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Reality Destroys the Shadow
Acts 6:8-15

Reading through the Foxes book of Martyrs this week I was struck by how all through the ages since the time of Christ, men and women have endured incredible persecution and suffering because they stood up for what they believed. They lived and died for the truth they believed in. Our believing brothers and sisters endured incredible torture and pain and yet still they stood strong for the truth. As their bodies were being scorched by flames, they would sing out songs of faith. They would give thanks to the good and faithful God who redeemed them. An amazing peace and presence of God seem to be the witness of those who watched. We owe an incredible debt to these people who choose not to give in and give up to what they knew was not true. They died full of grace and filled with the spirits power because that is the way that they lived. And I wondered to myself...do I believe in such a way that I live the truth I say I believe? And if I do truly believe, am I willing to die for such a truth? What kind of faith would that take to endure without giving in? This world says that everything has its price...it just depends on how much your willing to pay and how much time you want to spend pursuing it. Is that true? Can everything be bought only dependent on how much you want to spend? My house is not for sale, but...if you offered me 500,000 I would sell my house to you. Am I willing to be bought for everything? Am I willing to sell the truth I believe...cheap? Am I willing to give up my commitment to Christ when it gets inconvenient, challenged or ridiculed? What does that kind of faith look like? What kind of truth are you willing to die for? Does commitment have its boundaries?

This morning's text for study comes from the book of Acts the 6th chapter. Turn there now. This section marks a transition in the book that Luke the author records the events of the early church and God's mighty hand in all of it. In the first five chapters Peter was the main human character. Now the spotlight focuses on a couple of men that have been appointed as deacon leaders in the church, Stephen and Phillip. They serve as a transition for the emphasis then switches to a man, a peculiar choice by God Saul. A thread that weaves its way all through the book of Acts peels from its main statement in Acts 1:8 The great commission by Jesus for his believers to be witnesses empowered by the Holy spirit to tell the entire world about the good news of what God has done to bring salvation to people through His son Jesus Christ. Luke chooses stories to demonstrate to the readers of Acts that God's plan moves forward despite the opposition that comes toward it. Will the message continue forward even though the influential and powerful political leaders strongly oppose it? Answer? Yes. The leaders cannot snuff it out but their persecution serves only to fan the flames of truth. Will a moral weakness coming from within this multiplying church cause it to corrode and fail? Answer. No. God deals strongly with it and the church continues to grow. What if there is complaining and temptations to become distracted from the key priorities brought about by the problems of much success? Would the church become unfocused and unbiblical and unspiritual drowned in the administrative headaches of the thousands who had joined the believers? Answer. No.

The leadership responds well and one of the seven men appointed to handle some of the administrative load was a man named Stephen. He was a man 6:5 that is full of faith, full of the Holy Spirit. He was well respected by the community of believers, a man of wisdom, a spiritual man who expected God and anticipated God to work through him. Stephen's ministry was not limited to waiting on tables, as we read in

chapter 6:8 Stephen was full of grace and power and performing great wonders and signs among the people. (READ)

Stephen was teaching debating preaching healing people and yet his words made some people livid. They felt threatened. V,9 People who attended the synagogue of Freedmen. These people were ex-Roman slaves who came from various parts of the known world. Egypt, Africa, Asia Minor or modern day Turkey, Cilicia. Different ethnic groups lived together in various quarters of Jerusalem and some would have their own synagogue where they could meet together. It's interesting that Luke includes the area Cilicia. Because the capital of Cilicia is Tarsus. Tarsus was Saul's hometown. It is quite possible that Saul was in on the debates at the synagogue of Freedmen. Trained by the famous Gamaliel it would be a natural for him to know about the debates with Stephen. We cannot be sure he actually participated in the debate with Stephen...but we know he was there as one in full agreement with the evil outcome. For he was the one watching the coats of those who stoned Stephen to death. The first martyr for the faith.

The word used for debate here implies a more formal debate rather than just a yelling match down at the town square. They probably held this debate about the claims of Jesus down at Synagogue of Freedmen. V.10 tells us Stephen not only held his own, he downright embarrassed the debating competition. The other side was "unable to cope with the wisdom and Spirit with which he was speaking." Shamed by the truth, spirit and logic unable to silence Stephen by debate, they resorted to putting his arguments in a more damaging light.

