

Open Your Heart to Jesus

1. Last week...it was exciting to see the Holy Spirit take over our service
 - a. I know it seemed silly to some to have us repeat the prayer last week...but people are telling me how things seems to be different after that prayer
 - b. People are gaining a deeper understanding of their Bible reading time...and the spiritual things about God are becoming clearer to some
 - c. We are going to continue where we left off...and repeat verse 51
2. Acts 7:51 "You stubborn people! You are heathen at heart and deaf to the truth. Must you forever resist the Holy Spirit? That's what your ancestors did, and so do you!
 - a. Stephen has accused them of being stubborn...and resisting the Holy Spirit
 - b. Please understand that...stubbornness....and the resisting the Holy Spirit... is a condition of the heart
 - c. They know who God is...they know what He has done in the past...they know God wants to know them more in their lives...and yet they refuse
 - d. All because of the condition of their hearts...which is motivating their rebellion...
 - e. Let's see if we can gain some more insight...through the words of Jerimiah
 - f. This is God's message for the rebellious people of Israel
3. Jer 5:21-25, 21 Listen, you foolish and senseless people, with eyes that do not see and ears that do not hear.22 Have you no respect for me? Why don't you tremble

in my presence? I, the Lord, define the ocean's sandy shoreline as an everlasting boundary that the waters cannot cross. The waves may toss and roar, but they can never pass the boundaries I set.²³ But my people have stubborn and rebellious hearts. They have turned away and abandoned me.²⁴ They do not say from the heart, 'Let us live in awe of the Lord our God, for he gives us rain each spring and fall, assuring us of a harvest when the time is right.'²⁵ Your wickedness has deprived you of these wonderful blessings. Your sin has robbed you of all these good things.

4. Slide...Their rebellious hearts have robbed them of all kinds of good things and blessings
 - a. I have often wondered...how my rebellious heart...has robbed me of the blessings God wants to give me
 - b. Last week we read in Romans...that a true Jew...depends not on circumcision of the foreskin...
 - c. But rather on a changed heart...produced by God's Spirit
 - d. Jesus said...you must be born again...or born of the Spirit to see the kingdom of God
 - e. Stephen's sermon is showing them...that life is about making the decision of whether they respond to the workings of the Holy Spirit...or not
 - f. Here is what Stephen is saying...
 - g. You are rebellious stubborn sinners...you come from a long line of sinners
 - h. But you don't have to stay that way...

- i. Because of the great workings of the Father...who sent His Son Jesus....to be the perfect sacrifice for sin
 - j. So God in His wisdom...sent His Holy Spirit now to work on our hearts
 - k. And here is the key...you have to let Him in our hearts
 - l. A carpenter cannot remodel a home from the street...you have to let him in the house
 - m. A farmer cannot plant a crop without the tractor entering into the field
 - n. A cake will not bake unless you put it in the oven
 - o. So we must allow the Holy Spirit to Indwell our hearts...in order for change to occur...so that you can receive the inheritance God promised
 - p. When we refuse to open our hearts...to the working of the Holy Spirit ...we are essentially...blocking the blessing God wants to give us
 - q. And just as the tabernacle was always with Israel...so Israel could get right with God...at any time they chose to
 - r. So we too have the same opportunity to get right with God ...because we have Christ sacrifice...and the Holy Spirit is always available for us
 - s. This is why Stephen says...You are heathen at heart and deaf to the truth.
 - t. Must you forever resist the Holy Spirit? That's what your ancestors did, and so do you!
 - u. Let's turn to 1 John 3 to add some clarity to some things
5. 1 John 3:1-6, 1 See how very much our Father loves us, for he calls us his children, and that is what we are! But the people who belong to this world don't recognize that we are God's children because they don't know him. 2 Dear friends,

we are already God's children, but he has not yet shown us what we will be like when Christ appears. But we do know that we will be like him, for we will see him as he really is. 3 And all who have this eager expectation will keep themselves pure, just as he is pure. 4 Everyone who sins is breaking God's law, for all sin is contrary to the law of God. 5 And you know that Jesus came to take away our sins, and there is no sin in him. 6 Anyone who continues to live in him will not sin. But anyone who keeps on sinning does not know him or understand who he is.

- a. Verse 1 tells us...The Father loves us...He called us to Him...but the world doesn't recognize the Lord...because they don't know Him
 - b. When we see the Lord...whether at our death...or at His return...we will become like Him...and see the Lord for who He really is
 - c. Those who are truly God's children will desire to be pure as Christ is pure
 - d. John just said that anyone who keeps on sinning...doesn't know Jesus or understand who Jesus truly is
 - e. It seems the more I read my Bible...and pray in relationship with Christ ...the more I know Him and the less attractive sin seems
 - f. But yet at the same time...we Christians...who know Jesus still will struggle with sin...our sinful nature will not allow us to be perfect
 - g. This section of scripture is more clear in its original Greek language ...which I will spare us the details
 - h. In the Greek it is saying in verse 6 that
6. Slide...Anyone who knows Christ doesn't practice continual habitual sinning

