

Earthly Outlier Acts 7:54-8:3

The only response, from the rulers and authorities, is anger.
They spend no time in reflection, no time in repentance.
They only react!

Contrast

Stephen's gaze, his focus is on heaven (kingdom) / Jesus.

Question: When confronted are you an earthly outlier? Do you react as expected (minimizing, justifying, dodging, accusing)? OR Do you humbly reflect, seek understanding, and move toward change?

vs. 56, Standing - to act as an advocate in the heavenly court.

Colossians 2:14-15 He erased the certificate of debt, with its obligations, that was against us and opposed to us, and has taken it away by nailing it to the cross. **15** He disarmed the rulers and authorities and disgraced them publicly; he triumphed over them in him.

vs. 58, Another character drop (Saul)

vs. 59-60, As Stephen is being stoned he asks the Lord to not hold this sin against them.

- Forgiveness
- God's tender mercy - he falls asleep

Stephen is the first Christian martyr.

Martyr - witness, to the point of death / complete resolve concerning faith

2 Kings 6:17 Then Elisha prayed, "Lord, please open his eyes and let him see." So the Lord opened the servant's eyes, and he saw that the mountain was covered with horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.

Luke 3:21 When all the people were baptized, Jesus also was baptized. As he was praying, heaven opened,

Forgiveness is completely other worldly.

Forgiveness is a kingdom value.

Forgiveness can only be experienced fully through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit.

What is Luke communicating by recording Stephen's death (martyrdom)?

Words of Jewish martyrs recorded at the time of their death, "Do not think that God has forsaken our people. Keep on, and see how his might power will torture you and your descendants!"

Contrast - These were not the words of Christian martyrs.

Stephen is crying out in a loud voice for God too not hold this sin against them.

Luke 23:34 Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, because they do not know what they are doing." And they divided his clothes and cast lots.

Matthew 5:38-45 "You have heard that it was said, **An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.** **39** But I tell you, don't resist an evildoer. On the contrary, if anyone slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. **40** As for the one who wants to sue you and take away your shirt, let him have your coat as well. **41** And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two. **42** Give to the one who asks you, and don't turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

43 "You have heard that it was said, **Love your neighbor** and hate your enemy. **44** But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, **45** so that you may be children of your Father in heaven.

Luke 6:35-36 But love your enemies, do what is good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High. For he is gracious to the ungrateful and evil. **36** Be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful.

Question: Do we follow in the footsteps of Jesus? On the topic of forgiveness are you an outlier? Concerning loving your enemies are you an outlier? Are you listening and applying the values of the kingdom to your everyday life?

8:1-3

- Severe persecution broke out against the church.
- All except the apostles were scattered throughout the land of Judea and Samaria.

Acts 1:8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

- Stephen was mourned deeply and honored.
- Saul was ravaging (began to destroy) the church.
- Dragging off men and women, and putting them in prison.

Luke intentionally includes the detail of men and women being dragged off to prison.

Who do you arrest and put in jail?

House to house - house hold leaders / church leaders.

Luke is pointing out the contribution (faithfulness) and courage of women disciples.

First century Palestinian culture viewed it as quite the exception and masculine for a women to show courage yet the Christian community is not taking on the cultural view.

Luke is highlighting the bravery / courage among women.

In the kingdom of God women are cultivated to be actively engaged in the movement and the leadership of the church.

Question: How are we partnering together as sisters and brothers to display the fullness of Jesus? Do you have healthy relationships with brothers and sisters in Christ? Does our family demonstrate something beautiful and glorious to a watching world?