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(To Power to pray)

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THE FIRST MARTYR FOR CHRIST

Acts 7

Sept 27, 87 Berkeley " " A.M. v

If Christianity and our Democratic way of life survive, our young people and older ones too must be ready and willing to give everything they possess - even life itself. Young Stephen had seen the Lord and had been transfigured by him. And he went forth to live and to die.

When the Godless world marched out against him, he said in substance, you can't kill me. You may kill the body, but you cannot prevent my being loyal to the Lord. You can stone me to death, but you cannot prevent the doors of Heaven from opening wide for me.

Stephen lived during periless days and times. They marched against him and against Christ. But he lived a full life and he died bravely. He was a young man who had something on the inside.

Following the days of Pentecost, the people were brought together in a brotherhood and there was a great spirit of growth. Many had been cut off from financial support. And they faced poverty. Big-hearted men such as Barnabas had given all of their wealth to support the needy converts. And those that were homeless.

6:12-3

For some reason the administration of the Apostles did not prove satisfactory. As we discovered in Chapter 6. That there were things neglected. And the Apostles decided to remedy this evil. As they saw themselves neglecting this group, and secondly, they visioned themselves as undertaking too much. And they must give their time to the preaching of the word. For this reason, they appointed seven men that would help to take care of serving tables - the temporal things in the church.

*He acts like a chicken with his head cut off*

There is always the ever present danger of being side-tracked. And they were in danger of giving their time to work in which they had not been appointed. Now had they done so, they would not have been as effective. And they stop and think how the machinery of the church has grown and grown the age in which we live.

July 27. A mother in Winnipeg, Canada, keeps her four-year-old son out of cookies and candy when they visit the supermarket by taking off his belt. He's so busy holding up his pants he forgets the candy. I guess that says that when a fellow's got his mind on what really counts in life he forgets the knickknacks of trivia.

Preachers are better trained today than they have ever been before. But I am afraid that the modern church with all of its weak spots, is weakest maybe at this point. Because ministers have become skilled in many ways. And they have done so at a great price. Many times our skill is not doing the supreme thing. We get ourselves involved in the multitude of mechanics. And we forget that daily there is the matter of prayer and the ministry of the word.

*6:15*

Now the multitude heard the suggestions. And they went about selecting seven men. And one of the young men selected was Stephen. No doubt, everyone knew him. And he was a charming man. And there are two whole chapters here in the New Testament that tells us about the history that was involved with this man's life. We watch him live but for one brief day of his life. And we see him pass early and swiftly.

Luke admired this gifted young man - it is very evident. He uses one word to describe it. And that word is (full.) Well-rounded, and there was a fullness about Stephen. I think what Luke was saying, he was not a one-sided or half-baked individual. He was well-rounded, well-balanced, well-groomed. And he was well-matured.

His fullness consists in the fact of something that people could not do away with.

He was not full of himself - or trickery. But he had a fullness that even the

demons could not handle.

We do ~~not~~ have time to go into this matter in detail - but merely to mention that he was ~~(full) of faith~~. And this was a fine element. He was not timid. But his faith had meaning to him in terms of God. For without faith it is impossible to please God.

He was ~~full of wisdom~~ - this too is a wonderful trait. That he could handle the problems and situations in the church.

He was ~~full of power~~. That is virtue. As he went about things happened. We are told that many wonderful dynamic things happened. That the whole church was blessed with the experience of grace. Not that he was full of learning or these other fine qualities. But here is a description that made him a powerful saint. And he was really needed. And this is the kind of power that we need. The power that Stephen had. He was full of grace, you will recall.

Now the great secret of Stephen's fullness was that he continued with this. It was like a ~~spring of water within him~~. It was giving, giving all the time. And he had an inexhaustible resource. And this secret was the ~~Holy Spirit~~ - the Holy Ghost.

~~He knew that Jesus Christ was the same yesterday, today, and forever.~~ And this is what we come to look upon now in Chapter 7. The outcome of the fullness of this man. The faith he had. And the usefulness of this man and the effectiveness of his preaching. He was a ~~man~~ that was hard to ignore because ~~he had a message~~. And men who heard him knew they had to repent. They had to make a change.

