

Acts 6:8-15 – Wisdom & Power for Christ’s Kingdom – Sermon Outline

Intro: Wisdom and Power for Christ’s kingdom comes only through study, prayer, and a large faith in God.

Need: We need such wisdom and power for Christ’s kingdom today, asking of it from the Lord in expectant faith.

Theme: When we are full of God’s wisdom and power, we will overcome Christ’s enemies by faith.

1. Stephen, full of faith and power, does great wonders and signs among the people. (8)
2. Synagogue leaders dispute with Stephen’s preaching of Christ, but cannot defeat his wisdom. (9-10)
3. Slandorous charges of blasphemy are brought against Stephen, who visibly glows with God’s anointing. (11-15)

I. Stephen, full of faith and power, does great wonders and signs among the people. (8)

A. Stephen is “full of faith and power” as the 7 chosen were to be “full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom”, 6:3.

1. In 6:5, Stephen was said to be “full of faith and the Holy Spirit”. Christ has filled His people with His Spirit, which gives the gifts/blessings of wisdom, faith, power, and so on.
2. Christ is nourishing His body, His bride the Church, with His life-giving Spirit, to serve Him and overcome all enemies, to seek first His kingdom in true faith, wisdom, and power, by His Spirit.
3. Stephen is filled to do “great wonders and miracles” similar to the Apostles as a testimony to Christ.
4. **Gal. 3:5**, *“Therefore He who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you, does He do it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?”* Christ by His Spirit worked miracles in Stephen.
5. To do great things for God, and to be greatly gifted, you need more than natural giftedness, but fullness of faith/confidence. Ask God to bless you with His Spirit & to have faith to live by the Spirit.
6. Note, Stephen was chosen, not to be an Apostle, but to serve the tables for the neglected widows, and yet, he still had time to do some serious debating and miracle working in his free time!

B. Powerful prayer -- faith that pleads with and appeals to God, who supplies power in answer to prayer.

1. To live and walk by faith such that the Lord hears, responds, and grants the great requests we ask of Him, we must come to Him as faithful children to a loving, gracious, good gift-giving Father.
2. **John 14:13-14**, *“And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name, I will do it.”* **We ask in Christ, as God’s children through Him, and Christ Himself answers, glorifying the Father. So we ask in Christ, for God’s glory.**
3. **1 John 5:14-15**, *“Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.”* **We ask confidently, with faith that He will do what we ask, provided we are asking according to His will.**
 - a. It’s easy to think that asking according to God’s will basically means praying for what God was already planning to do, as if God’s will doesn’t come about through means of righteous prayer.
 - b. God’s sovereignty and fore-ordination of all that comes to pass, includes your faithful prayers and petitions that He commands, and His responding to them out of Fatherly love, mercy, kindness.
 - c. God really does, in response to prayer, do what He would not have done if those prayers were not offered to God. In that sense, His purpose “changes” in response to man’s faithful prayers.
 - d. But did God fore-ordain He would change what He would do in response to those prayers? Yes.
 - e. So the eternal decree does not change, but is fulfilled, through God answering our prayers.
 - f. The same is true of salvation/Gospel preaching: **Rom. 10:14-15**, *“How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent?”*

