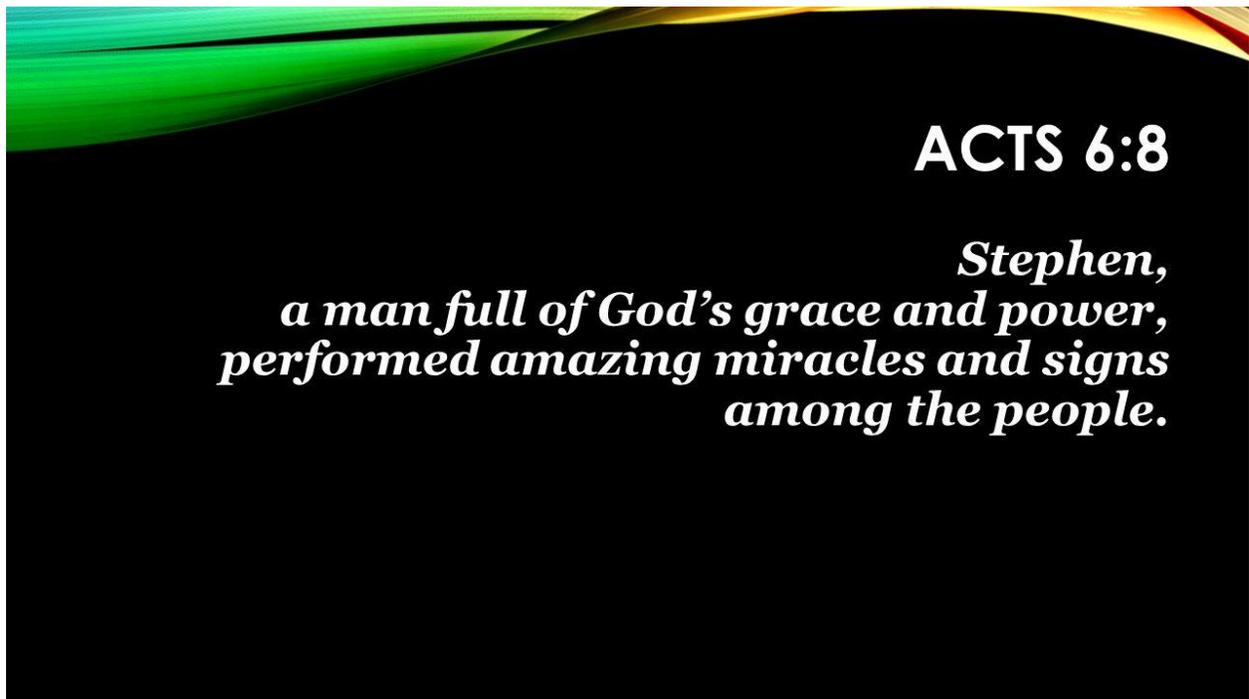


July 28th, 2019  
Acts 7:54-60

How to be safe?

<sup>54</sup> Once the council members heard these words, they were enraged and began to grind their teeth at Stephen. <sup>55</sup> But Stephen, enabled by the Holy Spirit, stared into heaven and saw God's majesty and Jesus standing at God's right side. <sup>56</sup> He exclaimed, "Look! I can see heaven on display and the Human One<sup>[a]</sup> standing at God's right side!" <sup>57</sup> At this, they shrieked and covered their ears. Together, they charged at him, <sup>58</sup> threw him out of the city, and began to stone him. The witnesses placed their coats in the care of a young man named Saul. <sup>59</sup> As they battered him with stones, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, accept my life!" <sup>60</sup> Falling to his knees, he shouted, "Lord, don't hold this sin against them!" Then he died.

Last Sunday we had an opportunity to hear about mission and God's power within us. God was at work, God is at work and God will continue to be working through his people in this world. Will we join him? Today we come back to Acts. We have witnessed how the disciples saw Christ ascended, we witnessed Holy Spirit coming upon all the believers. We learned that lying is not the way to live our lives and we ended up with how to solve the problems in the church. Two week ago we appointed 7deacons to serve the widows.



One of these 7 deacons was a man named Stephen. Stephen was filled with the Holy Spirit. He had an exceptional faith. Stephen was doing great wonders and signs among people.

Today's sermon is very important because I want to teach you how to be safe and not to be killed. You will have to avoid all what Stephen did. First mistake he did was he said yes to the ministry.

So #1 what not to do is never say yes to any ministry. It can be dangerous. There was a need in the community of believers, there were a lot to do and Stephen said yes. Soon you will also be asked to help our church to grow, you will be asked to share your gifts, make sure you write none. Because it can be very dangerous. You do not know where it could lead you...

