

## **ACTS 6:8-15**

### **Stephen Was That Dude**

On January 5 of 2021 my father, Tommy Little, entered the hospital due to Covid concerns. Unfortunately, he would never be discharged. After a two-month long struggle at Texas Health hospital in Fort Worth, TX, my father ultimately succumbed to a series of embolic strokes while on a ventilator and under heavy sedation.

As devastated as I was at the time of his passing, I knew I had to pull myself together... because I very much wanted to speak at my dad's funeral. And the reason I felt so strongly about doing so is because I had to say on public record what our family, our family's friends, and all the other mourners who had gathered that day already knew.... I wanted to tell the world that my dad... he was that dude. And I did. I went on to tell of how my dad had earned the trust, respect, and admiration of so many, and how we was an incredible husband to my mother, and the very best father to my siblings and I.

I know its typical at a funeral to embellish the earthly accomplishments of an individual, but I wasn't embellishing. As I went on and on gushing about my dad I can tell you that I meant every single word. A year and a

half later, I can, even now, tell you with wholehearted sincerity that my dad was that dude.

He was awesome. He was strong. He was confident. He was patient. He was kind. He was wise. He was full of integrity. He was loving. He had that thing about him where everyone around him respected him and wanted to be like him. He was an awesome man.

But, regardless of how wonderful my dad was, I had to stand in front of all those people and tell them the truth that day... and the truth is... and lets not get it twisted... my dad wasn't Jesus. As incredible as he was, and despite all the adulation he rightly received at his funeral... he wasn't born miraculously of a virgin. He wasn't God with us.. in the flesh. He wasn't sinless and spotless. He didn't die a sacrificial death for the atonement and propitiation of our sins. He {my dad} was not our Redeemer. He wasn't Jesus.

Nor was he John the Baptist, of whom Jesus said "of all the men born of a woman none is greater". So I told the hearers that day... as I honored my earthly father...  
**JESUS HE WAS NOT. NOR WAS HE JOHN THE BAPTIST. BUT HE WAS THAT DUDE.**

Jesus he was not. Nor was he John the Baptist. But he was that dude. I think the same thing can be said about the

man featured in today's text. Today, we will continue our study through the Book of Acts by looking at the second half of Acts chapter 6... starting in verse 8. Today's text is really just a brief biographical portrait of one of the baddest dudes that ever walked the earth, in my humble opinion. Let's read the text and then let's talk a little about the man named Stephen.

<sup>8</sup> Now Stephen, full of grace and power, was performing great wonders and signs among the people. <sup>9</sup> Opposition arose, however, from some members of the Freedmen's Synagogue, composed of both Cyrenians and Alexandrians, and some from Cilicia and Asia, and they began to argue with Stephen. <sup>10</sup> But they were unable to stand up against his wisdom and the Spirit by whom he was speaking.

<sup>11</sup> Then they secretly persuaded some men to say, "We heard him speaking blasphemous words against Moses and God." <sup>12</sup> They stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes; so they came, seized him, and took him to the Sanhedrin. <sup>13</sup> There they also presented false witnesses who said, "This man never stops speaking against this holy place and the law. <sup>14</sup> For we heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs that Moses handed down to us." <sup>15</sup> And all who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at him and saw that his face was like the face of an angel.

Ok, like I said, today's text is a brief biographical portrait of the the man named Stephen.

What do we know about Stephen?

Well, from last week's text, where we were first introduced to Stephen, we learn that he was the first deacon chosen for service and that he was a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit " In today's text, and in particular verse 8, we learn that he was a man full of grace and power.

So not only was Stephen a man who was filled with the Holy Spirit... but this being filled with the Holy Spirit manifested itself through Stephen in remarkable ways. Verse 8 goes on to say that Stephen was performing great wonders and signs among the people.

What were these wonders and signs? I don't really know. I don't think anyone really knows. The text doesn't say.

But what we do know is that whatever these signs and wonders were, they were impressive enough and disruptive enough to get the attention of the powers that be. Verse 9 tells us that opposition arose -he had some opps - and this opposition was trying to shut down Stephen with some shady tactics.

