Acts 7, 8, and 9 - “Meet Saul, Enemy of Jesus Christ”

Sermon Goal: Through examining the life of Saul, I want for us to see several things.

1. We are never too far gone.

2. We are redeemable.

3. We must guard against relying on our own righteousness.

Review of Acts 6:15 – 7:60 “Stephen Takes the Sanhedrin to School”

**SLIDE 1**

Outline of Last Week’s Passage Acts 6:15 – 7:60

1. The Empowerment Acts 6:15

2. The Pivot Acts 7:1

3. The Remediation Acts 7:2-50

4. The Confrontation Acts 7:51-53

5. The Martyr Acts 7:54-60

SLIDE 2

Application From Last Week

1. Wait Patiently on the Lord – He will fill you

Luke 12:11-12 –

“Now when they bring you to the synagogues and magistrates and authorities, do not worry about how or what you should answer, or what you should say. 12 For the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say.”

2. Know the Word – Study it

2 Timothy 2:15

“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”

3. Boldly Speak the Truth – No matter the consequences

Ephesians 4:14-15

“...we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, 15 but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—"

4. Trust in His Will for Your Life – and Death

 Psalm 27:1

 “The Lord is my light and my salvation;

 Whom shall I fear?

 The Lord is the strength of my life;

 Of whom shall I be afraid?

Loose Ends from last week...

SLIDE 3

Before we move forward with Chapter 8, Let’s revisit Stephen’s earthly death.

Acts 7:54-60

**54 “When they heard these things they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with *their* teeth. 55****But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, 56and said, “Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!” 57Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord; 58and they cast *him* out of the city and stoned *him.* And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul. 59And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on *God* and saying, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” 60Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, “Lord, do not charge them with this sin.” And when he had said this, he fell asleep.”**

Review

Stephen’s Death

Last week, I kind of glossed over this, but today, it’s important for us to take a closer look at this passage. First, we’ll look at Stephen’s brutal death and God’s grace to him in the midst of it.

Stephen was stoned to death. Here is a helpful quote from Jeremy Thomas about the process of stoning someone:

“...when you read about somebody being stoned to death they weren’t picking up little marbles to stone them; they stripped these people down, shoved them off a wall about 15 feet high and if that didn’t kill them they laid them on their back face up, eyeball to eyeball and one of the witnesses would drop a forty pound boulder on their chest to smash and crush their heart. And if that didn’t finish them off then everyone would join in with large rocks. So this stoning bit was a brutal death, it was not a pretty sight.”

When I think about this process, I have to ask myself, “Am I yielded to the Lord to the point where I would willingly go to this type of death?” The answer is no, not without the Holy Spirit’s empowerment.

**SLIDE 4**

**God’s Provision And Grace**

1. God Gives Grace to Stephen (Acts 7:55-56)

**“But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, 56and said, “Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!”**

2. God’s Grace Extends to Sinners (Acts 7:60)

**“Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, “Lord, do not charge them with this sin.” And when he had said this, he fell asleep.”**

Now, for this week’s passage.

SLIDE 5

Acts 7:58b, 8:1a, 8:3, 9:1 - “Meet Saul, Enemy of Jesus Christ”

**“And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul.”**

*Stephen is stoned to death...*

**“Now Saul was consenting to his death.”**

*The church in Jerusalem is persecuted heavily, and scatters throughout Judea and Samaria. Stephen is buried and is mourned deeply*

**3****As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing *them* to prison.”**

*Saul’s anger and self-righteousness continues to burn...*

**“Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest 2and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.”**

**SLIDE 6**

1. Saul is introduced to us (Acts 7:58b)

**“And the witnesses, laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul.”**

Notes:

2. Saul agreed with what happened to Stephen (Acts 8:1a)

**“Now Saul was consenting to his death.”**

Notes: Connotates a more passive role

3. Saul becomes the most brutal opponent of Jesus’ Church (Acts 8:3)

**“As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing *them* to prison.”**

Notes:

4. Saul the Zealot is looking for work (Acts 9:1)

**“Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest 2and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.”**

Notes:

So, who even is this guy?

1. Saul’s Wealthy Status as a “Citizen” of Tarsus (Acts 21:39)

“Paul said, “I am a Jew from Tarsus, in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city; and I implore you, permit me to speak to the people.”

Notes: Spoken to the Jewish Military Commander in high, idiomatic (not common) Greek.

Tarsus was a wealthy city, and to be a citizen one had to own property and be of considerable substance.

2. Saul enjoyed the status of a Roman citizen (Acts 22:25-29)

**“And as they bound him with thongs, Paul said to the centurion who stood by, “Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman, and uncondemned?”When the centurion heard *that,* he went and told the commander, saying, “Take care what you do, for this man is a Roman.” 27Then the commander came and said to him, “Tell me, are you a Roman?” He said, “Yes.” 28The commander answered, “With a large sum I obtained this citizenship.”And Paul said, “But I was born *a citizen.*” 29Then immediately those who were about to examine him withdrew from him; and the commander was also afraid after he found out that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him.**

3. Saul was a “Hebrew of Hebrews.” (Philippians 3:4-6)

**“I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: 5circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, *of* the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; 6concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.”**

Notes:

4. Saul was learned, religious, and Zealous (Acts 22:3-4, Galatians 1:14)

**“I am indeed a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, taught according to the strictness of our fathers’ law, and was zealous toward God as you all are today. 4I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women...”**

**“For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and *tried to* destroy it. 14And I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers.”**

So what can we come away with in regard to Saul? He was wealthy, privileged, incredibly intelligent and learned, persistent, cruel (even brutal), and 100% convinced he was in the right and doing what he did to men, women, and children for God.

So, you think you’re bad? Got a past that you’re not proud of? Feel unworthy?

**SLIDE 8**

**Application**

1. We are never too far gone (Colossians 1:21)

**“And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled 22in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight—"**

2. We are all worth saving (2 Peter 3:9)

**“The Lord is not slack concerning *His* promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.”**

3. We must guard against relying on our own righteousness (Ephesians 2:8-9)

**“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, 9not of works, lest anyone should boast.”**