



The Story (*and Stoning*) of St. Stephen

Way to Introduce the Story:

What would you do if someone came up to you and said, “Only dumb people believe in Jesus”? Would you be quiet or would you tell them that you believe in Jesus? What if they laughed at you? The book of Acts tells us about a man named Stephen who said he believed in Jesus even when people said they would hurt him if he did.

The Story:

Stephen was a Christian man in the city of Jerusalem who loved God and Jesus very much. He understood the power of the Holy Spirit in his life. He was a Deacon (servant) of the church in Jerusalem and helped make sure that the poor widows received their fair share of food. He taught many people about Jesus and even performed many miracles in Jesus’ name.

Stephen wanted everyone to know the good news about Jesus. He knew that there were many Jews who followed God but did not yet believe in Jesus so he went to a synagogue to preach. A synagogue is where Jewish people gathered. The leaders of the synagogue became very angry. They did not believe what Stephen was saying about Jesus. In fact they became so angry that they began telling lies about Stephen to make everyone else hate him. They said Stephen was saying bad things about the Jews and about God. They said he wanted to destroy their temple and stop them from worshipping God.

Because they were so angry with Stephen they took him to the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin was a group of Jewish religious leaders who could make decisions like in a courtroom. Even when the Jewish leaders of the synagogue were saying all of these lies in the courtroom Stephen continued to trust in God. He had so much faith in God that his face was peaceful. The people said, “His face is like the face of an angel.”

When the High Priest (who was the judge) asked Stephen if these things were true

Stephen had a very good answer. He answered by telling everyone the story of God and how God had sent his Son, Jesus, to save his people. He talked about many people in the bible like:

- Abraham, who was the very first Jew and the father of a great nation. He also talked about Abraham's descendants, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph.
- Moses, who helped save God's people from Egyptian slavery and then recorded the Ten Commandments and the rest of the law.
- David and Solomon and how Solomon built the temple.
- Jesus who was killed by the non-believing Jews

Stephen talked about how that God sent His Son, Jesus, and how the Jews had rejected Jesus. Stephen spoke the truth but it made the people in the Sanhedrin very angry and they took him out of the city to throw stones at him until he died.

It must have been a very frightening time for Stephen. The bible says the people were so furious that they "gnashed their teeth" at Stephen and were yelling at him. But the bible also records that these angry people were not the only thing that Stephen saw before he died. The bible says...

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; and he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God."

Acts 7:55-56, RSV

And just before he died...

And as they were stoning Stephen, he prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."⁶⁰ And he knelt down and cried with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

Acts 7:59-60, RSV

A martyr is a person who is killed because of their religious or other beliefs. Stephen is remembered as the first Christian martyr because he is the first person mentioned in the bible who died because of his belief in Christ. Stephen is an amazing example of someone who stood up for what they believed in even when it meant they would suffer.

*There was one more person in this story who will go on to become a very important person in the church later on. He wanted Stephen to die too. He even held the cloaks for the leaders so they could throw more stones. This man's name was Paul.

Many followers of Jesus began to leave Jerusalem after the Stephen's death because Paul and others began to persecute them too.