First, they tried arguing. They wanted to argue. But how do you argue against a man (or woman) that is filled with the Holy Spirit of God, and, as such, is filled with faith, grace, power, and heavenly wisdom.. in abundance?? You can't argue with someone like that. I mean, you can try, but you're gonna take a loss. And we see in the text, that these haters did, indeed, take an "L". Look at verse ten.

<sup>10</sup> But they were unable to stand up against his wisdom and the Spirit by whom he was speaking. {Repeat} They tried arguing with him, but they were unable to stand against his wisdom and the Spirit by whom he spoke! I'm telling you, Stephen was a bad man

So when arguing didn't work, this opposition resorted to some shadier tactics. Look at verse 11...

<sup>11</sup> Then they secretly persuaded some men to say, "We heard him speaking blasphemous words against Moses and God."

So they hired some bad actors to lie on Stephen and bear a false witness against him. They intentionally misrepresented the words and actions of Stephen in hopes that they could turn public opinion against him and ultimately have him arrested. They wanted to shut him up and shut him down so badly that they hired plants to lie on his name. They manipulated the people to foment the

mob because they hated what Stephen was doing and they wanted him canceled.

Unfortunately, this shady approach of public manipulation and false witness worked... at least for the moment, and they were able to incite an angry mob of religious leaders to apprehend Stephen and bring him to the Sanhedrin.

Now you may be wondering what is the Sanhedrin? The Sanhedrin was basically the judicial branch of the Jewish community. It was Hebrew supreme court, if you will, and this Sanhedrin had a wide range of jurisdiction. It was comprised of 71 so-called sages and presided over religious matters, civil matters, and criminal matters.

So these opponents of Stephen formed a militia of sorts and incited a mob to apprehend Stephen and drag him into court to face the Sanhedrin. And, once again, they hired liars to bear false witness against the Spirit-filled man of God...

<sup>13</sup> They also presented false witnesses who said, "This man never stops speaking against this holy place and the law. <sup>14</sup> For we heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs that Moses handed down to us."

Once again, they intentionally misrepresented his message in order to manipulate the Sanhedrin courts into

condemning Stephen to death. Earlier I said they wanted to cancel him. I meant they really wanted to cancel him. Now... When we talk about someone getting canceled today, we often mean that they lose their platform, or lose some sponsorships, or, perhaps, have their Twitter taken away from them. But in Stephen's case, they wanted to all the way cancel him. Like, they wanted to unalive him. They wanted him dead because they couldn't stand against the truth of the Holy Spirit as He worked through Stephen. So they wanted him dead.

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Now, earlier I said that Stephen was one of the baddest dudes that ever walked the planet. Why did I say that? Well, thus far, based on what we've talked about, I would say that his resume is already quite impressive. He was the first deacon chosen, and the sacred text says that he was chosen because he was known to be a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit. That's quite a reputation to have. Furthermore, we've learned that he had Holy Spirit power that manifested through signs and wonders. And then, perhaps most impressive, he had such wisdom and skill in debate that his haters stopped arguing with him because they ended up looking stupid every time. So it's a pretty good resume.

But what if I told you we haven't even got to the best parts yet??!!

Ok, to quickly summarize and set the scene here...

Stephen was an awesome man of God and was performing many wonders in the Name of Jesus. And his haters were dead set on putting a stop to Stephen's ministry. And when debate didn't work, they lied on his name, falsely arrested him, and drug him into the Hebrew Supreme Court where they hired more liars to falsely accuse him of blasphemy, knowing such an accusation carried with it a sentence of death. So Stephen was there, bound, alone, without an advocate, on the floor of the highest Jewish court, at the mercy of the tribunal, listening to these paid actors tell lie after lie after lie. And he knew if the 71 sages that made up this high court were to believe these lies, death was a certainty for him.

If that were you, would you be shook?

So there was Stephen, facing his haters, and facing their lies, and facing a court with all the jurisdiction it needed to end his ministry and end his life... How do you think Stephen handled this?

Well, of course, Stephen was shook...right?.. no? Ok, so, Stephen wildly torqued his body in attempt to free himself of the chains that bound him and kept him there? No. So

Stephen desperately defended his honor and plead his case to controvert the lies they were telling on his name? Nah, uhuh.

