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### **Two-Timing God** **Acts 7:18-43**

I remember as a kid going to the library. Out on the table they had this large oversized book full of pictures taken from LIFE magazine from the last 50 years. These were slices of life from history, culture, sports, and entertainment. All the pictures told a story. One of the pictures I remember was a shot from the back of three people sitting down on a bench. It was of two guys and a girl. They were all dressed up at what looked like a dance. The guy in the middle had his arm around the girl's shoulder at his right and the girl on the right had her arm draped behind the back of the guy in the middle...but the photo showed that she was also holding hands, fingers entwined with the guy on the other side of the middle guy. Anyone who was looking at them from the front face side would assume that this gal and middle guy were the loving couple. That's the way it appeared from the front, but the LIFE magazine photo showed the real story. The gal was two-timing the middle guy...it was obvious her heart was with the guy on the other side.

I thought about that picture as I studied this week's sermon. I thought about the ways I two-time God. The way I want to appear to be fully in love with God. The way I say with my words and my songs that I want to be God's and God's alone...and yet with my eyes and my actions if anyone were taking a photo from my inside, it would reveal that I'm really just a two-timer who is more in love with myself, the stuff of my world, more in love with success, more in love with position, more interested in propping up my pride than I am in being wholly sold out in love with the Savior.

Do you ever two-time God? Does what you do on Friday nights or Tuesday mornings indicate you have been running with another lover

others than God? Maybe you are trying to make life work all on your own strength. Maybe you haven't discovered yet that God is the only one really worth following. Living in two worlds, a foot in each. Maybe God has been trying to reach out to you like a faithful merciful lover and yet you continue to reject Him, continue to deny that He is trying to reach out to you in love. This morning there is a message for you as well.

Turn with me in your Bibles to the book of Acts as we learn some lessons about God. Acts 7 recalls the very last words of the first martyr of the early church. This man Stephen was a man that refused to two time God. Stephen believed that God had done something incredible in Jesus Christ and that Jesus was the promised Messiah who came and completed, fulfilled and in a real sense destroyed the need for the temple system. In chapter seven we find Stephen a man who was filled with the Spirit, a man who had performed many signs and wonders and defended the case of Christ with powerful words. He is on trial before the chief priest and elders, leaders of the Jewish people accused of being against Moses and the Law and God. Stephen stands up and defends himself by giving the council a carefully chosen history lesson of the Hebrew people to make his points very clear that God has always been in the process of making changes in His program. That God's blessing is not limited to the geographical land borders of the nation of Israel nor is God's glory and presence confined to the temple in Jerusalem. The third main point that Stephen makes in his rebuttal-argument/history lesson is that the nation of Israel and especially its "Fathers" have a proven track record of rejecting God's plan and God's messengers... they have continually shown their two-timing attitudes of going behind God's back so that they can run to other lovers.

In the first 9 verses of chapter 7 Stephen recalls the story of how the much revered father of their people Abraham was not any where close to the promised land or temple when God took the initiative and appeared to Abraham in glory. Stephen reminds them that God made

some promises to Abraham that at the time looked impossible, but God came through and provided him with a mighty nation from His offspring when His wife was childless and way past normal bearing years. That God provided a land when he owned not a square foot of it. Faithful is God who promised and He will do it. God promised a Deliverer, a Messiah and He did it in Jesus Christ.

From the Joseph story Stephen reminds them of how the brothers of Josephs, the Patriarchs initially rejected him and tried in vain to snuff out God's purposes. But God's purposes will not be snuffed out and the brothers humbled themselves before Joseph in Egypt the second time after the initial rejection of Joseph. Stephen makes the point that God may often use the one least expected from an out of the way place to accomplish great things for God.

So now we come to the next of characters that Stephen recalls in his rebuttal history lessons to drive home his points to the Jewish council. This was a man named Moses. Stephen spends the most time in his speech with Moses because he was specifically accused of speaking ill of Moses. He begins by assuring them he is respectful of God's hand on Moses, but continues to be very clear that Moses is nowhere close to being on the same level with God Almighty. In the accusations in 6:11 they accuse him first of blaspheming against Moses...and also against God. Then again in 6:14 they accuse Stephen of preaching destruction for all that Moses handed down to them. Stephen in his rebuttal, makes it very clear that the law came not from Moses but from God through Moses. While respectful of Moses, He is not about to put Him on the pedestal of Deity. He makes it clear that Moses is not even worthy to be mentioned on the same level as God.

So lets read through Stephens shortened version of the Moses story and look at what he has included to see what points he is trying to make. (Start reading at v.18-22)

Here is the story to bring us up to speed. 400 years earlier during a world wide famine, Joseph had been placed by God in a very high position in the Egyptian government in order to provide food and protection for his brothers. They all were granted land in Egypt and it became a greenhouse of growth for the sons of Israel and the families or tribes of the brothers grew rapidly. It was a prosperous easy place to live and grow. The families of the sons of Israel grew so much that the Pharaoh who lived 400 years after Joseph started to become nervous about their strength in number, so he enslaved this large group of Hebrews that had kept to themselves. He was so intimidated by their numbers that he tried to have their baby boys slaughtered at birth. Moses was born into such a time. Stephen says in v.20 that God's eye was on him and even saw Moses as lovely. The story is familiar of Moses mother building a little watertight basket. Someone said she was into high finance as she floated a little prophet near the bank of the Nile. The princess drew him out of the water and took him into the palace where he was educated in the finest schools of the land. V.22 says that He was not only educated in all the learning of the Egyptians, but he was a powerful man in the things he did and the words he used. He was the rising cream of Egyptian leadership.

