

8/21/22 - Acts 6:8-7:1 - "Patterns of the World & Church - Part 1"

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[0 : 00] And so this is a two-part message today titled Patterns of the World and Church. And so why this is a two-part series is because from verse 6, 8, all the way into almost chapter 8, you have one plot narrative.

It's just like opening up the beginning of a story, finishing that story. The story is not finished. We're kind of like left on a cliffhanger of the Sanhedrin questioning Stephen.

And so we're going to cut this into two messages. And my hope today is that we can clearly see something.

That through Stephen's devotion to the task that is laid before him, due to his devotion to the task laid before him, God opened up many opportunities to witness the gospel.

However, with unique opportunities often comes unique challenges. And we are certain of this. And I believe what Luke's desire for us to see in this narrative sort of rising action of the intensity, building up until the resolution occurs in that story, I believe he wants us to understand something simple yet profound.

[1 : 26] That the activity of the world against the church will never suppress the activity of the spirit within a Christian's life. Those who are mature in their faith will stand confidence amid confrontation.

So let's dive into the patterns of the world in the church today, part one, and observe three patterns. Rather than three points, we will have three patterns. But I do want to pray as I do take this time seriously for God to work through his words.

So let's pray for that. Lord, we come to you just out of a hectic week that we've brought all these stresses.

We probably have emails that we have to get back to, issues in our inboxes and all the floods of things going on in TV. But Father, help us at this time to realize that it would be beneficial for us to pause it all.

To sit under your word is exactly where you want your church to be when they assemble. So Father, help us with this time to use this to edify us, encourage us, and challenge us.

[2 : 41] And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. So the first pattern that we see is the pattern of the world will confront God's power.

We met Stephen last week as he was appointed, one of the seven. And this is a man who is consistently referred to as mature in his faith.

This guy is like no other, none of the other seven, as Luke mentions. And so he's mature. You see that language here when he was appointed, he was full of faith, just a little bit previously, full of faith in the Holy Spirit.

And in the passage today, full of grace and power. This man was mature. It wasn't his first rodeo.

And just looking at the portrait of the book of Acts, don't we see an answer to prayer?

Remember that after John and Peter were released from the council after being imprisoned or put in jail overnight, they returned to the group of Christians and they prayed, and now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness.

[4 : 02] Just two chapters previously, we have an answer to prayer. Here comes Stephen. You see, the presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of this table waiter was the source of power in his life.

The presence of the Holy Spirit was the source of power for that table waiter. Think, being called to such a task like managing food distribution, many of the prideful will probably look at such a task as like, well, kind of like how people look at youth pastors.

You know, they think that they're like a step down from a pastor, that they're not really a pastor yet. And even I've heard comments in being coming from youth ministry, they say, well, when are you going to be a real pastor?

You know, as they're kind of like making this step down and separation between the work towards youth or towards adults.

And so, being called to such a task like food distribution, to free up the apostles to the ministry of the word, didn't that negate the opportunity to proclaim the word as his responsibility as well?

[5 : 18] Well, not at all. It did not negate the opportunity for him, as a table waiter, to proclaim the word of God.

It was through the task of waiting tables in which provided proclamation opportunities. And there's something that's clear, is history can warn us.

It should warn us. It should teach us history. Rafiki taught us that in The Lion King, to learn from the past, right? One thing is true.

The social gospel is dangerous. Salvation to the soul and salvation to society, that goes into a deep pit of darkness there. And it completely distorts the real gospel.

However, we have to not forget that it's just as dangerous to forget that the gospel is social. That there is engagement with the gospel. You see, through Stephen's service, this opened up unique opportunities to emphasize, empathize, empathize with others, with the hurting community, with people who are sick, with people who come with great needs who are oppressed, and he addresses those needs.

[6 : 37] And guess what? He uses his words to conversate. Christian outreach cannot be separated by charitable service and gospel proclamation.

They are not exclusive to one another. They are the same. Charitable service and gospel proclamation cannot be separated. You can be charitable all you want and not be a Christian.

There's a lot of charitable individuals in our community in Youngstown that will not be found in a church, but outgive the church and outserve the church. So you can be charitable and not be a Christian, but you cannot be a Christian and conceal the gospel in the name of charity.

You cannot. And we would do well to hold each other accountable to that as we get engaged with the community of Youngstown. And we see something here. There is something wrong.

Because this charitable efforts, waiting tables, their observers, verse 9, look, they rise up.

[7 : 47] Whose experience of Stephen is less than admirable. They rise up to this guy who's serving the community. And it's almost as if Stephen, forecasting in the passage, has truly shaken the hornet's neck.

