

Reading: Acts 6:8-15

Reading: Acts 7:54-60

SERMON

**Being in God's Glory** (Acts 6:8-15; 7:54-60)

*Play Music from Wildfire*

That music is from a musical version of the life of Stephen called Wildfire. That part as you may have guessed was the death of Stephen, the first Christian martyr who was stoned, but one wonders for what at times – or at least I do?

In chapter 6: 8 we read of Stephen

**“Now Stephen, a man full of God’s grace and power, did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people. 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, but they could not stand up against his wisdom or the Spirit by whom he spoke.”** (Acts 6:8-10 NIV)

A man

- Full of God’s grace
- Full of God’s power
- Full of signs and miracles
- Full of wisdom

And earlier in 6:5 we read

**“This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism.”** (Acts 6:5 NIV)

So he was also a man

- Full of faith
- Full of the Holy Spirit

Now what do each of those things mean? Let us begin by looking at the background of Stephen. The first mention of Stephen is Acts 6:5 and his story ends some 72 verses later, at 8:2 when we read

**“Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him.”** (Acts 8:2 NIV)

Stephen was chosen as one of seven ‘to wait on tables’ or as the New Living Translation says ‘running a food program’ or the Message even more bluntly puts it, ‘to help with the care of the poor’. Some say that this was the beginning of deacons, although the title deacon does not occur in the passage but the verb to deacon, to serve or to minister does occur in verse 2

**“So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to *deacon* on tables.”**  
(Acts 6:2 NIV)

But then if we read on

**“...choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the *deacon* of the word.”** (Acts 6:3-4 NIV)

The first applies to the seven, but the second mention applies to the Apostles and not the seven. So you are left wondering. The only thing one can say with certainty is that seven were appointed to serve the poor and Stephen was one of them and Stephen was probably Greek, although still a Jew, so a Grecian Jew.

So with that background in mind let us look at the qualities of Stephen:

- **Full of God’s grace** – The first thing is that he was full of God’s grace. How do we know this? The clue is given in his very last words. As the people are stoning Stephen he says

**“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.”** (Acts 7:60 NIV)

As he is being killed he says the similar words to Jesus that Jesus had said earlier to God the Father when he was being killed. Remember Jesus says

**“... "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.”** (Luke 23:34 NIV)

What grace thus must have taken on the part of Stephen. In some respects we expect it of Jesus, he was the Son of God, he is God, but a mere human being like Stephen. Would you have been so gracious? Or would you have wanted vengeance because Stephen had done nothing wrong – really, except be a follower of Jesus and make a stand for Jesus.

- **Full of God’s power** – next we come onto being Full of God’s power. There is no direct evidence for this except that we are told that he was brought up before the august body of the Sanhedrin, the top court in the land to defend his position.

I can remember when I went to local ministerial recognition committee in Nottinghamshire, I was nervous, really nervous. I walked into the room and looked around this long ring of people – some fifteen of them and one long chair just 3 paces from where I was standing just inside the door. All this did was to make me even more nervous, even though they were on my side. For Stephen he was walking into a hostile environment where everyone was out to get him, to kill this new religion that had sprung up. He then goes into a wonderful defence of the position which ends with the words

**“"You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit! 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— you who have received the law that was put into effect through angels but have not obeyed it.”**  
(Acts 7:51-53 NIV)

Not words for the timid or faint-hearted, but for someone who was full of power. Also as you may guess, not words to endear you to your listeners. If I had called the Ministerial Recognition Committee a group of stiff-necked people if they did not accept me, then I would probably not be standing here today!

Stephen was full of God's power, note – his own power. His power came from the right person which it was this power that he used before the Sanhedrin and as he waited on tables, as he helped the poor

- **Full of signs and miracles** – so we move on being a man full signs and miracles. We know nothing about his signs and miracles because none are recorded, so we have to take them at face value. They happened because he was full of God's power.

So why not today? Maybe we do not need them now because we have the word of God, complete, the Bible. However miracles do happen and at times we miss them. God is still at work today and is still performing miracles, but we can miss them, or we ask for the wrong thing.

- **Full of wisdom** – so Stephen was full of grace, full of God's power, full of signs and miracles, and full of wisdom. He gained knowledge and used it in the right place at the right time. If you read through his speech in chapter 7 of Acts, you can see that he knew his history, the story of the nation from Abraham to Jesus. He did not expect God just to drop knowledge into his brain, as some Christians seem to think God does. One has to read the Bible and try to understand it and try to remember it. The best way to do this is just to read it and read it and read it. When you have read it through once, then read it again.

But with that knowledge, there was also timing – that is wisdom. Yes, I know that his speech got him killed, but it was the right time to tell and apply that knowledge that he had learnt, even if it was going to cost him his life! Do we always have the same wisdom as Stephen? Do we have the same knowledge as Stephen, or are we even bothered to try and gain it. Or are we like some who try to breeze through exams doing no work and then wonder why they get bad results?

- **Full of faith** – Next he was a man full of faith. Faith in what? Faith in God and in Jesus. There must have come that time in his life when he made a jump, a jump from Judaism to Christianity. There are those who have never really had to make that jump because they have been brought up in a Christian home and so the course into Christianity was easy. In the music we heard earlier there was the group who were against the Christians, Paul being one of them. We need faith in God that he will. He will what.... He will be there when we need him, although it may not turn out as we wanted – it didn't for Stephen – he was martyred!

For Daniel's three friends it worked out when they were put into the fiery furnace for being disobedient to king Nebuchadnezzar, but obedient to God for we read

**“Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.”**

(Daniel 3:16-18 NIV)

I love that faith on their part where they could say, ‘Don't worry, God's able to save us, but if he doesn't, so what, we'll still follow him.’ They were thrown into the fire, but came out alive, Stephen gave his speech and was stoned to death. Both were faithful to God, but had differing results. Faith is not necessary a magic wand to a good, easy life, but faith is necessary for eternal life.

- **Full of the Holy Spirit** – and finally Stephen is a man full of the Holy Spirit. This was part of his CV for the role of those who were to help the poor, but it is again mentioned of Stephen in Acts 6:5

**“This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism.”** (Acts 6:5 NIV)

There he is especially mentioned as being full of the Holy Spirit and also in Acts 7:55

**“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.”** (Acts 7:55 NIV)

So it was recognised that he was full of the Holy Spirit.

So I have a question, look at verse 15 of chapter 6

**“All who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel.”** (Acts 6:15 NIV)

What did the face of Stephen look like for it to be like the face of an angel?

I am unsure as to how he looked, but maybe it was because of all the things we have noted about him

- Full of God’s grace
- Full of God’s power
- Full of signs and miracles
- Full of wisdom
- Full of faith
- Full of the Holy Spirit

That meant he shone like an angel. It must have been due to his character that affected his face. It is shone now that happy people have smiling faces and so look more attractive.

What sort of face do we give to the world – one of an angel or one like a ....?

Maybe it was that Stephen lived a life in the glory of God that it could nothing else but radiate out from his face. Is that true for you?