The way they dealt with Stephen here should sound very familiar to us as it is a very similar way they dealt with Jesus. Hired false witnesses to testify against him. Stirred up the people against him and then accused him of attacking the Law of Moses, the temple and the law and called all of that blaspheme. (incessantly speaks against this holy place and the Law v.13) v.14 have heard that Stephen said Jesus would

destroy this place and alter the customs which Moses handed down to us.”)

Now this morning I would like us to hand out in the verses here that bring accusation against Stephen. They accuse Stephen of saying that Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place (temple in Jerusalem and change the customs. Question one. Did Jesus himself say these things? Did Jesus say that he was going to destroy the temple? Question two. Did Stephen say these this same thing and if he did, did he mean what Jesus meant when he said them. Third question. Did the author of the book of Acts agree with what Jesus and Stephen said? If so then why did he say that people set up false witnesses. If Jesus and Stephen really did say that Jesus would destroy the temple and change the customs of Moses, how could those witnesses be false.

Now you are probably wondering. So what? Does any of this matter at all to me? Why should I care about listening to the rest of this sermon? Well, you can decide for yourself at the end, but let me have you consider these things to convince you it might be worth at least listening to. At the end of chapter 7 we read that Stephen died for the truth that he was accused of. He could escape with his neck intact if he had chosen to ease off and not address his accusation with such truth. He could have been silent, quiet or couched his argument in softer blows. But he didn't. He chose to die rather than to fail to speak the truth regarding Jesus and the Temple and the law and the customs. Stephen spoke v.10 says he was full of the Spirit and wisdom and so we would be fools not to listen to that kind of wisdom and try to understand what it was that Stephen was willing to die for. Second reason why you should listen to this sermon is that the Jewish leaders felt so viciously against it that even though they longed to keep their image intact and appearance of righteousness. They cast that aside and killed a man trying to silence this truth. It was so threatening to them that decided it was far better to

kill then to let truth be spread. Third point is that this rebuttal speech by Stephen is the far longest of all the book of Acts. It must be vital.

So, Lets tackle the first question. Did Jesus say that he was going to destroy the temple? The gospel accounts in Matthew 26:61 and Mark 14:58 tell us that at Jesus trial, false witnesses were brought forward and they witnessed in court, "This Jesus said I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days" High priest asked Jesus to respond and he said nothing. Matthew 27 and Mark 15 describe the crowds of people who passed by Jesus as he hung on the cross mocked him saying "You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself. If you are the son of God come down from this cross." Jesus himself in John 2:19-21 was quoted actually saying the words "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up. The Jews came back and said, " It took 46 years to build this temple and you will raise it up in three days? It would seem quite likely that Jesus in fact did say something like he was accused of "I will destroy this temple and in three days build it up again."

So what did Jesus mean when he said this? John adds the commentary, in v.21 "But he was speaking of the temple of his body." So we know that Jesus was talking about his body referring to his death and then resurrection 3 days later. Was Jesus only meaning that he would die and rise again in three days? If that was all he was meaning, then why refer to yourself as a temple? Why say those words in the temple itself in a place where most people would assume that he is referring to the temple building?

I think that for those who thought about it after his death and resurrection. For men like Stephen who thought about what Jesus said it meant that when Jesus died, the temple dies. When Jesus is destroyed, the temple is destroyed. That means the whole system, all the sacrifices, all the blood that flowed from animals to make atonement for sin. All the priestly activity that surrounded the place where the presence of God

choose to dwell. All of that ends when Jesus dies. Jesus was saying when you destroy me, in my dying the temple is destroyed.

Remember at the instant of Jesus death what happened in the temple? The curtain wall that veiled the holy place from the holy of holies was ripped in two from top to bottom. That is a sign of destruction for that place, the walls were coming down and Jesus was taking the place of everything in the temple. Jesus became the high priest who lives forever and is at the right hand of the Father interceding for us on our behalf (Hebrew 7:25) The temple priesthood is destroyed and now all believers are priests with direct access to God in his presence. Jesus himself became the sacrificial lamb. The lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world with his own blood makes redemption for sin. Hebrews 9 no longer are the animal sacrifices needed for they have been “destroyed” by Jesus. Jesus made his own blood the covenant of promise Mark 14:24. He made himself to be the mercy seat of the temple Romans 3:25. The very glory of God, the shekinah glory of the temple came down and rested on Jesus and the glory of the Father raised him from the dead Romans 6:4. The temple is no longer the place where you go and see the glory of God. Jesus is the place. Jesus is the person where you go see the glory of God.

