

# “Someone Stood Up for Stephen!”

## Acts 7 (7:51-60)

**Intro.** – What kind of a world does it take to see human life treated as though it were little to nothing. A current event involving a child and his parents will help illustrate what I mean.

August 4, 2016 a baby boy was born. He was a “perfectly healthy” baby born at a “healthy weight.” In the following weeks however, his parents noticed he was less able to lift his head and support himself as compared to other babies of a similar age. Doctors discovered he had a rare inherited disease – DNA depletion syndrome (MDDS). This little baby was at the center of a legal fight that progressed through the United Kingdom courts, to the European court of human rights and back to the high court, with his parents forced to suffer months of anguish as they fought to save their child. In essence, the parent’s rights to care for their child were being removed and determined by government authorities that the child should die.

Vice President Pence defended this little baby by saying his case shows how wrong government-run healthcare can be and that he’s praying the baby’s parents will be allowed to continue caring for him. “The heartbreaking story of the 11-month-old baby in England is a story of single-payer healthcare,” said Pence... “Frankly we breathe a prayer and the hope that the single-payer system in England will see its way clear to allow the family – the mother and the father – to be able to choose the greatest extent of life-saving treatment that’s available to their child.” “Otherwise,” warned Pence, “they will be submitted to a government program that says, ‘no, we’re going to remove life support from your precious 11-month-old child’ because the government has decided that the prospects of their life are such that they no longer warrant an investment in health services. “We hope and pray that little guy gets every chance, but the American people ought to reflect on the fact that for all the talk on the left about single-payer, that’s where it takes us,”

Monday, July 24<sup>th</sup>, 2017 a lawyer representing this baby’s parents said they are ending their legal fight over their baby’s treatment. As of Friday, July 28, 2017 little Charlie Gard died after life support was withdrawn.

I ask again, what kind of a world does it take to be so inconsistent with human life? It is the same kind of world that throughout history has murdered human life in the name of politics and/or religion.

Acts 7 records the very beginning of persecution of the Church. The years that followed forced Christians into underground caverns outside of Rome in some 600 miles of mole-like tunnels. Archaeologists conservatively estimate that 4 million plus bodies were buried in the catacombs and these tunnels. Inscriptions can still be found on the walls of these passage ways. The most frequent inscription is the sign of the fish (ἰχθύς)... Another frequent inscription was: *THE WORD OF GOD IS NOT BOUND*

Talk about back to basics! What a testimony! What a confession of faith in Jesus!!

Matthew 10:32-33 “*Everyone therefore who shall confess Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever shall deny Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven.*”

Stephen certainly confessed Christ before men. He stood up for Jesus and Jesus stood up for him!

*Purpose: to embed in our minds that confessing Jesus means He will confess us (i.e. stand up for Jesus and He will stand up for you)*

We will understand this by studying the results of Stephen’s death:

## I For Stephen – It Was a CROWNING

- the death of Stephen was his victory – i.e. for the Christian to be absent from the body (what is meant by “he slept” = he died) is to be present with the Lord.

### A. Stephen’s “Trial”

1. After giving one of the most comprehensive summaries of Israel’s history (Abraham to Jesus) for his defense, Stephen became the first Christian martyr.
2. Falsely accused and brought before the Sanhedrin, Stephen systematically made his defense based on Jewish history.

### B. Stephen’s Death

1. From calm argument to “holy indignation” – why? – Sanhedrin got the drift of Stephen’s defense
2. They made it clear they weren’t going to listen to this...
3. Want you to note that Stephen didn’t beat the bush” = He was “Nathan” in his approach:
  - Illus. – “Where is Nathan When You Need Him?” – 2 Samuel 12:1-15 (v 7) “you are the...”
4. All of this resulted in the stoning of Stephen – note: he died with same prayer on his lips as did Jesus when He was being crucified – “forgive them”
5. Now a quick review – Luke 22:69 etc. says Jesus “sat” down when He ascended to heaven...
6. The fact Jesus “stood up” at Stephen’s death is profound – our Lord expressing readiness to welcome Stephen home!
  - a. “Someone stood up for Stephen” – Stephen stood up for Him!
  - b. not suggesting Stephen earned in anyway his reward... just proved himself faithful.
  - c. this was Stephen’s crowning = ushered into presence of God with God standing to receive...

