

A) Sermon Slides

Slide 1: Title
Purpose and Power in Suffering
Acts 7

Slide 2:
Acts 6:8,10-11; Acts 7:1,2; 7:51-8:1(ESV)

And Stephen, full of grace and power, was doing great wonders and signs among the people. But they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking. Then they secretly instigated men who said, "We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God."

And the high priest said, "Are these things so?" And Stephen said: "You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered, you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it."

Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth at him. 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. And he said, "Behold, 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. 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. And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." 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.

And Saul approved of his execution.

Slide 3:

I. What does Stephen say?

a) How we present the Gospel to the religious

II. What does Stephen see?

b) How we become unshakable and forgiving during oppression

III. What is the final outcome?

c) What the purpose and power is in suffering as a Christian

Slide 4:

Stephen's Sermon

The charge:

"This man never ceases to speak words against the Holy Place and the Law"

Slide 5:

1) The temple was important, but God isn't confined by it

2) The Law is perfect, but no one can keep it except Jesus Christ

Slide 6:

He answers their charge but the most amazing thing he does is he reinterprets the story of God in such a way that the "people of God" are seen as the enemies of God.

Slide 7:

All the great "heroes" of God were poor representations of a pattern that found its climax and fulfillment in Jesus Christ. They were all prophets who temporarily delivered their people in spite of rejection and persecution. But Jesus Christ is The Prophet who eternally and permanently delivered His people THROUGH the rejection and persecution.

Slide 8:

"dikaios" = perfectly just and obedient

Slide 9:

Two ways to fulfill the law:

- 1) Obey
- 2) Don't obey and pay

Slide 10:

Stephen's Vision

Slide 11:

"While Stephen was confessing Christ before men, He sees Christ confessing Stephen before God." F.F. Bruce

Slide 12:

Stephen's feet are in an earthly courtroom where he is being condemned, but his eyes are on the heavenly courtroom where he is being commended.

Slide 13:

Stephen is fine because his love was in a place where it couldn't be smashed by the stones

Slide 14:

If our greatest love is in "that" place, then suffering can only do one of two things:

- 1) Enhance and deepen our love for that other home, and the Savior there who awaits

Romans 5:3-5 (ESV)

Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

- 2) Usher us into our greatest love

Slide 15:

Stephen's ministry to the Apostle Paul!

“Christ with me,
Christ before me,
Christ behind me,
Christ in me,
Christ beneath me,
Christ above me,
Christ on my right,
Christ on my left,
Christ when I lie down,
Christ when I sit down,
Christ when I arise,
Christ in the heart of every man who thinks of me,

Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of me,
Christ in every eye that sees me,
Christ in every ear that hears me.”
Saint Patrick

B) Group Discussion

- 1) Have someone read some or all of Acts 6:8-Acts 8:1. Anything stand out to you?
Questions?
- 2) Stephen is trying to preach the Gospel to religious people. What makes a person religious?
How would you define?
- 3) When someone is that way, what is missing? And what was Stephen therefore trying to do in their hearts and ears?
- 4) Stephen is "beautiful" in spite of intense persecution and oppression. His face and demeanor are directly oppositely proportional to the faces and demeanor of his accusers. How is this possible?
- 5) Explain the idea of the "two courts." Find the exact representation in this text, and then ask the group if we are still always trying to find our value or defense in two courts today symbolically. (How does the court of the world find value? Why do we care when we find ourselves lacking in the world's courtroom?)
- 6) Think about this saying: "The world loves something because it's valuable, but a Christian is valuable because he/she is loved."
- 7) What are the spiritual outcomes of Christian suffering? Explain how there is always power and purpose in the suffering of a Christian. (Genesis 50:20)
- 8) Share with your group how you have benefited spiritually from suffering
- 9) Prayer and praise