Hasn't he? I would like to call these moments the lean-in moments. Those moments where you can either dive into a conversation or head for the street.

And sort of avoid getting into a deep conversation. We often have those moments if you're boss at work, you know, your new job and everything. Hey, I'd like, we had an opening on Sundays.

Could you come in and work Sundays? And you might say, oh, no. I got commitments. And you kind of just brush it under the table. You don't get into specifics. Or if somebody asks a pastor what they do, I get often asked that a lot.

As a little small talk, usually they're expecting something other than a pastor. Especially somebody who's aging as well as I am. They're just like, oh, you? Oh, are you old enough to?

[8 : 54] Yeah, I think so. The disciples were in their early 20s. And God appointed me, so I think I'm qualified. So, you know, it's interesting how the world can get into these conversations.

And you can either dive in, lean into those conversations, or completely hit the streets. They often ask, what do I do for a living? I'm like, well, you know, if I want to kind of tiptoe around that question, I could say, well, I read a book to a bunch of adults for about an hour on Sunday.

You know, and that might be mistaken. Oh, you work for an adult daycare. And then I say, well, I guess you could say that. No, I'm just kidding. But then I say, yeah, there's more, you know, there's more to it.

I check in with people. I visit people and things like that. Oh, a receptionist or delivery boy. Well, I guess, I guess in a sense, I do that as well.

And so after so much in this small talk, you know your heart's beating. You know it's about time to lean into the conversation. Admit, unveil the cover that you are a Christian. And guess what?

[10:02] I might look like I'm 20, but I am a pastor of a church. And you say boldly, yeah, I'm a pastor. But after all those moments of stammering, it sort of just discredits the whole conversation.

They say, oh, seems like you need an adult daycare yourself. You know, it's interesting how we can get to these moments of those lean in moments. Don't act like I'm the only one that goes through these times.

When we are called to unveil our colors, because we see something wrong in this passage, with all the laboring, with all the charitable service that Stephen is doing, opponents rise up against him. Right? These were members of a handful of synagogues. You can count and we can debate that after the service. But there is a handful of synagogues.

And these were all Jews from the dispersion all throughout the regions of Jerusalem and throughout the surrounding areas. And they rise up against Stephen as he's waiting tables, rising up against him.

[11:14] And they dispute with him, also known as the word for debate. And I don't want to get technical, but maybe there is people who might understand this. But this is an ongoing thing.

This is an active participle in this passage, which is crucial to indicate that this was an ongoing discussion. This was probably days of there's Stephen again, serving the poor and, you know, proclaiming the name of Jesus Christ.

Well, what's the problem here? He's taking care of the community. He's loving people. Right? That's the cultural banner, you know, love is love and everything.

He's loving. Right? What's the problem? Why were they upset at his charitable effort? I don't think it was the signs and the wonders. Verse 10.

They could not withstand the wisdom and the spirit with which he was speaking. This is what Jesus Christ, promise of Jesus Christ that was fulfilled from Luke 21 15.

[12:24] Jesus says, for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict.

Promise of Christ fulfilled so quickly here. You see, the world will celebrate the works of the church. They will love the church if they help come alongside the societal efforts of serving and rallying and everything being loved and everything.

But the moment that our words are given and spoken is the moment that we are rejected when we proclaim Jesus Christ.

These diaspora Jews were clearly aware of the miracles. They were clearly watching. They were observing. They're not impressed. Their confrontation dwelt directly with the wisdom and the spirit with which he spoke.

In other words, the world will confront God's power. Not the power of the signs and wonders. Those help serve the community.

[13:39] Right? This is power by God's word. The power of words, meaning proclamation. And so you see, church, the church's boldness comes from proclamation of words, not propagation of miracles.

We see something so huge that is often mistaken in the book of Acts, that this is the word of God that is increasing. And the word of God is what nobody wants.

This is a historic problem. You can read back through biblical theology and you can see that the rejection of God's word starts at Genesis 3. The life-changing power of the gospel penetrates.

The words penetrate the heart of sinners by the power of the Holy Spirit through words. And if through words and the Holy Spirit, bringing life to dead bones.

Ezekiel 36. This is the miracle. Truly the most miraculous act that God can do within our lives is to raise our dead state to new life by words of the gospel.

[14:57] And this is simply a biblical pragmatic. There's no other way around it. There is no preach the gospel when necessary use words.

