

Acts 6:8-15 Fit for the Master's Use!

Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. 2 Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. 3 Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; 4 but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word." 5 And the saying pleased the whole multitude. And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch, 6 whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them.

7 Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith. 8 And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people. 9 Then there arose some from what is called the Synagogue of the Freedmen (Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and those from Cilicia and Asia), disputing with Stephen. 10 And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke. 11 Then they secretly induced men to say, "We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God." 12 And they stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes; and they came upon him, seized him, and brought him to the council. 13 They also set up false witnesses who said, "This man does not cease to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the law; 14 for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs which Moses delivered to us." 15 And all who sat in the council, looking steadfastly at him, saw his face as the face of an angel.

The Master tool convention got off to a rough start

Brother Hammer was appointed to preside over the Convention. But Brother Screwdriver objected, saying "*Brother Hammer, you're too noisy to preside over this meeting. You're always driving home your*

point, always nailing people. I call for your resignation immediately.

Brother Hammer responded "*Well, what about you, Brother Screwdriver? All you ever do is spin around in circles.*" -not getting anywhere

"That may be true, said Brother Screwdriver, but at least I'm not like Brother Plane. His work is so surface, so shallow. What right does he have to even be here?"

"If you're going to kick me out, protested Brother Plane, what about Brother Ruler? He thinks he's always right, measuring everyone else by his standards"

"Well, if you're going to come down on me, argued Brother Ruler, what about Brother Plier? He needs to get a grip!"

Brother Plier responded "*At least I don't rub people the wrong way, as he looked directly at Brother Sandpaper.*

Just then the Master Craftsman walked in.

A)And, as He used each tool at the perfect time, in the perfect way, He created an object of great beauty.

B)The body of Christ can be a lot like those tools in the tool shop - many different tools - Many different parts -

1)Sometimes we focus on how we are different - rather than what we have in Common.

C)But the beauty of the Body of Christ is when Jesus comes and starts using all the different tools as he sees fit

1)In his hands - we all find our place and purpose - and he uses each one of us despite and differences and diversity to make something of beauty.

D)And when we the various tools yield ourselves to Jesus the Master craftsman and respect and appreciate each other

1)Jesus is able to do great things through flawed people

The early church is a great example of that.

A)Starts with this group of guys who during Jesus earthly ministry were always looking down on one another

B) Group of guys who were all jockeying for position and striving to be the greatest in Jesus' eyes.

C) A group of guys who all forsook Jesus on the night of his arrest/Peter denies that He even knew Jesus 3X

D) But 40 days after the Resurrection this group is baptized in the Holy Spirit and - suddenly everything changes -

Now they are working as a unit

A) The Lord is adding to the church - everyone is catching the same heart -

B) All things in common - what is mine is your mentality

C) God is doing this beautiful thing - and a heart of what can I give, what can I do, and how can I help 1) permeated the life of the church for several years.

Mentioned this last week - by the time we get to Acts Ch. 6 we are several years in to the life of the early church - now 10k people strong

A) We see a new attitude emerges -

B) Suddenly the mood changes from - what can I give and how can I help - to we don't have enough.

C) We saw last week as we looked at the first 7 verses of Chapter 6

1) **Complaint arose** - Murmur - came to the attention of the Apostles

D) We saw that the apostles did something brilliant here.

E) They said our calling and priority is this: We know this is our place in the body - **given to the word and prayer**

1) Priority on serving the spiritual food -

F) Choose 7 men who can be put over the serving - or the ministry of the physical food.

One thing I didn't note last week that I think is worth noting - is this:

A) By not trying to take care of this need themselves

Aa) The Apostles were allowing for other men to be raised up in the body - which is a mark of excellent leadership.

B) See if certain people in the body are insisting on doing everything -

1) they end up hindering others from being used
Hinder others from developing and using their gifts

C) So these 7 men were chosen/ - this introduced to us what would become the office of the Deacon in the church

Paul the apostle would later write about Deacons and Elders in 1 Timothy and Titus.

A) What is the difference?

B) Elders serve the Body in spiritual matters - Teaching, Counseling, Discipleship -

1) they handle the word of God - The Apostles were Elders

C) Deacons serve the body in practical matters -

1) example in our text - these guys were chosen to oversee the daily distribution of the food

This was a very important practical matter that needed to be dealt with

A) But if the apostles tried to take this on

B) it would have hindered them from their priority of focusing on the spiritual matters -

1) The word and prayer -

C) And what we read in V.7 of the word spreading probably would not have happened.

