

## Stephen (2) - The Message

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[ 0 : 00 ] I think of this evening Stephen's message here in this passage. We've read part of it together. There's no real text as such we're looking at.

It's this message that Stephen gives. When he stands there in verse 2, Stephen said, Brothers and fathers, hear me. He stands with confidence, with boldness, and says, Brothers and fathers, hear me.

And immediately he goes on to speak about the God of glory. I just want to note their response in verse 54 as well. Now, when they heard these things, they were enraged, and they ground their teeth at him.

He spoke the truth to them, and they were enraged. And that's the kind of day that Stephen lived in. That's the kind of day that we see ourselves more and more in, living in in these days just now.

So we're continuing our study here. of Stephen. And the last time we looked at this, we were seeing Stephen the man, the man who was chosen to serve tables, which in many ways seems like just an ordinary task.

[ 1 : 13 ] And yet he was a man full of God's spirit and full of love for the Lord. He knew so well. He had grace and power. And as he appeared before his accusers in chapter six, we saw at the end of that chapter that his face was like the face of an angel.

He was showing the glory of God in so many ways. Tonight, I want us to think about the message that he spoke before those who were accusing him.

And to see the way that he spoke this truth and the way he was bold in standing up against those who were accusing him. And two things have happened, as I mentioned earlier on, since we last looked at this passage.

One was we have had our communion weekend and we were blessed under God's word. But as we come away from our communion, indeed, as we come away, many times we hear God's word, we're always challenged about, do we stand on the word?

And do we stand up for the word? And especially in a world and amongst a people who are indifferent and more and more intolerant towards this word.

[ 2 : 29 ] So we think of that, the blessings we've had and the challenges that we see going forward. And the second thing, as I highlighted, was, and as was prayed, this is not politics we're talking about here.

We're talking about a Christian who, for her belief, Kate Forbes, she has been so vilified in these last few days. We speak of and we hear about how our nation is a welcoming, a tolerant, a friendly place to come.

And yet when someone states their faith in Christ, this is what happens. And that's the kind of nation that we are living in. And so as Christians, we remember Kate, we remember all Christians throughout our land that we would not just stand with her and for her, but that we would stand beside her, that we would stand up for the Lord.

And as we look at this passage and we look at the message that Stephen has to the people here, we are again reminded of a man who walked in a Christ-centered way.

A man whose focus and attention was fully on the Lord he loved and he was filled with Christ and he too was vilified for it.

[ 3 : 43 ] But here is someone who didn't just talk the talk, but who walked the walk. And that is the kind of Christians that we are all to be.

So imagine yourself in the shoes of Stephen. Imagine yourself in the shoes of Kate Forbes just now. And all the accusations that are coming against you.

All the vilifications that are coming against you. For Stephen, it ended up in stoning. For Kate, she is under this torrent of abuse constantly, day by day.

Imagine yourselves in their shoes. What would you do? Stephen maybe could have taken the easy option, kept his mouth shut and just gone away and gone on with his business.

But that was not his way. His business was the Lord's business. And so he spoke for the Lord. And so many have said of Kate Forbes in these last few days.

[ 4 : 50 ] Why didn't she just keep quiet? Why does she not just not answer these questions that were being directed at her? Because she loves the Lord and his truth.

And her business is the Lord's business. And so for ourselves too, that is our business as well. What a witness Stephen is here.

Even as he stood in what was his last moments of life, he stood for his Lord. Presenting the greatness of God to a people unconcerned for their own souls.

But he had concern for them. And ultimately, that's at the heart of every Christian who is vilified for their faith. A desire that people would come to know the love of Christ.

You'll have heard the phrase, speaking as a dying man unto dying men. Well, here we see that in all its truth. Stephen, a dying man, speaking unto dying men.

[ 5 : 55 ] But what was his message? And what has Kate's message been in these last few days? What is the message that we have ourselves as a people as we seek to stand up for the Lord?

Well, what he shows them here is a real God. He shows them a real people. And he gives them a real challenge.

So I want us to think of these three things. He shows a real God. He shows a real people. And he gives them a real challenge. So the first thing is a real God.

And immediately you see he speaks there in verse 2. As he stood and said, brothers and fathers, hear me. The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham.

Immediately he is into that sense of a real God. The God of glory. And that is who he knew himself.

