



**Acts – Can I get a Witness?**  
**Wk. 23 The Difference Between Hearing and Seeing**  
**By Pastor Jody May 03/05/2023**

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**Acts 7:54 – 8:1 ESV**

**The Stoning of Stephen**

<sup>54</sup> Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth at him. <sup>55</sup> But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. <sup>56</sup> And he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." <sup>57</sup> But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together at him. <sup>58</sup> Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul. <sup>59</sup> And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." <sup>60</sup> And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

**Saul Ravages the Church**

**8** And Saul approved of his execution.

And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.

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**[INTRODUCTION]**

On the Jordan B. Peterson Podcast this past Monday Dr. Peterson was interviewing Dr. Jayantan Bhattacharya a professor/researcher/specialist in the field of economics and health care at Stanford University and heads up their department for health and aging. During the COVID 19 Pandemic he was a leading researcher on the effects of COVID and its' effect on society. When Dr. Bhattacharya broke with the mainstream doctors, media, and politicians of the day, he was blacklisted on social media platforms and endured undo hardships from other professionals in the field. It should be mentioned that Dr. Bhattacharya after looking at the medical facts, infectious rates, death rates, and pertinent data he believed that it was not necessary to impose mandatory lockdowns and that the best way to go about the Pandemic was to



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encourage the sick and elderly to lay low for a while until the rest of society could build up herd immunity. This had always been the action to take with pandemics and upon the numbers was still the best route during COVID but do to the politicization of the disease Dr. Bhattacharya was blacklisted.

During some dark times he risked losing his tenure at Stanford and endured ridicule from colleagues, politicians, and academic types by choosing to keep telling the Truth. It should be noted that Dr. Bhattacharya is a man of faith and after witnessing his professional contacts ridicule him enough to the point he was suffering mentally, he intensified his search for God, prayed for strength and decided to keep speaking the Truth. **Think of the story of Nehemiah you read this week and the opposition he endured to do the right thing.**

**What Truth did he keep speaking?** Truth, that masks were not necessary, truth that lock downs were ineffective, truth that the numbers did not support any of the enforced practices of the government. Now at the end of the pandemic and based upon all the numbers he is leading a lawsuit against leading pandemic experts to help ensure that such drastic measures don't happen again. Upon which Dr. Peterson's comment to all of this was at the end of the day all you have is TRUTH. For Dr. Bhattacharya his professorship didn't mean anything unless he was willing to stand up for the TRUTH. Dr, Peterson went on to say even when you are in trouble, and something you have done is wrong, it is better to tell the TRUTH about what you did and fall on the mercy of others. TRUTH while it may get you in hot water, will:

- Truth will bolster confidence and self-esteem of the one proclaiming it – you can sleep better at night when one is true to oneself.
- Truth will garner the empathy of those that don't like the Truth, for at least they can understand what made you come to the decision, even though they don't get or like it. Telling the Truth humanizes and undemonizes us to each other.
- Truth will have longer lasting effects for all involved instead of short-term effects for the liar. Truth is always the better option for it appeals to the better moralistic standard which is *while Truth may hurt it is life preserving in the end.*



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- **For the Christian when it comes to proclaiming the Gospel TRUTH in the face of an ever increasing religion of secularism,** it will glorify our Lord for it shows His authority over your life, and it demonstrates that you have put hope in His mercy not that of the world for it means you fear Him more than man.

All of this was the TRUTH that Stephen was living out in a very intense and politicized moment in the Ancient World. He had chosen to stick with the Truth for it was all he had and to believe any differently would mean he would have to turn his back on the Gospel. Here's what we will learn today as Stephen lives it out in front of our eyes.

**[MAIN POINT]**

**The world is rarely happy about hearing the Truth,  
The Christian will be at odds with the World when they see Truth,  
but the Lord rewards the one that tells the Truth.**

Upon hearing this last installment in the story, you might be saying to yourself, "I don't know if I want that type of reward!" Family it is hard to hear but let me tell you some truth this morning, there are things that are **worse than Martyrdom**, and that is **selling your soul so you can keep your life**.

