

## **Martyrdom for Christ**

1. Great Persecution Against the Church Begins in Jerusalem.
2. Christian Burial Demonstrates Faith in Christ's Resurrection.
3. God Uses the Scattering to Preach Christ Broadly.

We are told not only of Stephen's death, but also his burial in Christian community. His martyrdom is a spark that sets to blaze a great persecution of the Church. No opposition can thwart God's plans to make the good news of Jesus known in all the nations of the earth. How are you (we) trusting Him to fulfill His promises in this regard?

## First Corinthians 15: 1 – 20

Now I would remind you, brothers, of **the gospel I preached to you**, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: *that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles.* Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.

Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.

**But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead**, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.

### Acts—Series Overview

#### *The Expansion of the Gospel Witness with Power*

*Acts* records God's faithful accomplishment of all that He promised in taking the gospel to the nations. It lays the groundwork for all that will take place as His Church awaits His return. Just as Jesus lived and spoke as the Father commanded, we now are called to do in the power of His Holy Spirit. While Jesus did this perfectly, we will strive imperfectly, constantly in need of the Holy Spirit's direction, power, and correction. Nevertheless, our faithful God will work even through our failing efforts and His gospel witness through us will prevail and penetrate every nation, tribe, & territory. For the praise of our King!

# Taking Gathered Worship Home

Jesus will be praised by men, women, boys, and girls of every tribe, tongue, and nation around the globe. It has been His plan all along. To redeem that which was fallen into rebellion, treason, and death. He accomplishes those plans in ways that we could not conceive. Ruminates this week on His sovereign design and faithfulness to it.

*Please use the devotional material below each day this week to praise Christ. Ask Jesus to teach us His ways that we may walk in them to accomplish His purposes.*

## Sunday Morning

READ **Acts 8:1-4; Romans 1:1-6; First Corinthians 15:1-20**. DISCUSS, How does Stephen's burial teach us? How do you (we) grieve those who have gone to Christ before us? How are you (we) witnessing to Christ today? PRAY for Christ to embolden us to declare His resurrection wherever He leads us.

## Sunday Evening

*In lieu of the evening worship service tonight, please set apart some time to pray for God to bring revival here at FCCW and around the globe.*

## Monday

READ **Acts 8:1-4; Romans 1:1-6; Matthew 28:16-20**. DISCUSS, What is the significance of going to *all nations*? How is God faithfully carrying out what He promised? How are you working in concert with that? How are you working against it? PRAY, "Lord Jesus, give us boldness to proclaim Your resurrection and to hope in nothing less."

## Tuesday

READ **Acts 8:1-4; Genesis 23:1-20**. DISCUSS, Why does God take the time to recount the funerals of Sarah and Stephen? How does your understanding of Christian burial agree with Scripture? How does it conflict with it? PRAY, "Lord Jesus, You are the Resurrected One who will return to gather all your saints, body and soul, to Yourself. Help us to live according to that reality daily."

### Wednesday

READ **Acts 8:1-4; First Thessalonians 4:13-18**. DISCUSS, What happens to the bodies of believers in Christ when they die? What will happen when Jesus comes again? Why are our bodies included? How are you (we) comforting one another? PRAY, “Lord, You will return and gather all Your beloved to Yourself starting with those who have fallen asleep. We praise You!”

### Thursday

READ **Acts 8:1-4; 7:54-60; John 5:19-29**. DISCUSS, How much authority does Jesus have? What “hour” is spoken of here? What will Jesus do then? How are you preparing for that hour? PRAY, “Lord, You alone are King of Kings. Make our hearts delight in praising You and longing for Your return.”

### Friday

READ **Acts 8:1-4; Romans 1:1-7; First Corinthians 15:1-20**. DISCUSS, How has God been teaching you from these passages this week? REJOICE if Christ has honored you to witness for Him! PRAY for renewal and revival across our land.

### Saturday

PREPARE today for the worship service tomorrow. *There will be both the live-stream and in-person services available.*

READ **Acts 8:1-40; Genesis 23:1-20**. Invite others to join you for either the *live-stream or in-person service* tomorrow. Ask Jesus to help us in the transition back to gathered worship in the building.

## Romans 1: 1 – 6

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the **gospel of God**, *which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations, including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ ...”*