

Read: Acts 7:54-60

Jesus Brought Stephen Safely to Heaven

Acts 7:54-56

When [they] heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. 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 "Look," he said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

No one likes to be told they are wrong. Think about how angry you feel when your brother or your sister or your friend looks at you and says, "You're wrong!" Do you feel the blood rushing to your head and angry words crawling up your throat? Do you feel ready to burst into an argument?

That's what happened to some of the people in today's Bible reading. Stephen was a believer in Jesus and a very faithful servant in the church. The Bible says that Stephen was "filled with the Holy Spirit," which means that God made Stephen able to do good work and speak wise words. But then, Stephen was challenged by people who were enemies of Jesus and his followers. God gave Stephen the words to tell these people the story of a loyal God. As he told the story, Stephen pointed out the simple truth: those who rejected Jesus were wrong.

The truth hurt. It made these people furious with Stephen. Their anger boiled over. They turned into a raging mob. Sadly, they dragged Stephen out of the city and threw stones at him to silence him.

What an ugly scene. You might wonder why God didn't protect Stephen from such horrible people. Our last devotion talked about the power of the truth to protect believers. Why didn't God protect Stephen when Stephen spoke the truth?

Actually, truth *did* protect Stephen. God enabled Stephen to look up to heaven and see Jesus standing there, victorious over death, victorious over all the abuse that was heaped on him. When Stephen saw this, he knew that he was on the right side, the winning side. No matter what these people did to him, Stephen would win in the end, because he would be at Jesus' side in heaven.

What can we learn from Stephen? When people unleash their anger on us, we do not need to become equally angry or hurl arguments back. We can simply speak the truth we know from the Bible: we have a Savior who loves us and protects us. He does this even though we're sinful,

even though we sometimes ignore the truth ourselves. Whenever that happens, God forgives us and reassures us that Jesus paid for those mistakes. That's the simple truth.

Every time we read or hear the truth in God's Word, we see a picture of Jesus. Just like Stephen, we are strengthened for whatever this life throws at us. And we look forward to our future at Jesus' side.

The questions below are to help families discuss this devotion. The questions are divided by age group as suggestions, but anyone could reflect on any of the questions as they desire.

Questions for the Younger Children

- What made the angry people in today's reading so very mad at Stephen?
- What did God let Stephen see to help him?

Questions for Elementary Age Children

- Why do you think it was important that God let Stephen look up and see Jesus in heaven?
- If you could look up to heaven and see Jesus standing at the right hand of God the Father, how would that help as you endure anger on earth?

Questions for Middle School and Above

- Give two reasons why you think so many people reject the truth about Jesus today.
- How can your family develop the courage and confidence to speak the truth as revealed in the Bible, even when it is unpopular?

Closing Prayer:

O Victorious Jesus, thank you for people like Stephen who were not afraid to speak the truth. Give me courage to speak the truth whenever I have the opportunity, confident that you are reigning above and watching over me. Amen.

Hymn: CW 145:1,2 – Jesus Lives! The Victory's Won

Jesus lives! The vict'ry's won!
Death no longer can appall me.
Jesus lives! Death's reign is done!
From the grave Christ will recall me.
Brighter scenes will then commence;
This shall be my confidence.

Jesus lives! To him the throne
High o'er heav'n and earth is given.
I shall go where he is gone,
Live and reign with him in heaven.
God is faithful; doubtings, hence!
This shall be my confidence.