

THE MURDERED SERVANT

+ **SESSION IN A SENTENCE:**

Stephen preached the gospel with wisdom and boldness and was faithful to Jesus even at the cost of his life.

+ **BACKGROUND PASSAGE:**

Acts 6–7

+ **SETTING:**

Persecution of the early church was increasing in the book of Acts. The leaders in the early church had been imprisoned, beaten, and threatened with murder, but so far none of them had been put to death. However, all of the opposition boiled over in Acts 6–7. The religious leaders took extreme measures to stop the spread of the gospel. Stephen's account teaches us that even through suffering, God is sovereign and on His throne. Stephen preached the gospel faithfully, yet the religious leaders responded with hate and murder.

DAY 1

READ:

Acts 6:8-15

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Acts 6:8

NOTES



KEY DOCTRINE #41:

SIN AND DEATH

The ultimate consequence for sin is death—physical death, spiritual death, and eternal death (Romans 6:23). God was clear to Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden that if they ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they would surely die (Genesis 2:17). The type of death that would result from the fall in the garden of Eden wasn't only physical death but spiritual death as well, the separation of a person from God. Spiritual death continues in a permanent state when someone dies apart from the reconciling work of Christ, who defeated death through His own death on the cross and subsequent resurrection.

In Acts 6:8, Stephen was described as “full of grace and power.” The Lord was performing miracles through Stephen. These miracles did not come from Stephen’s own might, rather this power came from the Spirit’s work in Stephen’s life. Every person who trusts in Christ as the Savior is filled with the Holy Spirit. We should seek to live our lives full of faith and the Holy Spirit. Does your life demonstrate that you are led by the Holy Spirit? Do you seek to live according to God’s design for you in His Word, or do you live like the world around you?

Despite Stephen’s living his life for Christ, others became jealous of the work that God was doing through him. Stephen’s enemies lied against him and accused him of blasphemy (Acts 6:10-11). Ultimately, Stephen was put to death for his testimony about Jesus. Our lives lived for Christ may cause others to oppose the work that God is doing in our lives. However, we should seek to remain faithful to Christ amid opposition.

What lies against the gospel, God, the Word, or His people are prevalent today?

DAY 2

READ:

Acts 6:8-15

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Acts 6:10

NOTES

The opponents of Stephen were unable to counter his teaching (Acts 6:10). In Luke 12:11-12, Jesus warned His disciples that they would be dragged before the authorities but told them not to worry about what they would say because the Holy Spirit would guide them.

Here we see Jesus's promise of the Holy Spirit's guidance in the life of Stephen. The Spirit enabled Stephen to speak wise words that his opponents were unable to combat. The wisdom of man is nothing compared to the wisdom of God.

We often see God's work in our lives in a similar fashion. We should remember that God gives us wisdom to speak in difficult situations. Maybe the Lord brings to mind a Bible verse to share with a friend who is struggling, or you are emboldened to share the gospel with those who are hostile to Christians.

Praise God that He speaks His wisdom through us. And because of it, we have nothing to fear when speaking truth. Thus, we should seek to be faithful witnesses in whatever situation the Lord has us in, whether it seems simple or difficult.

How have you seen God give you words to speak in a difficult situation?

DAY 3

READ:

Acts 7:51-55

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Acts 7:55

NOTES

Persecution and opposition to the church increased. The leaders of the early church had been imprisoned, beaten, and threatened to be killed, but none of them had been put to death. However, all the opposition and jealousy from the religious leaders led to the martyrdom of Stephen. The religious leaders tried to hinder the spread of the gospel through various means, but the gospel continued to spread, and the church continued to grow. The religious leaders opposed the gospel work because sinful man hates the gospel. Thus, they resorted to the extreme measure of killing Stephen.

Even though Stephen was put to death, God was still on His throne. Before Stephen was killed, he was given a glimpse of Jesus in heaven standing at the right hand of God (Acts 7:55). This picture of Christ standing at the right hand of God should be an encouragement to all Christians. No matter what is happening here on earth, Jesus is still in control.

How does Jesus standing at the right hand of God bring comfort to you today?