So Stephen said yes, and guess what happened. "Opposition arose" (6:9a). Not only that, people lied "So they brought in some men to lie about him, claiming they had heard Stephen curse Moses, and even God" (6:11). This is serious accusation. For nothing was more sacred to the Jews and nothing more precious, than their temple and their law. The temple was the "Holy Place", the sanctuary of God's presence, and the law was "Holy Scripture", the revelation of God's mind and will. So of course Stephen was dragged before the Jerusalem court. "The high priest asked: "Are these accusations true"? Seems like the questions should be just "yes" or "no". But I think it was a wrong question to ask.

I am more and more convinced that questions are more important than answers. I am also learning that how not to ask wrong questions. First, I am starting this at my home. I have learned what are the wrong questions to ask my kids. For example, wrong question would be: Would you like to clean your room? Or: Can you unload the dishwasher? These are wrong questions. No, what I ask now is: Would you like to watch TV? Play Games? If you do, you need to clean your room. Do you want to have desert? You can after you eat your veggies. I also learned through big mistakes. There was a big gathering of people. Some people I have not seen for a long time. I was talking with one of my friend about the lady that we have not seen for a while. My friend said, look, this lady is pregnant. I said, oh, how nice. I am so happy for her. So when I went to greet her, I said, I am so happy, so glad you are expecting. She was not pregnant. She just gained some weight... I wish I would never asked that question. I was so upset I came to my friend and I said, she is not pregnant, why did you tell me she is? She said, she sure looked like. Never assume. The answer you will get depends a lot of how you will ask your question.

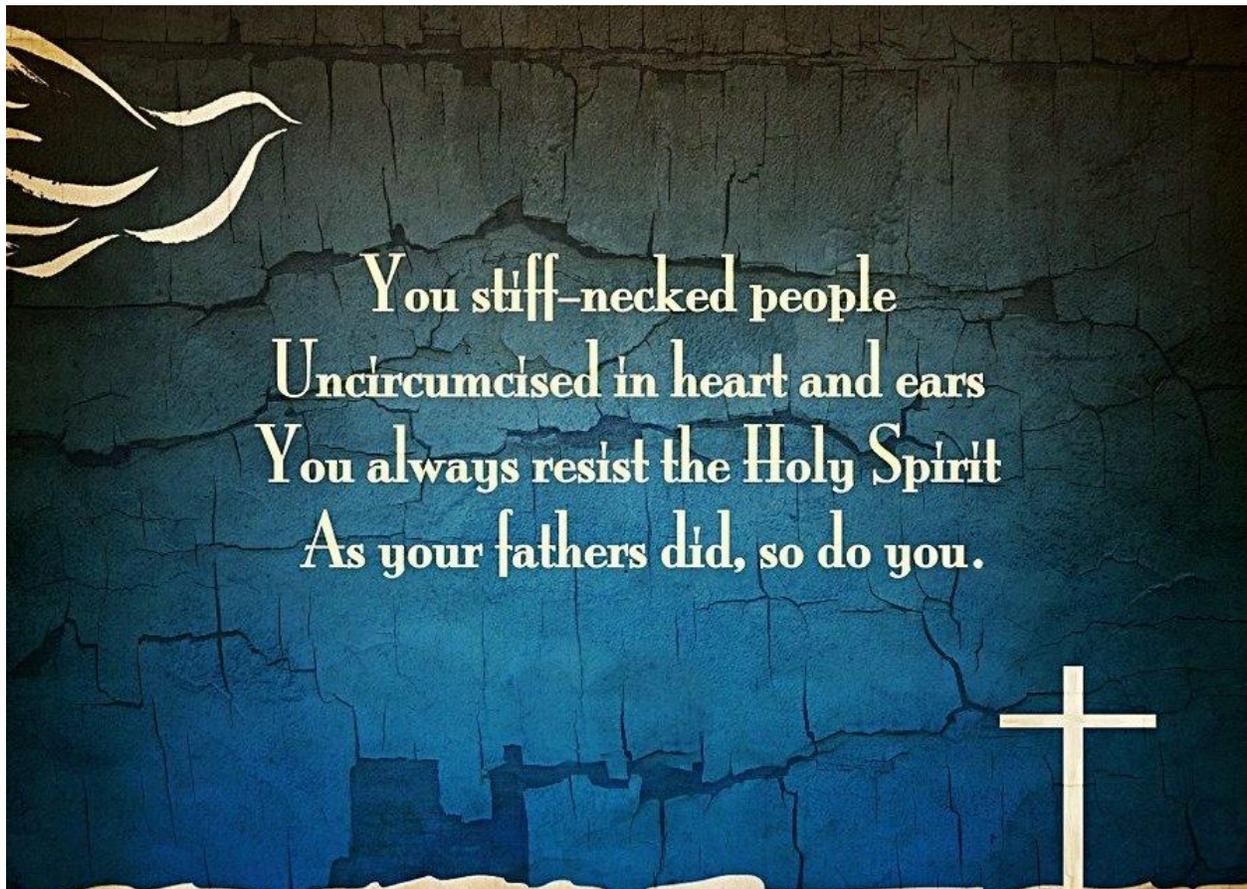
High priest asked wrong question. His power, his status did not let him to see what God was doing. But Stephen answered right.