Today we will learn about drama of telling the truth by looking at a comparison that Luke is drawing out for us. You will notice in the text today that Stephen is the only one that gets it, and he gets it for he is the only one that **'sees'** it. **Sermon title *The Difference between Seeing and Hearing* -** Literally during Stephen's last hour of life, he **sees** the Lord and it is what he **sees** that gets everyone so mad. Everyone else can only **'hear'** about what Stephen is seeing, they can't **see** it for themselves, they only **hear** his description of it. The intent here behind all of this, is that unless the Spirit opens the eyes of the unbeliever, they cannot understand the Gospel. BUT that never takes the Christian of the hook for sharing it if the situation calls for it.



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Peter has been preaching almost the same sermon that Stephen has been preaching. Twice in Acts, Peter has preached Christ and has called for his people to repent after condemning them for Christ's death and both times thousands came to follow Jesus. Stephen, almost the same message reaps no souls that day while preaching the same type of sermon. Why? It wasn't God's intended purpose to save souls for that day, but the **Gospel still needed to be preached!** Yet Stephen's purpose in doing what he did that day was just as important as what Peter accomplished, we will get to that shortly.

All of that to say when you are offered the opportunity you seize it as Peter would say:

### **1 Peter 3:15 ESV**

<sup>15</sup> but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, **always being prepared to make a defense** to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with **gentleness** and **respect**,

**"Always being prepared to make a defense"**, was not prefaced with only when people *will like what you say*. No remember the World rarely likes the Truth, and it will put you at odds with the world, but there is a reward for giving people truth always with **gentleness and respect**.

There are three things from this story of Stephen that when as Dr. Peterson pointed out, when all one has at the end is TRUTH, there are three things it gets you when you are faithful to proclaim it.

**1. Declarations of Truth comes with fury and guilt of the convicted.**

### **The Stoning of Stephen**

<sup>54</sup> Now when they heard these things they were **enraged**, and they **ground their teeth** at him

### **1<sup>st</sup> let's talk about the fury.**

When they **heard these things**, what things? That was Stephen's sermon from last week vs. 1-53. It was the explanation that God was not contained to the temple, that you could not treat him like a Genie in a bottle, that He was



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not controlled by behavior manipulation, and it was the religious elite that have lied and misled the people into these things, so that they could keep their prestige and power. Stephen's proclamation of TRUTH brought enragement, or literally **furry**. The same word is used to describe the emotion felt (5:33) when Peter condemned the Sanhedrin for killing Jesus. It is a blind rage that no longer considers the consequences of actions.

It also says they ground their teeth at them (Heather would totally get on their case about that). Grinding one's teeth in scripture is a sign of hatred or disdain, it's a furry that can't be quenched (Acts 5:33; 7:54; Job 16:9; Psalm 36:11) it is what **Anakin Skywalker felt after Obi Wan proved he had the high ground** 😊. That's just it, it's the anger generated by conviction and hearing how you are viewed as less, and even more it is provable. **Jesus** had commented on the fact that this would be the **case for His people**:

**Matthew 8:11-12 ESV**

<sup>11</sup>I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, <sup>12</sup>while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and **gnashing of teeth.**"

Hell is not only a place of torment, it is a place where your misery is compounded by the fact you were wrong, all can see it now, and there is no satiation for your anger.

Ok, so hearing the good news of the Gospel can bring furry because that is born of conviction, when one **hears** the Truth. But when the world can't turn off the voice of conviction it is always willing to take it one step further.

<sup>57</sup>But they cried out with a loud voice and **stopped their ears** and rushed together at him.

'**They**', you would think that at least some of them would be able to understand the preaching of Stephen but it says they **all cried together** as with one voice. This is mob violence now that needs a scapegoat. This is what had transpired with Christ when the false witnesses had gotten the



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people to cry for Barabbas and called for Jesus' crucifixion. So, the mob yells, and when you are screaming in rage you don't hear a thing, and then they rushed him. I think Luke is trying to point out no one is innocent, all of them in that room will bear the guilt of what is about to go down, they **acted as one**.

It's good to remember this scene so you and I can understand what both sides of the political aisle are always working towards: a **mob mentality**. If you can enrage a group of people enough, you can get them moving together as one. That's why you can't trust mob rule or a mob mentality to be right because it takes manipulation based on anger to get them moving. Meaning mobs are usually manipulated by stronger voices over a weak ones, Mob rule does not make the Mob right.

