

## “4 Convictions of Those Who Turned the World Upside Down” // Stephen, Acts 7:54–8:4 // Image Church

Being down here I’m reminded of something that happens every time we send people out... Open hands/panic. But we know that’s how God grows his church, and to see how God takes that seed and multiplies it... it is amazing, and my soul is encouraged.

Pastor Mike and Ashley really were some of our best; they are such a model in every way. They are just real people—not sanctimonious...

- We were having dinner with he and Ashley one night and they got in a ferocious argument... Veronica and I felt a little awkward, to be honest.
- Just kidding... he **really is one of our best** and **so are many of you**.
- For those of you in the choir, maybe one day you’ll be good enough

***Pastor Mike asked me to talk about the myth about calling... When God wants to call you into ministry... Cheerios***

**The call to leverage** your life for the GC was included in the call to follow Jesus—

- **Matthew 4:19:** *Follow me and I will make you a fisher of men.*
- **When you accepted Jesus,** you accepted the call to get involved in the GC
- The question now is **NO LONGER IF you are called,** only where and how

**At our church we have a lot of college students (which means we are dirt poor... and a lot of people trying to figure out the will of God for their life). We tell them that figuring out the call of Jesus on your life begins with applying this statement—** *“Whatever you do well, do it well to the glory of God; and you do it somewhere strategic for the mission of God.”*

- **We always tell them:**

- “You have to **get a job somewhere...**
- **Lots of factors go into...** Why not let the kingdom of God be the *largest* factor in what job you pursue and where you pursue it?

**The more I have studied the book of Acts, the more I have come to the conviction that Jesus’ plan for reaching the world is not gathering large groups of people to bask in the anointing of one man,** but raising up ordinary people in the power of the Spirit and sending them out, and thus the measure of success for a church ought not be seating capacity, but sending capacity...

So, to that end, I want to **walk you through the story of an ordinary guy** who literally changed the world, and show you 4 convictions that shaped his life that should shape yours.

His name is Stephen, and his story is told in ACTS 6–7. **If you have your Bibles...** take them out and **turn them on...** to ACTS 6.

### Acts 7:54–8:4

**Let me give you the context.** Stephen was not an Apostle, he was just an ordinary guy, but his story marks a turning point in the book of Acts.

- **Up until this moment,** you see, as far as we know, the gospel movement has yet to leave Jerusalem, even though Jesus had clearly told the Apostles he wanted his gospel carried to the ends of the earth...
- **Now, it’s been an exciting ride, to be sure... with all the miracles and baptisms and people getting struck dead in the offering and such...** but the bottom line is that the church still hasn’t left Jerusalem.

**That changes with the story of Stephen.** And I believe Stephen’s story is given to us, in part, as an example of what ordinary men and

women in the church are supposed to look like, and what will happen to the world when they do.

Stephen's story **begins back in chapter 6**, where he is **selected to be help** deliver food to widows so the Apostles could devote themselves to prayer and the word.

- His job, in one sense, was not that important:
  - He wasn't **elected teacher** or group president.
  - He was **not considered to be one of the theological leaders** in the early church.
- Just a table waiter.

But **Acts 6:7** tells us that **he did his job so well** and his witness was so full of the Spirit, **that it got the attention** of many in the community, including many of the Jewish priests, who began to turn to Christ.

- Well, this gets the attention of the religious leaders, who begin to try to discredit him.
- Love this verse: **"But they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which (this layman) he was speaking."** (Acts 6:10)

In **Acts 7** they bring him before the Jewish council, where he proceeds to give the longest recorded sermon in Acts...

- It is a pretty detailed history of Israel showing how the OT points to Jesus.

[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 they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together at him.

[58] Then they cast 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.

**Now, watch this: Acts 8:1**, And there arose on that day (the day of Stephen's martyrdom) a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, *except the apostles....* [4] And those who were scattered went about preaching the word.

- **There it is! This is the first time the gospel leaves Jerusalem**, and—I want you to let this sink in—not a **single Apostle** is involved.
  - **Stephen's witness** provoked the riot;
  - And of those **who left preaching the word**, Luke goes out of his way to note that not a single Apostle was included.

BTW, from that point on, 'ordinary' people are going to be at the front of the gospel movement.

- **Stephen Neill, *History of Christian Missions***: Anonymity of early church. **3 great church planting centers**.
  - **Acts 11: the brothers** "a few guys who are not significant enough for me even to tell you their names."
  - **Same thing happens in Rome**. In fact, when you think about this one, there's almost a little humor in it. **Acts 28**

So, the first of..

## 4 Convictions of Those Who Transform the World

### 1. God wants to use me

- You, ordinary believers have always been the tip of the gospel spear.

