

Series: The Book of Acts: Growth Against All Odds

Sermon: The Kingdom That Overcomes

Scripture: Acts 6:8 – 8:3 (NIV '84)

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THE TEXT

Acts 6:8 – 8:3 (NIV '84)

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

⁽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,*

⁽¹⁰⁾ *but they could not stand up against his wisdom or the Spirit by whom he spoke.*

⁽¹¹⁾ *Then they secretly persuaded some men to say, "We have heard Stephen speak words of blasphemy against Moses and against God."*

⁽¹²⁾ *So they stirred up the people and the elders and the teachers of the law. They seized Stephen and brought him before the Sanhedrin.*

⁽¹³⁾ *They produced false witnesses, who testified, "This fellow never stops speaking against this holy place and against the law.*

⁽¹⁴⁾ *For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs Moses handed down to us."*

⁽¹⁵⁾ *All who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel.*

7 ⁽¹⁾ *Then the high priest asked him, "Are these charges true?"*

⁽²⁾ *To this he replied: "Brothers and fathers, listen to me!*

Acts 7:48 – 8:3 (NIV '84)

⁽⁴⁸⁾ *"However, the Most High does not live in houses made by men. As the prophet says:*

⁽⁴⁹⁾ *"Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me? says the Lord. Or where will my resting place be?*

⁽⁵⁰⁾ *Has not my hand made all these things?"*

⁽⁵¹⁾ *"You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit!*

⁽⁵²⁾ *Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him—*

⁽⁵³⁾ *you who have received the law that was put into effect through angels but have not obeyed it."*

⁽⁵⁴⁾ *When they heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him.*

(55) But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.

(56) "Look," he said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."

(57) At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him,

(58) dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul.

(59) While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."

(60) Then he fell on his knees and cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he fell asleep.

8 (1) And Saul was there, giving approval to his death. On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.

(2) Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him.

(3) But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison.

OUR GREATER DANGER

The majority of people adopted two impoverished values: personal peace and affluence. Personal peace means just to be let alone, not to be troubled by the troubles of other people, whether across the world or across the city- to live one's life with minimal possibilities of being personally disturbed. Personal peace means wanting to have my personal life pattern undisturbed in my lifetime, regardless of what the result will be in the lifetimes of my children and grandchildren. Affluence means an overwhelming and ever-increasing prosperity – a life made up of things, things, and more things – a success judged by an ever-higher level of material abundance. After the turmoil of the sixties, many people thought that it was so much better when the universities quieted down in the early seventies. I could have wept. The young people had been right in their analysis, though wrong in their solutions. How much worse when many gave up hope and simply accepted the same values as their parents – personal peace and affluence. Now drugs remain, but only in parallel to the older generation's alcohol, and an excessive use of alcohol has become a problem among the young people as well. Promiscuous sex and bisexuality remain, but only in parallel to the older generation's adultery. In other words, as the young people revolted against their parents, they came around in a big circle – and often ended an inch lower – with only the same two impoverished values: their own kind of personal peace and their own kind of affluence. Francis Schaeffer, "How Should We Then Live", 227

One of the greatest injustices we do to our young people is to ask them to be conservative. Christianity is not conservative, but revolutionary.

Francis Schaeffer, "The Church at the End of the Twentieth Century: Including The Church Before the Watching World"

Christian values are in retreat in the West today, primarily, I believe, because of the church itself. If Christianity has failed to stem the rising tides of relativism it is because the church in many instances has lost the convicting force of the gospel message. Earlier we argued that while humanists did not understand humans, Christians did not understand Christianity. This is surely evident in post-World War II Christianity, which has become a religion of private comfort and blessing that fills up whatever small holes in life that pleasure, money and success have left open. What Bonhoeffer called a "god of the gaps."

The apostle Paul said, "My power is made perfect in weakness," and concluded, "When I am weak, then I am strong." And throughout Scripture God reveals a special compassion for the powerless: widows, orphans, prisoners, and aliens. Though the message of the Kingdom of God offers salvation for all who repent and believe, God does not conceal His disdain for those so enamored of their own power that they refuse to worship Him or to acknowledge His delight in the humble.

A culture that exalts power and celebrity, that worships success, dismisses such words as nonsense. Strong individuals rely on their own resources, which will never, ultimately speaking, be enough – but the so-called weak person knows his or her own limits and needs, and thus depends wholly on God.

Charles W. Colson, "Kingdoms in Conflict", 220, 527, 528

"When the church isn't being persecuted, it is being corrupted."

Charles W. Colson, "Kingdoms in Conflict", 113

GOSPEL PROMISES

He **receives** the Rejected

He **raises up** the Received

He **redeems** the Resistant

Acts 7:58b, 8:1a

(58b) Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul.

...(1a) And Saul was there, giving approval to his death.

Acts 8:3

(3) But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison.

Revelation 12:10-11

(10) Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say; "Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down.

*(11) **They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb** and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.*

1. Fear not
2. Do not trust in "princes or kings."
3. Be the church, faithful to JESUS in word, deed, and attitude!
4. Remember the end of the story and trust the cross of Christ.