

## 12-6-20 Courage to Carry On

### Acts 6:8-15

When put into a tough situation, how do you respond?

Have you ever heard the expression, having your mettle tested?

Mettle is the courage to carry on. If someone wants to "test your mettle," they want to see if you have the heart to follow through when the going gets tough.

"The Courage to Carry on" It can also be called a gut check. Do your words match what you truly believe when the bullets start flying? How will you respond?

I am sure all have met individuals that talk the talk, but when life smacks them in the teeth, they crumble.

I have never had the honor of serving in the military, but I am sure those that have can testify of having seen this play out.

I can tell you from coaching and playing different sports, you will have your mettle tested. When you come in as the top dog or when you are down huge in a game, do you give up or rise up?

Don't we see it everyday in life? We are encouraged when we see someone stand up for what is right or for an injustice and not fold. We are encouraged when someone is dealt a blow and they continue, blessing others as they go. It's ok to reel back after an initial hit, but do you have the courage to get back into the fight?

We see Courage to Carry on in the early church. When their mettle was tested, they continued to live for Jesus. The initial hit might wobble them, but they would get their legs back under them and keep pressing forward.

Last week we saw how God used people to fix a problem in the church. They selected 7 men that met the requirements the Apostles laid out. We are going to read how one of these 7 men would have their mettle tested. Stephan had the Courage to Carry on.

Stephen's life as a follower of Jesus was like a meteor flying through the night sky – very brief, but brilliant and bright; powerful and spectacular. Some might say his life ended way too soon. He didn't have a great position of power; he wasn't an apostle or even a pastor. He was simply a follower of Jesus who had been captivated by the good news of His salvation. And even though his life was short, God used his brief time as a disciple of Jesus to produce earth-changing results.

#### I. The CHARACTER He Possessed.

- **Read verse 8**
- Now from the previous verses we studied last week and from the verses before us today, there are several aspects of Stephens's character worth noting. Now the way I want to mark these is by a repeated word that's used in verse 3, verse 5, and verse 8.
- Repeated words or phrases are of great importance in biblical interpretation.

- The word “full” is repeated 3 times. The word means to be completely controlled or possessed by something. When you say, for example, “Someone is filled with rage or filled with anger or filled with jealousy or filled with joy or filled with love,” you mean that is a dominating emotion.
- That is a dominating force in the person’s life. It’s a consuming thing in their life; It has complete control. Well, there are five specific things that Luke remarks Stephen is full of, five things that make up his character. I want us to consider each of them for a moment.

#### **A. Full of the SPIRIT**

- We see this trait mentioned twice. This is really the one from which the next four flow. The Holy Spirit is the controlling and all-encompassing source of his life and ministry. He is controlled by the indwelling presence of the third person of the trinity.
- What does being full of the Spirit look like? We know from the apostle Paul that it results in encouraging one another with praise songs.

**Ephesians 5:18-21, “And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, 19 addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, 20 giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, 21 submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.” ESV**

- Stephan lived out the fruit of the spirit, **Galatians 5:22, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law”**
- Full of the Holy Spirit begins with submission and obedience to God’s Word and Will for your life. Seeking His direction.

#### **B. Full of WISDOM**

- **Acts 6:3, “full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom,”**
- It’s one thing to be intelligent; it’s an altogether different thing to be wise. It’s one thing to have an education; it’s another thing to have wisdom.
- It’s one thing to possess common sense; another thing to possess wisdom.
- Stephen was full of wisdom because he was full of the Holy Spirit. In fact, he was so full of wisdom that he confounds those who are questioning him. He’s so full of wisdom that **verse 10 (Read)** says.
- This display of wisdom took place in different Jewish synagogues around Jerusalem. Luke lists what appears to be 4 different, unique synagogues that had it out for Stephen. Look at **verse 9**.
- We learn from history there were as many as 500 synagogues in Jerusalem at the time of the early church. All you needed was 10 adult men and a Rabbi to start a synagogue, so there were many synagogues in Jerusalem. And you notice, these synagogues were created based on

hometowns. Those who were from Alexandria met in one synagogue, those from Cyrene met in another.

- Luke also mentions Cilicia. Cilicia was a Roman province. And guess what the capital city of Cilicia was - Tarsus. Who was from Tarsus? Saul, Saul of Tarsus. **(Acts 21:39)**
- We too should focus on being people of wisdom. Wisdom is the application of the Bible. Being able to apply it to our own life, strive to live it out. Memorizing and knowing the Bible is the beginning of wisdom, applying it in your life and knowing how to apply it in the lives of someone else, humbly is the second part to God's wisdom.
- All of us are or have been spiritually deficient (held back) in our walk with Jesus. Unfortunately, too many have stayed spiritually deficient. If you can't hear wisdom from others, you will end up lacking it.