4. So we pray for what is according to God's will, as God's children in Christ come to our Father who gives good gifts to His children. **We also must pray persistently, repeatedly, continually!**
 5. Luke 11 is very clear on this. Christ first gives the Lord's prayer to His disciples, where we are to pray to the end that God be glorified by His kingdom and will being done, that He give us our daily bread/necessities, for forgiveness of sin, a heart to forgive others, and to resist temptation and be delivered from evil/sin/the evil one, Satan himself.
 6. Christ then gives a parable of persistence, a man who goes to a friend at midnight, needing to borrow 3 loaves of bread. The friend said he and his children are in bed and cannot get the loaves, but the man keeps asking his friend, and because of persistence, he rises and gives all that is needed.
 7. So Christ in Luke 11:9-13 says to keep asking, seeking, and knocking, that a son asks his earthly father for food, and the father gives it, how much more does the heavenly Father give the H.S. to those who ask for it! In Matthew 7 it says the Father gives "good gifts", which of course flow from H.S.
 8. But how can you pray according to God's will and for His glory and Kingdom, if you do not know what God's will is, what glorifies Him, and what the nature of His kingdom is? You must study Scripture!
 9. **James 1:5-8, "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways."**
 10. Even if we ask according to God's will, but come doubting and uncertain, either that it is God's will or that He can/will perform it, we lack true faith, and God will not bless such double-minded doubts.
 11. You may ask one day, and think it wrong the next day, or that you cannot do what you need to do if God would answer your prayer. Why should God bless such prayers? If a son goes to his father and says he'd like a large sum of money to start a restaurant, but then in his prayers doubts if he really knows how to cook or manage people, or if this is really a good idea, would you lend the money?
 12. So be sure you want what you ask God for, and be sure you ask Him to prepare you to be able to handle what He blesses you with. For if you are praying according to God's will, you are praying for things like sanctification, victory over sin, a job to work hard and serve Him, a spouse, children, to encourage or correct someone in need, a building for our church, reformation and revival, etc.
- C. **The disciples with Christ could not heal or cast out demons when they lacked faith. Christ had gifted and commissioned them for that, and yet also told them prayer and fasting were needed to do it.**
1. Even our giftings, whether of word ministry or deed ministry, if they are not steeped in prayer and even prayer with fasting, will have limited effectiveness. God must further bless His own gifts to us!
 2. We reject some of this because of how the Charismatics have twisted these things, but at root, it is true that God answers our prayers powerfully, when we pray faithfully, in His will and for His glory.
 3. I believe many of these Charismatics are not only not praying according to God's will, as if moving mountains was about juggling them in mid-air for fun rather than God being glorified/His kingdom.
 4. But I also believe many of these ask, like Simon the Sorcerer, to boast in themselves, not in God.
 5. Such men need rebuking as Peter gives to Simon in Acts 8, for their souls are in danger.
- D. **Stephen, either directly from God or by the association/laying on of hands from the Apostles, was gifted by the Spirit, and full of faith and wisdom and power, to work mighty miracles and signs before men.**
1. As we have said, the miraculous signs, healings, etc., confirmed the Apostolic message, which was paramount at the beginning of the Apostolic ministry, as it was in Christ's ministry, now Stephen's.
 2. Now that God's Word is completed, we have the testimony/confirmation in the written word of God.

3. But God may still heal or work extraordinary things through the prayers of righteous men. After all, it is in **James 5:13-18** that we are commanded: “Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms. Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit.”
 4. **Matthew Henry** says what Elijah said was not only a word of prophecy but of prayer, “which turned the key of the clouds...” See the power of prayer and truth of God’s word; for He performeth the counsel of his messengers.”
 5. But this prayer was for God’s glory & kingdom, for under wicked King Ahab, Israel had turned to idolatry, and deserved this punishment to draw them to repentance.
 6. We know God doesn’t always answer prayer like this, because it is extra-ordinary, and not always according to His will. But He may grant such extraordinary prayers!
 7. But ordinarily, we must ask for our daily bread, not a bread-making miracle worker multiplying a few loaves and fishes. That is not an ordinary prayer, it is not praying according to God’s will.
 8. The Apostles did not begin praying earnestly that the daily distribution would be resolved by a perpetual miracle where they could turn a few loaves of bread and fishes into millions and millions.
 9. But really they prayed for something greater – 7 men full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom! For the sake of Christ’s Kingdom, that is more glorious and extra-ordinary! And Stephen’s example proves that!
 10. One final note, when you do pray righteously and for wonderful things for Christ’s kingdom, be sure you have on the full armor of God, to resist and overcome Satan’s darts and schemes, especially the shield of faith, as it says in Eph. 6. Stephen, remember, is full of power, wisdom, and faith.
 11. So he boldly targets the enemy, which riles those children of the devil in the synagogue up, to do Satan’s bidding and attack Stephen. Yet he is full of faith to face the martyrdom that awaits him.
 12. The armor of God from the risen Christ is greater than the wiles and sting of sin/death/the devil.
 13. Beeke has a little 80 page book called “The Family at Church: Listening to Sermons and Attending Prayer Meetings” and it is excellent. In the prayer section, he recounts from Scripture and then church history revivals of faithfulness that began in fervent prayer, and even how children, at times as young as 8-9, themselves held prayer meetings together, that led adults to join in with them!
 14. We have seen in Acts the Church before, during, and after Pentecost, waiting for the Lord in prayer.
- II. Synagogue leaders dispute with Stephen’s preaching of Christ, but cannot defeat his wisdom. (9-10)**
- A. Stephen is full of wisdom, a disputer/defender of the faith, an apologist for Christ, mighty in the Word.
 1. Poole tells us the Jews had at least 480 synagogues in Jerusalem alone, which were like schools for the children and those older came there to study, pray, worship, etc. as well.
 2. Different translations and commentators will present this differently – is this one synagogue or several? The Greek is singular, which tips it toward being one synagogue, but isn’t decisive.
 3. The “Libertines or school of the freedman” are likely those Jews who were set free from Roman slavery under Pompey, contrasted from Jews who were never enslaved.

