

Sermon Discussion 10/25/2015

Acts 6:8-8:4 – “Stephen, Suffering, and the Spread of the Gospel” by Drew Hunter

Sunday's Outline

At this point in the early church, there had already been some persecution against a few of the apostles. Some had been thrown in prison and threatened. But this text tells the story of the first martyr of the church: Stephen. The gospel has saturated Jerusalem, but it has not yet gone to Judea and Samaria. Luke shows us the unique and unpredictable way the gospel spreads beyond Jerusalem through Stephen's witness, namely:

- 1) His character (6:8-15)
- 2) His message (7:1-53)
- 3) His death (7:54-8:4)
- 4) His legacy

The effects of Stephen's actions are widespread. Through his witness, we see that all are called to be witnesses – not just the apostles. He used his knowledge of Scripture to challenge his audience as he pursued their forgiveness and salvation. God uses this persecution to advance the mission.

Quotations

“Without the abiding consciousness of the presence and power of my dear Lord and Savior, nothing else in all the world could have preserved me from losing my reason and perishing miserably. In His words, ‘I am with you always, even to the end of the age,’ became to me so real that it would not have startled me to behold Him, as Stephen did, gazing down upon the scene. I felt His supporting power...It is the sober truth, and it comes back to me sweetly after 20 years, that I had my nearest and dearest glimpses of the face and smiles of my blessed Lord in those dread moments when musket, club, or spear was being leveled at my life. Oh the bliss of living and enduring, as seeing, ‘Him who is invisible.’” -*John Paton, missionary to the New Hebrides*

Help for Understanding & Application

- 1) What is Stephen's role in the church in Jerusalem? What does the text tell us about Stephen's character?
- 2) What does Stephen's summary of the Old Testament in 7:1-53 reveal about him?
- 3) Why do you think the crowd responded so explosively to Stephen's response to the accusations levied at him? What was it about his message that caused such a response? How did the way Stephen told the story differ from the ways contemporary Jews would have told it?
- 4) Trace the theme of “God's pilgrim presence” throughout Stephen's response. Make note of Acts 7:2, 9, 33, 44, 47, 48, and 55.
- 5) How would you re-tell the story of the Old Testament to someone who has never been to church before? How would you tell it to someone who has grown up in the church and has a cursory knowledge of Scripture?
- 6) What would you say is Stephen's motive in this passage? What is the most important thing he wants those listening to him to think or respond?
- 7) How does Stephen's faithful witness encourage us to be faithful witnesses today? In what ways was Stephen like a bridge between the apostles and all other believers, including us?
- 8) How does Jesus' promise to “...be with you always...” encourage you to be a faithful witness today?