

Lesser Known Characters 06 Stephen - Usefulness

by Joseph Balsan

The sermon highlights the importance of being a laborer for God, growing in faith, and being filled with the Holy Spirit, scriptures, and courage in our Christian walk.

Duration: 53:14

Scripture: Acts 6:1, Acts 7:54, Romans 5:3

Topics: "Christian Service", "Helping Others"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker uses a story about two sons encountering obstacles to illustrate the concept of usefulness. The first son encounters a stone and struggles to lift it, eventually giving up and continuing on his way. The second son, however, helps another person remove obstacles along the way, which gives him the strength to lift and carry the stone. The speaker then relates this story to the life of Stephen, emphasizing his usefulness and the importance of helping others.

Transcript

Well, it's nice to see you all tonight, and we trust the Lord will give us a profitable season together. I would like to have you turn to the sixth chapter of the book of Acts, Acts chapter six. Acts chapter six, in verse one, and in those days when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there rose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations.

Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.

And the saying pleased the whole multitude, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicholas, a proselyte of Antioch, whom they set before the apostles, and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them. And the word of God increased, and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly, and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith. And Philip and Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people.

Then there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called the synagogue of the Libertines and Cyrenians and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilician of Asia, disputing with Stephen. And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake. Then they suborned men, which said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God.

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, and set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place in the law. For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us. In all that sat in the council, looking steadfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.

Then said the high priest, Are these things so? And he said, Men and brethren and fathers hearken." Now let us go down to the fifty-fourth verse of the seventh chapter. When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth. But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, and said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God.

Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, and cast him out of the city, and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul. And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.

And he kneeled down and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep, and Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem, and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.

And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering into every house, and hailing men and women, committed them to prison. Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word.

May the Lord bless to us the reading of his word. I am sure from the portion that I have read to you tonight, you are well aware of the character that is before me tonight, and that is this remarkable man whose career was cut short by the first martyrdom that took place in the church of the living God, that man whose name was Stephen. Alexander White, who has written a number of books on various Bible characters, says concerning this man Stephen, he said that when they destroyed or killed this man Stephen, they killed a man who could have been another apostle Paul.

And he was undoubtedly one of the outstanding characters that we find in the entire Bible. You know, someone has written a little message on him, and he called him Stephen the odd job man. Stephen the odd job man.

In other words, he was a man who was available, and who was suitable, and who was ready to do anything that needed to be done. And that is the theme that is before me tonight. I think that as we look at this man Stephen, there is one word that could very well describe this man's life, and that word is the word usefulness.

I don't know how true it is, because I haven't examined the Greek. I'm not a Greek scholar. I'm not a Greek student.

All I do is use concordances, and what they tell me why those are the things that I try to learn and assimilate. But I was sitting in a doctor's office not so long ago, a Christian doctor, and he had Christian magazines in his office. And I picked up one of these magazines, and there were little studies in these magazines on Greek words.

And he brought out that they used to call the early people, he thought they were called Christians. Last night I was talking about them being called Christians, and this man said they were called Christians because it comes from a Greek word *prestos*, which means useful, and Christians were useful ones. And how true that should be that Christians should be useful.

You know, a number of years ago I remember reading the 10th chapter of Matthew, where the Lord Jesus said, Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he send forth laborers into the harvest. And you know, I was impressed with that word laborers, because a laborer is a man who is willing to do anything. We're living in a day-to-day of specialists.

We know how true that is. I remember when I moved into Fort Dodge from northern Michigan, and we had sold our old stove and our refrigerator. We'd moved nearly a thousand, oh well, maybe 750 miles or so down, and so we had to buy a new stove and a refrigerator.

And so we made an agreement with the merchant, who was also an electrician, that if we bought these two appliances from him, he would wire our electric stove at half price. We'd have to have a 220 cable run into the stove, to the meter, and so on. And so they came to put in the cable, and it happened that right where he was going to put that cable, why, there was the gas jet, and so he had to pull aside the molding from the bottom of the, just by the floor, you know, and he ran, he drilled a hole, and he ran that wire down, and after he had done that, he was just pushing the stove back, and I said to him, I says, well, aren't you going to hammer that board back in place? He says, no.