So it was wise and appropriate for the Apostles to open the door for these other men to be raised up and given an opportunity.

A) So seven are chosen - we noted in our study last time the criteria for these seven men

B) Seven men from among them - in church -

- 1) Good Reputation - Proven Character
- 2) Full of the Holy Spirit - Controlled by ... dependent
- 3) Full of Wisdom -

C) Stephen is the first one mentioned V.6 - he is given his own description

1)He is described as **A man full of faith and the Holy Spirit.**

Today I want us to see 4 things we can learn from Stephen's life

A)#1 Stephen's Fullness - full of faith and the Holy Spirit

B)We noted last time that when the Bible says someone was full of something -

1)means they are controlled by that.

C)Stephen is a man who is being controlled by & led by his faith in Jesus and the Holy Spirit

D)Now we are told in Romans 10:17 **that faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God.**

E)This would indicate that Stephen is a man of the word - **he is a guy who is into soaking up the scriptures -**

1)Probably at every gathering - he just can't get enough.

Sometimes I meet guys who say they want to be Pastors -

A)Tell me about your devotional life - find out they don't have one

B)Rarely see them at Bible study - Someone who is being called into Elder type ministry will be a man of the word.

C)Stephen being full of faith - Tells us he is a man of the word - and we will see that in chapter 7 -

D)He preaches an incredible sermon

1)Gives us insight into the handle he had on the word of God

He was also Full of the Holy Spirit which leads to him being used powerfully V. 8 And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people.

A)The Holy Spirit working through his life is using him in the miraculous

B)So first of all we see Stephen's fullness

#2 Stephen's Faithfulness

A)It is true that God used Stephen in a remarkable way and for a specific purpose as we will see in a few minutes

B)But I want you to note: **It started with him being faithful to wait on tables and oversee the food distribution**

C)Let me remind you - the Book of Acts comprises a period of 30 years in the life of the early church

Now you could sit down this afternoon and read the whole book of Acts in an hour

A)Wow look at all this stuff happening - God is on the move - **every page seems like something amazing is happening**

B)But what we are getting in reading the book of Acts is the highlights of God working in over a 30 yr period

1)No doubt there were many, many - normal days.

C)I point this out because we can read here in V.6 of how Stephen was chosen for this role

1)And two verses later in V.8 he is doing miracles and being used radically by God

D)And it is easy for us to think - this just happened over night -

1)One day he is serving tables and the next day leading crusades

E)I can say with strong conviction - that was not the case

God never works that way: You will not find a guy in the Bible where God works that way.

A)There is always a training process -

B) there is always a time where the person is proven by being faithful in the little things

C)It is true that Stephen ends up being used in a radical way.

1)But it is only after he responds to this invitation to serve in a practical way.

D)What if Stephen responded the way I have seen other guys respond when asked to help out in a practical way.

1)Pastor Rob I am not called to wait on tables, serve in the parking lot - help stack chairs -

E)Called TO PREACH - LEAD WORSHIP - platform

I can tell you this with the utmost certainty - If Stephen responded like that -

A)Had he turned down the opportunity to be wait on tables

B)He would have never been used in a greater way!

C)His being used by God started with his faithfulness to serve in a practical way.

Notice something here: The next person named in V.6 is Philip -

A)Here is what I find interesting about this group of men -

B)Only Stephen and Philip go on to further ministry.

C)It would seem that both of them would move into ministry that would be more Elder like.

D)We see the beginning of that in Stephen's life here in Ch 6 and the entirety of Ch 7 is devoted to him

E)And a great part of chapter 8 in the story of the book of Acts is given to the story of Philip.

True: Stephen and Philip go on to further ministry that went beyond the overseeing of the distribution of food.

A)But these other 5 men who are chosen here - nothing else is known about them in the scriptures

B)It is quite possible this is the only role they filled in the life of the church.

C)Here is why I bring this up. - When it comes to these other 5 men -

D)If all they did was be faithful to serve tables make sure the widows were being taken care of -
1)**That is ok! - AWESOME**

E)THEY WERE FAITHFUL TO THEIR CALLING - AWESOME!

I love the men and women who serve our church in practical ways.

A)I am so appreciative of their hearts, their service and commitment

B)When I was pastoring in Oregon - the Lord used a friend in our church to help **me really see the value of the Deacons in our church**

C)We were Mobile church 4 yrs - Every Sunday - Wednesday - set up

1)Did some big events - amazing faithful group of guys.

