



GROW AT HOME

DAY 45

READ

ACTS 7

REFLECTION from PASTOR DOYLE SURRATT

My devotional today is found in the sixth and seventh chapters of Acts and it's the story of Stephen. He was one of those chosen to help administer the affairs of the Early Church--which initially involved primarily caring for the widows. However, his life took an unexpected turn when some folks got jealous (or at least zealous). Let's start with what we know about him as a person in order to evaluate and learn from his life. Given the outcome, it might be counterintuitive to suggest that he was a huge success, but I think he was. You can evaluate for yourself.

We can learn a lot about Stephen from this passage: he was a Godly man and he was a man full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom (which were the qualifications (Acts 6:3) for the position he was appointed to). Those same attributes are ascribed to him in Acts 6:10 when his opposers try to argue with him. He is also said to be full of faith, the Holy Spirit, and (in verses 5 & 8) grace and power. He was also powerful in the Holy Spirit--as we see in verse 8 when he did great signs and wonders. He was gentle, which is my word for what 6:15 says--when they looked at his face it was like an angel. In other words there was a calm and a confidence that can only come from the strong work of God in your life. And as we read on we find that he was incredibly brave: when confronted by the authorities, he didn't back down but patiently explained who Jesus was and showed them that they were sinners just as the forefathers had been. He boldly pointed out they were in opposition to God's purposes and were guilty of killing His Son. Pretty brave stuff!

So we have a man who is very respected, spiritually strong, supernaturally powerful (or more accurately was a conduit of God's power), calm in the face of great danger, very brave and (if we read to the end of chapter 7) unbelievably forgiving. This sounds like a great person, maybe someone we would aspire to be, right? So what does all of this get him? Dead! That's right! They stoned him to death. They arrested him--at which time he tried to convince them, not of his own innocence (too trivial a subject for such an opportunity), but of the truth of the Gospel of Jesus. The reaction of the religious leaders was that of an angry mob: they dragged him out and threw rocks at him until he was dead. Dramatic, horrible, sad, a waste of such a good man...or was it? I think conventional wisdom would not say that Stephen was very successful. Maybe he could have been had he been given the chance but... But maybe we could not settle for conventional wisdom so often. Let's take a look from another perspective.

What if this isn't all there is? I mean, what if this short time we are given in this life is just the beginning and that we were created for a greater purpose that could last for all eternity? Maybe we, like the author of Ecclesiastes, could realize that conventional wisdom is often just "under the sun" thinking. It's leaving God and forever out of the equation. If we were to evaluate St. Stephen's life (or even our own) in light of His plan and His timeline we might define success differently--more accurately. What if we looked at Stephen's martyrdom as sad, but not a waste. Nothing is wasted in God's economy if we are a part of His Kingdom!

Let me show you three things that prove that his life was a success. First of all, we know from Acts 7:56 & 59 that he is in Heaven. The greatest hope for every one of us is to go to heaven someday. A few years ago a Pastor friend of mine died (way too young if you ask me) and one of the first thoughts I had was good for you, you made it! You ran the race God set out for you, and now you are receiving your reward (and probably some new assignments). Getting to Heaven = success. Another way Stephen was a success is in the fact that we are reading about, being inspired by, and learning from him still today. He made history! I just hope that a few people will remember me for a generation or so after I'm gone...but a couple thousand years? That's a big deal! Making history for being a good (Godly) man = success. And finally St. Stephen left behind quite a legacy. In Acts 7:58 we read that they "...dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul." That's right Saul--who later converted and became the great Apostle Paul, author of much of the New Testament--was there that day to hear and see what a fully devoted follower of Jesus looked like. You never know who is watching your spiritual journey. Influencing others for Christ = success.



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REFLECTION from PASTOR DOYLE SURRETT (CONT'D)

So quickly, what can we learn? What questions should we be asking ourselves?

QUESTIONS

- AM I GOING TO HEAVEN? FOR SURE? HOW DO I KNOW? WHAT AM I GOING DO ABOUT IT IF I'M NOT SURE?
- AM I SERVING GOD'S PURPOSE FOR ME WHILE I'M HERE ON EARTH IN THIS LIFE?
- IF I'M NOT HOW DO I GET STARTED?
- AM I LEAVING A SPIRITUAL LEGACY ANYWHERE IN MY LIFE? WHO AM I INFLUENCING INTENTIONALLY OR OTHERWISE?

DAILY DEVOTION