He says, I couldn't hammer that board back in place. He says, I'd get in trouble with the carpenter's union. Well, I says, well, listen, he says, I said, I'll tell you what, I won't tell anybody of the carpenter's union about it, and you can just go ahead and nail it back.

He says, well, he says, no, he says, I couldn't do that, because I'm the president of the electrician's union. And so I had to hammer the board back myself. We're living in a day-to-day of specialists.

That's true also in medicine. I was staying with a brother who was a heart doctor, and we were talking about the various phases of medicine, and how we're living in a day of specialism today. And he said to me, well, he says, you know, that's not all.

He says, within 20 years, we're not only going to have a day of specialists, but we're going to have a day of fragmentarians. I says, what do you mean? I says, a man who is going to study the heart is not going to study the whole heart. He's going to study only a little part of it, because our knowledge of it is multiplying so fast that no one man would be able to treat the whole heart.

Well, my friends, God is looking for laborers. God is not looking for specialists. Oh, we thank God for those who are specialists.

But on the other hand, God is looking for those who are laborers, those who are willing to put their hand to anything that needs to be done, whatever it may be that needs to be done. And I think that as we look at this man Stephen, I think that we see a man who is ready to put his hand to anything that needs to be done, and we find that whatever he does, he is doing for the Lord. And we find that he does it well, and he's commended for what he does.

I wonder, are you and I as believers ready to put our hands to anything for the Lord, just so it's doing something for him, or are you and I seeking a special line of things? Well, as we look at this man Stephen, while we remember the circumstances which I read to you this evening, how the difficulty arose amongst the believers. There were the Hebrew believers, and there were the Grecian Hebrews, and evidently the Grecian Hebrews felt that their widows were being neglected in the ministrations. And the result was that here in these early days of the church, a murmuring began to arise amongst the believers, and when this murmuring began to arise, the twelve apostles called a multitude of disciples together, and they said, it is not reason that we should leave the word of God and serve tables.

Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you, seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business, but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word. Now, here we find that there are those that they are looking for who are going to be occupied with the temporal things that pertain to the work of the Lord. And I want you to notice that they didn't ask for just anybody.

There were certain qualifications, because these men were going to handle the money of God's people. And you know, when it comes to handling the money of God's people, why, we find that there were three qualifications that were absolutely essential. First of all, they had to be men of absolute honest report.

They had to be men of absolutely unblemished reputation and testimony, men whose hands were absolutely clean when it came to handling the money of the people of God. And the second thing is, they had to be men who were full of the Holy Spirit, because this was a ministry that had to be guided and controlled by the Holy Spirit. And thirdly, they were men who had to be wise men.

In other words, they had to be men that were sincere. They had to be men that were spiritual. They had to be men that were sensible if they were going to handle and take care of the material things that belong to the assembly or the company of God's people.

And the saying pleased the whole multitude, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicholas, a proselyte of Antioch. Now we come to this man who is one of the seven that was chosen for this ministry and for this work, and I would just like to notice three things about this man. And the first thing that we want to notice about this man is the vitality of his spiritual life, the vitality of his spiritual life.

If you and I were to read this sixth chapter of Acts, as well as the seventh chapter of Acts, we would find one word that occurs on a number of different occasions. And on occasions where it does not occur, you and I could very well apply it. And you know what that word is? That word is the word full.

Here was a man who was full of certain qualities that very well described the vitality of his life. Again and again he is spoken of as a man who is full of various things. Now it tells us here in the fifth verse, and the saying pleased the whole multitude, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith.

That was the first thing he was full of. He was full of faith. Now what is faith? Do you remember that when the Lord Jesus Christ was going to speak of faith? Remember when he spoke of faith? He said, if your faith is as small as a grain of mustard seed.

Now they tell us that that is very small. Now you and I, if we wanted to use a picture of something small, we could just as well have said, well, if your faith is as small as a grain of sand. But that's not what the Lord said.

The Lord said, if your faith is as small as a grain of mustard seed. Why did the Lord Jesus say, as small as a grain of mustard seed? Why didn't he say, as small as a grain of sand? Because you know the thing about a grain of sand, it doesn't grow. The one thing about faith is, it can be ever so small, but that grain of mustard seed has in it the element of life which makes that mustard seed to grow and develop.