The temple in Jerusalem is destroyed. We have a new temple. A new high priest. A new sacrifice. A new access to glory in the presence and fellowship with God as so even when John had his vision and wrote it down in the book of revelation he writes in Revelation 21 “and I saw no temple in the city for its temple is the lord God almighty and the lamb and the city has not need of sun or moon to shine upon it for the glory of God is its light and its lamp is the lamb. Jesus Christ is the Passover lamb that is sacrificed for us so that we might live.

When Jesus said, “Destroy this temple and in three days, I will raise it up, He was saying that he would be taking the place of the temple by dying for sin once and for all. And by rising against he would reign as

high priest forever and Lord of glory. Jesus was saying that when I die, the temple system dies. I'm the new access. I'm the place of forgiveness. I'm the sacrifice for sins. I am the presence and radiance of the glory of God. The temple is done.

I think Stephen understood exactly what Jesus meant when he said that he would destroy the temple. That was a powerful truth that he was willing to die for. But, from the accusations leveled against Stephen it sounds like Stephen was still speaking this similar statement months after Jesus had died and rose again. Stephen speaks of something that is yet to happen. Are Jesus and Stephen talking about the same thing? Jesus said its done in three days after his death. They are still accusing Stephen of saying that it will happen.

What Jesus meant was that the basis the core of the Old Testament sacrificial system which focused on the temple was destroyed when he died. The whole temple system was simply pointing to Him, Jesus who would fulfill and complete the forgiveness of sin. The blood of animals never saved anyone or forgave anyone, they simply put off the payment until the real thing could do satisfy and forgive completely. The temple system was a shadow and that all was destroyed when reality lies down on it and takes its place. On a sunny day in late afternoon stand out in the yard and you will see a shadow of your body. If you want to destroy that shadow, simply lay down and its gone. The real thing has taken the place of the shadow. That is how Jesus destroyed the temple by laying down his life in reality of all that the shadows were representing. That destruction was completed in three days and he rose again as a new temple for all those who put their trust in Him.

The basis for the system was now gone, but what Stephen was dealing with was the dismantling of the old temple system. It was not going to go away immediately. It took time. As people understood and responded to the truth, the fringes of the old system would fade away. Now as we back up and re-read v.7 again, it takes on a whole new

powerful meaning. “ A great many priests were becoming obedient to the faith.” What it means is that a great many of priests began to realize they were out of a job. They believed that Jesus was the now the high priest, they no longer needed to sacrifice animals. Jesus provided forgiveness of sin. They no longer needed to go through a high priest or building to be in the presence of God. They were allowed direct access and every believer, all Christians are priests in the service of serving God. Stephen then goes on in chapter 7 to make an incredible case for backing up these very statements. That all the Old Testament and all the great heroes of faith that the Jews looked up to all were pointing to this time and this new thing that God had done in Jesus Christ.

So the question then asks. Why then did the author of Acts? Why did Luke write that the witnesses that came forward, were false witnesses? In what way were they speaking falsehood when Luke writes in v.13 “And they put forward false witnesses who said This man incessantly speak against this holy place and the Law;” If you look at the rest of the book of Acts you will find that Luke knew very well that Jesus came and the customs of Moses would be changed. In Acts 15 there was the controversy over the necessity of following the Law of Moses concerning circumcision, but the decision of the Apostles was that this custom belonged to the old system. In Acts 10 Peter has a vision of eating unclean animals when he is told by God to go and preach the gospel to the gentiles. A voice instructed him clearly: What God has cleansed you must not call common. The laws about unclean foods had been changed. The laws had served their purpose in setting Israel as a distinct people, but now God is no longer just the god of the people of Israel. He is the God of all people who trust in Him.

