

“HISTORY LESSON” (Part 2)
Psalm 64, Hebrews 3:7-15, Acts 7:17-38
July 27 & 28, 2024

“A man was getting the windshield of his car washed and wiped at the filling station. When the attendant finished doing his windshield, the man said, ‘Terrible job! Redo my windshield. That windshield’s as dirty as when you started.’

“The filling station attendant wiped it again.

“The man in the car looked it over, and then in frustration said, ‘My goodness! Can’t you even clean a windshield? This window has not changed.’

“The attendant did it again.

“The man’s wife was sitting next to him in the car, fuming. She reached over, pulled off his glasses, wiped **them**, and gave them back to him. The attendant had been doing his job correctly. The man himself was the problem all along.”¹ Once his glasses were clean, the man could see clearly.

When problems occur in our lives, it is easy to want to blame the performance of another for what is going on, rather than first inspecting our own lives and seeing if the problem doesn’t start with us. It is easy to want to point out the failures of another rather than claim our own failures first. It seems to be human nature to want to blame someone else for what’s going on, rather than accepting the responsibility for it ourselves.

But there are times when we become surrounded with those who want to put us down or see only our demise. Psalm 64 clearly points out that we do have an enemy that wants only to destroy us, and most often, our only recourse is to turn to the Lord our God for the help and protection that He provides. That, really, should be our first avenue when we find situations that are against us. When we trust in the Lord our God, He already knows the situation we are in **and** those who are against us. And though the plots of our destruction might be intricate and well planned, God will intervene to bring about His purpose for us so that we might continue to praise Him and glorify Him in all that we do. God will even

¹ (Tony Evans, *Tony Evans’ Book of Illustrations*, [Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2009] pg. 225, #686)

use the devices of the enemy to bring about their own destruction. Then, King David tells us, “*All people will fear; they will proclaim the works of God and ponder what He has done. The righteous will rejoice in the Lord and take refuge in Him; all the upright in heart will glory in Him!” (Ps. 64:9-10).*

But sometimes we become the aggressor, and find ourselves outside of God’s plan. We may have our own agenda for life so fixed in our brains that we **want it only to go one way**, and it better be ours. Hence, we often miss out on the better things that God has for us if we were to allow Him to direct our paths.

We learn in the Book of Hebrews that it is not a good thing to harden our hearts against the ways of the Lord. The writer reminds us of the Hebrew people wandering in the desert while on their way to the Promised Land. They kept longing for their own things, the things that they had experienced in Egypt, and they rebelled against the leadership of Moses. So God decided that none of them should reach the land that He had promised them.

The writer of Hebrews encourages us to stay faithful to the Lord God, no matter what it might look like or how difficult it might seem. He tells us, “*See to it, brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called ‘Today,’ so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness*” (Heb. 3:12-13).

God desires that we continue to trust in Him and stay faithful to all His commands, even if there are others out to get us. Who knows but God might be using our witness to turn the others from their wicked and deceitful ways back to Him? Who knows but that God could use the very situation you are in to bring about a good thing for the Lord?

You know that there are people who are watching you closely to see what you will do in every situation you are encountered with. They want to see if your words of commitment to the Lord Jesus match your words and actions in everyday life, even in the face of horrible persecution and false accusation. They want to know if faith in Jesus really is that good to have in their own lives. They are interested in seeing what you do in bad situations so that they might determine if they would put their

faith and trust in Jesus, too. They might even be part of the ones who are pushing you past your limits to see just how Jesus will lead you, or if you'll go back to your old ways and respond in worldly ways to the situation. They want to see if you really believe in Jesus enough to follow Him, no matter what.

When we are in the middle of the struggles, it can be easy to give up, or fight back, or seek retaliation. But if we keep our eyes on the ones who have gone before us as examples of how we can live as witnesses for the Lord, we can gain encouragement and hope from them.

Harold Myra gives us a good statement in *Christianity Today*, (Oct. 22, 1982). He tells us, "In addition to the Saints in Scripture, we have nearly 2,000 years of history that can and should be used as challenges to piety and faith. We Protestants have been so concerned about avoiding the veneration of the saints that we often have bypassed a rich heritage, a rich heritage of faith. Just as the book of Hebrews gives us a roll call of believers (in chapter 11), so we can look to countless examples of equally courageous lovers of God."² And in so doing, gain courage ourselves to live for the Lord Jesus Christ.

Today we continue to look at the example of Stephen in the Book of Acts, chapter 7. Stephen had been filled with the Holy Spirit, and was doing great wonders and signs among the people (6:8), when some in the Synagogue began arguing with him. Not being able to stand up against the wisdom the Holy Spirit had given him, these "Freedmen" instigated false witnesses to accuse him of trying to pervert the faith. He was arrested and put on trial before the Sanhedrin.

