

Heaven Opened

Joseph Carty / General

Acts / Martyrdom; Stephen; Saul (Name); Paul / Acts 6:8–8:4

Stephen preached a sermon that ended costing him his life. The leaders of Isreal refused to admidt they had made a mistake in killing Jesus. In order to silence the sermon, they put an end to his life. In the midst of being killed Stephen was closer to God than ever. He had a vision of Jesus as he was dying.

- Continuing Sermon
 - series in Acts.
- Last week.
 - 7 deacons chosen.
- Today,
 - next sermon
 - amazing ministry
 - of deacons.
- Sermon Today,

- How to have peace.

- Many Christian
 - claim to have peace.
 - but do not.

- Kids say
 - I'm so full.
 - But I have room
 - for ice cream.

- Christians double speak.
 - I'm full of peace.
- Hardship comes.
 - Constant complaining.

- Learn lesson
 - from Stephen.

Stephen

[Acts 6:8–10](#) (ESV)

And Stephen, full of grace and power, was doing great wonders and signs among the people. Then some of those who belonged to the synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called),

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and of the Cyrenians, and of the Alexandrians, and of those from Cilicia and Asia, rose up and disputed with Stephen. But they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking.

- Stephen
 - great leader
 - signs and wonders

Debate

- Greek Jews
 - debating with him.

Acts 6:10 **ESV**

But they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking.

- Have you ever
 - been in a debate
 - other person
 - way over head?
- They could not
 - argue with truth..

Debate

not God's method.

It is said,

you may win a debate.

but you won't win a friend,

or a convert.

Lies

- When they realized

- they could not argue
- they chose a
 - different route.

[Acts 6:11-14](#) (ESV)

Then they secretly instigated men who said, “We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God.” And they stirred up the people and

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the elders and the scribes, and they came upon him and seized him and brought him before the council, and they set up false witnesses who said, “This man never ceases to speak

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words against this holy place and the law, for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and will change the customs that Moses delivered to us.”

Hypocrisy

- I meet people... say -
 - I’m not religious

- Why?
- Wickedness done
 - in name of religion...
- Some truth to that.

The story is told of a zoo that was noted for their great collection of different animals. One day the gorilla died, and to keep up the appearance of a full range of animals, the zookeeper hired a man to wear a gorilla suit and fill in for the dead animal. It was his first day on the job, and the man didn't know how to act like a gorilla very well. As he tried to move convincingly, he got too close to the wall of the enclosure and tripped and fell into the lion exhibit. He began to scream, convinced his life was over...until the lion spoke to him: "Be quiet, or you're going to get us both fired!"

- Look what they do..
 - stir up people
 - create reason for arrest
 - brought before council
 - false witnesses
 - against
 - Temple

- law
- Moses
- Religious leaders?
 - resort to falsehood?
 - willing to murder?
 - kill innocent?

Final Persecution

- This is Satanic Delusion.
 - kinda like last days.

Revelation 13:15 ESV

And it was allowed to give breath to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast might even speak and might cause those who would not worship the image of the beast to be slain.

- Religious people
 - forcing worship.
 - or death.

- Nothing new.
 - Satan seeks
 - kill
 - steal
 - destroy
- By any means
 - lie and deception.
 - pretend truth.
- Stephen is
 - interrogated
 - accused
 - lies

Shining Like an Angel

- He is calm...

Acts 6:15 ESV

And gazing at him, all who sat in the council saw that his face was like the face of an angel.

- Fill with holy radiance!

Long ago a man sought the perfect picture of peace. Not finding one that satisfied, he announced a contest to produce this masterpiece. The challenge stirred the imagination of artists everywhere, and paintings arrived from far and wide. Finally the great day of revelation arrived. The judges uncovered one peaceful scene after another, while the viewers clapped and cheered.

The tensions grew. Only two pictures remained veiled.

As a judge pulled the cover from one, a hush fell over the crowd.

A mirror-smooth lake reflected lacy, green birches under the soft blush of the evening sky. Along the grassy shore, a flock of sheep grazed undisturbed. Surely this was the winner.

The man with the vision uncovered the second painting himself, and the crowd gasped in surprise. Could this be peace?

A tumultuous waterfall cascaded down a rocky precipice; the crowd could almost feel its cold, penetrating spray. Stormy-gray clouds threatened to explode with lightning, wind and rain. In the midst of the thundering noises and bitter chill, a spindly tree clung to the rocks at the edge of the falls. One of its branches reached out in front of the torrential waters as if foolishly seeking to experience its full power.