DAY 4

READ:

Acts 7:51-58

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Acts 7:57

NOTES

Stephen rebuked the religious leaders for doing exactly what their ancestors did: continually rejecting God's messengers and resisting the Holy Spirit (vv. 51-53). The religious leaders, following that same sinful pattern, plugged their ears and shouted in order to keep themselves from hearing God's message through His messenger (v. 57). The religious leaders then fulfilled what Stephen had said they always did: they resisted the Holy Spirit and killed the messenger from God.

It is easy to see the errors and the blind spots of the religious leaders. However, what might be some of the areas of your life where you are not fully submitting to the Word of God? Is there anything in your life that you are holding back from Christ? We should seek to examine our lives and see where we might be plugging our ears to what God has clearly revealed in His Word.

In what areas of my life am I not fully submitting to Christ?

VOICES from THE CHURCH

"Don't miss that the Holy Spirit can be resisted. Though the Spirit brings the truth to bear on a heart and mind, a person can be stubborn and unwilling to respond. Don't be obstinate to what God says through his Word and by his Spirit. The consequences can be disastrous."¹

-Tony Evans

DAY 5

READ:

Acts 7:59-60

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Acts 7:59-60

NOTES

As Stephen was being killed by the religious leaders, he called upon the Lord as a sign of his trust in Jesus. He also prayed for the Lord not to hold their sin against them (v. 60). This is similar to what Jesus said on the cross in Luke 22:34. Stephen believed that Jesus was the divine Judge who alone could condemn or forgive those who killed him. Stephen extended mercy towards those who opposed him. Even as stones pelted his body, Stephen's desire was for his enemies to receive the forgiveness he had found in Jesus Christ alone.

When we are persecuted, it is easy to respond in anger. But we should see Stephen's actions here as a good example of how we should respond to those who oppose and persecute us. Yes, we are called to be bold in the midst of opposition, but we should also desire that our enemies come to know the saving grace of Christ.

To whom in my life can I extend mercy and forgiveness?

GROUP

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"The deepest things that I have learned in my own life have come from the deepest suffering. . . . the greatest gifts of my life have also entailed the greatest suffering."²

—Elisabeth Elliot (1926–2015)

POINT 1: Sharing the gospel requires wisdom (Acts 6:8-15).

If sharing the gospel with wisdom and the Spirit, nothing can withstand it.

? Why is it important to have both wisdom and the Spirit?

In response to the gospel, some will accept it as truth and others will deny it with lies.

? From Day 1: **What lies against the gospel, God, the Word, or His people are prevalent today?**

POINT 2: Sharing the gospel requires boldness (Acts 7:51-53).

Stephen boldly proclaimed that salvation could not be found in the land, law, or temple, but in Jesus Christ alone.

? What are some examples of things we might find "salvation" in other than Christ?

Stephen boldly rebuked the religious leaders for disobeying God.

? Why is it important to acknowledge our sin and disobedience as a main part of the gospel message?

POINT 3: Sharing the gospel requires sacrifice (Acts 7:54-60).

Boldly sharing the gospel will require some, or a lot, of sacrifice.

KEY DOCTRINE #41: SIN AND DEATH

The ultimate consequence for sin is death—physical death, spiritual death, and eternal death (Romans 6:23). God was clear to Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden that if they ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they would surely die (Genesis 2:17). The type of death that would result from the fall in the garden of Eden wasn't only physical death but spiritual death as well, the separation of a person from God. Spiritual death continues in a permanent state when someone dies apart from the reconciling work of Christ, who defeated death through His own death on the cross and subsequent resurrection.



What kinds of sacrifice do believers endure today to spread the good news of Christ?

Like Jesus, we are to forgive those who persecute us.



How should Stephen's response serve as a model for how we respond to those who persecute Christians?

MY RESPONSE

Because we have been saved through the sacrifice and death of Jesus, we bear witness to His great glory, even when we are maligned or persecuted for our faith.

- **HEAD:** How have you come to entrust yourself to Christ as Savior and Lord?
- **HEART:** How can we pray for those who hate us?
- **HANDS:** How can you be a bold witness for Christ this week?



Scan this QR code to access this session's Scripture passages.

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Jesus stood as a helpmate; he stood as if anxious to help Stephen, his athlete, in the struggle. He stood as though ready to crown his martyr. Let him then stand for you that you may not fear him sitting, for he sits when he judges. . . . He sits to judge, he stands to give judgment, and he judges the imperfect."³

—Ambrose (c. 333–397)