

Acts 6:8-8:3

A profile in boldness

(What are the marks of spiritual boldness?)

Introduction

1. Spiritual boldness characterized the Apostles ministry after Pentecost. This boldness often resulted in persecution. Stephen was the church's first martyr.
2. While it may sound exciting to experience the power of miracles and have the wisdom of the Spirit, we must not forget that the cost can be high in terms of temporal comfort. Matt.10:16-28; 20:22-23; Lk.17:33; Jn.16:1-2; Rom.8:17,35-37.
3. If you see Mel Gibson's movie, "The Passion of the Christ" you no doubt are struck by the seriousness of Jesus' suffering and the line in the movie where he promises that the servant is not greater than the master meaning that those who followed him would face suffering. Jesus' disciples would share His power and also His suffering.

Acts 6

1. Spiritual boldness will bring resistance.

"8 And Stephen, full of grace and power, was performing great wonders and signs among the people. 9 But some men from what was called the Synagogue of the Freedmen, {including} both Cyrenians and Alexandrians, and some from Cilicia and Asia, rose up and argued with Stephen. 10 And {yet} they were unable to cope with the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking. 11 Then they secretly induced men to say, "We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and {against} God." 12 And they stirred up the people, the elders and the scribes, and they came upon him and dragged him away, and brought him before the Council. 13 And they put forward false witnesses who said, "This man incessantly speaks against this holy place, and the Law; 14 for we have heard him say that this Nazarene, Jesus, will destroy this place and alter the customs which Moses handed down to us." 15 And fixing their gaze on him, all who were sitting in the Council saw his face like the face of an angel."

- a. Stephen's attributes were impressive: He was "full" of 1) Wisdom (6:3), 2) faith (6:5), 3) Grace (6:8), and 4) Power (6:8). **This is a wonderful balance in virtues.**

Wisdom | Faith

Grace | Power

(insight) | (beyond sight) (acceptance) | (change)

- b. Stephen's power and wisdom are evident even though he was not an Apostle. **This is the first indication that disciples other than Apostles were performing miracles.**
- c. The injustice of the actions against Stephen is highlighted. Luke wants us to see the contrast between Stephen's treatment and his response to it. **We also are forced to see the contrast between Israel's heart and God's heart.**

2. Spiritual boldness knows how to tell the story.

Acts 7

"¹ And the high priest said, "Are these things so?" ² And he said, "Hear me, brethren and fathers! The God of glory appeared to our father **Abraham** when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran, ³ and said to him, '*Depart from your country and your relatives, and come into the land that I will show you.*' ⁴ Then he departed from the land of the Chaldeans, and settled in Haran. And from there, after his father died, {God} removed him into this country in which you are now living. ⁵ And He gave him no inheritance in it, not even a foot of ground; and {yet,} even when he had no child, He promised that *He would give it to him as a possession, and to his offspring after him.* ⁶ But God spoke to this effect, that his *offspring would be aliens in a foreign land, and that they would be enslaved and mistreated for four hundred years.* ⁷ And whatever nation to which they shall be in bondage I Myself will judge,' said God, '*and after that they will come out and serve Me in this place.*' ⁸ And He gave him the covenant of circumcision; and so {Abraham} became the father of **Isaac**, and circumcised him on the eighth day; and Isaac {became the father of} **Jacob**, and Jacob {of} the twelve patriarchs. ⁹ And the patriarchs became jealous of **Joseph** and sold him into Egypt. And {yet} God was with him, ¹⁰ and rescued him from all his afflictions, and granted him favor and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh, king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt and all his household. ¹¹ Now a famine came over all Egypt and Canaan, and great affliction {with it;} and our fathers could find no food. ¹² But when Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent our fathers {there} the first time. ¹³ And on the second {visit} Joseph made himself known to his brothers, and Joseph's family was disclosed to Pharaoh. ¹⁴ And Joseph sent {word} and invited Jacob his father and all his relatives to come to him, seventy-five persons {in all.} ¹⁵ And Jacob went down to Egypt and {there} passed away, he and our fathers. ¹⁶ And