A little bird had built a nest in the elbow of that branch. Content and undisturbed in her stormy surroundings, she rested on her eggs. With her eyes closed and her wings ready to cover her little ones, she manifested peace that

transcends all earthly turmoil.

Berit Kjos, A Wardrobe from the King, pp. 45-46.

- Peace is NOT,
 - the absence of problems.
- Peace IS
 - Contentment and thankfulness
 - in harmony or trouble.
- Stephen's face of peace
 - while in trial
 - with liars.
- For some
 - cause more anger!
- Finally allowed to speak
 - long sermon
 - history of Israel

- God's leading.
- Abraham
- Isaac
- Jacob
- 12 Tribes
- Moses
- David
- Solomon

Cutting Rebuke

- After 50 verses
- Stephen get to point:

[Acts 7:51–53](#) (ESV)

“You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they

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killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered, you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it.”

- Stephen's Point
 - History of Israel.
 - lots of mistakes
 - bad leaders
 - rejected prophets
- Shouldn't think
 - we are right
 - because we are leaders.
 - educated people.
- Throughout history
 - leaders made mistakes.
 - educated people wrong.
- Make decisions
 - word of God.

Heavens Opened

- Story Continues:

[Acts 7:54–56](#) (ESV)

Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth at him. But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed

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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.”

- What different experiences.
- Murderers
 - angry
 - enraged
 - out of control
- The abused one.
 - at peace
 - calm

- ready for anything.

- Here is a lesson
 - Stephen was closest
 - to God in his death.

- We tend to think.
 - God only wants good.
- If bad happens
 - we went against God.

- No clearly
 - God's will for
 - Stephen to die.

- Powerful idea
 - God is with him.
 - close to him.
 - strengthening him.

- Through the hard times.
- Closest moment
 - of his life
 - was in his death.

Fiery Furnace

Second Chance

“We are not careful”

4 men

Son of man.

Closest to death

Closest to God.

- Lesson
 - don't fear trials.
 - they may come
 - through will of God.

- Use trials
 - chance to grow
 - in the Lord.

La La La. I'm not Listening.

[Acts 7:57-58](#) (ESV)

But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together at him. Then they

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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.

- Childish thing.
 - La La La
 - I'm not Listening
- Act like mad men
 - demon possessed.

- **Saul**,
 - organizer of death.
 - ring leader.
- Always amazes me...
 - Jesus saw him,
 - and thought,
 - Great Disciple!
- God uses us all.
 - broken as we are.

Acts 7:59–60 *ESV*

And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” 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.

- Christlike man
 - Christlike death.

- Same words of Jesus
 - receive me spirit.
 - forgive them.

- Who says that?
 - while being murdered?
 - after lies.
 - after treachery.
 - please forgive them???

- The one with
 - infinite peace.

In 1555, Dr. Nicholas Ridley was sentenced to be burned at the stake in England because of his witness for Christ. On the night before Ridley's execution, his brother offered to remain with him in the prison chamber to be of assistance and comfort. Nicholas Ridley declined the offer saying, "I intend (God willing) to go to bed, and sleep as quietly tonight, as ever I did." Because he knew the peace of God, he could rest in the strength of the everlasting arms of his Lord to meet his need.

Most of us will never face a trial of our faith that is quite that severe, yet all of us go through difficult times. During those times, we have the opportunity to fix our minds on God and receive His peace.

- True peace
 - trust in God.
 - in the face
 - worst possible results.

Muffin

[Isaiah 26:3-4](#) (ESV)

You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you. Trust in the LORD forever, for the LORD GOD is an everlasting rock.

- As Stephen is murdered.
 - prays for their forgiveness.
- Only the words
 - someone transformed
 - by God's love.

- I hope to experience
 - this love.

› Lesson

- forgiveness
- resentment
- peace

Persecution

- This was beginning

[Acts 8:1-3](#) (ESV)

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,

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except the apostles. Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him. But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison.

- Started great persecution.

- Christians
 - run for their lives

All Things Work Together For Good

Acts 8:4 **ESV**

Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word.

- God amazing.
- Use persecution
 - for his good.

Appeal

- Trust God
- He'll be with you.
- Good / bad.
- Life / death.
- Joy / sorrow.

- Allow His leading.
- With complete trust
 - comes peace.