- Knew the Bible - 1st 5 Books of Law -

*Abraham*

I. THE REVELATION OF GOD'S GLORY - V. 1-7

V. 1 - ~~(Are these things so)~~ the judge asked the prisoner. Whether he pleads guilty or not guilty. Now the prosecution of the case here, and of the high priest, and all of these other dignitaries gathered around. I imagine Stephen expected this question. They had looked upon his face and his face looked like an angel.

V. 2 - He begins by giving a witness. ~~Men and brethren~~ - he intends to speak at length. The address is very respectful. He does not criticize them but his speech will go to the point. And things were at a passionate heat. And the charge was lodged against Stephen!

If you had been in Stephen's place, what would you have offered in defense?

Here is what he had been ~~accused of~~. Speaking against Moses. Speaking against God. Speaking against the temple. Against the law. And against their customs. Now what could be blasphemous about a man who spoke reverently and who spoke Scripturally as this man did.

If you were this witness, how would you have handled it. Dr. Carl Bates once told about being a witness in a trial. He had been summons to be a witness. He testified in behalf of a member of his church. He faced a charge that he did not believe was true. It was a large church and the prosecutor knew this. And he also knew that it was impossible for the preacher to know all of his members personally. Yet, he affirmed on the stand under oath that he knew this person.

Then the prosecutor asked the preacher a loaded question. Dr. Bates, am I a member of your church? Now honestly, the preacher said he did not know. And he said as much - when he said if you are a member, you never attend. The courtroom exploded with laughter. And he said, that will be all Dr. Bates.

Now he had placed the emphasis on the courtroom principle of witnessing. But we have missed the point - when Jesus said, ye shall be my witnesses. Now he did not say that they were merely bear witness like the preacher going to the courtroom. What he said was far more significant. Ye shall be witnesses in your own person.

A witness in a court is there to tell what he saw and heard. And what he saw and what he heard may have little or not effect upon him personally.

But with Stephen a Disciple of Jesus however, there is a difference. The very nature of the case makes it so. What he saw and heard, changed his personality to such an extent that he would never be the same again. And the Holy Spirit made the difference, in Stephen's life.

And Stephen is going to leave the old disobedience and unbelief of Israel - starting with the story of Abraham with the history as Oliver Cromwell once said, as he outlined the education necessary for his son Richard. He said, I would have him know a little history.

It was to this lesson of history, that Stephen was going to give a revelation of God's glory first. He saw that the men that played a great part in the history of Israel, were the men who heard God's command. Great men of faith and adventure. And he was going to insist that they worship God long before there was ever a temple built in Jerusalem. And he was going to insist that the Jew's crucify Jesus and that all through the ages, they had persecuted the prophets. They had abandon the leaders whom God had raised up.

So he begins with Abraham. He was a man who answered God's call. Get thee out. In the book of Hebrews - he went out not knowing where he went. Heb. 11:8.

An old Scotch minister once admonished the church in South India that the people were often demanding just where such and such a step might lead. And where it would end.

A Christian has no right to ask where he is going if he is under a mandate from God. The man who obeys God's command was a man of faith - Abraham. He did not know where he was going but he believed that God would guide him and the best was yet to be.

Abraham was a man of hope. He never saw the promise fully fulfilled, but he never doubted that it would be.

We might ask the question how did Luke secure this address. It was delivered in public and it followed the Scriptural story. In a simple fashion. It could have been recorded by a secretary. It was certainly heard by Paul. And I don't think Luke could have invented this key-note address.

The first words strike us as the key-note of what he said in his defense. The God of Glory. Now that does not sound like one who blasphemes God. And the charges are unwarranted. And Stephen quotes the words - Gen. 12:1. He knew exactly what he was saying. And the audience knew that he was thoroughly versed in the Scripture. And this made a frightful impression upon them. Here was the obeying command of Abraham. And that his residence in Haran was temporary - V. 4.

And God transferred him to Palestine. And he connects his hearers with God and Abraham and the covenant.

He speaks of Abraham's inheritance - V. 5. And how the land would be promised to his seed.

V. 6 - There was perhaps 400 years that would elapse before the descendents would possess the promised land. And this was mentioned in Gen. and Ex.