### C. Full of FAITH

- Verse five and eight says that: Stephen, a man full of faith...
- It means to have a confident belief and assurance in the truth. He is filled with faith, controlled by his faith, his confident belief in the truth.
- In **chapter 7** Luke records Stephen's address before the Sanhedrin. It's the longest speech recorded in the book of Acts; longer than any Peter's sermons and speeches; longer than Paul's address to king Agrippa. Stephen's speech before the Sanhedrin in **chapter 7** is the longest speech in the history book of the NT. Stephen believed, he had faith in the Scriptures. He quotes the Scripture extensively and leans on them. Stephen demonstrates being obedient, full of the spirit, filled with wisdom and faith.
- He also had faith in a God who was in control of history; he believed in the sovereignty of God - not random chance or circumstance. He also believed that Jesus was the Messiah of God, redeemer of lost sinners who put their hope in him.
- Are we full of faith? Do we confidently believe that God's Word is the Truth? Are we full of faith or do we live as it's a book of suggestions? Are we controlled by our faith? God says in our heart to do this, do we do it, or just ignore it?

### D. Full of GRACE

- In some translations verse 8 says, full of grace...
- Stephen overflowed with grace. The congregation must have known him as a gracious person, a very loving person. That's probably why they chose him to serve widows.
- Stephen's grace was put on display for us all to be reminded. Go to **Acts 7:59-60**.
- What kind of tenderheartedness is this? No anger, no vengeance, no violence, no retaliation. This is grace. Even toward those who are killing him in a fury of rage, he could be gracious

because he was full of the Holy Spirit. He could be gracious because he was full of wisdom. He could be gracious because he was full of faith. This kind of grace is a product of his belief system.

- Wow! When Jesus showed grace, it was easier to explain away, he's God, of course he can do grace, it's what he does. Stephen though, wow, he elevated the bar, showed us that we are without excuse.

#### E. Full of POWER

- **Verse 8**
- This too is a product of the indwelling Holy Spirit. In fact, **verse 8** describes him as a conduit of supernatural power in that he was being used by God to perform signs and wonders.
- I would remind you; Stephen is not an apostle. Stephen is not a pastor or elder or prophet. He is a servant in the church. But just because he doesn't hold those titles of spiritual authority in the church doesn't mean he can't be used by God in powerful ways. The power of God flowed through him and he was a conduit of supernatural ministry.
- Every born-again believer has the same Holy Spirit indwelling them. I would say we just aren't as committed and sold out.

#### The CHARACTER He Possessed...

##### II. The COMPLAINTS He Addressed

- **Read verses 9-14**
- **"We have heard him speak blasphemous words..."**
- Luke describes this conspiracy with a few phrases. In **verse 11** it says, they secretly induced men to drum up these charges of blasphemy against him. In **verse 12** it says, and they stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes against Stephen. In **verse 13** it says Stephen was before the Sanhedrin and they set up false witnesses to speak against him.
- This was a multi-layered, multi-pronged, well-orchestrated, perfectly executed conspiracy to get rid of Stephen. Sounds familiar doesn't it. Sounds like what happened with Jesus.
- What was their accusation? What were the charges they brought against Stephen? They charged Stephen with blasphemy. They charged him with blasphemy in four different areas.
- Four serious charges for the Jews against Stephen. Blasphemy against Moses, against God, against the temple, and against the law.
- Well, their entire case rests on a single sentence of their testimony. It's in **verse 14: "for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and will change the customs which Moses delivered to us."**
- Their entire case rests on this one sentence.
- I don't think there's any doubt that Stephen actually said these words - or something very similar to these words. Why? Because Jesus said something very similar to these words.

- They used the charge of blasphemy against Jesus. Mocking him about saying he would destroy the temple and build it back up in three days.

