

Stephen's Fullness (Acts Vi. 5)

by Seth Rees

The sermon emphasizes the importance of Christian experience, faith, and the Holy Ghost in achieving spiritual fullness and blessing.

Scripture: Matthew 5:44, Mark 9:23, Acts 6:5, Romans 10:17, 1 Corinthians 2:5, 1 Corinthians 2:13, 1 Thessalonians 5:15, James 1:6, 1 Peter 3:9

Topics: "Holy Spirit", "Faith Development"

Description

Seth Rees preaches about the life and blessings of Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Ghost. Stephen's Christian experience is highlighted as the most important aspect in the eyes of heaven, emphasizing the importance of being filled with faith and the Holy Spirit. Rees encourages believers to cultivate faith, believe for larger things, and trust in God's power for all aspects of life, including salvation, sanctification, and divine healing. He stresses the significance of being right in faith intellectually, experimentally, and practically, and the need for courage, wisdom, and love in the Christian walk.

Transcript

"And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost "(Acts VI. 5).

This is our first introduction to Stephen. We know nothing of his birthplace or childhood, his genealogy or his education. We are not told his political, social, or financial standing. We do not know whether he came off Fifth Avenue or off the Bowery; out of the slums or from up town. We are at once introduced to his Christian experience. This makes me think that Christian experience is the most important thing that heaven sees in a man; and we are told at once that Stephen "was full of faith and of the Holy Ghost." So this must be the Divine standard for the measurement of man. Men have their standards; men measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with each other; but God has His standard, and when man stands up alongside of God's measuring line he finds himself too short. A little boy told his mother that he was six feet tall; and when she doubted his statement, he assured her that he had just measured himself by his own little feet. That is the way men measure themselves; that is the way men measure each other. They measure by their own rule. But God has a rule, and when we are measured by God's rule we are altogether too short. God has a way of making men measure up, and if you feel a shortage tonight in your Christian experience, I am delighted to be able to tell you that God has a plan by which your shortage may be supplied, and there may creep into your soul the consciousness that God has rounded you out and filled you up until you meet the Divine expectation.

I notice that Stephen had a double allowance. He was twice full. Most people are not once full. But he was "full of faith and of the Holy Ghost;" and while I do not care to draw the line too closely between the fullness of faith and the fullness of the Spirit, yet there are a great many people who have doubtless at some time received the Holy Ghost who are not very full of faith. There are some here now who do not have the faith they should have.

We will never have much more faith than we have, unless we stop talking doubt and unbelief; for if we talk doubt we will have doubt; if we talk unbelief it will grow on our hands; but if we will cultivate faith, if we will encourage faith, we will have plenty of it. Faith is not only the gift of God, but "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God," and we ought to have fullness of faith in Jesus Christ. We ought to be believing for larger things. We ought, with our faith, to look out beyond the most forbidding things that threaten us; for "all things are possible with God," and "to him that believeth."

It is the people that are believing that get blessed, I do not care what the subject is. Take the subject of salvation, and the people who scratch their heads and doubt never get blessed. Take the question of sanctification, and the people who hang around the edges and say, "I do not believe this, and I do not believe that," never get very happy. You never see them filled with ecstasy and devotion. Take the question of divine healing, and the people who always say they do not believe, do not get much out of it. It is the folks who believe that get blessed.

Beloved, you and I ought to let faith abound. We ought not to talk unbelief, or permit ourselves to mix up with any kind of doubt about anything which God has promised in His Word.

I notice that Stephen was right in his "faith" intellectually, he was right in his faith experimentally, and he was right in his faith practically. Now, it is worth something to be right in your faith intellectually. I know that some people tell us that it does not make any difference what people believe if they are only sincere and honest. I grant that there are some people who tumble into sanctification without having their heads right; but if they stay right in their hearts, they will soon straighten up in their heads. It is worth something to have the truth in our heads.

In these days of error, in these stormy times, I think it is important that you and I should be grounded in the truth, and should study our Bibles to know whether God has a salvation that is as big as our need, whether the remedy is as great as our disease. They are telling us everywhere that it is not. They are telling us everywhere that the best thing we can have is the power to control and subjugate sin; but if we can find out from our Bibles that we can be saved from all sin, we have got a good start. That is worth something.

Yet there are people who are right in their heads on the question of holiness, especially Methodists and Quakers, who are not right in their hearts. But God has a plan by which we can be right in our hearts. Stephen found out God's plan, and found the blessing; and some of us have found out God's plan, and received the same blessing as Stephen, and we feel good about it. You can get God's plan and have the same experience as Stephen, and it will make you right in your heart. This is exceedingly important; for the heart is your home; it is the place you live. If people can live right in their kitchens, in their homes, and around their own firesides, they can generally behave themselves when they have company.

And Stephen was right practically. He was a man of good report. He was a man who was right in his walk. What he had in his head had dropped down into his heart, and he practiced what he preached. God help us to do thus in these days when men can so easily break engagements, and for such a trifling thing fail to keep their word! I pray that God may make us practical in our faith!