Luke mentions them as false witnesses because they tried to put a false spin on a truthful statement. Satan does this all the time. He loves to pervert and twist God greatest truths and gifts. It's true that Jesus would destroy the temple and change some of the customs of Moses, but

its not true that this was blaspheme against Moses and God and Stephen wasn't against the temple and the law. Jesus destroyed the temple, and the Law in that he was the fulfillment, the completion. Just like the rising sun destroys the need for a flashlight. Just like a loving reuniting at the airport destroys the need for letters and long phone calls. Jesus was the reality that descended and destroys its shadow. The reality wasn't against the shadow, it simply fulfilled it. Jesus welcomed in an entirely new thing. Now we can see why those who were at the head of the old thing, the shadow, the temple, chief priest and leaders fought against this truth. When it goes away they are out of power, influence and a job too and they were willing to kill to snuff it out.

Jesus destroyed the temple, destroyed the shadow by laying himself down as the reality. Now, we no longer have to offer the sacrifices of animals. No longer do we have to go through a priest to talk with God. No longer do we have to go to a temple in Jerusalem to be in the presence and glory of God. Jesus Christ has come into the world and died and rose again to forgive our sins. And is at the right hand of the Father pleading our case on our behalf as advocate. Now is that truth worth dying for? Stephen thought so...do you? Are you living as if you believe it?

Acts 6:8-7:8 Stephen full of grace and power.

Does commitment have its boundaries? Limits? Is everyone for sale it just takes more time and a whole lot of money? Stephen had gone to the synagogue of Freedmen to preach the gospel. Its membership was made up of Jews from all over the known world.

What interests most people about the story of Stephen is that he was the first martyr for his faith. But Luke's main concern is how Stephen plays a vital role in developing Christian missions world wide both through his teachings and in his death. God is not bound to buildings, or land. Or denominations. .

Like a river glorious. Hidden in the hollow of His blessed hand. Never foe can follow, never traitor stand. Not a surge of worry, not a shade of care, not a blast of hurry, touch the spirit there. Stayed upon Jehovah hearts are fully blest, finding as He promised perfect peace and rest.

This section marks a transition in the book of Acts. Up until now Peter has been the main focus and now it will be shifting to Paul. Stephen is the bridge between those two giants of the faith.

Luther's stand against the pope Macarthur p. 218

v. 8

And Stephen

Full of grace

And Power

Was performing great signs and wonders among the people.

(Stephens ministry was not limited to waiting on tables. 4:33 Great power to apostles and abundant grace. 4:30 prayer that God would extend His hand to heal and many signs and wonders would take place. V.31 that they would speak the word in boldness. 2:43 “and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles.” Now its happening through one who is not an apostle but transferred apostolic power through laying on of hands,)

v.9 BUT some men from what was called the synagogue of the freedmen including both Cyrenians and Alexandrians and some from Cilicia and Asia rose up and argued with Stephen.

(are these roman slaves who have been freed. Different ethnic groups lived together in different quarters in Jerusalem and some had there own synagogues to meet together. Since Saul of Tarsus was in Cilicia its possible that he had heard Stephen in the Synagogue debate and may have even debated with him. However no one could match his wisdom and spirit. so why then enslave or limit others? There is nothing so oppressive as a recently freed slave. A recently freed cigarette smoker??? Luke wants us to know this group was extensive, from all over from Egypt to Asia minor.

v.10 and yet they were unable to cope with the wisdom (shamed by truth and logic and unable to silence him by debate, and therefore resorted to putting up his arguments in an damaging light) and with the Spirit with which he was speaking.

(undeniable power and signs and truth induces great venom and anger why?

The way they dealt with Stephen is similar to the way the Jews dealt with Jesus. Hired false witnesses to testify against him. Stirred up the people against him who accused him of attacking the Law of Moses and the temple and them executed him. The Jews were jealous over their law and could not understand how Jesus had come to fulfill the Law and bring in something new from God. They were proud of their temple and refused to believe that God would permit it to be destroyed.

v.11 Then they secretly induced men to say, (hupoballo which means to put under like a carpet to bring men under ones control suggestion or by money.” Pay off under the table deals to accuse Stephen of things he has never done.