And you know, that's the way faith is. Faith is something that is not inactive. Faith is not something that is lifeless and inert.

Faith is something, my friends, that has life in it, and faith is something that grows. The Bible says, he that believeth on the sun hath everlasting life. He that believeth not the sun shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him.

He didn't say, he that believed on the sun. He says, he that believeth. Why did the Lord say that? Because, my friends, wherever there is real faith, that faith will continue.

And wherever there is real faith, that faith is going to grow, that faith is going to develop. And my friends, wherever there is faith, it may be that a person may for the first time come to the Lord Jesus, and he may see himself as a sinner, and he may put his trust in the one who died on Calvary's cross, and he may know that he's saved through believing in him. But you know, wherever there is that faith, that faith is going to grow, and that faith is going to develop.

Now, how does that faith grow, and how does that faith develop? You've all heard about D. L. Moody, how he used to pray to God that he would increase his faith, how he would pray for strong faith, how he would spend long hours in prayer praying for faith. My friends, one day he read the verse in the 10th chapter of Romans, faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. And when he read those words, he says, why, that's how faith grows.

That's how my faith can become stronger. Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. And now all I need to do is read that word and study that word, and my faith will grow.

A brother in Lyman, Iowa, told me a little story one time about his little son coming home from the meeting, the Sunday school, and his son said to him, Daddy, he says, I know how you get faith, and I know how your faith gets strong and big. And he says to him, how does your faith get strong and big, son? He says, well, I heard the man quote the verse, faith cometh by hearing, and hearing. That's all the Father he got.

Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing. My friends, that's true. Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing, but hearing what? Hearing the word of God.

What is faith? Is faith an unseen force that suddenly comes into us, and hits us, and lays hold of us, and we don't know what it is? No, no, friends, that's not what faith is. Is faith some imagination of the mind that I try to work up within myself, and try to make myself feel confident that it's so? Is that faith? No, friends,

that's not faith. You know what faith is? Faith, my friends, is simply believing and accepting what God says.

God says it, and I believe it. Faith is that belief that is based on what God says, and faith is taking God and his word. Stephen was a man full of faith, but he was something else.

It says he was a man full of faith, and it tells us also in the fifth verse that he was a man full of the Holy Ghost. Aha, friends, how needful this is. Full of the Holy Spirit.

Here was a man in whose life there was no part that was closed to the Holy Spirit. Here was a man whose entire being was permeated and controlled by the Holy Spirit. Every believer has the Holy Spirit, but the question is, how much of you does the Holy Spirit possess? That's the question.

He was a man who was full of the Holy Spirit, and notice further down in the sixth, eighth verse, it says, and Stephen full of faith. Now, the real rendering of this word faith here, they tell us in the revised version, is he was full of grace. It was something that was additional to faith.

It was grace. You know, the word of God says we are to be growing in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Here was a man who was full of the spirit of graciousness, and he was also full of power, and he did great wonders and miracles amongst the people of God.

And then you notice in the tenth verse, it says that when he came in contact with these men, they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake. Here was a man who was filled with such wisdom that he went, when he met the enemies of the faith, when he met those who opposed the faith, why he was able to resist them, and they were not able to resist the wisdom with which he spoke, because he was so full of the things of God. And then as you and I read this seventh chapter, and you and I read this wonderful sermon that he gives that we're going to speak on a little later, why you and I have here a man who is full of the scriptures.

He was full of the word of God. How do we know he was full of the word of God? Because, my friends, if you and I read this sermon that he has here in the seventh chapter of Acts, we have a beautiful panoramic presentation of truth that shows that this man had a comprehensive grasp of the scriptures that enabled him to present to these people the thing that would convince them and prove to them that Christ was the Son of God. And the seventh thing about him, was that he was full of courage, because he didn't hesitate to stand up before the very ones who opposed the gospel, and he was full of courage to bring before them the word of God, and to apply it to them in such a way that they could not resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake.

