

The First Martyr

Acts 7:1, 48-60

Pastor Johanan Justin

Jesus calls all who believe in Him to share in His suffering and death. What does it look like to be a light that shines brightly to the end, even if the end means dying for Christ?

Stephen: The First Martyr

1. Stephen's Defense

Stephen was charged with speaking maliciously against the temple and the law of Moses (Acts 6:13-14). Stephen's defense was lengthy but engaging.

What was Stephen trying to say?

I. God's presence was never meant to be restricted to the temple. The whole earth, not the temple, was God's intended dwelling place (Acts 7:48-50; Hab. 2:14).

II. It was the Jews – not Jesus – who had rejected Moses and God (Acts 7: 39-40). The Jews appeared to be fervent worshippers, but inwardly they gave worship to every other idol. Stephen was being a light by confronting them with this truth. Christian light illuminates the will & ways of God. The Christian life is a limitless depth of heartfelt worshipful devotion that is meant to be mined and uncovered.

2. Stephen's Defiance

Stephen closed his defense in a manner that showed a defiance against the status of those judging him (vv. 51-53).

III. They were no different from their fathers: murderous, rebellious, guilty! Stephen was not in a fair and neutral court, thus his strong and defiant response. He was taking the opportunity to call the people to repentance. Despite the people's angry response, Stephen

then declares his vision (Acts. 7:55-56). Stephen's declaration led to his condemnation. His defiance was not only against the status of the religious leaders, but also against the world. Stephen knew that He was under the authority of the Great King Jesus. Jesus, in all His glory and majesty, was standing in acknowledgement of His servant who had not denied Him (Luke 12:8). Christian light pierces the darkness of the heart & the mysteries of heaven.

3. Stephen's Demise

Stephen was stoned unceremoniously, with full contempt. Stephen responded to his stoning with two petitions (Acts 7:59-60), similar to those that Jesus made on the cross (Luke 23) - forgiveness for their executors, and the submission of their lives. Even in his dying moments, Stephen continued to shine brightly for Jesus. He declares through his commitment of his spirit to the Lord, that there is hope even in the face of death. Through his petition for Jesus to forgive the people, he sought for God to extend merciful favour upon the people.

Luke records Stephen falling asleep, a picture of peace. Christian light warms with loving forgiveness & unshakable hope. We need Jesus! He is the only way we can shine until the very end for Him.