

'Missional No Matter What'

Acts 7:54-60

Intro:

Image E.g. My 'wee' daughter Abigail 'stood strong' [when the boys were running at her] no matter what she faced! 😊

Need Q – Don't we need more Christians to *stand* for Christ, on mission, no matter what they face?

Q – Do you ever struggle to stand on mission for God?

When we talk about the 'Mission of God':

- a. Sending of God / Sprinting of God towards His target – 'Missio Dei' = Latin phrase = sending / E.g. Prodigal Son
- b. Saving of God / Stretching out with Salvation– e.g. if you had cure for cancer ... He has cure for cancer of soul
- c. Striking problem – Fewer and fewer Christians are willing to stand on mission & speak for Christ
 - i. Bombarded by Culture / Wave of Secularism / Swayed by Postmodern Pressure (no 1 right way)
 - ii. 2/3 Christians don't actively share their faith
 - iii. Number 1 reason = fear / fear of rejection, misunderstanding, being asked difficult Q, categorized

Subject **THE FIRST CHURCH STOOD FOR CHRIST ... [ON MISSION, NO MATTER WHAT THEY FACED]**

Text Turn to Acts 7:54-60 ...

Preview We're going to see Stephen, a servant of Christ, who has so set his heart on Christ, having been shackled before the Sanhedrin, and spoken boldly of Jesus, beautifully exemplifies standing for Christ no matter what he faces

I. The Religious Leaders Are Filled With Fury (7:54)

"When they heard these things they became furious and ground their teeth at him" (v54)

- 'filled with fury' = lit. in Gr. – 'hearts torn in 2' i.e., 'hearts torn asunder' = deep division between them & Stephen
- 'gnashed their teeth' = picture here of hell, violent rage towards him
- E.g. Stott Quote = "The Sanhedrin snarled at him like wild animals"
- MTR = Don't be surprised if the culture (& specific people in it) are filled with fury towards you / Christ you serve

II. Stephen is Filled with the Spirit (7:55a)

"But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit ..." (v55a)

- What would you have been filled with? How would you have reacted to their rage?
- E.g. Churchill – "If I was your husband I'd give you the gun!" 😊 You ever been there, desire to retaliate / pay back?
- Not Stephen – 'filled with the Spirit' – filling of the Spirit in Luke-Acts = primarily the influence & control of the Spirit leading to empowerment for mission, proclamation & missional faithfulness
- Stephen allows the Spirit *in this moment* to control, influence, empower ... his mind, heart, words, reactions
- Picture in Acts has consistently been = Stephen is filled with the Spirit over time – Acts 6:3, 5, 8, 10, 15 – wow!
- MTR = Who's controlling you? Who will control us?

III. Stephen is Focused on His Savior (7:55b)

"But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked intently toward heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God" (v55b)

- E.g. I went surfing once! Kept being forced to drift by the waves, Carrie said keep focusing on 1 target on beach
- That's Stephen here – as the waves of the storm seek to blow him off course – stays focused on Jesus!
- 'looked intently' lit. in Gr. = to fix eyes on, gaze upon
- 'saw the glory of God'
 - o glory = splendor, brightness, magnificence, excellence, pre-eminence, dignity, grace, majesty, kingship, perfection, absolute rulership!!!
- 'saw ... Jesus standing at the right hand of God' [i.e., saw the grace of Christ!] **only place standing in NT**
 - o At right hand = right hand a place of position / proximity / prominence, reserved only for 1 of highest rank
 - "only 1 who has the highest position can sit with such proximity & be given such prominence"
 - o Standing – normally seated – cheering Stephen on, interceding for him – Go Stephen!
 - o Rising up – "Jesus is rising up from the throne to greet his martyr"

- MTR = That's what you need in the midst of standing – focus on the glory & greatness of God!