As the church was growing - need for more Elders. Disciple/ counsel

A)A few of the guys -I thought had potential for this - I had spent time discipling them

B)First opportunity - no follow through -

1)My lunch with Dale - complaining – Let Deacons Deek - Pray for Elders

C)These guys in our church were faithful and amazing Deacons -

1)so good at the practical things - many of them are still there

D)and for most of them - haven't moved further into any other ministry

E)But They are being faithful to the one thing God has put into their hands

What about me? What about you?

A)Listen God calls us His stewards in this life.

B)God puts things into your hands to take care of just like Adam and Eve

C)Kids - steward of your kids - Resources steward of your resources

1)Gifts and talents - steward of those things too.

D)IN the church - gives us opportunities to serve him - greeter - Parking lot - Door keeper - Ushers

1)Coffee shop - Keeper of the grounds - Set up teams

E)Turned our Sanctuary over 5 days in 5 days in this past week.

Maybe God has given you the opportunity to lead a circle group

A)Oversee a home group, men's study group - women's study group -

B)Youth leader or counselor - Sunday School teacher

C)God gives you that opportunity and there is one thing that he is looking for. **Faithfulness** 1 Cor. 4:2

1)Be faithful with what I have put into your hands

C)Now in the story of the book of Acts and the history of the church -

1)There is **no indication** that these other 5 guys were not faithful stewards of that ministry. -

D)Every indication is these guys were faithful to their call. **God takes notice of faithfulness**

So why were Stephen and Philip given further ministry? - Listen it was their Calling.

A)God had a plan for them that went beyond waiting on tables -

B)But it doesn't mean they were better or more faithful

C)It was all about Calling -

1)God had a different calling for these two guys than the other 5 guys chosen

I point this out: Because there is a misconception in the church - that is based on A principle we see in scripture:

A)**Faithful in the little things exalted to greater things**

B)Many people in ministry have taken that to mean - Always Bigger ministry or more people.

C)Amongst Pastors - Bigger church/ bigger platform

D)If you are faithful God is going to turn your church into a mega church

Did you know the average church in the United states is only 80 people in size.

A)The average CC is only about 150 people.

B)I know some guys who are Pastoring churches that are under 200 people

1)They are great Pastors faithful Pastors - amazing Bible teachers

C)But their churches have never grown more than 200 people

1)Sad thing is they can sometimes feel like a failure

D)Because our world tends to only recognize the mega church pastors

1)Sad indictment on us -

E)But God sees their faithfulness -

And he sometimes rewards their faithfulness with more influence in their community

A)He rewards their faithfulness to serve people in a way that most mega church Pastors never get to.

B)And I believe Jesus will reward the faithfulness of those Pastors in a great way in HEAVEN

C)See all Jesus is interested in is are we being faithful with what he has put into their hands

1)Are you being faithful with what God has given you to steward?

D)Stephen and Philip moved on to different types of ministry not because that they were better -

1)but because it was their calling

#3 Stephen's Special Calling

A)God is going give Stephen further influence because he has a specific call on Stephens life that involves reaching a specific person

⁹ Then there arose some from what is called the Synagogue of the Freedmen (Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and those from Cilicia and Asia), disputing with Stephen.

B)the Synagogue of the Freedmen?

1)What was that?

C)Jerusalem, the temple was the central place of worship

1)Sacrifices were done there. Priests worked there. Enormous amount of activity was there.

D)But when the people of Israel were taken captive into Babylon - **since they were far from home and the temple**

1)They built these secondary places of worship - Synagogues

Over time the Synagogues were built all over the middle East as well as in Israel - as places to come and study the word - worship

A)They were sort of like the local church in a community

B)The Talmud tells-us that at this time, there were 390 synagogues in Jerusalem alone.

C)And very much like the local church today-

1)Each synagogue had its own flavor, its own kind of emphasis, own style

One such Synagogue was the one mentioned here the synagogue of the Freedmen

A)The synagogue of the Freedmen was comprised of ex-slaves, freed slaves, or the family members of freed slaves,

B)Which is why it was called the synagogue of the Freedmen

C)We know from history that Pompey, the general of the Romans, took an enormous amount of different people from North Africa and Asia Minor

1)as his personal slaves in the city of Rome.

D)They eventually were freed in Rome, and a lot of them, who were Jewish, made their way here back to Jerusalem.

1)They established a synagogue.

Notice in V.9 our text told there were people there from, Cyrene, (North Africa) Alexandria, (Egypt) and also from Cilicia.

A)Now there is someone in the story of God's moving in the book of Acts who was from Cilicia -

B)Saul of Tarsus....become Paul

C)This Synagogue of the freed men was probably the synagogue he attended.