Second huge mistake Stephen did and what we all should avoid is:

**#2** Do not study Scripture and do not share it.

Stephen did just the opposite. Look what happened to him. He knew his Scriptures. Not only he studied, memorized, but he shared. It was dangerous to share...It was so risky to share. He gave his life for the gospel. So he shared God's story starting with Abraham, Joseph, Moses, David and Salomon. Why did he share to the people who knew the Scriptures? His opponents, high priests, law teachers knew it even better. Because we need to hear the story over and over again. Even if we know it well we need hear it again. Even we think people know the story about Jesus, it does not mean we do not share it. We need to listen again,

we need to remember and remind ourselves and others again and again. Stephen's main point in his long speech, long sermon was that the presence of God is not restricted to any one land or to any material building. In the end Stephen says: you, you religious leaders, authorities, you are the lawbreakers. You rejected the Savior, who is himself the law fulfiller. Stephen says:<sup>1</sup> "You stubborn people! In your thoughts and hearing, you are like those who have had no part in God's covenant! You continuously set yourself against the Holy Spirit, just like your ancestors did".



After they heard this, they had enough. "Once the council members heard these words, they were enraged and began to grind their teeth at Stephen".

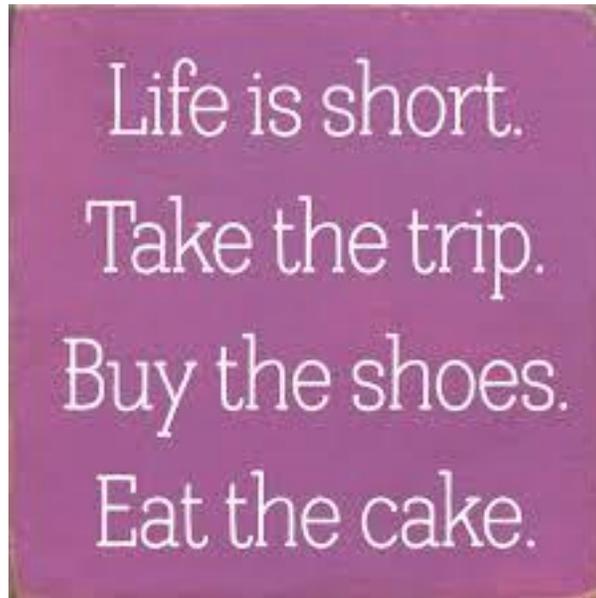
Mistake #3. Never stay calm. When people get angry around you, get even angrier. People can stand calmness. Make sure you say worst, make sure you raise voice. If they are ugly to you, - get back with nastiest things. Even if it is not true. Stephen lifted up his eyes to heaven. His eyes were fixed to Jesus.



“Together they charged at him, threw him out of the city, and began to stone him. My favorite part is what Stephen saw when people like animals were grinding their teeth, they were enraged... Listen what Stephen says: **“Look,” he said, “I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!”**. Only when you study, look deeper into the word of God, you can notice something interesting. Think of the Apostle Paul.”The third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended to heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty”. Isn’t Jesus seated at the right hand of His Father? But here, Stephen sees that Jesus is standing...I can’t help but to think of Jesus, as He can not just sit. He stood up to welcome His disciple... He is ready to embrace him. I can not help but to think as how I would greet my child whom had suffered, who had go through the biggest pain, lost everything and now my child is back into my arms. Even if I am filled with that passion, love, how much more Jesus is for Stephen...

