

# Acts 6:8-7:60 | Mark Minnella

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[0:00] I have two old friends that have been going to Jamaica for 25 years.

! They work with poor people in Jamaica, providing practical things.! I talked with both of these women over the last couple of weeks.

I like that they work through local organizations and churches. They work with women. They have gotten involved with the sex trafficking.

My friend Ronnie, her nephew is a lawyer and he's been working with legal means through that. But they go down every year, sometimes a couple of times a year, and they bring practical things for people that need them. So after this hurricane, it's pretty much a mess. She wasn't sure when they were going to be able to go down, but they're taking collections. So yes, you could give money, but you also, there's a list back there, and you can grab one of these if you want. My thought was I'm going to go to my dentist and say, hey, you give out these little toothpaste and toothbrush thingies every time I go there. I have a collection of them. I don't use them. And maybe, I don't know, you want to donate that.

And I'm going to go to my dermatologist guy and get some little skin stuff. And you know, and just, I put some boxes back there. Hopefully I'll need to bring some more. But if you want to be involved, you certainly can pray for that.

[1:39] So I think it could be an opportunity for us to minister to some people. And so the organization is called the Place of Safety. As I said, it was started by an old friend of mine.

Actually, this girl Veronica, we went to great school together. We go way back. That's a long time ago.

Back a week. One of the boxes that you can be out there? Yeah, there's three boxes in the corner. How long were you here? A week? Oh, at least. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Right now, you can't fly in right now. The airport's all trashed. And she said, she talked to several of her people down there.

They have to hike. One of the people, the guys that she talks with, had to hike 11 miles to make a phone call because all the cell towers are down. So, yeah, communications. You can imagine, you know, something like that, what they would do even here, but especially there.

There's no communications. All the roads are, you know, trees falling over and roofs of houses and things. And so it's pretty messed up. A lot of people are having trouble finding food.

[2:51] So anyway, she put a list together based on her experience. They've taken thousands of pairs of shoes over the years and lots of clothing and stuff. And so I said, Ronnie, what about, like I said, anything that's bulky is going to be expensive to ship, right?

She said, well, yes. They do have a company that takes those big shipping containers. But she said the price has gone up on those. And so it seems like personal items, toiletries.

She mentioned specifically this skin so soft stuff because they put it on the babies. It keeps the bugs from biting them. But anyway, there is a list of things. So that. I don't like that. I'm not so good at staying in one place.

Yeah. So I never took an office job. I tried for two years. I had an office job a long time ago and and they had me in a cubicle and I was on the phone and and I kept pulling the phone cord.

And I said, look, I can't do this. And so they got me a 75 foot phone phone cord and a headset. And I could pace around the office while I was on the phone.

[4:06] And it worked. But but yeah. Yeah. ADD is not contagious. You can't get it from me. Don't worry. But so I'm hoping that you all read

the passage because Teddy has us on this whirlwind tour of the book of Acts.

We're doing 28 chapters in what, like six weeks or something. So, yeah. So we're going to breakneck speed. So put on your seatbelts and we'll we'll we'll jump right in. And today we're going to be looking at chapter six and seven.

We have two things here. We have the practical maintaining of the ministry in chapter six, verses one to seven. And then the rest of it from chapter six, verse eight, all the way through the end of chapter seven is all about Stephen.

So let's pray and we'll get moving. Lord, thanks so much for your word. God, without your word, we'd be lost. And I just pray this morning as we look into your word that it would touch our hearts and change our lives to become more like Jesus.

Amen. The church was growing quickly. There was three thousand saved on the day of Pentecost. And then it records five thousand later and many more, even some of the priests.

[5:19] By the way, the first mention of the word church is in Acts chapter five, verse 11. It's a Greek word. I think it's like ecclesia, something like that. Is that close?

All right. There we go. And I meant to ask you before, but everybody pronounces these things different, you know. And so but it's used. It was a common word and it was used of a group of people gathered together for any purpose and assembly, something like that.

In the New Testament, it's used in two ways. That being of a local church, like the church at Corinth, the church at Ephesus, Bethel. Those would be local churches. And then also it's used of the universal church.

That would be every believer around the world. OK. So these new believers, they have a logistical problem at this point. There were Jews from many different countries that came to Jerusalem for the feast.

Right. And a bunch of them got saved. So they stuck around some of them. And because they weren't expecting to stay that long, they needed food.

[6:23] They needed shelter. And so you see in Acts chapter five, which we skipped over, but you see that people sold things and brought money and donated and gave it to the apostles so that they could take care of these folks.

And the apostles were distributing that. If we look in in chapter five, verse 42, it says this. Day after day in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ.