[ 6 : 54 ] And standing before those who are accusing him. His faith is in this real God.

And it's Peter who says in the New Testament that we are always to be ready to give an answer to every man that asks you regarding the hope that is within you. And here is Stephen ready.

And here is Stephen ready. Ready to give an answer for the reason regarding the hope that is within him. And that's what we've seen with Kate as well.

Answered questions but ready to give a reason for the hope that she has. And that is what we need to be as well.

Somebody said of that Peter was right. The effect of Christian. The Christian who really meets the world with the gospel. And really communicates and really makes an impression.

[ 7 : 50 ] Is the one who can give to every man who asks the reasons for what he believes. And what is our reason that we have?

Well Stephen here tells him of a real God. Not just a real God that he believes in. But a real God that he knows and has experienced.

And he's speaking here to the people who have made God in their own form. They've brought God into their lives in some way. But they've tried to shape their God into someone who will go alongside their views.

Their desires. Their ways of life. So you see here the people of Israel. He speaks of making false gods. And it goes right back to Moses taking them out of Egypt.

And how the people just rejected him. As Moses led them out. He was rejected.

[ 8 : 55 ] And they began by making this golden calf. They were rejecting God. And again we just think of the world of Stephen.

That's the world that they were living in too. They were rejecting God. Not just they were rejecting Stephen and angry against him. They were rejecting God. This God of glory.

This God who is able to give them all that they need for life. All that they need for eternity. And they're rejecting him. They're gnashing their teeth. They're enraged it says.

And how is it that nothing changes? So today you see the response against the Christian faith. It's just the same. They're not just rejecting Kate. They're rejecting the whole Christian faith.

They're rejecting Christ. They're rejecting God. They're enraged against this God. And they're pushing this God away. Because it doesn't fit the mold of what they want.

[ 9 : 56 ] But the message of truth. The message of the gospel. Is this God of glory who is real. And if only they would hear about this God of glory.

The grace he is able to show. The love he is able to give. But also as we've been singing. We're reminded the God of judgment. The God who will not put up with us forever. A people who were put into exile. A people who are put away from God. You see God giving them over to what they want. And it never ends well. And so today we think the same. As a nation. As a people. As we reject God. He gives us over to what our hearts desire. And it never does us any good. We're rejecting the God of glory once again. Stephen was being rejected. And yet he stood with boldness.

[10:59] He stood preaching the truth of who this God of glory is. How he has been with his people. Down through all the generations.

Even when the prophets were being killed and rejected. Even when they rejected God's own son. Jesus Christ. God is still there for him.

It goes right down to verse 51. Where he says you stiff neck people. Uncircumcised in hearts and ears. You always resist the Holy Spirit.

Which of the prophets did not your fathers persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand. The coming of the righteous one. Whom you have now betrayed and murdered. They have rejected. And yet there is still this concern from Stephen. A concern that they would hear. And it's a reminder to ourselves.

[11:59] That Stephen believed in this real God. And we too believe in this real God. A God of grace and mercy.

But a God of judgment. And that is why our concern should be towards our nation. And towards the lost of our nation. And the nations of this world.

Because we know what the scripture says. We know what the end is of those who believe. And so this real God should give us all concern.

For the way our nation is. And the way the world is. And the lost nature of our people. Someone who is in charge of a missionary organization.

I can't remember the name of the person. But he was once asked the question. What would you do to keep. Or what do you try to do to keep your people encouraged. And focused on what they are doing.

[12:57] And serving the Lord. You know how do you keep them from losing impetus. From losing encouragement. And being discouraged in the work. And his answer was this.

Well do you know. It's not so much what I would do that I would want. It's what I would love to do for them. That would keep them going. I would love to take each missionary. And show them hell. For two minutes. And that would be enough to keep them going. All their days. To see the reality of hell. As a Christian.

And then to know. What the lost people are going. That would be enough to spur them on. And when you look through the scripture. That is what you see. So often with the people of God. And they know the glory of God. But they know the wrath of God. On those who disobey. They know the end. Of those who disobey.

[13:54] And so that keeps him going. With this message of the hope. Of the glory of God. In the person of Jesus Christ. Stephen. In the midst of all that's going on.

