

Stephen (1) - The Man

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[0 : 0 0] to look at the life of Stephen together this evening and God willing and then the next maybe three times we meet together in prayer when I'll be leading we look at the life of Stephen and here in verse 8 we read of Stephen Stephen full of grace and power was doing great wonders and signs among the people and you also read about him in the earlier verses as well when you when they were asked to pick brothers from among them seven men of good repute full of spirit and wisdom and the wisdom whom we will appoint to this duty that's serving and Stephen was one of those who was chosen Stephen a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit well as we turn to the book of Acts and as you read through the from the beginning of the book of Acts the great thing about it is that just as much as it reminds you of the many great blessings that there are from God when we see so many conversions in the early chapters of the book of Acts the spirit poured down at Pentecost Peter preaching powerfully and many people converted this real sense of growth and blessing from God in this but we also as we read through it we realize it's very real as well it's not just a case that everything's going to go well for the Christian all the time there's reality for us in these chapters as well so to this point reading up to to chapter 6 you've seen in the earlier chapters the blessing of the awakening of the church with many people converted you've seen how this has led to a spirit of opposition so almost immediately there's this real realization this reality that the Christian life isn't easy just as there's many blessings from God there's much opposition but up till now every obstacle it seems to be overcome one after another and overcome to the glory of God and to the growth of the church so following on from really the end of the book of Luke Luke also wrote Acts as well when we have the death and the resurrection of Christ the death when everything seemed to be opposition against God's people and everything was dark what was happening in the midst of God's people then and yet then you have the glory of the resurrection that God was showing his wonderful purposes in all of this you have Peter preaching on the day of Pentecost and there's people mocking and accusing the followers of Christ of being drunk but the power of the spirit took hold and there's 3,000 added to the church then in chapter 3 you have a miracle taking place of a lame man being healed and the result from that is opposition on the part of the rulers of the day so all that's good that's happening there seems to be also opposition in the midst of it in chapter 4 you have the arrest of Peter and John again this opposition as they are proclaiming the word of God so as the church continued to grow opposition continued to grow against it and so there was this mix of blessing and challenges and that's so often the case in the ministry of God's word but as you see at the beginning of this chapter itself chapter 6 still there are good things happening now in these days the disciples were increasing in number there was more and more coming to follow the Lord and so blessings are there in the midst of opposition but now you come to this point in the book of Acts and it's a point where Stephen if you like comes to the fore

and something happens to Stephen that you may think well how are things going to go on from here as we see in this chapter Stephen is seized in the next chapter as we'll be looking at we'll see Stephen is stoned he is put to death there is this opposition that has now come to this point where Stephen loses his life for faith in the Lord Jesus and you would think to yourself well what's happening here okay we can have opposition but people dying for their faith is that really necessary but what we see is it is still all for the glory of God and Stephen here shows this wonderful obedience to his saviour standing up for his Lord and the Lord is with him in the midst of it all just as we've sung in the psalms we've been singing the psalms have been speaking about the challenges that God's people face and yet just that last psalm we sang psalm 57 I live with savage beasts I dwell with lions strong with men who speak with piercing words there's all this opposition and yet this assurance that God sends his help from heaven that God is with his people and that's what we see with Stephen the first Christian martyr as we have it here in the book of Acts we might expect this his death as the opposition that he faced would make the Christians who were there backtrack

fall away from the faith turn away from the Lord Jesus this is going too far now if my life is going to be in danger I'm going to back off but that's not what happens at all what you see is the church continues to go even through the death of Stephen and through the death of many martyrs since the church and its opposition against the world's opposition against it the church continues to grow to this very day even in the midst of opposition against the church the church continues to grow and you only have to go forward a few chapters to chapter 11 to see the impact that Stephen's death was having in chapter 11 at verse 19 it says now those who are scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch speaking the word to no one except Jews now if you were to read on you realize the context of that chapter as it's speaking about the persecution that arose over Stephen the people were scattered but yet they went away preaching the gospel it says there to the Jews but we also see as you go on to the Gentiles also the gospel just rapidly spread so the world against the gospel thinking we'll stop it in its tracks with a stoning of Stephen it almost had the complete opposite effect persecution arose but with that the gospel spread and the gospel was blessed and how often do you hear particularly missionary speakers coming to speak about the persecuted church in different parts of the world and one thing they so often say is about the persecution we don't want it to stop and you think to yourself well why that would seem to make no sense if they're suffering for their faith surely you would want that to stop but they will say no because God is using that opposition that persecution to build his kingdom and so often it is through

persecution that the church grows I remember one speaker once saying about the united kingdom and the persecution coming to the united kingdom they said this we are too sleepy for it to happen here in the UK we're too sleepy and what a challenge that is we don't suffer persecution they were saying because we're too sleepy we're sort of holding ourselves back in other countries are putting themselves forward standing up for Christ they're suffering persecution but they said we we're too sleepy there's a great challenge in that and there's a great challenge as we look at Stephen's life we need to be more like Stephen godly people who will stand up as martyrs for the for the Lord full of the spirit and wisdom it's said of Stephen that's what we want to see in his life that we would long for our own so in three parts we're going to look at Stephen first of all we're going to look at Stephen the man then the next time we'll look at Stephen and the message and then finally we'll look at Stephen and the martyr but tonight we want to look at Stephen the man and the kind of man he was and especially in light of the persecution that he was facing up to the first thing we see about Stephen is this he was a godly man he was a godly man as you read there in verse five what they said pleased the whole gather and they chose Stephen a man full of faith and of the holy spirit what is what does it mean to be godly what is godliness we speak about godly men we speak about godly women but what is it to be godly what makes a person godly I think sometimes we can think of it as an age thing the older we get the older the