V. 7 - He talked about the judgement that came from Egypt in the form of the ten plagues.

II. THE REHEARSAL OF GOD'S COVENANT - V. 8-16

At this point, he began a new theme about Joseph as he traces the history.

V. 8 - The covenant of circumcision. The covenant was always called God's covenant. And the seal of this covenant was circumcision. The removal of the fore-skin. And the religious idea here of placing the child into and under the covenant with all the blessings, promises, obligations - resulting therefrom.

This sanctified these people. Set them apart.

Understand this was an act limited to the male.

Eve was made of Adam. Now all girls were in the covenant through their fathers. The covenant line was transmitted only through the men. Thus this covenant, Abraham begot Isaac. And circumcised him the eighth day. And it continued from Isaac through Jacob and then to Jacob's sons.

Stephen felt very Scripturally in connecting this with Abraham. V. 8 - He sketches the story of Joseph. God who made Joseph a Saviour. He was sold to Egypt. It gave him grace and wisdom. They tried to get rid of Joseph - the enemy did. And the envious Jews. They did the same thing about Jesus. David was sold in slavery. V. 10. God was with him. To take care of him.

V. 11 - There was a famine.

V. 12 - Egypt was the great wheat country.

V. 13 - There is a second journey that Joseph made known himself to his brothers.

That was a shortage of food. Both men and animals. There was not fodder for the cattle and no grain for the people. And this is the point in which Stephen exalts and mentions Joseph.

The key to Joseph's life was Gen. 50:20. As for you, you thought evil against me. But God meant it unto good. Disaster had turned to triumph. Sold into Egypt as a slave, wrongfully imprisoned, forgotten by men he had helped, God gave him grace and wisdom.

This word grace is a lovely word. As it very simply means beauty. And strength of character and charm. Joseph was always a really good man. Now it would have been easy for Joseph to become sour and bitter. Each thing that happened to him as a slave and while in prison. But through wisdom and not of cleverness - but the ability to take on a long view of things, and to see things that God sees. He welcomed each new task that God offered him.

*Revelation of God's glory 157 4-16*

Therefore he rehearsed God's covenant through Joseph - V. 16. In which he tells about the death and the burial of Jacob down in Egypt.

*Moses*

III. THE ROMANCE OF GOD'S LEADERSHIP - V. 17-36

This is a wonderful witness Stephen has given. The revelation of God's glory through Abraham. The rehearsal of God's covenant through Joseph. And now the romance



of God's leadership through Moses.

His defense he emphasizes that God continues. They charged that they blasphemed the law. And Moses, the law giver.

V. 18 - There was a new king. And the time for fulfillment was set. The previous king was favorable. But until the time of this new king, Israel flourished unmolested. But now their troubles really began. Until the time of the memory of Joseph and all that he had done, favor was upon the Israelites. But the new king neither knew nor cared for Joseph, nor for any of the family. They met nothing to the new king. Affliction began in V. 19 - the old agreements and the old promises originally made to the Israelites, were wiped out. And there began a wave of destruction. All of the male children.

V. 20 - We have a terrible situation - Moses is born. And birth occurred at a terrible season. For he had to be exposed to death - and had to be saved in a most remarkable way.

V. 21 - Pharaoh's daughter saves, adopts, rears, educates God's great deliverer. And if she could have known what God was having her to do - here was a type of Jesus who nearly perished as a Babe - who also was saved even in Egypt. And who also became a great deliverer.

V. 22 - He was educated, instructed. They were noted for science, medicine, astronomy, and math.

I Kings 4:30.

Moses like Paul was a man of the schools. And this helped to make him a mighty man. But he would have utterly failed without God. No divine work could be done

without God. And the glorious story of what Moses accomplished. God brought the Old Testament mediator to his great office. Now Moses was educated in every and in all of the wisdom. A magnificent education. Produced a man powerful in word and in deed. Mightily equipped for leadership.

V. 23 - He felt the urge of leadership at age 40. The idea was in his heart. He went out and he looked upon his brethren - his own blood kin. Heirs of the covenant. They were slaves. He shared their hope.

