

Series: The Church

THE YEAR OF THE BIBLE

Sermon #2: The Blood of Martyrs

Acts 6:1-8

Dr. Matt Cassidy --- November 15, 2020

Hey, good morning, Grace! Thanks for being here and thanks for joining us via the internet. We really appreciate everyone participating in any way you can, especially during this difficult time. I'd like to have kind of a difficult-time contextual talk afterwards if you would let me do that again. I think it's going to be five minutes, after the sermon. So, don't tune us out. And you guys [speaking to those attending in person] can't leave anyway. We're not going to let you ... so, a captive audience. My favorite.

Introduction

This week we're going to look at the Church again. That's where we are in our Bible timeline. There is nothing like the Church ... nothing. There is no thing on earth with the wonder and the power and the beauty and the brilliance, the love ... and here's the word ... the potential... of the Church, the bride of Christ.

And today, I want you to see this; I want you to walk away with this. We get to be here during the Church. I mean, it's taken us eleven months to get to the place where a non-Jew game is in the game here of salvation history. It took 10,000 years for history to get here, and we get to be here.

And this is what you need to know about the Church. The Church is built and designed to be dangerous. The Church is the bride of Christ and she is dangerous. We're supposed to be that way.

We're going to look today at what scholars call the most important event in history, because this event changed the direction of the Church for the good. And this event took place at an extreme expense; at such an expense that God chose to spend that. But you and I—we probably wouldn't. So, that's what we're looking at. There's your introduction. Are you ready to go?

The Early Days of the Church

All right. The Church—where we left it, where we were before, if you remember—is just getting started in Jerusalem during Pentecost. And during the first hundred years, to give you an idea of the power of the Church, there has been nothing like it in human history. One scholar wrote this. He said, **“Never in so short a time has any other religious faith or, for that matter, any other set of ideas, whether they’re religious or political, or economic, nothing has had this kind of impact and power without the aid of physical force or social or cultural prestige. Nothing has achieved this kind of command and position in such an important culture as the Roman culture.”**

In other words, when the Church got started in those first few years, it had an amazing influence on the culture itself. Now there have been some religions or some political values or view that have had that kind of influence, but needed violence. They needed some kind of prestige. And the way the Church did it is that it loved. It swept through the Roman Empire by just being an example of what it was like to become like Christ in all of life. And people would just simply watch and observe. And it not only didn’t submit to the culture, it changed the culture, and then outlived the culture of the Roman Empire. And Rome was just the first of many.

The bride, the Church, is dangerous. She stood up to and defeated Rome. She is meant to do that wherever she goes. You and I—we are the Church and we are meant to be dangerous as well. That’s what this story is about. It is about the power of the good news, the gospel—that word literally means “good news.” The good news of the gospel is like an infection. But it is for soul health and revitalization. It’s like an infection where people are literally born again. And the infection is to take place by people living a life filled with grace, generously giving their lives away, and other people watching and wanting that. And the infection started at ground zero, Jerusalem, on the day of Pentecost. That’s how it all started.

And the plan to affect the entire world, to spread the kingdom of God—this ambition of how God got started in the Garden of Eden in Genesis chapter 3 after the fall—this is the culmination of God’s plan here. This is how a revival is supposed to take place, this infectious revival.

Acts 1:8

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.

Jesus says this in Acts chapter 1, verse 8. He says, “But you will receive the 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.”

Let me translate that into Texan, or whatever, so that we can understand that those are geographical terms. Jesus says, *Look, the Spirit of God is going to come upon you, and you need to be witnesses in Austin and the Travis and Williamson County area, and even in Oklahoma. (I know, Oklahoma!) And then even the uttermost parts of the earth.* It’s going to make its way around the world. You’re going to need to be dangerous. That’s how the plan works out.

And in the early days of the Church, chapters 1 through 5 of the Book of Acts, things are famously well. The Church is getting along nicely. This baby church is loving. It’s safety and it’s comfort. And there are no plans yet to get into Judea and Samaria. And the uttermost parts of the earth? *Naaah, maybe we can get around to that.*

The Story of Stephen

And that’s where this story takes place, in the context of that. And that’s why Luke writes this story, which is called by another scholar, **“These chapters [6, 7, and 8] are the hinge of the real life of the early Church.”**

Luke gives three entire chapters, two and a half chapters to this event because it’s the most important in history, as one author said. And you look at this description that’s being used by Luke and you can realize the description of our lead player, Stephen. It gives an entire chapter to his speech, the longest speech in the Book of Acts.

