

**The New Testament Church**  
**The International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church**  
***We Will Serve the Lord - Acts 6-7***  
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I Introduction - the fellowship of Christ's sufferings – Phillipians 3:10-11

- A. The suffering of the soul – *anguish of mind, will and emotion* – Matthew 16:24
  1. Due to sin, there is always a conflict in our mind, will and emotion
  2. We are called to *deny self* and take up our *cross* – where His will crosses ours
    - a. Our will vs. the will of God
    - b. Our mind vs. not understanding why
    - c. Our emotional disappointments, discouragements and pain
  3. The benefit is a **closer following in our Savior's footsteps – walking with Him!**
  
- B. Suffering from without – *persecution* – Matthew 5:10-16
  1. *Blessed are the persecuted for righteousness sake*
    - a. 90% of all nations in history monarchal tyranny (today one third of the nations with little religious liberty, yet nearly 70% of the world's population)
    - b. Believers can be mature, righteous and loving – yet *still killed for their faith*
    - c. God's people have lived under liberty and tyranny throughout history
    - d. Yet in all cases, we can be **blessed** (in a good place with God)
  2. *You are the salt... and light... of the earth (world)*
    - a. Yet God says the Kingdom, when manifested, will bring forth liberty
      1. Salt is being “active and vocal” in serving one's community positively
      2. Light exposes evil but restores the individual, family, church, and nation
    - b. God's Sovereignty working with our choices, determines liberty or martyrdom
  
- C. So what is the lesson of Jesus and the Scriptures?
  1. **In whatever condition – slave or free – we will serve the Lord**
  2. God has a purpose for suffering and it primarily is drawing us closer to Him, getting us to focus on eternal things, helping us put priorities in order
  3. Being salt and light, though it has resulted in the increase of liberty, is no guarantee that we may not be persecuted – let us pray, for righteousness sake
  4. Today we *remember the prisoners as if chained with them – those who are mistreated – since you yourselves are in the body also* – Hebrews 13:3

II Lessons from Stephen – *We will serve the Lord* – Acts 6-7

- A. Acts 6:1-6 – **character** of Stephen – *We will serve the Lord* (drawn close to Christ)
  1. A complaint about meeting Hellenist (Greek) widow needs (a minority group) since the majority were Hebrews (Jews)
  2. The apostles summoned the disciples (thousands) to select seven (who die daily)
    - a. Good reputation – known for his character, trustworthiness
    - b. Full of faith – faithful – steadfast, dependable – (faithfulness is true success)

- c. Full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom – practical guidance – spirit and word
  - d. Stephen, a Hellenist, a Greek speaking new convert (at most two years old in the Lord) who belonged to a Synagogue and was the first chosen
  - e. He was filled with love and compassion to those in need – he served
3. The people chose (elected) the deacons, and then the apostles laid hands on them

B. Acts 6:7-15 – **nature of persecution** – *We will serve the Lord (focus on eternal)*

1. God’s word spreads, miracles confirm it, and the number of disciples increase (We serve the Lord, and leave the results and consequences to Him)
2. Opposition arises, begins with argument, but Stephen had wisdom (heart & mind)
3. Secretly get “witnesses” to lie, which stirs up the people, to drag him to court
4. The result was that they took his message out of context to get him accused
5. *all... looking steadfastly at him, saw his face as the face of an angel* (heart & mind)

C. Acts 7 – **legacy of Stephen’s martyrdom** – *If God should choose, that our life we would lose – though our foe may slay us; we will serve the Lord! (priorities in order)*

1. Verses 1 through 54 describe an amazing sermon by Stephen in his defense, beginning with Abraham, to Patriarchs, Moses, Israel, the Law, then...
2. His heart was surrendered to God, so that the most difficult message could be seasoned with salt – similar message as Peter’s in Acts 2:23 – “*you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death...*”
3. Stephen said *You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit as your fathers did, so do you... they were cut to the heart... cast him out... (why in Peter’s case did they repent, but in this case they did not? – we serve the Lord so whatever He desires is fine with us)*
4. *But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God..*
5. *And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul*
6. Stephen’s heart is seen in v. 60 – *he knelt down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.*
7. **The seed of Stephen’s martyrdom leads to Saul’s conversion and the spread of Christianity that eventually took down the Roman Empire!**
  - a. He had no idea that the one orchestrating his stoning would continue his work
  - b. He was the vehicle that caused the *dispersion* of the Church to do what they were supposed to do all along – God uses trouble to get us to obey!

D. Conclusion:

1. We are in need of the kind of *character* Stephen had (to die daily in soul)...
2. God uses *persecution* and suffering to *refine* and *mature* His Church – **draw close to Christ, focus on the eternal, and put our priorities in order!**
3. We do not know the *legacy* that will come from our sufferings, both internal and external – but we are to be faithful in the fellowship of Christ and the gospel!
4. The end God has in mind is worth all the means – regardless of how He chooses to do it – whether in liberty or slavery – *May His Kingdom Come!*