

Dying Grace
Three Surprising Truths We Learn from the Story of Stephen
Acts 6:8-7:60

1. God's blessing doesn't guarantee success and popularity. (Acts 6:8-15)

And Stephen, full of grace and power, was performing great wonders and signs among the people. But some men from what was called the Synagogue of the Freedmen, including both Cyrenians and Alexandrians, and some from Cilicia and Asia, rose up and argued with Stephen. But they were unable to cope with the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking. Then they secretly induced men to say, "We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God." Acts 6:8-11

2. Just because you're right doesn't mean that people will believe you. (Acts 7:1-54)

Now when they heard this, they were cut to the quick, and they {began} gnashing their teeth at him. Acts 7:54

3. Your last day will be your best day. (Acts 7:55-60)

But being full of the Holy Spirit, he gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; and he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." Acts 7:55-56

For Further Thought and Discussion

Getting Started

1. What was helpful to you in this week's sermon? What didn't you understand?
2. Can you think of a time when unmet expectations ruined an otherwise good experience? What are some of the unrealistic expectations Christians commonly hold?

Going Deeper

1. Please read Acts 6:8-15. Where do you see God in Stephen's ministry? How do the Hellenistic Jews react to Stephen? Why? Why do you think they react this way to him and not to the apostles? What does Stephen's experience reveal about God's blessing and use of us? Is this different than what you would expect? Why or why not?
2. Please read Acts 7:1-54. How do you see Stephen developing the following themes: God's work isn't confined to Israel; acceptable worship of God isn't confined to Jerusalem; people have always rejected God's messengers? How does Stephen answer the charges against him? Why would his answer be so infuriating to those who heard? What do you learn from Stephen's experience about speaking what is true? This is the longest sermon recorded in Acts. Why does Luke include it?
3. Please read Acts 7:55-60. What do you notice about Stephen's death? How is this different than the way many people see dying today? What do Stephen and Jesus have in common? How does Stephen's experience affect your view of dying?
4. Stephen caused a problem because he brought out the implications of the gospel further than the apostles had thus far. What aspect of the gospel do you most need to apply to your own life right now?

Application

1. What is one lesson you will apply from this week's discussion?
2. How will you apply it?