V. 24 - He lived at the capitol with the king - some distance from the oppressed slaves. Two striking incidents of what he found are preserved. He was an Israelite being wronged by an Egyptian. Moses came to his defense. And the Egyptian was fatally injured and died. He had tremendous power and energy - but it was being badly misdirected. He was acting without a call or directory from God.

V. 25 - Understanding that God through his hand was giving salvation to them, feeling himself the deliverer and instrument of God, Moses had left the Egyptian fort. Now he becomes the great deliverer. His people misunderstood him however.

V. 26 - He saw two of his own fighting the next day. He tried to make peace and take their side. But Moses eyes were open.

V. 27-28 - He established Thee as a ruler. And a judge over us. Pharraoh also heard of what was being done. And sought to bring Moses to account. Heb. 11:27.

Moses own people did not understand and Stephen talks about this as a view of Moses being a type of Christ. Both were denied. Both were thrust out by Israel. And God made both of them deliverers of Israel. But he made Christ such a higher sense.

V. 29 - Moses ~~(fled)~~ Became a foreigner. His plans utterly failed for 40 years - he spent in the wilderness.

V. 30 - He had an experience at a ~~thorn (bush)~~ and there he listened in V. 31 - as the Lord's voice rang out from the bush. It was a strange sight - fire. There was a voice. The Lord was revealing the meaning of the fire. And he gave his full name in V. 32. I am the God. And he goes back to Abraham, to Isaac. And no wonder Moses was trembling. And this was the way that Stephen thought of God. And of Moses.

V. 33 - He was standing on holy ground. He removed his sandals. And received his commission to deliver the Israelites.

The trouble lay not in the way that Stephen and his treatment of Moses - but the trouble lay Stephen said, in the treatment Moses received from Israel. From now on, Stephen's accusers and the judges begin to see that Stephen is not on trial. But his judges are. God's word, Moses himself, goes back just as Jesus did in John 5:45. Moses paid a great price for leading them out of bondage.

V. 36 - He discusses how they crossed the Red Sea and were delivered.

V. 38 - He comes to tell them that there had been brought to them The Ten Commandments - the living commandments. The living logia. In connection with the new covenant and its fulfilled promise in Christ. The living power of God is in them. They are even unto life. Rom. 7:10.

#### IV. REBELLION OF GOD'S PEOPLE - V. 39-60

The revelation of God's glory through Abraham. The rehearsal of God's covenant through Joseph. The romance of God's leadership through Moses. And now

he comes to close by charging the fathers with the rebellion and the rejection  
- the disobedience of his people.

V. 40 - He charged the father with the rejection of Moses at Sinai.  
And he specifies that they demanded that they make Gods.

V. 41 - He rightly calls it a calves a calf as they worshipped. in Egypt.  
And they rejoiced in the work of their own hands. They had a feast, dancing,  
and singing.

Now Stephen passes over the rest of the history and talks about their  
idolatry, in the book of Amos. He summarizes this with the tabernacle in the  
wilderness. V. 47 - the house that Solomon built - the temple. And yet they  
continued in their disobedience.

V. 51 - Ye stiffnecked and he charges them in V. 52 - with the prosecution  
of the prophets.

Results

V. 54 - When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart.

The Queen of England called upon one of her subjects to go to a very important  
mission, for the crown. But said the man, my business will suffer. The Queen  
said to him - you serve me and I will take care of your business. The man went  
away upon his mission to the Queen. In return, she used her influence for him  
and he prospered more than ever.

Stephen was using his influence for Christ. And there were many who heard  
him and believed. People ought to do what God wants them to do. And he will take  
care of them. Often we will hear young people say, the Lord has called me to  
preach or be a missionary. But I have family and other obligations. And I just

can't give up a job or go to school.

If God has called you to preach or be a missionary, you go right ahead on faith and God will open the way for you. Many can testify to that fact. As I can in my own behalf.

Stephen gave them the word of God - it was like a sword. And they had no come back. And when a preacher preaches that way, what he says can always be backed up with the Bible.