- a. I may sin from time to time...accidentally and maybe even on purpose
 - b. The Lord will forgive me when I ask Him to...because God is love and He deeply desires to forgive us...in order to restore relationship with Him
 - c. But what John is doing is getting into the nitty gritty...of the lines so many love to draw in the sand
7. 1 John 3:7 Dear children, don't let anyone deceive you about this: When people do what is right, it shows that they are righteous, even as Christ is righteous.
8. Slide...Those who practice righteousness are righteous just as Christ is righteous
- a. The key word is practice...what John is saying is...if we habitually practice...righteousness...it shows we belong to Christ
9. 1 John 3:8 But when people keep on sinning, it shows that they belong to the devil, who has been sinning since the beginning. But the Son of God came to destroy the works of the devil.
- a. When we practice sin...we are reflecting what the devil stands for
 - b. When we do righteousness...we are reflecting what Christ stands for
 - c. Satan wants our sin to create a barrier...between us and God...but Jesus came to the earth to destroy this barrier through the cross
10. 1 John 3:9-10, 9 Those who have been born into God's family do not make a practice of sinning, because God's life is in them. So they can't keep on sinning, because they are children of God. 10 So now we can tell who are children of God and who are children of the devil. Anyone who does not live righteously and does not love other believers does not belong to God.
- a. In other words...our actions reveal the condition of our heart

b. I have went through what John wrote...because of what Stephen is accusing them of...rejecting the Holy Spirit

c. Here is their actions to the workings of God in their life

11. Acts 7:52-53 Name one prophet your ancestors didn't persecute! They even killed the ones who predicted the coming of the Righteous One—the Messiah whom you betrayed and murdered. 53 You deliberately disobeyed God's law, even though you received it from the hands of angels."

12. Slide...They deliberately practiced disobeying God's law

a. They resist and even kill everything that tries to reveal the truth of God's word to them...such as prophets...the Holy Spirit...even the Son of God

b. They are ungodly in their hearts...which is evidenced by the refusal to listen to the truth of God

c. They deliberately will twist the law...which puts on an appearance of righteousness...but their hearts are truly far from righteousness

d. Let's see how these guys respond to the truth...and the Holy Spirit

13. Acts 7:54 The Jewish leaders were infuriated by Stephen's accusation, and they shook their fists at him in rage.

14. Slide...They rejected the Holy Spirit again to practice more lawlessness

a. They become angry...they rejected the truth...because they want to continue to live a certain way...which is contrary to righteousness

b. Their hearts are resisting...and rejecting the Holy Spirit...because of their stubbornness to change their hearts

c. They rejected Jesus...even though they know He was the Messiah...

- d. And now they are rejecting the opportunity the Holy Spirit is offering them...to get right with God...which is available any time they want to
- e. But they would rather continue to practice the works of the devil
- f. The evidence against them...consist of the rejection the prophets...the rejection of the Holy Spirit...and they rejected Christ...to even kill Him
- g. Their rejection led to defiance...evidenced by the making of idol gods... that fits their own needs...instead of the true God

15. Acts 7:55-56, 55 But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed steadily into heaven and saw the glory of God, and he saw Jesus standing in the place of honor at God's right hand. 56 And he told them, "Look, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing in the place of honor at God's right hand!"

16. Slide... Stephen is confessing Christ as his Savior

- a. Stephen is testifying that the one they killed...is now standing in the place of honor...just like Jesus said it would be
- b. Here is how they react

17. Acts 7:57-58, 57 Then they put their hands over their ears and began shouting.

They rushed at him 58 and dragged him out of the city and began to stone him.

His accusers took off their coats and laid them at the feet of a young man named Saul.

- a. The Father God and Jesus are the 2 witnesses...who see their practice of lawlessness...or the works of the devil...
- b. I said before...these religious leaders will twist a law...in order to appear righteous...but are really lawless at heart...they are missing God

- c. They invoke a law of Moses...for blasphemy of God...while they themselves are guilty of blasphemy of the Holy Spirit...pause
- d. In the history of Israel...they would lay their coats at the feet of new king...in Israel
- e. When Jesus rode into Jerusalem on the donkey...they waved palm branches...but they also laid their coats on the ground before Him
- f. So by laying their coats at Saul's feet...they are symbolically making Saul their authority...the one who made the decision to kill Stephen
- g. I am going to go full Bible nerd here...I do this so you see how the law and the Bible all fit together

18. Lev 24:10-12, 10 One day a man who had an Israelite mother and an Egyptian father came out of his tent and got into a fight with one of the Israelite men. 11 During the fight, this son of an Israelite woman blasphemed the Name of the Lord with a curse. So the man was brought to Moses for judgment. His mother was Shelomith, the daughter of Dibri of the tribe of Dan. 12 They kept the man in custody until the Lord's will in the matter should become clear to them.