4. In this synagogue were those from various regions, including Cilicia, from which Paul/Saul of Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, hailed. So Paul quite possibly belonged to this synagogue, and indeed was present.
 5. Some even believe Saul/Paul was the one chiefly disputing/opposing Stephen at this time!
 6. We read in Acts 7 and 8, after all, that Saul is present at Stephen's stoning, and approves of it, and then that Saul is chiefly responsible for the first widespread persecution of the Christians, Acts 8:1-3.
 7. If Paul and Stephen were both trained under the wise and revered Gamaliel, as we know Paul was, Acts 22:3, you could see the anger and rivalry, as the wise Stephen defects over to the Christians.
- B. This helps us understand Stephen's wisdom and why the synagogue leaders disputed with him, not the Apostles. They knew Stephen, he was well-trained, and the Apostles were not known for such.
1. In truth, the Apostles and Stephen were well-trained, as they likely as children did learn much at the synagogues, but further, the Apostles in the entirety of Christ's ministry, and Stephen as a disciple of Christ at some point, would have learned from Rabbi Jesus, the Greatest Teacher of all.
 2. Stephen's commission to feed the neglected widows did not preclude him from a ministry in the local synagogues, defending and declaring Christ over against the distorters and deniers of the Truth.
 3. This ministry was something Stephen likely especially trained for and gifted in, perhaps more so than the Apostles, who weren't as familiar with that synagogue, and had a broader commission to take the Gospel all throughout the region, and collectively and along with Paul later, to the ends of the earth.
- C. For these reasons, and the anointing/gifting of the Spirit that Christ gave Stephen to speak the words necessary, that learning and training was made effectual by the Spirit and in Stephens' faith:
1. Stephen had been full of faith and wisdom, that is why he was chosen, so he likely had this ministry at the synagogue already. This probably isn't his first dispute/rodeo with them.
 2. Stephen in his sermon while on trial says in acts 7:22, *"And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and deeds."* Stephen, by natural gifting, learning, and the Spirit, was also mighty in words and deeds, but now for Christ and His kingdom, not the devil.
 3. This transformation of course will eventually take place for Paul as well, but presently he is the great persecutor and enemy of the church, a God-hating Pharisee.
 4. Note, Stephen being learned and gifted was important, but if he had not the Spirit, he would have turned that learning to wicked ends, and if he lacked the fulness of the Spirit, he would have been afraid of these rulers and cowered, or not made a strong defense of the faith before them.
 5. Not any and all Christians are cut out for this. Even some pastors may not be a chief apologist or leader in this way, though they should given their calling, while to the church, likely requires it.
 6. But all Christians, even those not formally taught and trained, if they study the Scriptures diligently, pray fervently, and desire by God's grace to live boldly, will give a faithful and brave answer. Such is the Lord's kindness and gifting of His Spirit to each one of His true children who are walking faithfully.
 7. We are not told directly what Stephen said, but based on the following verses, and his own words in Acts 7, he clearly spoke about Christ in all the Scriptures, that Christ was the true Temple, that the ceremonial law would be abolished because of its fulfilment in Christ, etc.
- D. This also shows us the epicenter of Stephen's learning was around the Scriptures. So should ours.
1. Our learning should not end with the Bible, there is much more we ought to study and know, at least at some level, but it must begin and be particularly in God as revealed in Scripture.
 2. Calvin on this text praises the synagogues and schools and centers of learning, and greatly laments the lack of zeal for it in his own day. He says no one is willing to spend money to educate their kids!
 3. Does this mean the schools were wonderful in his day compared to ours? Not at all.

