

4/9	On the Move.	Acts 8:1-3
4/16	Personal Stories	Acts 8:4-8
4/23	Simon: On The Wrong Side	8:9-25

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Acts 7:54 When they heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. <sup>55</sup> But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. <sup>56</sup> "Look," he said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." <sup>57</sup> At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, <sup>58</sup> dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul. <sup>59</sup> While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." <sup>60</sup> Then he fell on his knees and cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he fell asleep.

What happens when people turn on you? What recourse do you have to violence?

The success of the church as a socially effective group was because of its constant support and identity to Jesus. That was now bringing a strong negative reaction. The city of Jerusalem was totally polarized because of the teaching in Jesus' Name. The Gospel was dividing families apart; just as Jesus had said it would. In **Luke 12:51~53** *"Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division. From now on there will be five in one family divided against each other, three against two and two against three. They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law."*

One cannot just slid into the Faith. You can't just role into becoming a Christian! How hard can it be...really? I'm a devoted father. A good man who pays his taxes. I'm even in Church on Sunday and not on the golf course---certainly that needs to speak for something?

This morning, we will be looking at two men's lives who are standing on totally opposite sides of the issue. One has put his trust **in who he is by what he has done in himself and in the system** he holds to—while the other placed his faith and trust in the Person of the Son of God. Both felt satisfied and at peace with their choices. One was right and the other was dead wrong.

Those who could not stand this New Message began to join forces with those who were against the Message before the Cross. Some of the Leaders of the Jews, some of the Sanhedrin and now, more from the

city feed this anger. They become hardened against the Message of Hope. They become opponents of this new Church—as they had opposed Jesus during His three-year ministry.

Ever see a group go mad? We may have watched the TV accounts of the riots in the Watts area of LA. The Mob frenzy of the IRA. How the masses went wild in Rwanda, killing of so many. The movie Hotel Rwanda shows a mob gone mad with rage! And so much so in real life.

**FROM the WEB:** "The" government "deliberately delayed in controlling or preventing mob frenzy"

...some of whom have gone so far as to kill someone while in their **mob frenzy**.

**DAWN-1951:** Meanwhile, the public were whipped into lynch **mob frenzy** by newspaper headlines and many innocent people nearly become victims of **mob mentality**. ...

That heinous act was committed under the cover of **mob frenzy**, coolly watched over by men and women leaders of the ... present deputy prime minister..."

- ❖ **Stoning** was the ordinary form of capital punishment prescribed by Hebrew law!
  - **for performing human sacrifice** (Lev. 20:2 "Say to the Israelites: `Any Israelite or any alien living in Israel who gives any of his children to Molech must be put to death. The people of the community are to stone him.'")
  - **For blasphemy** (Lev. 24:16 "anyone who blasphemes the Name of the LORD must be put to death. The entire assembly must stone him. Whether an alien or native-born, when he blasphemes the Name, he must be put to death.")
  - **Idolatry** (Deut. 13:6~10 If your very own brother, or your son or daughter, or the wife you love, or your closest friend secretly entices you, saying, "Let us go and worship other gods" (gods that neither you nor your fathers have known,<sup>7</sup> gods of the peoples around you, whether near or far, from one end of the land to the other),<sup>8</sup> do not yield to him or listen to him. Show him no pity. Do not spare him or shield him.<sup>9</sup> You must certainly put him to death. Your hand must be the first in putting him to death, and then the hands of all the people.<sup>10</sup> Stone him to death, because he tried to turn you away from the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.)
  - **Desecration of Sabbath** (Num. 15:32~36 While the Israelites were in the desert, a man was found gathering wood on the Sabbath day.<sup>33</sup> Those who found him gathering wood brought him to Moses and Aaron and the whole assembly,<sup>34</sup> and they kept him in custody, because it was not clear what should be done to him.<sup>35</sup> Then the LORD said to Moses, "The man must die. The whole assembly must stone him outside the camp."<sup>36</sup> So the assembly took him outside the camp and stoned him to death, as the LORD commanded Moses.)
  - **Occultism** (Lev. 20:27 "A man or woman who is a medium or spiritist among you must be put to death. You are to stone them; their blood will be on their own heads.'")

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- **Execution took place outside city**
  - ✓ **Lev. 24:14** "Take the blasphemer outside the camp. All those who heard him are to lay their hands on his head, and the entire assembly is to stone him.
  - ✓ **1 Kings 21:10 & 13** "*But seat two scoundrels opposite him and have them testify that he has cursed both God and the king. Then take him out and stone him to death.*" ... **13** Then two scoundrels came and sat opposite him and brought charges against Naboth before the people, saying, "*Naboth has cursed both God and the king.*" So they took him outside the city and stoned him to death.
  - ✓ **Acts 7:58** dragged him out of the city and began to stone him.
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After Stephen's recall of the spiritual hardness of Israel from the days of Moses to the present time, the crowd went wild! They were challenged to return to the true Faith in the God of Abraham but they saw only blood. Enraged, the screaming mob turned on Stephen and dragged him outside the city where they stoned him to death...

There, they heard him pray for them saying: **Acts 7:60** Then he fell on his knees and cried out, "*Lord, do not hold this sin against them.*" When he had said this, he fell asleep." He was the first to be a Church's Martyr: the first of many.

