



The Acts of the Spirit

GATHERING THE CHURCH

ACTS 7:1-53

"THE SPEECH"

SEPTEMBER 17, 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. 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.

SERMON SUMMARY

Pastor Joey preached on Stephen's pivotal speech to the Jewish religious leaders. Stephen warned them not to act like their fathers who rejected God through the prophets. He warned them that they are...

- Attempting to confine God to their man-made structures (The Temple)
- Attempting to manipulate and control God through bargaining (The Law)
- Attempting to eliminate anyone who challenges their idolatry (Murdering Jesus/Prophets)
- Rejecting God and his salvation offered through his son Jesus

Stephen's speech was meant to explain to the Jewish leaders their folly and appeal to the Greeks for the validity of Jesus' deity. For us, it is meant to shake us awake from our own temptation to manipulate God and confine him to our structures. Specifically, to avoid acting like our spiritual fathers, we must open our hearts to God and experience new life with Him and His people.



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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

Pastor Joey explained that we all can be accused of "acting like our fathers." This phrase means that we often display the habits, qualities, and mannerisms of our family of origin. This usually happens subconsciously and instinctually.

- Why do you believe it is common to recreate our parents' habits, mannerisms, and decisions?
- How have you seen your parent's behaviors reincarnated in your life?

Pastor Joey explained that humanity's shared heritage is idolatry, which is when we elevate something to the position of God to get what we want from it. We will use any means necessary, even religious systems and institutions, to try to control/manipulate God. This is how we all "act like our fathers."

- Why do you believe we all are tempted to control/manipulate God?
- How have you experienced this temptation in your life?

Extract the Truth & Explore Your Experience

Read Acts 7:1-53 (If time allows)

Religion has always been a tool for control and manipulation. Stephen wanted them to see this truth so they could be free from the lineage of their fathers. Stephen was demonstrating real love for these leaders by appealing to them with the following truths:

The temple was a place to worship God for a salvation he had ALREADY brought, not a place that contained God.

The Law was meant to point them to the messiah, not a formula to procure God's favor and blessing.

God's interaction with his people has always been pointing them to the new life the messiah would bring, not subjugating him to their expectations.

God's people are His dwelling place through Jesus. Therefore, when we gather, we do so to receive and rejoice, not negotiate or manipulate.



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- What do you believe made it so hard for these leaders to hear Stephen's message?
- Why do you believe they felt the need to control or manipulate God instead of worshiping and rejoicing in Him?
- What do you believe the religious leaders truly wanted that only faith in Jesus could provide?
- Stephen highlighted many Jewish fathers who lived by faith, including Moses. Why do you think it was important for the early church to see these faith fathers as a part of their faith history?

Explore Your Experience

When it comes to control and manipulation, they can often be symptoms of fear. When we are afraid, we are tempted to subconsciously use manipulative strategies to get what we want from scenarios or people. Let's dig into understanding these topics to avoid "acting like our fathers."

- Why do you believe control/manipulation are a symptom of fear?
- When have you noticed fear cause you to try to control and manipulate others?
- In those situations, what are you truly afraid of? (i.e., loss, pain, neglect, danger, exposure, not having the good life, helplessness etc.)
- What are you looking for in those situations that only God can provide?

Experience Transformation

Pastor Joey said that we can imitate the good in our fathers or the bad; the choice is up to us. We can blindly recreate the bad or consciously cultivate the good. Let's call to mind the changes we want to make...

- At the end of your life, what do you want to be true of your faith? Or what do you want others to remember you by?
- How does fear leading to control/manipulation keep you from living that out?
- What is one thing you can do this week to move from fearful manipulation to genuine peace in your new life in Jesus?

Pray

End by praying for one another's:

- Fears, repentance for manipulating, & rejoice in the gift of new life in Jesus



**PREPARE FOR
NEXT WEEK:**

Read Acts 7:1-53