Christian gets the more godly they are and very often that can be the case because a Christian who has gone through much in life and experienced so much in life and lived close to the lord through it all has learned what it is to be trusting in the lord and there is this godliness about them but it's not just that there's more to godliness and just being old in the faith Stephen wouldn't seem to have been an old man and he wasn't one who was up there with the others who were the apostles Stephen was chosen to serve tables and yet what we see is he was a godly man so what is it that makes Stephen a godly man and what can make you and I godly men and women well what we see of Stephen is that he was full of faith he was full of faith this is one element of godliness and it's more than just saying I believe it's more than just saying I have faith it is faith that shows itself in action faith that shows itself in a willingness to serve god faith that shows itself in an obedience no matter what so first and foremost it is yes about grasping hold of the lord Jesus as our own savior saving faith is not in ourselves it's in the lord Jesus Christ and so we must come to this faith in the lord Jesus Christ but this faith is then a living faith and an act of faith an obedient faith and just notice here how Stephen you know he's not one to mump and moan here he's not one to say

[12 : 31] I wanted to be an elder in the church I didn't want to be one who was serving tables if only I could be someone more important in the church then I would be able to serve the lord fully there's this attitude of obedience he was called along with six others to serve tables to help those who were in need but he didn't see this as something as hindering his service he saw this as serving the lord with all his heart and that's what you see of Stephen in verse 8 Stephen full of grace and power was doing great and wondrous signs among the people so we don't need to be a people to be godly to think well maybe if I be if only I could be an elder in the church I would be godly if only I could have

a position of authority in the church then I could be godly every one of us should be godly Christians no matter who we are no matter what position we have we can all serve the lord in obedience with all the gifts and talents that he has given to us faith is trusting in the lord no matter what putting our trust in him and that's what you see with

Stephen he is a godly man he is willing and prepared to face up to whatever obstacle came with his certainty that god was with him and that in his obedience towards god that god was completely in charge of everything faith was full in him he was a man full of faith everything that he did he did he did with knowledge and assurance in his lord Jesus Christ in the knowledge that god was sovereign over all so how can we be a people who are godly how can we be full of faith well as it says there's faith there's this obedience and being full of the spirit he was walking close to god he was a man who was in step with god in tune with god all the time when you read of step in throughout this section what you see is a man who was fully trusting in god and that's the kind of people who we are to be as well he trusted in the power of god now when you go forward into the new testament you read in second timothy as paul is writing to the people there he says of the people that there will be those with no real love for god in the latter days and he describes him in this way in second timothy chapter 3 verse 5 he says having a form of godliness but denying its power a form of godliness but denying its power and that was not stephen his godliness was seen in that he was not denying its power he was preaching the power of godliness and the power of god so many people today speak about christianity in a way that it's about what we do but that is denying the power of god we have to trust god and his power and that's where stephen's faith was in the godliness that came through faith in his lord and so where is our godliness tonight is it in ourselves or are we fully trusting in god as our lord fully obedient to him in all that we do he was a man full of faith and that faith lived itself in out in his life in everything that he did and so our faith should live itself out in that way as well that in all that we do we are fully trusting god the second thing we see about stephen here is he is described as a wise man a wise man again you see it in how those who are looking who they were looking for to serve the tables are described in verse 3 pick out from among you seven men of good repute full of the spirit and of wisdom and as as as stephen is speaking to the crowd later on in verse 10 they couldn't stand up to him because of the wisdom and the spirit with which he was speaking so he was stephen he was a wise man and what you notice is that the wisdom that stephen is described as here is also the wisdom with which he preaches later on in chapter 7 about moses in chapter 7 verse 10 it speaks there about the wisdom that moses had and rescued him out of his afflictions and gave him favor and wisdom before pharaoh so this was moses's wisdom it's a very wisdom that stephen has described as having as well and what's interesting about this is as he speaks about moses this is what rattles the people's cage this is what rubs up them up the wrong way he's speaking about moses in a way that they say he shouldn't be and yet he's speaking about here we hear but the wisdom that stephen had is the very same wisdom that moses had and so what does that mean well it's the wisdom that god gives god gave moses this wisdom god gave stephen this wisdom as a very wisdom that we can get from god as well if anyone lacks wisdom let him ask god who will give so we have this wisdom on offer from god this knowledge of god through his son the lord jesus christ in his book knowing god jim parker speaks of wisdom in this way he says wisdom is the power to see and the inclination to choose the best and highest goal together with the surest means of attaining it the inclination to choose the best and highest goal together with the surest means of attaining it so there is this wisdom that comes from god that's the wisdom that we are to look to and where is this wisdom found it is found in the word of the cross god's wisdom is summed up in jesus christ on the cross because in first corinthians chapter one and speaks of it in this way to those who are perishing the cross is foolishness but to those who are being called by god christ is both the power of god and the wisdom of god as we put our trust in the lord jesus christ we have this wisdom that he gives to us this is the wisdom of stephen wisdom of moses the wisdom of all god's people down through every generation the wisdom that even had is the wisdom that we should live for and where is this wisdom shown is again seen in how he lives his life the will of god in all things not my will but yours be done i read a poem that teaches about wisdom and seeking to know the wisdom that the lord will give in his will the author it says is unknown i thought we'd share the poem with you and it says this i am not sent a pilgrim here my heart with earth to fill but i am here god's grace to learn and serve god's sovereign will leads me on through smiles and tears grief follows gladness still but let me welcome both alike since both work out his will no service in itself is small none great though earth it fill but