A man traveling for a New York firm had been stealing money from the firm. Thousands of dollars. He suffered from his conscience by working hard. And going to places of amusement at night. He was stropping an old-time razor and he looked for a piece of paper on which to wipe the blade. But since he could find nothing - he tore a page out of the Bible, placed there by the Gideons. Suddenly, his eyes caught these words. The wages of sin is death. Rom. 6:23. He smoothed out the piece of paper and read the remaining words of the sentence. The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. He was startled by this text. He opened the Bible and read for two hours. Then fell on his knees, poured out his heart to God, rose up - a new man in Christ. Went back to New York and confessed his theft and they decided not to prosecute but to let him keep on working and pay it back month by month. In this instance, the word of God was powerful. It cut the sinner to the heart.

Now the second thing that happened to these people, they ashed on him with their teeth. They were cutting their hearts. They were guilty before God. Instead of confessing their sin, asking for forgiveness, they got mad with the preacher. Sinful human beings are like that. It is easy to get angry. Than to

humble one's self and cry out, God be merciful to me a sinner. Luke 18:13.

But after all, the best friend that you have, is one that shows you your condition before God and urges you to get right. And that's the task of the preacher.

You remember David - he was a man that temptation knocked on his heart and he fell in sin. Nathan heard God's voice saying, go and confront him with this sin. And Nathan replied, alright Lord, I'll tell him a story and in the end, I'll try and get him to face his sin. He goes to the palace and says good morning to the king. And then he says, I want to tell you the case that has come to my attention. And he told the story about a villian and when he had finished his story - the king cried out - who is that wicked fellow. Tell me who he is and I'll see that he is killed. And the prophet said, thou art the man. 2 Sam. 12:7. Then David saw his sin and he felt his guilt. And he said I have sinned. And Nathan just as quickly replied, the Lord hath put away thy sin. David did not get mad with the preacher. He saw himself guilty. And he cried out to God for forgiveness. But sinners in Jerusalem were not like David. They mashed on him.

V. 55 - We see the troublemakers here. That in this earthly court that was trying Stephen - but he knew that he was not accountable to them. This, he knew, that he was to look into Heaven - the Supreme Court of the universe and he saw God on the throne and he saw Jesus standing at his right hand.

When Jesus went back to Heaven, we are told that he sat down at the Father's right hand. He is to remain there until his return to earth. We see him standing up - the glory of that scene. A deeper truth than this lies behind it. Stephen needed help and he looked toward Heaven for it. When you expect someone to help you - you do not expect to sit down. So here we see Jesus rising - stretching his

hands.

If you are lost tonight, then he will reach down and will help you. And he will help you to carry your load.

We know here that Heaven is interested in what goes on on earth. Stephen was down here - and Jesus was up there. And yet he was interested in what was happening. This is the promise. He will never let you walk alone.

V. 57 Stephen told what he saw. He saw the Heavens open and the son of man standing on the right hand of God. And when he said this, the people cried and stopped their ears. People still stop their ears to God's truth - they will not listen to it. That is why many people will not come to church - they do not want to hear the truth. Or when you tell them that they are poor, guilty sinners - they say none of that for me. They stop their ears, they close their hearts, and Christ knocks and they will not let him get in.

There are even Christians that close their ears and their hearts. And they do not want to be faithful and give their best.

Sin is a real progressive thing. They said, let us stone him. Let us put him to death. And they rushed on him in their anger.

Now, like a surgeon, the word of God had cut deep in their corruption. They had broken the commandments and the covenant. And why is it that some hearts melt and some deliberately harden against the word. One is due to God's grace who is able to soften and melt. The other is due to man's guilt. Now man cannot egg the spirit with his unregenerated or natural ability. Conversion of the sinner is not easy to explain because the work of conversion is in the Holy Spirit. What did your fathers do - Stephen said. They persecuted every one of the prophets.

Though the Holy Spirit spoke to them. Even to this day, according to the statement of the Old Testament is able to name a prophet who was received with approval and enthusiasm. V. 52 Yes, they killed all of the prophets.

As the words went home, no man can escape. They were hostile in the final analysis. They shouted less they hear another word like Stephen's voice - and they went against him. And they took him outside of the city - V. 58. Lev. 24:14. That is the paved streets afforded no suitable stones - they took him outside of the city where there were plenty of stones available.

