

Fearless: Calm, Cool, and Collected in the Face of Opposition and Death **Acts 7:1-53**

Intro: Jesus' followers had witnessed two deaths that had rocked their world: John the Baptist and then Jesus. They are about to witness a third, that being Stephen. Like John the Baptist and Jesus, Stephen's death is without merit but it is according to God's will. It will have far reaching implication in the truest sense of the word. Take note of the similarities between Jesus' and Stephen's deaths.

Jesus said, "unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain."

The New Living Translation has it like this, "unless a kernel of wheat is planted in the soil and dies, it remains alone. But its death will produce many new kernels—a plentiful harvest of new lives." John 12:24

Acts 6:10 states that those who argued with Stephen concerning Jesus as the Messiah "were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke." If that is true in his life, then think of the results of his death. The results will be absolutely astounding because of Stephen's "Unstoppable Fearlessness"

Fear is a crippler. If left unchecked it will paralyze you. If it's the wrong kind of fear it will rob you of the boldness and joy Jesus desires for us and will strip the value of your life away.

Matthew 10:28 has Jesus saying, "And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."

Fearing God, which is a good fear, above all else will provoke us to stand strong on His word and purposes "fearlessly" before any intention of Satan or any belief of man. (Proverbs 1:7; 2:5; 9:10; 2 Timothy 1:7; John 14:27, 1 John 4:18)

Today many people have given in to an ungodly fear and, as a result, are paralyzed. Their lives are diminished and they are having a negative impact for Jesus and those they influence.

Stephen stands as a grand example of a disciple, initially chosen to serve tables, who is willing to "speak the truth in Love" (Ephesians 4:15) and he triumphed and overcame fear "by the blood of the Lamb and the word of his testimony; (because he) did not live his life so much as to shrink from death." (Revelation 12:11)
"For whoever desires to save his life will lose it but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it." (Matthew 16:25)

A. The Religious Leaders Accusation against Stephen. Acts 6:8-15

Stephen is being accused (falsely by the way) of ceaseless blasphemy against Moses and God (6:11)

1. Concerning the Temple (6:13)
2. Concerning the Law (6:13)
3. Concerning changing the customs (6:14)

Notice: these are similar to accusations leveled against Jesus.
Matthew 15:1-9; 26:59-62

Stephen addresses these very accusations, but not by defending himself. By the power of the Holy Spirit, he proclaims them as the guilty ones.

B. Stephen's Accusation against The Religious Leaders. Acts 7:1-50

Stephen's history lesson seems long and boring to us, but it is piercing and precise to his accusers. He turns the tables by addressing each of their false accusations and pointing out their history of resisting God's purposes and intentions. They know they are guilty and are cut to the heart. (v54)

Stephen begins politely and courteously "Brethren and Fathers" (v2)

1. From Abraham to the rejection of Joseph (v1-9)
2. The Salvation of Joseph to the Rejection of Moses (v10-29)
3. The Salvation of Moses to Rejection of God at Mt. Sinai (v 30-43)
4. Salvation and Relationship with God to Religion and Idolatry (v44-50)
The Idolatry of placing Moses, the Law and the Temple as more important than relationship with the God. **They have rejected reality for fantasy** and have made an idol of Moses, the Law and the Temple.

C. You Stiff-Necked and Uncircumcised in Heart and Ear. Acts 7:51-53

1. **You always resist the Holy Spirit**, from Joseph to Moses, right on up to the promised Messiah, Jesus. They rejected Jesus. They will reject Stephen as well. "If the world hates you, understand that it hated Me first" John 15:18 (also 1 John 3:13)
2. **As your fathers did.** God's people had a past pattern of stubbornness and hard hearts, at first anyway, towards the very ones whom God would send to bring them Salvation and Redemption.
(2 Chronicles 36:15-16)
3. **You betrayed and murdered** "The Righteous One"
(Isaiah 53:11; Jeremiah 23:6)
4. **You have the Law but have not obeyed it.** (John 7:19)

They have continually chosen Religion over Relationship. The result will be devastation and destruction just as Jesus and the prophets had said.
(Jeremiah 7; Matthew 23:37-24:2)

Stephen, on the other hand, chose obedience unto death. A faithful, fearless, Spirit filled servant who will become the church's first martyr.