Stephen’s Character

Let me tell you about Stephen. You’re going to love this man. When Luke describes him, it is so obvious that Luke wants us to enjoy the full character of Stephen. Look at all the

adjectives that are used to positively identify this young man. Let's count them. I listed them—when we go through this, let's just list them.

Acts 6:5, 8

This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit...⁸ Now Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people ...

“This proposal pleased the whole group, and so they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit.” And then, later on, “And Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people ...” He is a man of God; he will be used by God.

Acts 6: 9, 10

Opposition arose, however, from members of the synagogue ... these men began to argue with Stephen.¹⁰ But they could not stand up against his wisdom or the Spirit by whom he spoke.

Chapter 6, verse 9 says, “Opposition arose, however, from the members of the synagogue. And these men began to argue with Stephen, but they could not stand up against his wisdom or the Spirit by whom he spoke.” He's very intelligent.

Acts 6:15

All who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel.

Verse 15: “All who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen, and they saw that his face was like that of an angel.” He beautiful. He's the most valuable player. He's the greatest of all time. He's first in his class. He's first chair. He's whatever we would call him—he wins all those accolades. And he earned them. In the context of the Bible, he is spiritually

devoted. He is intellectual. He can make these arguments that even the Sanhedrin, the religious Jewish leaders at the time, could not answer. He's even handsome. I hate this guy. No, I love this man.

The point is that Stephen is the future of the Church. He's a young man and he has his whole life ahead of him. He has character and intelligence, he is surrendered to the Spirit of God, he is humble. He's in charge of waiting tables. And he's okay with that. He's a beautiful soul.

You see there in the middle of chapter 6, it says that opposition arose. And they pointed that towards Stephen. And they couldn't find anything wrong with this person. They can't find anything that he's done that would be remotely unethical. And so, they have to make things up. They just have to accuse him of things that are lies.

Acts 6:12-15

Opposition arose, from members of the synagogue ...

¹³ They produced false witnesses, who testified, "This fellow never stops speaking against this holy place and against the law. ¹⁴ For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs Moses handed down to us." ¹⁵ All who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel.

I'll just read it to you. "Opposition arose from the members of the Sanhedrin, and they produced false witnesses to testify." And this is what their testimony was. "This fellow over here won't stop speaking against the holy place, the temple, and against the law. And we have heard him say that Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and will change the customs of Moses that he has handed down to us."

And this is where that angel face thing comes up. "And all who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently upon Stephen, and when they saw him, his face was like the face of an angel."

Stephen's Defense Speech

And now, Stephen gives a defense against these lies and accusations against him. And I love it—it's a whole chapter, so we can't go into it. We're surveying these.

He starts his defense with speaking of the glory of God. He ends it with talking about the glory of God. He's a man of God. It's a long chapter, it's a good speech. It's the longest speech in the Book of Acts. And here's what he says. He does a survey of God's salvation history going all the way back and showing how God has used Moses and the temple and particularly, he's showing how God had been telling the people all along that there would be a Messiah, a promised one, coming soon. And His Spirit would come.

And then Stephen accuses them of this: he says, *You guys have missed it. You're living in the past and even the recent present. But God has moved all those things, we're pointing towards this, and you're missing it again.*

Acts 7:51-53

“You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit! ⁵² Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered Him—⁵³ you who have received the law that was put into effect through angels but have not obeyed it.”

And not only that, this is how he ends his speech. This is the climax. He says this: “You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit! Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered Him, Jesus—you who have received the law that was put into effect through angels but have not obeyed it.”

Acts 7:54-56

When they 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.”

This man is dangerous. And how do they respond? They do not respond well. Here's what they said. “When they heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. 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. ‘Look,’ he said, ‘I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.’”

“Standing at the right hand of God...”--if you know your Bibles, you know that Jesus went to be with the Father to sit in a place of authority—that's the place of judgment—at the right hand of the Father. And it says here that He's standing. He's standing there. So, scholars say, What has happened here? How is Jesus standing? Why is He standing? And many will say that the reason Jesus is standing is that was the posture of someone giving testimony for another person. Jesus Christ comes as a character witness. He's testifying on Stephen's behalf. Just like Jesus promised. He said, “If you acknowledge me before men, then the Son of Man will acknowledge you before the angels of God.” And here is Jesus standing and saying, *I have something to say about this man Stephen.*

Others say that the reason Jesus is standing is because He's standing to greet a hero coming home.