Full. Are you and I being filled with some of these things? Do we believe God? Do we trust in God? Do we look to God? Does the Holy Spirit have his way in your life and mine? Are you and I characterized by grace? Is there strength and power in your life and mine to do things for God? Is there wisdom? Is there the knowledge of his word? Is there courage to put into practice, to tell others, and to make it known to others? Oh, as you and I look at this man, you and I see a man here that is an outstanding Christian because of the qualities that characterize his life. Someone has very well said, every one of us produces one masterpiece in our lifetime.

Have you ever thought to yourself that you're producing a masterpiece, that I'm producing a masterpiece? If we do nothing else, each and every one of us are going to produce one masterpiece in our lifetime. You

know what that masterpiece is? That masterpiece is yourself, and that masterpiece is myself. As you and I read the sixth and seventh chapters of Acts, you and I find that there are a number of verbs that are used in describing this man, Stephen.

I read one time of two professors who went to listen to a lecturer, and as they were listening to the lecturer, why it was a dry, dead lecture, and one said to the other as he nudged him, let's get up and go out. And the man says, no, he says, I want to sit here and listen for a while. I hope you'll get to the verbs.

I hope you'll get to the verbs. What did he mean? Well, the verbs are words of action, and he was saying, I hope he gets to the place where he tells us what to do. Well, Stephen was that kind of a person.

He was a man of action. If you and I were to read these sixth and seventh chapters of this book of Acts, you and I would find that there are certain verbs that are used to describe this man. The simple verb of was.

He was something. What was he? We have the verb also that he did something. What did he do? He did many wonderful miracles.

He served in a variety of capacities. He was doing something. You and I read that this man saw something.

He saw a vision of Christ in glory that enabled him to endure the most intense kinds of sufferings. We find that he was a man who suffered, suffered even unto death for the name of our Lord Jesus. We find that he was a man who spoke.

We find that he was a man whose face shone with a radiance that expressed the reality of what he believed to such an extent that his enemies beheld his face as though it was the face of an angel. We find that he was a man who prayed. He prayed for his enemies as they were stoning him to death and saying, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.

My friends, here was a man of action. Here was a man who was full, but here was a man who was also characterized by action. You know, that's what we've got to be careful about.

We've got to be careful that we don't just sit and listen to preaching and do nothing about it, because we'll develop spiritual dyspepsia. You know what that is? Dyspepsia is stomach trouble, you know. You can eat the richest food, but if you eat the richest food and you don't exercise, well, you're soon going to run into trouble with your digestive system.

And it's the very same. It's a wonderful privilege to sit night after night and week after week listening to ministry of the Word of God, but listening to it and doing nothing about it isn't going to be for our spiritual benefit. We've got to use what we hear.

We've got to put into practice what we learn, because it's putting it into practice that it's going to be a benefit to us and it's going to benefit others as well. Stephen was a man who was full, but he was a man of action, and that was what made his life vital. That's what made his life vibrant.

That's what gave reality and fervor to him in his life. That's what we need, Stephen, the vitality of his life. But the second thing I want you to notice is the potency of his service, the potency of his ministry, because his ministry was potent.

His ministry was powerful. Here was a man who moved things. Here was a man who moved people.

Here was a man who, wherever he came, he touched people, he affected people. You know, we can touch people. We can affect people.

I have some good friends here from Grand Rapids, Michigan, and they with me remember a dear sister now with the Lord, and this dear sister had many trials. Her husband left her when she had seven children. She had difficulties and trials to such an extent that she went into a mental institution for a while.

She had trials. The Lord brought her through those trials, and when I knew her, she was an elderly widow who lived in a little cottage there in Grand Rapids, Michigan. And whenever I came to Grand Rapids, of course, the brother that I labored with, we did visiting.

And I even visited when I was without him. But I'd always go see this dear old sister, and you know, of course, you're going to see her to encourage her and to cheer her up. But you know, you didn't go there to encourage her to cheer her up.

No, no, friends, you weren't sitting there five minutes, and she was cheering you. She was encouraging you. The first thing she would say is, you know, this book is like medicine.

It does good to your soul as well as to your body. That's what the word of God says. It's healing to the body.

And you were sitting in that woman's presence five minutes, and she was lifting you up, and she was having an effect upon you, so that when you walked out, you walked out helped, encouraged, refreshed. You came in contact with her, and you were affected for good. She moved you to action.

