



Purple Heart

Scripture:

Acts 7:54-60 When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth.

55 But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God.

56 And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.

57 Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord,

58 And cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul.

59 And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.

60 And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

Introduction:

The early church was administered by the very people that had walked with Jesus. They in turn presented Christ and believers were added very swiftly to the early church as the Gospel spread.

As is the case today, some folks accepted Jesus and others totally rejected Him, preferring to trust in the traditions and culture related religion of the day instead of the prophetic writings of the old prophets and the actual fulfillment of that prophecy in their own time in history.

The religious community of the time began to intimidate, imprison, and to kill those that would take a stand for Christ. Stephen is the First Martyr of the Christian faith as recorded in the Book of Acts.

Full of the Holy Spirit

Acts 7: 55 But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God,

As the early church grew, the number of people needing everyday maintenance grew also. There was no social system in place to care for the needs of the widow, the orphan, the sick, or the elderly. Federal programs to assist with housing, food, and health needs did not exist. The local church took oversight of the needs of its own people.

The church leaders that were supposed to be getting the Gospel out to the masses had to travel and be in synagogues and in public forums and church gatherings to proclaim the Gospel.

There are only a finite number of hours in a day. Those hours were precious for proclaiming the Gospel, for leading folks to the Cross, for establishing more churches and growing folks in grace.

And although the social aspect issues were relevant and necessary, there was little time to be side tracked with hospital visits for non-life threatening issues; little time to distribute food and clothing; little time for day to day maintenance issues.

As a side note:

Stephen is considered the First Martyr of the Christian faith. After his stoning the widespread persecution of the Christians began in earnest; including the killings assisted by Saul [who would later become Paul after his experience on the Road to Damascus.]

Of the original disciples all met with martyrdom with the exception of John the Apostle who lived to be right at 100 years old and of course Judas Iscariot who died by hanging himself shortly after he betrayed Jesus in the Garden.

The apostles were getting bogged down in day to day maintenance of the born-again crowd.

Stephen is first mentioned in Acts 6 when the apostles decided they needed to appoint godly men to look over the maintenance issues of the people within the church.

Seven men were first appointed. It is noteworthy that many of the names in the list go on to be outstanding leaders and evangelists themselves in a short amount of time.

These men were not “above” the chores and duties within the congregations.

Stephen is particularly singled out in the scripture:

*Acts 6:5 And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and **they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost**, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch:*

STEPHEN’S REPUTATION AS “FULL OF THE HOLY SPIRIT” IS CONSISTENT FROM HIS FIRST MENTION IN SCRIPTURE UNTIL HE IS MARTYRED.

Acts 6:8-15 And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people.

9 Then there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called the synagogue of the Libertines, and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and of Asia, disputing with Stephen.

10 And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake.

11 Then they suborned men, which said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and against God.

12 And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council,

13 And set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law:

14 For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us.

15 And all that sat in the council, looking stedfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.

During his time serving as a servant under a higher under-Shepherd, you see him performing miracles.

You see him debating in doctrinal issues with the established religion to the point they are so confounded by his wisdom that they resort to bribing people to lie about what he is saying!

He is summoned to the court to answer! And he answers with the longest oration recorded by any of the disciples or apostles in one setting in the Book of Acts. He does not even blink; he just tells it like it is.

THE RESULT IS FASCINATING AS THE COUNCIL IS LOOKING RIGHT AT HIM, CAN SEE HE IS TELLING THE TRUTH, BUT THEY REFUSE TO ACCEPT IT.

THEY WOULD RATHER HAVE RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS THAN TO ACCEPT CHRIST.

Acts 6: 15 And all that sat in the council, looking stedfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.

BUT WHY ARE WE SO AMAZED? THIS ASPECT OF HUMAN NATURE HAS NOT CHANGED TODAY!

Looked up Stedfastly

*Acts 7: 55 But he, being filled with the Holy Ghost, **looked up stedfastly into heaven**, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God.*

Acts 7: 1-53 records the discourse of Stephen addressing the council. This is the SAME council that had crucified Jesus.

This same council had recently attempted to silence the apostles by beating them and then: *Acts 4:18 And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus.*

BUT LISTEN TO HIM, THEY DID. THAT IS AMAZING. But Stephen withheld nothing but the truth from the council.

Acts 7:51-53 Ye stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye.

52 Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which showed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers:

53 Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it.

This time the council would be insighted beyond the normal guidance of their own laws and rules. This time the council **unlawfully** took Stephen right out and began to be as base as to BITE on him and torment him then stoned him to death.

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56 And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.

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59 And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.

STEPHEN'S STAND COST HIM HIS EARTHLY LIFE; BUT SAUL [PAUL] WAS WATCHING.

This time Satan would be mistaken if he thought this would slow down the spread of Christianity. Stephen was more lauded than he realized. Instead, the Gospel would spread even wider and further both geographically and through time as well. Saul was standing there; we have no idea what he was thinking. We do know that the persecutions began in earnest after this incident. We also know that before long Saul would meet Jesus on the Road to Damascus and be changed to Paul. Certainly this day would be part of Saul's memories and another piece in the puzzle of how he would develop as the Apostle Paul one day.

Saw the Glory

*Acts 7: 55 But he, being filled with Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and **saw the glory of God**, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God.*

King Jesus we are told by many New Testament writers, inspired by the Holy Spirit, sits at the right hand of the Father making intercession for those that have accepted His blood atonement. BUT NOT THIS DAY!

This day we see Him standing. *Acts 7:56 And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God*

WHAT AN HONOR! KING JESUS IS STANDING AT THE STONING OF STEPHEN.

Acts 7:59-60 And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

As a side note:

Stephen was not one of the original apostles/disciples yet this council went "after him."

This is an old trick of Satan. If he can get someone in the ranks to suffer for the faith, then the soldiers are more likely to let up on the attack or leave the fellow Christian soldier "hanging out to dry".

If a prominent leader is attacked, the soldiers are more likely to fight for him, to stand by him.

Satan attempts to pick us off, one by one.

Conclusion:

At the beginning of Stephen's journey, he did not foresee his stoning. He did not set out to earn the Purple Heart; no normal thinking person would do that.

But he did earn it. He stood by the stuff! Even unto death.

If you have that life, that born-again life that Christ offers, are you willing to pour out your life as a sacrifice to Him?

Do you know Him?

Trail Markers to Discuss:

Take each highlighted sentence and use as a discussion point asking some of these questions:

- Can you think of where this can apply to you today? Right now at this point in your life?

Activity:

Refer to: *War Heroes 2-Adult Workbook*