

Unstoppable Kingdom

Locally: Sacrificing for the Savior – Part Two

Acts 6:1-8:4

Last week we preached part one of a message entitled ‘Sacrificing for the Savior’ and were introduced to a young man named Stephen. He was appointed to help take care of the widows in the early church. While doing so, people who didn’t believe in Jesus or like this movement began to argue with Stephen about the law of Moses and the Temple. They accused him of blasphemy (the worst sin to commit according to the Jews). They dragged Stephen before the Sanhedrin (Jewish court). After charging him with blasphemy, the High Priest asked Stephen to answer the charges...

“And Stephen said: ‘Brothers and fathers, hear me. The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran,³ and said to him, ‘Go out from your land and from your kindred and go into the land that I will show you.’⁴ Then he went out from the land of the Chaldeans and lived in Haran. And after his father died, God removed him from there into this land in which you are now living.⁵ Yet he gave him no inheritance in it, not even a foot’s length, but promised to give it to him as a possession and to his offspring after him, though he had no child.⁶ And God spoke to this effect—that his offspring would be sojourners in a land belonging to others, who would enslave them and afflict them four hundred years.⁷ ‘But I will judge the nation that they serve,’ said God, ‘and after that they shall come out and worship me in this place.’⁸ And he gave him the covenant of circumcision. And so Abraham became the father of Isaac, and circumcised him on the eighth day, and Isaac became the father of Jacob, and Jacob of the twelve patriarchs.⁹ “And the patriarchs, jealous of Joseph, sold him into Egypt; but God was with him¹⁰ and rescued him out of all his afflictions and gave him favor and wisdom before Pharaoh, king of Egypt, who made him ruler over Egypt and over all his household.¹¹ Now there came a famine throughout all Egypt and Canaan, and great affliction, and our fathers could find no food.¹² But when Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent out our fathers on their first visit.¹³ And on the second visit Joseph made himself known to his brothers, and Joseph’s family became known to Pharaoh.¹⁴ And Joseph sent and summoned Jacob his father and all his kindred, seventy-five persons in all.¹⁵ And Jacob went down into Egypt, and he died, he and our fathers,¹⁶ and they were carried back to Shechem and laid in the tomb that Abraham had bought for a sum of silver from the sons of Hamor in Shechem.¹⁷ “But as the time of the promise drew near, which God had granted to Abraham, the people increased and multiplied in Egypt¹⁸ until there arose over Egypt another king who did not know Joseph.¹⁹ He dealt shrewdly with our race and forced our fathers to expose their infants, so that they would not be kept alive.²⁰ At this time Moses was born; and he was beautiful in God’s sight. And he was brought up for three months in his father’s house,²¹ and when he was exposed, Pharaoh’s daughter adopted him and brought him up as her own son.²² And Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and he was mighty in his words and deeds.²³ “When he was forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brothers, the children of Israel.²⁴ And seeing one of them being wronged, he defended the oppressed man and avenged him by striking down the Egyptian.²⁵ He supposed that his brothers would understand that God was giving them salvation by his hand, but they did not understand.²⁶ And on the following day he appeared to them as they were quarreling and tried to reconcile them, saying, ‘Men, you are brothers. Why do you wrong each other?’²⁷ But the man who was wronging his neighbor thrust him aside, saying, ‘Who made you a ruler and a judge over us?’²⁸ Do you want to kill me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday?’²⁹ At this retort Moses fled and became an exile in the land of Midian, where he became the father of two sons.³⁰ “Now when forty years had

passed, an angel appeared to him in the wilderness of Mount Sinai, in a flame of fire in a bush.³¹ When Moses saw it, he was amazed at the sight, and as he drew near to look, there came the voice of the Lord:³² ‘I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob.’ And Moses trembled and did not dare to look.³³ Then the Lord said to him, ‘Take off the sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.³⁴ I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have heard their groaning, and I have come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send you to Egypt.’³⁵ “This Moses, whom they rejected, saying, ‘Who made you a ruler and a judge?’—this man God sent as both ruler and redeemer by the hand of the angel who appeared to him in the bush.³⁶ This man led them out, performing wonders and signs in Egypt and at the Red Sea and in the wilderness for forty years.³⁷ This is the Moses who said to the Israelites, ‘God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers.’³⁸ This is the one who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the angel who spoke to him at Mount Sinai, and with our fathers. He received living oracles to give to us.³⁹ Our fathers refused to obey him, but thrust him aside, and in their hearts they turned to Egypt,⁴⁰ saying to Aaron, ‘Make for us gods who will go before us. As for this Moses who led us out from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.’⁴¹ And they made a calf in those days, and offered a sacrifice to the idol and were rejoicing in the works of their hands.⁴² But God turned away and gave them over to worship the host of heaven, as it is written in the book of the prophets: ‘Did you bring to me slain beasts and sacrifices, during the forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel?’⁴³ You took up the tent of Moloch and the star of your god Rephan, the images that you made to worship; and I will send you into exile beyond Babylon.’⁴⁴ “Our fathers had the tent of witness in the wilderness, just as he who spoke to Moses directed him to make it, according to the pattern that he had seen.⁴⁵ Our fathers in turn brought it in with Joshua when they dispossessed the nations that God drove out before our fathers. So it was until the days of David,⁴⁶ who found favor in the sight of God and asked to find a dwelling place for the God of Jacob.⁴⁷ But it was Solomon who built a house for him.⁴⁸ Yet the Most High does not dwell in houses made by hands, as the prophet says,⁴⁹ “Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me, says the Lord, or what is the place of my rest?”⁵⁰ Did not my hand make all these things?”⁵¹ “You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you.⁵² 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,⁵³ you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it.”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 together⁵⁸ 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.⁶¹ And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.² Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him.³ But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison.⁴ Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word.” **Acts 7:2-8:4**

