

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

HEART TROUBLES (ACTS 7:39-43)

"HE RECEIVED ORACLES TO GIVE TO US"

After the Jews were liberated, saw miracles, and heard the instruction of God through Moses, they still did not listen to what he said.

- Though they were far from Egypt, they returned there in their hearts. **We learn that sin occurs in the heart before it manifests into actions.**

EASY DOESN'T MEAN BETTER

After being liberated from 400 years of slavery, the Jews had forgotten what God had brought them from, and since **liberation is not painless**, they longed to return to an "easier" time when at least they had basic necessities.

- **Sometimes our slavery offers a quick relief from our costly freedom**

MAKING GODS TO HELP THEM COPE

Stephen quotes Ex. 32:1 about the making of the golden calf as Moses was communing with God on Mt. Sinai. The Talmud records this as Israel's greatest sin.

- **People are prone to create idols and gods to fit their selfish desires. It's easier to fabricate a custom god than to submit to a Creator's authority.**

"...CELEBRATED WHAT THEIR HANDS HAD MADE."

Romans 1:25 says a time will come when people "worship the creation more than the Creator." Though this has happened throughout history, our current age has made it an anthem. The result was God turning away (v42).

- **Though God's grace is deep, there comes a time when He will give people over to their desires** (Romans 1:28).

CONNECTING THIS WITH JESUS

Just like denying Moses, the Sanhedrin denying Jesus was going to send them into another wilderness experience. Just like the rebellious people of the past, **they put more value into traditions, comforts, and ease than they did the will of God.**

THE GLORY DAYS (ACTS 7:44-50)

THE GEOGRAPHY QUESTION ARISES AGAIN

During the exodus of the Jews, they had a mobile temple called the tabernacle that became a representation of the glory days of liberation and conquest.

- Though an immobile temple was eventually built, Stephen brings up a mobile tabernacle to show that **God is not confined to one place.**

WE CANNOT PUT GOD IN A BOX

Stephen quotes Isaiah 66 to show the magnitude of God. Not only does "the Most High not dwell in sanctuaries made with human hands," but He is much bigger than any human experience or explanation.

- **This doesn't mean that God is some abstract idea. God defines the basic tenets of Himself through His Word.**

RELIGION HAD TAINTED GOD'S IMAGE

Though God is a God of order, the simplicity of the 10 Commandments and basics of the OT had been convoluted by traditionalism and superfluous religious practices

- There is nothing wrong with traditions or high church, but **when we impose rules that are not biblical on others, we are crossing a line.**

STEPHEN WAS AN OUTSIDER

Stephen was a Hellenist (Greek culture) who didn't hold a strong reverence for the temple. So, the NT concept that we've replaced the temple (universal priesthood of believers) was easier for him to grasp. **If Jesus taught us anything, it is that God is a personal and compassionate God who knows us as individuals.**

IT'S YOU (ACTS 7:51-53)

THE SWITCH GETS FLIPPED

We go from a history lesson from a young man that "looks like an angel" to an accusation that was as good as asking for a death sentence.

- For centuries religious leaders had killed prophets that spoke the hard truths of God, and now Stephen assumes the role of teller of hard truths.

"YOU STIFF-NECKED PEOPLE"

Stephen accused the Sanhedrin of not being willing to look any way except their own. He said they have "uncircumcised hearts," meaning that they have not submitted their hearts to God. **They claimed to follow God, but their actions and unwillingness to follow the Spirit proved otherwise.**

THE PAST SHOULD HAVE TAUGHT THEM

The mistakes of the past and the clarity of the prophecies should have altered the religious leader's decisions, but instead they go on killing like they did in the past.

- **Our failure to learn from past mistakes and listen to godly counsel from those God has placed in our lives is utterly amazing!**

I DON'T WANT TO PLAY BALL

Stephen began with "brothers and fathers," but at this point he wanted no association with **hypocrites that had no desire to listen**. Not only did they kill prophets, they killed the Prophet and felt no remorse.

- **If there is no acknowledgment of sin or desire to make a change, there will be no forgiveness or progress.**

HAVE WE BECOME THEM?

Stephen saw his situation as near hopeless. So, he might as well get it all out in the open in hopes that someone hears the truth.

- We currently live in a "Christian nation," but it seems that **we look frightfully similar to the arrogant nation that received "the law under the direction of angels yet has not kept it."**

FALLING ASLEEP (ACTS 7:54-60)

"...ENRAGED IN THEIR HEARTS"

The angry mob had no time to let anyone with a level head calm them down. After Stephen's accusations, they were enraged to the point of murder in the streets.

- **To contrast their hate, Stephen was filled with the Holy Spirit.** He looked up and saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God.

JESUS WAS STANDING UP

As Stephen was about to be murdered, he saw Jesus standing next to God. **Was Christ standing to welcome His first martyr, to be a witness of Stephen's dedication, or to judge the people who were killing him?**

- It is safe to say yes to all of these. **Jesus is our comfort, our support, and our advocate for justice.**

THEY SCREAMED AND COVERED THEIR EARS

After Stephen spoke of what he saw, the Sanhedrin became completely blind and deaf to the truth because of their hatred.

- **This imagery is so eerily close to the response of a vast majority of society today to the truth of Christ! The name of Jesus brings us all to a place of deciding where we stand.**

STONING AN INNOCENT MAN

As the atrocious act of stoning took place right outside the city walls, the mob laid their coats at the feet of another young man named Saul. Now the plot thickens.

- The young Rabbi was between 24-40 and had a part in organizing the stoning.

"HATED FOR MY NAME'S SAKE" - JESUS

We've seen 3 trials since the birth of the church in Acts: The first ended in threats, the second in beatings, and the third in murder.

- **Though we don't seek opposition, as Christians we must know that it will eventually find us. The exclusivity of Jesus as the Savior is a divisive topic that will anger some people.**

A HORRIBLE WAY TO DIE

Normally victims of stonings would lie on their backs, but Stephen fell to his knees when pushed over by the mob. Stephen echoes Jesus' words from an old Jewish prayer about forgiving those who have offended us.

- Jesus was not the only one to pray for those that persecuted Him. **Every Christian is called to love their enemy.**

"AND SAYING THIS, HE FELL ASLEEP."

Sleep is a very common term for death in the NT. The word cemetery is derived from the Greek ekimethe that also means to sleep.

- **Followers of Jesus do not die, but fall asleep until Christ wakes them up** (John 3:16). "To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord" (2 Corinthians 5).

RESPONSE DETERMINES DESTINY

- Stephen responded to **the call of Christ**
- He responded to his **call to serve**
- He responded to his **call to lead**
- He **responded to accusations with truth**
- He **responded to hostility with peace**
- He **responded to thrown stones by hitting his knees and looking up**