

“The Sermon of Stephen”

Acts 7:1-53

Sermon Series Title: “Church Beginnings”

Sermon Series Summary: From now until around Easter, we will be in the book of Acts, covering chapters 1-12. After the Ascension of Jesus Christ, we see the NT church being born by the power of the Holy Spirit. Through this series, we see the church being built, the kingdom going forth, and the gospel being proclaimed.

Setting: The book of Acts is a transitional book between the resurrection of Jesus and the established local churches of the epistles. With Jesus’ call to the church in Acts 1, we see how the gospel spreads to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the end of the earth.

Summary: Being filled with the Holy Spirit, Stephen is led to proclaim Christ through the Old Testament. He rejects the areas of pride in the Jewish leaders, and he teaches how Christ fulfills all of Scripture. He proclaims that they are following their fathers in rejecting God’s sent prophets by rejecting and crucifying God’s ultimate prophet in Jesus.

Sermon Points:

1. Israel’s Pride
2. Stephen’s Points
3. God’s Plea

Main Idea: *“Let us trust in Christ who is our Redeemer and our Refuge.”*

Instead of discussing an introduction question, “popcorn” read Acts 7:1-53.

1. What parts of Stephen’s sermon stick out to you?

(Answers will vary.)

2. How does Stephen connect redemptive history with the Jewish leaders and with Christ?

Community Group Discussion Questions

(Although it is Stephen who is charged with speaking against the temple, the law, Moses, and God, Stephen takes this time to review redemptive history and charge the Jewish leaders of their sin of pride. Then, he calls them to repent and turn to Christ.

First, we see that they take pride in their ancestry. They are descendants of the people chosen by God. Second, they take pride in their land. It was Israel's glorious inheritance after the Exodus. Third, they take pride in their customs (circumcision, sacrificial system, etc.) and temple. This is their system of atonement for sin, sacrament as God's people, and dwelling place of God. Lastly, they take pride in Moses and the Law. Moses is the main prophet used to bring about the most glorious act of redemption in the OT and the Law is the revelation of God.

These sources of pride define their identity, self-worth, and standing with God. They believe that God has to show favor on them and bless them because of their history and customs. They are misinterpreting their religion and using God to justify their sinful behavior.

Stephen calls them out and rebukes them. First, he says that there is nothing special about these ancestors outside of God's grace. And the Jewish leaders are more in line with the sinful Israel ancestors who rejected God's servants. Second, he argues that God blesses Abraham, Joseph, and Moses outside of the land. God is not bound by a geographical area. Third, God's blessings are not bound by customs and temple. God blessed Abraham before circumcision. God's dwelling place is not just in the temple. Fourth, Moses himself said that there will be another prophet that comes after him. Stephen calls Jesus, the Righteous One, addressing the truth that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Law.

Jesus is the ultimate child of God... the Son of God Himself. Jesus is the ultimate inheritance who calls us His inheritance. He is the ultimate temple who was destroyed and raised back on the third day. Jesus is the ultimate prophet, revealing God's truth, and the fulfillment of the Law, living and dying for our salvation.)

3. What are the sources of our pride that we trust in instead of Christ for our source of joy, worth, purpose, and hope?

(Answers will vary.)

4. What do you think is the heart of Stephen as he preaches this sermon? What does this teach us about our hearts as we talk about Christ?

(We see Stephen addressing them with honor and respect. He calls them "fathers and brothers," even though he knows that they want to kill him. But he ends by calling out their pride by calling them a "stiff-necked people." But I believe he is doing it, because he movingly desires for them to trust in Christ.

Community Group Discussion Questions

Stephen knows that what he says will get him killed. And yet, he doesn't care about his own safety, but he wants to deliver the message of Christ to them. And even in his last breath in v. 60, we see the heart of Christ as Stephen pleads for God to not hold this sin against them.

This teaches us that we are to approach people, even opponents, with honor and respect. We are called to share Christ even if it means that it may cost us something. We should approach them with compassion and humility, as we see Stephen doing even till his last breath.)

Final Thoughts: *There is so much in our passage. We see Stephen's heart of compassion and humility as he preaches this sermon. He doesn't try to defend himself, but his main objective is to present Christ. He calls out their sin of pride, calls them to repent, and calls them to trust in Christ. Where are the places of pride within us that we look to for joy, worth, identity, purpose, and hope? How does this lead us to repent and trust in Christ more? How does this affect our love for others and the message we share with those around us?*