Stephen was a man like that. Wherever he came, he moved people to action, because his ministry was potent. What made his ministry potent? The vitality of his life, yes.

And I want you to notice concerning this man, that when it came to a position of responsibility, there was a man who had the confidence of his brethren, because when it came to selecting seven men, and it depended upon the multitude, they selected Stephen as one of them. You know, it's a good thing for Christians to have the confidence of their brethren. We need the confidence of one another.

We need the confidence of fellow believers. That is, that believers can depend upon us. Believers can trust us.

Believers can commend us. Believers can speak well of us. And you know, friends, this isn't the product of five minutes.

Someone has very well said you can become a Christian in a moment of time. We know that's true. The moment you accept Christ as your Savior, you become a Christian.

But you don't become a good, dependable Christian in a moment of time. That's the product of a life. That's the work of a life.

That's the product of time. When we're proved in our circumstances and in our lives, Stephen was a man who had the confidence of his fellow believers, because in time he had proved the reality, and the truth, and the dependability of his character. He was a man of honest report, because it had been confirmed in

his life.

But I want you to notice something else. Here was a man of whom it was said that he was full of faith and power, and did great wonders and miracles among the people, and yet, my friends, he was ready to do any menial, mundane task that came along. He wasn't above a work.

He was willing and ready to take any part in any work that he could possibly fit into. You know that's needed today? Readiness to do anything that would be a help. Readiness to step into the smallest and the most insignificant place.

You know, in the Old Testament we have a wonderful structure called the tabernacle. And you remember that in that tabernacle there were beautiful pieces of furniture. There was the Ark of the Covenant.

There was a table of showbread. There were those pieces of furniture. And then there were other parts of that tabernacle, like the boards.

And there were also the foundations of silver. There were the pillars. My, they were important things in the tabernacle.

But then, you know, there were things like the little things that bound the curtains to the pillar--only little rings, very small rings. Each of the family of Levite were divided into three families, and each of those families had a certain function. There was one family that took care of the furniture.

There was another family that took care of the boards, and so on. And there was another family that took care of the curtains and the rings, and so on. What do you think would have happened if the family that took care of the rings says, well, that's too small for us? That's not as important as the furniture and so on.

Our part is not so necessary. We won't be as diligent about that as they have to be about their part. You know what would have happened, friends? There never would have been a tabernacle, because those little rings were absolutely essential to raising up the curtains that would house the tabernacle or the furniture of the tabernacle within the tabernacle itself.

The smallest things were just as necessary as the more prominent things, the heavier things, the bigger things. The smaller things pertaining to an assembly are just as necessary as the larger things. Here was a man, Stephen, who was ready to serve tables, even though he was the most wonderful and gifted preacher.

He was ready to do anything. We find a third thing about him in his service that made his service so potent. What was that? He was one who could work with others.

Here he was one chosen among seven. He wasn't a man who says, well, it's got to be my way or else. He was a man who could work in association with others, because he realized that this was a work that had to go on, and in order for it to go on, they had to work together.

Oh, I don't always get things the way I like them, or the way I would like to see them. But then, after all, I'm not the one to be pleased. The one to be pleased is the Lord, and the thing is, we've got to work together.

I think that's one of the greatest difficulties amongst Christians. If I can't have my way, I'm not going to be in it. If I can't have my way, I'm not going to do it, and the result is the whole thing falls to pieces.

Well, that wasn't the kind of man Stephen was. Stephen was a man who could join in with others, gifted and capable, an able man that he was. Nevertheless, my friend, he was able to work with others.

Six others were chosen with him. He was ready to be one of the seven. He didn't have to be the chief of the seven.

He was ready to be one of the seven. He was ready to put his shoulder to the wheel and do it. That's wonderful to be able to work with others.

We need to work with others. If the work of God is going to go on ahead, we need to work together. Stephen was that kind of a man.

He was able to work with others. And you know, Stephen did great works amongst the people. It says here in the eighth verse, and Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people.

But you know why he did great wonders and miracles? Because he was able to do the little things. You know, I read a story some time ago. It was a fable, but the lesson was good nevertheless.