Stephen was full of the Holy Ghost. He did mighty works and miracles among the people. He had a power that gainsayers could not resist, which is something that is very much needed nowadays. He not only had the power to perform miracles, but he had the power to stop the mouths of people and to spike the devil's guns. We need it in these days, and, thank God, He is bestowing it. Without our scarcely lifting a finger he is giving us power to create confusion in the devil's camp. All that we have to do is to go up and take the spoils.

O beloved, when you get the baptism of the Holy Ghost and fire, it will not only straighten you out in your head, but it will straighten you out in your life. It will give you a power which will make you irresistible and invincible. And that is the thing which the preachers and deacons and ecclesiastics do not like; for they want folks that can be managed, and it is awfully embarrassing to "the powers that be" to find men that have a blessing that is unmanageable.

The next thing I noticed about Stephen's blessing was, that in those days it did not debar him from official position in the church, but rather confirmed him in his office. He was chosen because he was a man "full of faith and the Holy Ghost." Now, that leads me to think that, if the Church of today followed the Pentecostal Church in its selection of officers, she would choose Spirit-filled men; she would select men who were full of the Holy Ghost and of faith. But who does not know that in these days a man who is guilty of having Stephen's blessing is placed at a great discount by the ecclesiastical authorities and powers in our churches? Let me say to you that when a witness and advocate of full salvation is held in disrepute in the church, there is something radically wrong and there ought to be a reformation. Nowadays many a man who gets Stephen's blessing goes out of office rather than in. Many a woman has lost her position as President of the Ladies' Aid Society because she obtained Stephen's blessing. She could not dry the church dishes any longer, and she had to go. And many a man has been removed from the position of Superintendent of the Sunday school or teacher of the Bible class because he got Stephen's blessing; and many a poor preacher has had to take to the woods and Hardscrabble Circuit because he is guilty of having Stephen's blessing. These things make my heart sad. I smile when I think of the preacher, for I know it is good for him; but I am sad when I think of the folks, for it is awful for them.

I want to tell you that when a church is in such a condition that she rejects salvation, it is no time for you to spend your time and money by undertaking to promote that condition of things. God bless you, you can thunder around at Bunker Hill if you want to; but the battle was over years ago. You can waste your ammunition on an empty battlefield if you want to; but I am going to the front. I am going to fight where God is, and where God is at work, and where the devil and the enemy are, and I am going to join hands with God. When you get Stephen's blessing you will lose sight of things that fill your vision today, and you will see that the things eternal are the all-important things, and will seek the things that will beat par when the world is on fire. God in heaven give us something that will stand when everything else has fallen!

The next thing I notice about Stephen's fullness is, that it gave him courage. He was filled, not only with the Holy Ghost, but with courage. To have encountered the jeers and assaults of the world and of worldly people would have been heroic; but to be attacked by the church, which should have stood by him, to be arrested by the people who should have been his friends, to be misunderstood and misrepresented, that was something awful; and yet Stephen stood out before allsorts of opposition. Look at him before the council! The Spirit of God comes upon him, and he arraigns the council before their own consciences, and charges home to judge and jury their awful crime.

Such heroism as God gave Stephen is greatly in demand in these days; and when you get Stephen's blessing you will have courage to face folks and look them straight in the two eyes and tell them the whole truth. You will not feel like crossing the street to escape meeting any one. So far as your motives are concerned, you would be willing to have them written on the wall, that people might read them; for your heart is clean as heaven; and you are not afraid to face people. Nothing else but the second blessing will do it. Beloved, there is nothing else but the second blessing that will save the church; there is nothing else that will save the world; there is nothing else that will deliver us in this age of compromise; there is nothing else that will save us from this pleasure seeking, time serving, ease loving spirit which has fastened itself on people generally. There is nothing else that will kill the indifference and laziness that is getting into the churches; that will fill us with courage; that will make us go through with God! If we do not get it, we are gone. Another thing I notice about Stephen's blessing is, that it gave him great wisdom -- not the wisdom of this world, but the wisdom that comes from God out of heaven. Now, wisdom, concisely defined, is "knowledge, with ability to apply it properly." That is what Stephen had, and that is what people generally want; but it is the rarest thing in all this country -- "knowledge, with the ability to apply it properly." In these days, men know a great deal. Their heads are stuffed, but their hearts are starved.

We do not know how to apply knowledge, and we have, therefore, a great deal of wasted energy. We have efforts that are worse than fruitless. We are making tremendous strides in activity and in energy nowadays; but the mill is not turning out much wheat. We have the noise, and the rattle, and the ceaseless hubbub in our churches; but when you go around to where the wheat ought to run out, there is nothing. God help us! What is the use in running a machine, if you can not get any wheat? What is the use of grinding, if you can not get the grist? What is the use of paying out your money, if you can not get returns?

Now, I want to say something to you holiness people. You will not pay a doctor that does not help his patient, and you will not pay a lawyer that will not win his case, and it is nonsense to pay a preacher that does not get men saved and sanctified; and the time has come when God's people must be careful that they get returns for their outlay which will stand the fire of the judgment.

