

Living out our faith Pt 9

Acts 7:1-60

- By now the early church had grown from a handful to over thousands and with that amount of growth come problems. First to rear its head is one that the church deals with on a regular basis the accusation of favoritism. The Greek faction of Jewish widows was accusing the church of favoring the Jerusalem widows when it came to distribution of food and provisions. So in order to get satisfaction they run to the Apostles and demanded they fix the problem. Well, to do that meant the Apostles would have to neglect the main portion of their ministry, which was prayer, and the teaching of the word. So, they suggest selecting seven men with good character, full of wisdom and the Holy Spirit. This pleased everyone. Included in the seven was a man named Stephen. He not only possessed the qualities needed to wait on tables but also the wisdom to refute heresy (verse 6:10). The naysayers, unable to resist his wisdom hire liars to discredit him (verses 13-14).

V1-16

- Where we pick back up in the scriptures, they set Stephen before a council to accuse him of trying to change their customs set forth by Moses. But God turns the tables on them. As they looked at Stephen with contempt, what they see is innocence and illumination, as God sets Stephens face aglow. Remember Luke is writing this narrative and the person he is getting this account from is an eye witness who will be revealed later in the story. In verse 1, Stephen is asked if these accusations are true. Stephen doesn't seek to defend himself; instead he wants to enlighten his audience to truth. In other words, whenever we're given the opportunity whether by chance or a misunderstanding, use it to share Jesus. This is the longest recorded message in Acts which shows the importance attached to it.
- Stephen is going to tell us things that are only recorded here in scripture. Verse 2 – in Genesis, when God told Abraham to leave his family Stephen tells us exactly when this happened. He's beginning with the promise to Abraham because he wants to prove to his listeners that they can't put God in a box. That there is always progress and change in God's program and that the Lord is creative and innovative in His dealings with human beings. Although Abraham's promise was to him and his descendants – the Jews – it also pertained to the entire human race. In verse 9 he moves on to Joseph who was a deliverer and ordained by God, but was not recognized by his brethren. He describes how his brothers hated and rejected him, afflicting him the first time, but when they encounter him a second time they recognize him as their deliverer and he saves them in verses 13-14.

V17-40

- He moves on to Moses, and describes how God also ordained Moses to be a deliverer. It is only here in verse 22; he tells that Moses was learned in all Egyptians ways. Then verses 25-28 he tells how after 40 years Moses had supposed that the children of Israel would understand that God had raised him up to be their deliverer; but like Joseph and Jesus they did not. Verse 30 – it's amazing how in one verse of scripture 40 years have passed (**2 Peter 3:8**). Verse 33– tells of the custom of the priests when entering the tabernacle or temple,

Muslims do this today when entering a mosque. Then Verses 37– 41 Stephen gets personal, saying this Moses whom you claim to follow because of our ancestors, was rejected by our ancestors who turned to idols and made a golden calf when they thought he was lost.

V41-60

- You accuse me of not obeying Moses but our own people didn't obey Moses, you claim I'm a blasphemer our nation was carried away because of idolatry (Verse 43). Next in verses 44 – 50 he says, although we had a tabernacle God allowed Solomon to build Him a house even though He doesn't dwell in temples made with hands. Emphasizing again how God is both creative and innovative when it comes to His dealings with man. Stephen has systematically dismantled their accusations "you spoke against Moses, you spoken against the Law, and you spoke against the temple". Oh really. Well our fathers rejected Moses as a deliverer, and disobeyed the law, so much so that God allowed the temple to be destroyed by our enemies. Then in verse 51, Stephen raises the real problem is that their heart is hardened against the Holy Spirit causing their ears to be closed to the truth. Verses 52-53 – Stephen then asks them where in the past do we have to be proud of our ancestors who you are following and who have gotten us in this mess?
- Verse 54 – although his face was shining like an Angel they view his words as coming from the devil. This is what happens when you are convicted but you refuse to repent. Everywhere we read how Jesus is sitting at the right hand of God but we read He's standing up to receive the first of many Martyrs of the early church. Then we learn in verse 58 Saul, who is Paul, is there and this is where Luke would get his account of this story.