IV. Stephen is Fearless to Speak (7:56)

“Look!” he said, “I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!” (v56)

- I see Jesus! Accepted by God / Given Access to God / Provided with Authority from God
- Son of Man = this is the only ref. to the Son of Man outside the gospels in the NT
 - o Daniel 7:13-14 – means one born as a son of mankind, human figure (like a son of man in Daniel), coming on clouds to the enthroned ancient of days to receive universal dominion
- Sin / Substitutionary Atonement / Faith
- How will they believe if they do not hear? How will they hear if one does not speak? [Rom. 10]
- MTR = E.g. Dad & his brother – ‘You tell everyone else about Jesus. When are you going to tell me?’
 - o Who is it you won't share Jesus with because you are gripped by fear?

V. Stephen is Faithful to Stand (On Mission no Matter What, Right to the End)

⁵⁷ But they covered their ears, shouting out with a loud voice, and rushed at him with one intent. ⁵⁸ When they had driven him out of the city, they began to stone him, and the witnesses laid their cloaks at the feet of a young man named Saul. ⁵⁹ They continued to stone Stephen while he prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!” ⁶⁰ Then he fell to his knees and cried out with a loud voice, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them!” When he had said this, he died.

- ‘Receive my Spirit’ – Total Surrender
- ‘Do not hold this against them’ – so like Jesus!
- Impact on Paul – persecution spreads church, Paul becomes spearhead of the church's mission! You never know who'll you'll impact

VI STAND FOR CHRIST [HP]

- Will you stand for Christ? Will we be a church that, by the power of the Spirit, stands for Christ?
- They may not throw stones at you, but they may throw abuse at you
 - o They may not drive you out of the city, but they may seek to exclude from their friendship group
 - o They may not call for your blood, but they may call for your resignation
 - o Would you be willing to stand for Christ?
- E.g. Baker in NI / Friend with future Father-in-law @ dinner / Little girl in Church of England School in UK
- Stand for Christ – Be filled w. Spirit, Focus on your Savior, Ask for Fearlessness to Speak & Faithfulness to Stand



54 When the members of the Sanhedrin heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. 55 But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. 56 'Look,' he said, 'I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.' 57 At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, 58 dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul. 59 While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.' 60 Then he fell on his knees and cried out, 'Lord, do not hold this sin against them.' When he had said this, he fell asleep.

ACTS 7:54-60



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(2) STEPHEN IS FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT (7:55A)

“BUT STEPHEN, FULL OF THE HOLY SPIRIT ...” (V55A)






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(2) STEPHEN IS FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT (7:55A)



(3) STEPHEN IS FOCUSED ON HIS SAVIOR (7:55B)

“BUT STEPHEN, FULL OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, LOOKED INTENTLY TOWARD HEAVEN AND SAW THE GLORY OF GOD, AND JESUS STANDING AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD” (V55B)



“But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked intently toward heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God” (v55b)

(3) STEPHEN IS FOCUSED ON HIS SAVIOR (7:55B)






(4) STEPHEN IS FEARLESS TO SPEAK (7:56)

“LOOK!” HE SAID, “I SEE THE HEAVENS OPENED, AND THE SON OF MAN STANDING AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD!” (V56)





“Look!” he said, “I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!” (v56)

(4) STEPHEN IS FEARLESS TO SPEAK (7:56)



57 But they covered their ears, shouting out with a loud voice, and rushed at him with one intent. 58 When they had driven him out of the city, they began to stone him, and the witnesses laid their cloaks at the feet of a young man named Saul. 59 They continued to stone Stephen while he prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!" 60 Then he fell to his knees and cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them!" When he had said this, he died.

(5) STEPHEN IS FAITHFUL TO STAND (7:57-60)

The image features a white background with four horizontal bars of different colors: orange, yellow, blue, and purple. The orange bar is at the top left, the yellow bar is at the top middle, the blue bar is at the top right, the green bar is at the bottom left, the orange bar is at the bottom middle, and the purple bar is at the bottom right. All bars have rounded ends.

STAND FOR CHRIST