Application: faithfulness results in a *standing reception* just like Jesus said, “He who confesses Me...”

## II For Israel – It Was a REPROACH

- Israel’s history is certainly consistent – consistently contrary to God!

### A. They *Permitted* John to be Murdered

1. John the Immerser did what God told him to do (i.e. he stood up for God without question...)
2. Jews let King Herod take this one whom God sent as the forerunner of Jesus (Lk 3:4-6) killed him:
  - a. because John had the nerve to stand-up to Herod for having Herodias, bro Philip’s wife
  - b. Jews permitted John to be murdered.
3. It is noteworthy the Bible says John was NOT afraid of Herod but Herod afraid of John (Mk 6:20)

### B. They *Demanded* Jesus to be Crucified

1. When the religious leaders demanded the crucifying of Jesus – Pilate said, “*Shall I crucify your King?*” – “*We have no king but Caesar...!*” = Pilate acquiesced.
2. Their rejection of Jesus = rejection of God because Jesus is God!
3. They demanded and got what they wanted = King of kings, and Lord of lords crucified!

### C. They *Silenced* Stephen by Stoning

1. Sanhedrin were *cut to the quick* (5:33) and gnashed their teeth at him (i.e. like angry dog baring its teeth in anger).
2. Stephen saw the *glory of God* and Jesus standing at the right hand of the Father
3. This really set off the Jews... they stoned Stephen and justified it by accusing blasphemy...

Here a servant of God is murdered by the leaders of the Jews = reproach of Israel (reprehensible = i.e. you reap what you sow principle)...

## III For the Church – It Was a MISSION

### A. From Pentecost to Stephen

1. From the beginning of the Church to this point = Gospel given to Jews first... and Church grew...
2. Opposition had been brewing = murder of Stephen resulted in Church fulfilling her mission...

### B. From Jerusalem to the World

1. Acts 1:8 “...*And you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.*”
2. Acts 8:1-5 (read).
3. Here’s the point: this persecution prevented the Lord’s Body from being an *withdrawn, self-serving CLUB!*... – death of Stephen actually brought about the Church’s mission!

## IV For Saul – It Was CONVICTING

### A. Saul Was Present

1. “The witnesses” = by Law, those testify against Stephen required to hurl 1<sup>st</sup> stones...
2. Laid their robes/cloaks at Saul’s feet = more than “Here, hold my coat!” = Saul taking responsibility in case Roman authorities called Jews to account for this action.
3. Chap. 8 – Saul began ravaging the Church... = Saul was more than present...

B. Saul Never Forgot

1. 1 Timothy 1:12-15 (read)
2. H.S. used Saul’s sin in ignorance as conviction to bring him to Christ – Note: God never waste anyone’s blood!

The death of Stephen used to convict Saul to become Paul the Apostle.

**Conclusion:** D.L. Moody told of a young Norwegian boy who stood up at the close of a revival meeting to testify of his faith in the Lord. The boy had difficulty speaking English; yet, he wanted the people to know that he loved Jesus. Standing speechless for a moment at the front, he trembled as the tears trickled down his cheeks. Finally, he composed himself and choked out the following words: “I’m up here because Jesus wants me to testify for Him. He promised that if I tell the world about Him, He would tell the Father about me!” And with that the young man paused and finally made his way to his seat. Moody said you could hear a pin drop. Why? “Because that boy’s testimony went straight to the heart of everyone present!”

Why did this have such an effect on this gathering? How could such a simple *testimony* dazzle the sophisticated people who were present? How?! It was the TRUTH!!!

God doesn’t call us to be martyrs. He does call us to be *living sacrifices* – men, women and young people who are willing to confess Christ before the world:

- In work situations...
- In school situations...
- In moral situations...

I conclude with this summary: Stephen stood up for Jesus and Jesus stood up for him!