

Acts, Sermon #16

MCBC 12/09 Vill. Bible 12/09

Acts 6

Turn to Acts 6:5 –7 men

Rest of chapter 6 and Stephen

All of chapter 7 is about Stephen

I have entitled today's message "**The Face of an Angel**"

Acts 6:8-15

Let us stand for the reading of God's Holy Word.

Let us pray.

You may be seated.

“The Face of an Angel”

Stephen is the spring board for the Church of Jerusalem. It is through this man that the church moves to the 2nd and 3rd geographical areas of the Lord's commission.

8:1 – The consequence of the persecution was that all of these thousands of believers were scattered abroad into the next two regions. The church is on the move, 11:19.

Stephen's martyrdom was the occasion for the gospel advancement and the fulfillment of the commission of Acts 1:8. Stephen is the springboard from Jerusalem to the next regions.

Acts 1:8 – geography that is covered by the commission of Christ

Stephen's ministry is the catalyst that moves the church out of Jerusalem and into that larger, broader ministry.

We are introduced to this man named Stephen in Acts 6 and God has given us a few details regarding him, vs. 5.

Then we get a biographical account beginning in vs. 8-15.

Account of Stephen's ministry

Beginning in 7:1-53, we have Stephens message; **first** his ministry and **second**, his message. The result of his message, vs. 54-60, was the martyrdom of Stephen.

His death and the subsequent persecution became the hinge to opening up the furtherance of the Gospel and the church's advancement

The result of Stephen's ministry, message and martyrdom was the launching of the church to the regional and cross cultural areas

Let us look at Stephen's ministry in chapter 6 and learn some lessons from his life.

Stephen's ministry was the outgrowth of his character.

Acts 6:3 – initial qualifications; Vs. 5 – individual description of one of the 7 men.

Stephen already had a testimony amongst the people. He is recognized amongst his peers for his character. Real ministry begins with the character of the minister. His character was the fount of his ministry. (He had unquestioned integrity). Stephen was recognized for his character by everyone in the church and was appointed to serve.

Secondly – he was under the control of God's Spirit.

Thirdly – full of wisdom

Fourthly in vs. 5 and vs. 8 – full of faith. Stephen was a man who had convictions of things not seen but knew to be true. He did not walk by sight but by faith.

Stephen was full – “totally controlled” by faith. Full of rage – totally controlled by anger

Faith in what? We see that in chapter 7:

- that God is sovereign, 7:2,
- the working of the Holy Spirit, vs. 51,
- that Jesus Christ was the Messiah, vs. 52,
- that Jesus Christ was risen and seated on the right hand of God, vs. 55

Two things – Full of faith

Full of the Holy Spirit – dominated by and controlled by the Spirit.

Stephen trusted God – Faith

Obeded God – Led by the Spirit – powerful part.

Believers, we need a faith. We need power.

Full of power, vs. 8 “ye shall receive power after the Holy Spirit comes upon you,”

Stephen was a man of character, spirituality, ability and firm conviction.

In vs. 8 – Stephen’s powerful ministry is described. Unusual works, wonders, indicators of divine power.

Up to this point, only Jesus and the apostles had performed such works. Those things were the signs of the apostles, II Cor. 12:12.

Therefore, God did not restrict solely to the apostles the working of miracles. God is breaking the pattern, something out of the ordinary through this man and we will see this again in Philip, Acts 8:6.

How was it that Stephen was doing this? In vs. 8 we have the source of those ministries.

He was a man full of faith and power. He had integrity and was enjoying the favor of God in his life in a special way.

Favor was shown in the power, the ability that was given to him.

I Peter 4:10-11, this passage teaches us about our work in the ministry.

With a gift from God and the Holy Spirit we can literally do something beyond our human abilities that will glorify God and have eternal consequences.

Every man has received a gift or gifts.

Turn back to Acts 6.

Look at the opposition to Stephen’s ministry. There is an adversary. The adversary opposes anything that is going forward for Christ.

Where there is no ministry, there is no opposition but where there is advancement and fulfillment of Christ's commission, there will be opposition. Here is an example of it and we will see some of the forms it takes.

Vs. 9 – it took the form of argument, “disputing” with Stephen. Arguing is pretty mild opposition.

Let me give you the background.

Synagogues (word means to gather together) arose during the time of Babylon exile. The Jewish people did not have access to the temple.

They gathered for 3 purposes:

1. For worship – reading scripture, explanation of scripture and prayer
2. Education of the people and children
3. Government of themselves according to O. T. law.

Ancient secular documents estimate there were around 400 synagogues in ancient Jerusalem at this time.

This particular synagogue was called the Synagogue of the Libertines. Libertines – technical word for slaves that had been freed (set at liberty).

These former slaves were from 4 different areas, vs. 9. Saul could have been one of those who disputed with Stephen.

Vs. 10, they could not resist Stephen.

Notice now, **tactic #2**:

In vs. 11– they took a different tactic versus Stephen, a new tactic.

Vs. 11 – suborned – they hired men and instructed men. “Suborned” means to place under employment. In other words, they paid people to say something bad about Stephen!

And the result was that these “holy” people were accusing Stephen of being unholy . . . and THEY were the ones using hired and false witnesses to try to destroy the character of Stephen.

Vs. 11 – Blasphemy is to speak evil of something that God deems sacred. Speak against Moses and therefore, against God

The new approach was to arouse people to stir people up on some very sensitive points. These men said that Stephen spoke against Moses, who authored Jewish law, and against God.

They turned on Stephen. These were the very people among whom Stephen had his ministry. Vs. 8, and now vs. 12, it says they stirred up the people.

Now, the **3rd tactic**:

Vs. 12b – the 3rd factor – to arrest this man and bring him into a trial, official interrogation

Notice the accusation’s folks. They are important!

Vs. 13 – He continually speaks against the temple, the pride of the Nation and the Law, vs. 14. What are they talking about?

John 2:19 – Jesus said, destroy this temple and in 3 days I will raise it up. They said, for 46 years we have been building and you can raise it in 3 days?

What was Jesus referring to? His Body. False witnesses said that Stephen had said, that Jesus was going to destroy. That’s not what he said.

John 4:21, *Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father.*

Matt. 12:6, *But I say unto you, That in this place is one greater than the temple.*

Mark 15:29-30, while on the cross, "*Ah, Thou that destroyest the temple and buildest it in three days*"

It was well known that Jesus had said some things about the temple.

Vs. 13 – Reference to the Law, Jesus continually rebuked their traditions of the law. He said, He came to fulfill the law not to break it, Matt. 5:17-20.

Stephen had evidently realized at this early stage in the church, that the temple was now null and void and he was understanding the ramifications of the New Covenant.

The temple and the sacrifices had pointed to Christ and He had come.

Heb. 9:1-12

Now I want you to notice lastly, the evidence of the grace of God on Stephen's ministry.

Acts 6:15 –evidence of the blessing of God on this man – his very countenance – and what is humorous is that there was one other man's face that God's glory was on – **Moses**.

"The Face of an Angel"

Let's stand for closing invitation

Stephen was a hinge that moved the church's outreach from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria.

God can take bad things and use them for His good. Will we trust Him? Full of Faith Stephen was like Daniel in his character and work.

Do we have a good testimony and are we using the gifts that God has shown to us for the ministry?

The gospel was advanced to the surrounding areas.

Have you received this gospel?