Chapter six. In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food.

So you had two language groups. All right. You had Jews that spoke Aramaic. Those would be the Hebrew ones. They didn't really speak Hebrew except in the in the rabbinic schools and things. And then you had Jews that were called Hellenistic. They spoke Greek. OK. And so the 12 gathered together, all the disciples, and they said it would not be right for us to neglect our ministry, the word of God, and to wait on tables.

[7:34] Choose seven men among you who are known to be full of the spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word. I remember many years ago, we went out to California for training at Saddleback Church.

At the time, Saddleback Church was the fastest growing church in America. Rick Warren was the pastor. And at one of the meetings, he shared how the church began. He said that him and his wife had gone door to door in the community.

They started a Bible study and it started kind of slow. But then when things started taking off, Rick said that he couldn't keep up with everything. He said that his health was suffering. His marriage was suffering.

And he said the church had plateaued around 250 people. It was at this time that God gave him a passage in Ephesians chapter 4, verses 11 and 12, where it says, So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and pastors and teachers to equip the people for the works

of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.

So Rick Warren said that he called the meeting of everyone in his church and he repented and publicly apologized for trying to do everything. He said that he had been wrong and that the scripture said it was his job to feed them, but it was their job to do the work.

[9:00] And he promised to feed them and get out of the way, and that's when the church exploded. He said that he had been the bottleneck because he was trying to do everything and he couldn't. The apostles get it right here.

They see that prayer and the ministry of the word are where they should be spending their efforts and their time. Prayer, preparation, and preaching. I often say that I love to see the body work. Not this body, it doesn't work so good anymore, but the body, the church. You know, the other day I looked up the President's Council on Physical Fitness Test.

They don't have that anymore, so all the young people are going, we don't know what you're talking about. Okay, so when I was a kid, they had this test, and they would give it to you in eighth grade. It was a physical test. And for a 14-year-old boy, listen to this.

56 sit-ups, 40 push-ups, 10 pull-ups, 1 mile in 6 minutes and 26 seconds, a 50-yard dash in 9.1.

[10:00] I did that at 13. Not so much today. But I love to watch the body of Christ work.

You know, it's exciting. You have an event like a hayride or a retreat, and people plan, and people organize, and someone brings a message, and people cook. And it's exciting to watch the body of Christ work.

And, you know, we were looking at some passages in the prior meeting this morning, and I didn't say these because they didn't have anything to do with prayer, but underlined in my Bible, I had all these verses on unity and how we're supposed to work together, but we're supposed to cooperate, and we're supposed to have a spirit of unity.

And I like the spirit of unity here at Bethel. So differences, but all united in one cause. We have elders and deacons, and we also have many other people who do stuff here without a title, right? Every week I go into the kitchen after the first meeting, and here's Mary Ellen washing up the communion stuff. But people do stuff all the time around here, you know? The building gets cleaned.

[11:09] The building gets maintained. This is how it's supposed to be. We all function, but in different ways. I put a passage there. I'm not going to read it. It's too long. 1 Corinthians 12, 12 through 30.

You can look at that. And it likens a physical body to a body of believers, and it talks about the eye and the hand and the foot and how they do different things, but they're all necessary for the function of the body.

And so it is here. Different people perform different services, but it all works together for good. So the apostles figured it out.

They had the people pick seven men to carry out the food distribution. It's interesting that all of the names of the seven are Greek names. See, they had two languages, I said, and so the Greek widows were the ones that were getting neglected, they said, so they picked seven guys from the Greek community.

Make sense? I'll say this. If you're here and you're looking for something to get involved with, there's lots of stuff to do around here. Right?

[12:13] See one of the elders or one of the leaders? There's stuff to do. Everybody should be doing something. Lots of opportunities here at Bethel, right? Starting in verse 8 of chapter 6, we're introduced to Stephen.

He was one of the seven chosen to take care of the widows, but he didn't just wait on tables. Verse 8 says, Now Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people.

You know, I tried to find out how much time had passed between Pentecost and the stoning of Stephen, and it doesn't tell us.

It doesn't tell us. I saw estimates from a few months to years. I tend to believe in the shorter times for several reasons, but mostly that the believers were all still in Jerusalem, and they were pretty

much all Jewish.

The command in Acts chapter 1, verse 8, says this, But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you'll be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea, and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

[13:21] And the command in Matthew 28, 19, to go and make disciples of all nations. Well, that hadn't begun yet. The believers were all, as far as we can tell, still there in Jerusalem.

What was their plan to carry out this commission from the Lord to take the good news into all the world? Well, I don't see where they had one.