"*The high priest asked Stephen, 'Are these charges true?'*" (7:1), to which Stephen begins his defense. Last week we heard the first part of his history lesson as he lifts up Abraham's faithfulness to follow and do the work of the Lord God Almighty. Abraham walked in faith, not knowing where God would lead him, yet ready to do His work. Today we focus on Stephen's next example of faithfulness when he lifts up the work of Moses. Listen to this section of Stephen's defense. This is Acts 7:17-38. (READ Acts 7:17-38).

Just like Abraham, Moses labored to follow the call of the Lord in his life, not knowing what

² (Charles Swindoll, *Swindoll's Ultimate Book of Illustrations*, [Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998] pg. 268)

God had planned for him, but ready to do His work, even if that work put him in awkward places.

Moses had been saved from extermination by the daughter of Pharaoh, who took him in as her own son when all the other newborn Hebrew baby boys were commanded to be thrown into the Nile River to die. He was raised in the ways of Egypt, becoming “*powerful in speech and action*,” but he also learned of his being of Hebrew descent.

His whole future changed overnight, however, after protecting one of his people from the brutality of an Egyptian overlord. **Had he** remained “son of Pharaoh’s daughter,” it is possible that he could have become Pharaoh, himself. But because he claimed his heritage as a Hebrew, and asserted his authority to stop the mistreatment of his people, his easy life as an Egyptian came to an abrupt halt. He became an exile, running for his life away from the luxuries that once surrounded him, because he killed the Egyptian who was mistreating one of his people. He lost his position in Egypt, and began a new life as a foreigner in Midian at the age of 40.

Moses then settled down in Midian, content to live out the rest of his life simply and quietly. He married, had two sons, and grew closer to the God of his fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. **But then** he received a new call from God at the age of 80 to go back to Egypt and deliver his people out of slavery. God had indeed seen the suffering of His people and so Moses was tasked with the unbelievable job of leading the people out of bondage to Pharaoh and into freedom in the Promised Land.

God called Moses to go back to the very place he had once escaped from. He had been rejected by the people with the words, “*Who made you ruler and judge over us?*” (Acts 7:35, Exodus 2:14). God had now lifted Moses up to become the ruler and judge over the people of Israel so that they could find release from their slavery. God was making a way for the people to find freedom and renewal as a nation so that their hearts and lives could now follow the ways of the Lord, not the ways of their captors.

However it wasn’t just getting the people out of Egypt that was the problem. It was getting Egypt out of the people that caused the most problems. Stephen reminds the leaders of the Sanhedrin

that the people had lived their entire lives under the cruelty and enmity of the Egyptians. They had become so accustomed to the religion of Egypt that they lost contact with the Lord their God. Moses did his best to re-educate them to the ways of the Lord, but the hearts of the people were still in the things of Egypt. So God decided that they were not yet ready to move into the Promised Land as His people. The whole generation had to die (except for 2 - Caleb and Joshua). God wanted the complete hearts and minds of His people to following only His will and His ways. We'll talk more about this next week.

Moses was the one God called to lead the people “*out of Egypt and performed wonders and signs in Egypt, at the Red Sea and for forty years in the wilderness*” (Acts 7:36). Moses was the one that God talked with to give guiding laws and commands by which the people were to live after they left Egypt. Moses was the one that God was guiding and empowering in order to give the people new life. “*This was the Moses who told the Israelites, ‘God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your own people’*” (Acts 7:37). “*The Lord [had] said to [Moses], ‘What they say is good. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their fellow Israelites, and I will put My words in His mouth. He will tell them everything I command Him’*” (Deuteronomy 18:15, 17-19).

Stephen was reminding the leaders of the Sanhedrin all that God had called Moses to be and do for the people of Israel. In reminding them of this, he was telling them that that was exactly what he also believed. But by reminding them that God would raise up a prophet among them, Stephen was now inviting them to put their faith and trust in the One that God had indeed called to be among them as the Messiah, Jesus Christ. He was the Perfect One whom God sent to the Earth to bring freedom from sin and death to all who would believe in Him. God had foretold Moses about it; Moses had told all the people about it; and now Stephen was reminding all the leaders of the Sanhedrin about it, so that they might see the connection between the Laws and Commandments of God brought to the people by Moses, and the fulfillment of the promise of God to provide a new Savior who would free them from the slavery to sin.