- Historically, the gospel has travelled around the world faster on the wings of business than it has even through Apostolic effort.
- **What would happen if you started to see your skill as a tool given to you for the spread of the gospel?** Prov 22:29, “Do you see a man skillful in his work? They will serve before kings!”
  - Many of you have a skill—you are good at it, and the skill with which you do your job is a key which opens up others to gospel witness—athletic. Business. Home contracting. It will get you into places and the lives of people with whom where you can share the gospel.
- For some of you, **that skill opens international doors...**
  - **We hear a lot today** about the problem of a ‘lack of missionaries’ or a ‘lack of funds.’
  - I read this recently... 40K evangelical missionaries / 2 million Americans in secular employment (200K)
    - **My dad**
    - Some of you should realize that God placed in your hands a key!
    - **To follow Jesus means, “Whatever you do, do it well to the glory of God, and do it somewhere strategic for the mission of God.”**

*The first conviction is “God wants to use me.”*

If you are a so-called “ordinary” Christian, God wants to use you in his kingdom. In fact, you are his **plan-A**.

And **if you think you are not that important or that talented**, that is all the more reason why you should expect God to use you—because **God has always delighted** in using ordinary people to accomplish extraordinary things. “Not many wise, not many noble, not many strong...”

- **Adrian Rogers...** STAND if you were valedictorian or salutatorian / all American athlete / went to college on scholarship / student body president / homecoming queen... etc

*The second goes hand in hand with that...*

## 2. The Holy Spirit fills me

**What makes Stephen remarkable is his confidence**, a confidence he apparently gained from an awareness of the fullness of the Spirit within him.

- **The most common characteristic repeated** about Stephen was that **he was** filled with the Spirit.

**What gives ordinary people such extraordinary confidence** and effectiveness is the *knowledge* of the power of the Spirit within them.

Jesus made **such extraordinary promises** about the power and potential of the Spirit in believers... so staggering that if you don’t watch yourself you won’t take them seriously!

“Nevertheless, I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you.” John 16:7

- How absurd must that have seemed to those first disciples? To your **advantage**? *What’s it like to walk around with Jesus for 3 years?*
  - *How awesome would it have been to walk around with Jesus...*
- Does your **experience with the Spirit of God justify** that?
  - If your pastor I stood up here and told us he was resigning... SAD. But what if the chairman of your elders said you had a new candidate...
    - Are you as excited...?
- Or consider this promise: Matthew 11:11, “Among those born among women, none is **greater than John the Baptist...**”
  - Greater than JtB?
  - Someone in here is the “least” in the kingdom of heaven...
- **Because, you see**, if the HS is inside of you, **it means that spiritual power is no longer about** ability, but availability.

- **God can do more through one willing vessel** than all the talent in the universe
- **We have a really good example of this in Acts 8:** Philip, another ordinary guy preaching in Samaria... taken by the Spirit to a road.
- **The point:** God can accomplish more through one believer cooperating with the Holy Spirit than with the most dazzling array of talent assembled anywhere in the world

### Amy

- **My point is not that you're going to start hearing voices** or that walking with the Spirit means you'll start doing wacky things all the time.
- **My point is that one person who makes themselves available to the HS can accomplish more than all the talent in the world.**
- The gospel goes forward through ordinary conversations...  
**PASTOR MIKE was the best at this...**
  - Listened constantly and brought so many people to Jesus (and we miss him!)
  - Listened to God and came down here

My question for you: **Are YOU listening** to him?

- **59 times; in 36 of those he speaks!**
  - **The book of Acts is the story** of HS filling and moving ordinary people in the church for his purposes.
- **Are you listening?**

3<sup>rd</sup> conviction...

3. I will be like Jesus to others

**Vs. 59 may be my favorite part of this whole story, because it gives us a window into Stephen's soul, showing us what he was thinking about at the very moment of his death.**

[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."

Where have you **heard these phrases** before?

They sound **almost identical** to what Jesus said when he died:

- "Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit."
- And, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do."

It seems that in Stephen's dying moments he was thinking about what Jesus had said on the cross—things that Jesus had prayed for Stephen, and now he is saying those very things for others.

- **Get that:** In Stephen's dying moments, he is **attempting to do for others** what Jesus did for him.

**That's what it means to follow Jesus:** to look at your life as a sacrifice for others like Jesus sacrificed himself for you.

**Let me ask you a question: Where would you be without Jesus?**

Same place millions are without you.

- The gospel of Christ is ineffective to save until it has been preached. LUTHER That comes with an **obligation.**
- **Rhonda...** Do you really believe this?

**Have you wrestled with the obligations** you owe to the gospel? **Have you squarely faced the fact that 2.8 billion people in the world have little to no access to the gospel?**

- And **don't turn that number into a statistic...**
- **Stalin:** These are people just like you, made in the image of God just like you, who know what's it like to feel afraid, lonely, lost...

