

A Good Witness

Living for the Lord is the good life, and in fact, it is the best life. Today, we're going to be looking in the book of Acts Chapter 6 and Chapter 7. But before we do that, let me invite you to look at the Website, www.LRWM.org. On the Website, you'll be able to leave us a prayer request that we can share with you and pray with you and for you on the request that you have. If you have someone that you want us to pray for, send that to us. You can use that Website, LRWM.org, and you can send us an email or you can also get the address where you can write to us. That's Lewis Woodard, 497 Judith Avenue, Fruitland Park, Florida 34731.

In Acts Chapter 6 and Chapter 7, we read of a man by the name of Stephen. In Acts 6:8-15, it says: *⁸And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people. ⁹Then 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. ¹⁰And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake. ¹¹Then they suborned men, which said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and against God. ¹²And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council, ¹³And set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law: ¹⁴For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us. ¹⁵And all that sat in the council, looking stedfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.*

Then we look in Acts 7:54-60: *⁵⁴When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart,*

and they gnashed on him with their teeth. ⁵⁵But 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, ⁵⁶And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God. ⁵⁷Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, ⁵⁸And 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. ⁵⁹And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God... Now, they didn't call upon God but Stephen did, it said... Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. ⁶⁰And 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.

What comfort it should be to us who know Jesus as our Savior to know that, when it comes time for us to be with Him, when we leave this life, the Bible tells us that we fall asleep in Him. We fall asleep and we go to Heaven.

I want to speak to you for the next few minutes about the marks of a good witness. Stephen is first introduced as a man with all the qualifications of a deacon. He was one of the first deacons. If you go back to Acts Chapter 6 and read the first few verses, you'll find out that he fit the qualifications of a deacon. He was chosen by the people and they laid hands on him and the others, and they were to go out and they were to proclaim the Word of God. They were to relieve the pastors of these churches. They were to help the pastor so he could be left with the studying of the Word and the giving out of the Gospel and the overseeing of the church. Stephen was a man who fit these qualification of a deacon. You can go to

I Timothy Chapter 3 and you can read about the qualifications. He had a good reputation with the people. He was recognized for his worthiness.

It says in I Timothy 3:10 about deacons, *And let these also first be proved.* He was proved. It was proven that he was a good man of good reputation. He was also full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom for dealing with delicate situations. He was a man of God. And then we see that Stephen proved to be a good witness. As the story unfolds, he reveals the marks of a good witness.

First, I see him as a man, as a person who knew the truth. He knew the Lord. Otherwise, he could not have been full of the Holy Spirit, the Holy Ghost. The Bible tells us that we are sealed by the Spirit of God until the day of redemption. All of us who know Jesus as Savior, we have the Holy Spirit. The Bible says in Romans 8:14, *For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.*

He also knew the Word of God. His sermon before the Sanhedrin reflects an extraordinary familiarity with Scripture. He knew about the death, burial, and resurrection of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, and he proclaimed that with boldness.

And then we see that he knew the spiritual history of his people. Stephen knew the people. He knew their indifference to the goodness of God, their defiance of their leaders, their rejection of His Son. He told them in Acts 7:52 how that their ancestors had the prophets and they wouldn't listen to the prophets either, but yet, they turned out and they stoned the prophets. They killed the prophets who were bringing the good news. They brought the good news about salvation. The ancestors killed the prophets. And then these people that Stephen was speaking to, he said, "You and your people,

you and my people, you people, you have killed the Son of God."

Well, not only did Stephen know the truth, but he also lived the life. The Bible says in James 1:22, *Be ye doers of the word and not hearers only.* Certainly, he was one who was willing to go out and share the faith with other people. Before his ordination, it tells us, he was a man of good report, and we see that, under bitter persecution before the Sanhedrin, his face shown like the face of an angel. He was being persecuted, ridiculed. The Bible even tells us that they gnashed upon him. They bit him with their teeth. But in Acts 6:15, it says that he had the face of an angel.

There was no bitter response, no fear, and no trembling and no desperation and no despair. He didn't try to get away from them. He kept preaching the Word of God, and in his dying moments, his prayers recalled the prayers of Jesus. As we look back, we see Jesus on Calvary's cross. He prayed, "*Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do,*" in Luke 23:34. And finally, Jesus said, *Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit,* Luke 3:46.

The comparison of Stephen and Jesus... Stephen, as we look presumably on Calvary, we see the comparison with him as on Calvary. He was carried out of the city in Acts 7:58. This would be the traditional place of stoning, of death. In Mark 15:22, we see the place of the skull. Jesus was taken there. Jesus prayed the same prayer as Stephen. Stephen prayed the same prayer as Jesus. "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge and receive my spirit." Jesus said, "Forgive them, Father." Stephen said, "Don't charge these people with my death. Forgive them, Lord."

Stephen not only lived the life; he shared the faith. The Bible says in II Timothy 3:16, *All*

scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. He shared the faith. And what is profitable should be shared. *Freely you have received, freely give*, according to Matthew 10:8. If you've received Jesus as your Savior, it didn't cost you a dime, but it cost Jesus His life. You freely got salvation from the Lord, and so we need to, as saved people, freely give that out. Tell people how they too can be saved.

The testimony of Stephen had the approval of God, and therefore, there was power and there were miracles, according to Acts 6:8. The lifestyle of the early church included much spiritual sharing. We see this coming through in the meetings with the emphasis on prayer.

In a challenge thirty-one years later, the same emphasis appears, as we see not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, but exhorting one another, according to Hebrews 10:25. This was at the upper room. The people were gathered together with one accord and they prayed, and some thirty-one years later, we see that the Bible tells us, don't forsake the assembling of yourselves together. Join yourself with a good Bible-believing, Bible-preaching, Bible-teaching local church that stands upon the Word of God.

Well, what is thus shared is not fruitless, as we read about Stephen. The promise of God still stands. "My Word shall not return unto Me void," God says, "but it shall accomplish that which I please," Isaiah 55:11.

The testimony of Stephen apparently made an impact that had much to do with the salvation of Paul, the greatest preacher of all time. Remember, the people lay down their coats at the feet of a man by the name of Saul who would later become Paul the apostle. He would receive Jesus as his Lord and Savior and

become the writer of over half the New Testament.

What can we see and what can we learn from the testimony of Stephen, a good witness? Stephen went to Heaven with a glimpse of the glory, according to Acts 7:55. Stephen left a message for all generations: Know the truth, live the life, and share the faith.

Know the truth. The Bible says that the truth shall set you free. Well, what is truth? Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life, and no man comes to the Father but by Me." Have you trusted Jesus today as your Savior? Do you know Him? Have you shared with Him the innermost beings of your thoughts and your heart? Why not call upon Him today and receive Him right now as your Lord, as your Savior. "Lord Jesus, come into my heart. I know I can't save myself. I know I'm a sinner. Please save me so that I can be in Heaven with You, so that I can see You as Stephen saw You and as he's with You right now. Come into my heart. I turn my life over to you."

If you'll pray a prayer like that, God says He'll save you, because you're honoring Him by receiving His Son as your Savior. Why not ask Him into your heart right now.

If you're saved and you're not living for Jesus, turn your life around right now by letting Him do it for you. Come to Him. If we confess our sins, He's faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness, the Bible says. Ask His forgiveness, not for salvation, but because you are saved, and let Him lead you and guide you.

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Until next time, this is Doug Anderson reminding you it's a good life living for the Lord. May the Lord bless you richly is our prayer.