

GROWTH + GROUPS

NAVIGATE LIFE TOGETHER

Maranatha Chapel Sermon Based Study Guide SB 11.01.2020

THE CROWN OF GLORY – ACTS 7

Receiving the Message and Relating to the Study

What insights, principles, or observations stood out to you from this week's message? Discuss with your group.

Stephen was full of the Holy Spirit and fire as he preached the Gospel to this crowd of people who had forgotten their own spiritual heritage. Stephen's address begins with "the Glory of God" and closes with the Glory of God, his face shining! Why? Because Israel was the only Nation privileged to have the Glory of God as part of its inheritance. Sadly, the Glory had departed, first from the Tabernacle and then from the Temple. But God's Glory had now come in His Son, but the Nation rejected Him. Abraham was the founder of the Hebrew nation, and his relationship to God was one of Grace and Faith. Abraham was saved by Grace, through faith, not because of circumcision or law or worshiping in a Temple. The Gospel has never changed; all people are saved by grace through faith not works! Works are the fruit of true faith, not the root! Let's get into our study...

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

1. What struck you most or spoke to you from Pastor Ray's message this last weekend?
2. If you were telling the story of your life, what are three key events you would include?
3. Why did you choose those events? How did they shape who you are today?

Digging Deeper in God's Word: Life Lessons

LOOK BACK AT ACTS 6:3, 8

1. What kind of a person was Stephen? What do you think it would have been like to be around him? Why?
2. Does it encourage you that this great early church leader was not one of the apostles, but a lay person who rose up from within the church? What implications does that have about every Christian's potential significance?

Stephen was a regular guy; he was not one of the early apostles, but one of the men they chose because of his great reputation and spiritual wisdom and insight to lead in the food distribution efforts of the early church. He was clearly well respected, and he was going to have an opportunity to testify to the greatness of the gospel in a way he probably had never imagined.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ACTS 7:1-50

1. To whom was Stephen speaking? Would they be familiar with the Old Testament stories Stephen shared?
2. Do any of the stories Stephen recounted surprise you? Why do you think he chose these stories in particular?
3. What does the fact that Stephen articulated his speech like this tell you about him?
4. What point was he making to the Jewish leaders? What was he leading up to?

Stephen addressed these Jewish leaders with stories that were from their heritage. They were the well-worn

Prepare! in 2020

tales of their past; stories that they had told and retold over and over again. But despite their hearing, they had missed the point of it all. Over and over again in their past, their ancestors had rebelled against their loving God. The same thing had happened in the case of Jesus, and that's what Stephen was getting to.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ ACTS 7:51-53.

1. What charges did he make against the Sanhedrin? What was Stephen saying about Jesus?
2. Was Jesus the type of Messiah the Jews expected? Why or why not?
3. What can we learn about humbly sharing the story of God with others from the way Stephen did it?

Stephen emphasized the prophets and their treatment to underscore that Christ (who was the true prophet) was received in the same manner. Stephen called out the Sanhedrin as responsible for Christ's death. Jesus Christ was not the type of Messiah the Jewish leaders and scribes expected (a conquering king). Instead, He was a humble man who gave Himself up for His people. When we share the story of Jesus with others, we can't back down from the truth, but we must also realize in humility that we too are the sinners for whom Jesus died.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ ACTS 7:54-60.

1. Why do you think the leaders reacted so violently against Stephen? How might humility like Stephen's inspire hatred?
2. What are some similarities between Jesus' death and Stephen's death?
3. What does the way Stephen died show you about what he believed?

After he prayed, Stephen "fell asleep," a softer expression for death. The phrase also expresses the Christians' assurance of resurrection. Stephen died with a vision of His exalted Lord in his mind and immediately stepped into His presence. In the end, Stephen not only testified about the centrality of the gospel; he lived that truth.

Applying God's Word

What did you learn from this study and how does this personally speak to you? Discuss with your group.

Stephen's enemies accused him of speaking against the Law of Moses, but the history of Israel revealed the nation had repeatedly broken the Law. The Nation refused to accept the new truth that God was revealing from age to age. Instead of seeing God's truth as Seed that bears Fruit, the religious leaders embalmed the truth and refused to accept anything new. By the time Jesus came they were so encrusted with tradition that when the Truth of the Power and Presence of God in the person of His Son came with Signs and Wonders they killed their own Messiah! Man's dead traditions had replaced God's Living Word.

1. What sacrifices is God calling you to make right now for the sake of the gospel?
2. Have you ever believed that doing great things for God is the job of the church staff or Christian leaders? What's wrong with believing that?
3. What is one way that Stephen's sacrifice encourages you in your daily life?

PRAYER - Ask God to make you bold for the gospel to the point that you are willing to unashamedly share the message of Jesus with others regardless of the consequences.

"Thus says the Lord: "Heaven is My throne, and earth is My footstool. Where is the house that you will build Me? And where is the place of My rest? For all those things My hand has made, and all those things exist," Says the Lord. "But on this one will I look: On him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word." (Is. 66:1-2)