You see, God has “*seen the oppression of [His] people,*” not only “*in Egypt,*” but throughout the

world. “[He has] *heard their groaning and [has] come down to set them free*” (Acts 7:34, Exodus 3:5,7,8,10). God sent His only Son, Jesus, to the world as the perfect and ultimate sacrifice in order to take away the sins of the world, and to take as many as who would receive Him as Savior and Lord into the Promised Kingdom of God. God does not delight in our hardship and oppression, but He delights that we claim His Messiah, our Savior, Jesus, as the One who will bring about the fulfillment of God’s promise for the salvation of the world.

Stephen was working by the power of the Holy Spirit to help the leaders of the Sanhedrin make the connection between God’s promise to Moses and God’s provision of the Messiah in Jesus. He was not trying to rewrite the laws and commands of God. He was not corrupting the faith of the Jewish people. Stephen was using the Scriptures of the Old Testament to enlighten the spiritual leaders of the people of the fulfillment of God’s promise to them.

But in order for them to see clearly, they first had to admit their own sight had become compromised by pride and self-seeking ambition. They knew the Laws of God given by Moses. They prided themselves in trying to live out the letter of the Law before the people. They had given themselves to doing all that God had commanded, but they missed the part about God desiring them to be a holy and perfect people. And the only way that that could happen was for them to receive Jesus Christ as their Messiah, the Prophet and Savior in the line of Moses, so that all their sins could be permanently atoned and forgiven so that they COULD BE pure and holy before the Lord. The leaders of the Sanhedrin had become so absorbed in striving to being perfect in their own eyes, that they forgot that their role as spiritual leaders of the people was to help the people do the same thing, only to become holy in God’s eyes. God had supplied the Messiah, but it was up to them to see Jesus as the One, “*like Moses,*” who would lead them into freedom right there in their own land.

God’s Holy Spirit moved in Stephen to become the evangelist even to his own oppressors. They were out to get him because of his faith and the great works and signs of wonders that he was doing among the people. Instead of shrinking back, instead of giving up on his faith in Jesus, Stephen boldly

proclaimed the work of the Lord God Almighty in producing a Messiah who would come for the whole world's salvation from sin and eternal death. This Messiah would bring freedom, and hope, and life, to all who would follow Him, not just for this world, but on into eternity.

He looked into the eyes of those around him, and saw their need to clearly see Jesus as God's Messiah. Stephen loved them so much that he wanted each one of them to realize the fulfillment of God's promise. God was providing this tremendous platform for him to present the Good News of Jesus Christ to the leaders of the Sanhedrin. He boldly let the Holy Spirit work in and through him so that the leaders might repent and acknowledge their failures and then begin to seek the Lord.

Folks, that's our calling also. When we put our trust in the Lord Jesus, and claim Him as our Savior, He invites each one of us to become His bold witnesses to the world for Him. Jesus invites us to love those around us so much that we would want them to hear the truth about Jesus so that they can put their own trust in Him as their Savior, too. We are invited to open up our lives to the power of the Holy Spirit so that He might work in us, in order to reach the people right around us. We don't need seminary degrees to teach others about Jesus. We only need a heart to know Him, learn about Him, and then share the very faith that we have with those we love, so that they might hear about Jesus, and hopefully repent and find His forgiveness and salvation, too. As we come to love Jesus with all our hearts, He will fill us with such compassion for the ones around us that have not yet put their trust in Him. And as we stand up for Jesus, even in the face of opposition and animosity, we can justly and rightly proclaim Him as the promised Savior of the world.

But it starts here, today, as we genuinely confess our own sins, and seek the Lord's forgiveness for our own faults. We must have clear sight in our own eyes before we can deal with the hurts and fears and doubts of those around us. We must be right in our own hearts before we can dare speak for Jesus in our own circles of life. We need Jesus just as much as anyone else around us. And as we give ourselves over to the Holy Spirit's power, our love for others will lead us to help them find the truth about Jesus. Don't fear letting God use you to be His witness to the world. Each of us has a story to tell

about how we have been changed by the love of the Lord. Let it begin here so that you can tell it to others who may find themselves in the same place you once were. And then you can lead them to the light of Jesus that you have in your own hearts.

Let the witness of Stephen empower you to worship passionately, love extravagantly, and witness boldly the love of Jesus Christ. Let's pray...

Father, Thank You for Your love for each one of us. Thank You for Your call in our lives to follow Jesus. Let us do so with all our heart, soul, mind and strength by the help of the Holy Spirit. Help us to have Your eyes for just one minute to see those around us who need to find Jesus' salvation. Guide us so that we might help them to see the need for forgiveness of their sins through Jesus. Empower us to be so bold in our witness that no matter whom we are addressing, we speak in love with them, telling them the truth of the Gospel, helping them to come to know Jesus, too. Thank You for Stephen's witness. Give us the same courage to speak Your truth in love. This we pray in Jesus' Name. AMEN.