

Series: **The Original**
Today's Title: ***"Inconvenient Truth"***

July 18, 2021 – Acts 7:1-60

Objective: To give us joy that God is a redeeming God and strength in the face of opposition.

Let me tell you about our family and greeting cards.
You get booed if you give a sweet, sentimental card.
The funnier the card is - the more it makes fun of getting older, or whatever the occasion is...the better.

This is a card that my wife, Kim, got for a friend of hers.

Front: 'At our age, the water can be dangerous.'

Inside: 'Lifeguards don't try as hard.'

Turn to Acts 7 - pg. #914

Opening prayer

Forgive me for making this leap...this connection to the card...but sometimes, we don't like to hear certain things.

We don't like to hear that we're older.

We're past our prime.

On a more serious note...

We don't like to hear about mistakes or failures of the past.

In our passage today, Stephen is going to bring up the past. He's going to give a survey of Israel's history - some of the good - but he's going to point out the bad - the parts the Jewish leaders didn't want to admit.

The reality was history had repeated itself...and they were guilty of repeating some of the nation's gravest sins.

This wasn't just a history lesson - it was about them - their very recent sins - which set them against God.

6:11-14 - The accusation / indictment against Stephen was: Blasphemy against God, Moses, the Law, the Temple.

Chapter 7 is often referred to as Stephen's sermon, but it's a legal setting, not a religious setting.

[Pic / rendering of Sanhedrin]

Therefore, I want us to think of this as a courtroom drama - and this is not only Stephen's defense, but it's also his prosecution.

In his sermon / defense, he not only defends himself against the charges of blasphemy, but he brings forth evidence - evidence from history and from the religious leader's response to Jesus - to indict them as the actual blasphemers. This chapter is a courtroom drama in which Stephen is acting as his own defense attorney - and a prosecuting attorney - at the same time.

Stephen's belief in God and the promise of Israel. vs. 1-8

They have indicted Stephen - and now the 'trial' begins.

Read vs. 1-8

Stephen begins with a history lesson that every man in that room knew from their childhood. This was not new information, but Stephen begins here:

1) To establish common ground. He is one of them - a Jew - a follower of God - a child of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

2) He gives a defense to the charge of blasphemy against God. This is a statement of his belief in God - and his belief that God founded the nation of Israel - through Abraham - and the promises God made to Abraham regarding his descendants.

3) Stephen talks of the unrealized promises of God.

Abraham never realized the promises of God - they didn't come true in his lifetime - but they did later - for his descendants - just as God promised.

This is an important spiritual truth: We must trust God's word - trust His promises - even if we don't experience them in our lifetime.

The patriarch's rejection of Joseph. *vs. 9-16*

As Stephen defends himself against the 4 indictments, he will turn the tables on the Jewish leaders and indict them.

He will show that their rejection of God's chosen leader and Savior is right in-line with the history of the nation - the history of the nation's leaders.

Read vs. 9-16

Stephen points out the historical facts about the sons of Jacob rejecting their younger brother, Joseph.

The sons of Jacob - Joseph's brothers - are the patriarchal heads of the tribes of Israel.

They were referred to as "the fathers" of the nation - along with Abraham, Isaac and their father, Jacob.

Joseph's brothers were planning to kill him, but one of the older brothers, Reuben, talked them out of murder. They ended up selling him to some Midianite traders, who in turn sold him as a slave in Egypt.

But Joseph was chosen by God to be a leader and to save millions of lives - including his own brothers.

But his brothers had rejected him - hated him - were jealous of him - because he was chosen by God.

Stephen honors Moses. vs. 17-22

Read vs. 17-22

One of the charges against Stephen was he had blasphemed Moses.

Stephen answers this charge by recounting Moses' birth and how God protected him - and how Moses was "mighty in his words and deeds".

Stephen didn't blaspheme Moses - he admired Moses.

The nation's rejection of Moses. vs. 23-43

But the nation had rejected Moses.

The nation had blasphemed Moses.

Read vs. 23-29

Israel rejected Joseph - God's anointed deliverer.

Israel rejected Moses - God's anointed deliverer.

As a result, he fled, as a fugitive, and for the next 40 years lived in the wilderness, lived the shepherd, nomadic lifestyle, got married and had children.

Stephen is building his case - his prosecution case - of not only their rejection of God's past anointed deliverers, but their most recent rejection of God's anointed deliverer - the Messiah!

Read vs. 30-38

Stephen's respect of Moses and his role as the chosen and anointed leader over Israel - and as the one who "received living oracles to give to us" is his defense against the charge of blasphemy against Moses and the Law.

The authority of Moses was in God's choosing of him to lead the people - to redeem them from their Egyptian slavery. But the "wonders and signs in Egypt and at the Red Sea and in the wilderness for forty years" validated his authority - his God-given authority.

They rejected Joseph the first time.

The 2nd time they had no choice of rejection - Joseph was a powerful ruler - #2 in Egypt - and he delivered them from the famine.

They rejected Moses the first time.

The 2nd time - when Moses came back, the people had no choice but to follow him - God had chosen him - he had the power of God, and he delivered them from the oppressive hand of Pharaoh.