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

III. Sacrifice Self-Defensiveness for Truth – Acts 7:2-50

Stephen was given every opportunity to defend himself from the serious charges brought against him, but he refused. Instead, he used the opportunity to share the truth with the highest court in Israel.

“This was not a speech designed to procure an acquittal from the court, but a faithful testimony to the truth as he saw it. It took the form of a survey of Old Testament history, showing that God had never tied himself to one holy place, and that his people throughout their history had always resisted his messengers and the Spirit who spoke through them.” F.F. Bruce

What is a “sacred cow”. Sometimes in institutions like families (Sunday lunch at Grandma’s house), churches (programs), businesses (products), and communities those things that can never be questioned, scrutinized, or criticized. This produced an immediate and fierce reaction.

Stephen Addressed Three Sacred Cows:

- **The Land** – Stephen proved that God met with Abraham, blessed Joseph, took care of Moses and the Israelites ALL OUTSIDE THE LAND!

“Then the Lord said to him (Moses), ‘Take off the sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.’ Acts 7:33 (Ex 3:5). The Land isn’t the Blessing

- **The Law** – The law was synonymous with God and Moses and was deified. Stephen proved that the hope of Israel was never in the law, but the one to whom the law and Moses pointed...Jesus!

“This is the Moses who said to the Israelites, ‘God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers.’” Acts 7:37 (Deut. 18:15) The Law and Moses can’t save!

- **The Temple** – Stephen proved that this was false security!

“Yet the Most High does not dwell in houses made by hands, as the prophet says, ‘Heaven is my throne, & the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me, says the Lord, or what is the place of my rest? Did not my hand make all these things?’” Acts 7:48-50 (Isaiah 66:1-2) God is not confined to your building!

We can make wrong assumptions about ourselves in the same way. We can mistakenly think that because we live in a **blessed country**, or because we have a **high view of the Bible** or come to **church on a regular basis** that we automatically have the blessing of God. But the Kingdom is not about the Land, the Law, or the Temple...It’s about Jesus and His Unstoppable Kingdom!

If you are taking a journey, you may use many different modes of transportation (boat, uber, airplane, train, rental car etc.). Each of them is important, but none of them are the point of the journey). God has used the law, the Temple, the land, churches, music, preaching and many other things in his Kingdom but they are all pointing us to one person...Jesus, the King of Kings!

IV. Sacrifice Fleeting Ease for Eternal Glory – Acts 7:51-60

If Stephen’s thoughts about the sacred cows didn’t infuriate the court, his concluding remarks would. He called them stiff-necked, uncircumcised in

hearts and resisting the Holy Spirit. He pointed out that their ancestors had persecuted/killed many of the prophets sent by God, and now they themselves had betrayed and murdered the Savior of the World. This court did not have the authority to kill anyone, so they just became a deliriously enraged lynch-mob who would not be stopped. They began to stone 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.’” Acts 7:55-56

“Stephen has been confessing Christ before men, and now he sees Christ confessing his servant before God.” F.F. Bruce

Life is short, eternity is long. Sacrificing for the Unstoppable Kingdom only makes sense if we see past the temptation of a life of fleeting ease and are willing to Sacrifice for the Savior. Are we all going to die a martyr’s death for Jesus? No, but we are all called to Sacrifice for the Savior!

“Then Jesus told his disciples, ‘If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me...for what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul?’” Matthew 16:24, 26a

V. Sacrifice Home Sweet Home for the Mission of God – 8:1-4

Exp: Stephen was dead. The first Christian Martyr. It was now open season on the disciples of Jesus. Jerusalem was no longer safe, so they left...

“And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles... Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word.” Acts 8:1, 4

Was this good news or bad news? It Depends on how you look at it. If what matters most is comfort, health, wealth, status, and temporary kingdoms then this is really bad news. But, if what matters most is God’s Unstoppable Kingdom growing, then this is very good news. Remember...

“And you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” Acts 1:8b - Jesus had a plan...

Saul of Tarsus: We are introduced to a MAJOR character for the remainder of Acts and the New Testament. A young Pharisee was present at the stoning of Stephen who will take the lead in persecuting Christians but will convert to Christ and eventually write over one third of the New Testament as the Apostle Paul! He will say how watching Stephen die being faithful to Jesus in word and deed affected him later in Acts (chapter 22).

“The Church owes Paul to the prayer of Stephen.” St. Augustine of Hippo

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

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)