

Acts Part 17 – Unresistant Wisdom

A sermon series by Pastor Byron Chesney Wednesday, December 30, 2015

† Acts 6:8-15

8 And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people.

9 Then there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called the synagogue of the Libertines, and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and of Asia, disputing with Stephen.

10 And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake.

11 Then they suborned men, which said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and against God.

12 And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council,

13 And set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law:

14 For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us.

15 And all that sat in the council, looking stedfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.

We pick up from where we left off last Wednesday night looking at the calling of 7 men to assist in the duties of the Church, providing for the widows and needy. Of those 7 men the Bible mentions Stephen, whom we said is always mentioned in the Bible as being full of faith, power, spirit, and wisdom.

8 And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people

I notice that the Lord spends a lot of time showing us the character of Stephen. It is his character that causes him to be hated by the Jews. Besides Jesus, Stephen, is the first Christian martyr.

First of all the Bible says that he is “**full of faith.**” Being full of faith is the number one characteristics of great men and women of God. If you read over that great Faith Hall of Fame chapter in Hebrews 11, you will find 17 great men and women from the Old Testament times listed there as having great faith. If Stephen had been living in the Old Testament days, he too would have been in that list.

Not only was he full of faith but he was full of **power.** This power is seen in what the Bible describes as “**great wonders and miracles.**” There is not a list of these wonders and miracles given but one is not needed. It was obvious that they were great, most likely as great as that of the Apostles such as Peter and John. It is enough to get the attention of the religious leaders of that day.

9 Then there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called the synagogue of the Libertines, and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and of Asia, disputing with Stephen.

These Jews that rose up against Stephen were not the same Jews that were always after Peter and John. These Jews were not native to Jerusalem but were living there now. They had their own synagogue where they met. According to Dr. John Lightfoot, there were 480 different synagogues in Jerusalem.

The Bible says that these men were “disputing” with Stephen. Most likely they were asking him questions about Jesus, Christianity, and grace, all things that the Jews rejected. They probably started off asking serious questions trying to understand what Stephen was preaching and teaching but then things got heated and they started arguing with him.

10 And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake.

Obviously everything they asked Stephen about he was able to provide an intelligent answer for and one that they could not dispute. So they lost their argument with Stephen because he had been enabled by the Holy Spirit to speak with great wisdom.

This example from Stephen ought to be a reminder to us as Christians today. When someone starts disputing or questioning our beliefs or our faith, we need to rely upon the Holy Spirit to give us the words to say. Too many times we get into arguments with people and instead of speaking with wisdom we become belligerent and that never helps anyone.

We need to watch how we talk with other people, especially the lost or those of other faiths. Just like it would be very difficult for someone of another faith to convince you that your faith is wrong, the same applies to Christians trying to convince someone of a different faith that theirs is wrong. We have to rely upon the Holy Spirit to give us the proper words to say and the proper attitude to say it in.

11 Then they suborned men, which said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and against God.

Since they were not able to dispute what Stephen was saying the natural reaction of brute beasts is to strike out against him. So they round up some men that they know will lie. There were plenty of them around, just like there are plenty around today. They find them some men who will lie and say that they heard Stephen speak blasphemy against Moses and God. If there were at least 3 witnesses that claimed they heard Stephen speak blasphemy then that was grounds for stoning.

12 And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council,

Then they go around stirring up everyone. No doubt they ran through the streets and the market place spreading their lies against Stephen. People are so eager to believe a lie, just like they are today. People hear one little piece of juicy gossip and they get so worked up they can barely contain themselves. People are depraved. The Bible speaks about people that are depraved over in the Book of **Isaiah 59:7** **Their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed innocent blood: their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity; wasting and destruction are in their paths.**

And just like what happened with Peter and John, Stephen gets detained and brought before the Sanhedrin council.

13 And set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law:

And the lies continue. They claim that Stephen is continually speaking blasphemous words. This time they claim it is against “this holy place, and the law.” They are talking about the Temple and the Laws of Moses.