Then when he was approaching 40 years old, about my age 6 months to go. Moses goes for a walk down in the Hebrew section of town. He sees the oppression of his people and specifically watches an Egyptian man mistreating one of his Hebrew people. Moses steps into defend, in the process strikes this Egyptian down and kills him. V.25 We see why he was down in the Hebrew section of town. He knew well that God had crafted him to be the deliverer of the Hebrew people. He saw how God had miraculously preserved him and prepared him with all the resources of Egypt at his fingertips, his leadership skills, power, position and thought "I'm the man...it's obvious" and he SUPPOSED that the

Hebrew people also understood that God was going to use him to deliver them. But v.25 ...they did not get it.

Very next say v.26 Moses takes another walk down to the Hebrew section and this time he sees a couple of Hebrew men fighting with each other. He decides to use his peacemaking skills and steps into intervene. He approaches them and says, "Hey, guys why are you beating up on each other? Don't you get beat on enough from the Egyptians? But, The Hebrews are not interested in listening to him and reject his attempts to stop the fight. One of them actually walks over to Moses and gives him a shove and says, "Who made you ruler over us? What are you going to do about it? Are you going to kill me like you did that Egyptian guy yesterday? The word of his murder got out fast. It's tough to bury your sin in the sand. It seems a toe always sticks out somewhere. No doubt the Pharaoh saw the threat of Moses trying to lead a rebellion of Hebrews and put out a warrant for his arrest. In the face of his failed attempts to deliver, Moses fled into the desert.

What are some lessons we can learn from Moses so far? One lesson is that trying to do God's work in our own way will end in failure. Moses was convinced of what God wanted him to do. He saw that God had crafted him as the one who would lead the people out of slavery. Moses saw all the knowledge and power and position and influence. He looked at the strong arm of his own flesh and decided that must be the way to deliver. He attempted to deliver in his own strength and failed.

This was a message to the council as well as us today. The council prided themselves on their knowledge and power and influence and resources. They flexed their muscles to get their own way...but trying to do it apart from God only ends in failure. I think Stephen wanted to remind the council that yes, Moses was a great child of God and God's hand was upon him, but remember, Moses was a complete failure for the first 80 years of his life. When he tried to exercise all the wisdom of the Egyptians and acted upon the basis of human knowledge and all the

resources he possessed, he fell flat on his face. When he tried to be the hero and instead he became a murderer and had to flee. He tried to be a deliverer and instead became a refugee. Moses failed when he acted out in the strength of his own flesh instead of the strength of faith in Almighty God. That is the lesson of dependence and humility that Moses needed to learn before he could be used greatly by God. So out went Moses to God's leadership boot camp in the desert.

We pause to ask ourselves. Am I simply relying on my own strength? Is God trying to teach me something right now? Might I be in a desert boot camp where God is preparing me for something he wants me to be doing for him? Am I teachable in this desert? You or I may be incredibly gifted and oozing with talent, but God will not be able to use us until our hearts are molded into a faith dependence on him. Until Moses acted in faith, he was a very talented failure. Is it your ministry or Gods? Are you teachable or stiff-necked? Are you proud or humble? Have you decided you've already arrived and frustrated that others around don't get it? Maybe its you that doesn't get it. Maybe its you that is too talented for your own good.

I think the Stephen was hoping the council who loved Moses so much would start to see themselves in his failures. I think Stephen wanted to drive the point home that God is the only one worth following and when you try to do God-sized work in your own strength you will fail miserably on your face. I think Stephen was saying to these council people. "You want to follow Moses? Then look what he did. Moses failed when he strutted about trying to flex his own power and walked by his own eyes and educated mind. But then God appeared v.30 and when God appeared and empowered Moses and taught him the true source of strength and authority...he could start becoming a victor instead of a victim. It took God another 40 years out in the desert before Moses was teachable enough to listen to God. It wasn't until 80 that God trusted

him enough to appear to him...how long is it going to take us before we stop trusting in our own strength and start listening in faith to God?

When men and women and boys and girls begin to act in faith toward God, they can have all the power of an omnipotent God behind them and they can be ready to do God sized tasks.

So God appears to Moses in a burning bush on Mt. Sinai, interesting that would be the same mountain where God provides him with the ten commandments. It says in v.30 that an angel of the Lord appeared and we know that angel is the Lord as we hear that God speaks to Moses from the bush and burns but is not consumed. V.31 Moses saw, he marveled and he approached for a closer look. God's voice identified himself, "I am the God of your fathers" Response, "Moses shook with fear" Moses is not even worthy to stand in the presence of God. "Take off your shoes God says" for this place is a holy place." What point is Stephen making here that is a common thread throughout his speech? A place is holy only because God is present and land out in the middle of the desert can be holy because God is holy and God is there. You don't have to go to the holy land to have holy ground. You don't have to go to the holy temple to be in the holy presence of God. Where ever God is...is holy. This is the climax of the story of Moses as God says he has seen the oppression of his people, heard their groans and God says, "I have come to deliver them." God is going to deliver so he is going to send Moses to Egypt.

Now you would think in any complete Moses story they wouldn't leave out some of the best parts. Moses confronting the Pharaoh. Moses and the miracle staff and plagues of destruction. Moses and the parting the red sea. Moses leading out the millions in triumph. There is only a short mention of all the exciting parts in v.36. It's largely ignored in his story. What does he mention next? Look at v.35 He repeats the rejection phrase from v.27. This Moses whom they disowned and rejected as a Deliverer. Stephen is ramming home the point that Moses is God'

messenger and yet he was rejected by the Hebrew people. Stephen takes it even further in v.37 quoting Moses who said to the people of Israel, "God shall raise up for you a prophet like me from your brethren." He is talking about Jesus the Messiah whom these chief priest and leaders have rejected just like their fathers rejected Moses. The Sanhedrin had those same rejection, rebellion attitudes as the early Hebrew fathers. Stephen doesn't want them to miss the connection between Moses and Jesus.

Stephen doesn't stop there. Look at v.39 "and OUR FATHERS were unwilling to be obedient to him, but repudiated him and in their heart turned back to Egypt." God's messenger Moses was rejected even after the miraculous exodus and release from Egypt. Even after they had seen the red sea parted and the entire Egyptian army toasted by God. Even after they follow clear direction from God by a daytime cloud and a nighttime pillar of fire. Even after they are sustained by food in the form of manna, their hearts are still unwilling to be obedient and still they longed for the leeks and onions and garlic of Egypt. Still they wanted to go back to Egypt. Their hearts were two-timing God as they wanted to worship the idols of Egypt. Almost unbelievable isn't it.

God has continually sent messengers of truth and yet there is a proven track record of rejection. We rip on the Israelites and Stephen wants to wake up the pious Sanhedrin to the blindness of their own disobedience and rejection. But ask yourself. How have I rejected God's merciful presentations of truth to me. How has God been merciful to me in providing direction, truth and guidance and yet I've rejected it? He's given us direct clear guidance from the Bible and yet we don't even read it. He has given us a church family to worship with and challenge each others to faith and yet we grouse and complain and rip each other down and question each others motives and spiritual level of maturity. Some of us have been given a great gift from God in a family that loves God and yet we just sneer at it and say big deal. We turn on a knob of this box in

our cars and any time of the day here someone preach the word of God. Some of us have Moms' praying for us Dads who read God's word to us, Grandparents who model us God's truth. Neighbors who are living by the book and yet we still are disobedient to God. We have so much more than the Israelites ever had. God has been so merciful in continuing to present his truth to us...and yet we still reject it??? How have you rejected God's truth?

v. 40 Stephen reminds the Council that the fathers in the desert made substitute gods, v.41 they made a golden calve made with their hands. They went back to worshipping the stars of Rompha and pagan god Moloch. They made all these sacrifices for 40 years out in the wilderness, but it was not to God v.42. God says you were two timing me the whole time. Acted like you had your arm around me. Acted on the front of things that you were my one and only and yet you were holding hands with the evil one behind my back. In outward form you were worshipping God but in your hearts you were worshipping Moleck. And that is basically demon worship and it leads to godless living. God sent the living oracles, the Law so that you could live well in the land and enjoy fully the blessings of the law and you would be protected from the evil around you but you rejected it. So this led God to send them into captivity again in Babylon v.43.

You will not two time God. You will not use religion to manipulate God. God is not yours alone to put into your box for God cannot be put into a box. Look at your history people of Isreal. If you want to remember your history you would remember that God's presence is not confined to a geographic place, or temple or certain nationality. God is constantly moving in mercy to get the truth to us. You have a proven track record of rejecting God's continual attempts to get through to you. Don't miss it now. For just as you rejected Moses you are now rejecting the Messiah that Moses predicted. Just as your fathers were two timing God by

longing for the pagan idols while pretending to worship God. You are doing the same thing. And God is not pleased.

Ask yourself this morning. How am I two-timing God? In what ways am I trying to appear on the outside as a good follower of Christ, but in reality you know you are two timing God on Friday night. You dress up with a Christian smile on Sunday morning, but on Tuesday morning you are worshipping a different god at work. On Thursday evening you sit in front of a different God. More concerned with entertainment then holiness. More concerned with feeding your sensual pleasure then righteousness. More concerned with catering to self then to obeying God. More concerned with popularity and acceptance and fitting in then doing what it right. More concerned with making money and getting ahead, no matter who you have to step on to get there. More concerned with filling up your garage with toys and tools, filling up your closet with clothes then filling your minds with the excellent things of God. That is two timing God. So my question this morning is this. Where am I going to stop two timing God this week? Where am I going to decide that I will only have eyes for Him and Him alone?