

# MONDAY 27 June 2022 "Truth or Consequences?" (Acts 6:8-7:58)

Hello my 'Walking with Jesus' friends as we begin another week together.

*Have you noticed the struggle people face when they attempt to speak truth, which is God honoring truth, almost everywhere in the world?* A new phrase has arisen which describes the sometimes-violent efforts used to silence people speaking the truth... 'the cancel culture'. It can be found on social media or even in the public professional media. It can be found in schools, in politics, in health care, in courtrooms, in business, and almost everywhere. Have you seen it when someone attempts to speak truth about our gender identity as being established by God in the womb as God shapes and forms us prior to birth? Or when someone proclaims God's definition of marriage is a covenant of love between one man and one woman for a lifetime. Or when someone celebrates God's explanation of the origin of the universe as God describes it in Genesis

1. *The reliable truth about almost anything, is harder and harder to find, isn't it?*

May I give you three very real, current examples? What voice do you trust for the absolute truth about COVID and the various COVID vaccines? Where do the people of the world, especially the Russian people, find the real truth about what is happening in the war in Ukraine? Or where do people of the world, especially the United States, find out the real truth about why gasoline prices have more than doubled in the past two years, affecting the rising cost of almost everything including food?

*Sometimes in our world people will go to extremes to silence those attempting to speak the absolute truth.* The city of Jerusalem, about 2000 years ago, went through a prolonged season of truth battles focused around the Person, the words, the miracles and especially the death and resurrection of Jesus. In recent days I've been leading you through the account of what happened in those months, as recorded by Dr. Luke, in the book of Acts, in the Bible. Luke, a Greek Physician, wrote two books in the Bible and he opened his first book which bears his name, by declaring he had gone to great lengths to thoroughly investigate so we can trust his accounts as being truthful. (Luke 1:1-4) Today join me please in Acts 7 for a detailed account of this truth battle which sadly, ended in chaos and the brutal mob execution of a wonderful, honest, God honoring man, Stephen.

Yesterday we saw the Jesus movement was growing so rapidly they needed to select 7 men to oversee the practical work of meeting the needs of widows and others. Those seven men are named in Acts 6:5 and the first is **"Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit."** Notice how Luke describes Stephen's impact on this Jesus movement in Jerusalem in Acts 6:8 **"Now Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, performed great wonders and signs among the people."**

Luke doesn't tell us exactly what those specific **'great wonders and signs'** were, but clearly many people in Jerusalem were in awe of what this humble man was doing as he carried out the duties of a deacon in helping the widows and others in need. Sadly, Luke then records this: **"Opposition arose, however...among the Jews who began to argue with Stephen. But they could not stand up against the wisdom the Spirit of God gave him."** (Acts 6:9,10) May I ask you, my 'Walking with Jesus' friends all around the world... WHO is the person, someone you know personally, *in whom you see the strongest evidence* of what Luke describes here as **'the wisdom the Spirit of God gave him'**? What does it look like? How is it manifested in the Spirit anointed, wise person you are thinking of? Do you see pride or humility in this person? How does his or her wisdom affect the people their life touches? And finally, this question... do you see opposition rising up against that person? If so, why?

As you continue reading Dr. Luke's report of how the opposition against Stephen moved to action, you'll see some men were **'secretly persuaded to say...'** deceitful things about Stephen, in some cases, outright lies. (Acts 6:11) The people were stirred up to the point the religious leaders needed to take action to keep things calm in Jerusalem and they did so by arresting Stephen, as they had the apostles, remember? (Acts 5:18) Stephen was dragged into the same courtroom and the same Sanhedrin, the most powerful leaders in Jerusalem. False witnesses gave false testimony about Stephen but rather than refute the lies, Stephen stood confidently silent. Luke gives us this amazing summary statement: **"All who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel."** (Acts 6:15)

Now I can't explain that my friends. I don't know what Luke means by that. We do know that the angels at the resurrection of Jesus are described by Luke this way: **"two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning..."** (Luke 24:4) and the angels who appeared at Jesus' ascension are described by Luke as **"two men dressed in white..."** (Acts 1:10). But while in both instances Luke describes the angels as talking, explaining what was happening in Jesus' resurrection and ascension, neither time does Luke describe their faces. *So, I wonder what you think Stephens' face looked like that some would say he looked like an angel?*

The High Priest was clearly frustrated by all that was going on in Jerusalem and concerned about these accusations made against Stephen, *but he was also a man seeking truth*, so he simply asked Stephen one question: **"Are these charges true?"** (Acts 7:1) I wonder my friends, *how do you pursue finding truth?* The entire seventh chapter of Acts is Luke's detailed description of Stephen's response to the High Priest, which was a clear, truthful, accurate summary of Israel's history beginning with Abraham and concluding with Solomon's construction of the Temple in Jerusalem. These religious leaders knew Israel's history in great detail, Stephen was proving he had said nothing to counter the revered history or past leaders or prophets. I imagine more than once during Stephen's dissertation, the High Priest may have said *'get to the point Stephen, answer my question about the accusations made against you'*.

And suddenly Stephen turned from historian to judge and speaking directly to the entire Sanhedrin, with a convicting tone, Stephen said: ***"You stiff necked people! You are just like your ancestors: you always resist the Holy Spirit of God! Was there ever a prophet you did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One [Messiah]. And now you have betrayed and murdered Him..."*** (Acts 7:51,52) Oh my! Once again, as had happened when the apostles stood in this same room, this group of learned, respected, highest authority religious leaders are accused of killing Jesus, the Messiah! Their response was immediate: ***"When the members of the Sanhedrin heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at Stephen. But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God. "Look", he said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!"*** (Acts 7:54-56) Look at the mayhem that is erupting in this room. Stephen is claiming God is giving him a vision of seeing directly into the throne room of God in heaven! ***But what does it mean that Stephen saw Jesus STANDING at the right hand of God?***

Peter had declared in Acts 2:33, and Paul declared in Romans 8:34 that as Jesus ascended from earth to heaven, He assumed His exalted place at the right hand of God. But Hebrews 1:3 tells us ***"After Jesus had provided purification for sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven and so became superior to the angels..."*** We understand Jesus was seated in authority as a declaration of both His finished accomplishment of the Redemption mission and His supreme authority over the Kingdom of heaven. ***But if Stephen saw Jesus STANDING, may I suggest my friends that it may mean Jesus was watching this courtroom scene and stood in declaration of His sovereign reign over this historic moment?***

King Jesus was fully aware of all that was transpiring and was about to happen to Stephen. Jesus could intervene and miraculously stop this atrocity, but He chose to allow it as part of the accomplishment of His promise made to His disciples ***"I will build My church and the gates of Hades will not prevail."*** (Matt. 16:18) That's important friends because Luke records that ***"They covered their ears and yelling at the top of their voices rushed at Stephen, dragged him out of the city and began to stone him..."*** (Acts 7:57)

Let's pause right here friends, watching this horrific scene... ***very similar things are happening every day in many places around the world, where the truth of Jesus is forbidden to be spoken, Bibles are forbidden to be read or owned, and baptisms are punishable by arrest, torture and death.*** Yes, Jesus is watching, Jesus is providing strength to the persecuted and especially the martyrs, and as He promised, Jesus is growing His Church despite horrific persecution! Let's pray for them right now, my friends!

**Today's Scripture is Acts 6:8-7:58.**