

# The Old-Time Evangelistic News

Evangelist W. Paul Redmond Sr.

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Stephen: The Man who was Faithful to the End (Part 10)

Acts 6-7

Last month we concluded with a few comments on The Reminder about Stephen found in verse 55. Why is that found at the end of the account? We can only speculate as to why, but I think there may be several reasons. One is to combat any thought that Stephen was in the flesh as he preached his message to this crowd. As we have seen, Stephen was very direct in his message and his application. Just knowing what people are like, I am sure that many would say that Stephen was just mad and in the flesh. No one would really preach like that. Contrary to the modern philosophy of preaching that is abounding in our Independent, Fundamental churches, a man full of the Holy Ghost will preach just like Stephen. He will be direct and confrontational. In truth, there is no other way to preach. To do otherwise is to contradict Stephen's example, as well as the models of preaching that Jesus, John the Baptist, Peter, and Paul did. A true, Spirit-filled preacher will be direct toward his audience.

Perhaps another reason the statement is made is to remind us that being full of the Holy Ghost will not exempt us from the attacks of the devil and his followers. Charismatics and others teach that if one is following God and filled with the Holy Ghost, then everything will be wonderful. They say there will be no sickness in our life, and our pocketbooks will be full. Stephen's example alone refutes such false teaching, let alone the examples of the other apostles in Acts. He was full of the Holy Ghost, and yet bad things happened in his life. Again, this is the second time that Stephen is directly said to be full of the Holy Ghost, and another time it is given as a qualification which Stephen fulfills. So, three out of the five times you find this phrase, it is about Stephen. Yet, Stephen is about to die. Surely, he did something wrong. But right before his death, the Holy Ghost led

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Luke to insert the clause, "*But he, being full of the Holy Ghost.*" Stephen was as right with God as possible. He was full (under the complete control) of the Holy Ghost. He was not living in sin by committing adultery or any other gross sin; he was not angry with his fellow man; nor was there any other sin that we could mention that Stephen was guilty of. He was absolutely right with God—he was full of the Holy Ghost, and yet humanly speaking, everything was going wrong. The audience was about to kill him. But we are reminded—he was full of the Holy Ghost.

Friends, we must remember that being full of the Holy Ghost and serving God is the greatest thing that we can do. It will bring the greatest joy possible on the face of this earth, but that does not mean that there will not be difficult times. It does not mean that everyone will receive the Gospel with an open heart. It does not mean that we will always have good health and lots of money. There will be hard times for the believer, even the believer that is full of the Holy Ghost. In fact, I have said it before and will say it again, being full of the Holy Ghost may mean that times will be worse than you have ever experienced. Just remember Stephen, the apostles here in this part of Acts, Paul later in Acts, and believers down through the centuries. Many died while faithfully serving God, yea, while being filled with the Spirit. Do not let the troubles that may come hinder you from being full of the Holy Ghost. May we be like Stephen by living and ending our lives full of the Holy Ghost.

Another thought about why the phrase is found here leads into the third part of Stephen being Faithful in His Departure. Being full of the Holy Ghost will allow you to see and experience things that others will never experience. Stephen, while full of the Holy Ghost, "*looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God.*" This is what I call The Reception. Stephen saw what no one else had ever seen. He saw Jesus standing to receive him into Heaven. It is very important to pay attention to the fact that Jesus is standing. In six other passages where Christ is mentioned being in Heaven, He is always said to be

seated. Several of these passages are in Hebrews. The meaning there is significant. In the Old Testament tabernacle and temple, there was no seat anywhere. The reason was that the priest's work was never done. There were always sacrifices to perform. The priest had to offer his own sacrifice, and then he had to offer the sacrifices for the people. Three times a year, there were sacrifices offered for the entire nation. The altar of burnt offering was in constant use. There was never a chance to sit down.

However, when Jesus died on Calvary and offered His own body and blood for the sins of the whole world, it was the final sacrifice. He said on the cross, "*It is finished*" (John 19:30). Never again would anyone else have to offer another bullock, goat, sheep, or turtledove. Jesus Himself would not have to offer anything else, nor would He have to offer His own body and blood. The sacrifice of Himself paid for the salvation of the whole world for all of eternity. Therefore, when He entered Heaven, He sat down on the right hand of the Father in complete contrast to the priesthood of Aaron. They were never finished with sacrifices, but Jesus was finished with His. They still had work to do, but Jesus' work was completed on the cross. The sitting down of Christ is a beautiful picture of the completed work of Christ. His work is done, therefore He is seated.

But here in Acts 7:55-56, Christ is standing. Verse 55 records what Stephen saw, and in verse 56, Stephen tells the angry mob what he sees. It is a glorious scene. The Savior, whose work is done, shows His respect for His faithful servant. I cannot say that Jesus does this for every faithful believer, but He might. I know that right here, He is standing to receive Stephen into Heaven. For the faithful, Spirit-filled believer, there are things that he sees that no one else can or will see. It might be a mighty answer to prayer. It could be a miraculous provision. It could be Jesus standing up when you enter Heaven. I cannot tell you for sure what you might see, but it will be something that the carnal believer will not see.

Think about some other faithful servants who saw some amazing

things. Joshua saw the sun stand still. Jehoshaphat saw an army defeated without lifting a sword. Elijah and Elisha saw meals provided in terrible famines. Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah saw the Son of God in a fiery furnace. Daniel escaped the mouths of lions. On and on, we could go. Great things will be seen by God's faithful, Spirit-filled believers. Do you want to see Jesus in amazing ways? Then you must be full of the Holy Ghost and faithful to God!

There is a fourth part in Stephen's departure. It is found in verses 57 and 58. It is The Resolution. The crowd had been angry with Stephen from the beginning. They could not stand his preaching and tried to stop him with arguments. When that failed, they brought him to the council, the Jewish high court. When that failed to silence him, they were so mad that they began to gnash on him. Then he says that he sees Jesus. The men have had enough. Like a boiling pot left on the fire will flow over the sides, so these men lost all control of rational thinking. They were supposed to have a reasonable, controlled trial. That has long since disappeared. After the trial, the sentence was supposed to be carried out with decency and in order. Their anger and hatred of Stephen would eliminate any order. In their thinking, he has embarrassed them and called them murderers and rejecters of God's leading. They will show him. If he will not stop, then they will stop him.

Verses 57 and 58 say, "*Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, And cast him out of the city, and stoned him.*" These grown men, normally respectable, religious leaders, are acting like spoiled brats. They are crying out, perhaps to stop anyone else from hearing anything else that Stephen may say. They then take Stephen out to the place of execution and stone him to death. This was the Jewish form of capital punishment. A few months earlier, they testified to Pilate that they did not have the authority to execute anyone, but now they are so enraged that they do not care. Stephen cannot be stopped any other way, so they will kill him.

Before the stones take his life, Stephen utters The Request. He says, *Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.*” Here is a man, as stones are being hurled at him, who begs God not to hold the men responsible for their actions. His request is very similar to Jesus’ statement on the cross: *“Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do”* (Luke 23:34). How could Stephen respond with such grace and kindness? It all goes back to what we have seen stated about Stephen in three different verses. He was full of the Holy Ghost. There is no other explanation. You and I will act and speak differently, and we will do so in impossible circumstances—but only when we are completely dominated by the Holy Ghost.

Stephen is a great Bible character, and one that we should try to imitate as much as possible. He did not have success as most people think. Three thousand were not converted in one message as with Peter. He did not start churches in many different cities as Paul did. His ministry was limited to one city and was incredibly short. But he was faithful to the end. Whatever we may face, wherever we may go, may we be faithful to the end like Stephen.