No, not at all. I'm sorry if you have that t-shirt. You might want to take that to the fire. This is simply a biblical pragmatic that is often lost in the itching ears of those desiring this continuation of experiences and miracles and wonders because the problem is actually revealed as us.

We are not satisfied in God's word and what he spoke and what he promised he's going to do until our last breath on earth. We want to be entertained and we say it's in the name of God and miracles.

This is modern day idolatry at its finest. Jesus said, keep my words and they will know that you are my disciples. Words. The power of God will be confronted by the world.

First pattern. We see the second pattern as well as the passage continues. We see the world will suppress the truth. The world will suppress the truth.

[16:16] Verse 11 kind of unwinds this action of the world. We'll call them the Jewish leaders who are unsaved.

The world. They are secretly instigating men. They're stirring people up. They're bearing false witness. They get them arrested, running up the flagpole of authority.

It's like taking it to the Supreme Court and saying, I don't like the way this is going. Hear me out and put false witnesses against them. You see, the most despicable thing in the world's eyes is for the name of Christ to be attached to social activism.

What he's doing, waiting tables, would be a social act. But the problem is, like we said, it's when you're attaching the name of Jesus Christ as being the fuel and the means, the ends, the beginning, the end.

Everything that we do is fully consumed in the name of Jesus Christ. There's no separating the two. However, but the most despicable thing for a church, for a church's eyes is for the name of Jesus Christ to be detached from social activism.

[17:28] This is the modern day mantra, all inclusion, right? The worldly mantra is inclusion. Everyone just don't offend one another.

And we'll include everyone, every religion, but wait, not Jesus Christ. That's not inclusion. That's persecution. The world would rather shut a church down regardless of their critical role that they may have in a community of serving the needs, which tells you about what they care about most. Why would they have such a response like this? Stephen waiting tables, serving, proclaiming, people receiving life abundantly in Jesus Christ.

Well, we as a church have quite the advantage of finding the root of that problem. And the answer, I believe, that we seek is found within Scripture. Romans 1, 18.

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

[18:48] Verse 22 continues. Claiming to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

That's the problem. Man wants God on their own contingency. They want their own ideas and their own concepts of God.

They don't want Jesus Christ. You know, as children protest, you know, often that's a daily occurrence, I believe, in most parents' homes.

Your children stand against you and you say to do something, to eat those pieces of broccoli, and they resist it like the plague. And they throw that broccoli across the room and proceeding with the carrots and the apples and the yogurts.

It's a daily occurrence of children complaining and protesting against their parents, unless we're the only ones. I didn't hear an amen, but I'll assume that there's more in the room than just me, hopefully.

[19:58] God help me. As children protest, when they don't get their way, these diaspora Jews, these Jews from this dispersion, conduct themselves in the very same way, don't they?

They don't get their way. And so what do they do? They stir up trouble. That broccoli goes flying across the room. I'm not having it. Verse 11, they make a secret instigation.

Verse 12, they stir up the people. Right? Verse 13, they staged even false witnesses once they ran it up to the flagpole of what would be known as the Supreme Court.

Man, this seems like it's turned into, if this is anywhere near God's city, Jerusalem, this reminds me more of a high school cafeteria between cliques of people.

But sadly enough, this sounds like a lot of churches against their pastors as well. You see, for those who cannot withstand the truth of God's word will go to great lengths to disturb their audience.

[21:13] Why would they do that? Why would those who can't withstand God's truth, rather than submitting to it, they suppress it? We can say that it's Romans 1.18, like we said.

But there's something deeper into that. And it's a conscience issue. Because the gospel is sharp. And it's good news that remedies the bad news.

And guess what? Nobody wants the bad news. The bad news being that apart from Jesus Christ is an exclusive reality.

That you are lost. You are needy. You can have all the money in the world. Have all the boats and biggest house in the entire world. But if you don't have Jesus Christ, you have nothing.

You are hopeless, hellbound, rebels. You're selfish. Idol worshipers. Immoral, impure. Sinful, prideful, desolate.

[22 : 14] And an object of God's wrath. That's what the world does not want to reckon with. The bad news. That the good news remedies.

Might this serve as a reminder as we see that pattern of the world will suppress the truth. Isn't this a great reminder for anyone in leadership?

In church leadership specifically. Pastors or deacons. That Stephen was mature. He met some good qualifications.

And he was chose to serve in this higher capacity. But the moment that you step into that higher capacity, you should expect Satan to do all things within his power to prevent that from happening. And the sad reality, like I said, is that this often happens with contentious members in a church. Who secretly instigate through gossip and slander.