14 For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us.

We are not told everything that Stephen said while he was disputing with the Jews. He may have mentioned what Jesus had said in **John 2:18-19**: Then answered the Jews and said unto him, What sign shewest thou unto us, seeing that thou doest these things? 19 Jesus answered and said unto them, **Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.**

It is very remenicient of when Jesus was on trial and accused of blasphemy in **Matthew 26:59-66**

59 Now the chief priests, and elders, and all the council, sought false witness against Jesus, to put him to death;

60 But found none: yea, though many false witnesses came, yet found they none.

At the last came two false witnesses,

61 And said, This fellow said, I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days.

62 And the high priest arose, and said unto him, Answerest thou nothing? what is it which these witness against thee?

63 But Jesus held his peace. And the high priest answered and said unto him, I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God.

64 Jesus saith unto him, **Thou hast said: nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.**

65 Then the high priest rent his clothes, saying, He hath spoken blasphemy; what further need have we of witnesses? behold, now ye have heard his blasphemy.

66 What think ye? They answered and said, He is guilty of death.

So, it appears they are trying to do the same thing to Stephen that did to Jesus.

15 And all that sat in the council, looking stedfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.

All eyes are upon Stephen awaiting his defense to the charges. The council sits and stares at him but he isn't acting like a normal prisoner or criminal. There is something very different about Stephen. The Bible says the council "**saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.**"

That is an interesting statement, "**the face of an angel.**" Of course in our modern way of thinking we would assume that his face would have been beautiful to look upon or pleasant to the eye because we have a misconception of the appearance of angels, as we've been studying in our Angels 101 Sermon Series.

I looked through the Bible to try and get a description of an angels face and here is what I found:

Face as it were the sun:

Revelation 10:1: And I saw another mighty angel come down from heaven, clothed with a cloud: and a rainbow was upon his head, and his face was as it were the sun, and his feet as pillars of fire:

Face like lightning:

Daniel 10:4-6: And in the four and twentieth day of the first month, as I was by the side of the great river, which is Hiddekel; 5 Then I lifted up mine eyes, and looked, and behold a certain man clothed in linen, whose loins were girded with fine gold of Uphaz: 6 His body also was like the beryl, **and his face as the appearance of lightning**, and his eyes as lamps of fire, and his arms and his feet like in colour to polished brass, and the voice of his words like the voice of a multitude.

Different faces:

Ezekiel 1:10: As for the likeness of their faces, they four had the face of a man, and the face of a lion, on the right side: and they four had the face of an ox on the left side; they four also had the face of an eagle.

Ezekiel went on to say in **Ezekiel 1:13**: As for the likeness of the living creatures, their appearance was like burning coals of fire, and like the appearance of lamps: it went up and down among the living creatures; and the fire was bright, and out of the fire went forth lightning.

These are the only descriptions of angel faces that I was able to find in the Bible. In every one of them it is mentioned that they were very bright. Remember that angels have been in the presence of the Lord. Anytime we see someone that has been in the presence of the Lord, bright light is mentioned, such as in Moses after he had been in the presence of God:

Exodus 34:29-35: 29 And it came to pass, when Moses came down from mount Sinai with the two tables of testimony in Moses' hand, when he came down from the mount, that Moses wist not that the skin of his face shone while he talked with him. 30 And when Aaron and all the children of Israel saw Moses, behold, the skin of his face shone; and they were afraid to come nigh him.

31 And Moses called unto them; and Aaron and all the rulers of the congregation returned unto him: and Moses talked with them.

32 And afterward all the children of Israel came nigh: and he gave them in commandment all that the LORD had spoken with him in mount Sinai.

33 And till Moses had done speaking with them, he put a vail on his face.

34 But when Moses went in before the LORD to speak with him, he took the vail off, until he came out. And he came out, and spake unto the children of Israel that which he was commanded.

35 And the children of Israel saw the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses' face shone: and Moses put the vail upon his face again, until he went in to speak with him.

Also, on the mount of transfiguration: **Matthew 17:1-2**: And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart, 2 And was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light.

I fully believe that Stephen as he sat there in front of that evil council that was ready to stone him to death, that God shone through his face and gave him a holy appearance of glory such as he did Moses. How this council could possibly go through with what they are going to do to him is unfathomable after looking into his face and seeing the glory of God. But that shows how corrupt and evil they were.

† All Scripture from the Authorized King James Version