And here was a man standing a little off to the side who, in his own understanding, was perfect. He was the true Child of Israel. He was living the Life set for him so that by his life, and in his own efforts, in his own flesh, he would enter Heaven. Let's read about how he thought of himself from **Philippians 3:3~6**.

**Philippians 3:3** "For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh-- <sup>4</sup> though I myself have reasons for such confidence. If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: <sup>5</sup> **circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee;** <sup>6</sup> **as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless.**

You see, Saul of Tarsus HAD rather a good feeling about himself in **Acts 8**. He was going to slip right into heaven BECAUSE of who he was!

...**circumcised on the eighth day** -in the family of God by birth. Not a convert to the Jewish faith. His parents did it all right! They did what they were supposed to do by the Law of Moses. ...of **the people of Israel** He was not from outside the Promise of Abraham. Perfectly set

to go to heaven. Once more, he was ...of the **tribe of Benjamin** -He was the son of the woman who died given birth. The right Hand of his father. From this seed would come the first king of Israel; Saul! **He was so named after the first King of Israel!** It was to remind him of his roots. **He was indeed a Hebrew of Hebrews!**

These things, he had no control over yet it was part of the pedigree of his faith. He was papered! A pure breed!

Now, the next things he held onto that was of his own doing. Not just what Mom and Dad did for him. He writes: ...in regard to the law, a **Pharisee**. He belonged to the rightest group around. They were the standard setters of the day. They were perfect! They had those flowing robes and they would pray in the streets with long and loud prayers showing all who were in ear shot that they were perfect and not like the sinners ... over there!

...as for zeal, persecuting the church. He was dead against this new cult. He was filled with religious zeal to rid the world of this group. You see on the TV what religious zealots are capable of doing? Death to the pagan swine!

...as for legalistic righteousness, faultless.. Wow! That is a huge statement. Ever known someone like that? "I am faultless!" Other than Mary Poppins that is. My brother did. The pastor's wife in Smithfield thought she was without sin and told my brother so. He did not agree. But why was he faultless? He kept ALL the rules of Moses AND the rules of the Pharisees made up. He was a rule keeping fool!

But did it help him? No! After this event which Saul witnessed, he too saw the Lord and heard His voice. "*Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me? Why do you kick yourself bloody thinking it was by your works you could find Heaven?*"

Phil 3:7 **But** whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. <sup>8</sup> What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, **for whose sake I have lost all things**. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ <sup>9</sup> and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ --the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. <sup>10</sup> I want to know Christ and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death, <sup>11</sup> and so, somehow, to attain to the

resurrection from the dead. <sup>12</sup> Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. <sup>13</sup> Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, <sup>14</sup> I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.”

Maybe, some here this morning are like Saul was; depending on your past events and not on the work of Christ on the Cross. Don't try and tell me that Salvation is yours because of a deed written in your Bible of an act done to you at birth if there is not a transformation of your life! When He comes to take ownership, He changes all of your life.

**ILL:** Walking by an old house. Broken down and in need of repair or taken down. One day, you noticed that things are changing at the old house. New doors, new windows, paint, cleaned up the yard, no broken fences and it begins to look great. Why? Unknown to you, in a lawyer's office somewhere in town, a paper was signed by a NEW owner. This deed was stating the fact that the old house had a NEW owner. This new owner was now able to bring the change you can now see. New walls, new pipes, new wiring, new paint—new life. **Transformed by the Blood of Jesus.**

Just like some of you who have placed your faith in the One who died for you. You have a transformed life. Live that way! Renewal of your mind and of your lifestyle.

**Come and celebrate Him by remembering His Death until He returns.**

Transformed, like what He did to Stephen. Stephen lived a transformed life. He was known for being filled with the Holy Spirit. He was godly and his actions proved that Christ owned him. When he was standing there as the stones were beating and cutting into his body, he looked up and saw Jesus welcoming him into heaven—not because of what Stephen had done but because of what Jesus had done in his life. He was transformed. And he went to Heaven.

Saul, on the other hand, went home that afternoon and after a while, went to bed and thought of two things: **One**, Stephen's life was crushed out of him. His broken and crushed body was cold now but the thought of this event was still on his mind—because of what was said.

Stephen, shining like an angel, saw the Glory of Jesus, he saw Jesus. In fact, he said, *"I can see Him!"* And the crowd dealt with Stephen. Saul said to the men, *"Put your coats here, I'll hold your robes. Leave*

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*them here so you can throw better. Give me your coats!"* That is the **second** thing he was thinking about.

Not too long later, this Saul was on his way to bring the end of someone else's life, when he had an encounter with this Living Lord. Why are you so stubborn? Why are you resisting AGAIN against the idea of submission to Me? Bloodied—day after day—you kick yourself against the idea of your need of Jesus, of trusting in His Gift of eternal life! Why?

Saul answered: *"Who are you...Lord?"* Then in a moment, it all became new! He saw that he was unfit for heaven. He had depended on his acts of righteousness but they were as filthy rags. He was indeed not worth for Heaven. And with the cleansing Grace of God, Saul was transformed into a new being. New ownership. A transformed life was becoming a reality for him. And Saul, who later became Paul, said, *"I want to know Him progressively."* *"I want to know Him passionately!"* Even though I am unworthy of His Love, still I am a child of the King; for His Word teaches me, that His love reaches me...forever.