

Text: Acts 6:8-15

Title: “An Unstoppable Life” Pt.1

We've moved from focusing on our church being a HOUSE OF PRAYER to our families becoming HOMES OF PRAYER. And this month we take it a step deeper to our lives becoming HEARTS OF PRAYER. Easter is a little over a month away and we've prepared a “Walk to the Empty Tomb,” a 30-day personal prayer experience. It will be up on our website. Or follow me on Facebook and Twitter to get the daily guide which will start on March 7. We have a great opportunity to share the Gospel with our city in the next month leading up to Easter. Let's have our hearts ready.

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION – Each week we learn more about the murder of 21 Egyptian Christians by Islamic militants. Last week it was reported that the families of these martyrs were rejoicing that in the video of the beheading of these men their murderers didn't edit out some of the men praying to Jesus. As a result the killing of these Christians the name of Jesus was sent all over the world. An article in *Christianity Today* said that the murder of these Christians has sparked the largest outreach ever in Egypt.

ILLUSTRATION – Yesterday I receive an email from one of our IMB personnel in India. Listen to this story: “The most neglected and difficult group to evangelize here are Muslims. Our Indian workers struggle to get lost Muslims to accept any witness or to hear any Gospel presentations. This month at a training for Indian believers, our trainers urged believers to give Urdu (an Indian dialect spoken mostly by Muslims) New Testaments to Muslims and Urdu DVDs of the Jesus Film. Over 100 Muslims took a New Testament and Jesus Film. It was great!!! Bro. Shankar, the local pastor and his small church did the work and witnessing. They were ecstatic. But two days later, the leading Muslim imams (teachers at the mosque) were furious! Most folks in the area were Muslims. The tiny church building was only two houses away from the huge local mosque. The pastor was dragged out, carried to the police, threatened, questioned, and roughed up. A big uproar and loud, angry mobs formed. The imams demanded to know who wrote and who printed “this book” (i.e. the Urdu New Testament)? Who created this movie (i.e. the Jesus Film)? The imams told the pastor and police, “We have spent two days reading this book and watching this movie. We are studying them to find out what is wrong in them.” Ultimately Pastor Shankar was released, after being threatened severely by police and Muslim leaders. Pray for him and his small church. They need God's blessing and favor. But indeed the Lord used this persecution event to lead four Muslim imams to read the New Testament and study about Christ!”

Open your Bibles to Acts 6:8-15. There have been hundreds of thousands of people down through the ages who have died for their faith in Jesus Christ. And today we're going to meet the very first Christian martyr ... a man named Stephen. His name means “victor's crown,” and certainly he earned a crown by being faithful to Jesus even in his death. Read Acts 6:8-15.

The Bible says ...

Acts 6:10 - They could not stand up against his wisdom or the Spirit by whom he spoke.

Literally, “they could not withstand” his life. Stephen had an unstoppable life. He spoke boldly (literally “kept on speaking”) about Jesus Christ to his fellow Jews. In spite of the great opposition

that arose against Stephen, he could not be stopped. I want to talk to you today about the power of an unstoppable life. What is the secret of this unstoppable life?

Outside of this passage we don't know much about this man Stephen. But there's plenty of information and inspiration in the verses that we have in front of us here. I want you to notice...

1. **HIS FULLNESS**

The word "full" is repeated several times in this description of Stephen's life and ministry. That word "full" means to be completely occupied by something, or in this instance, someone. Stephen's life was completely occupied with Jesus.

ILLUSTRATION – If you're holding a cup of coffee and someone bumps your arm, what's inside the cup is going to come out. If it is full of coffee, coffee will come out. If it's full of water, water will come out. The same thing is true of your life and my life. Whatever our life is full of is going to come out when we get bumped or jostled. If your life is full of self, then self will come out when you are bumped by the circumstances of life. If your life is full of Jesus, when you get bumped Jesus will come out. So what comes out of your life when your cup is jostled?

Stephen was able to do what he did because He was filled with a life that was unstoppable ... the life of Jesus Christ.

STEPHEN WAS FULL OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

Now remember the apostles needed help in caring for the needs of the church. They instructed the believers...

Acts 6:3a - Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom.

The fullness of the Spirit is not just indispensable for service; it is indispensable to live the Christian life at all.

Ephesians 5:18 - Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.

Keep on being filled. Stay continuously surrendered to the Spirit ... minute by minute, hour by hour, day by day. The time to do this is not when the pressure comes. Remember the cup full of coffee. Whatever is in the cup is going to come out when the cup is bumped. So remain yielded to the control of the Holy Spirit.

STEPHEN WAS FULL OF WISDOM.

Acts 6:3a - Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom.

Wisdom is the ability to discern the right thing to do in a given situation. They had a difficult problem that needed to be solved and they needed men like Stephen. Stephen was one of their “go-to” guys. He didn’t campaign for the position. People just knew that he was full of the Spirit and wisdom. When people think about you what comes to their mind?

So...

Acts 6:5b - They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit...

There it is again. He was full of the Holy Spirit. But in addition to that we see here that...

STEPHEN WAS FULL OF FAITH.

