

JULY 6TH STEPHEN A PURPOSEFUL MAN

Acts 6:8-15

Remember the old “Happy Days” television program.
 Teenager Ritchie Cunningham has just been grounded for life
 By his father for misbehavior.
 As father and son talked about Ritchie’s misdeed and punishment.
 Howard Cunningham asked his son.
 “Do you know that there is a lesson in this for you?”
 Ritchie’s response was priceless.
 “I figured anything with this much pain had to have a lesson in it somewhere!”

That is the way real life works.
 We do not learn the great lesson of life
 in times of ease and prosperity, comfort and joy.
 The greatest character –building and faith-strengthening lessons
 come during a time of difficulty and heartache.

James 1:2-4 My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. James 1:2-4

Two days ago, on the 4th of July
 we celebrated our nation’s 232nd birthday.
 It was a little over two and a quarter centuries ago
 that the United States was born.
 It was birthed because men and women of purpose
 Set out to form a nation based on the ideals of liberty, responsibility,
 and the freedom to become what God intended

It came at a dear cost.
 Many risked fortunes, families, reputations,
 And paid with their lives for the freedom we enjoy
 Freedom isn’t free.
 Our constitution was written in blood.
 Thomas Jefferson wrote William Smith on November 13, 1787,
 “the tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time
 with the blood of patriots & tyrants”

Today I want to look at the price of freedom.
 From the life of a servant name Stephen.
 Who was the first martyr of the Christian faith.

What does it take to be a man of purpose like Stephen?

First of all it takes

I. A WILLING SERVANT

Stephen was a willing servant and it says the whole congregation chose...

The statement found approval with the whole congregation; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch. Acts 6:5

Stephen was "The Spirit filled Business Man"
 One of the seven elected deacons called to serve in the early church

The disciples were getting bogged down with administration
They needed the help of the laity.

It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables. "Acts 6:2nas

Tables meant not just the distribution of the food,
But the word also refers to the money transactions.
What happened was that two factions in the early church.
The Grecians Jews or Hellenists were the *Greek speaking Jews*,
The Hebraic Jews were the Hebrew speaking *Jews*
Were from different regions and spoke different language.

We don't know if there really was a food distribution problem.

It just says a complaint arose.

What we don't understand, we don't trust,
And what we don't trust, we fear
What we fear, become suspicious of
What were suspicious of, we seek to discredit or destroy.

Is that any different than Aberdeen,
Some fear all the new Spanish speaking residents that are coming in.
We don't understand their culture.
We don't understand their language
Guess what?
What we don't understand, we don't trust.
And what we don't trust, we fear.
What we fear, we seek to discredit and destroy.
Pretty soon every Latino is a drug addict and an illegal.

When we're together we smile and shake hands.
And move on as quickly as we can.

So the 12 disciples called the church together and voted to
Elect servants both from the Hebrew and Hellenist group,
Those filled with the spirit who could lead and assist.
And Steven was one of the willing servants,
Who stepped up to be elected.

Second a Purposeful man is a

II. A SPIRIT FILLED MAN

The statement found approval with the whole congregation; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch. Acts 6:

Stephen was filled with the Holy Spirit
Spirit filled men are faithful to God,
Faithful to their neighbors,
And faithful to their work.
You won't find any CEO in this group indict.

A Spirit filled man possessed seven characteristics of maturity.

Stephen was a man

Acts 6:5 Full of Faith and the Holy Spirit
 Acts 6:3,10 Full of Wisdom
 Acts 6:8 Full of Power
 Acts 6:15 Full of Light
 Acts 7:55-56 Full of Vision
 Acts 7:60 Full of Love
 Acts 7:56 Full of a sacrificial spirit.
 To die for his faith.

STEPHEN not only served but he
 stepped over the limitations of his job description
 And went the extra mile.
 He also led devotions and preached.

That is exactly what our founding fathers did,
 As they were common laborers, store owners,
 Farmers, merchants, who were led by the Spirit,
 and able to step over their limitations as common folks
 to become gifted servants of God
 in establishing a country and creating a nation
 with a constitution that is well beyond any
 other in the world.
 All because they put their trust in God first.

This didn't end with the signing of the declaration.
 Those early fathers saw fit to put their lives on the line.
 Because their obedience went further than the rule of law
 Their obedience was to the ruler of the God of Creation.

When Peter and the apostles were confronted with the choice
 to obey the civil magistrates or God they said:

“We ought to obey God rather than men” (Ac. 5:29).
 Christ also taught a limited obedience to the civil magistrate:
**“Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are
 God’s” (Mk.12:17).**

The loyalty of the Christian to his country or his government
 is always subject to his faithfulness to God’s law and government.

The uniqueness of America is that it was founded as
 One Nation under God.
 So people can come from any land as the
 huddled masses yearning to worship freely.

Did you know that the US Department of Justice website states
 “Religious liberty is often referred to as the “First freedom”
 because the framers placed it first in the Bill of Rights.
 Yet it is not merely first in order”
 It is a fundamental freedom on which all other freedoms rest”

What, after all, can be the meaning or value of economic freedom or freedom of assembly or freedom of speech, if our spirits are not free to worship or reject ultimate spiritual reality? All human rights are important, but religious liberty is the foundation of all the rest.

The Puritans described this infant country as
 “a city set on a hill”
 And not Capital Hill.
 The Puritans were referring to the light of Christ within us
 That could not be hid no matter where it was set.

Second the Puritans had a firm belief in original sin,
 so their desire was to limit the power of sinful civil magistrates, and politicians
 in order to limit their abuse of power.

Stephen took this a step further.
 He saw that the church was not doing what God had asked.
 The Pharisees and Leaders of the synagogue no longer were light on a hill.
 They had left the mercy side of salvation for the legalistic side.
 Instead of setting people free, their laws were enslaving them.
 He attempted to lead them back.
 To the Lord Jesus Christ the Son of the living God.
 And to the purchased price of Christ at the cross or our salvation.

Our Lord said, “But seek ye first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness...” (Mt. 6:33).

Righteousness means God’s justice.
 Our first loyalty must be to the Kingdom of God and His righteousness
 which is only found through submission to His law- the Word of God.

Third to be a man of purpose

III. STEPHEN WAS A MAN OF FAITH AND CONVICTION

Acts 6:8-15

8 Now Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people.

Stephen’s spirit filled free life.
 Was able to set people free in other areas of their lives.
 Some were healed,
 Some were given sight,
 Some were saved, but
 All were set free to enjoy life
 To enjoy family
 To enjoy their new found faith.
 God filled him with his Grace and power
 So that he did
great wonders and miraculous sign among the people .

And the Pharisee couldn’t tolerate it.
 They represent the philosophical liberalism of our day

That sees religion, unlike other human rights as a problem,
as a source of conflict, as something to be managed.

They saw the new Christian faith as a danger,
Something to be tolerated but managed,
But how does one manage the spirit of the one true God?
So when that didn't work they set out to suppress it.

This is plainly the case today in China

**You would think that with the Olympic coming they would
Be moving toward humanitarianism not away from it.**

But they don't have religious freedom,
they have religious tolerance
That means that they alone are in charge of what they tolerate.
And all religions must be under their management and control
And when that doesn't work
They imprison pastors,
They close down house churches as illegal operations,
They expel missionaries from US, South Korea, Canada, Australia
Some who have been teaching English in China for 15 years
And it is not only Christian religion, but
They want to be in charge of approving all reincarnated lamas in Tibet
So Tibetan Buddhists and Christians die because
there is no religious freedom in China

So it was for Stephen and the early Christians.
There was tolerance for this little sect called Christians,
Until it began to affect their power.
Notice where the opposition came from .

**9 Opposition arose, however, from members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen (as
it was called) - Jews of Cyrene and Alexandria as well as the provinces of Cilicia and
Asia. These men began to argue with Stephen, Acts 6:9**

No matter where we are
Or what we stand for
When we come against another's pride or place of power.
Against another's greed or tyrannical hold on others.
There will be a fight.
How sad that Stephen's fight came from the very church
that was to have birthed the savior.

When men of God misplace the truth of God's word
For the advance of culture and self indulgence,
The world is the loser.

Stephen was so knowledgeable that they couldn't stand up to his wisdom.

**10 but they could not stand up against his wisdom or the Spirit by whom he
spoke. Acts 6:10**

We may want to take charge, manipulate, and control.
But God wants us to trust in the love of a Father who makes no mistakes.

He wants us to rely on the One who made us

“More than conquerors through him who loved. Us. Romans 8:37

They hated what he said:

He exposed their self indulgences and impurities.

So they sought to destroy the truth that revealed their sin.

With any mean possible

And when they had driven him out of the city, they began stoning him, and the witnesses laid aside their robes at the feet of a young man named Saul. And they went on stoning Stephen as he called upon the Lord and said: Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. Acts 7:58-59

Stephen being a Spirit filled man

And falling on his knees, he cried out with a loud voice, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them. And having said this he fell asleep Acts. 7:60

These are the very words our Lord Jesus used at the cross.

It shows the absolute trust of Stephen in the savior that

That he could let go of everything in this world

And gain an eternal one.

That is our task as well.

To let go and let God use us.

Will you let go of the past that is dragging you down?

Will you let go of those things you remember in your life that

Have hurt others and have hurt you?

Will you let go of the times you failed miserably?

Maybe it's that failed marriage.

Maybe it's that failed parenting,

Maybe it's failing financially because of your own irresponsibility.

Or maybe you have failed in your Christian life?

It's was just too hard to withstand the temptations of the world.

And now your past sins are an anchor that keep you earthbound

when your heart longs to be more, to reach to the sky.

Apostle Paul says:

But now in a single victorious stroke of Life, all three--sin, guilt, death--are gone, the gift of our Master, Jesus Christ. Thank God!

I Corinthians 15:57 lb

Stephen died to say: The spirit of the Law in Christ Jesus our lord

Has set you free from the law of sin and death.

His life opened the door of freedom not only

for the Jew and Gentile residents,

but also for the priest.

Acts 6:7 And the word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priest were becoming obedient to the faith. Acts 6:7

That is the effect of the Gospel.

To unit and unify all under one God.

It was this thread of truth in our founding fathers

That brought together this nation under God.
With Liberty and justice for all.
One Nation.
Not a bunch of little nations.
One nation.
Whether German, Scandinavian, Spanish,
Chinese, Mexican, Arab, Indian, or Norwegian.
ONE NATION UNDER GOD.
He brought us together
And only he will keep us together.

So today we remember the sacrifice of Stephen
We remember as well the sacrifice of our founding fathers,
But we realize that neither would have been possible
Without the ultimate sacrifice of Christ on the cross
And it is this memory that brings us together in Closing communion.