Look at verse 15 <sup>15</sup> And all who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at him and saw that his face was like the face of an angel. His face. was like the face. of an angel. HIS FACE WAS LIKE THE FACE OF AN ANGEL. I'm telling ya'll... Stephen was that dude. While facing haters, lies, and a death sentence... Stephen's face was like the face of an angel.

What does that mean, exactly? To be honest, I'm not sure what it means. I don't know from experience what the face of an angel looks like. Most commentators believe that, at minimum, it means his face was glowing... it was shining. Whatever it means, I can tell you this, with certainty. Stephen, as he faced his opposition, as he faced liars, and as he faced a high court that was soon to condemn him to death,..... Stephen was unfazed.

He was unfazed. Stephen was unbothered. Stephen's anxiety level was zero. Stephen had no worries. Stephen had.. no fear. He was calm in the midst of the chaos, confident, and content to be in the very middle of the Will of God. From this place, and from this posture, Stephen would soon go on to preach one of the most powerful sermons ever recorded. We can't really get into that

sermon today. Pastor Valentine will tell you all about it next week, I'm sure. Our assignment for today ends here in verse 15.

Let me read verse fifteen again.

<sup>15</sup> And all who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at him and saw that his face was like the face of an angel.

So what do we do with this? As we look for a personal application from this text, what can we glean? To be honest, I struggled with how to bring this down to a simple application.

I suppose if I were a motivational, self-empowerment-type preacher I could get really cute with this text and tell you something about how you're always going to have haters, and that when the opps start hating you, it's not so much you that they hate. It's really Jesus and the Holy Spirit in you that they're hating on. So you can just dismiss the haters 'cause they're just jealous of what you got. They're jealous of God's favor on your life and they see you as a threat because you are so awesome. Man. if I were that type of preacher I could really gas you up... But I'm not. I can't say all of that to you with a straight face.

Here's why... First, I know those things are true about Stephen because the Bible says so. I know that Stephen

was that dude. He was filled with the Holy Spirit, and wise beyond measure, and it was, for certain, his Christ-centered message about Jesus that provoked the ire of his haters. I know that Stephen's opposition was quite literally and directly God's opposition. So I know those things are true about Stephen. But I don't know those things are true about you. I know, for sure, its not always true about me. Sometimes, when I encounter opposition its not because the haters are jealous or mad because I'm a threat. Sometimes its because I'm just wrong... or I'm acting out of character.

Sometimes, when people hate us, or oppose us, sometimes... it's because we suck as humans. You know what I mean? Our sin and our imperfection is real. We're not always "the good guys". But that's okay! There's grace for that. Jesus died for people who suck at being human so that we can be forgiven, redeemed, and sanctified. So there's grace for that. But I can't stand here and assume that every time we face opposition its because we're right and they're wrong. I can't make you that promise. So I'm not going to go down that path.

I also thought about going down the path of a very literal application... such as... "if you ever find yourself performing incredible signs, and wonders, and miracles, because you're so full of the Holy Spirit that the powers

that he can't even stand it so they go out and hire liars to drag you into the highest of courts to put you on trial for blasphemy,.... when that happens... just sit there and make your face shine 'cause God's got you." But, to be honest, I don't even know how to pull off that type of glow. And it seems unlikely, though not entirely impossible, I suppose, that any of us would ever face that exact scenario.

So what do we do? How do we wrap this up? In all seriousness... I do think there are some things about Stephen that we learn from this brief biography that could help us, or, perhaps, inspire us, to be better disciples.

Remember what I said earlier... Jesus he was not, nor was he John the Baptist... but he was that dude. We're not trying to exalt Stephen to any type of deity, rather, we're looking at him as an exemplary model of a disciple to see how we can grow in our own sanctification.

That said, there are four characteristics about Stephen that I want to briefly discuss in hopes that it will inspire us to be better disciples...