As Christians we need to stand against this when we see it, it may even cause you to stand with someone that's facing it, no matter who they are. Would we have stood with Stephen that day I wonder, or would have we surrendered him to the mob? Would we have believed the power of mob belief, as in what the majority wants is what rules the day, or would we have heard rightly the gospel that day? Here's what it would have gotten you that day in Jerusalem.

**58 Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul.**

It is not a pretty scene, and Luke's account is not to lay out all the grisly details, just know that public stoning was not a normal occurrence. Stonings were brutal, they were violent, and they were participated in a way to keep them from happening when they were not warranted.

At a stoning it is the witnesses that were called to testify that offered a chance to the defendant a chance to recant, Stephen never got that. Stephen, according to the Mishnah, was pushed over a (12 ft) ledge by that first witness, if he survived the second witness would try to take him out. If he survived that then all the witnesses were required to pick up a rock and stone him to death. You see the practice is that it requires **all witnesses to be a part of the execution**. **IF** it is found out later that the punishment was



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based on a false testimony then those that were the witnesses were now the guilty party of murder.

You see guilt and the conviction of the gospel, when the world can't escape it, will seek its' death, they want to cancel the noise of condemnation in their heads (like that ringing in your ears). It took all the forces of Hell to finally get Jesus to the cross and that's only because He let them. It was the same for Stephen. You see Stephen's death was not out of the control for God, for Jesus has all authority. Through Stephen's death Jesus was giving him the opportunity to live, die, and be reborn one day for something bigger than himself. In return Jesus made sure Stephen got his name in the book.

Then just like Pilate, Saul keeps his hands clean by overseeing it and never picks up a rock. Instead, he incites his people to do the dirty work for him. It's a despicable crime that Paul is ok with letting Luke write about it, for it amplifies the glory of the Gospel when people learn that Saul became Paul and modeled Jesus' love for the church.

**[GOSPEL]**

This is a good reminder for all of us, Jesus doesn't keep us from getting in trouble, from telling the Truth, nor does he keep us from feeling the effects of stuffing our ears when we neglected to heed the Truth. No, what Jesus does as He did with His life, is He uses our suffering, He uses our failures, He uses the world's fury, He uses the world's guilt, all to spread the story of His love for His Father and us, and the world can't stop it! Jesus is heaping burning coals on the head of this world, by letting the hate of the world wash over the heads of His church.

Family, there is nothing that can be done to you and there is nothing you have done that God cannot use to spread His glory in this world. Let us not be afraid of telling the Truth, let's be a little quicker to let it come in, and let's be ok to share our stories if it promotes the Truth of Christ.

**[CHALLENGE + APPLICATION]**



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The gnashing of teeth is a natural occurrence because the world does not hear truth, and acting out of anger is starting to happen with more occurrence in our society so we need to be prepared when that happens:

**First, be aware that good answers make for bad tempers.** No one likes a know it all and no one likes a life that reminds them of bad choices so be prepared when you share good answers you will most likely not to stay on someone's Christmas Card list. That's ok it will save you time reading it and sending one back. Just make sure you deal with rejection with **gentleness and respect** (1 Pet. 3:15). An easily ignited temper at truth given, with gentleness and respect, is not to be feared but to be prayed for.

**Second, be aware that spiritual enlightenment will often bring spiritual hardness of heart.** Often the HS will shed enough light on someone's depravity not to necessarily save but to condemn (Pharaoh, King Saul, Judas). That doesn't mean Salvation won't happen eventually, it just means the more rebellious a person is usually the more of a fight they will put up resisting the news of the gospel. (2 Cor. 2:16)

**Thirdly, be aware of your own furry and don't fall in the trap of avoiding conviction.** Many times, we turn off and tune out the soft encouragement or correction of a loved one because we can't get past the notion that their words come from a disdain on our existence. The devil's best employment against Christians is to incite feelings of bitterness against one another, turn on the negative self-talk and feelings against one another, and stuff up your ears just like the Sanhedrin, to the point all you hear is the grinding of your own teeth. Be open to the movement of the Spirit of conviction in your own life and be open to people not liking you for bringing Truth to one's attention.