This king had two sons. They were twins, and one of them was going to succeed him. And so he determined to find out which one was going to succeed him.

So you know what he did? He put him to a test. He says, I want you to run this course. And he says, I want you to come to this place where there is this stone.

And he says, the first one that gets that stone and brings it back to me, he will be the king. So they both start running. And of course, as they're running, they come upon a man with a broken down wagon.

And so the one son, he says, well I can't stop to help that man with the wagon. He says, I've got to run on to that stone. So he keeps on running.

But the other son, he stoops down and he puts his shoulder to the wheel, and he helps the man lift the wagon, and he helps to put that wheel on the wagon, and he finally gets it on the wagon. And then, of course, he sets the man on his way, and he starts running. And of course, the other son, as he comes along, why, he finds that something, another obstacle has been in the way, something bigger.

And so when he comes to this obstacle, why, the person says, come and help me roll this big stone out of the way. It's fallen into the path, and I need help. And the man says, I can't stop.

He says, I'm going to be the care to the throne. He says, I can't stop. And so he passes by.

The other son comes along, and of course, when the person asks him to help, why, he puts his shoulder to the wheel, takes a big stick or a big branch, cuts down the branch, and uses it as a lever, and tugs and tugs and works and works, and finally they get the stone out of the way. And then, of course, they're running along, and they finally meet another obstacle. The first son again passes it by.

He can't stop. He comes to the stone first. The other son, he comes to the third obstacle, and again it's a bigger obstacle than ever, and it spends time consuming time, and he's using his strength to take that thing out of the way, and finally he does it.

The first son comes to the stone. He reaches down to lift it up, but he's absolutely helpless to lift it. He finds he's impotent to lift it.

He struggles and strains and fumes and fusses. He sweats and everything else. He's not able to lift it.

He starts running back, and as he does, he meets his brother. He says, you'll never be able to move that stone. I'm going back, and I'll be first there anyway, and I'll be the king.

The second son comes to that stone. As he stoops down, he lifts that stone, and as he lifts that stone, he lays it upon his shoulders, and he begins to come back. And the first son comes before his father, and he says, father, he says it's impossible to move that stone.

I couldn't move that stone. Your other son won't be able to move that stone. But you know, friends, in a little while, he sees his brother coming with that stone, and what does he see? He sees that brother lay that stone right in front of his father's feet, and his father says, you're the king.

How did you do it? He says, as I went along and I met the different obstacles, he says, I helped to remove those obstacles, and those obstacles gave me the strength that enabled me to lift and carry the stone. You know, we all want to do big things, don't we? I do. I'd be a liar if I said I didn't.

I want to do the big things, but the question is, am I ready to do the little things? The little things that fit you for the big task. Somebody has very well said, big doors swing on little hinges, and sometimes we despise the hinges. That's not the kind of a man Stephen was.

Stephen was willing to do the little things, and because he did the little things, when the time came to do the great things, he was able to do the great things by the power of God. Now, of course, we see this wonderful witness that he had. His ministry was potent because of his knowledge of the word of God.

You read that seventh chapter of Acts, and you'll find what a tremendous panoramic presentation of scripture this man gives. He goes right from the life of Abraham, goes right through the life of Joseph, goes right through the life of Moses, and right through the history of the people of Israel until the very time that he was speaking to that people. You know, it's good to have a knowledge of the whole word of God.

You ever read that little poem by Amos? I think his name is Amos Ward or something. He says, I thought I knew the Bible piece, kneel, hit and miss. I read a chapter in Genesis, twelfth chapter of Romans, fifty-third chapter of Isaiah.

He says, I thought I knew the Bible, but I knelt in very rapture when I read the Bible through. When he read that Bible through from beginning to end, he got a panoramic view of the scripture that amazed his soul. You know, I read a little story the other day.

I read a story about a leper, a leper who was blind, a leper who memorized and repeated the whole gospel of Matthew word by word to those who listened to him. And he says, you know, it has given me such a vast concept and understanding of Christ and of who he is that it just thrilled and filled my soul with heaven. Stephen was a man who knew the scripture.

