

The Story of Redemption

Փրկութեան Պատմութիւնը

Acts 6:11-14; 7:1-59

False accusation is something that bothers me very much. I have experienced it in my life, and most likely you have too.

Stephen, one of the seven of newly-elected deacons, got charged with a serious “crime.”

“We have heard Stephen speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God.” (Acts 6:11 NIV11)

“This fellow never stops speaking against this holy place and against the law. For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs Moses handed down to us.” (Acts 6:13.14 NIV11)

Well, not a single word is correct, except the fact that Jesus did say the Temple would be destroyed, but they twisted it and used it out of context.

-I would expect defense lawyers standing with Stephen.

Let us see what happened.

All who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel. (Acts 6:16 NIV11)

Looking intently, gazing steadfastly, fastening their eyes on him

-How uncomfortable is it to look intently at a person. I guess they thought they would see anger, they would see shame, they would see repentance.

-They saw his face **was like the face of an angel**.

-Moses had a divine presence experience on the Mountain. He spoke with God and asked if he could see God’s GLORY and His face. God did not allow Moses to see His face (Exodus 33). Moses saw God’s back: **“I will take away My hand and you shall see my back”** (E. 33:20-23). Moses’ face began to shine. He was in the presence of God.

-Stephen was not on a mountain. He was in a wicked dark courtroom with evil and ugly faces staring at him.

Last week I mentioned, let us not do any ministry **if we are not filled with the Holy Spirit**. **Stephen was full of God’s grace and love**. That was not coming out of Stephen; the shining face was only coming from God.

-This is a lesson for me. I will face ugly things. Please LORD, fill me your grace.

Then the high priest asked Stephen, “Are these charges true?” (Acts 7:1 NIV11)

In my words: “Are you against Moses, God, the Law, the Temple?”

Brothers and sisters, those are serious accusations.

- Stephen is not going to retaliate by defending himself. WHAT?

Instead, he is going to preach, teach, and tell the story of redemption.

- Like the story of Jesus after the resurrection, he was walking with two men on the road to **Emmaus**. They did not recognize Jesus. Luke writes that “Jesus, beginning with Moses, took them through the entire Old Testament and explained all that the Old Testament had taught regarding the Messiah.”¹

After listening to the history lesson of the redemptive work of God, the eyes of the men were opened, and they recognized HIM. **“They asked each other, ‘Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?’” (Luke 24:32 NIV11)**

-Stephen’s sermon. The longest sermon in Acts. I will not read all of it to you, please go home and read it yourself. I will go over the main topics:

“Brothers and fathers, listen to me! The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham while he was still in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Harran. ³‘Leave your country and your people,’ God said, ‘and go to the land I will show you.’ ⁴“So he left the land of the Chaldeans and settled in Harran. After the death of his father, God sent him to this land where you are now living (Acts 7:2-4 NIV11)

Where should one start? He started with Abraham: **God made a covenant with Abraham.**

If we need to understand Jesus, we need to start from the beginning. This concept is not new. In the Old Testament books, we see a similar way of telling the story. (Nehemiah 9; Daniel 9; Psalms 105 and 106)

NT Wright says:

“It is with Abraham that the story of the Jewish people begins; and it is with Abraham that genesis begins the story of *how the world is to be set right.*”

The story of the people of Israel, in other words, does not come as a separate, free-standing entity, but as a way of saying: this is how the creator God is acting to deal with the problem of human sin, social catastrophe, and cosmic disasters as set out in Genesis 3—11.”²

Indeed, the covenant was not just with **Abraham**, the covenant promise passed down to **Isaac**, then to **Jacob**, then to his sons. *(All the way to us through Jesus)*

- Then the story of **Joseph**, one of the sons, who was sold to the Egyptians as a slave.

- Finally, Joseph was elevated to be like the prime minister in Egypt.

- In famine, God told **Jacob to go down** with his family to Egypt and reside there and settle in the land of Goshen.

- The **New Pharaoh** came who did not know Joseph. He mistreated the Israelites and turned them to slaves. The Israelites groaned and God heard their plea.

Moses came in the picture.

Moses grew up and was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action. (7:22)

- Do you see God's plan, the **master maestro** leading the history of redemption forward... Moses' education will be used latter.