At least we're not told if they did. But God, he had a plan. He had a plan. Persecution. That's what happened. Starting in chapter 8, you're going to see the Christians are persecuted, and they're scattered, and they took the gospel all over the Roman Empire.

That's a different passage. We're not going to look at that. We're going to talk about Stephen. His name means crown, a wreath, or one who surrounds. He received the crown as the first martyr of the New Testament.

It also says he was able to do miracles. Prior to this, we only see Jesus and the apostles were given this power. But with the laying on of the apostles' hands and the power of the Holy Spirit, Stephen was not only able to perform miracles, but his wisdom could not be overcome by the Jews.

[14:40] So the unbelieving Jews, they devise a plan. They make up charges, just like they did with Jesus. Then they brought him before the high priest in the Sanhedrin, and the high priest was probably still Caiaphas, probably the same guy.

And he's the same one that condemned Jesus. It says in chapter 6, verse 15, they saw his face was like the face of an angel.

And I thought of Moses. You know how when Moses came down from the mountain after he'd been with the Lord, and his face was bright, they couldn't even look at it. And I don't know what Stephen looked like, and I don't know what an angel looks like, and I don't know how they know, but you would think that would be a little bit of a, hey, this guy's different, but...

And the high priest says this, are these charges true? Well, they weren't. They were all made up. But I noticed that Stephen doesn't try to defend himself. Instead, what happens next, beginning in verse 2 of chapter 7, Stephen starts with the call of Abraham, and he gives a history of the Hebrew nation and their relationship with God.

And he's going to focus on three main things. Three main things that the Jewish people of that time held as their pillars or proofs that they were the people of God.

[16:01] Three false ideas for their confidence before God, but it was the land, the law, and the temple. These, of course, were false, and Stephen is going to refute each one of them with the word of God.

It's very important for us to remember when we're seeking to persuade people that we use the word of God, not our own ideas. Hebrews 4.12, for the word of God is living and active, sharper than any double-edged sword.

It penetrates even to the dividing of soul and spirit, joints and marrow. It judges the thoughts and intents of the heart. Romans 10.17, Faith comes from hearing, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.

Stephen starts with the land, and he recounts how God appeared to Abraham while he was still in Mesopotamia. Then he went to Haran, and he never had an inheritance in the land.

The point is, God blessed Abraham even though he never occupied the land. So the land's not the blessing. He then recounts Abraham having Isaac at 100, Isaac having Jacob, and then the 12 tribes of Israel.

[17:18] He mentions Joseph. Joseph's the type of Christ we know. And how Joseph saved his family from starvation by bringing them to Egypt. God blessed the Jews in Egypt.

But after Joseph dies, it says there came along a king who did not remember him. And he made slaves of the Jews. And he made them kill their babies. Then Moses was born.

Moses was taken in by the daughter of Pharaoh. And he was raised in the palace for 40 years. He had a master's degree from the University of Egypt. At 40 years old, he goes out to visit the Jews,

his people.

And he witnesses an Egyptian beating one of the Jews, one of the Hebrews. And so he steps in, and he kills the Egyptian trying to defend one of the Jews. He thinks he's ready to lead the nation. But God had other plans. The Hebrews reject him, and he flees to Midian. Again, not in the land. For the next 40 years, God re-educates Moses.

[18:25] 40 years of the best education in the world, not ready to serve God. 40 more years in the desert, now you're ready. Numbers 12, verse 3 tells us this.

Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth. In Acts chapter 4, we see Peter and John were brought before the Jewish leaders for teaching about Jesus.

This is before our passage on Stephen, but I want to make a point here. Peter stands up, gives another great message, and in Acts 4.12, he says, Salvation is found in no one else, for there's no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.

And now we look at verse 13 in Acts chapter 4, and it says this. When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished, and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.

See, the apostles, they were regular guys, common men, not educated, but they knew Jesus.

Moses had the finest earthly education, but God didn't want to use that.

[19:40] At 80, God calls Moses, and now, Moses says, I can't even speak. God goes, okay, I'll speak for you. The point here is that credentials of being a witness for God are knowing the word and spending time with the Lord.

Don't ever think that God can't use you. He can and He will. So Moses, he leads the nation of Israel out of Egypt and into the desert. The greatest miracles of Israel happen in Egypt and at the Red Sea, not in the Promised Land.

Hey, if you read the story about finding chariot wheels at the bottom of the Red Sea, I studied it. It's kind of a hoax. I thought it'd be cool if it was real, but it's 220 feet down and you can't see, so some guy made it up, I think.

Anyway, Moses meets the Lord in the burning bush. Where? Midian. Not in the Promised Land. So, one down, two to go. Stephen's next argument is against the law.