He was not only a man who knew the scripture, but he was a man who knew the intention of the scripture, because he sums up his whole presentation, and he presents Christ. He brings Christ before the people, and he brings before these people their guilt in disobeying the law, slaying the prophets, resisting the Holy

Spirit, and taking Christ and crucifying him on the cross. He not only knew the scripture, but he knew how to apply it.

Good to be able to apply the scripture. It's good to be able to read it and know how to apply it, because that's what gives power to our ministry. But the third thing about him is the victory of his death.

The victory of his death. Stephen and many wonderful things that he did, but I think, my friend, the most glorious thing about Stephen was his death, because Stephen accomplished more by his death than he did in his life. Well, you say, accomplished more by his death than he did by his life? How is that possible? Well, you remember the story when he brought before them their guilt, and they gnashed on him with their teeth? It says he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing on the right hand of God.

Here was a man who had a vision just prior to his death, my friend, that he had had at no other time. Here was a man who was granted a vision of the unseen world that he had had at no other time in his whole experience. He saw the glory of God and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, and he said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God.

Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, and cast him out of the city, and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet whose name was Saul. You and I say, isn't it terrible? Why did the Lord step in? Why did the Lord save Stephen from being put to death? There was a man that needed to be reached.

There was a young man that needed to be saved. This young man excelled Stephen in mental, religious, spiritual outlook as far as his possibilities are concerned. Here was a man who was going to be chosen to do a work.

My friends, I have no hesitation in saying that Paul did the greatest work apart from the Lord Jesus that the world has ever seen. There's no doubt that Paul became the greatest exponent of Christianity, and of the truth through Christ that the world has ever, or wills to ever see. And that man had to be reached.

And before that man could be reached, someone had to lay down his life, and that man was Stephen. As Stephen was being stoned to death, they laid the clothes at a young man's feet. And what that young man saw there that day was the beginning of the work of God in his soul.

How do I know that? Because in the ninth chapter of Acts, when Saul of Tarsus was stopped, the Lord said to him, it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. It is hard for thee to kick against the goads. What was it that was goading Saul? What was it that was speaking to Saul? You know what it was? It was the remembrance of that sight when he saw that young man dying.

And when he saw him dying, and he saw his face as the face of an angel, he saw his face lifted up toward heaven, he saw him, he heard him say, Lord, into my hands I commit my spirit. Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. It spoke to that man as nothing else had ever spoken, and Paul could never get out of his memory the sight of that young man being stoned to death.

That was what woke him up. My friends, the church never has to be afraid of persecution. Persecution has always been a time of blessing for the church.

It's always been a time of fruitfulness and reaping for the church. It has well been said that in the times of the martyrs, the blood of the martyrs was the seed of the church. In other words, more were converted when they saw those people being thrown to the lions, burned at the stake.

More people were being converted to Christ than the devil would have thought possible. Saul of Tarsus was awakened. Saul of Tarsus was convicted by the death of this young man, and we know that's always been true, hasn't it? The death of believers in one way or another has spoken to the hearts and the lives of others, and we find that after this young man's death, when the persecution increased, the result was that the church went everywhere.

Not just the preachers. Believers felt their responsibility. They began going everywhere preaching the word.

Why? Because they had been stirred and stimulated. They had been awakened and aroused by the persecution that arose because of Stephen's death, and they went everywhere preaching the word. One man died, but in his place multitudes rose up to carry the message of the gospel to many parts of the world in that day.

My friends, that was the result of a life that was useless when alive, and a life that served God in its death. Are you and I useful? Do you and I fill a place of benefit and usefulness? May you and I learn the lesson of usefulness from the life and the death of this man, Stephen. You know what Stephen's name means, don't you? Stephen's name means a crown.

That's what it means. It means a crown. Oh, to be a crown, to have a crown, to cast at the feet of the Lord Jesus because we have been useful for him and to him.

Shall we pray? Our Father, we desire to thank thee this evening for the Lord Jesus Christ, and we thank thee for the lessons from the life of this thy servant. And Father, how we do long to be vessels sanctified and meet for the Master's use and prepared unto every good work. Father, we pray that thou will stir our hearts, that we may yield ourselves to the Lord Jesus.

We realize only one life will soon be passed, only what's done for Christ will last. We ask thy blessing and thank thee for thy words in the Savior's name. Amen.

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