Faith is absolute confidence in God. Stephen didn’t depend on his own strength and his own wisdom. He put his trust in God. He was completely sustained by the resources of God. Faith is the means by which we access the resources of God. When we live minute-by-minute looking to God His resources will be released through us. And that’s the reason we see the next thing in Stephen’s life. Stephen is a Spirit-filled wise, faithful servant, but he was more than that. He did amazing things.

Acts 6:8 - Stephen, a man full of God’s grace and power, did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people.

STEPHEN WAS FULL OF GRACE.

Now this could mean a couple of things. It could mean that Stephen was a man full of God’s grace. And that is certainly true. The great wonders and miraculous signs that he performed would not have been possible apart from the grace and activity of God in his life. But it could also mean that Stephen was a gracious and kind man. Perhaps it is both of these components. God’s grace working in us produces a gracious person.

Acts 6:8 - Now Stephen, a man full of God’s grace and power, did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people.

STEPHEN WAS FULL OF POWER.

In Acts 1:8, the key verse in Acts, Jesus said, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you and you will be my witnesses.” That’s the source of Stephen’s unstoppable life ... the power of God that comes through the Holy Spirit. Apparently Stephen was enabled to perform miracles just like the apostles. But the power of Stephen’s life is also seen in his witness. We’ll see this next week in Acts 7. Stephen steps up and proclaims a powerful message. In fact, it’s one of the most powerful and insightful messages in the book of Acts.

Stephen was full because he filled. When you surrender to Jesus and allow the Holy Spirit to take control of your life and these things will flow out of you.

Stephen’s fullness led to...

2. HIS BOLDNESS

Acts 6:9 - Opposition arose, however, from members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called)—Jews of Cyrene and Alexandria as well as the provinces of Cilicia and Asia. These men began to argue with Stephen,

Stephen must have gone to these synagogues to speak, like Jesus did, and like the Apostle Paul would do later. Some scholars say that there were hundreds of synagogues in Jerusalem. These were local groups of Jews, some from other lands who gathered to read Scripture, worship and carry on their Jewish religion outside the Temple. Notice that there was apparently a synagogue made up of Jews from Cilicia. This is important because as Stephen spoke here he would have probably come into contact with a fiercely zealous Pharisee named Saul of Tarsus (in Cilicia). The fact that Stephen spoke with such power may have frustrated Saul, for we will see later that Saul will have a hand in Stephen's death.

Acts 6:10 - but they could not stand up against his wisdom or the Spirit by whom he spoke.

Notice the devious way with which they opposed Stephen.

Acts 6:11 - Then they secretly persuaded some men to say, “We have heard Stephen speak words of blasphemy against Moses and against God.”

Acts 6:12 - So they stirred up the people and the elders and the teachers of the law. They seized Stephen and brought him before the Sanhedrin.

Acts 6:13 - They produced false witnesses, who testified, “This fellow never stops speaking against this holy place and against the law.

Acts 6:14 - For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs Moses handed down to us.”

You know, I'm amazed that such intrigue could come from people who claimed to worship and serve God. These were members of synagogues where they were supposed to gather to read Scripture, pray and worship God. Yet out of this came such hatred. I'm constantly amazed at how mean religious people can be. You see, if you are filled with religion, then when you are bumped, what comes out will look like this ... hatred, rage, deception and devious ploys. But if you're like Stephen filled with Jesus, when you're bumped, Jesus will come out.

To put it another way, when you cut Stephen and he bleeds Jesus. What do you bleed when you're cut?

Standing before this crowd of fierce enemies Stephen gave a great defense of the Gospel. He had an amazing grasp of God's activity among his people, the Jews. This afternoon I encourage you to go home and read Stephen's bold message to his fellow Jews.

Acts 6:15 - All who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel.

What a contrast to the angry, mean, fierce faces of his enemies! Stephen had the face of an angel. What does that mean? He had a “grace face.” Stephen is bumped and jostled by fierce hatred, but his face was like the face of an angel. He had been in the presence of the glory of God and it showed on his face. In fact the great British poet Alfred Lord Tennyson read this passage and said, “God’s glory smote him on the face.”

This fullness sustained Stephen in the face of harsh enemies. It will sustain you in the face of any adversity or challenge you face. Men, it will help you love your wife sacrificially. Moms, it will give you strength to love your children through the tough days of life. Students, it will help you live for Christ in the face of pressure from your friends.

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION – Have you heard of Amy Carmichael? Amy lived in the late 1800s and the first half of the 1900s. For 55 years she served as a missionary to India, most notably starting orphanages. She wrote inspiring books about missionary life that have sparked hundreds to follow her to the mission field. While serving in India, Amy received a letter from a young lady who was considering life as a missionary. She asked Amy, "What is missionary life like?" Amy wrote back saying simply, “Missionary life is simply a chance to die.” I don’t think she was necessarily talking about physical death, though that is certainly a possibility. I think she was talking about dying to self ... laying down our agenda, our will, our ambitions, our desires and taking up the Cross of Christ.

In one of her books Amy wrote this: “Give me the love that leads the way, the faith that nothing can dismay, the hope no disappointments tire, the passion that will burn like fire; Let me not sink to be a clod: Make me Thy fuel, Flame of God.”