

A Christ-Like Man

by R.A. Torrey

The sermon highlights the characteristics of Stephen, the first Christian martyr, and how his life and death demonstrate the importance of living a life full of faith, grace, power, the Word of God, the Holy Ghost, love, courage, and prayer.

Scripture: Acts 6:5-7

Topics: "Faith and Courage", "Character of a Believer"

Description

R.A. Torrey emphasizes the exemplary character of Stephen, the first Christian martyr, who embodied Christ-like qualities such as being full of faith, grace, power, the Word of God, the Holy Spirit, love, and courage. Stephen's unwavering faith allowed him to face persecution with grace, and his deep knowledge of Scripture empowered his preaching, leading to both conviction and hostility from his adversaries. Despite his martyrdom, Stephen's life and death had a profound impact, ultimately contributing to the conversion of Paul, the apostle. Torrey calls for believers to emulate Stephen's fullness in their own lives, highlighting the necessity of prayer and the Holy Spirit in achieving such a character. The sermon serves as a powerful reminder of the cost of discipleship and the eternal rewards that follow faithfulness.

Transcript

THERE is one man who is pictured to us in the Bible who appears to be more like Christ than any other man of whose life we have an account. That man is Stephen, the first deacon in the Christian church, and the first Christian martyr. There is no fairer life recorded in history than that of Stephen, excepting, of course, the life of Him of whom Stephen learned and after whom he patterned. The character of Stephen presents a rare combination of strength and beauty, robustness and grace. Stephen occupies small space in the Bible, two chapters, Acts 6 and 7, and two verses in other chapters, Acts 11:19 and 22:20, yet in this short space a remarkably complete analysis of his character and the outcome of it is given.

1. STEPHEN'S CHARACTER

Let us look first at Stephen's character. One word occurs again and again in the description of Stephen. It is the word "full" He was a remarkably full man.

1. First of all he was "full of faith." The record reads, "They chose Stephen, a man full of faith" (Acts 6:5). Stephen had unbounded confidence in God and in His Word; he believed implicitly in the certainty of every statement in the Word of God regarding the past, and he believed implicitly in its promises regarding the

future. He had no fear of consequences when God's Word, or God's Spirit bade him do anything, he simply did it and left the consequences with God. It was God's to promise and to command, it was his simply to believe and obey what God said, and leave the outcome with God. Even in that awful moment when he was surrounded by a howling mob with gnashing teeth, when the pitiless rocks were crushing his body and face and brain, he quietly looked up and said, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit," and then kneeling down uttered a mighty prayer for his enemies, and gently "fell asleep." Oh, that we had more men and women of Stephen's faith, men and women who believe all God says and do all He commands in His Word and leave the results entirely with Him; men and women who walk straight on with childlike, unwavering confidence in Him in the path He marks out. There was never a day when men and women of that sort were more needed than to-day. Our power and our accomplishment will be proportionate to our faith in God and in His Word. Faith is the outstretched hand that helps itself to all God's fullness. The Lord Jesus is ever saying, "According to your faith be it unto you" (Matt. 9:29), and of many of us it must be said that "Jesus could do no mighty work there because of their unbelief" (Mark 6:5; Matt. 13:58).

2. In the next place Stephen was "full of grace." This we find in verse 8, B. V. The Authorized Version reads that he was "full of faith and power," but the Revised Version reads that he was "full of grace and power." It is true, as already seen, that he was full of faith, but he was full of something besides faith: "full of grace." His faith in God and His Word brought the grace of God into his heart and life. He not only had grace, he was full of it: "full of grace." He was completely emptied of self, of his own will, of his own plans, of his own goodness, of his own thoughts, of his own strength, and the grace of God had just come in and taken complete possession of his heart and affections and will and character and life. This was the reason why he was so much like Christ Himself, Christ was just living His own life over again in Stephen. As we look at Stephen with his face shining like an angel's (Acts 6 : 15), and listen to the words that fall from his lips, it seems as if Jesus Himself had come back to earth again, and so He had: He had come back into Stephen's heart and was manifesting Himself in Stephen's life. And in the same way Jesus Christ is ready to come back again in your life and mine if we are only willing to be emptied of the self-life and filled with grace. Then we can say with the Apostle Paul, "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I that live, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith which is in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me" (Gal. 2:20, B. V.). Ah! friends, most of us have some grace, but let us be full of grace, let us allow grace to fill every corner of our lives.

