

Readings

Scripture

⁸ And Stephen, full of grace and power, was doing great wonders and signs among the people. ⁹ Then some of those who belonged to the synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called), and of the Cyrenians, and of the Alexandrians, and of those from Cilicia and Asia, rose up and disputed with Stephen. ¹⁰ But they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking. ¹¹ Then they secretly instigated men who said, "We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God." ¹² And they stirred up the people and the elders and the scribes, and they came upon him and seized him and brought him before the council, ¹³ and they set up false witnesses who said, "This man never ceases to speak words against this holy place and the law, ¹⁴ for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and will change the customs that Moses delivered to us." ¹⁵ And gazing at him, all who sat in the council saw that his face was like the face of an angel.

- Acts 6:8-15 (English Standard Version)

Reflection

Now Stephen takes the stand and, as everyone who is seated in the assembly looks at him intently, a divine glow seems to envelop him. Luke writes that Stephen's face "was as the face of an angel." We infer that Luke received a detailed eyewitness report from Paul, who in his address to the Jerusalem crowd freely admits his part in Stephen's death (Acts 22:20). Paul, then, was one of those who observed the transformation of Stephen's facial features. Yet in spite of the supernatural glow (see Exodus 34:29-30), the members of the Sanhedrin are unwilling to listen to the appeal of Christ's gospel.

- Simon Kistemaker, *Acts* (p. 232-233)

"We are right smack dab in the middle of the world's most important incomplete process – sanctification. None of us is yet what grace makes it possible for us to be. The battle with sin and temptation still goes on. The war for what will effectively and functionally rule our hearts still rages. We are not yet even near being blameless in and of ourselves. No, the reality is that between the already and the not yet of God's transforming process, we are all a bit of a mess. We still fall into temptation. We still give way to wrong thoughts and desires. We still say things that we should never say. We still behave in ways that expose the sin that is still in our hearts. So there is simply no way our personal security can be found in ourselves. Peace is not found in the degree of our faithfulness to God, but in the utterly unshakable nature of his faithfulness to the commitment of grace he has made to us."

- Paul David Tripp, *New Morning Mercies*, May 3

Sermon Outline

Like the Face of an Angel
Acts 6:8-15

The Acts of the Apostles
Brad Anderson

When a person receives the grace that is found in Jesus Christ that same grace is the means by which lasting growth occurs. (Acts 6:5,8)

What does Stephen's life show us about our growth in grace?

We will find grace when we may not know what to say. (Acts 6:9-10)

We will find grace when we are falsely accused. (Acts 6:11-14)

We will find grace when that same grace passes through us to another.
(Acts 6:15)

Reflection Questions (taken in part from the *Serendipity Study Bible for Groups*)

- What does Luke mean when he says in Acts 6:8 that Stephen was full of grace and power? Earlier in Acts 6:5, Luke says that Stephen was a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit. What do these descriptors tell us about what Stephen was like? Have you ever met someone like this? Where in Acts have you seen language like this used to describe what is happening?
- Where do you see Jesus described in similar fashion in the Gospels? Where then do these qualities in Stephen originate?
- Consider your growth in grace like the seasonal growth and produce of a fruit tree. Describe what happens over a calendar year. Which months seem to be the most active? Which months seem to be the least active? How do you interpret the activity that occurs during the months of least obvious activity? How does this metaphor help you understand more clearly the seasonal experience of our growth in grace?
- In Acts 22:1-21, Paul freely admits his role in Stephen's death. As Paul was clearly present and witnessed the treatment of Stephen, what sorts of questions do you think Luke might have asked Paul as he gathered material to write Acts?