

“Suffering to Glory” | Rev. Craig Chapman | June 27, 2021

Genesis 50:15-20 15 When Joseph’s brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, “It may be that Joseph will hate us and pay us back for all the evil that we did to him.” 16 So they sent a message to Joseph saying, “Your father gave this command before he died: 17 “Say to Joseph, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father.” Joseph wept when they spoke to him. 18 His brothers also came and fell down before him and said “Behold, we are your servants.” 19 But Joseph said to them, “Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? 20 As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.”

From Acts 7 and 8 And the high priest said, “Are these things so?” 2 And Stephen said: “Brothers and fathers, hear me. The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran...35 “This Moses, whom they rejected, saying Who made you a ruler and a judge?’ - this man God sent as both ruler and redeemer by the hand of the angel who appeared to him in the bush. 36 This man led them out, performing wonders and signs in Egypt and at the Red Sea and in the wilderness for forty years. 37 This is the Moses who said to the Israelites, ‘God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers.’ 38 This is the one who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the angel who spoke to him at Mount Sinai, and with our fathers. He received living oracles to give to us. 39 Our fathers refused to obey him, but thrust him aside, and in their hearts they turned to Egypt, 51 “You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. 52 Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you now have betrayed and murdered, 53 you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it.” 54 Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth at him. 55 But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. 56 And he said, “Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God. 57 But I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.” But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together at him. 58 Then they case him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul. 59 And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. 60 And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” And when he had said this, he fell asleep. 8:1 And Saul approved of his execution. And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.

Luke 23:32-34, 39-43 Two others, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. 33 And when they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals one to his right and one to his left. 34 And Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” And they cast lots to divide his garments.

Introduction

The Acts of the Apostles teach us about the beginning of the Church. Stephen was one of the first deacons and the first Christian martyr. Acts 6 and 7 detail his trial, where he was charged with blasphemy against the temple and the law. Stephen’s defense is the longest speech in the book of Acts. The basic message (similar to Peter’s speech in Acts 2-4) reminds Israel that they’ve had an historic pattern of rejecting God.

Background

- 1) **As we face suffering, God wants us to see something (what Stephen saw):** - In verse 56, Stephen sees Jesus standing. God reveals to Him the Heavenly throne room and it is the only time in the Bible that Jesus is standing. Standing signifies the One who Advocates interceding for our needs with God the Father. This vision enables Stephen to rejoice in spite of his suffering.
- 2) **As we face suffering, God wants us to be something (Forgiving and Joyful People)** -Forgiveness - As he faces death, Stephen forgives his persecutors. (v. 60) It harkens back to our Old Testament reading of Joseph when he forgives his brothers and says in Genesis 50:20 “What you meant for evil, God meant for good.” In our gospel reading, in Luke 23:34, as Jesus faces the ultimate suffering, he too forgives his persecutors.
 - Joy - In Acts 6:15 Stephen’s face appears like an angel. He is able to experience joy in the midst of his suffering through God’s strength.

Discuss

- 1) How should we face pain and suffering in this life?
- 2) What can we learn from Stephen’s example of suffering?
- 3) Do you know someone who has seen blessings in the midst of suffering?

Conclusion/Application

In Acts 1:8, Jesus tells his disciples that they will be “his witnesses in Judea, Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” Acts 8:1 is the beginning of the fulfillment of that promise. As a result of suffering, the disciples were scattered and dispersed like seeds. Their example shows us that we should pray for perseverance not to end suffering. May every day be a celebration of our dependence on Him.

39 One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him saying, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!" 40 But the other rebuked him saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? 41 And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong." 42 And he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." 43 And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise."

By Mary Catherine Campbell