3. Stephen was also "full of power!" Grace and power are not one and the same thing, though all real power comes from grace, i.e., it is a gift of God's grace. However, the graces of the Spirit are different from the gifts of the Spirit. "Love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and self-control" are the graces of the Spirit (Gal. 5: 22). The various gifts of power for service are the gifts of the Spirit. Many a man has the graces of the Spirit in rich measure who has not much of the power of the Spirit in his work. Others have very much of the power of the Spirit in some directions, but are greatly lacking in the graces of the Spirit, but Stephen was full of faith, grace, and power, and so ought we to be. The graces of the Spirit ought to be richly revealed in our lives; the power of the Spirit ought to be mightily manifested in our work. It is the privilege of every believer to be a man of power in service. Grace and power are both at our disposal, grace for living like Christ, power for working like Christ. (John 14: 12). The men and women needed to-day are the men and women who live graciously and work mightily.

4. Stephen was also full of the Word of God. There is but one sermon of Stephen's reported. You will find it in the seventh chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. But what a sermon that one sermon is. It is Bible from beginning to end. When Stephen opened his mouth to speak the Scripture just flowed forth. As it is "out of

the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaketh" (Matt. 12: 34), it is evident that Stephen's heart was full of God's Word. He had pondered the Word of God deeply ; he had discovered the deeper meanings of its precepts, promises, history, and prophecies ; he had hidden the Word of God in his heart; he was full of the Word. This goes far toward explaining why he was also full of faith and grace and power. It is vain for one to pray to be full of faith if he neglects the Word of God, for faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God" (Rom. 10:17). I remember a time when I longed for faith, and tried hard to get it, but I never succeeded until I began feeding upon the Word of God. It is vain to seek for grace in the life and neglect the Word of God, for the Bible is the Word of His grace, which is able to build you up" (Acts 20: 32). It is vain to pray for power and neglect the Word of God, for it is when "the Word of God abideth in you" that "ye are strong and overcome the wicked one" (1 John 2:14). Faith and grace and power all come from the Word of God, and in order to be full of them we must be full of it. How much we need to-day men and women like Stephen who are full of the Word of God, who have such a command of the Bible that none are "able to resist the wisdom by which" they speak, and men also who have the Word of God not only upon their lips, but in their hearts and lives. But we cannot be full of the Word of God if we do not study it, study it long and earnestly and prayerfully, study it (really study it) every day of our lives.

5. But Stephen was full of something else yet, he was "full of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 6:5). Being full of the Word of God and being full of the Holy Ghost go hand in hand. In Eph. 5 : 18, 19, R. V., Paul says, "Be filled with the Spirit; speaking one to another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord." And in Col. 3:16 he says, "Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom ; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord." By the comparison of these two passages we see that what

in one place is attributed to being full of the Spirit, is in the other place attributed to being full of the Word of God. The two go naturally together, but they are often divorced. I know men who are full of the Word, i.e., they have a very large technical and formal knowledge of the Word, but who are not full of the Spirit. They are well instructed but they have no unction. They are dry as chips. Indeed, I have known men who were once full of the Spirit, but they have lost the manifestation of His presence and of His power. As far as the form of knowledge of the Word goes, they know as much as they ever did, but the power has gone out of their words. But Stephen was "full of the Spirit" of God as well as full of the Word of God. His enemies were not able to resist, not only "the wisdom/ but also "the Spirit by which he spake" (Acts 6: 10). Let us seek to be full of the Holy Ghost. Without this our lives will be graceless and our efforts will be powerless. The Holy Spirit's power was manifested in Stephen, as we have already seen, in a twofold way: in his life, and in his work.

6. Stephen was also full of love. In Acts 7:57-60 we see how absolutely his whole inner and outer life were under the control of love. In no other man, perhaps, except Christ, has love shone out as it did in Stephen. Look at Stephen as he falls beneath the stones hurled at him by his infuriated antagonists and assassins. He can no longer stand, and he sinks to his knees. His crushed forehead is throbbing with pain, his strength is fast waning, but he summons all his remaining strength and utters a loud cry. What is it? Is it, Lord curse these my murderers? No, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. " Here we see love for enemies triumphant even in death. There is perhaps no lesson of Stephen's life harder to learn than this, and yet there is no other lesson that we more need to learn than this, and there was never a time when we more needed to learn it than to-day, when we are face to face with a mighty foe who may do us or our loved ones awful harm. Let us never forget to be full of love. Love is the one Divine thing. "If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am become sounding brass, or a clanging cymbal" (1

Cor. 13:1, R. V.). Ah ! it is easy to love the lovely, in fact it is not hard to have a certain sentimental love for the unlovely, provided they have never crossed our path in any way; but to love the one who lies about you, as these did about Stephen, to love the one who does you harm, seeking, it may be, your very life, as they did the life of Stephen, this is the hard thing, this is the supreme test of whether the Lord Jesus be indeed dwelling in us or not. There are many of us here to-day who have coveted earnestly that we might be full of faith and grace, and power, and the Word of God, and the Holy Spirit, but are you full of love? Do you really wish to be full of love? Remember in answering that question that while love is the divinest thing in the world, it is also the most costly.