{from there} they were removed to Shechem, and laid in the tomb which Abraham had purchased for a sum of money from the sons of Hamor in Shechem. 17 But as the time of the promise was approaching which God had assured to Abraham, the people increased and multiplied in Egypt, 18 until *there arose another king over Egypt who knew nothing about Joseph.* 19 It was he who took shrewd advantage of our race, and mistreated our fathers so that they would expose their infants and they would not survive. 20 And it was at this time that **Moses** was born; and he was lovely in the sight of God; and he was nurtured three months in his father's home. 21 And after he had been exposed, Pharaoh's daughter took him away, and nurtured him as her own son. 22 And Moses was educated in all the learning of the Egyptians, and he was a man of power in words and deeds. 23 But when he was approaching the age of forty, it entered his mind to visit his brethren, the sons of Israel. 24 And when he saw one {of them} being treated unjustly, he defended him and took vengeance for the oppressed by striking down the Egyptian. 25 And he supposed that his brethren understood that God was granting them deliverance through him; but they did not understand. 26 And on the following day he appeared to them as they were fighting together, and he tried to reconcile them in peace, saying, 'Men, you are brethren, why do you injure one another?' 27 But the one who was injuring his neighbor pushed him away, saying, '*Who made you a ruler and judge over us?* 28 *You do not mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday, do you?*' 29 And at this remark *Moses fled, and became an alien in the land of Midian*, where he became the father of two sons. 30 And after forty years had passed, *an angel appeared to him in the wilderness of Mount Sinai, in the flame of a burning thorn bush.* 31 And when Moses saw it, he {began} to marvel at the sight; and as he approached to look {more} closely, there came the voice of the Lord: 32 'I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob.' And Moses shook with fear and would not venture to look. 33 But the Lord said to him, '*Take off the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.* 34 *I have certainly seen the oppression of My people in Egypt, and have heard their groans, and I have come down to deliver them; come now, and I will send you to Egypt.'* 35 This Moses whom they disowned, saying, '*Who made you a ruler and a judge?*' is the one whom God sent {to be} both a ruler and a deliverer with the help of the angel who appeared to him in the thorn bush. 36 This man led them out, performing wonders and signs in the land of Egypt and in the Red Sea and in the wilderness for forty years. 37 This is the Moses who said to the sons of Israel, '*God shall raise up for you a prophet like me from your*

brethren.' ³⁸ This is the one who was in the congregation in the wilderness together with the angel who was speaking to him on Mount Sinai, and {who was} with our fathers; and he received living oracles to pass on to you. ³⁹ And our fathers were unwilling to be obedient to him, but repudiated him and in their hearts turned back to Egypt, ⁴⁰ saying to **Aaron**, *'Make for us gods who will go before us; for this Moses who led us out of the land of Egypt-- we do not know what happened to him.'* ⁴¹ And at that time they made a calf and brought a sacrifice to the idol, and were rejoicing in the works of their hands. ⁴² But God turned away and delivered them up to serve the host of heaven; as it is written in the book of the prophets, *'It was not to Me that you offered victims and sacrifices forty years in the wilderness, was it, O house of Israel?'* ⁴³ *You also took along the tabernacle of Moloch and the star of the god Rompha, the images which you made to worship them. I also will remove you beyond Babylon.'* ⁴⁴ Our fathers had the tabernacle of testimony in the wilderness, just as He who spoke to Moses directed {him} to make it according to the pattern which he had seen. ⁴⁵ And having received it in their turn, our fathers brought it in with Joshua upon dispossessing the nations whom God drove out before our fathers, until the time of **David**. ⁴⁶ And {David} found favor in God's sight, and asked that he might find a dwelling place for the God of Jacob. ⁴⁷ But it was **Solomon** who built a house for Him. ⁴⁸ However, the Most High does not dwell in {houses} made by {human} hands; as the prophet says: ⁴⁹ *'Heaven is My throne, And earth is the footstool of My feet; What kind of house will you build for Me?'* says the Lord; *'Or what place is there for My repose?'* ⁵⁰ *'Was it not My hand which made all these things?'*

a. Stephen tells the story of Israel so as to make the following points:

