

Christ-Filled Potential

In Acts Chapter 6 the apostles appointed seven men to wait on tables in order to serve the widows who were underserved in the local church. One of these men was Stephen, who we now read about in Acts Chapter 7. As discussed last week, what one may consider a burden may be a blessing to someone else. In this passage we continue to read about Stephen, but this time he has stepped away from waiting tables to share his testimony with the Jewish leaders, including the Chief Priest. His faithfulness in small things led to greater ministry and influence in other areas of his life. The opportunity to serve the widows of the local church opened the door of ministry for Stephen which ultimately led to a pivotal moment in his faith and the early church. Simply put, we must always remember the life-changing potential that Jesus sees in us, not the apparent current state of our situation. Realizing the impact that God wishes to make through us opens our eyes to the opportunities that are constantly around us to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ to all who have ears. That is why we need to pray for God to fill us with the Holy Spirit to help us do what is right in the small things of life so we will be ready when the big challenges come!

1. Have you ever been in a rut where you didn't understand the point of what was going on around you? What emotions did you or do you encounter during these times?
2. During these times, how did you display faithfulness to God no matter what you encountered?
3. Has God ever given you "bigger platforms" for your faith after you proved faithful through smaller responsibilities or privileges?
4. By observing God's movement through Stephen's life, how should we approach every situation in our life, no matter how small or meaningful it may seem?
5. Is it healthy to expect God to do amazing things through our lives? How can we fight the temptation to turn this expectation into a demand or a constant disappointment when miracles aren't always performed in our lives or those around us?

Spirit-Influenced Perspective

After hearing Stephen's proclamation of faith, the Jewish leaders drug him out of the city and proceeded to stone him. However, the response of Stephen is not what one would expect for this situation. "And as they stoned him, Stephen prayed, 'Lord Jesus, don't charge them with this sin!'". The only justification of this action was that Stephen was focused on Jesus; he saw the glory of God! For just a few moments, he lost sight of what was going on around him and he saw the Lord. He saw what others didn't see because he was filled by the Spirit, in awe of the beauty and truth of Jesus. When you see Jesus in the midst of your circumstances, you remember that all things work together for the good of those who are part of the body of Christ. You remember that nothing can separate us from His love, and that what you're going through in this life is temporary in light of eternity.

1. What is your primary focus when you encounter obstacles or even joyous times in your life? Do you tend to focus on the impact it has on yourself, others, or Jesus? What did Stephen focus on in this passage? Is it possible to care about the impacts or consequences for all three?
2. What does your perspective of a given situation reveal about your faith in Jesus?
3. Is it reasonable to simply take our eyes off the "current" situation and focus, instead, on the big picture of eternity with Jesus? Does this seem like "an easy way out" to you? How would anything ever get done? Can the two perspectives work together? If so, how?
4. How does Stephen's spirit-influenced perspective compare to how you handle circumstances in your life? Is it feasible to have this radical response in our society or culture today?

An Examination of Death

After Stephen's testimony of faith and the consequential stoning, one of the early leaders of the church was killed by the hands of the Jewish leaders. However, in this story, Stephen was not the victim, he was the victor! There are several truths that we must realize about death. First, death is an enemy. God did not create us in the Garden of Eden to die. Unfortunately, the result of the first sin was death, which is inherited by all of man. Fortunately, death is a conquered enemy. Jesus Christ came on this earth to free all His people from sin, granting them eternal life with the Creator God. When we give our lives to Jesus, the Holy Spirit comes to dwell in us, establishing the reality of eternal life. Soon, we begin to realize that eternal life does not begin at death. To be absent from the body is to be in the presence of the Lord. In the moment our life ends on this earth, our life continues in eternity through continual relationship with the Perfect Trinity - the Creator God, His Only Son, and the Holy Spirit.

1. In the United States, it not often that you have to put your life on the line for sharing the gospel. Do you live your life with an attitude that you would be willing to die for the gospel?
2. A way to relate this to the "American society" is, "Are you willing to be inconvenienced for the gospel?" When it comes to your money, time, relationships, energy, and priorities, how are you "sacrificing" or being "inconvenienced" for the good news of Jesus Christ?
3. How are these answers evident in your family, friendships, workplace, church, community, and even private life? If one of these areas is lacking, are you truly willing to sacrifice for the gospel?
4. If you struggle with the concept of sacrificing for the gospel, are there other aspects that you would be willing to sacrifice for more (your kids, sports, career, retirement, etc)? What does this demonstrate about your faith and relationship with Jesus?
5. Jesus Christ came to this earth and sacrificed His life for ours so that we could devote our entire lives to serving Him. Therefore, what are the implications of committing our lives to Jesus?

Prayer Focus

- That we would begin to realize the potential that God sees through every opportunity of our lives
- That our perspective on any situation would be centered on the glory and name of Jesus Christ
- That we would live our lives in radical response to the good news of the gospel and the implications that it has, not only on ourselves, but all who are far from Christ