God Does Not Intervene

But here's what happens. God does not intervene in this. God does not stop the craziness from continuing. He allows it to happen. And the people—the Sanhedrin and the religious leaders at the time—it says they put their fingers in their ears. They covered their ears and they start yelling and screaming and then they all attack Stephen. They drag him outside the city and they begin to stone him. And God does not intervene. God does not do a thing to stop it.

Acts 7:59-60

While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” 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.

It says that these are the last words of Stephen, very similar to the last words of Jesus the Christ. “While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, ‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.’ 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.” He died. That’s Stephen. That is the end of Stephen, the man that was filled with grace and beauty and best, humility. He was being used by God. He was surrendered to God’s Spirit. He was the future of the Church. And he’s the first martyr.

Maybe it’s just me. I’m just going to say what I think. You know, I’m just going to say stuff, and maybe you can join in or throw rocks, you know, send a story so you can do that, maybe.

Was this necessary? Doesn’t it seem a little excessive, to sacrifice someone like this? I mean, some of you have played chess, right? I mean, would it be a good thing to—I don’t know—two moves in, sacrifice your bishop to take a pawn? In the military context, if the most able and intelligent man on base is Master Sergeant Buck Wilson, and you send him out on patrol or on some special op event, and his parachute gets tangled and he dies right when he hits the ground, before it even gets started, that’s kind of a waste, isn’t it? Maybe somebody else could have done that.

Let me just play it back in a biblical way. Goliath kills the young David. All of the potential—that’s the point here—the possibilities for this man. Luke has built him up for us to see all that he could have been. And nobody knows what could have happened in this man’s life, he was such a young man. And what could have been, God knows. And that’s the whole point—God does know all that could have been if he had lived. And God did not intervene. He didn’t do anything. He just watched.

Even Stephen’s speech was lost. Nobody in this storyline repents. This is not like Pentecost where 3,000 people flip and say, *Okay, I get it. Yeah, you’re right. We did crucify the Promised One. How do I repent and become one of His?*

Here's what does happen. Because of Stephen's speech that led to his martyrdom, it is—I think the phrase is—it shattered the glass door that gave license to persecute and kill the Church. And it all starts with Stephen. And you can see that throughout Acts. They just keep going back to Stephen and his speech.

Acts 8:1-3

Saul was in hearty agreement with putting him to death. And on that day a great persecution began 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 loud lamentation over him. ³ But Saul ravaging the church, entering house after house, and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison.

Look what it says in Acts chapter 8, verse 1 through 3: “Saul was in hearty agreement with putting him to death. And on that day a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. Devout men buried Stephen, and they were loud in their lamentations over him.” I bet they were. They knew him and loved him. “But Saul ravaging the church, entering house after house, and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison.”

“Ravaging”—this is a uniquely violent word. It's the only time it's used in the New Testament. In the Old Testament it's used one time. And the word is in the Book of Psalms, and it's talking about a wild boar grinding up and tearing up a vineyard. And it's not hard for us to imagine that. Many of you have seen videos of feral hogs going through a farm or a ranch. And before and after—hundreds of thousands of dollars of damage. It looks like a tornado touched down. That's what ravaging means here. And Paul (Saul) is going through with a license now to go house to house, tearing Mom and Dad away from their children. And it all starts with Stephen.

Acts 11:19

Now those who had been scattered by the persecution in connection with Stephen ...

It continues three chapters later in chapter 11 of the Book of Acts. It says, “And those who had been scattered by the persecution in connection with Stephen ...”

“Persecution in connection with Stephen”—now you can imagine behind closed doors in that church in Jerusalem that there were people who said, *Can we just talk about this? Can we just talk openly? Give me a microphone.* Well-meaning people, cautious people, safe people, saying, *Stephen’s speech—was it really necessary? To call the Sanhedrin stiff-necked and killers of the Promised One? It’s hotheads like Stephen that get us in this kind of trouble. And now the whole city is against us. We can’t do ministry now. We can’t do ministry because the city hates us now. And look at the cost. Look at the cost of what’s happened to the houses and the property that people have lost. Look at the cost of families. Look at these children. Are we going to have to raise all of these children? What are we supposed to do with this? And now we have to live like refugees. We have to run for our lives and live scattered, in exile.*

God Is Eternal with an Eternal Perspective

That would certainly be a perspective in a church meeting after something like this happened. That would be a perspective. And that’s what today’s learning time is all about. It is all about perspective. Because there are other perspectives. God has a perspective. God is eternal and God has an eternal perspective. And He is all-knowing. And He tells us what is right and real and true. And He needs to tell us what is right and real and true from His eternal perspective. And He has.