1. There is progress and change in God's program.

- a. The promise to Abraham. vs.2-8
- b. The sojourn of Joseph. vs.9-16
- c. The deliverance of Moses. vs.17-43
- d. The building of the Tabernacle. vs.44-46
- e. The construction of the Temple. vs.47-50

2. The blessings of God are not limited to the land or Israel and the temple area.

- a. Israel's patriarchs and leaders were blessed outside the Land. vs.2-5,9-10,29-34
- b. The Law itself was given outside the land. vs.38
- c. The tabernacle was built in the desert. vs.44-45

- d. Even the temple, though in the land, was not to be limited in its theology. vs.49

3. Israel in its past always evidenced a pattern of opposition to God's plans and His men.

- a. Abraham tarried in Haran. vs.2-4
- b. Joseph as sold by his brothers into slavery in Egypt. Vs.9
- c. Moses was rejected by the Israelites. vs.23-29
- d. Israel rejected true worship by turning to idols. vs.39-43
- e. The people of Israel missed the point of the Temple. vs.48-50

- b. This pattern sets the context for the Gospel.

3. Spiritual boldness knows when to confront the heart.

⁵¹ "You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing just as your fathers did. ⁵² Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who had previously announced the coming of the Righteous One, whose betrayers and murderers you have now become; ⁵³ you who received the law as ordained by angels, and {yet} did not keep it."

- a. Stephen recognized that it is possible to "resist" the Spirit. **We have freedom to resist God's Spirit and should take a warning from this passage.**
- b. When Stephen tells them that they are not keeping the Law, he is no doubt referring to the neglect of the commandment which forbids murder. **Personal preferences were being allowed to replace Divine Principles.**
- c. It is significant that Stephen puts the blame for the crucifixion of Christ squarely on the back of these people. **He was not afraid to offend them with the truth.**

4. Spiritual boldness is not divorced from compassion.

⁵⁴ Now when they heard this, they were cut to the quick, and they {began} gnashing their teeth at him. ⁵⁵ But being full of the Holy Spirit, he gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; ⁵⁶ and he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." ⁵⁷ But they cried out with a loud voice, and covered their ears, and they rushed upon him with one impulse. ⁵⁸ And when they had driven him out of the city, they {began} stoning {him,} and the witnesses laid aside their robes at the feet of a young man named Saul. ⁵⁹ And they went on stoning Stephen as he called upon {the Lord} and said, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!" ⁶⁰ And

falling on his knees, he cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them!" And having said this, he fell asleep."

- a. We should note that the "filling of the Spirit" did not save Steven from suffering and even death. **God wants to empower us to respond to life in a holy way not to control life for our comfort.**
- b. Part of the power of Steven's witness is the price he is willing to pay and how he responds to his circumstances. **Success in following Christ is measured in what we are willing to sacrifice to obey.**
- c. We also must note the graciousness of Stephen in praying for those who were about to kill him. **Our graciousness in the face of personal injustice is a testimony of Christ's Spirit in us.**
- d. Most of us have the ability to be bold in certain circumstances. **It is interesting to note that we often are bold only when we defend ourselves in the face of personal injustice.**
- e. Wisdom means that a person knows when to confront and when to extend mercy. **Too many Christians are either bold in all circumstances or timid in all circumstances depending on their personality.**

5. Spiritual boldness can be misguided.

Acts 8

1 And Saul was in hearty agreement with putting him to death. And on that day a great persecution arose against the church in Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. 2 And {some} devout men buried Stephen, and made loud lamentation over him. 3 But Saul {began} ravaging the church, entering house after house; and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison."