



NEW TESTAMENT • LESSON 49

THE DEATH OF STEPHEN

The gospel cannot be stopped by persecution.



MONDAY

THE STORY: ACTS 6:8-15

Stephen is filled with the Spirit and with power. Jesus said, “If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also” (John 15:20). Stephen, like Jesus, was spreading the gospel of the kingdom with power. The religious rulers were angered that the old covenant was being minimized for a new covenant of grace. They didn’t think it was right that their customs be replaced (Acts 6:14). However, they could not withstand Stephen’s wisdom and could not deny the power of God upon him.

They incited men to testify that Stephen was a blasphemer, just as they had done to Jesus. But Stephen was not afraid. The Spirit of God was upon him. Even those who sat in the council saw that his face “was like the face of an angel.”

TALK ABOUT IT:

How was Stephen’s ministry like Jesus’ ministry? (Stephen was doing great wonders and signs among the people. And he was sharing the gospel with such wisdom that the leaders could not argue against him.)

What kinds of things might Stephen have said that would have angered the religious leaders? (Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. This meant there was no longer any need to continue to sacrifice at the temple.)

Imagine telling people they can be forgiven by trusting in Jesus and that they would no longer need to sacrifice at the temple, which had been the tradition for years!)

PRAY:

Thank Jesus that His sacrifice on the cross is good once and for all to cover our sin; that no further work is needed to be acceptable to God. We simply need to trust in what Jesus did!



T U E S D A Y

THE STORY: ACTS 7:1- 53

Stephen rebukes the Jews for their unbelief. The rulers of Israel had always rejected the plan of God, each step of the way. Stephen summarized the history of God's dealing with Israel and ended with a stinging rebuke, accusing the present leaders of murdering Jesus, the Righteous One.

These men were not innocently unaware of the gospel or confused. They were actively opposing the work of God, just as leaders of Israel did when they turned away from God and when they killed the prophets. Then Stephen, with great courage, rebukes them for not keeping the law they are claiming to defend.

TALK ABOUT IT:

What did Stephen accuse the Jews of doing? (Stephen accused the Jews of killing Jesus, just as they killed the prophets before Jesus.)

Who do you know that does not believe and needs the grace of God? (Parents, help your children see that we all need the grace of God to repent and believe.)

PRAY:

Ask God for grace for each member of your family to repent and believe. Take time to lift up those you know who currently reject the gospel.



WEDNESDAY
WHERE IS THE GOSPEL?

THE STORY: 1 JOHN 2:1,2

Stephen called Jesus the “Righteous One.” The Righteous One means the only one who did what was right. The reason that Jesus can be called the Righteous One (Acts 7:52) is because he never sinned, not even once! Not only that, but Jesus obeyed all of God’s laws. No one before Jesus and no one after Jesus can keep God’s Law. The Bible tells us that there is no one who is good, not even one (Psalm 14:3 and Romans 3:10).

Because we have broken God’s laws, like the Ten Commandments, we deserve the punishment of hell. Jesus died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sin. He lived a righteous life, obeying all the laws for us. Jesus took our sin and gives us his obedience so we can enter into heaven. He is the only Righteous One!

TALK ABOUT IT:

How does John connect Jesus as the Righteous One to the gospel? (John tells us that Jesus, the Righteous One, is our atoning sacrifice - one sacrifice for the sins of all.)

What does Jesus now do in our defense when we sin? (Jesus is interceding, or praying, for us before the Father. The nail marks in his hands and feet forever plead our case before the Father. Jesus took our penalty. So now when we sin, we need not fear the eternal judgment of God.)

PRAY:

Thank Jesus for His atoning sacrifice on the cross which paid for our sins and brought us life!



THURSDAY

THE STORY: ACTS 7:54 – 8:8

Stephen is stoned for his faith and the gospel is spread. The Jews, along with the Jewish leaders, became very angry at Stephen's vision of heaven. They took him out of the city and stoned him. Their anger spilled out toward other Christians. As a result of the persecution, the Christians in Jerusalem were scattered. At first that might seem like a defeat. But God had a plan. The Christians that were scattered began to preach the gospel in the surrounding countryside. The result was that many, who would not have otherwise heard the gospel, were saved. We are told of the results of this scattering in Acts 11:19-26: "A great many people were added to the Lord."

TALK ABOUT IT:

How did God work the death of Stephen for His own glory? (Those who fled the persecution, which began with Stephen's stoning, spread the gospel to the surrounding countryside.)

PRAY:

Thank God that nothing stands in the way of His plan, even persecution!



FRIDAY ON THE ROAD TO EMMAUS

THE STORY: ISAIAH 24:16

Isaiah speaks of the Lord as "the Righteous One" to whom all the ends of the earth will sing "Glory." In Revelation 5:12-13 we read that every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea will sing glory and praise to the Lamb. Isaiah gives us a glimpse of that day.

When Stephen gave his defense, he called Jesus the “Righteous One” (Acts 7:52). This declaration enraged the crowd and led to the stoning of Stephen. Luke records that, at that moment, the heavens opened and Stephen himself saw the righteous Son of Man, the Righteous One.

TALK ABOUT IT:

Why is Jesus called the Righteous One? (Jesus never once committed sin. Jesus also kept the whole law.)

Why was it so important that Jesus never sinned? (Perfect righteousness is what God requires. Jesus met that requirement for us. Only a sinless man could meet the standards of God’s holiness for us.)

PRAY:

Thank Jesus for being the Righteous One who is without sin, who is able to redeem us by His sacrifice.