I started my sermon talking about wrong question. Indeed, you can ask thousands times “why”? You can still ask today. If you need so. But maybe it is wrong question. Never doubt that God is love, never doubt that God cares. Even if the thought comes to your mind, do not let it stay. God is love. So many things happen that I have no answer. But I trust God does. So many times my heart is broken from the pain, loss, sickness...But I know Jesus stands up to meet every

single person who trusts in Him. Our life is here is truly short. You can say, life is short so let's enjoy, buy new shoes or something like that.



But I think we should start think more like this:

## **LIFE IS SHORT, LET'S GET READY FOR ETERNITY.**

What will matter as we meet Jesus face to face? What will matter in the eternity? It matters how we live now. Our choices matters. How we spend times- matters, how we spend money- matters. It matters if we choose to forgive, to love to serve, to share our faith with others...

Stephen lived a short life here, let's do not ask why. Let's praise God because of what Jesus did, because what Stephen witnessed, the kingdom of God continues to grow. I do not want to spoil the next Sunday sermon, but something amazing happened because of Stephen's life and death.

Mistake #4. Never apply what you hear from the Bible. Listen to my sermon, but do not dare to try anything in your life. Try to forget as fast as you can, maybe even do not listen that carefully, try to think about your lunch, start worrying about work, kids, relationship. Do anything you need to do not to apply to your personal life. Maybe you can think of somebody else who needs to hear it. There are always OTHERS, who needs to hear it, but not you. So just do anything, whatever helps you, not to apply to your life, your daily life. It can cost to loose your life.

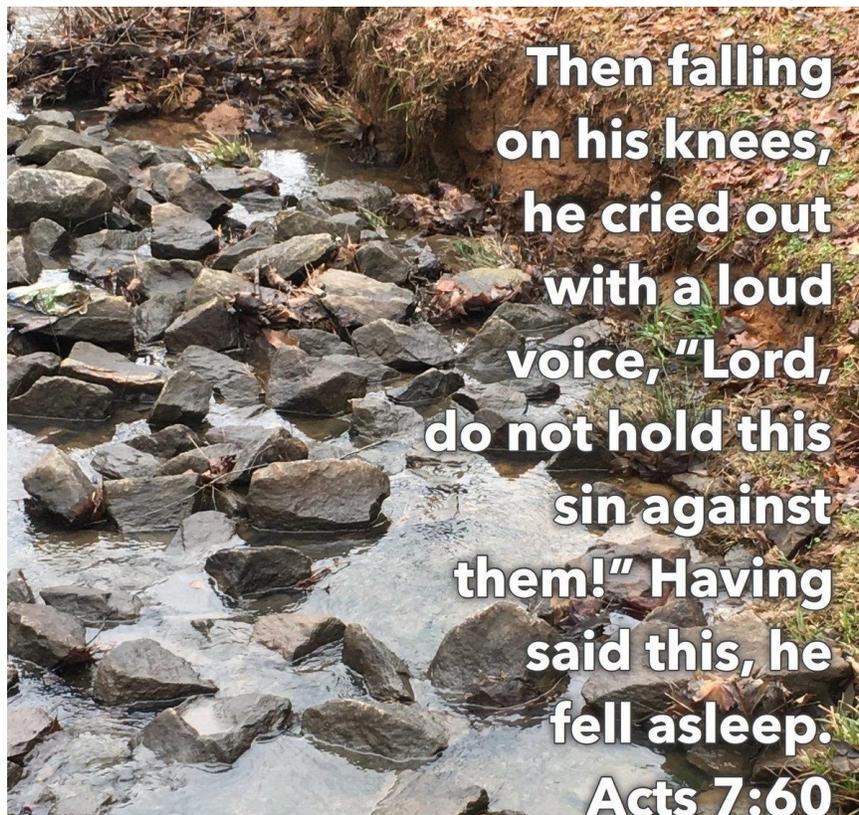
It is hard to imagine, hard to understand. But here is Stephen, starts to feel the stones, rocks hitting his body...people screaming and acting out anger, people who are ready to kill. To do anything to silent gospel...I certain, they thought it would be too difficult to stop few thou-

sand people from spreading gospel, spreading the word, that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of



God and He is not dead... Stephen's faith gave him the New Life. Life that enabled him not to fear, life that enabled him to see the Jesus in the most difficult times and to forgive those whom hurt him, those who killed him:

Luke, author of Acts, I believe, very purposely chose the word asleep. You can go asleep when you have peace. You fall asleep so you will be awake in the presence of Jesus.



Jesus at the cross said: Father, into your hands I commit my spirit” Stephen said: “Accept my life”. Let’s to accept Jesus into our lives so when the times come He will accept us.