- Moses who was defending his people, well, he became an outcast in the wilderness.

Do you see what Stephen is trying to say; Moses, who was appointed by God to deliver his people was rejected by the very people he was supposed to be rescuing "Who made you a ruler or a judge over us?"

Does this remind you anything? Isn't this what the High court is doing by rejecting Jesus?

God is at work:

God is the first subject mentioned (7:2) and his are all the main actions: God appears (7:3), speaks (7:3, 6), moves (7:4), gives an inheritance (7:5), promises (7:5), judges (7:7), gives a covenant (7:8)...God appears where and when he wishes, directs and moves peoples, and issues promises that are open-ended, to be fulfilled in surprising ways.³

- **But God** came in the **burning bush** and told Moses to go to Pharaoh with a message from God: "**Let my people go.**"

- **The ground of the burning bush was holy ground.** This holy ground is more ancient than the **Temple** itself. Please notice Stephen is preparing the background about what Jesus said about the temple.

"However, the Most High does not live in houses made by human hands.

(Acts 7:48 NIV11)

"What Stephen is about to go on to say is that the holiness of what God has done and is doing in Jesus himself is now substantially upstaging the holiness of the Temple."⁴ *(Oh no, this is going to be very costly)*

- Stephen told the story of how God used Moses to rescue, redeem the Israelites from Egypt, the **story of Exodus**, the **story of redemption**.

The people made new idols and worshiped false gods.

Also, the people murmured, complained (same word as last week's) that they were in the wilderness, and they wanted to go back to Egypt.

- God sent them prophets, but **they refused to listen**; they **killed them**.

Now so far, it is their story that they all agree.

Stephen did not conclude saying "So, you see, I am really just trying to follow in the tradition of our fathers. I'm trying to be an obedient Jew." No, he did not finish that way **he finished this way**:

"You stiff-necked people! Your hearts and ears are still uncircumcised. You are just like your ancestors: You always resist the Holy Spirit! ⁵² Was there ever a prophet your ancestors 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 given through angels but have not obeyed it." (Acts 7:51-53 NIV11)

What an ending! They know their history very well:

They rejected the prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah... and so on...

"In other words, 'Name one who was well received.' They had killed those who foretold the coming of the Righteous One.

Stephen had been giving them **the history of themselves**. They had received the law by the direction of angels and had not kept it."⁵

Wow, strong words, strong and bold words.

Also, strong diagnosis of the heart and ears: their ears and hearts are close. They don't listen anymore. They don't keep the law anymore.

They resist the Holy Spirit.

In Hebrews we read that people can become dull of hearing, callous of hearing, callous of heart:

"About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing." (Heb 5:11 ESV)

In Hebrews we also read

"For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." (Hebrews 4:11 NIV)

How did the court people take this sermon?

“When the members of the Sanhedrin 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...” (Acts 7:54,55 b)

Anger, gnashing of teeth versus the grace of God on the face of Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit. One of the roles of the Holy Spirit is to be an advocate.

Application

1. I will face ugly things. Please LORD, fill me your grace.

Next week we will see how Stephen died. He was stoned, but his face towards heaven and he saw the glory of God. He saw Jesus, “the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.”

Lord, I need your Spirit in me to give me an attitude like this.

2. He was wise in defending his faith in Jesus.

He told the story of redemption by God. He knew his audience and told them their own story.

This means we need to be prepared. We need to know His Word. We need to have a daily encounter with God.

3. Watch out from idols. The Temple, the Law, which was given from God, became idols, replacing God.

What is replacing God in your life?

4. Do you know the Story of redemption? It is your story as well. Are you forgiven by Jesus? In this Lent season are you ready to walk with Jesus towards Calvary surrendering your life to him?

1. R.C. Sproul, *You Will be My Witnesses to the End of the Earth*, Acts. P 104

2. N.T. Wright *Acts for Everyone (book1)*, P 109

3. Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, SP 5 (Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 1992), 119.

4. N.T. Wright *Acts for Everyone (book1)*, P 114

5. R.C. Sproul, *You Will be My Witnesses to the End of the Earth*, Acts. P 105