“We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God” (paid false witnesses that he spoke against God)

v.12 and he stirred up the people
the elders and the scribes
and they came upon him and dragged him away
and brought him before the Council (They surprised him
while he was ministering and one more time)

v.13 and they put forward false witnesses who said,
The man incessantly speaks against this holy place
and the Law
for we have heard him say that this Nazarene, Jesus
will destroy this place
and alter the customs which Moses
handed down to us.

v.15 And fixing their gaze on him, (same word at 7:55, on what have you fixed your gaze?

all who were sitting in the Council saw his face
like the face of an angel.

(The very glow of his face was a witness to the council that he was from God as they would remember the glow on Moses face when he came down from the mountain with the Law. It was as if God himself was saying this man is not against Moses. He is my faithful servant.

People around us can read our hearts from the look on our faces. What are we reflecting the face?

To the very end he spoke truth. This may well have been the very first time that Saul of Tarsus heard the gospel message.

Chapter 7

The temple: Stephen makes a point that God did not choose to limit his presence to any one location.

Don't miss God's initiative. It was God who spoke God who delivered, punished and rescued.

Stephen steps up to confront sin with the truth. He reminded them that Scriptures predicted a messiah would come. The God had said He would not dwell in a temple made by human hands. V48. Disobedience vs. Obedience belief vs. unbelief

God selected and directed our fathers v2-16

God protected and freed our fathers -v.41
God tested and instructed our fathers -v44
God conquered and gave land to our fathers -v.45
God met with and blessed our fathers v.46-47
God communicated with our fathers v.48-50

Stephen reviews the history of Israel and contribution made by the revered leaders

Abraham: Was the founder of the Hebrew nation and his relationship to God was one of grace and faith. God called him out of a heathen nation into the light of salvation and Abraham responded by faith not because he kept a law or worshipped in a temple, neither of those things were in place yet, those came afterward. He believed in the promises of God and that faith saved him. God promised Abraham land and descendants would suffer in Egypt and then enter the promised land. It all took place just as God promised. The Jews prided themselves on being Abrahams children, but they had confused physical descent with spiritual heart experience. They were depending on their national pedigree instead of their heart of faith to save them. John the Baptizer had warned them about their sin. So had Jesus. But they were blind to it and cluttered their life up with man-made traditions and made salvation a list of does and don'ts and a matter of good works, not faith. God has no grandchildren. Each of us must be born into the family of God through personal faith in Jesus Christ. John 1

v.8 the Jews prided themselves on circumcision failing to understand that this rite was symbolic of an inner spiritual relationship to God. They had missed to point to the symbol and sentimentalized the ritual Joseph They rejected both Joseph and Moses as their God sent deliverers the first time, but then the second time they recognized them. Joseph when they returned to Egypt for more food. Moses was rejected the first time he tried to deliver them from bondage and then had to flee for his life, but the second time the nation accepted him and he set them free. These guys were included to demonstrate how Israel had treated Jesus Christ. Rejected the first time, but when he comes again they will recognize Him as Messiah and receive Him Revelation 1:7. Israel is suffering today from partial blindness that one day will be taken away.

Contradictions: Genesis 46 states that 70 people made up the household of Jacob, including Josephs family already in Egypt, but Stephen claimed there were 75. The Hebrew text has 70 but the Septuagint the Greek translation of the OT says 75. That difference came from counting to include Josephs grandchildren I Chron 7. Being a Hellenistic Jew, Stephen would naturally use the Septuagint.

Acts 7:16 says that Jacob was buried at Shechem, but Gen 50 states that he was buried in the cave at Macpelah at Hebron along with

Abraham, Isaac and Sarah. It was Joseph who was buried at Shechem. It is likely that the children of Israel carried out all the bones of Joseph and his brothers bones and together they were all buried at Shechem. The father mentioned in Acts 7 would then be the 12 sons of Israel. Stephen seems to say that Abraham bought the land, but Gen 33 say that Jacob did. Abraham purchased the cave at Macpelah. It could well be that Abraham purchased them both and then at a later time Jacob had to buy it again.