He starts by quoting Moses' statement in Deuteronomy 18, 15, where Moses says to the children of Israel, God will send you a prophet like me from among your own people.

[21:03] Then in verse 39, Stephen says, but our fathers refused to obey him. Instead, they rejected him and in their hearts they turned back to Egypt. They had Aaron make a golden calf in the desert and they worshipped it.

The law of Moses could not save the Israelites. Even Moses told them, look for another prophet. Look forward to Jesus, right? The Messiah. So, the land and the law and now we'll talk about the temple.

He goes on to talk about entering the land under Joshua, setting up the tabernacle, and then Solomon building the temple. He says, however, the most high God does not live in houses built by men.

Probably a reference to 1 Kings 8, 27, where Solomon says at the dedication of the temple, but will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you, how much less this temple I've built.

Beginning in verse 51, Stephen levels his accusations directly at the religious leaders. He's shown them how the land, the law, and the temple are not the way to God.

[22:12] I often say that religion keeps more people out of heaven than anything else. I think religion is man's feeble attempt to save himself.

I also think it's exploited by many people for their gain. So, Stephen says this, you stiff-necked people, your hearts and ears are still uncircumcised.

You're like your ancestors, you always resist the Holy Spirit. Verse 52, was there ever a prophet your ancestors did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the righteous one.

And now, you've betrayed and murdered him. Verse 53, you have received the law that was given through the angels, but you have not obeyed it.

When they heard this, they were furious, and they gnashed their teeth at him. The next verse, 55, is an interesting verse. It says, But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven, saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.

[23:28] Look, he said, I see heaven open, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God. Much speculation has been made around this passage here, because everywhere in the New Testament, we see that Jesus is seated at the right hand of the Father.

Lord. So, four plausible explanations. One, Jesus was ready to judge the nation of Israel for their rejection of the Messiah, and he paused.

Second, some say that Jesus was standing because he was ready to come back to usher in the kingdom if the Jewish nation had accepted their Messiah.

Three, that this marks the end of God's offer to Israel as a nation, and going forward, we'll see Samaritans and Gentiles getting saved.

And fourth, most conservative commentaries favor the idea that Jesus let Stephen glimpse into heaven, and that he stood, Jesus stood, to receive the first Christian martyr.

[24:43] were not told. I just say if it's one of the first two, I'm glad he waited. So now, verse 57, at this, they covered their ears and yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him.

Kind of reminds me of a little kid when he's mad, right? I'm not listening to you, right? That's what they did. They stopped up their ears. They can't stand the truth. They dragged him out of the city and began to stone him.

Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul. While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.

And then he fell on his knees and cried out, Lord, do not hold their sin against them. When he had said this, he fell asleep. And Saul was there giving approval to his death.

What can we learn from this? Stephen lived what appears to be a short life, kind of like Charlie Kirk.

[25:49] But his death had a huge impact. Many missionaries have been put to death, but they know their reward is in heaven. You think of the Ecuador Five.

Those guys knew the danger, but they went anyway. Second thing that we can notice is that believers seemed comfortable in Jerusalem ministering to the Jews.

I say that they still didn't really get it. They knew that Jesus was the Messiah. They heard his words, but they really didn't understand what he came to do.

And so they're still there. They're preaching the word. They're true. They're still in this little group of Jews in Jerusalem. And we're going to see as we go to the rest of the book that persecution scatters the believers and the gospel of the kingdom is carried to the rest of the world.

Sometimes God does things that appear on the surface to not be so good. Maybe you lose a job.

[27:02] You lose a loved one. A storm in life. Maybe a hurricane. And you think, why, God? But he might have a better plan. You know, I thought back to February of 1988.

We had just bought our first house. We had just had our first child. And we just bought a new car.

Oh, yeah. And we decided that Denise would stay home to raise the kids.

I was given three weeks notice that our whole department was closing and I would have no job. And I went home and I said, we're going to be fine.

God will take care of us. We had no idea how. But our faith was not shaken. Because we had seen God work in our lives many times before.

God had a different plan. A better plan. Musicians can come up. Third thing and then I'll shut up.

[28:06] We can learn from Stephen this. Stay close to God. That's where the power is. Stay humble, faithful, and fearless in his love and his power.

Father God, thank you so much for Stephen. What a brave man he was. What a man full of the Holy Spirit looks like. What a man who is not afraid.

God, I pray that that spirit would be in each of us. That we would boldly proclaim the truth as we know it in a humble way but in a powerful way with the power of your Holy Spirit.  
I pray that you would draw us close to yourself and that we would use the Word of God as the sword that it's meant to be. Amen. Amen. Thank you.