And that’s why we are so dedicated to the Bible, because it is so easy for us to lose perspective and not know what is right and not know what is even real and what’s passing. We don’t even know what we’re supposed to fear. What are we supposed to value? What really counts?



We are so easily deceived. It's so easy to look at something like this, like this little shadow in the water. That's a fish.



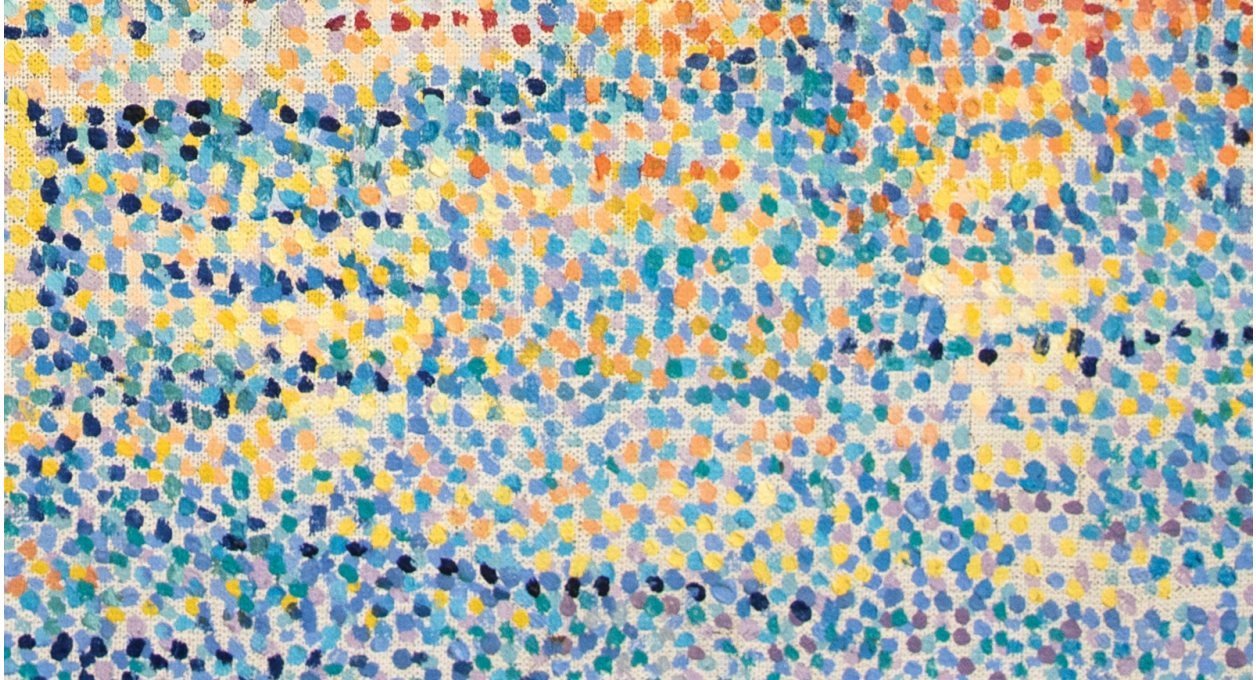
It is NOT a fish. It's a duck. And perspective tells us the truth of what is. That's what God's perspective.