First, consider this... Stephen was a regular guy. He was regular schmegular guy. Meaning, Stephen had no title or status such as apostle or elder or pastor. He wasn't Archbishop Stephen. He was just regular Stephen. We

learned this last week when the guys that did have those titles sought out "regular" men to serve tables... and Stephen was the first one chosen. I think this is important to note and important to remember that you do not have to hold an office or have an elaborate title to do great things for Jesus. Stephen shows us that the Holy Spirit works through regular people to do irregular things. Said another way... The Holy Spirit works through ordinary people to do extraordinary things. Today's text is a brilliant example of that.

**Second, Stephen was Christ-centered.** In his words and actions, Stephen displayed a worldview that placed Jesus Christ in the middle. Stephen was Christ-like, but he wasn't *the* Christ. Stephen was a great man, but he wasn't THE man. And Stephen knew this. Instead of making it all about him, as though he were Jesus, Stephen, rather lived a life that glorified THE MAN... THE GOD MAN Jesus Christ. Stephen sought out the be like Jesus, not to usurp Jesus. To Stephen, Jesus was central. Jesus was preeminent. Stephen's story, his message, the narrative he was preaching, wasn't about him... Stephen wasn't the hero of his own story... it was about Jesus. In theological terms we could say that Stephen was Cristo-centric, or Christ-centered, ..... not man-centered.

Ok, thirdly... Stephen was Spirit-filled. And being filled with the Spirit, he was also filled with grace, and faith, and power, and wisdom. His Spirit-given wisdom was so strong, and so compelling, that his opposition's attacks and the lies of his haters could not stick to him. He was teflon to his haters. Stephen did not quench the Holy Spirit, nor did he suppress the Holy Spirit.. rather he was a man known by those around him to be filled with the Holy Spirit of God.

Lastly, I'll say this about Stephen... he was others-oriented. In keeping with his Christ like-ness, of being like his Savior, Stephen was a servant leader willing to lay down his life for the good of others. This is one of the reasons he is widely known as the first deacon. Stephen gave himself away in service to others so they would be blessed and Jesus' name would be exalted. He was others-oriented.

So, maybe now, after considering these characteristics of Stephen, maybe we feel compelled to ask ourselves a few challenging questions... like...

Is my life centered around Jesus? Do I live a Christ-centered life? Is Jesus the center of my Universe? Or do I tend to insert myself into the middle of my story and make it primarily a story about me? Am I, at heart, a narcissist? Does my story... Does my worldview... place

Jesus in the center? Or am I the sun in my own solar system where everything orbits around me?

Unfortunately, we live in a society today that encourages everyone to be a narcissist... to be "me first" ... to be the center of my world... to look inward to find my happiness.. to know my worth... and to live my truth. If you have been swept up into this me-centered ideology, which, by the way, is easy to do (its very tempting), I'd like to gently and lovingly call you to repentance. I know, by my own experience, there is so much more joy in repenting from me worship and becoming Christ-centered. There is real meaning, and real purpose, and lasting joy. I could go on forever talking about this. I won't though. I'll just ask again, is my life centered around Jesus? Is your life centered around Jesus? Are we Christ-centered people?

Next, let's ask.. Am I filled with the Holy Spirit? Am I a spirit-filled follower of Christ? Am I empowered by the Holy Spirit to do great things? Is my wisdom a true, heavenly, enduring wisdom that is inspired by the Holy Spirit? Or am I more of a self-reliant person with little or no regard for the Holy Spirit within me?

And then, lastly, let's ask... am I "others oriented"? Do I have the posture of a servant? Do I prefer others above myself? Do I lay down my life for others?

Maybe, just maybe, if we become like Stephen, if we grow into disciples who are Christ-centered, Spirit-filled, and others-oriented, maybe we can move like Stephen moved. And when faced with haters, and liars, and judicial oppression... maybe we can glow. Or maybe not, I don't know. I know the promises of God are true. But I also know that the majority of the Books of Acts is descriptive, not prescriptive. And God doesn't promise us that our face will glow when persecution arises. Nor does he promise to deliver us from persecution. In fact, many early believers died as martyrs (just wait til next week), but even in death they were able to glorify Jesus and propagate the Gospel.

So may we be believers, may we be disciples who are Christ-centered, Spirit-filled, and others-oriented, not so that we'll avoid or escape persecution, but so that we will shine when faced with opposition. And so that we will glorify our Savior and promote his Gospel even unto death.