



Sermon Series: Risk-Takers: The Adventure of Walking by Faith

To be used with Session Six: Stephen: A Faith That Advances God's Kingdom

Sermon Title Possibilities: Full of It

Scripture: Acts 6:3-15

Connection with Unit Theme: To complement the Bible study “Stephen: A Faith That Advances God's Kingdom” this sermon emphasizes that bold faith helps advance the kingdom of God. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines bold as “adventurous; inclined or willing to take risks.” But it also defines bold as “wise” and “noticeable; likely to attract attention.” Stephen embodies our entire sermon series. Like Noah, he exhibited a faith that pleases God. Like Joshua, he displayed a faith rooted in God's Word. Like Rahab, his faith was not held hostage by fear. Like David, his faith met adversity head-on. Like John the Baptist, his faith challenged others. Psalm 118:6 could summarize Stephen's boldness: “The Lord is for me; I will not be afraid. What can a mere mortal do to me?”

Introduction: John Robert Lewis was the son of a sharecropper raised in rural Alabama. He lived in constant fear because of racist signs that said, “no colored boys, no colored girls.” His parents and grandparents told him “Don't get in trouble.” Nevertheless, as a young man he was inspired by the Montgomery Bus Boycott, started when Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat. He risked his life numerous times being beaten and arrested for organizing voter registration drives, sit-ins at lunch counters, and generally challenging the injustice of racial segregation. Congressman Lewis said, “Rosa Parks inspired us to get in trouble...to find a way, to get in the way, to get in what I call good trouble, necessary trouble. She kept on saying to each one of us, you too can do something. And for people if you see something that is not right, not fair, not just, do something. We cannot afford to be quiet” (<https://blogs.loc.gov/loc/2020/07/remembering-john-lewis-the-power-of-good-trouble/>)

When opposition arose against the Good News of Jesus Christ, Stephen couldn't afford to be quiet because “there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to people by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). As a result, he got in “good trouble, necessary trouble.” Stephen believed in the message so deeply that he was willing to be arrested for it, and eventually he would lose his life for it (Acts 7:58-60). Are you willing to get in “good trouble, necessary trouble” to spread the Good News?

1. Acts 6:3-7. Have A Noticeable Faith.

What does a person with notable faith look like? The text says they have a good reputation. A good reputation implies that people with notable faith are people of character. Reputation is who you are when people are looking. Character is who you are when no one is looking. Your reputation should reflect your character. Is your reputation a mirror of your character or a mask for your character?

A person of notable faith is full of the Spirit and wisdom. The Bible says that Jesus, being full of the Spirit, was led by the Spirit, which means He was submitted to the Spirit, into the wilderness, where He resisted the devil's temptations by applying the Word of God. He emerged from the wilderness "in the power of the Spirit" (Lk, 4:1-14). When we submit ourselves to the Spirit, it allows us to be filled with the Spirit and empowered by the Spirit (Acts 6:8) and that same Spirit guides us into all truth (Jn. 16:13), teaching us how to apply truth, and applied truth is the very definition of wisdom (Acts 6:10).

A person of notable faith is full of faith, meaning they know in Whom they have believed, they act on what they believe and trust God for the outcome. "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own understanding; in all your ways know Him, and He will make your paths straight" (Prov. 3:5-6). Do you have noticeable faith?

2. Acts 6:8-10. Stand Firm on Faith.

Stephen was "full of grace," which not only means God's favor, but grace was necessary if he was going to defend the Gospel in an attractive and effective way. 1 Peter 3:14-16 says, "Do not fear them or be intimidated...ready at any time to give a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you. Yet do this with gentleness and reverence, keeping a clear conscience, so that when you are accused, those who disparage your good conduct in Christ will be put to shame." The Freedmen's Synagogue was composed of Cyrenians (Libya), Alexandrians (Egypt), some from Cilicia (southern Turkey) and Asia (western Turkey). These were educated, cultured, Greek-speaking Jews from North Africa and Asia. However, despite their intellectualism, they could not denigrate Stephen's character, deny his power, nor defeat the persuasiveness of his speaking because Stephen, although he may have employed his education, culture and intellect, was not relying on them, but relying on the Holy Spirit (the Spirit is mentioned three times, vss. 3-4, 10). "Whenever they bring you before synagogues and rulers and authorities, don't worry about how you should defend yourselves or what you should say. For the Holy Spirit will teach you at that very hour what must be said" (Lk. 12:11-12). Stephen tangibly demonstrated that the wisdom of the world is foolishness to God (1 Cor. 1:18-25).

3. Acts 6:11-15. Let Faith Speak for Itself.

Stephen had Jesus as an example that every accusation is not worth a response (Matt. 26:59-63; 27:11-14). Job's friends were more effective in silence than in speech (Job 2:13; 13:5). Faith can sometimes speak where words are insufficient. This chapter ends with Stephen's silence and his face shining like an angel. Jesus said, "let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven" (Matt. 5:16). However, Ecclesiastes 3:7 declares there is "a time to be silent and a time to speak." When the time came for Jesus to speak, it led to His crucifixion. In Acts 7, when the time arrived for Stephen to speak, it led to his stoning. Jesus declared, "A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you" (John 15:20). However, during Stephen's testimony, he saw heaven open, and Jesus standing at God's right hand (Acts 7:55-56). Paul said, "If we suffer with Him, we'll also reign with Him" (2 Tim. 2:12), and that "these light and momentary afflictions are working for us an eternal weight of glory that far outweighs them all" (2 Cor. 4:17). Sullivan Pugh wrote years ago, "May the works I've done speak for me. When I'm resting in my grave, there's nothing more to be said. May the works I've done speak for me." What will your works say when this life is over?

Conclusion: Church tradition holds that the apostle Paul was small in height, bow-legged, bald, with a unibrow, a hooked nose and an eye disease. But despite his eye ailment, the Galatians received him "as an angel of God" (Gal. 4:14). Vernon Grounds relates a story concerning J. B. Lightfoot, prominent biblical scholar of the 19th century, who wrote several commentaries on the Bible that are still consulted today. Grounds says that Lightfoot was described by one of his devoted students as "startlingly ugly: a stout little man with a grotesque figure and a squint." However, that same student also said that Lightfoot was "the best man I have ever encountered, and in a day or two . . . his face appeared the most beautiful and lovable thing imaginable" (<https://odb.org/2006/06/07/a-daily-beauty>). The bible never describes Stephen's physical appearance, but it says to see his face was to see the face of an angel. May we pursue a beauty that is beyond skin deep, that as we walk by faith, our lives increasingly reflect the beauty of God as the Holy Spirit also works to change us from glory to glory into the image of the Son, Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 3:18).

Author Bio

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