*Exaltine Christ is a crime which the world will not leave unpunished. One must pay the price for following Jesus -*

They took off their robes and cast them at a young man's feet named Saul. Saul was acting in a capacity here and they went to work on a man - whom they were not even worthy to take his place. They put their robe at the feet of their leader. He perhaps was supervising it. This is something however that Saul never forgot. The time will come when he'll see Jesus and he'll fall down before him, and give his life to the Master.

V. 59-60 We find that he makes a direct prayer. And the very spirit of Jesus towards his enemies as he died on the cross was the spirit of Stephen.

How will it be with you when you come down to death. Adm. Grayson told Woodrow Wilson that he was dying. Mr. Wilson said, (I am ready) Will you be able to say that. Can you say I am ready, Lord I have trusted thee as my Saviour. I have tried to live for thee. And now I long to come home to be with thee. When you come to the end of the way, I wonder if some of you will have to cry out - Oh God, give me a little more time.

*V. 60* ~~Stephen said to Joseph Parker~~ Did I live as for Stephen?  
He gave him the power to pray for those who stoned him, Mr Parker replied.  
Will some of you as a Christian have to say, I trusted Thee as my Saviour, but

I have not lived for you. And I am ashamed to meet you. Stephen was ready, and gladly did he go up to meet Jesus. I think that Stephen dies as he kneels down



and offers his last prayer. Lord, lay this not to their charge. They were putting him to death. He was praying for them. Where did he learn to pray in this manner. I think I know - it was the cross on the lonely hill where Jesus looked down at the crowd and said, Father, forgive them. Stephen tried to (live) like Christ and now he is dying like Christ. He is probably dying on Calvary where Jesus died. Perhaps, outside the city wall might have been right close to Calvary.

*Devon Bill Batten - 2 min live - hands folded in prayer*  
And Stephen knew that shortly he would stand with the great judge. Why did he pray for himself. Why did he not spend his time getting ready to face the judgement. Well, he had done that a long time ago. He had no fear for himself.

When you come to die, what will be your prayer. Will you have to ask for forgiveness, for your sins - or will it be well with your soul. Death may come sooner than you think.

Stephen prayed for those who killed him. The days went by and his prayers were answered. Because Saul, the chief persecutor was saved.

And it is remarkable here that it says - he fell asleep. You know our word cemeter is the sleeping place of the dead. It is a word picture of rest. Calmness - in contrast to violence or rage. This is what Jesus said of Lazarus. And Stephen went to rest to wake up one day from all of his troubles - just like going to sleep. We fall asleep and we wake up in Heaven. And the stones of the slayer are going to be changed to jewels. Heaven's court would receive him.

Stephen is one man we find no regret in. And if you are going to be an influence in the world for God, you ought to seek to live like this man.

And if we are going to be victorious, we need a heart like he had. Because it showed in his face.

A rich man in France dearly loved the song of 'Nightingale' - and he wanted some of the birds singing in his own garden. So he set about to get some - and he reasoned if he made the grounds comfortable and happy for the nightingale - they would come. He first banished all the cats, the hawks and the owls. The enemies of the nightingale. Plowed the ground, filled it with the kind of worms that the nightingale was especially fond of. Studied all the literature he could find on them - and did everything to make it a paradise. The first year none came. The second year, none. But there was as the shadows fell late afternoon of a day in the third year, he was greeted with a delightful song of a pair of nightingales. This was the first pair - but soon there followed to his garden many. And it became known as the garden of the nightingales. Oh, if we want the spirit of God to fill our hearts, with Heavenly music, we must vanish the evil from them. We must prepare the soil with earnest prayer. And invite the Heavenly spirit to come in as Stephen. What a glorious day and a glorious way to die.

Witness - *Man of Marston*

A prisoner in a Pa. prison contracted a dread disease. He asked the doctor, is there any hope for me. He was told, no, there is no hope. The man looked up into the sky and he cried out I can't go out there alone. God is up there waiting for me. The chaplain told him that God was merciful. He tried to help him. But it was too late. The chaplain told him that God had a message of hope. And he said, I can't face God alone. Send for my old father. He'll be glad to die for me. The father came and he could not help his son. He had to stand by and see him die. The last thing that that boy said, I can't meet God alone. What a contrast - the death of Stephen - he knew that God was waiting for him!