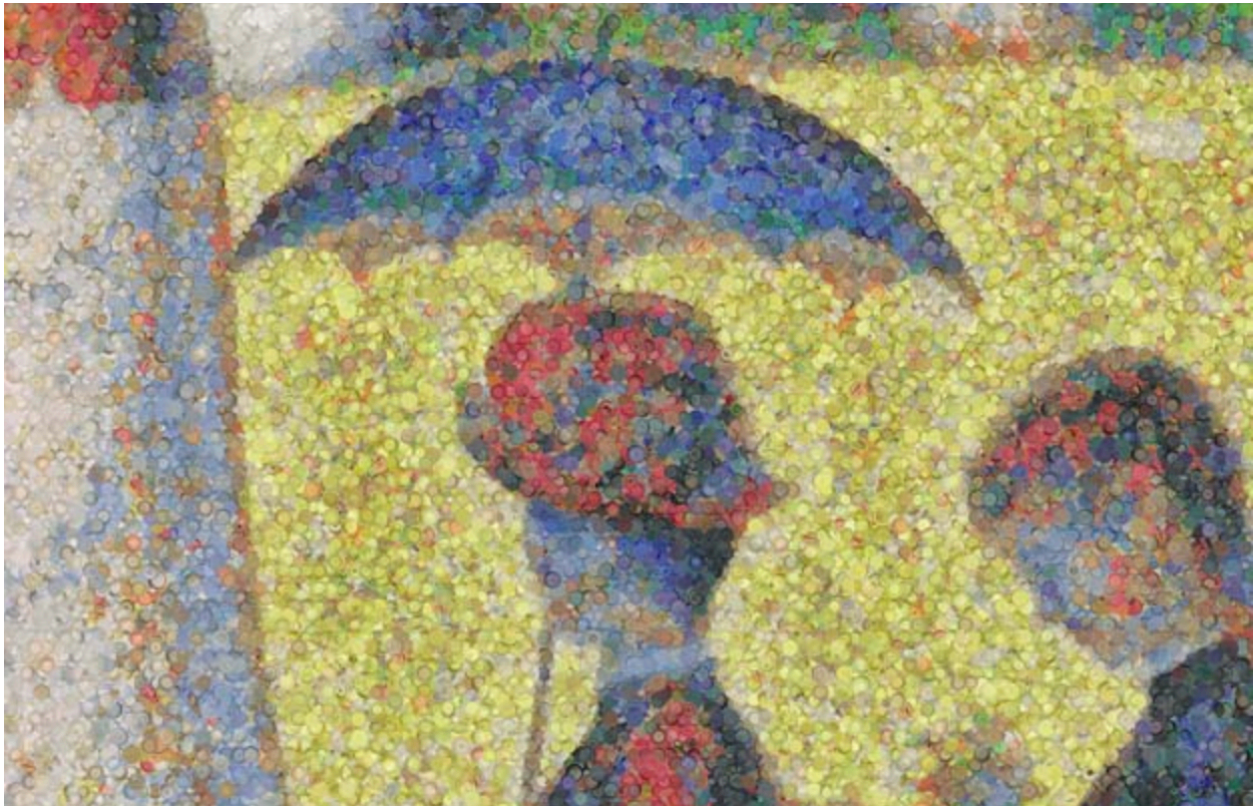
Look at this little picture here. You look at this and the perspective is, That's a stupid parent! And what's the emotion attached to that? We should fear this thing!



But the real perspective is, the truthful perspective is that that rock isn't dangling over thousands of feet. It's just a foot and a half off the ground. And that's not a stupid parent. That's kind of a cool parent. Okay, that's going to make a Christmas card that's going to rock, I'm just saying. A change in perspective.



Look at this little paint splotch and maybe you get emotionally upset, like somebody spilled some paint.



You back up a little bit and change your perspective and say, *Look, my kid—that's refrigerator art—good for him or for her. Look at me, I'm a proud parent.*



You back up a little more and realize, *That's beautiful and worth about a half a million dollars.* Perspective teaches you what is real and true and valuable and what to fear.

And that's what God does. It's all about perspective. And if we're not careful and we're just looking for a perspective that's too close up, we say that the death of Stephen is unnecessary. It was too expensive. It was a waste of a life of potential. And God's perspective, that's the point. That's why we read our Bibles. We're trying to get the mind of God—not the words—the mind of God into our minds and change our perspective. Because He brings sobriety to so many of our worries. The things that we fear, He consoles. The things that we're confused about, He makes sense out of, sometimes. And when evil invades our lives, the Bible steps in and says, *Hey, there's more to this story and you're never going to know it this side of the grave.*

The Church Is Scattered

Stephen's death—the Church is scattered. The Church is scattered. That's what it says over and over again. Galatians 4:4 says, "But when the fullness of time came, God sent forth His Son ...". He had set this up for thousands and thousands of years. He gave the Greeks a thousand years to unify the language so that everyone would be speaking Greek. And the Romans had

three hundred years to build roads everywhere to get the message out. And it was all set up to go with this great command to “Go to all the world and share the power of the gospel.” And the Church stalls before takeoff. She doesn’t move out of Jerusalem because she’s no longer dangerous. And that’s not how she was designed. And that’s not how the Church works.

Acts 1:8

“When the Holy Spirit is come upon you, you will receive power, and you will be my witnesses to Jerusalem, to Judea, to Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

And now, Jesus’ last commandment—“And when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, you will receive power”—yes, use the power—“and you will be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the earth.” No one leaves Jerusalem because everyone wants to be safe. And the Church can’t run on safety.

Acts 8:4-6, 8

Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word. ⁵ Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ. ⁶ And the crowds with one accord paid attention to what was being said by Philip, when they heard him and saw the signs that he did... ⁸ So there was much joy in that city.

