

LESSONS THIS QUARTER

- 1) 02 June 2024..... Acts 1 Commissioned
- 2) 09 & 16 June..... Acts 2a..... Empowered
- 3) 09 & 16 June..... Acts 2b..... United
- 4) 23 June Acts 3 Placed
- 5) 30 June & 07 July..... Acts 4a..... Emboldened
- 6) 30 June & 07 July..... Acts 4b..... Accountable
- 7) 14 July Acts 5 Worthy
- 8) 21 July..... Acts 6-7 Servicing**
- 9) 28 July Acts 8 Baptizing
- 10) 04 & 11 Aug..... Acts 9a..... Calling
- 11) 04 & 11 Aug..... Acts 9b..... Healing
- 12) 18 Aug Acts 10-11 Including
- 13) 25 Aug Acts 12 Praying

INTRODUCTION

- Every church is only 1 generation away from apostasy & collapse
- Problems within the early church had to be quickly resolved for it to continue growing in the right direction – spiritually and numerically
- What are some key attributes of a healthy growing church of God?
 - Number of Baptisms | Numerical Growth | Attendance
 - Number of Programs | Number of workers/contributors
 - Spiritual Growth (How would you judge this?)
 - Healthy Bank Account (all bills paid plus reserve)
 - Other attributes: _____
- What are some top concerns churches need to resolve before they undermine and even destroy unity and ministry?
 - Facility issues, such as the color of the new carpet
 - Doctrinal issues, such as the acceptance of same-sex unions
 - Financial issues, such as salary raises of staff vs fix the boiler
 - Practical issues, such as taking care of weaker members
 - Ministry issues, such as reaching out to another culture
 - Relational issues, such as quarrels among members
 - None of the above | Some of the above | All of the above
 - Other issues: _____

| Passage | Comments |
|---|--|
| Acts 6:1-4 | <p>Know Your Priorities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • v1. Expect problems, "...when the number of the disciples was multiplied there arose a murmuring..." – Having problems in a growing church is a good sign. We get to see Biblical principles put into action as God's people rise to the occasion (1Cor 11:19). Problems get fixed, God gets the glory, & the church grows • vv2,4. "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God... [we must] give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word." <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Why is praying and teaching God's word so critical to church health and growth? Not music, not programs, not even evangelization mattered as much. ♦ Consider this. Praying empowers us, and accurately conveying God's word both saves and matures the congregation to do the work of the ministry... 2Tim 3:15-16 |
| Major Types of Church Polity (governing style) | |
| <p>Elder-Rule. Elders govern the church with congregational support (example, Deacon selection, buy in for church relocation, etc.)</p> | <p>Elder-Led. Elders lead with congregational oversight (example, Elders make recommendations with congregational approval)</p> |
| <p>Congregation-Rule. Elders are basically paid staff, and church is often run as a business model with committees making policy</p> | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any of these models can successfully fulfill God's desired will, and any of these models can fall prey to unscrupulous behavior such as churches being manipulated by a few members who either have the charisma, money, or the majority of voting members on their side • Even if the churches listed in Revelation 2-3 started off on the right foot with the right church polity, 5 out of 7 of them fell victim to corruption. Sardis became a dead church; Ephesus had truth, but no love; Pergamum held to false doctrines; Thyatira tolerated immorality; and Laodicea had wealth but no zeal; – Yet, Christ acknowledged them as His Church, and He applauded the true believers who were in them for hanging tough and remaining faithful | |

