

The Present and Active God (Acts 7:1-60)

We won't read the entire chapter here (please do so later)

- Story of Abraham, Patriarchs & Joseph, Moses, Israel in the wilderness, David, Solomon and the temple
- I'll give you the sense of it—the main point and how it helps us now

Last week in chapter 6 we met a man named Stephen

- Full of: Holy Spirit, faith, wisdom, grace, power
- You'd think life would be good for Stephen: full of; chosen by peers; serving; working miracles; quality
- Opposition (He looked too much like Jesus)
 - Sanhedrin
 - **Read Acts 7:51-60**

The accusations against Stephen (false) where that he had spoken negatively about the **temple** and the **Law of Moses** (6:13)

- Stephen uses the opportunity to talk about Jesus (i.e. not a self-defense intended to acquit him) **WOW**
 - **1. That Moses himself pointed to Jesus in the Law**
 - **2. That God Himself said worship would not be confined to the temple**
 - His thrust in mentioning these things is to remind his audience (representative body of Israel) that they had **missed** the **mark** with both **Moses** and the **Temple**
 - **Acts 7:39, NIV** (Moses)
 - **Acts 7:48, NIV** (Temple)
- So, Stephen's conclusion is that they have also **missed** that Jesus is the Messiah (**Acts 7:51-53, NIV**)
 - I.e. They (Israel) have missed the point before, and they are doing so again
 - They are radically offended (**Acts 7:54, NIV**)
 - And they kill Him

But, there is one last thing Stephen claims that causes them to ultimately rush upon him, drag him outside and stone him

- He claims to see God's glory and that Jesus is central to it (**Acts 7:55-56, NIV**)
- A strong response (**Acts 7:57-58a, NIV**)
 - Why? Connecting God's glory and Jesus...

There is a subtext running through Stephen's speech and vision that will be helpful to many of us today

This week I spent some time in the mountains with a friend...

- Looking at the story of the Resurrection...
 - (I was experiencing the fact that there was finally a power greater than myself)
- Here is why that is important to me right now...
 - (Sometimes it feels like we are left to our own devices)

But the truth is: God is always present and active in our lives

- That is important to remember because life is hard

Abraham

- Called out and promised (did not know where; did not see how)
- God was present and active in the ambiguity of his call and the physical impossibility of it
 - Abraham would realize this when he finally held Isaac (**verse 8b**)

Joseph

- Rejected by those who were supposed to love and protect him
- But God was present and active in his rejection and slavery (**Acts 7:9-10, NIV**)

Moses

- Called by God but failed miserably in his attempt to fulfill his calling

- God was present and active in his failure (see Acts 7:23-36)

Israel

- Promised by God that they would be His people who would worship Him
- God was present and active in their suffering in Egypt (Acts 7:34, NIV)
- And then was present and active with them in their wandering in the wilderness (verses 44 & 45)

Stephen

- God was present and active in his great moment of need (verse 55 & 56)

You

- God is present and active in your drama right now as well
 - Maybe like Abraham you do not know where you are going or how you will thrive there (Reality)
 - Maybe like Joseph you have been rejected by those who were supposed to love and protect you
 - Maybe like Moses you feel like your best efforts have been failures
 - Maybe like Israel you feel like your suffering and wandering are unending
 - Maybe like Stephen you feel like your current trial will crush you (and it may)

But, God is present and active even in our crushing

- How do we know?
- Because Jesus was crushed for us (proof of God's never ending, always pursuing love)

How will you respond? What is God's invitation to you in your current difficulty?

- An invitation to hear? (verse 51a = hearts and ears uncircumcised)
- An invitation to obey? (verse 51b = resisting the Holy Spirit)
- An invitation to rely? (verse 55a = full of the Holy Spirit)
- An invitation to see? (verse 55b-56 = seeing God's glory and Jesus clearly)

The reason we can hear, obey, rely, see is because there is a bigger, wiser, stronger, better Power—loves us!

- Cross = proof of love
- Resurrection = proof of power
- Stephen's Vision = proof of presence (the veil between heaven and earth is thin)

The Sanhedrin was missing the story of God's activity and presence among them (and the full expression of it)

- Stephen, formed by the same story, saw more clearly (He did not miss it)

How might you lay hold of the story of God's active presence now for yourself?

- What about your story... can you identify God's work and presence there?
 - Acknowledge God's presence and work there and thank God for it
- It may not be how you want or expect it to look... but it is there
 - How will you respond to it?
 - Of course there is ambiguity and difficulty in it (but He is with you—stick with Him)
 - Don't respond in fear that turns back and becomes unfaithful (Acts 7:39-41, NIV)

What do you want to say to Jesus about your present circumstances?

- See Him in glory at the right hand of the Father