- a. I love when the Holy Spirit does things like this in scripture
- b. It tells us their names...like these names means anything to us
- c. Bible names have meanings...the name shelomith means recompence... which means...either receiving a reward or paying compensation
- d. The name Dibri means oral...or spoken words...and Dan means judgement
- e. By putting the names in order...with Andy's additional words to make a point

19. Slide...Andyism... What we practice; righteousness or lawlessness is evidenced by what we say and do; which will become the determining factor of whether we receive a reward or rejection when we face the Lord at judgement day

a. Lets look at how Moses deals with this problem

20. Lev 24:13-16, 13 Then the Lord said to Moses, 14 "Take the blasphemer outside the camp, and tell all those who heard the curse to lay their hands on his head. Then let the entire community stone him to death. 15 Say to the people of Israel: Those who curse their God will be punished for their sin. 16 Anyone who blasphemes the Name of the Lord must be stoned to death by the whole community of Israel. Any native-born Israelite or foreigner among you who blasphemes the Name of the Lord must be put to death.

a. This is the law...regarding the crime they are accusing Stephen of

b. Realize...this law of Moses...is exactly how they will be judged when they see the Lord face to face...in murdering Stephen

c. God will get the final say...God will seek our revenge...so we don't have to...Jesus said...how you judge others is how you will be judged...

d. Realize who is present...at Stephen's death...to witness their actions...the Father and the first born Son...who will later judge each of them

e. Stephen says...I see the Father...and the Son at the right hand of God

f. Now lets deal with the laying the coats at Saul's feet...who will later become Apostle Paul...why did they do that

21. Deut 17:2-12, 2 "When you begin living in the towns the Lord your God is giving you, a man or woman among you might do evil in the sight of the Lord your God

and violate the covenant. 3 For instance, they might serve other gods or worship the sun, the moon, or any of the stars—the forces of heaven—which I have strictly forbidden. 4 When you hear about it, investigate the matter thoroughly. If it is true that this detestable thing has been done in Israel, 5 then the man or woman who has committed such an evil act must be taken to the gates of the town and stoned to death. 6 But never put a person to death on the testimony of only one witness. There must always be two or three witnesses. 7 The witnesses must throw the first stones, and then all the people may join in. In this way, you will purge the evil from among you.

22. 8 "Suppose a case arises in a local court that is too hard for you to decide—for instance, whether someone is guilty of murder or only of manslaughter, or a difficult lawsuit, or a case involving different kinds of assault. Take such legal cases to the place the Lord your God will choose, 9 and present them to the Levitical priests or the judge on duty at that time. They will hear the case and declare the verdict. 10 You must carry out the verdict they announce and the sentence they prescribe at the place the Lord chooses. You must do exactly what they say. 11 After they have interpreted the law and declared their verdict, the sentence they impose must be fully executed; do not modify it in any way.

- a. By laying the coats at Paul's feet...they are saying that the Pharisees Saul is the authority...the priest...or the judge of God's law...a man of God
- b. What they are saying...by putting the coats at Saul's feet...is that Paul has declared the verdict of what to do with Stephen

- c. This Saul...later becomes Paul...the great apostle to Christ...who is forgiven of this crime
- d. Let that soak in for a minute
- e. Stephen's declaration of seeing the Son of Man at the right hand of the Father...amounted to blasphemy in their eyes
- f. But in all actuality...the Father and the Son are the 2 witnesses who will later judge each of them
- g. From Stephen's perspective...he sees the love of Jesus...who is standing... ready to receive the first martyr of the church

23. Acts 7:59 As they stoned him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."

- a. Some translations says that Stephen was calling out to God
- b. The word "God" is not in the original Greek writing of Luke
- c. The original Greek says...then Stephen prayed asking "Jesus" to receive his spirit
- d. Stephen is offering one of the highest acts of worship which can be offered...by calling on the name of Jesus...to receive his spirit
- e. No greater love than to lay down your life for your brother

24. Acts 7:60 He fell to his knees, shouting, "Lord, don't charge them with this sin!"

And with that, he died

- a. Stephen falls on His knees...who Stephen is seeing...Jesus...standing at the right hand of the Father...Stephen is requesting Jesus to receive him
- b. I think Luke wanted us to make the connection of the similarities between Jesus asking for his murderers to be forgiven...and Stephen doing the same

- c. Jesus obeyed the Father...thus Jesus asked for the Father to receive His Spirit
- d. Stephen obeyed Jesus...thus he prayed to Jesus...to receive his spirit
- e. Jesus gave the command to love our enemies...to pray for them in spite how much they persecute us...Stephen did this perfectly...as did Christ
- f. Just to show us...that Paul is taking the responsibility for Stephen's death

25. Acts 8:1 Saul was one of the witnesses, and he agreed completely with the killing of Stephen.

- a. When we think of apostle Paul...with all the coats at his feet...only later to meet Christ on the way to Damascus to kill more Christians
- b. Do you think Paul learned a lesson in forgiveness...do you think Paul would understand what Grace is...when he has been forgiven of much
- c. We start to see the picture of what drove Paul to be so reckless and relentless in his evangelism...
- d. Consider this event in Paul's life...when Paul says he was the chief of sinners

26. Discussion

- a. Are we encouraged by how much Jesus wants us to live for Him...
- b. do we see how Jesus is waiting for us stop being stubborn
- c. How Jesus is praying for us right now
- d. How the Holy Spirit is working in our hearts right now