| Passage | Comments |
|---------|--|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What makes a church successful is spiritually qualified and mature leaders (elders) who rely on God to help them biblically guide, protect, train, and serve the flock; and humbled followers who willingly support and submit themselves to those in an overseeing role • Remember this. A church is only as strong as its leaders, and yet, a bad populace leads God to remove good leaders from them Jer 3:14-15 |
| 6:5-6 | <p>Special Men are Selected to Serve Widows</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We can only assume these 7 men were the church's first set of deacons, but the word for deacon "διακονος diakonos" is never used in Acts or of these men • Why men to minister to widows? Wouldn't women be better? • What does a man "full of faith & of the Holy Spirit" look like? Can we point out any examples of such men today? • Notice the process for Deacon selection: 1) Apostles give the congregation mandate to select the right men; 2) the congregation then present these men to the Apostles; 3) and the Apostles commission the men (This is evidence of an elder-rule, not elder-led or congregation-led church) |
| 6:7 | <p>Church Problems Fixed – Church Growth Continues</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We must always be aware of "big" issues in church that need immediate and direct attention. To let such issues linger and fester does not promote church unity or church growth • Notice that "a large number of priests became believers" <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ We can impact the most hard-hearted people with God's word told in a loving way backed up with godly behavior |
| 6:8-15 | <p>Stephen Performs Great Signs and Wonders</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stephen was not only full of faith and the Holy Spirit, but he was also full of God's grace and power. He was uniquely endowed to work "great wonders & miraculous signs" • We may not be able to work signs and wonders today, but we can still pray to speak in such a way to baffle and even to convert the critics – and yes, possibly even to get martyred <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ When signs & wonders stopped (Heb 2:3-4) Paul asked for prayers that God would open doors and that he and others would speak boldly, and make it clear in the way they ought to speak (with salt) Eph 6:19-20; Col 4:3-4 → If Paul prayed this way, so should we, but do we? |

CONCLUSION / APPLICATIONS

- Church problems are not always a bad thing. If Satan is attacking it, this could mean the church is marching in the right direction.
- External persecution actually promotes church growth, and we should expect it if we are truly doing ministry God's way
- Internal persecution (what we cause ourselves) such as relational, money, and ministry issues, should be of short duration and have very minimal impact because the Bible gives us instructions on how to resolve or endure those problems (2 Tim 3:16-17)

NEXT WEEK: Acts 7. The first church martyr, Stephen, is a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit. God is not partial to anyone, so what keeps us from being full of faith and of the Holy Spirit?



PREACHER, IF THINGS DON'T PICK UP PRETTY SOON, WE'RE GOING TO HAVE TO PRAY ABOUT IT

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INTRODUCTION

- The first church martyr, Stephen, was a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit. God is not partial to anyone, so what keeps us from being full of faith and of the Holy Spirit? And if we were full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, what would we be like?
- Stephen's story is given a good bit of real estate in Acts (68 vs out of 1,007 for about 7% of the whole book). That's quite significant for a man whose initial responsibility was to relieve the Apostles of some lower priority work, such as taking care of neglected widows.

| Passage | Comments |
|---|---|
| Acts 7:1-50 | <p>Stephen Responds to the Charges</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How did Stephen, a Greek Jew, with no bibles at home become so knowledgeable of Scripture? He predominately used familiar stories found in Genesis and Exodus, but he also touched on prophecies found in Joshua, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Amos, 2Samuel, 1Kings; and Psalms ♦ Consider this. He listened very intently in Sunday School |
| 7:51-58 | <p>Stephen Calls the Baby Ugly</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are several similarities between Stephen's death and Jesus': 1) Both asked God to forgive their slayers; 2) Both died horribly; 3) Both died for their words • BUT, where Jesus was relatively silent, as a lamb to the slaughter, Stephen took the opportunity to throw a few punches: 1) You air-heads; 2) You Gentiles; 3) You can't do anything right; 4) You're just like your stupid daddies; and 5) you are godless wonders • Did Stephen needlessly bring about his own death by agitating the crowd and then conveying how much more spiritual he was by telling them of his heavenly vision? • Consider this #1 – Christians don't do well with crowds. 1) Jesus got crucified; 2) Apostles went to jail several times; 3) Paul got stoned; and 4) Paul had to flee several towns • Consider this #2 – Crowd dynamics. Crowds are easily manipulated. They stray to the lowest common denominator |
| For Highest Impact, Know Your Audience and know Scripture, and be filled with the Holy Spirit | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stephen was talking with people who had a similar Greek heritage. He knew what his audience needed. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ To have the most impact he focused on familiar OT history, which directly tied into Jesus and the Cross • Another example. When Apostle Paul was speaking to Jews, like Stephen, he would go as far back as Moses or Abraham to make a point <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ BUT when addressing Gentiles, who did not have a Biblical heritage, Paul went to Genesis 1 and talked about God the Creator of all things..... Acts 17:22-24 • For us, Yes, take the Gospel to the far reaches of the world, but never miss a chance to share the Gospel within your home town, state, and to fellow countrymen |
| 7:59 | <p>Stephen Responds with Dying Love and Forgiveness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Father, Forgive them" • Stephen was asking God to extend His grace to these murderers to give them more time to repent and possibly for them to suffer less in Hell (IOW, this event would not be held to their eternal account) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Remember – Harsh judgment awaits those who reject the Truth (Prov 15:10). And every word, thought, and deed will receive just recompense for all eternity |