7. Stephen was not only full of love, he was also full of courage. Many men seem to be forgiving simply because they have not sufficient energy of character to be vengeful, but Stephen's forgiveness was not of that kind. He was a man of almost matchless energy and fearless courage ; he knew the Jews, he knew what they had done to his Lord, and yet, knowing their history, he faces his angry antagonists and boldly says: "Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost; as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One" (Acts 7:51, 52), and then when they gnashed upon him with their teeth, he beat no retreat; but looking up steadfastly into heaven, and seeing the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, he says", Behold, I see the heavens open, and

the Son of man standing on the right hand of God" (Acts 7:56). Do we not sorely need courage like that to-day, courage to face the enemies of Christ, and give our uncompromising testimony for Him? How unlike this is to the timid, cringing, sentimentality and gush that passes for Christianity to-day. We need Stephens in business, we need Stephens in society, we need Stephens in public affairs, we need Stephens in the home and in the church.

There was then this seven-fold fullness in Stephen: he was "full of faith," "full of grace," "full of power," full of the Word of God, "full of the Holy Ghost," full of love, full of courage.

8. There was one more thing about Stephen's character that needs to be noted, he was a man of prayer. Prayer was the spontaneous utterance of his heart in the hour of trouble. The last two utterances of his life were prayers (Acts 7:59, 60) just as were two of the last utterances of his Master, and Stephen's prayers were closely modelled after those of his Master. No man can be a man of power who is not a man of prayer. No man can be full of grace who is not a man of prayer. No man can be full of the Holy Ghost who is not a man of prayer. Of all the sad neglects in present day Christian living there is perhaps one so sad and fatal as the neglect of prayer. Why is there so much striving after holiness and so little obtaining of it? Neglect of prayer. Why is there so much machinery in the church and so little real work turned out? Neglect of prayer. Why is there so much preaching and so few conversions? Neglect of prayer. Why is there so much Christian enterprise and so little Christian progress? Neglect of prayer. What the church of Christ needs to-day above all else, as in the day of Jonathan Edwards, is a call to prayer. What the individual church and the individual Christian needs to-day is a call to prayer. Oh, that some mighty voice might be heard sounding from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and then around the world: LET US PRAY. Our nation to-day is at the greatest crisis in its history, and what our nation needs to day above all else is prayer, real prayer, prayer by multitudes of men and women who know how to pray. The great majority of our statesmen are right when they say that the great need of our day is preparedness, but the preparedness that we need is not the preparedness that is wrought out by Germanizing our land, building up a vast military system; it is the preparedness that is wrought out by prayer.

II. THE OUTCOME OF STEPHEN'S CHARACTER

There is little time left to dwell upon the outcome of Stephen's character and life.

1. His face shone like an angel's (Acts 6 : 15). The face of any man who is full of faith, and grace, and of the Spirit, and of the Word of God, and of power, and of love, will shine.

2. He preached with unanswerable wisdom and resistless power (Acts 6:10).

3. He "wrought great wonders and signs" (Acts 6:8).

4. "The Word of God increased, and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem exceedingly" (Acts 6:7). The Word of God is bound to increase, and the number of disciples is bound to multiply exceedingly when we have deacons and workers like Stephen.

5. Men were "cut to the heart" by his preaching (Acts 7 : 54) . The preaching of such a man, full of the Holy Ghost, is sure to bring deep conviction. Our Lord told His disciples that when the Holy Ghost was come He would "convict the world in respect of sin." There will be convicting power in the preaching and personal work of any man or woman who is full of the Holy Ghost.

6. But this conviction in Stephen's case did not result in conversion. As men could not gainsay the truth of what he said, they took to lying about the preacher (Acts 6 : 13) . But they did not stop at that, they gnashed upon him with their teeth (Acts 7 : 54), and they did not stop at that, they stoned and killed him (Acts 7 : 58-60). This is the sort of treatment that a man like Stephen may expect from a God-hating and Christ-hating, and truth-hating world. In all probability there will be conviction of sinners and conversion of sinners, but sooner or later there will be hatred and persecution and suffering, and it may be death.

7. But there was another outcome of Stephen's character, Stephen had his exceeding great reward, a reward that far more than compensated for the cruel treatment that he suffered. The heavens were opened and he saw Jesus and the glory of God (Acts 7: 55), then he gently fell asleep and departed to be with Christ, which was "very far better" (Acts 7: 59, 60; cf. Phil. 1 : 23), and out of that seemingly fruitless sermon and triumphant death there sprang the prince of Apostles, Paul. Paul and all his mighty ministry and all the results of that wonderful ministry were the outcome of what Stephen was.

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