

REVIEW

- Recall our last series, “It’s About Time,” about the big rocks and God’s four spheres.

IT’S A FIGHT

Ephesians 6:10–13 ¹⁰Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. ¹¹Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. ¹²For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. ¹³Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.

- We spoke about fake news.
 - warnings in scripture about those who would lie to us (false teachers)
 - how we discern the truth (see **2 Timothy 4:1-5** and **2 Timothy 3:10-17**)

THIS WEEK: HATE SPEECH

- How do we speak about the truth?
 - Remember the warning that if we want to live a godly life, we will be persecuted. (**2 Timothy 3:12**)
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THE CONTEXT OF STEPHEN: THE DISCIPLES

Acts 4:8–12 ⁸Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: “Rulers and elders of the people! ⁹If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a man who was lame and are being asked how he was healed, ¹⁰then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. ¹¹Jesus is “the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone.” ¹²Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.”

Acts 4:18–20 ¹⁸Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. ¹⁹But Peter and John replied, “Which is right in God’s eyes: to listen to you, or to him? You be the judges! ²⁰As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.”

Acts 4:27–31 ²⁷Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. ²⁸They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. ²⁹Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness . . . ³¹After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.

THE CONTEXT OF STEPHEN’S LIFE: THE EXAMPLE SET BY THE APOSTLES

- Stephen ministered to the Greek widows.
- He was chosen as a deacon (servant) because he was filled with the Holy Spirit and power.

1. NOTICE THE KIND OF PERSON STEPHEN WAS: FULL OF GRACE AND THE HOLY SPIRIT

- He had acted kindly to the hurting. There was a sense of real (Holy Spirit) power in him, and not just in his words.
- His motivation was grace and love—to see people come to know Christ.
- His heart was to love. Biblically, hate speech is to hurt, to offend, to demean.
- Real hate speech is to demean, hurt, and offend.

Acts 6:8–9 ⁸Now Stephen, a man full of God’s grace and power, performed great wonders and signs among the people. ⁹Opposition arose, however, from members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called)—Jews of Cyrene and Alexandria as well as the provinces of Cilicia and Asia—who began to argue with Stephen.

2. NOTICE STEPHEN WAS WISE. HE SPOKE THE WORD OF GOD. (See also James 3:13, 17)

- Wisdom is God’s perspective used in the right way.
- His communication was wise, even nonverbal: “his face was like the face of an angel.”

Acts 6:10 But they could not stand up against the wisdom the Spirit gave him as he spoke.

Acts 6:15 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 7:2 To this he replied: “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. NOTICE THE RESPONSE OF THE CULTURE TO THE TRUTH, AND THEN STEPHEN’S RESPONSE.

- Doing God’s will doesn’t always mean it turns out the way you want it to in this life.
- He was willing to share the truth because he loved those who were lost.
- He was willing to tell the people that Jesus was God’s Son, and they had participated in His death.
- But Stephen’s purpose was to bring them to Christ.

Acts 7:51–60 ⁵¹“You stiff-necked people! Your hearts and ears are still uncircumcised. You are just like your ancestors: You always resist the Holy Spirit! ⁵²Was 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—⁵³you who have received the law that was given through angels but have not obeyed it.” ⁵⁴When the members of the Sanhedrin heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. ⁵⁵But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. ⁵⁶“Look,” he said, “I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.” ⁵⁷At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, ⁵⁸dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul. ⁵⁹While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” ⁶⁰Then he fell on his knees and cried out, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” When he had said this, he fell asleep.

BOTTOM LINE

2 Timothy 2:23–26 ²³Don’t have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels. ²⁴And the Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. ²⁵Opponents must be gently instructed, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, ²⁶and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.

1 Peter 3:15 But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect,

QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS IN LIFE GROUP OR WITH YOUR FAMILY AND FRIENDS

Passages to consider: Acts 6:8-15, 7:51-60; Matthew 5:38-48; Ephesians 4:2-3; 1 Peter 3:15-17

1. What impacted you from the sermon?
2. Read Acts 6:8-15, 7:51-60. What do you observe about Stephen and his situation?
3. In what ways has the definition of “hate” been shifted in your world? Or what have you noticed about expressing opinions or offended-ness? A) How has this impacted you?
4. When you have a disagreement or different views, how do you handle it? (Be as real and honest as possible. 😊)
5. Take a look at Ephesians 4:2-3 and 1 Peter 3:15-17. What stands out in these passages? A) What challenges you personally?
6. What is God, through the Holy Spirit, His Word, and His people saying to you? A) How will you respond? Think specific and practical.

Next week: The Right Fight (Week 3): Who’s my tribe?

Passages to prepare: John 13:34-35, Galatians 5:22-23; Ephesians 5:15-17