He could have avoided it all. By keeping his mouth shut. But he didn't. Why? Because he longed that others would come. To know this Christ.

And although it all seems to end. In failure for him. As he is stoned. We'll see God willing the next time. Just how the impact followed on. Even from his stoning.

Even from his death. It rippled effect. It changed the life of one man in particular. Saul. Who looked on. Who's Paul. In the New Testament.

The one who was used. To God's glory. So much. We pray that in the midst of. The persecution that Stephen faces. In the midst of. The persecution that Kate faces.

[14:55] Just now. In the midst of the persecution. We face. As we stand up. On the side of the Lord. That we would never be afraid. Or embarrassed to say. I believe.

In a real God. The God of grace. The God of mercy. But to the God of judgment. But that is who he is.

So Stephen shows. A real God. The second thing we see is. He shows a real people. When you look at the list.

And the names Stephen mentions here. Abraham. Joseph. Moses. Joshua. Solomon. David. You look at them. And you hear these names.

And you think. These are all heroes of the faith. These are all people who stood up for God. In great ways. But what you notice too. Is Stephen is putting them across.

[ 15 : 50 ] As real people. Abraham. Who is one of the fathers of the faith. As he's called. And yet at times.

He took things into his own hands. He thought he could do things better. He was an ordinary man. With faults. Joseph too. You look at his life.

He suffered so much. At the hands. Of his family. And creators around him. And yet he was able to say. In his life. God meant it for good. Moses.

Such a long time. In the wilderness. Because he murdered someone. Always getting it wrong at times. Even when he was leading. The children of Israel. Out of the. Captivity in Egypt.

But yet. Greatly blessed. By God. Joshua. David. Solomon. All people greatly blessed. By God. But all with their own weaknesses.

[ 16 : 44 ] As well. They're all. Ordinary people. Who trusted. God. And Stephen. Is in the midst of this.

Great outpouring of. Of God. On the church. He is an ordinary person. As we saw last time. Stephen the man.

He was someone called. To serve tables. An ordinary. Church member. Just as we would look at it. An ordinary Christian. In every way.

And yet someone who trusted. God. And we are all. Ordinary people. In and of ourselves too. But we have an extraordinary. God.

God. We don't need. To be perfect. Or highly gifted. To be used by God. We just need. To trust him. And to be willing.

[ 17 : 39 ] To stand up. On his side. It was a story told. Back in the early 1800s. Of a group of men. Wealthy men. Who used to meet often.

And in those days. Tea. Was a big thing. And to find. An exquisite tea. Would really impress. Impress those. Who would come to you. And they would take turn about.

Hosting these times. When they would come together. And drink tea. They would try and find. The most costly. The most exotic. Blend of tea. To impress their guests.

And one evening. It was one of the most senior. One of the most wealthy men. Who was hosting them. For the evening. And he made. And he made. A grand ceremony. Of bringing. Tea to the people.

Who were with him. To the men. Who were with him. And he had the tea leaves. He brought them in. In a golden. Ornate box. And he went through. All the pomp. Of making the tea.

[ 18 : 34 ] And serving the tea. In the finest. China cups. That he could have. And all the guests. They started to. Lavish praise. On this tea. Saying it was the best.

They had ever tried. And the host. Smiled to himself. And he said. Do you realize. The tea. That you are drinking.

There is a tea. All the peasants. Around you are drinking. It's just. Ordinary tea. Nothing fancy. About it. They were taken aback.

By that. But it's just a reminder. To ourselves. That what we have. Is an ordinary group. Of people. We are all ordinary.

In the eyes. Of God. But what we have too. Is an extraordinary. God. We don't go through things.

[ 19 : 31 ] For our own glory. But we do it. For the glory. Of God. The message of God. Is not something. To be put in a golden.

Box. It's a message. To be taken out. And shown. Just how ordinary. It is. In so many ways. It's for everyone. It's for all people.

Everywhere. But it's extraordinary. Because it's a living word. It's the truth. It's the truth. That causes. So much. Offense.

It's a truth. That to this day. Enrages. And causes people. To grind. Their teeth. Faith. But it's a message. That we have.

And we pray for boldness. And strength. For others. We think of Kate Forbes. Would you want. To be in her shoes today. Well in many ways.

