

Read Acts 6:11-14

1. Why would Stephen have been such a threat?
2. What are the similarities between the accusations brought against Stephen and those brought against Jesus?

Consider

Both Stephen's words and actions demonstrated the insufficiency of what the Jews believed. Not only could they not deny the signs and wonders that Stephen did; they could not refute Stephen's explanations from the Scriptures. It was their inability to refute his teaching that would have been most troublesome to the Stephen's detractors. With the signs and wonders alone they could refer to Deuteronomy 13 and declare that Stephen was instructing them to follow other gods. But since Stephen could demonstrate the truth of his teaching from Scripture, the signs and wonders strengthened his argument. Yet rather than repenting from their sin and unbelief, these men resorted to lies and false accusations against Jesus. In Stephen we see a fulfillment of what Jesus said would take place with his followers. Jesus told them that they would be brought before courts, kings and governors (Matthew 10:16-20). They would be scourged, as the apostles already were (Acts 5:40). Even though Stephen was not an apostle, he fulfilled the prophetic word Jesus declared. As Jesus and later the apostles had been taken before the Sanhedrin, now Stephen faced the same situation. Like Jesus, they falsely accused Stephen of saying things he never said. They accused Jesus of having declared he would tear down the temple and rebuild it in three days (Matthew 26:59-60); with Stephen they accused him of speaking against the temple. They used against Stephen the false accusation made against Jesus (v. 14).

Saturday, November 5, 2011

Daily theme: God confirms those who belong to him.

Questions

Read Acts 6:15

1. How did God confirm Stephen's innocence?
2. Why would Stephen's appearance as an angel be particularly meaningful to the chief priests?

Consider

Jesus told his followers not to worry about or even plan for their defense before governors, kings and courts (Matthew 10:19-20), because the Holy Spirit would give them exactly what to say. In the case of Stephen we see the Holy Spirit working through Stephen even before he uttered a word in his defense. We see in Stephen a resemblance of Moses' face shining after he had seen God's glory (Exodus 34:29). In the case of Stephen's face resembled that of an angel. Quite likely Stephen's face glowed as that of an angel would. Through this action, God in his grace gave the Sanhedrin yet another opportunity to repent and turn to Jesus. They taught there was no resurrection, but Jesus rose from the dead. They declared angels did not exist, but God had used an angel to free the apostles from prison and here the Holy Spirit caused the servant of Jesus, Stephen, to have the appearance of an angel. Once again God gave the chief priests reason to repent, but they refused. God's actions with the Sanhedrin give us insight into God's patience and to what lengths he will go to keep presenting us with the truth.

A Christian filled with the Spirit and faith cannot be stopped.

Acts 6:1-15

Sermon Series: You will be my witnesses.

Devotional Notes October 31-November 5, 2011

Monday, October 31, 2011

Daily theme: We need to discover our role in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Questions

Read Acts 6:1-2

1. What does Luke imply caused the problem?
2. Why didn't the apostles take care of this problem themselves?

Consider

Acts 4:37 indicated that the apostles received the resources for those in need. However due to the ministry described in Acts 5, the numbers of followers grew by great numbers. That growth raised difficulties that needed to be addressed. In the midst of the growth a complaint arose. Apparently not all the needs were being met as we saw in Acts 4. In first century Judaism there were two basic groups of Jews. There were Jews who were raised according to the Hebrew culture in Palestine. Another group of Jews lived outside of Palestine in Greek culture who came to Jerusalem during the required feasts each year. It was the widows of the second group who were being overlooked. Apparently when the number was smaller the apostles could handle the responsibility of distributing the food, but as the assembly of disciples grew it appears that the apostles could no longer fulfill the ministries of food distribution, the word and prayer. The ministry of food distribution (v. 1-2) should in no way be considered inferior to the ministry of the word (v. 4). There is an unfortunate translation in this passage. The word translated as "serving" (v. 1, 2) is the same word that is translated as "ministry" (v. 4). The two translations can give the impression that what the apostles were doing (ministry) was more spiritual than food distribution (serving), but that was clearly not Luke's meaning, since he used the same word "deacon" in both cases. The word "deacon" can refer either to service or to ministry. The apostles chose the responsibilities of the word and prayer to occupy their time, because these were the activities to which Jesus had assigned to them. To neglect them would be disobedient to Jesus. Therefore we should focus our attention on the ministry to which God has assigned to us while not elevating one ministry/service over another, because they are all done for the glory of God.

Tuesday, November 1, 2011

Daily theme: For ministry, being full of the Holy Spirit is a requirement.

Questions

Read Acts 6:3-4

1. Why would the apostles require men full of the Holy Spirit to oversee this ministry?
2. What does it mean to devote yourself to a particular ministry?

