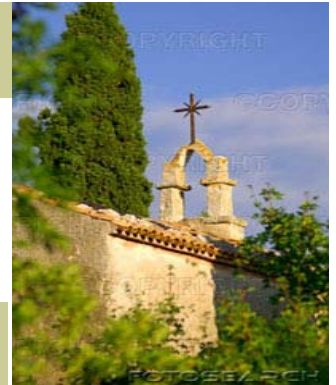


DIGGING DEEPER

“WHAT’S THE BIG IDEA?”—WEEK 2

OPENING QUESTION:

Describe a time in your life, or in the life of someone you know about, where persecution or hardship due to your relationship with Christ, actually wound up bringing you (or others around you) closer to Christ.



ACTS 7 (NIV)

There is too much text to place in this week’s Digging Deeper, so, open your Bibles and read the text. As you read, note some key points in His-story and share your observations with the group. Break your reading/observations into 5 sections:

- A) 7:1-7 *The Time of Abraham*
- B) 7:9-19 *The Time of Joseph*
- C) 7:20-45 *The Time of Moses*
- D) 7:46-53 *The Time of David*
- E) 7:53-8:3 *The Time Stephen*

OBSERVATION QUESTIONS:

1. Who was Stephen? Who was Stephen talking to? Why was he sharing these stories of their faith? What was the end result of his testimony?!
2. What common themes or circumstances appear in each “Time” represented above? What unique understandings of those times does Stephen’s ‘sermon’ reveal?
3. According to vv. 51-53 what was Stephen’s prophetic conclusion about his accusers? As his accusers reject his interpretation, how does Stephen (vv. 55-56, 59-60) react to their misperceived judgment?
4. Briefly, who is this man named Saul? What role does he play in the dispersion of the Jewish Christians in the early church?

Discussion Questions:

1. Stephen is falsely accused of crimes against God, the Law, and the Temple. Those in power manipulate facts, outright lie, stir up others through emotionally charged language, and pervert the truth. This is nothing new. What does this Deacon/Table servant's reaction teach us regarding how we should respond when we find ourselves in situations like this?
2. In vv. 51-53 Stephen really lets the leaders of the Jews 'have it' as he speaks hard, but true words to their face. The end result is not positive (he gets killed), but do you think it was the right thing to do? Should we speak truth (directly, lovingly) to others even though doing so may cause us or others pain? Why or why not?
3. Stephen experiences a vision as they are preparing to kill him. How would this vision have brought peace to Him...or to us...as we find our selves in the midst of persecution, pain, or problems. Share an example from your own life.
4. Stephen's martyrdom 'begins' the movement (in fulfillment of Acts 1:8) of Christianity outside of Jerusalem. The persecution of the saints (by Saul/Paul and others) much to the 'disappointment' of Satan, actually furthered (not hindered) the cause and the message of Christ! Do you think God still uses persecution to accomplish his will...personally, nationally, and internationally? Why or why not? Give examples.

PRAYER NOTES FROM PASTOR JAMES

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