



The Acts of the Spirit

GATHERING THE CHURCH

ACTS 7:54-8:1

"THE STONING"

SEPTEMBER 24, 2023

CONTEXT

The Book of Acts is the theological history of the church. In the previous weeks, we explored how God's people (the church) have become where heaven and earth meet. The church is multiplying rapidly, and with it, opposition from the outside and obstacles from within. Despite the opposition, the apostles resolve to continue preaching about new life in Jesus and radically meeting people's needs.

But the church is now at a critical junction long foretold; God's rescue mission is expanding beyond the Jews to the whole world as he commanded. But everyone is adjusting to the reality that it's time for that plan to unfold. Last week, we examined Stephen's loving challenge to the religious leaders to let go of their idolatrous attempts to manipulate of God and to receive instead the joy that comes through worshiping God through His son Jesus. This week, we look at the leader's response.

SERMON SUMMARY

Pastor Jeff taught us that Stephen, filled with the Spirit, clearly saw Jesus for who he was. Knowing Him precisely as he is allowed Stephen, in the face of murderous hate, to live with an otherworldly:

Faith-filled **CONFIDENCE** in the face of opposition
Sacrificial **LOVE** in the face of violent hate
Eternal **HOPE** in the face of death

Mirroring Jesus's life and death, Stephen's sacrifice and prayer produced fruit, contributing to the conversion of Saul and the expansion of the Gospel as we know it today.

Practically, this passage challenges us to fix our eyes on Jesus clearly and regularly so that we, too, can offer otherworldly confidence, hope, and sacrificial love to the world.



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This document can be used for either personal or group reflection.

Group facilitator: you do not need to ask every question but can select the best ones for your group dynamic.

DISCUSSION

Expand Our Awareness

The Religious leaders and Stephen both looked to heaven but saw different things. One saw God as he was represented in Jesus; the others saw a figment of their creation. For Stephen, seeing Jesus clearly fueled him to replicate what we saw. Likewise, what the leaders visualized about God dictated their behavior.

- What do you believe the leaders saw when they pictured God, and how did it dictate their behavior?

Last week, we explored the religious leader's temptation to repeat the mistakes of their fathers.

- How might their skewed view of God be influenced by what was modeled by their forefathers?

Extract the Truth

Read Acts 7:54-8:1a

Conversely, Stephen, born again by the Holy Spirit, was led to replicate what he saw in his Savior Jesus. Following what was modeled for Him, Stephen was empowered to live with otherworldly, faith, hope, and love.

- Based on the text, where do you see evidence of Stephen's Spirit-filled:
 - Confidence
 - Hope
 - Sacrificial Hope
- Based on how Jesus is revealed in the scripture, what did Stephen see when he looked to Him and directed his behavior?



Explore Your Experience

Visualization is a tool that fuels behavioral change in powerful ways. What we think about something will dictate our behavior, both positively or negatively. To cement and change our spiritual thoughts and behaviors, we must examine what we visualize about our God and replace it with accurate expectations.

- What experiences or influences in your life have positively and negatively shaped your view of God?
- Currently, when you visualize standing face-to-face with Jesus, what do you:
 - See?
 - Feel?
 - Experience?

How do those expectations about what Jesus is like influence your behavior?

Is there anything you visualize about Jesus that is contrary to who he has revealed himself to be through the scriptures?

How might that be hindering your relationship with him?

How that may that be showing up in your life?

Experience Transformation

Seeking to follow Stephen as he followed Christ, let us seek to transform our hearts and minds through application.

- What obstacles are you currently facing in your life that are zapping your:
 - Faith/Confidence?
 - Eternal Hope?
 - Sacrificial love?
- Visualize talking to Jesus about that obstacle, what would that experience be like based on how he has revealed himself in the scriptures?
 - What do you think he would say?
 - What do you think he would encourage you with?
 - What do you think he would challenge you?
 - What do you think he would want you to change about how you visualize him?
 - After calling to mind these thoughts, how do you feel about those obstacles?



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Engage the World

- Regarding heavenly confidence, hope, and love, which one do you feel most prompted to pursue in your life currently?
- What needs to change about your view of Jesus that would help fuel those efforts?
- What is one small way you want to demonstrate that quality this week, and towards whom?

Prayer

Pray for one another's:

- Right view of God
- To be filled with the power of the Holy Spirit
- To receive confidence, hope, and love from God, so you can demonstrate it to the world.



**PREPARE FOR
NEXT WEEK:**

Read Acts 8:1-8