

STEPHEN'S CRIME

Acts 6:8-15

Now Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people. [9] Opposition arose, however, from members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called)--Jews of Cyrene and Alexandria as well as the provinces of Cilicia and Asia. These men began to argue with Stephen, [10] but they could not stand up against his wisdom or the Spirit by whom he spoke.

[11] Then they secretly persuaded some men to say, "We have heard Stephen speak words of blasphemy against Moses and against God."

[12] So they stirred up the people and the elders and the teachers of the law. They seized Stephen and brought him before the Sanhedrin. [13] They produced false witnesses, who testified, "This fellow never stops speaking against this holy place and against the law. [14] For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs Moses handed down to us."

[15] All who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel.

PRAYER

Last week we were introduced to one of the main characters of the early church

A man named Stephen

He stands out because he is known as the first Martyr of the church

A. WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT STEPHEN?

1. He was a Greek/ A HELENIST/OUTSIDE JERUSALEM
2. He had been a convert to Judaism
3. And now he was a Christian

We also know...

He was one of seven men OUT OF 15,000 selected to wait on the tables of the widows and disperse food

He was selected for this job **because he had the following qualifications**

1. known to be full of the spirit
2. known to be full of wisdom

B. TODAY WE FIND OUT MORE ABOUT STEPHEN IN ACTS 6:8

Acts 6:8

Now Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people.

Stephen was a man

Full of God's Grace

Full of God's power

And one who did signs and wonders among the people

We don't know too much more about this man Stephen then that

We know what he taught

And

We know how he died

Though we don't know too much about him he will always be remembered as a man who was full of the Spirit and full of Power

Let me ask you a question at this juncture that I would like you to keep in mind through this message

C. HOW DO YOU WANT TO BE REMEMBERED?

After you are gone...

What do you want people to say about you...

The following are some real epitaphs – Describing the way people wanted to be remembered

Here lies Walter Dudley
 He found out too late,
 Dobermans aren't cuddly.

Here lies Mary Aster
 Who wishes she'd jay-walked
 Just a little bit faster

Here lies mangled Hiram Brown
 Peered up the shaft to see
 If the elevator was coming down.
 It was.

Here lies the body of Samuel Crane
 He ran a race with a passenger train
 He got to the crossing and almost across
 Sam and his car were a total loss
 If he only took time to stop look and listen
 He'd be living now instead of missin'

Stephen will be remembered
 He was a man full of the Spirit and Full of Power

Next lets talk about the events of this text...

Our text tells us that.....

D. STEPHEN DID MANY MIRACULOUS SIGNS AND WONDERS

We know that the purpose of signs and wonders are to direct people
 toward Christ

You might call them

The power tools of evangelism

And Stephen flowed in them

**When God gives such gifts they are not to stand alone they were
 intended to be accompanied by the gospel...**

In previous instances where a miracle took place the preaching of the gospel took place

and it invariably caused opposition,

Our text tells us in Acts 6:9

Stevens Preaching caused opposition also as “men began to argue with Stephen, “

But Acts 6:10 tells us

... they could not stand up against his wisdom or the Spirit by whom he spoke.

E. SO THEY PLOTTED AGAINST STEPHEN TO KILL HIM

Acts 6:11 says

...they secretly persuaded some men to say, "We have heard Stephen speak words of blasphemy against Moses and against God."

THE RESULT WAS

Acts 6:12

... they stirred up the people and the elders and the teachers of the law. They seized Stephen and brought him before the Sanhedrin.

FURTHER OUR TEXT TELLS US THAT

Acts 6:13-14

They produced false witnesses, who testified, "This fellow never stops speaking against this holy place and against the law. [14] For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs Moses handed down to us."

Before We get to the Climax of this story we need to deal with

F. THE CHARGES AGAINST STEPHEN

What were those charges?

1. He proclaimed that Jesus would destroy the temple
2. and change the customs Moses had handed down to the Jews

WHAT IS SO IMPORTANT ABOUT THESE CHARGES

Why are they a vital issue?

What does it matter whether Jesus destroyed the Temple or not?

I WILL LET YOU ANSWER THAT.

But as you think about it consider these three things.

- 1) **Stephen died for the truth that WE are about to talk about.**
- 2) **The Jewish leaders killed because of this truth.**
- 3) **When Luke gives it more space than any other message in the whole book of Acts.**

Is this important

I pray that the Lord will show you the utter importance of what we are about to see.

Lets examine these charges by asking several key questions

- **Did Jesus really say that he would destroy the temple?**
- **If Jesus and Stephen really said that the Jesus would destroy the temple in what way where the false witnesses against Him false?**

Question #1

I. DID JESUS SAY THAT HE WAS GOING TO DESTROY THE TEMPLE?

Apparently He did

A. THE BIBLE TELLS US THAT DURING JESUS' TRIAL FALSE WITNESSES CAME FORWARD AND SAID,

Matthew 26:61

..., "This fellow said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and rebuild it in three days.' "

Mark 14:58

"We heard him say, 'I will destroy this man-made temple and in three days will build another, not made by man.' "

According to the ancient Historian Josephus it was a capitol crime to harm the temple

So to say I will destroy the temple meant death

When the high priest asked Jesus for an answer to this charge Jesus didn't say anything

B. AFTER JESUS WAS CONDEMNED

Matthew 27:40 tells us that the crowds who passed by the cross while Jesus was dying mocked Jesus by saying,

"You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!"

Those words bear a striking resemblance to those of Satan during Jesus' temptation in the wilderness

But he would not come down for He was obeying the word of the father and fulfilling prophecy

C. PROPHECY HE HIMSELF MADE WHEN HE HAD CLEANSED THE TEMPLE BEFORE THE PASSOVER.

The Jews asked him in John 2:18

... "What miraculous sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?"