If Jesus sacrificed himself to save you, it makes sense that we ought to sacrifice ourselves to save them. **Some of you need to go.**

That also affects how we see our money: **Can't go on tipping God at 10% and using the rest for you**

- I know a man who is trying to get to **90/10**: reverse tithing. "Jesus didn't tithe his blood for me, he gave it all."
- NOT the standard for everyone, but **shows you how to think...**

*Conviction 3 is "I will be like Jesus to others..."*

#### 4. Jesus is worth it

- **We return one final time to Acts 7.** As they began to hurl stones at Stephen, he said: [56] And he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."
  - **Scholars point out that Jesus' standing here is odd**, because everywhere else we see Jesus as the right hand of God we see him sitting.
  - **Why is he standing?** He's standing to receive home his son.
  - **The world has risen up against Stephen** to tell him he is a fool, a traitor, that his life is a waste... but **Jesus stands in the same moment** to say, "Well done, good and faithful servant. They call you heretic. I call you 'son.'"
- **And Stephen looks up and with face beaming with angelic brightness says**, "Yes, Jesus is worth it!" I'd rather have Jesus than anything else!

**\*\*At some point, following Jesus will cost you something, and in that moment the only way you'll make it is if your eyes are full of the vision of Jesus just like Stephen's was.**

**I spent the 1<sup>st</sup> 2 years of my ministry serving as a missionary in a Muslim UPG in SE Asia. About 11 one night... Fajar:**

- We hear Fajar's story and we say, "Yes, brother, Jesus is worth following even if it costs you that."
- The **cost to follow Jesus in places like SE Asia is severe**—the cost to get the gospel to places like that is severe, too.
- But do we think Jesus is worthy of doing what it takes to get the gospel to people like Fajar so that they can believe?

- **BIG STATEMENT:** It is hypocritical to say "Amen, Fajar," it's worth leaving it all to follow Jesus" and you not being willing to obey Jesus to get the gospel to people like Fajar, because Jesus' salvation work is not complete until they've heard

**To be obedient to Jesus is costly:**

- For some, it will cost you your reputation;
- it may lead you to great financial sacrifice,
- to cheerfully support your children as they go overseas;
- for some of you it means you'll give away your retirement or spend your retirement years on the front lines of ministry;
- for some of you it may mean leaving all you are comfortable with and taking the gospel to a place many miles away where they barely know it,
- for some it may mean even offering up your life in sacrifice like Stephen did.

**And in the moment of sacrifice, IF you are going to stand faithful, you are going to have to be able to say from deep in your soul: HE IS WORTHY!**

- **He died for me!** I owe him everything! "Jesus paid it all..."
- **He rescued me when I was lost!** "Were the whole realm of nature mine...!"
- **You're going to have to be convinced, deep in your soul, that HE'S the only one who is eternal!**
  - **On the final day of history**, he's the only one who will be standing to receive me home.
  - If he is standing for me, then the whole world can stand against me..."
- "He's the **ONLY ONE** who is worthy! By **his will** we exist; by **his blood** we were redeemed; and for **his purpose** we now live."
- **Jesus is worthy and he is worth it.**

**The world was changed by ordinary men like Stephen who lived by these 4 convictions.**

- God wants to use me

- The Holy Spirit fills me
- I will be like Jesus to others
- Jesus is worth it

## Ending 2:

- The cost to follow Jesus in places like Indonesia is severe. But the cost of **getting the gospel there to him** is also severe.

**If you are really going to follow Jesus**, you are going to have to possess the conviction deep in your soul that Jesus is worth it.

Because there are going to be times and places where following him will cost you—maybe everything.

- you are going to get made fun of;
- or disappoint someone...
- you are going to have to make an uncomfortable sacrifice that costs you dearly...

And in that moment you have to be convinced that Jesus is worth it

- **David the Fullback.** (Nick Saban of coaching)
- That's a picture of what it means to follow Jesus. I'd rather have his smile.
  - **He died for me!** I owe him everything! "Jesus paid it all..."
  - **He rescued me when I was lost!** "Were the whole realm of nature mine...!"
  - **He's the only one who is eternal!**
    - **On the final day of history**, he's the only one who will be standing to receive me home.
    - If he is standing for me, then the whole world can stand against me..."
  - "He's the only one who is worthy! By **his will** they exist; by **his blood** they were redeemed; and for **his purpose** they now live."
  - **Jesus is worthy and he is worth it.**

**The world was changed by ordinary men like Stephen who lived by these 4 convictions.**

- God intends to use me
- The Holy Spirit resides within me
- I owe the gospel to others

- Jesus is worth it

Our world will be changed if you live by those.

## Bullpen:

We rejoice that God has allowed our church to grow in RDU, and never want to stop reaching it... But our greatest joy is probably what we did earlier this year... 100 members...

- In one sense, this moment is painful: the kinds of people who volunteer to go on church plants...
- In another, joyful.
  - Our studies show that for every 1 we sent out, we now have 20 people worshipping in churches we have planted in North America.
  - We have sent out a total of 900 of our members over the past few years on church planting teams—460 domestic and 440 international.
  - They have planted a total of 238 churches (42 N/A; 196 Intl)

Over the years, we have come to the conviction the measure of success for any church ought to be sending capacity, not seating capacity: because Jesus' vision of world evangelization was not a large group of people gathered to bask in the anointing of one man, but ordinary people raised up and sent out.

So, to that end, I want to walk you through the story of an ordinary guy who literally changed the world. His story is told in the book of Acts (Acts 7, if you have your Bibles...) IPAD?