Pastor Jim Jackson, 11/15/26

THE CHURCH, Pt. 6—A Family of Service and Sacrifice

Acts 6:1-15, 7:51-60; 8:1-3

Stephen is <u>CHOSEN</u> to serve the Family

Jews living outside Judea were often looked down on as being 'Hellenistic' or 'Greek-influenced' by those in Jerusalem going to the Temple. As the new church was made up of people from all over, some felt Hellenistic widows were being neglected. As the Apostles took the burden of the spiritual needs of praying, teaching, and leading the church, they suggested finding gifted, qualified men to serve the physical needs. *The people of God serve God when they serve God's people* (1 Pet. 4:10, 11)! They picked (not voted on) seven Godly men, who likely already had a serving reputation, to help as kind of proto-deacon ministry. Though Stephen was a well-spoken, intelligent man, he humbly served wherever the need. Humility is using your strength and giftedness to lift up and bless others. *Humility isn't weakness exemplified but Jesus personified.*

Stephen is <u>KILLED</u> serving the Family

Stephen was an evangelist who engaged with Hellenistic Jews about Jesus and his Messianic credentials. Stephen had an excellent knowledge of the OT and was empowered by the Holy Spirit to speak with clarity, wisdom, and power (Mark 13:11). *Gifted, hardworking, Spirit-empowered men are a rare blessing to God's Family!* Seeing they couldn't defeat his arguments, they spread lies to have him arrested and brought to trial. At the trial, Stephen delivers a devastating speech on the hardheartedness of those who clearly see God at work, but rather than turn to Him, they oppose His messengers! The trial then turns into a mob that drags Stephen out of the city and stones him to death as the first martyr. *You may silence the man, but you can never silence the message!*

Stephen's death <u>INCREASES</u> the Family

At his ascension, Jesus told his disciples to spread the Gospel and disciple people (thus setting up churches) all over the world (Matt. 28:19; Acts 1:8). Being centralized in Jerusalem, God used persecution to send His Family out to start other Families. Persecution purifies, as it makes false Christians fall away, weak Christians stronger, mature Christians resolute, and future Christians count the cost (Luke 14:28; John 15:20). *Persecution doesn't extinguish God's Family but rather expands it* (Matt. 16:18)!