4. He laments the schools -- *"We ought not be astonished if things are as bad as we see them today. What about all these colleges that make up the universities which people praise so highly? A child could not learn as much evil or become accustomed to as much filth and degradation in a brothel as they would there. Why is that? Because everything there is given over to dissolution and the headmaster fails because things are not regulated according to God's word. Therefore, as children are guided, so will they conduct themselves."*
 5. He also decries the contempt for letters and the sciences among Christians in his day. How much worse is it in our day, when we do not only condemn scientific learning, but disregard Bible learning!
 6. Calvin was highly trained before his conversion, and God used that for his preaching, writing, and disputing skills as a minister. He entered college at 14, studied grammar, rhetoric, logic, arithmetic, astronomy, and music. He then studied for civil law, to be a lawyer. His first book was a commentary on the Roman philosopher Seneca's book *De Clementia*, clemency or showing mercy in judgment.
 7. He, like most all the Reformers and Puritans, were heavily educated, and knew very well Greek, Hebrew, and Latin. **Matthew Henry** studied under *Thomas Doolittle and Thomas Vincent*, who wrote that great expansion on the shorter catechism, and catechized *John Owen* in his youth. Matthew Poole was educated at Cambridge, **Vincent** himself at Oxford. Many were professors/scholars.
 8. The Reformers and Puritans highly valued education for themselves and their children, it was part of covenant nurture and bringing up children who knew God well, and knew the world well to serve Him.
- E. The diligence of the Reformers is also humbling, even if they perhaps went to an extreme at times.
1. **Calvin's** demanding schedule likely lead to his poor health. **John Owen** for several years only allowed himself 4 hours of sleep to pursue his work and studies. **Matthew Poole** rose at 3 or 4 AM and studied til the late afternoon. Many ministers today have similar diligence, and all Christians study.
 2. We do have some good curriculums and homeschool options today, and Elder Booher and I will gladly teach Bible, History, Literature, Greek, Hebrew, Logic, Rhetoric, and more for free to your kids.
 3. But as the Jews had their synagogues, Christians today need their church buildings for worship, fellowship over meals, and classrooms for study of both children and adults.
 4. Paul's instruction to Timothy is a plain, biblical example of sound schooling, even homeschooling by mothers. **2 Tim. 1:5**, Paul urges young Timothy to continue in the faith and the learning he received from his infancy, *"which first dwelt in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice"*.
 5. **2 Tim. 2:1-2**, *"the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also"*.
 6. Paul teaches Timothy, who must teach others, who can also teach others. That's 4 generations.
 7. That's how the Church grows and is perpetuated. That is the basis for Paul telling Timothy to endure hardship as a good soldier of Christ and in Christian warfare to not get entangled with the affairs of this life, in order to please the one who enlisted him as a soldier.
 8. Timothy is a soldier of the Church, a teacher of men, given this calling and gifting at the laying on of hands that Paul had bestowed upon him, **2 Tim. 1:6**.
 9. **2 Tim. 3:14ff.**, Paul urges Timothy, *"Continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus."*
 10. So let us pray to that end, that the Lord would provide for us a church building, for all these purposes.
 11. Surely this is praying according to His will, and for His glory. And let us pray in a persistent faith, knowing the Lord will provide what we ask for, and even above and beyond what we imagine.