Consider

The apostles realized that the daily distribution of food was not merely a physical task, but required wisdom and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. All ministries reflect Jesus so they must be done with the utmost integrity. In this case, these seven men would be dealing with money that the congregation had contributed. That money would be used to purchase food for those in need (widows). They had already seen what had happened to Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11), therefore they dare not put just anyone in charge. These men would need wisdom to determine whether a person was actually in need or not. They would need the guidance of the Holy Spirit to reveal to them when individuals might try to deceive them, as Ananias and Sapphira attempted. Some might try to appear in need, but not actually be. Being full of the Holy Spirit meant that the Holy Spirit could reveal needed information that they would not know under normal circumstances. The Holy Spirit could also give them insight on how to better distribute the food. In 1 Timothy 5 Paul indicated to Timothy that not all widows should receive assistance, some had family that should take care of them, while others should remarry. The seven would need the guidance of the Holy Spirit to apply and communicate such decisions. While the seven took care of the ministry of food, the apostles devoted themselves to the ministry of the word and prayer. To devote ourselves to a ministry means that we make that ministry a priority in our life. While we devote ourselves to ministry, our ministry is not the dream of our life, but we like the apostle Paul do ministry out of the overflow of our relationship with Jesus (Philippians 3:7-11). Being devoted to our ministry should never compete with our pursuit of a closer relationship with Jesus, rather our ministry complements and depends on our intimacy with Jesus through the Holy Spirit.

Wednesday, November 2, 2011

Daily theme: God displays his grace by saving those who once opposed him.

Questions

Read Acts 6:5-7

1. What observations do you note from the list of the seven men selected?
2. Why do you think Luke made mention of the priests coming to faith?

Consider

A quick glance at the list of seven men might not reveal much information, but a closer examination reveals more substance. Stephen, listed first, is described in greater detail than all the others. By this description, Luke gives us an indication that Stephen will have a greater role in the story. Although he does not describe the second man in the list, Philip, Luke will describe in further detail Philip's ministry and family (Acts 8, 21:8-9). One other man, the seventh, Nicolas, received a special note. Nicolas was a proselyte from Antioch. His description is significant, because a proselyte referred to a Gentile convert to Judaism. This made him unique among the seven and the apostles, because they were all Jews by birth, but Nicolas was a Jew by conversion. His selection indicates that his being a proselyte, was not a hindrance to the congregation selecting him for leadership (Galatians 3:28). In verse 7, Luke returns to the main theme of Acts, the expansion of the kingdom of God. At this point it was expanding in Jerusalem. Then Luke added a bit of irony. While Gamaliel had implied that the apostles and

their ministry would disappear, it did nothing of the sort. Not only did it expand, but a great many priests chose to follow Jesus. Primarily the priests belonged to the Sadducee party, yet many were leaving what the Sadducees taught and following Jesus. The realization that the followers of Jesus were not only expanding in Jerusalem, but also expanding among their own group, must have made the Sadducees, even more sensitive. This helps us understand the context of what would take place with Stephen in Acts 7. The chief priests had attempted to stop the growth of the gospel, they had followed logical human advice, but the growth of the kingdom of God could not be stopped, just as Jesus said it would not (Matthew 16:18). This verse should give us great encouragement when we consider those whom we know who are opposed to Jesus.

Thursday, November 3, 2011

Daily theme: Even though Stephen was not an apostle, he performed signs and wonders.

Questions

Read Acts 6:8-10

1. Why is it significant that Stephen also did signs and wonders?
2. How does the opposition that Stephen experienced fulfill prophecy?

Consider

Luke revealed a number of firsts in Acts 6:8-10. Stephen represents the first time in Acts that an individual other than the apostles performed signs and wonders. Prior to Stephen only the apostles, particularly Peter, did signs and wonders. Now for the first time a non-apostle performed them. This is significant for us because signs and wonders are not limited to the first century apostolic ministry, but also includes those who today would be called laymen. In addition to Stephen, with Philip, mentioned in verse 5, we see that the gift of prophecy extended to the generation after the apostles, because Philip's four daughters all had the gift of prophecy (Acts 21:8-9). Philip was not an apostle either, but each of his four daughters were prophets. Both Stephen and the daughters of Philip give us an indication that signs and wonders are not limited to the apostles and did not end with the apostles. Stephen's ministry of signs and wonders also lent him credibility for what he taught. Jesus had said the powerful works that he did were a testimony to the truth of his teaching (John 10:37-38). In the case of Stephen the same could be said. It seems to surprise us when the gospel is opposed. We find Jesus and his gospel to be the most beautiful person in the world, but to some they don't want to have anything to do with Jesus. Jesus told us that he came not to bring peace to this world but a sword. He added that he would divide families right down the middle (Matthew 10:34-39). It is quite possible that Stephen's own friends and possibly family opposed him when he proclaimed the truth of Jesus. As in the case of Jesus, Stephen's opponents could not refute the testimony of his signs and wonders nor the power of his teaching.

Friday, November 4, 2011

Daily theme: The world opposes those who operate powerfully within the kingdom of heaven.

Questions