Moses

Stephen's opponents accused him of speaking against the law, but repeatedly the nation broke the Law. In the wilderness at Mount Sinai they made an idol and broke the first two laws. Then they adopted foreign idols after they entered the promised land. V.41

Stephen quotes Amos in v.42 to describe the judgment that God "takes his hands off" and permits sinners to wreak their own havoc. In outward form they were worshipping Jehovah, but in their hearts they were worshipping foreign gods. It was not to me that you worshipped these gods." You took along Molech right with you.

God hated these other foreign religions because they were unspeakably obscene in their sexual perversity and temple prostitution, they sacrificed children on their altars. It was basically demon worship and opened the way for godless living. God's law was given to protect the people from the pagan influences around them, so that they could enjoy the blessings of the land from God.

Joshua

David

Solomon

In 51 to 53 Stephen comes to the climax of his speech. The application of what he was saying cut deep into the hearts of the listeners. Man's dead traditions had replaced God's living truth.

It was more than a history lesson it was a refutation of their accusations and an indictment of their own nations sins of proven rejection of God's attempt to reach them in the past. Stephen proved that the entire nation was guilty of far more worse sins than of those he was being accused of.

v.1-8 God of glory. Begins his address and then closes it with v.55 glory of God. And all the time he spoke his face radiated the same glory! Why? Israel as a nation was privileged to have the glory of God as its inheritance Romans 9:4 but the glory of God departed, from the tabernacle first, then the temple later. God's glory came in His son but the nation as a whole rejected him. John 1: "We beheld his glory, of the only begotten full of grace and truth v.14, ...he came to his own and his own did not receive him. V.11

v/56 "Son of Man" To say that he was the Messiah of the Jews was one thing. To claim that he was the son of God was worse but to give Him the title of the Son of Man was more than they could tolerate. To them that meant Jesus was the savior of the whole world. Exekiel's passages uses the term to save all mankind not just the Jews. The loss of exclusiveness was what they feared most. If Jesus was the son of Man then it marked their end of priority and privilege. The truth cut too close to home.

Stephen means crown. Stehanos in Greek. The crown was the remarkable radiance of his face. They would give a stephanos or crown or garland to reward a civic leader or Olympic athlete. What a perfect name to one who stood so tall on his final day. Hughes on saints final words at death p. 101.

On the last day of his life Stephen lived as Christ lived.

Nothing special about the land. God revealed himself to Abraham outside in Mesopotamia. God blessed and provided for Joseph and family in Egypt. The Law was delivered to them in Mt. Sinai and God called that area holy ground. Its not the land that is the special thing. Its not the Law or Moses. The Jews rejected both in his day. Moses told them to look for another prophet for the law could not save Israel. The temple wasn't the special thing. They couldn't say " Surely God is with us look we have the temple. His house is right in our backyard. So Stephen quotes Isaiah 66 "Heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me? Has not my hand made all these things? Gentlemen you think you are in because you have the land the law and the temple. But your wrong that is not what its about.

Stoning somebody to death even somebody as young and healthy as Stephen is not easy. You do not get the job done with the first couple of stones and rocks. And even after you get the man down it is a long hot business. To prepare themselves for the workout, they stripped down to the waist and got somebody to keep an eye on things for them until they were through. The man they go was a fire breathing young arch conservative Jew named Saul who was there because he was in full agreement with what they were doing.

So why did God let this happen? Why do good people suffer? I'm sure the church asked those questions because other had been miraculously saved, freed from prison etc. but not Stephen why? He had been the leader of the new wave of leaders to follow after Jesus. Would their be hope? Don't underestimate the power of God while we overestimate the power of the enemy, God was not finished. He had barely begun. The

persecution of the church caused the believers to scatter across the known world. The church would now be independent as being just another sect of Judaism. His death forced independence of Jerusalem and thrust it out into the Gentile world. His death would be the mighty wind that would blow the seed of the gospel open and spread across the world the multiply by millions. The blood of the martyrs is indeed the seed of the church.

Lessons to learn:

1. Lord does not offer us safety, but he does offer us strength.. Our task is obedience and it may lead to difficulty, but He will give us the power to stand.
2. The Lord works out his purposes through the worst things that happen to us. He is not absent during his difficulties, he uses them to bring us into deeper fellowship with Him

Do I dare trust Christ unreservedly and completely?

Have I accepted the grace so that I can stand strong against evil?

What do people see when they look at my face?