And thank Stephen. Look what happened. Look at chapter 8, verse 4. It says, “And now those who were scattered went about preaching the word. Philip went down to the city of Samaria to proclaim to them Christ. And the crowds with one accord paid attention to what was being said by Philip, when they heard him and saw the signs that he did. So there was much joy in that city.”

Sure, no one responded to Stephen and his message. But look what happens when Philip leaves the town. Everybody wants to hear this. And they go to Samaria. Remember, Oklahoma? Even in Oklahoma they’re responding to this. They’re loving it.

“Scattered”—here’s what’s beautiful about this word “scattered.” In Greek it’s kind of related to the word for seed. And the idea of scattering seeds—that’s the best part about this, is that they’re scattering the seeds of the gospel everywhere. The irony is that it is the persecution

of the Church that is meant to thwart its growth and kill the Church, when actually it is the persecution of the Church that scatters this seed everywhere and causes it to grow. Scattering the Church in the Stephen story makes the Church—kind of against its will, soft determinism—dangerous again, that way she was made. And what happens when she's scattered and dangerous? Much joy. Much joy was found in that city.

The people went as missionaries more than as refugees.

--Everett Harrison

That's what Everett Harrison says. He writes this: "The people went as missionaries more than as refugees." They didn't leave Jerusalem as victims. They went with purpose. They got sober and realized, *Wait a minute, this is what we were called to do. This is what the King said to do.*

Years ago I went on an exploratory mission trip with a lot of our leaders to China. And we had this beautiful dinner with this old saint that had been a pastor in China for decades. He's been in prison for much more than ten years during his career. That's what you do there. And he was just telling us about the old days and how the early church's heart was broken because most of the Christian experience was on the east coast of China. And they just couldn't get the message inland. They weren't permitted to travel and it was difficult at the time.

And then he just told this story, that it was Mao Zedong that came into power in the sixties. He was an excessively violent Communist leader and he came in and squashed all of the religions, but within the context of the Christian faith, he killed the priests and the pastors and all Christians that they could find. They either burned the churches down or imprisoned or killed these men and women that loved God. And the ones they didn't kill, if they didn't torture them right away, they would send them to camps all over China—labor camps, inland. And this man says that from his perspective, it was Mao Zedong and his persecution that allowed the Church to spread west into the inland and to the far west outer reaches of China. Because that's how God works. The Church was allowed to be dangerous. That saint, that perspective—he's dangerous. He sees things the way God does-- eternal perspective.

Stephen's speech was dangerous and it changed the Church. Stephen's speech and his martyrdom were like the match that lit that church on fire and got them to do what Jesus told

them to do—to go to Jerusalem, and then to Judea, and then to Samaria and the uttermost parts of the earth.

Acts 11:19, 20

Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to none except Jews.²⁰ But in Antioch they began to speak to Greeks ...

It talks about it Acts chapter 11. Look at this. It's us. "Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia"—okay, that's way beyond Samaria up the coast—"and then Cyprus"—which is off the coast, it's an island in the Mediterranean—"and then to Antioch"—near the bend in the Mediterranean Sea—"speaking the word to none except Jews. But in Antioch they began to speak to Greeks." That's us. Let me just say—would all the non-Middle Eastern believers in Jesus Christ want to thank Stephen with a big amen? Amen.

That's why William Barclay said the death of Stephen is "one of the greatest events in history."

Application: The Church Is to Be Dangerous

The application is obvious. The Church is dangerous. We were meant to be dangerous. It's where we live, it's where we play best.

Kill us, torture us, condemn us, grind us to the dust ... The more you mow us down the more we grow, the seed is the blood of Christians.

--Tertullian (c. 160-225)

Tertullian, a northern African apologist, was directing his comments towards Rome and their persecutions and their killings of Christians, and he wrote this. It's a famous quote. You might know it. "Kill us, torture us, condemn us, grind us to the dust ... The more you mow us down the more we grow, the seed is the blood of Christians."

The more you mow us down the more we grow. It sounds a little bit like we're a weed, doesn't it? Let's go. Let's take this persecution. That's why Paul says in Philippians 3, "I want to know Christ and share in the fellowship of His suffering and in His death." Because Paul was dangerous and he wasn't afraid. He wanted to get in the game. He wanted to play.

This passage, this story, this two and a half chapters—I needed to hear this so bad this week. I don't know about you, but I just needed to hear this. Because becoming like Christ in all of life means becoming dangerous.