So we have spent time talking about:

**The world being rarely happy about hearing the Truth, &  
The Christian is at odds with the World when they see Truth,  
but now**

**Let's talk about the Lord rewarding the one that tells the Truth.**

**2. Standing for Truth comes with a greater Revelation of Jesus.**





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Besides Stephen's powerful message that got them all furious and gnashing their teeth what had sent them over the edge was something that Stephen **saw**. Remember they could only hear about Jesus, they couldn't see what Stephen saw about Jesus.

When last we left him, He had been arrested and he was calm and collective with his face, if you remember, *looking like an angel*. Stephen is seeing Jesus the Christ, he's seeing the fulfillment of scripture, and then he relates it all to the Sanhedrin. He could see it all from Abraham to Moses to David to the Dispersion to the present day and he could see the revelation of God's plan of redemption in Jesus. This revelation has given him a sense of calm and at the same time an authority that was not his own, it made him fearless in front of his captors. That fearlessness had made him take the lead in his capture and he turned his imprisonment as an opportunity to speak for God. God is judging the leadership of Israel, He ends the religion of Judaism, and condemns them for blasphemy.

**1<sup>st</sup> we see that when Stephen doesn't back down from the Truth, he is rewarded with a full realization of who Jesus is.** When you read about the lives of Martyrs you don't come across stories where the heroes of our faith weren't first put through tests. Martyrdom always comes after persecution and pressure to recant what you know to be true.

When a person hangs tough and holds onto the truths of the gospel, they are rewarded with a deeper understanding of **how the gospel works**. The proof is, **that knowledge** is what gets them through the pain of death. In the same way in all our lives when we practice living out the truth of the gospel and standing up for Jesus when others bad mouth Him, we are strengthened and rewarded with deeper understandings of the gospel. When you practice suffering as Christ did for the fame of God and the Glory of the Gospel you are resetting your heart to be like Christs. It is one of the ways that God perseveres in us to bring us home, He is making us like His son.

But the culmination of the Covenant of Redemption is not the only thing that Stephen saw.



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<sup>55</sup> But he, full of the Holy Spirit, **gazed** into heaven and **saw** the glory of God, and Jesus **standing** at the **right hand** of God. <sup>56</sup> And he said, "Behold, I **see** the heavens opened, and the Son of Man **standing** at the **right hand** of God."

Stephen gazed, that is a word meant to relate the viewing of something that is veiled from others, it is used in the scripture to look and see heavenly things, secret things. What Stephen saw was the manifestation of the revealed will of God: **Jesus at the right hand of the Father.**

Being at the right hand of someone, as expressed in the Bible and out of it, means to be the one that **enforces the will** of the one in charge. Jesus is at the Father's right hand, He is the enforcer of God's will. We know from verses like Heb. 1:3, Mark 16:19, Luke 22:69 that Jesus is sitting at the right hand of God having earned His rest after paying for our sins.

Hearing this would have enraged the Sanhedrin for here is the man they killed, here is the man they feared, and here is the man that is still doing wonders through the disciples so He can't be dead!? But now He's seated at God's right hand, meaning they were out! They no longer did the will of God Jesus did, and His position meant He controlled them as well. But wait, there's more!

Have you noticed He's not sitting down, no, He's standing up. Scholars believe what this represents is that Jesus stands **up to receive Stephen**. It is the same welcome that people of distinction receive when their teachers, masters, professors, etc. recognize their underling's achievement. Jesus is calling Stephen home, He knows what is about to happen, and HE is standing to receive him. He is acknowledging **well done**.... This is the vision that Stephen holds onto when they drive him outside to his death, it is a blessing for fighting for truth to see the revelation of Jesus and His delight in you!

**[CHALLENGE + APPLICATION]**

Today family don't give up sharing the truth of Christ, don't give up believing the truth of Christ, the battle is worth it. I can't tell you how many times I have become discouraged with life and myself but what I keep coming to learn that



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is by surrendering to God, praying in weakness it is always rewarded with having a **deeper understanding** of Jesus. That is the only thing that keeps me going some days. If I get more of Christ, then it's all worth it. To understand that Jesus prays for me, intercedes for me, and fights for me makes me want to not quit and it should make you not want to quit as well.