John 2:19-21

Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days."

[20] The Jews replied, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?" [21] But the temple he had spoken of was his body.

D. NOW WHAT DID JESUS MEAN?

1. DID HE MEAN HE WAS GOING TO DESTROY THE TEMPLE?

Jesus Predicted the destruction of the temple
Matthew 24:1-2

Jesus left the temple and was walking away when his disciples came up to him to call his attention to its buildings. [2] "Do you see all these things?" he asked. "I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down."

This took place at the hands of Rome in 70 AD

2. DID HE MEAN SIMPLY THAT HE WOULD DIE AND THEN RISE AGAIN— IN THREE DAYS?

If he meant he would die and rise again in three days

Why did he refer to himself as the temple?

And more importantly

Why would he say word's like this in the temple itself,

Didn't he realize that people would take him to refer to the temple building and all that goes on there?

3. I THINK WHEN JESUS SAID "DESTROY THIS TEMPLE, AND I WILL RAISE IT AGAIN IN THREE DAYS."

He meant When I am destroyed the whole temple system is destroyed.

All these sacrifices,

All this blood
 All this priestly activity surrounding the holy place where God's
 presence dwells—

IT ALL ENDS

4. DID YOU EVER WONDER WHY THE BIBLE SAYS

Luke 23:45
 the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in
 two.

WHEN Jesus Died

It was a sign.

That which was set up before is now destroyed.

E. JESUS HIMSELF IS TAKING THE PLACE OF EVERYTHING IN THE TEMPLE.

By his death the price was paid for sin
 And God established a new Covenant for Man

So man could freely have access to the father through Jesus Christ the
 Son.

F. THERE WOULD BE NO FURTHER NEED FOR A TEMPLE HIGH PRIEST

Jesus became our one and only high priest who lives forever to make
 intercession for us

Hebrews 7:25

Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God
 through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.

“Destroyed”

G. THERE WOULD BE NO FURTHER NEED FOR A SACRIFICE

Jesus offered himself and his own blood once for all to make an eternal redemption (Hebrews 9:12, 25-28; 10:10-12).

Hebrews 9:12

He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption.

So all the animal sacrifices of the temple are "destroyed."

H. JESUS MADE HIMSELF THE MERCY SEAT OF THE TEMPLE

Romans 3:25

God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished--

His blood was sprinkled for the remission of our sins

I JESUS MADE HIS OWN BLOOD THE BLOOD OF THE COVENANT

Mark 14:24

"This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many," he said to them.

Most importantly

J. THE GLORY OF GOD--THE OLD SHEKINAH GLORY OF THE TEMPLE—NO LONGER RESTED IN THE TEMPLE

But it came and rested on JESUS

and when it God's glory rested on Jesus he was raised from the dead

Romans 6:4

We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

He is, as James says (2:1), **"THE LORD OF GLORY."**

And so the temple is no longer the place where you go to see the glory of God.

K. IF YOU WANT TO SEE THE SHEKINAH GLORY OF GOD LIKE THEY DID IN TEMPLE DAYS YOU MUST COME TO JESUS

Humbly
And ask him for forgiveness

And receive his salvation

And when you do

The Word says you are the temple

1 Cor. 6:19

Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own;

1 Peter 2:9

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

L. STEPHENS TESTIMONY WAS THAT THE TEMPLE IN JERUSALEM IS UNIMPORTANT

We have
A new priest,
A new sacrifice,
A new access to glory and fellowship with God.

SO MY ANSWER IS YES,

Jesus said that he would destroy the temple.

Which leads me to ask a second question

II. WHAT WAS FALSE ABOUT THE FALSE WITNESSES?

They said Acts 6:13-14

They produced false witnesses, who testified, "This fellow never stops speaking against this holy place and against the law. [14] For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs Moses handed down to us."

Jesus had said that he would destroy the temple

Stephen was proclaiming that Jesus would destroy the temple

But not in the way that these false accusers represented

They missed the point

HE WAS SAYING,

When I die the temple system dies.

And when I rise,

I am the EVERLASTING sacrifice for sins.

I am the priest and go between with God.

I am the presence and radiance of his glory.

The temple is finished.

NEW LIFE HAS JUST BEGUN

They were false accusers because they could not see they were blinded to what was happening all around them

It was all passing away

Because Jesus is the only way

There are a lot of people out there like these false accusers

Caught up in religion

And missing out on the most important relationship they could ever have

They miss the point

And they miss out on the kingdom of God

But Stephen did not miss the point

And neither do you

CONCLUSION

Imagine if you had been there
And seen these proceedings

Men shouting
Arguing
Enraged
Making false accusations

And then in that moment

Acts 6:15

All who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen,
and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel.

They were angry and upset **and he had the face of an angel!**

What did that look like

He was no Brad Pitt

His face was glowing
His face was shining
With the Glory of God
Like that of Moses when he came from meeting with Jehovah on the
mountain after having received the law

Stephen stood before the Sanhedrin having been with the Lord of Glory

HE WAS FILLED WITH GOD'S SPIRIT!
HE WAS FILLED WITH GOD'S WISDOM!
HE WAS FILLED WITH GOD'S GRACE!
HE WAS FILLED WITH GOD'S POWER!

And he will always be remembered because of it

HOW ABOUT YOU?

This morning

How do you want to be remembered?

Well what made Stephen so memorable?

- was it that he was a martyr
- was it that he was a good preacher

His life was noteworthy because he understood what Jesus meant when he said

This temple will be destroyed

And he spent every last day of his life basking in the presence and the glory of Jesus

We need the glory of the Lord to rise among us.