that is small that seeks its own and great that seeks god's will then hold my hand most gracious lord guide all my doings still and let this me my life's one aim to do or bear thy will stephen was one who had that very mind from christ where to do his will

was what counted for him so let us pray to be a wise people the final thing we see about stephen here is that he was a content man you would think in the midst of all the opposition that he faced that this would unsettle him in some ways or challenge his faith or make him question things but what you see is he stands strong he stands strong in the faith even when the people falsely accuse stephen of going against the teaching of moses he still stands strong in faith in verse 10 as i said it says but they could not withstand the wisdom and the spirit with which he was speaking so as he stood up and as he stood up and spoke of moses in this way and all that he was doing and how they challenged him and all that he was saying what happened with him well when you look at verse 15 there's this remarkable thing that happens to stephen gazing at him all who sat in the council saw that his face was like the face of an angel there was something that stood out about stephen even here to those who are in opposition against gazing on him all who sat in the councils saw that his face was like the face of an angel he shone and who else is it said of in scripture who shone for god moses himself in exodus 34 verse 29 it says when moses came down from mount sinai with the two tablets of the testimony in his hands he was not aware that his face was radiant because he had spoken with the lord so the very one that they were accusing him of speaking against it's almost like he's replicating moses he's shining with the same glory that moses did and why is that because they were both close to god one commentator puts it like this the description is of a person who is close to god and reflects some of his glory as a result of being in his presence just as moses had spoken with the lord and been in his presence and shone stephen is here seen as one whose face shines like an angel because he is close to the lord it's a wonderful example of that told by a missionary when he said a hindu trader in india once asked a missionary what do you put on your face to make it shine the missionary was sort of taken aback by the question surprised by the question he said i don't put anything on it but the hindu man carried on questioning him he said you must put something on it all of you people all of you who believe in jesus you have it i've seen it in so many different places in towns in agra and surat and bombay i've seen all you who are following jesus and you you glow and the mission he suddenly began to realize what he was getting at and he said oh no i know what you mean and i will tell you the secret it's not something we put on from the outside but something that comes from within it's reflection of the light of god in our hearts imagine that a hindu someone opposed to the christian faith and yet saying there's something about you christians something that makes you glow it's not something we put on but something from within just as moses had been in the presence of god and shone just as stephen here is close to god and shining for him like the face of an angel surely as christians too we should have that within us the glory of god shining through so it would be obvious to others who say surely they must have been with the lord so the closer we are to the lord the more contentment we will find and the more joy we will find and the more we will radiate the glory of god through ourselves again looking at timothy and what paul says first timothy chapter 6 it says godliness with contentment is great gain godliness with contentment is great gain and truly stephen had godliness and contentment in the lord he gazed on his savior he gazed on his savior he looked to him he shone for him and we as his people are to be a people who look to the lord day after day and shine for him in the face of opposition in the face of persecution stephen saw no one but jesus and found his contentment in him so may our prayer be that we will continue to fix our eyes on him to find this godliness that comes from him to pray for this wisdom that comes from him and to find our contentment fulfilled and complete in him let us pray our father in heaven we thank you for your word and the wisdom it gives and the way that we come to your word we meet with you and come into your presence and we pray that you will fill us up that we will be a people full of faith and from the inside out lord you will make us shine for you to be examples of those who are close to you and honor you and serve you with all our hearts help us to do that lord whatever calling you have in our lives we are all called take up our cross and follow you so give us the strength oh lord for that and the grace and the wisdom to go on in all of these things and pardon our sins in jesus name amen we conclude our worship by singing in psalm be merciful to spring

[28 : 59] Mori was our boy we 2000 the selection of the thing we do in 2003 we are the second part of he is an independentist of the greeting and heart and conference and the warning, unity of the humility to be completed in■■ we have all the potential inwhile athletics just left the harmony narah to the future and the reason that the learning that was extremely special every element of

coming together can that inform us she may have an environment and the relaxation of tyrana requires we may be HTV chenry■ on the happening and the team of our group happened in the games analysis of mother and I was able to roll back this program would never respond to her