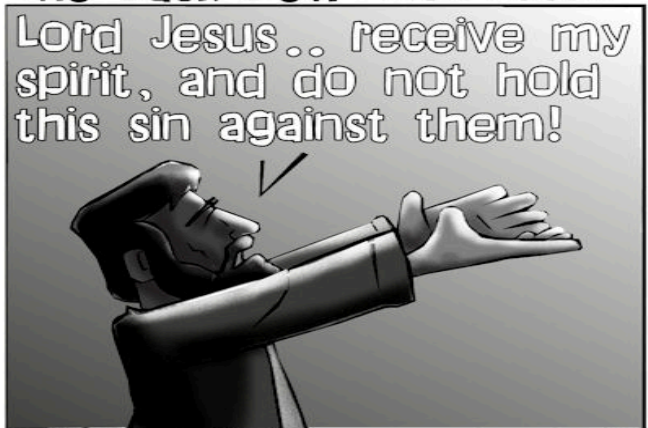
| Passage | Comments |
|-----------------------|---|
| | <p>Hell is a place of eternal pain, and suffering in "outer darkness with weeping and gnashing of teeth" – where "their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched" and where some seemingly are "beaten with many stripes" and others "with fewer stripes." IOW, there are varying degrees of punishment in Hell Mat 8:12; Mark 9:44; Luke 12:46-48</p> |
| A Word on Forgiveness | <p>Jesus, while He was suffering on the Cross, asked His Father to forgive His tormentors of their deeds Luke 23:34</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This forgiveness did not grant salvation to the Lord's tormentors, but in all probability these tormentors would not be judged eternally for this particular and horrific crime – Though they would be eternally judged for all their other trespasses • If these tormentors were not forgiven, can you imagine receiving many more stripes throughout eternity for the crime of tormenting and murdering the Majestic and Holy Son of God, along with all their other sins? • Yet, Zechariah, before he was slain in the temple, asked God not to forgive his slayers, but to "observe and repay" King Joash and his henchmen for what they were about to do to him. And before the end of the year his slayers were wiped out 2Chron 24:22-26; Mat 23:35 • AND, Jeremiah asked the Lord "Let me see Your vengeance on those who plan to do me harm", and the Lord said that "I will punish them, their young men will die by the sword, and their sons and daughters will die by famine" Jer 11:20-22 • Were Zechariah and Jeremiah less spiritually mature or less loving than Stephen? No, I don't think so. Please note, that destruction came upon the slayers of Jesus and Stephen just as it came upon the slayers of Zechariah and Jeremiah. In 70 AD, Romans demolished Jerusalem and deported the people • As Jeremiah said, God judges righteously Jer 11:20 |

CONCLUSION / APPLICATIONS

- Where do we typically picture Jesus being today? Is He not portrayed as "Sitting at the right hand of God"? [Luke 22:69](#)
 - ♦ EXCEPT in [Acts 7:55](#). Here we see Jesus STANDING as He welcomes Stephen into Heaven. And if Jesus is standing, we can bet so were all the Angels...standing for a man who was fearless to share the truth of the Cross to those who hated it.
 - ♦ The next time Jesus is seen off of His Throne is when He is sitting on a white horse speeding through the heavens with a host of Angels to bring final judgment on the earth..... [Rev 19](#)

NEXT WEEK: Acts 8. Like Philip, we can't wait for people to come to us asking to be led to the Lord. We must be bold to go and share.

The Back Pew – Jeff Larson



If 'Success in Life' is measured by what is accomplished in the face of adversity then Stephen is one of the great men in church history. [Acts 6:8-7:60](#)