[23 : 20] Who stir up people and factions. Who stage false witnesses when they don't agree with something. And Satan uses even the church.

He has breached the walls often in our culture today. So we as a church, we have to remember to cover our leaders in prayer.

Especially grace. If they mess up. If they mess up. I mean, 80% of pastors do quit. Statistics have said. Two of the pastors of this church previously have left ministry.

It is a daunting task. And they don't need any help from Satan to be used through the church that they're called to shepherd. So let's pray for our leaders.

And let's cover them in grace. And leaders, you must not find motivation through the affirmation of those who approve you or deny you. This is important.

[24 : 24] Because your affirmation comes not by the lips of man. It comes by the lips of Jesus Christ himself. Well done, my good and faithful servant. Our devotion is to please God, not man.

So we must all be on guard. And in service to God, Stephen, he was accused of half-truths. Isn't that how it goes?

You make it sound good like Stephen's a monster. But it's only half the truth. We've seen it round and round. If you've been through grade school in those cafeterias, you know. In service to God, Stephen was accused of those half-truths.

And those who desire his destruction only heard what they wanted to hear. They had a preconceived notion. What they heard was good. It felt good. It felt good to get angry and stand against something together with other people like groupthink.

And storm the Capitol building and everything, right? And just all come together. Man, this is good. This is what we're doing. We're God's mouthpiece. And we see that their accusations were blasphemy, false witness, which were both prohibited in Jewish culture.

[25 : 35] We see that in Exodus 20, Leviticus 24, and Deuteronomy 19. Blasphemy and false witness. And it was those who seemed to have it all together, the guys with the hats and the robes, that seemed to have all this external affirmation that they have it all together.

They are the religious elites. But they are the ones that are often, even in our lives today, are the ones most lost. The ones with pristine houses and those thousand-dollar shoes.

Right? Sad. Their first charge, regarding their first charge, it was Jesus Christ who said he destroyed the temple. Yeah. But it wasn't Stephen.

And they used that against him to say that he was going to be hurtful and harmful to their worship. And not to mention, Jesus Christ also said the other half of the truth, that he would raise it up again, and was talking about his body, of which he did.

And he raised it up again. So, half-truth charge. And we see another, regarding the second charge, Jesus Christ did not abolish the law. Church, please have your ears open.

[26 : 50] Jesus Christ did not come to abolish the law, but he fulfilled it in himself. And this is important, because the customs of the law that were stipulated for Israel are fulfilled in himself.

The food customs, the sabbatical customs, the sacrificial customs. Thank God we don't get a... I love me a good roasted pig and a goat, but we don't have to do it anymore to cover our sins.

Right? All fulfilled in himself. And this is the good news. Clearly, if Stephen was attempting to say anything, it was the fact that in Jesus Christ, life, death, resurrection, and exaltation, he is making all things new.

It's like Stephen is saying to these worshipers of God, observing all of these things and extra things to kind of barrier and put those hedges of protection around the things that really matter.

And they make all these man-made regulations just to keep an extra buffer just in case they screw up, which they do. And he's saying, essentially, that your Messiah, of which all that you observe through your sacrifices, through your food, through your sabbatical, all are fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

[28 : 22] He is the better Adam. He is the better Abraham. He's the better Moses. Jesus Christ. Believe.

That's all. Is to believe in your Messiah. Which makes it a point in the world will suppress the truth. Is that there is nothing that we, as a church, can do to make the gospel appeal more to others. Now, you might argue, yeah, our tone may be factored in.

Because you could sound like a religious nut out there hitting people over with the Bible. You don't want to sound like a Bible-thumping jerk about it. But the gospel is the gospel.

It doesn't need any means of appealing. It's not going to appeal to the world. And this is clearly a sign of it. Right?

[29 : 27] We'll be meeting Saul in just a couple weeks. But after his conversion, he told the Corinthian church in 1 Corinthians 2, Amen. Boy, sounds really simple, right?

Doesn't sound simple when people are holding stones in their face. We got the third pattern. The world is ignorance of the truth.

We see in verse 15 through the first verse of chapter 7. And gazing at him, all who sat in the council saw his face like that of an angel. And the high priest said to him, Are these things so?

Stephen, under even the most extreme pressure, attack, slander, everything coiled up into one situation, remains controlled and still very bold.

I'd imagine for these religious elite, they would probably be at their wit's end with him. Extremely irritated. Because they are trying to discredit and destroy Stephen, and they can't make any progress.

[30 : 55] And here Stephen is standing there radiant. They've done all they can do. And his composure is visibly identifiable. I want us to think about this for a moment.

