

Powerful Preaching #4

Stephen The Martyr

Acts chapter six reveals a problem which arose among the brethren-- neglect of the Grecian widows (Acts 6:1). This problem was solved by the apostles when they instructed the saints to choose seven godly men which could oversee the daily physical needs of the widows (Acts 6:2-4). One of these righteous men was Stephen (Acts 6:5). He was "full of faith and power, [and] did great wonders and miracles among the people" (Acts 6:8). However, the account of this faithful Christian does not end here.

Next, we find Stephen in a dispute with men who professed to be followers of God (Acts 6:9). Their arguments were ineffective, so they "caught him" and took him to the council (Acts 6:10-12). At that point, the Jews employed one of the tactics of error, they brought up false charges, trying to conceal the real issue (Acts 6:13-14).

Before the council, Stephen began to lay the ground work for his ultimate goal of convicting these men of sin. He starts by recounting the history of the Jews from Abraham down (Acts 7:1ff). During this sermon, Stephen quotes extensively from the Old Testament as he pointed out the rebellion of Israel. It was shown that the patriarchs mistreated Joseph, whom God had favored (Acts 7:9-16). Stephen further explains the rejection of Moses, both before and after his calling by God (Acts 7:20-39). He also shows the direct rebellion of the Israelites toward God when they made the golden calf (Acts 7:40-42). Finally, after making these and other points, Stephen unashamedly applies the illustrations.

Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers: who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it (Acts 7:51-53).

This was not a complement, nor was it a soft-spoken rebuke, so vaguely worded that his audience did not know it applied to them. It was a plain and pointed announcement that his listeners were godless people, despite their self-deception. To this the Jews reacted violently.

When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth. 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, And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God. Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, 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. 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 (Acts 7:54-60).

For powerfully preaching the truth and exposing the sin of those men, Stephen paid with his life!

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