[ 20 : 27 ] You are. Because her shoes. Are the shoes of faith. And if you believe. In the Lord Jesus Christ. You too. Are in those shoes. Of faith.

And so we pray. For strength. For others. Like Kate. Who stand up. For the faith. We pray. For ourselves. Too. Lord. Make us bold.

Give us courage. To stand up. For you as well. That's the final thing. I just want us to take from this. He gives. A real.

Challenge. Along the way. Stephen here. Reminds him. In his message. Of turning to idolatry. Turning. Away from God. And the nations.

Being judged. By God. Even when he sent those. Who would be redeemers. For the people. In verse 35. This Moses.

[ 21 : 22 ] Whom they rejected. Saying. Who made you ruler and judge? This man. God sent as both ruler and redeemer. By the hand of the angel. Who appeared to him in the bush.

They sent this redeemer to them. The savior to them. But they rejected him. And to this day. So it goes on. Still. It's not that we see Kate.

As a redeemer. So we see any individual. As a redeemer. But the only redeemer. Of God's elect. Is Lord Jesus Christ. And it is him. That is being rejected.

Again. And again. And again. Today. Rejected. By so many. But we need.

To stand. For him. We need to stand. For him. And all that he has done. For us. We need to stand. For him.

[ 22 : 21 ] Man called. Howard Hendricks. Has said these words. In the midst of a generation. Screaming for answers. Christians. Are stuttering.

And you think to yourself. How true. But do you know. When he said that. In 1983. 40 years ago. He said that. In the midst of a generation. Screaming for answers. Christians. Are stuttering. Where are we now? 40 years later. We're not just in the midst of a.

Generation screaming for answers. We're in the midst of a generation. Screaming. They have the answers. But the answers they have. Are so wrong. And so far.

Removed from the truth now. And Christians. We are still stuttering. But we have a God. Who is able to help us.

[ 23 : 17 ] Speak. God who lives. In his people. God who is able to speak. Through his people. And where does he speak.

Through his people. Everywhere. We go. So God. Lives. In us. We can be impressed. With how. Kate. Has answered. So many questions. Against her. And against her faith. But let us be a people. Remind ourselves. Daily.

And rejoice. That God is in us. And God. Is with us. And that as we go about. His business. Just as Stephen.

Went about the business of God. And didn't keep his mouth shut. Just as Kate. Goes about her business. Glorifying God. And not keeping her mouth shut. May we as a people.

[ 24 : 13 ] Go about the business of God. Not keeping our mouth shut. Either. But that we would speak. A word. That we would stand up.

For the Lord. That we would imitate Stephen. By being more concerned. About bearing witness. Than our own. Protection. Stephen.

Challenges them so. Clearly here. In verse 51. You stiff-necked. People. We pray. For courage. For Christians. Throughout our land. Today. To stand. To stand. On the side of Christ. To stand against. The evil that we see around us.

To stand with those. Who stand. For his message. And for the hope. That there is. In Christ. That whatever else. We think of our nation.

[ 25 : 09 ] Whatever we think of our politics. That we would stand and pray. Lord. Have mercy. On us. And come. In a day of your power.

We live. In days like Stephen. And where people are enraged. Against what they hear. But we stand. With the same God. As Stephen stood with.

We stand knowing. That he is with us today. May we take courage. And have boldness too. To face up to the challenges. And reality of persecution.

As it comes. And to be bold. And courageous. Trusting. In our Lord. Let us pray. Our Father.

In heaven. We. Weep over our nation. At this time. Lord. As we see. The disarray. We are in. But yet. We thank you. And rejoice. That you are God.

[ 26 : 05 ] Of heaven and earth. When we pray. Have mercy on us. We pray. Lord. That you will come. In your power. And in all your glory. And that you will.

Free your people. That you will. Heal our land. That you will hear. Our prayers. Lord. Hear. Your praying people.

Even this night. Those who are gathered. In their twos and threes. Those who are gathered. In their hundreds. We pray Lord. For all your people. Far and wide.

That you will hear. And answer. In these days. Lord. Have mercy. We pray. And forgive us. For our sins. And give us. The boldness. And courage. To stand on your word.

And to stand. For your word. For we ask. In Jesus name. Amen. We're going to conclude.

[ 27 : 00 ] By singing. ingenious ingenious Tamteran. All seen.