There is a foreshadowing of Christ here.

Jesus came to offer salvation - He came to “seek and save the lost” - but He was rejected - crucified in His 1st advent. The nation rejected their Messiah - their Savior / Redeemer.

But Jesus will return - and His return will not be like the first. When Jesus returns, He will return in power - in might - and He will bring His righteous judgment when He returns - and “every knee should bow...and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord...” (Philippians 2:10-11)

Like Moses, Jesus came to redeem His people.

John 1:11

“He (*Jesus*) came to His own, and His own people did not receive Him.”

Israel, instead of following Moses, their God-appointed leader, they chose the oppressing nation. Israel longed for Egypt.

The religious leaders rejected Jesus and plotted to kill Him to protect their power and position with the Romans (John 11:48).

Read vs. 39-43

Shortly after their liberation from Egypt, the nation rejects God, and they lust for the things of Egypt. They resort to the idol worship they learned in Egypt.

Over the subsequent centuries they committed horrific sins, which led to God's judgment in the form of the Assyrian and Babylonian exiles.

The nation - over and over - had rejected the Law of God and chose to worship idols - demonic spirits - and they worshiped images they made with their own hands.

Stephen didn't blaspheme the Law - but the nation and the nation's leaders had for centuries!!!

Stephen gives appropriate honor to the temple. vs. 44-50

Before the temple in Jerusalem, there was the tabernacle - a mobile temple.

Read vs. 44-50

Stephen didn't blaspheme the temple, but He knew that God was not housed in the temple.

vs. 49 - He quotes the prophet, Isaiah, as evidence of the temple's limitations.

The problem was not Stephen's view of the temple, but the religious leader's view of the temple.

Stephen indicts the leaders. vs. 51-53

He indicts them for repeating Israel's pattern of rejecting God's deliverer.

They rejected Joseph.

They rejected Moses.

They rejected the prophets.

They rejected Jesus.

Read vs. 51-53

Stephen wasn't against the Law, but the religious leaders were.

The leaders received the Law - said all the right things publicly about the Law, but they refused to obey the Law. (As Jesus pointed out many times.)

The nation continually, over the centuries, disobeyed the Law.

They worshiped idols.

The result: God sent them into exile - The Assyrian and the Babylonian exiles.

After the exiles, when Israel returned to the promised land, they stopped worshiping idols, but they continued to disobey God's Law.

The apex of their disobedience was their rejection and murder of Jesus - the “righteous One”.

The enraged leaders murder Stephen. vs. 54-60

Read vs. 54-60

Stephen is the first martyr of the Church.

Contrast: Stephen was “full of the Holy Spirit” (vs. 55).

The leaders “ground their teeth” - filled with anger / rage.

One writer, in describing this passage, says:

“This was not a sudden outburst but a growing tension that gradually rose higher and higher as Stephen spoke, and never died away until Stephen lay before them horribly mangled, blood-spattered, and dead. These dignitaries had never faced such a prisoner.

He spoke like a judge, not a prisoner.

He seemed more like an accuser than the accused.

His message drew blood, but his conscience had led him to the place where he regarded no price too great to pay for his convictions.

Stephen no longer faced an orderly council, a calm, sane conference; but a mob whose eyes were bloodshot, whose minds were irrational with hate, and whose emotions were bent on murder.

They were not willing, for any man, to expose...and reveal the depth of their sin.

This, a satanic reaction.

Herod killed John the Baptist because John pointed to his sin and rebuked him for it.

The Pharisees nailed the Lord Jesus Christ to the Roman scaffold and stained their hands with His blood because He denounced and exposed their hypocrisy.

The Jews reacted in the same manner toward the apostles, and Stephen is the first of a multitude nobody can number, who, in their unflinching exposure of men's sins, died an awful death at the hands of the sinners they exposed."

(Source: <https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/44-27/stephens-victorious-death>)

Apply it...

Every sermon I write an 'objective' - in which I try and summarize in 1 sentence the point of the passage.

The point of the text.

The objective for today's text is: 'To give us joy that God is a redeeming God and strength in the face of opposition.'

God is a redeeming, loving, forgiving God.

Stephen recounted the numerous times throughout Israel's history that the leaders rejected God's appointed, anointed, deliverer - savior.

The flip side of that is that God continually, repeatedly, over and over again, sent a God appointed, anointed, deliverer, savior.

The heart of God is revealed over and over again - as a redeeming God.

A God of love...mercy...grace...longsuffering... and forgiveness.

He is also a God of justice, righteousness, holiness and judgement - and when Jesus returns, He will not return to forgive, but to judge with righteous and holy wrath.

But now...God is offering forgiveness.

He loves you - He longs to redeem you - to forgive you.

Come to Him. Seek Him. Accept His forgiveness!

Stand strong - be faithful in the face of opposition.

Eph. 6:15 - brace yourself - get ready for the impact.

Be strengthened, knowing you're not alone.

Christ - His Word and the Holy Spirit is in you - and we're all with you!

When you face opposition, be bold, be gracious - speak the truth in love.

1 Peter 3:15

"...always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect..."

Close in prayer