Think with me, church. Wake up. It is extremely unlikely that this Sanhedrin stood up at this time and said, Do you see his face?

Stephen, you have a face of an angel. Right? And Luke's back there in the corner like, Yep, keep it coming. I'm writing this for Theophilus. And wait, can you repeat that last one?

An angel you said, right? It's extremely unlikely that the Sanhedrin stood up at that moment, just as they rose up in accusation, as if they complimented altogether Stephen and his radiant face.

But in this moment, in this time period, we understand that Luke was sent as a physician to have interviews, personal testimonies, eyewitness accounts, that at a certain point after all of this, Stephen is long six foot in the grounds at this point.

[32 : 03] We understand that after all of this, it was affirmed from this council, whoever it was, that they all commented something after that meeting that said, Did you see his face?

Did you see his face? It was like that of which we read of Moses coming down from the mountain. Face of an angel. And still yet, they reject its proclamation.

Now you want to tell me who's the one bearing false witness again? You want to tell me who's blaspheming God? Well, it's not Stephen.

See, a world lost in sin cannot identify truth, even if it's standing right in front of them. Pun intended. There is nothing more blasphemous than unbelief.

The world is ignorant of the truth. So what is, what's Stephen to do? What's he going to do? What do we as a church to do?

[33 : 15] We continue to pursue every opportunity to serve, to wait tables, whenever God calls, but also to speak. And this is ironically what the suppressing world was trying to alleviate.

And look how this ends. They give Stephen the microphone. They say, what is your plea? Right? For Stephen and for us today, our plea is the name of Jesus Christ and him crucified.

And we will continue to examine that plea next week from here. But as we come to a close, there is one thing that stands superior in the world of lies.

And that is truth. Truth is not relative. There is absolute truth. And to say that absolute truth doesn't exist is ironically an absolute truth.

Understand? There is absolute truth. And if there is absolute truth, we need to get to that absolute truth as a church in all that we do.

[34 : 25] When the church stands upon that truth, nothing can withstand. That all life as we know it, we can look around the world and the condition of the culture today, it is subordinate to that gospel truth.

It is in gospel truth that all meaning in life is given. And through Stephen's ongoing following of Jesus Christ, the road led him down a similar path of suffering and betrayal just as Jesus Christ has traveled.

Constant challenge, slander, facing charges, and even, spoiler alert to next chapter, death. But what an honor it is to partake in the sufferings of Jesus Christ when he has called you to it. Church, don't be caught off guard if this ever occurs in our own lives. Romans 5, 1 through 5 can encourage us, I believe.

It says, therefore, Paul says, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him, we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand.

[35 : 40] And we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Not only that, as if there's more that needs to be added to that.

Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings. We rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance.

And endurance produces character. And character produces hope. And hope does not put to shame. Because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

This is good news to the Christian. That we are dead to this world. And if we are dead to this world, we are alive in Jesus Christ.

There is nothing that this world can take from us. There's no reputation that we have to worry about that's at stake other than our standing before the throne of God.

[36 : 49] Forgiven by the blood of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ came as a light into the darkness. And the darkness could not overcome the light. And even the darkness of death, as he was buried for three days, could not even extinguish that light.

And the same will be for you, Christian. You see, the trajectory of Christ's victory through suffering serves as a model of what the Christian life actually should look like.

Yeah, we have some privileges and honors and rights in this country. But this does not exist in every country. I would say that our rights often create lazy Christians who kind of just blend in with the world.

And because we can gather in church. But like I said, it changes the whole story when the rocks are being collected against us. We live lives where suffering gives way to sorrow, even death.

But our victory is always secure in Jesus Christ. Amen. So for us, let's be reminded that our turning to Jesus Christ and the power of the indwelling spirit, that we are given every reason to be confident in our salvation, personally and corporately.

[38 : 08] It's a great honor to be labeled as a Christian. It's a wonderful honor to be labeled as a Christian, to be fired from our workplace because we're a Christian. What an honor.

But it comes with a great cost and especially great accountability. Because the moment that the world identifies you as a Christian, wait for that microscope to come for looking for every one of your shortcomings to call you a hypocrite.

But maybe that's why so many people in the church conceal their faith after all. It is a great honor to be labeled a Christian. Let's never forget our job description that matters most.

Matthew 28, 19. Go, therefore, make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Teaching them with words to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you to the ends of the age. How is he with us to the end of the age?

[39 : 13] Acts 1.8. You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you. And you will be my witnesses. Amen.

Let's pray.