

Unstoppable Kingdom

Locally: Sacrificing for the Savior – Part One

Acts 6:1-8:4

Our year-long journey through Acts continues. So far, we have seen Jesus promise the Holy Spirit and give his disciples the great commission.

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

Everything in life that is worth anything requires sacrifice. What do you love: kids, finances, physical health, freedom, your career, friends, hobbies etc.? God’s Unstoppable Kingdom is no different

“Joyful sacrifice is giving up something you love for something you love even more.” JD Greear

Over the next two weeks, we will wrap up an important section of our study, “Unstoppable Kingdom Locally” and will see what happened to get the good news of Jesus outside of Jerusalem and into Judea, Samaria and to the end of the earth. God will build his mission on the sacrifices of those early disciples.

“Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, “It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them. And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith. And Stephen, full of grace and power, was doing great wonders and signs among the people. Then some of those who belonged to the synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called), and of the Cyrenians, and of the Alexandrians, and of those from Cilicia and Asia, rose up and disputed with Stephen. 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 they stirred up the people and the elders and the scribes, and they came upon him and seized him and brought him before the council, and they set up false witnesses who said, “This man never ceases to speak words against this holy place and the law, for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and will change the customs that Moses delivered to us.” And gazing at him, all who sat in the council saw that his face was like the face of an angel. And the high priest said, ‘Are these things so?’” Acts 6:1-7:1

Main Idea: The Unstoppable Kingdom Grows from the Seeds of Sacrifice

I. Sacrifice Status for Service – Acts 6:1-7

Widows have always been near to the heart of God. Their care is seen throughout the Old Testament, the New Testament and in the Early Church. This church was caring for two types of Jewish widows: The Hebrew widows who were “locals”, born and raised in Israel and spoke Aramaic while the Hellenist widows were born and raised outside Israel in a Greek culture, which was different from those raised in Israel and spoke Greek. All the Apostles and most of the early disciples were local, Aramaic-speaking Jews themselves. Prejudice was a potential problem!

“And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, ‘It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.’” Acts 6:2-4

Today many churches are too dependent on their pastor and staff. This is not good for the church, the pastor, or for the Kingdom of God!

“And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of the ministry, for building up the body of Christ.” Ephesians 4:11-12

While some think they are not good enough to serve, others think they are too good to serve. However, the Unstoppable Kingdom advances through churches where the pastors pastor, the people serve, & everyone is all in!

“And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.” Acts 6:7

II. Sacrifice Freedom for Faithfulness – Acts 6:8-7:1

There are no small jobs in the Kingdom. No matter what your job is, you are to continually pray for people and share the gospel! Stephen was assigned the simple task of serving food to widows, but...

“Stephen, full of grace and power, was doing great wonders and signs among the people.” Acts 6:8

Opposition: Every time God is working, Satan has a counter-attack. The leaders tried arguing with Stephen (Acts 6:9), but they couldn’t resist his wisdom and spirit (Acts 6:10). So they resorted to slander and violence to stop him.

“Then they secretly instigated men who said, “We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God.” And they stirred up the people and the elders and the scribes, and they came upon him and seized him and brought him before the council, and they set up false witnesses who said, “This man never ceases to speak words against this holy place and the law, for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place

and will change the customs that Moses delivered to us...And the high priest said, 'Are these things so?'" **Acts 6:11-14, 7:1**

This seems like bad news and in one sense, it is. It is very bad news that Stephen is being harassed by the synagogue leaders and Sanhedrin for ministering to widows, preaching the gospel, and praying. But God is up to something. Looking at this situation through the lens of temporary earthly kingdoms that value only comfort, health, wealth, and personal satisfaction we could freak out. But, if instead, we look at it through the lens of the Unstoppable Kingdom of God then we are led to a place of absolute trust!

"You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you." **Isaiah 26:3** **"Mind" (YAY-ster) = Framing or framework.**

Just as color-tinted glasses make the world look different, "Unstoppable Kingdom"-tinted glasses reveal the world through a different framework that allows us to further trust in God as he keeps us in perfect peace.

"And gazing at him, all who sat in the council saw that his face was like the face of an angel." **Acts 6:15**

Main Idea: The Unstoppable Kingdom Grows from the Seeds of Sacrifice including the sacrifices of "Status for Service" and "Popularity for Wisdom".

While the Unstoppable Kingdom is undeniably built on sacrifice, there has never been any greater sacrifice than that which was given by Jesus! When you and I are tempted to grumble or complain about the minor sacrifices of the kingdom (volunteering, giving, serving, sharing the gospel, gathering for worship, Bible study, prayer time, resisting temptation, etc.), we must remember Jesus and the sacrifice he made for us.

"Who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."

Philippians 2:6-8

"Joyful sacrifice is giving up something you love for something you love even more." **JD Greear**

Jesus has made it possible for you to join the Unstoppable Kingdom through his sacrificial death and glorious resurrection. As a citizen, no sacrifice is too great when we are sacrificing for the Savior!

Sources and Further Reading Opportunities:

- *CSB Study Bible* – Trevin Wax, General Editor (2021)
- *The Bible Exposition Commentary* – Warren Wiersbe (1996)
- *Word Pictures in the New Testament* – A.T. Robertson (1933)
- *The New American Commentary: Acts* – John B. Polhill (1992)
- *Acts: Bible Study Commentary* – F.F. Bruce (2017)
- *Acts for Everyone* – N.T. Wright (2008)
- *Acts: The Church Afire* – Kent Hughes (1996)
- *Acts* – K.O. Gangle (1998)
- *The Kingdom of God* – Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1992)
- *Kingdom First* – Jeff Christopherson (2015)
- *The Kingdom Agenda* – Tony Evans (1999)
- *What is a Joyful Sacrifice?* – J.D. Greear (2019)