12. May it be granted so that we, our children, and our grandchildren will be mighty in the Scriptures, full of faith and the Lord's power, for generations to come, for Christ's kingdom and the good of mankind.

III. Slanderous charges of blasphemy are brought against Stephen, who visibly glows with God's anointing. (11-15)

- A. The tactic of the wicked, if they can't refute you in public debate, is to bring false charges against you.
 1. The charges against Stephen, of being a blasphemer, are similar to the charges against Christ.
 2. As stated before, Stephen likely referred to Christ as the True Temple, and the judgment on the earthly Temple that would come in the year 70. But Stephen honored Moses and the Temple as that which pointed to Christ and the true, heavenly Temple.
 3. Calvin says the Jews here were divorcing "truth from the types", and by that turned Moses and the Temple into idols. Christ worked through Moses, the ceremonial laws and Temple/sacrifices. But they were not Christ, and so to cling to them when Christ the substance has come, is the real blasphemy.
 4. The new covenant is richer, fuller, clearer, and complete, but in comparison to what? To the old covenant administration. So it stands in continuity with the old, and is the growth, outworking, and maturation of it. Otherwise, the Temple and the ceremonial laws meant and signified nothing.
 5. Stephen understood this, as will become all the clearer in Acts 7, as he begins with Abraham, works through to Moses, the law, and the greater prophet Moses pointed to, Christ, and then to David and Solomon's time with the Temple being built, but reminds the Jews that Heaven is God's true throne.
 6. He exclaims they are stiff-necked, uncircumcised of heart & ears, always resist the Holy Spirit, killed the prophets that foretold Christ's coming, betrayed and murdered Christ Himself, broke the law.
 7. Only being full of the Spirit, wisdom, faith, and power can he say that, then endure being stoned.
- B. 12, So did Stephen blaspheme, as the synagogue leaders bribed men to say against Stephen before the Sanhedrin court once more? It all depends on if Jesus is truly the Christ or not.
 1. But we see, v. 12, they were able to convince some of the people this time that Stephen was really a blasphemer, along with elders and scribes, so they take Stephen by force before the Sanhedrin.
 2. The Apostles may have not preached on these matters directly or forcefully yet, or even fully understood themselves, but Stephen did. He knew the Scriptures. Remember Peter in Acts 10-11, and the Jerusalem council in Acts 15, how they struggled to understand the Gentiles being included, and that the Gentiles did not have to keep the old covenant ceremonial laws and sign of circumcision.
 3. 13-14, Jesus never said He would directly destroy the Temple or Jerusalem. He did say it would be destroyed, which happened by the Romans in AD 70 as God's judgment. And Christ did say destroy this temple, referring to the Temple of His body, and in 3 days He would raise it up again.
 4. But the blindness of these Jewish leaders did not permit them to see the truth in Christ, as proclaimed in the power of the Spirit by Stephen, and so they think it is all blasphemy as they misinterpret what is said, and cannot fathom the Temple and ceremonial law ending.
 5. But Stephen is the true interpreter of the law, and the customs being fulfilled, not fundamentally changed but realized, in Christ, and now we are living sacrifices and God's temple in Christ.
- C. Despite these charges, Stephen's appearance shines, supernaturally, with an angelic glow.
 1. This shows that Stephen is blessed by God, just as Moses was, and so is right in interpreting Moses to be pointing to Christ. Moses, coming down from Mt. Sinai and receiving the law/10 commandments, also shone with God's glory. Now Stephen does as well, yet they still resist him.
 2. Stephen exuded what he was full of – Spirit wrought grace, wisdom, power, & faith. He will speak confidently before His accusers & soon to be murderers. May we have such faith today. Let us pray.