**John 2:19-22, “Jesus answered and said to them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” 20 Then the Jews said, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?” 21 But He was speaking of the temple of His body. 22 Therefore, when He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this to them; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said.”**

- Now what did Jesus mean? Did he simply mean that he would die and then rise again—his body would be destroyed and then raised up in three days? If that's all that he meant, then why did he refer to himself as the temple? And why would he say words like this in the temple itself, knowing that most people would take him to refer to the temple building and all that goes on there?
- I think the answer is that for those who had ears to hear, and for those who thought this through after his resurrection (like Stephen did!).
- Jesus meant: When I die, the temple dies. When I am destroyed, the temple is destroyed. This whole system—all these sacrifices, all this blood flowing to make atonement for sins, all this priestly activity surrounding the holy place where God's presence dwells—it all ends when I die. You destroy me and in dying I destroy the temple. And here's the BIG truth from this statement that led to the charges of blasphemy.
- The death of Jesus REPLACES everything that happened in the TEMPLE.
- That's the bigger implication of that statement. By Jesus dying, the purpose and function of the temple dies.
- Why do you think that at the very moment when Jesus breathed his last breath, at the very moment of his death, the curtain in the temple was torn in two from top to bottom? It was a token of destruction. The walls were coming down. Jesus himself was taking the place of everything in the temple.
- **Hebrews 7** says that Jesus became our one and only high priest who lives forever to make intercession for us. The temple priesthood was "destroyed." All the Jewish priests in Jerusalem were out of a job.
- Jesus offered himself and his own blood once for all to make an eternal redemption (**Hebrews 9:12, 25–28; 10:10–12**). So, all the animal sacrifices of the temple are "destroyed."
- When Jesus said, "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up," was that he himself was taking the place of the temple—by dying for sin once for all, and by rising from the dead to reign as the everlasting priest and Lord of glory.
- When I die, the temple system dies. And when I rise, I am the temple. I am the sacrifice for sins. I am the priest and go-between with God. I am the presence and radiance of his glory. The usefulness and function of the Jewish temple is completed.
- And this is what Stephen was preaching. This is what Stephen was proclaiming in the synagogues. And apparently, he was having some impact with his preaching. **Acts 6:7, “...and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith.”**

- Stephen was preaching the gospel and as they begin to understand the implications of the death of Jesus; they realize the temple was only a foreshadowing of the completed work of the messiah Jesus, the obvious conclusion for them was: "I don't have to offer sacrifices anymore.
- When Jesus, the true Son, the true light of the world, rose on that third day - there was no more need for the temple. There was no more need for this artificial light that really couldn't take care of the darkness in the world. The temple was only a dim reflection of the true reality. Jesus replaced EVERYTHING that the temple stood for.
- What glorious, transforming truth. But it was this truth that was the source of the complaints that were brought against Stephen. He had the Courage to Carry on.
- When you are being persecuted because of the TRUTH, what will you do?
- The Truth is still the same today. Jesus came and replaced EVERYTHING, our hope is found in him and nothing else.

### III. The COUNTANCE He Expressed

- **Read verse 15**
- They are accusing him of blasphemy. They're calling him evil. They're saying he is denouncing God and Moses, and he is standing there looking angelic. What a rebuke to his accusers.
- Stephen is standing before the council and he looked like he has transcended above it all. All his power in the Holy Spirit, all of his wisdom in the Holy Spirit, all of his grace in the Holy Spirit, all of his faith, all of it came out on his face. He looked angelic.
- Only once in all the revelatory history has God ever put His glory on the face of a man. That's in **Exodus 33**, and He put it on the face of Moses. After Moses saw the glory of God in **Exodus 33 and 34** and came down, his face was shining. He was reflecting somehow the glory of God. For a moment, God allowed Moses to reflect His glory. That's the only time that's happened in the whole Old Testament.
- Here in the New Testament, while the Jews are accusing Stephen of being a blasphemer of Moses, God puts a glow on his face. He stands, as Moses did before his people in shining purity with the mark of divine favor on his face.
- I won't pretend to act like I fully understand all that took place here, but I do know it came across as divine presence and divine approval. They were damning him as a blasphemer, and he had the face of an angel.

### Conclusion

God is still looking for men and women who reflect the glory of God through their trust in the finished work of Christ.

**For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to give strong support to those whose heart is blameless toward him. 2 Chronicles 16:9**

May I suggest to you that God is still looking for men and women like Stephen? Those who behold the glory of the Lord in Jesus; those who can serve Him in His church, who can be chosen out of the thousands, who have demonstrated the character of a Stephen, full of faith, full of grace, full of the Holy Spirit, full of wisdom and power.

God is still looking for people who have courage without limit, who have boldness without bounds. God will demonstrate His glory on the face of those people; perhaps not visibly, but in the calm, peaceful, tranquil, almost transcendent trust that comes through in the most hateful and violent circumstances; people that are able to live their life in Christ. God is still looking for His people to display courage to carry on.

Last Thought: **CONFIDENT trust in Christ produces COURAGEOUS living through Christ.**