The time has come when I can not invest my money in foreign missions (although I believe in foreign missions), when the missionaries have not had their Pentecost. I can not put my money along lines that do not bring me returns. I have got to have ten per cent. I must have more than that-- I must have a hundred per cent. You ought to pray about this matter of where you put your money. God bless you, you can get a soul for every dollar you invest. If you do not know the place, I can tell you where. A soul is going to be worth a great deal a little later on. When gold and silver will not be worth using for sidewalks, a soul will shine with rich luster. The time has come when we are forced to pay some attention to what will catch the fish, and less attention to the appearance of our outfit and things that do not catch fish. God bless you, I am in for a whole string of fish. I would rather get a tadpole, and sometimes a sucker, if I can get also a soul, than to return with an empty net.

Stephen had a blessing that put conviction on people; he had a blessing that put the hook in men's jaws, and made that old Sanhedrin gnash their teeth and rage, while the same blessing kept him sweet meanwhile. It is one thing to stir the devil and it is another thing to have a blessing that will keep you sweet after he is stirred. I know some people who stir the devil, but he stirs them!

This wisdom comes, not so much by way of Harvard and Yale, as it comes by waiting on God; not so much by study as by devotion. It comes to people who are little and unknown, and are willing to stay unknown. You do not get it by a great deal of research, but it is something that maybe revealed to a child. I

have seen a child ten years old that had that which would outdo a whole regiment of bishops. I know men that have been taken from the slums and from the saloons, and been sanctified and made preachers, that I would rather have lead my work during my absence than a Doctor of Divinity or a Doctor of Laws, if he had not had his Pentecost.

I like Stephen. I expect to tell him so when I see him. He did not live long, but he made a mark while he did live. I would rather preach myself to death in three months, and go to heaven as Stephen did, than to hang around for nine hundred and ninety years inactive and ineffective - I would indeed. I have told God if I can not be something more than an ordinary Christian, I do not want to be anything. I believe that God wants us to be something more than ordinary Christians: to be filled with the divine; to be irresistible; to be irrepressible; to be so that the devil himself cannot do anything with us; to be so that we can fight our way through a whole regiment of imps, and get the victory anyway. Notice another thing the blessing did for Stephen. It put a shine on his face. Look at him before the council! His face looked like that of all angel. God did it. God knows how to shine his folks for a state occasion. I believe that God put a shine on Stephen's face for this occasion. You have known people who at first seemed homely and unlovely, but when you got acquainted with their lives, and saw how they followed the example of Jesus Christ in their walk, they got to looking really beautiful. It was not only heaven shining down on Stephen, but it was truth shining out of his soul.

It takes hard wood to polish well; and do you know that, in these days, God is going into the slums, and getting knots and making good people of them, and putting a shine on them that is going to astonish angels and devils? We sit up in our cushioned pews and frescoed churches, and we are too good to go down and fish people out of the slums; and we draw up our garments when people who are a little beneath us come around, when, if we knew God as He really is, we would be thankful to help these people for God. If you have not been through the fire that burns out pride, that burns out strife and all love of self, you are short of being a good Methodist, or a good Quaker, or a good New Testament Christian.

I now come to the climax of Stephen's experience, and that is the blessing of love. The last thing I know about Stephen before he went up was, that he was praying for his enemies. In the midst of the shower of stones, with a shining face, with a loving heart, he cried to God for his enemies. That was a love that made him forget himself, that made him forget that bruise where that stone struck him on the shoulder and where that one hit him on the side of the head; that was a love that made him forget his own injuries and pray for the people who were casting stones at him.

And if you are so fortunate as to get Stephen's blessing, it will make you like Stephen in that particular, so that when people are saying all manner of things against you, you can look up to heaven and say, "God bless them." And there is no sense in your talking about being sanctified unless you can do that. If there is some one you do not love, you have not got Stephen's blessing. If there is some one you do not care to speak to, you do not know anything about Stephen's fullness. If there are people who have lied about you, and you do not feel good toward them, you have not got Stephen's blessing. This world is crying out for people who have Stephen's blessing. You step on a geranium in your garden, and you never think of begging its pardon, and yet in return it showers you all over with a sweet perfume. O, for something that will make us return good for evil, so that when people step on us and bruise us, we will just shower them all over with a bath of heaven's fragrance! Stephen had this blessing, and we ought to have it, and when we get the baptism with the Holy Ghost and with fire we will have it; and instead of feeling sensitive and peevish, and as though every one was against us, we will just shower even one with blessings.

It is no wonder to me that Jesus Christ rose to His feet to receive a man like Stephen into heaven. It is no wonder to me that He rose to welcome Stephen to the sky. If you will get Stephen's blessing, and live Stephen's life, and die Stephen's death, Jesus Christ will rise up to meet you.

God did not make man to mock Him. God has not put the desire in your heart for Stephen's blessing, and at the same time refused to give it to you. God will do for you exactly what He has done for others; and if you will meet the requirements and conditions, He will do it now. Amen!

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