

The Early Church: Radical Allegiance

Acts 6:3-7:60

The story of Stephen, the first Christian martyr, confronts us with the question of ultimate allegiance. In a culture shaped by competing loyalties and pressures, Stephen remains faithful to Jesus even in the face of hostility, false accusation, and death. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, he bears witness not only through his words but through the way he suffers. This passage invites us to wrestle with what it truly means to confess that Jesus is Lord—not just with our lips, but with our lives.

Consider / Contemplate

- “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.” — Tertullian
- “The early martyrs paid an extreme price, their very lives. But the value of their example is not in the martyrdom itself, however noble and courageous, but in their commitment to Christ’s lordship. That we might not have to die for Christ is irrelevant. How we *live* for Christ is the real issue.” — Jerry Sittser
- “A Christian is one who follows Christ no matter the cost.” — Dietrich Bonhoeffer
- “Courage is fear that has said its prayers.” — Dorothy Bernard

Thinking It Through

1. What stands out to you most about Stephen’s character and response throughout this story?
2. Why do you think the early Christians’ confession that “Jesus is Lord” was viewed as such a threat?
3. What competing allegiances tend to rival Jesus for authority in our culture today?
4. Stephen repeatedly emphasizes that God does not dwell in temples made by human hands. Why was that important? Why is it important now?
5. How does Stephen’s response to suffering resemble Jesus? Be specific.

6. Why do you think the witness of someone's response to suffering, especially unjust suffering, can be so powerful?

7. The sermon distinguished between true persecution and cultural discomfort or antagonism toward Christian values. Why is that distinction important?

8. In what areas of your life is it hardest to truly live as though "Jesus is Lord"?

9. What would it look like this week for your life—not just your words—to bear witness to Christ?

Prayer Points

- Pray for Jesus to strengthen our allegiance to Him above everything else... every competing idol, loyalty, or fear.
 - Pray God would fill us with wisdom and the power of the Holy Spirit as we seek to bear witness to Christ.
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