1)Even though he was not a former slave - Saul of Tarsus was a Roman citizen - but he probably was drawn to this group

D)Why is this significant? This is related to Stephen's special calling

We will see next week - that Stephen is going to preach an incredible message to this group and the religious leaders - Sanhedrin

A)We learn that Saul of Tarsus was present for this insightful and challenging message.

B)Turn to chapter 7:54

54 When they heard these things they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with their teeth.

55 But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, 56 and said, "Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!"

57 Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord; 58 and they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul

C)This was the purpose of Stephen's calling - God would use him to impact this young man Saul of Tarsus

1)Chapter 9 **Hard for you to kick against the goads.**

D)The goad was a stick with a sharp point they would use to prick a donkey to get it moving

I believe the goad in Saul's life was the sermon that he heard that day from Stephen- it was pricking his heart

A)There was a conviction of the HS that was happening in his heart - couldn't resist.

B)Some of you are experiencing that right now. Holy Spirit - convicting you of something -

1)Stop resisting that - respond to the Holy Spirit's conviction

Time for you turn to him - or come back to him

C)One more thing to note before we move on:

For all of you who are praying for a bigger impact - more influence

A)Stephen was given a greater impact - But it cost him his life - **It was cost you as well**

B) Maybe not actual death - but there is a pain and a death that does come with greater influence

1) You become a bigger target of the enemy - Be aware of that

C) Wrap up and move toward communion

4th thing we want to note here about Stephen is his Shinning.

¹⁰ And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke.

¹¹ Then they secretly induced men to say, "We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God."

A) They bring false accusations against him - if you have ever been the victim of that you know how painful that can be

B) Stephen will respond to all of these false accusations in ch.7 see next week

C) Start with False accusations against Moses and God

¹² And they stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes; and they came upon *him*, seized him, and brought *him* to the council. ¹³ They also set up false witnesses who said, "This man does not cease to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the law; ¹⁴ for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs which Moses delivered to us." ¹⁵ And all who sat in the council, looking steadfastly at him, saw his face as the face of an angel.

The people are throwing mud on him - But God is causing Stephen to shine

A) One of my friends Nate Holdridge has a podcast called the Jesus Famous podcast

B) Love that title - and heart - Ministry is not about making ourselves famous -

C) Making Jesus famous! - Simply Jesus - All about Him

Stephen was so captivated by Jesus - so caught up in the study of Jesus and his connection to the Word.

A) Stephen's message next week -

B) Everything in their history was pointing to the salvation that would come through Jesus

C) Stephen is radiating the glory of God

D) App to us: In 2 Cor chapter 3 Paul the apostle is talking about the time when Moses - before God

E) Face glowed - had to put on a veil to be around the people -

F) He was radiating from being in God's presence

And Paul said the same thing can happen to us when we spend time in the word seeking to behold Jesus - see Jesus

¹⁸ But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord 2 Corinthians 3:18

A) Catch that: When you get into the word of God to spend time seeing Jesus beholding Jesus -

B) A transformation takes place - You begin to shine -

C) You and I become those lights shining in the darkness -

Stephen was a man of the word

A) And as he is sharing the word - he begins to radiate - the glory of the Lord

B) One last thing before we rap up today - Move toward communion

C) One of the things they were accusing Stephen of was this:

1) They were accusing him of saying that Jesus said he would destroy the temple

D) Jesus never said that: He never said he himself was going to destroy the temple

E) This is what he said: ¹⁹ 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. John 2:19-22

Jesus allowed the temple of his body to be destroyed to make us a body - His body the body of Christ

A) And Jesus allowed his perfect sinless blood to be shed - in order to connect us by blood.

B) Blood related - Justified and saved from the wrath of God by His Blood - “ (Romans 5:9)

C) We have redemption and receive forgiveness because of his blood. (Ephesians 1:7)

D) We are brought near to God and brought into relationship with one another - through the blood (Ephesians 2:13)

E) We need to celebrate and cherish that connection - BLOOD RELATED

F) JEUS GAVE HIS BODY - TO MAKE US A BODY!

But the church right now in the USA resembles the tools at the tool convention

A) More divided than ever - people calling each other out over political ideologies

B) Differences of opinion on non-essential matters - I think it breaks our Lord's heart

C) We need to stop it - be careful in our convictions and opinions we don't ostracize whole parts of our body

D) We need to come under - Jesus - respect our differences -

This focus today - we partake of communion

A) His body given - make us His Bride - body

B) His blood shed - blood related - connected