own rebellion.

- It was easier to deny who they were than embrace all that Jesus had for them
- It seemed more rational to stone Stephen than to reflect on his words

- It was easier to walk their own path, despite the pain, than it was to repent and to walk in God's goodness

This was always a problem for the children of Israel. Their history is filled with examples of their rebellion and God's faithfulness.

Gideon said to Him, "O my lord, if the Lord is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all His miracles which our fathers told us about, saying, 'Did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt?' But now the Lord has forsaken us and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites."

Judges 6:13 (NKJV)

Gideon is questioning God's faithfulness when he says, "where are all His miracles". He wants to be all that God's calling him to be, but he wants to know that God's there.

Stephen is assuring the people of his day that God is still there, but they can't hear it.

- They can't accept that Jesus was the fulfillment of a promise
- The miracles and the messages didn't matter because their desire was different
- They wanted to retain their religious structure and be delivered geopolitically

They wanted the benefits of the promises without the seal of the New Covenant.

- Their physical bodies reflected the mark of the old covenant, but their hearts couldn't embrace the marks of the new
- Their hearts had grown cold to the nature of God and they couldn't embrace His graciousness toward them
- Legalism had replaced relationship and their stony hearts couldn't receive Him

This is a good lesson for all of us to remember. God has something great for us all, but our hearts must be open to receive it.

Choices:

We all have choices to make. These choices will affect the destiny of our lives. Making our choices determines who we will become in the end.

Do we want to become whom God wants us to become or do we want to do our own thing?

Stephen:

Stephen challenged them to embrace whom God wanted them to be. His whole discourse is designed to direct them back to trusting God for their destiny.

This is where we all find ourselves sooner or later.

Who do we want to be? Do we want to find our destiny in Christ or go with our own ideas?

- The apostles were all paying a price for their identity in Christ
- What the Romans and the Jews meant as a deterrent, God used as a magnet
- The harder they pressed the apostles, the more the disciples grew

People who'd been touched by the Holy Spirit couldn't go back to where they came from.

This is a message for us also:

This message was not just for the Jews, it's for us as well. Who do we want to become? When facing Christ this is the definitive question; do we accept or reject?

There is no middle ground to be found on; we are either Stephen or we are Saul.

- We join Christ and pursue our destiny in the New covenant of God or we align ourselves with those who don't
- Saul had to come to this place of revelation and so do we
- We can accept or we can reject but there is no neutral position

...and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith;

Philippians 3:9 (NKJV)

BEING FOUND IN CHRIST
IS THE BEGINNING OF
OUR ETERNAL DESTINY;
WHERE WE MOVE FROM
WHOM WE ARE TO WHO
GOD CREATED US TO BE.

CHILLIWACK VICTORY CHURCH

NO PERFECT PEOPLE