If you look at church history, the church fails when it gets involved in power or comfort. And it thrives in persecution. And for the church to thrive and for you to thrive, for me to thrive—this is why I needed to hear this—is my passion for Christ needs to be a consuming passion. It needs to be the prime directive, the desire to be dangerous and not comfortable.

What would it be like if we interviewed Stephen? Again, cynical Matt comes in with a microphone, like I know what I'm talking about, and I say, "Man, you had your whole life ahead of you. You had so much potential, all these things, and you were humble too. And you were so good-looking. You were in the prime of your life. What in the world do you think about that now?"

And then with a face of an angel he would say, "The King values souls. And whatever the King values, I value. Lost coin, lost sheep, lost son. I just wanted to play a part in the kingdom."

I'd say, "Put me in, coach. I'm ready to play."

If Stephen was a braggart, he'd say, "And did you know I was greeted by a standing Christ? The King of kings was standing when he greeted me." So, there's that... you live a dangerous life, you get a standing greeting.

Story of William Borden

William Borden was a man like Stephen. He was very gifted. Around the 1900s he graduated from high school. He was in an aristocratic home. And for his high school graduation—maybe some of you might have enjoyed this—he got a trip around the world just to enjoy himself before he started at Yale. And in his exploration around the world before he got back to school, he saw the hearts and lives of people in Asia and in Europe and in Africa and his heart broke.

He had become a Christian in high school under the teachings of D. L. Moody. And he wrote his parents and said, “After seeing what I’ve seen on this trip I want to be a missionary.”

And so, his parents were hesitant and his friends said, “You’re throwing your life away. You are the heir to an empire. Don’t do this.”

So, he finished Yale, and his dad set him down and said, “You can still run the company. It’s yours to have. Don’t be dumb.”

And he went on to Princeton, the School of Theology, and he graduated with a degree there. And his dad set him down again and said, “If you leave, you can never come back. You can never have this company and this fortune if you leave.”

And so, he got on a boat to China. And when he was going to China, he realized that he wanted to work specifically with Muslims, and so he went to Egypt to learn Arabic, the language, and the customs of the Muslims. And when he was in Egypt, like just a week or so later from arriving, he catches spinal meningitis. And within a month he’s dead. He never spent a single day being a missionary. And because of his family and all that he had lost and all that he had left, there was a shockwave that went through the world. He was in every major newspaper in America. And people brought their perspectives to that. The loss of a fortune, the loss of a beautiful education, the loss of all this potential, the loss of a life.

And his parents were given his Bible eventually. And in his Bible in the margins, written right after he renounced his fortune, he said, “No reserve.” And then after his dad sat him down and said, “I’m cutting you off, you can never come back,” he wrote, “No retreat.” And then Borden, just days before he died, having never done the fulfillment of all of God’s dreams that God had for him, he wrote, “No regret.” No reserve, no retreat, no regret.

But he was not forgotten. The press got ahold of that value, that perspective, and the news went out. And it became lore. And young men and women who had their whole lives ahead of them began to surrender those. If Borden could walk away from a fortune, they could walk away from whatever they had. And they started a big chant: “No reserve, no retreat, no regret.” And because of his death—and it was so inspirational that hundreds—no, I’m sorry—thousands—oops, thousands upon thousands of young men and women left their ambitions to become happy Americans and went into the mission field. It’s probably the single greatest missions revival that’s taken place in modern American history.

Borden was dangerous. And I bet he was greeted by a standing Christ.

Conclusion

I need to hear this. We were designed to be dangerous—this church was. You and I were designed to be dangerous. Are you dangerous? This week let's take it for a spin. No reserve. How about you go somewhere and do something and don't hold back? Start a new life where you just say, "No reserve."

Maybe you could choose something that has been a demon in your life that you have never been able to conquer because you always thought you had a place of retreat. How about you say next week, "No retreat." And then you live, just a week, like you'll be dead on Saturday. Just pretend you'll be dead on Saturday and you live this week with no regret.

Why don't you be dangerous? Let's be dangerous. Just try it for a week. Let's see what happens. It could be a contagion. We could live—let's say this together as a church—no reserve, no retreat, no regret. Let's be a dangerous church.

Will you pray with me?

Lord Jesus, the author and the perfecter of all danger, oh, we love You so much for being that way. Perfect love casts out all fear. Lord, we wonder why life doesn't work, because we want life to work safely. We want an adventure without danger. We want obedience without risk.

So, Lord, I confess my addiction to peace and comfort. I confess my addiction to maybe even the American life and the American dream. Lord, I ask that You would renew my spirit of desiring to do whatever, to go wherever, to be with whomever, whenever, at any cost.

