

The 11th Sunday after Pentecost ~ Sunday, August 9, 2026

“Marks of the Early Church ~ Spirit-Filled Courage”

Psalms 27:1-6 Acts 7:54-8:4 Luke 21:12-19

The first Christians were more than just the _____ of a new religious movement; they were ordinary men and women whose lives had been _____ by the risen Christ and _____ y the Holy Spirit.

“...they will arrest you and persecute you; they will hand you over to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors because of my name.” (Luke 21:12)

God was using Stephen in remarkable ways to proclaim Christ and, as a result, some members of the synagogue set up _____, accusing him of speaking against Moses, the Law, and the Temple.

“...for I will give you words and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict.” (Luke 21:15)

In his sermon, Stephen demonstrated that throughout their history, God’s people had repeatedly _____ His messengers.

“You stiff-necked people...You always resist the Holy Spirit! As your fathers did, so do you.” (Acts 7:51)

These weren’t words spoken out of _____ or self-righteousness. They were the loving, but _____ words of a man who longed for his hearers to acknowledge Jesus as the promised Messiah.

His words cut his listeners to the heart—not with _____, but with rage.

From a human perspective, it appears that _____ has won. Ultimately this isn’t a story about death; but about _____.

The courage to remain _____ to Jesus Christ no matter the cost. This kind of courage doesn’t come from strength of character, human determination, or blind fearlessness. It comes from the _____.

Stephen reminds us that ordinary believers can display extraordinary courage when they’re filled with the Spirit and fix their eyes on _____. His life—and even his death—teaches us that no opposition can overcome a believer whose _____ rests in the risen Jesus.

3 CHARACTERISTICS OF SPIRIT-FILLED COURAGE

Characteristic #1: Spirit-filled courage _____.
“Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth at him.” (Acts 7:54)

The truth had exposed their _____, and rather than humbling themselves before God, they _____ themselves against Him.

“But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.” (Acts 7:55)

The council is consumed with anger; Stephen is filled with the _____.
The crowd’s eyes are fixed on Stephen; Stephen’s eyes are fixed on _____.

Stephen is not _____. The One whom the world rejected is reigning in glory. The One whom Stephen has been preaching is alive. The One whom Stephen is about to die for is _____ over him.

This is where Christian courage always begins—not with confidence in ourselves, stubborn determination, or pretending we’re not afraid, but by seeing _____ for who He truly is. Throughout Scripture, courage is always connected to God’s _____.

“Be strong and courageous...for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.” (Joshua 1:9)

“The Lord stood by me and strengthened me.” (2 Timothy 4:17)

Christian courage isn’t self-confidence; it’s _____. It’s knowing that Jesus is exactly who He says He is, that He reigns over all things, and that He’ll never _____ His people.

This kind of courage isn’t manufactured in the moment of _____; it’s _____ long before the crisis ever comes.

“He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither.” (Psalm 1:3)

Just as storms reveal the depth of a tree’s roots, trials reveal the depth of our _____. Stephen stood firm because his heart had long been anchored in Christ.

“I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:20)

Characteristic #2: Spirit-filled courage_____.

“But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together at him. Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him.” (Acts 7:57-58)

“Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” (Acts 7:59-60)

“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” (Luke 23:34)

“Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.” (Luke 23:46)

Luke wants us to see that Stephen has become like the One he follows—which is the _____ of Christian discipleship.

Jesus never promised to make us more religious; He promised to make us more like _____.

“...we are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.” (2 Corinthians 3:18)

The Holy Spirit doesn’t just give us the courage to _____ suffering; He uses suffering to _____ us into the _____ likeness of Jesus.

This kind of selfless response isn’t the result of Stephen’s _____, it’s the supernatural work of the _____.

However, biblical courage looks very different. It’s strong without becoming _____, truthful without becoming cruel, and firm without becoming _____.

However, Stephen reminds us that we’re called to something higher—we’re called to speak the truth and at the same time, to reflect the _____ of Jesus.

“...love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.” (Galatians 5:22-23)

These qualities aren’t signs of weakness; they’re evidence of _____ strength. Anyone can retaliate; only someone filled with the Spirit can forgive. Anyone can return insult for insult; only someone whose _____ has been transformed by Christ can bless those who curse them.

Characteristic #3: Spirit-filled courage_____.

“And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.” (Acts 8:1)

“Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word.” (Acts 8:4)

The persecution that was intended to destroy the Church actually became the means by which God _____ the gospel. The enemies of Christ thought they were extinguishing the flame. Instead, they _____ the sparks. What appeared to be a crushing defeat became another step in God’s sovereign _____.

In fact, the _____ itself is the greatest example of this. What looked like history’s greatest tragedy became its greatest _____.

“You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)

Now, through persecution, believers begin carrying the gospel into Judea and Samaria exactly as Jesus had foretold. God’s mission hadn’t been interrupted, it had _____.

Stephen reminds us that our responsibility is _____; God’s responsibility is the _____.

“I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.” (1 Corinthians 3:6)

That’s why Spirit-filled courage is ultimately an act of _____. It believes that God is _____ even when we cannot see it.

“We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.” (Romans 8:28)

This truth gives us tremendous _____. We may not understand everything God is doing today. We may never see the fruit of our faithfulness this side of heaven. But Stephen’s story reminds us that no act of faithful obedience is ever _____.

He invites us simply to be _____, trusting that one day we too will see that every sacrifice, every prayer, every act of obedience, and every moment of Spirit-filled courage was part of His beautiful and sovereign _____.

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Stephen’s story isn’t a story about a martyr; it’s a story about a faithful _____.

One day, our race will be finished, and my prayer is that, like Stephen, we’ll be found _____—not because we were fearless, but because the Spirit of God enabled us to stand _____ to the very end.