

A Sermon with a Response!

Saturday, 5/9 at 4:00 | Sunday, 5/10 at 9:00

Fifth Sunday of Easter – 2020

Introduction: Dear friends in Christ: Why are you listening to this sermon: Only to be polite, **OR** to understand, and then to respond? James challenged his readers with these words: “...prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves” (Jas. 1:22 NAS). That means: Hear God’s Word; then, by His grace – *understand it*, and by His power – *put it into practice!*

First, in this sermon, we have a good example of a problem followed by a solution, *which has application today!* Second, we have an argument, followed by preaching and a murder. In each case *there was a response!* So today and each week, think about the sermon... *and then respond!*

1. **Problem:** ¹ **Now in these days when the disciples** [*believers*] **were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists** [*Greek-speaking Jews*] **arose against the Hebrews** [*Hebrew-speaking Jews*] **because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution.** // Those who HAD were giving and those who were NEEDY were receiving, *but the Greek-speaking Jews were being treated unjustly.* What about us, are we being fair with everyone?
2. **Solution:** ² **And the twelve** [apostles] **summoned the full number of the disciples and said, “It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables** [*we should each serve as called and gifted*]. ³ **Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of**

the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty [you pick them, then we will appoint them; those men could be called the first deacons – they met spiritual qualifications, but their main duties were caring for physical needs]. ⁴ **But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word** [those things will be our focus].” ⁵ **And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip** [not Philip the apostle; you can read much more about this Philip in Acts 8], **and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte** [convert] **of Antioch** [those last five men are never mentioned again in the Bible]. ⁶ **These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them.** ⁷ **And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.** // Think about what happened... ♦ They identified a problem of unfairness, ♦ they put a wise solution into practice, and ♦ God blessed the believers in Jesus with ✓ growth in the Bible and ✓ many being saved, including priests! May the Holy Spirit help us here at Bethlehem to ♦ identify our problems, ♦ put wise solutions into practice, and ♦ have God’s blessing upon us for 😊 *personal growth in His Word* and 😊 *many being saved!*

3. **Persecution:** ⁸ **And Stephen, full of [God’s] grace and [God’s] power, was doing great wonders and signs among the people** [on the same level of what God was working through the apostles]. ⁹ **But some men from what was called the Synagogue of the Freedmen** [not necessarily a building, but a group who met together, “likely indicating Jews from Italy who had been freed from slavery” (TLSB)], **including both Cyrenians** [Libya] **and Alexandrians** [Egypt], **and some from Cilicia and Asia** [two places in modern-day Turkey], **rose up and argued with Stephen**

(v. 9 is NAS).... // Even though the ones who disputed with Stephen had their roots in various countries, Lenski wrote: they “**had their present permanent homes in Jerusalem**” (252). In the verses we skip in our reading, *they say that Stephen was treated very similar to Jesus – being arrested, brought before the Sanhedrin, and falsely accused by false witnesses. Then those present “saw that [Stephen’s] face was like the face of an angel” (Acts 6:15 ESV).*

- a. Stephen’s sermon: ^{7:2} **And Stephen said: “Brothers and fathers, hear me....** // Then Stephen gave the people a summary of God’s work during the previous 2,000 years, touching on the lives of Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, David, and Solomon, *as well as the general disobedience of the descendants of Jacob – the ones through whom God would eventually send His Son, the Promised Messiah.*
- b. The end of Stephen’s sermon: *He boldly told them the truth:* ⁵¹ **You stiff-necked [stubborn, unbending] people, uncircumcised in heart and ears [bearing the sign of a relationship with God outwardly, but not having it inwardly], you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you.** ⁵² **Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? [Implying they persecuted them all!] And they killed [God’s prophets,] those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered,** ⁵³ **you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it.”** // ♣ You are descendants of Jacob, ♣ you have God’s Word, ♣ you should have known the truth, and ♣ you should have believed in Jesus, yet, instead, *you murdered Him!*
- c. The reaction to Stephen’s sermon: ⁵⁴ **Now when they heard these things** [they could have repented, but, instead]

they were enraged, and they ground their teeth at him.

⁵⁵ 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. ⁵⁶ And he said, “Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.”

[Remember, Stephen’s hearers saw no connection between God and Jesus!] ⁵⁷ But they cried out with a loud voice and

stopped their ears *[doing both things so they could no longer hear what Stephen was saying]* and rushed together at him.

⁵⁸ Then they cast him out of the city *[even as Jesus was put to death outside of the city]* and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul *[a.k.a. Paul]*. ⁵⁹ And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit *[similar to Jesus’ 7th statement]*.” ⁶⁰ And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them *[similar to Jesus’ 1st statement]*.” And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

- i. How did they respond to Stephen’s sermon? They were enraged, which led them to murder Stephen!
- ii. How did the people respond to Peter’s sermon on the Day of Pentecost? *Repentance unto salvation!*
- iii. How do we respond to this or any sermon? It’s important to ✓listen intently, ✓rightly understand, and ✓diligently apply God’s Word in our lives!

This Week’s Challenge: Each time we hear or read God’s Word, let us be determined to rightly understand and diligently apply!

Let Us Pray: Dear Holy Spirit, forgive us, fill us, and help us, so that we truly understand and beneficially apply God’s Word!

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