**Standing for Truth** gives us a **Greater Revelation** of **Jesus**, yes it does! Now, here's the last thing Truth will bring you:

### 3. **Sacrificing** for Truth comes with **prayer** that bears **fruit**.

<sup>59</sup> And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." <sup>60</sup> And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

Stephen now understanding the will of Jesus, seeing His approval of this act, is now consigned to sacrifice for the kingdom. Just as Jesus knew His death was the will of the Father, Stephen knew this was the will of His Lord. He uses the word κύριος (*kyrios*). n. masc. **lord, master, Lord**. *The noun conveys the idea of someone who is in a position of authority.*<sup>1</sup> He is declaring who is the running this event. To those that are holding to their false charge of blasphemy. Stephen asks Jesus not the Father to receive His soul, and then he asks Jesus not to hold this against them, he's asking someone other than the Father to forgive. That is the same thing that got the Sanhedrin mad at Jesus, the fact that He had power to save and power to forgive sins.

He says one last prayer, and he dies. It is worth going one more verse to see how this played out.

### **Saul Ravages the Church**

**8** And Saul approved of his execution.

And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.

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<sup>1</sup> Lo, J. (2014). [Deity](#). D. Mangum, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, & R. Hurst (Eds.), *Lexham Theological Wordbook*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.



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You may be thinking the **bad guys won?** Persecution began, the church - all those good people having all things in common scattered finally, and Saul standing over everything with smugness approving of the action. Oh, what a dark day or at least you may be led to believe that, unless you were not aware of the history of the church.

Persecution began, that's right, and what have we said before about persecution? What makes the church grow, what makes them stubborn, it is persecution. The fire had already been lit in Jerusalem, and then it was spread like **wild fire**. Have you ever witnessed what wind does to a fire in the woods, it fans the flames and spreads the fire everywhere. All the Sanhedrin did that day was pour gas on it, and even then, Gamaliel had warned them not to.

Then what happened? They all went home. Back to their synagogues where they had come from to **take the gospel**. To evangelize their brothers, to share the good news that the **Sanhedrin had been told to evacuate** there was a new power in town, and to wait for the coming of the Apostles that would further start their own church in their own hometown.

Then lastly, God heard Stephen and **He forgave Saul**. God had set this up before time, had put Saul in place, elected him, used this event to get his name known, used him for Stephen's persecution, used him to start the church's persecution, knocked him down off his high horse, saved him, regenerated him, gave him faith, gave him the name Paul and then sent him on to be the greatest church planter of all time.

Oh, what a site it would have been to see Stephen standing behind Jesus to see Paul upon his arrival. To see these two men, embrace, cry, and thank the Lord for letting it be the way it played out, giving Jesus the credit for the spread of the church.

Stephen's sacrifice and prayer is what ignited the flames of the **greatest movement in all of history, the church of Jesus Christ**. Sacrificing for the Truth brought Stephen to the point where he could care for others like Christ and in his death throws was able to pray for his people for he loved his God



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more than his life and he loved his people enough to know they were led astray.

**[CHALLENGE + APPLICATION]**

Family, today who needs to hear the Truth from you? Who is it that you are not loving by the way you keep withholding the gospel from them? Who is it that you have not lovingly told that Jesus is the only one that can deal with their sins?

Today, make it a point perhaps to pick a name of a coworker, a family member, a neighbor, a school friend and start praying for them now that God would give you the opportunity to be like Stephen and tell them about Jesus. Pray that God would give you the opportunity to invite them to church, especially on Easter. Pray and remember Jesus honors the prayers of a righteous person. Let me finally remind you as we close so that we are not discouraged.

**The world is rarely happy about hearing the Truth,  
The Christian will be at odds with the World when they see Truth,  
but the Lord rewards the one that tells the Truth.**



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**[PRAYER]**

**[COMMUNION]**

**[BENEDICTION]**

Go in the name of the Father, who delivered to us total objectifiable truth in His Son so that we would have a way to relate with Him.

Go in the name of the Son, that fought with the father of lies and won so we could have a Salvation based on the Truth of His sacrifice not our works.

Go in the name and power of the Holy Spirit, that reveals to us the Truth, empowers our hearts with affections so we can proclaim it to a lost world.