



Stephen: The First Martyr

Acts 7:54-8:2
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The mandate for every Christian: "If anyone would come after me, let him ____ himself and take up his ____ daily and ____ me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself? For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels." (Luke 9:23-26).

The Big Idea: The *Faithfulness of Stephen* was tested. We know very little about the background of Stephen. We do know that the early church recognized his faithfulness. It would be safe to assume that he had developed a history with the disciples. It would also be reasonable to believe that Stephen had witnessed the life and ministry of Jesus. Stephen would quote His Savior with his dying words as he prayed for their forgiveness. "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose". (Jim Elliot).

Acts 7:54-8:2 (ESV)

7 ⁵⁴ Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth at him. ⁵⁵ But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. ⁵⁶ And he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." ⁵⁷ But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together at him. ⁵⁸ Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul. ⁵⁹ And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." ⁶⁰ And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

8 And Saul approved of his execution.

And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of

Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. ² Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him.

Raging Anger: The Word of God stirred up the hate in the people, because they refused to repent. "Now when they heard these things they were _____, and they ground their teeth at him." (Acts 7:54).

Confidence beyond Common Sense: "But he, ____ of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. And he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." (Acts 7:55-56).

Possessed by Satan: "But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and _____ together at him. Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul." (Acts 7:57-58).

Surrendering to the Lord Jesus: "And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, "Lord Jesus, _____ my spirit." (Acts 7:59) Stephen died with a supernatural conviction towards his trust in Jesus Christ.

Forgiving to find Peace: "And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, Lord, do not hold this sin _____ them. And when he had said this, he fell asleep." (Acts 7:60).

God uses adversity to His advantage: "And Saul approved of his execution. And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all _____ throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him." (Acts 8:1-2).

Summary:

Father Tertullian wrote, "The blood of the martyrs became the seed of the church." How would persecution cause the church to increase?

Purification and Authenticity.

Stronger communal bonds and solidarity.

Scattering and unintended evangelism.

Powerful Public Witness.

Spiritual Vitality over institutional comfort.