

DAILY BIBLE READINGS - Week of May 27, 2018

**THEME: "Stephen, First Martyr"
DEACON IN THE CHURCH**

SundayRead Acts 6:2-5

"They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost..." Stephen was a man who was obviously well thought of by his fellow men in that he was among those chosen to take care of the business of the Church at Jerusalem. If a person is judged to be Spirit-filled, he is the kind of witness that honors our Savior. This is a sharp reminder that our lives are read by others as we are told in II Corinthians 3:2: *"Ye are our epistle, known and read of all men."* Someone once said it this way: actions speak louder than words; and indeed they do. When a person says that which contradicts what others see, that makes a person a hypocrite. That is exactly what Jesus called the highly religious Pharisees and well educated scribes in Matthew 15:7: *"Ye hypocrites, well did Isaiah prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto with their mouth, and honoreth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me."* Was that not God's point when He said what He did in James 2:19? *"Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only?"* Jesus made that same point in Matthew 5:16 where He gives this order about the conduct of our lives: *"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven."* Stephen honored God!

POWERFUL MESSAGE

MondayRead Acts 6:8-15

"And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake." Speaking the truth of God is sharing the most powerful message in all the world, and that is what these people were hearing from Stephen! When a person shares God's truth, which is now recorded in the Bible, with others, he is using a spiritual sword, as we are told in Ephesians 6:17. The power of a Biblical message is not the eloquence of the speaker, but it is the essence of the message: the eternal truth of God! It is the power of the Spirit that causes the Word of God to penetrate the hearts and minds of those listening. That is the point made in Hebrews 4:12: *"The word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit...and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."* The words of men may pierce the mind; but the word of God pierces the soul and spirit, the very heart of man. Words of men may be powerful; but they fall far short of the wisdom of God as revealed in His Holy Word. The Scriptures are inspired by God the Holy Spirit; they are inerrant. They are what brings conviction to sinners making them want to hear the truth that sets them free from the darkness of the world. The Bible brings to the world the message of eternal life by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior!

PIERCING MESSAGE

TuesdayRead Acts 7:50-54

"When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart." The most important thing in the life of any person is how they respond to the eternal truth of the Word of God. Denying Biblical truth not only keeps a person in spiritual darkness with the inability to understand the origin and meaning of human life, but it means eternal darkness under the condemnation of a holy God. These people who ended up killing this messenger of God did not extinguish the message of God. Stephen's defense of the faith gave these people the opportunity to get right with God by placing their faith in Christ. He went all the way back to the time of Abraham and worked his way through Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. From there he spoke of Moses and the trip through the wilderness and right up to the coming of Jesus. Then Stephen explained that the plan of God in the days of the new covenant was to include the Gentiles. Stephen went on to explain that people are the *"temple of God in this new dispensation, an age of grace, that God did not dwell in a temple made with hands."* We know from I Corinthians 6:19 that the temple of God, His dwelling place in the Church Age, is the body of all believers. Stephen concluded by telling those people that they were guilty of *"resisting the Holy Spirit"* by their disbelief. Stephen was actually doing

them a great favor, and instead of showing appreciation, they became angry and subsequently violent. Their rage led to killing the messenger.

NEARING DEATH

WednesdayRead Acts 7:55-57

"But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God. And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God." While facing what turned out to be an angry crowd, Stephen was in a real life-threatening crisis, all because of his stand for Christ and defense of God's truth. Knowing that one of His followers was about to end his earthly journey and head for heaven, Jesus stood up in His place next to His Father's throne. Normally when we read of Jesus since His return to heaven after His crucifixion and resurrection, He is seated at the right hand of God. It appears as though when one of His people is going to die, Jesus stands up to welcome them home! But is that not what He promised in John 14:2-3: *"In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you...I will receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also."* When we know someone comes to our home, do we not go to the door and greet them? Stephen was heading to his home in heaven; and Jesus, as He promised, was there to greet him. To die is gain! Ask Stephen!

MARTYRDOM

ThursdayRead Acts 7:58-60

"And cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul." As humans, we might question why God allowed these people to kill such a devoted servant as Stephen. He was doing so much that brought glory to God and stood firm despite the opposition. The very fact that we would wonder about that is because it is our nature to think of the temporal; but God works from the eternal perspective, the big picture. That is why faith in God is so important! We know that His ways are perfect, far above what we can even imagine because of our finite minds. This is why a knowledge of Scriptures is so vital, because it shows us God's thinking and His way of doing things. By our faith in Christ, we have insight into God's ways with clues as to what He is doing and why He does it. How about that detail concerning the the fellow at whose feet they laid down garments that they had shrugged while casting stones at Stephen. God wanted Saul to witness the death of one who had made a commitment to Jesus. God had a reason for including this very important detail about Saul. God knows what is ahead!

LOVING SPIRIT

FridayRead Luke 23:34-46

"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do...Father, into thy hands I commend my Spirit." How interesting! This detail of the death of Stephen is precisely the same as one of the details of the death of our Lord! He had a heart of forgiveness for those who were persecuting him to the point of ending his earthly life. He was able to endure the pain and suffering just as did the Lord Jesus on the cross. The exact words of Stephen about those who were stoning him were these: *"Lord, lay not this sin to their charge."* See, Stephen had just had a glimpse of heaven; he had just seen Jesus standing at the right hand of God. God gave him a look at his destination where he would arrive in just a few more minutes. Compare them to the words of Jesus in His dying moments that are in today's Bible reading from Luke 23. Ought not our prayer every day in sickness and in health be like this: *"Let me be like Jesus; may others see Christ in me."* Do we show the love of Christ?

ETERNAL GAIN

Saturday Read Acts 8:1

"And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem: and they were scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles." God arranged that this highly educated

Pharisee witness the death of one of His own; and it apparently had an impact. I wonder how it affected Saul's thinking. It did not have an immediate impact because Saul went on to persecute many Christians; that is, up until he was on the road to Damascus. I think it interesting that after being blinded, he said: "*Lord, what would you have me to do.*" I wonder if his thoughts went back to Stephen. I do know that God does work all things together for good. Yes, people are watching and listening to us!