Lord, I'd ask that Your Spirit would speak to us as a church and tell us how to be dangerous. Would you speak to the saints in this room that are listening? What do I need to do? What value, what perspective do I have that has to die so that I can see things from eternity and desire that kind of life? Lord, I surrender. I surrender. Make us like that, Lord.

And maybe even like the Church in Acts chapter 7, where we pray this ambitious prayer of danger wincingly, and so, we would love soft determinism to kick in. Make us, put us in a place where we're dangerous, where we have to choose it staring at us; where we can live a life with no reserve and no retreat and no regret and we would be that way. Let that be the light that shines. Let us live a life that glorifies You in every way, life and death. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Wooh! That can preach, huh? Those are three great chapters. I'd love for you to read them if you would, Acts chapters 6, 7, and 8. They changed the world.

Hey, I wanted to just say again, just talking as your pastor and an older guy, I guess—if you don't know what it's like to have a relationship with Jesus Christ, we've got to start there. Don't do dangerous without Jesus. And if you don't know what it means to have the assurance that you are going to spend eternity with Him, would you do something? Here's your first act of courage: contact someone at the church. You can contact them with the online contact information that you received in our introduction that David was talking about—someone's online right now from our pastoral staff, it's online in this live event thingy. There's a Zoom meeting after this where you can talk to someone. Or you can contact the church. But have someone sit down with you, maybe someone from our church—every believer is a minister here at this church—and I'll bet there's someone who lives near you or is in your profession that you could meet and you could become friends with, and they can explain to you about the power of the resurrection in your life to make you new, born again.

Another thing I want to talk to everybody about is, I just have this feeling, and our elders felt that—we had a meeting Thursday night—that it's time to get back in shape. You know what I mean? We all kind of took some time off and we probably have the pounds to show it. I kind of know that to be true. And I feel like the hardest part of getting back in shape is getting back in shape, like starting again, knowing the pain that's coming. And the hardest part of going to the gym is getting to the gym and touching that doorknob.

And I think while that's a great metaphor for physical health, it's also a metaphor for spiritual, balanced life health. I think we need to do whatever we can to consider coming back to church. That's not how we keep score here, with attendance and all that kind of stuff. I'm saying this as a pastor for your soul, that if the doctor is telling that you're at risk or someone you're loving and close to is at risk, boy, listen to those doctors. But don't listen to the people that make you afraid, in media or news or whatever.

What I'm saying is this, that being here at church, I think, is important. It's very important. And I think that we're not persecuted. You know, I think that what we experience is not even hardship. It's just inconvenience. And I think that it would be good if you would consider coming to church. If you want, you can work up to it during our Christmas at Grace,

those four weeks in December. We're going to have an amazing experience musically, at least, I can promise you that. And I think it would be good for your soul.

Come on up here. We've done everything we can. We've added the bipolar tokomak supercollider flux capacitor something or other to this building. It is safe in here. Please consider coming back.

Wear a mask. I know some people don't want to come back because they'll have to wear a mask. I think you could wear a mask. That's just an inconvenience. That's all it is.

Volunteer. Volunteer at Grace. Help some other people come. We're going to try to go to two services as soon as we possibly can and we're making those decisions this week. So, would you do that?

I know it's gotten easy to stay home and let the kids stay in their pajamas. Let's get them suited up. Let's make the drive that we used to make and it wasn't that big a deal, and now it's kind of longer. Let's do that. Let's get back in here—if you can, and if it's safe for you.

Now my last kind of family thing is that at the end of the year we desperately—that's not—I always tell you the truth when it comes to giving. We need end-of-year giving to be significant this year. We're not desperate, we're doing quite well, thank you very much. Our giving is down about eight percent, but our expenses are down about ten percent--so, like a lot of companies right now. But this is true to the way churches and non-profits live: December is almost like a retail business where if December comes in then all things are good for the rest of the year. If December doesn't come in, all things are hard for the rest of the year.

Would you consider Grace Covenant Church becoming or being the first of your priorities for generous giving this year? We would much appreciate it. We're going to need that going forward. In the first four weeks of January I'm going to tell you about the next chapter in Grace Covenant Church's life and I think you'll be pretty excited about it. It'll turn you up. So, consider Grace Covenant Church for end-of-year giving. Put us at the top of that list, would you?

Thank you for coming, thanks for watching, being here—we appreciate that. We have donuts and coffee outside again. You guys are dismissed. Let the ushers dismiss you. I'll be out in the courtyard. Thanks for staying in there.

