

LESSON 3: Stephen Dies for the Faith

RECAP...

- What did this message teach you about standing for your faith?

READ: Acts 6:8-15, 7:51-60

THE STORY

- Acts 6:8-15 - Stephen Arrested
 - Stephen is being used by God to share the gospel.
 - Many rose up against Stephen and stirred up others to have him arrested. False witnesses testified against him.
 - In the midst of his trial, the counsel noticed Stephen's face shone like an angel.
- Acts 7:1-53 - Stephen's Sermon
 - The History of Israel under Abraham (v. 1-16).
 - The History of Israel under Moses (v. 17-50)
 - The Application of the Sermon (v. 51-53)
 - Stephen speaks against the rulers, calling out their unchanged hearts and the ways of their fathers.
- Acts 7:54-60 - The Council's Reaction
 - The council was convicted at Stephen's sermon and gnashed their teeth.
 - Stephen was granted a vision of heaven.
 - The crowd charged and executed Stephen by stoning him because the gospel threatened the Jewish way of life and was considered blasphemous.
 - Stephen speaks his last words. He petitions the Lord for mercy on behalf of his enemies and loses his life to the mob.

MAIN IDEA

- Where the religious leaders saw Stephen and the Gospel of Jesus as a threat to the Law, Stephen knew Jesus was the fulfillment of the Law. His bold proclaiming of who Jesus was, who the leaders were, and what Jesus came to do would ultimately get him killed.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- What qualities of Stephen were his enemies not able to withstand (vs. 10)?
 - They, "could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking." Both wisdom and the Spirit are from God. Stephen had none of this power on his own but received it from God.
- What happens to Stephen in verses 11-14?

- Stephen was taken captive, brought before the counsel, had false witnesses set up against him, all for the sake of the truth of the gospel. (Who does this sound like?)
- Look at verse 51, Stephen calls out the counsel in three ways that communicate one truth. What are the three ways? What are the implications of this?
 - Stiff-necked people, uncircumcised heart, resisting the Spirit
 - These people refused to accept Jesus as Lord.
- What was the counsel's response to the truth of the gospel?
 - They were enraged and they ground their teeth (vs. 54).
- How do we know God was with Stephen in the midst of his trial?
 - The vision of heaven (vs. 55-56).
- What was Stephen's final request before dying? What does this say about Stephen's heart?
 - Stephen asked that God would not hold his enemies' sin against them (vs. 60). Unlike his enemies who killed the prophets – Stephen asks for his enemies to be forgiven. Showing mercy and asking for mercy are evidence of one who has received mercy.
- How is being merciful a way to stand up for your faith?
 - Answers will vary.
- Who is someone in your life that you could show mercy to and how?
 - Answers will vary.
- Is there a trial you are facing right now? How do you know God is with you in the midst of it?
 - Answers will vary.

SO WHAT:

Have you responded to the truth of the gospel with rage or with mercy?