

Message Date: 09-13-20

To the Ends of the Earth- ACTS Part 4: Courage!

Message Title: Week 2, A big, giant piece of humble pie

- **Good morning everyone (or whenever)... thanks for joining us today. If you are tuning in for the first time, we are going through the NT book of ACTS.. and last week we entered into the incredibly important story of STEPHEN. If you're not caught up, you can listen to last weeks message FIRST.. OR, since I doubt any of you are going to do that, at least pause... and go read Acts chapter six. Not too long, introduces Stephen into our story.**
- **OKAY? Let's move on.**
- **What's your favorite kind of pie? Apple pie? Peach? Pecan? Key Lime? Maybe Pumpkin as we are heading into the fall.**
- **In our scripture today, we will see Stephen serve up another kind of pie... a delicacy we all have eaten, but rarely enjoy even though it can be very nutritious. On trial before the Sanhedrin, facing false accusations and displaying the peace and courage of an angel, Stephen served his accusers a big, giant slice of humble pie.**
- **Ah, humble pie. It's not a dish in high demand these days. You know what I'm talking about don't you? Humble pie is when something happens that confronts you with the blinders of your pride- something that enables you to realize how deceived, or just plain silly, your perspective has been. When we are absolutely, positively, and in all other ways convinced that we are the ones who have things right, and it turns out that well... not so much... that's humble pie.**
- **A similar dish, but a bit lesser known, is the culinary disaster known as eating crow. When you say something, and then come to realize that everything you said is WRONG. Kind of like having to eat your own words. NOT to appetizing. But I digress.. Back to pie...**
- **If Scripture were metaphorically cast as God's Diner, then humble pie would be on the menu. There's some great examples...**
 - o **Moses served it to Pharaoh... remember the whole red sea thing with parted waters**
 - o **Moses himself ate multiple slices along his journey, certain stone he beat with a stick**
 - o **Peter had a particularly large piece that night he denied knowing Jesus, having just proclaimed that he would never do so, even if everyone else did.**
- **Humble pie is healthy because it opens our eyes. It helps us see and hear. It can be like a reset button on our hearts, leading us to finally, blessedly, realize our pride and accept that God is wiser than we are.**
- **And here's the deal. Whenever God prepares a humble pie with our name on it, he does so out of love, in mercy, and with the goal of redemption. He may place it right in front of us, but the real question is, will we eat it? Will we let it do its work of relief and freedom? Or do we push it aside, send it back to the kitchen, and order another side of pride.**
- **As we move into Acts chapter seven, Stephen is about to serve the Sanhedrin with the story of their own history. They have accused him of working to undermine the Temple and Mosaic Law, and Stephen essentially says "So, you who love the Law, you who are so confident in your own righteousness, your own ability to keep all the rules and be good... let's look at your history and see How has that worked out for ya..."**
- **BUT! Before we go there... Sunday September 13th...**

- **Amazing passage of scripture.. We're going to focus on big theme of the speech. Stephen is saying all of this to make a single point... and that's what we don't want to miss... It's the humble pie God invites us to receive.**

Then the high priest asked Stephen, "Are these charges true?"

- **Charge was that Stephen was blaspheming God by speaking against the Mosaic Law, the Temple, and thus God himself. The Sanhedrin- the priests, temple officials, and religious rulers of Israel viewed themselves as the keepers, the protectors of the LAW and TEMPLE, and thus they held themselves to be GOD'S representative and defender against this new radical movement of Christ followers, exemplified that day by Stephen.**
- **In response, filled with the Holy Spirit, Stephen tells the story of Israel. He does so to reveal a pattern- a pattern plainly revealed by the scriptures, but which the spiritually blind religious rulers were unable to see.**
- **The pattern is this. Since God first called to Abraham, we see the sequence...**
 - **God making a promise, a covenant with His people. The covenant of his plan, his kingdom, and his provision.**
 - **God's people turn away from him, no longer trust in the covenant, God's provision**
 - **Times of Crisis. God's people cry out. In response to the crisis, God would raise up a leader or make provision for his people to be delivered.**
 - **After being delivered, God's people once again fail to trust and turn away.**
- **This is a cycle we see repeated multiple times throughout the Old Testament, and across this entire history Stephen points out pivotal events in which God acted on behalf of his people.**
 - **The promise to Abraham. Abrahamic covenant. You will be my people, a homeland I will show you, I will bless you and you will be a blessing to all the world, you will be my people and I will be your God.**
 - **The giving of the Law through Moses. The Mosaic Covenant**
 - **The temple.**
- **Stephen begins the story.**

2 To this he replied: "Brothers and fathers, listen to me! The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham while he was still in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Harran. 3 'Leave your country and your people,' God said, 'and go to the land I will show you.'

- **Starting with Abraham, Stephen led them through the story of God's covenant promise and the growth of Abraham's family over the generations, up to the life of Jacob and his 12 sons, who would become the patriarchs, the founders of the 12 tribes of Israel.**
 - **Then rebellion enters the story, with the famous story of Joseph and his 11 brothers.**
- 9 "Because the patriarchs were jealous of Joseph, they sold him as a slave into Egypt.*
- **But even though Joseph's brothers intended him harm, God used it for their provision.**

But God was with Joseph and rescued him from all his troubles. He gave Joseph wisdom and enabled him to gain the goodwill of Pharaoh king of Egypt. So Pharaoh made him ruler over Egypt and all his palace. "Then a famine struck all Egypt and Canaan, bringing great suffering, and our ancestors could not find food.

- **We know the story! God delivered the Israelites, 75 in all at this time, by bringing them to Egypt to be under Joseph's care.**

- **Then Stephen jumps four hundred years... all of this time the Israelites have been growing in Egypt, and God is about to fulfill his promise... once again in a time of crisis.**

17 “As the time drew near for God to fulfill his promise to Abraham, the number of our people in Egypt had greatly increased. 18 Then ‘a new king, to whom Joseph meant nothing, came to power in Egypt.’ **(Pharaoh of the Moses story)** 19 He dealt treacherously with our people and oppressed our ancestors by forcing them to throw out their newborn babies so that they would die.

20 “At that time Moses was born, and he was no ordinary child. For three months he was cared for by his family. 21 When he was placed outside, Pharaoh’s daughter took him and brought him up as her own son.

- **And so Moses grows up in the court of Pharaoh, and even then realizes that God has a plan for his life. When he is forty a series of events causes him to flee from Egypt, and after another forty years- Moses is 80 now- God calls him through the burning bush.**

30 “After forty years had passed, an angel appeared to Moses in the flames of a burning bush in the desert near Mount Sinai... he heard the Lord say: 32 ‘I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.’ 33 “Then the Lord said to him, ‘Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground. 34 I have indeed seen the oppression of my people in Egypt. I have heard their groaning and have come down to set them free. Now come, I will send you back to Egypt.’

- **Moses goes to Egypt, Stephen sums up what may be most famous story in the OT.**

36 He led them out of Egypt and performed wonders and signs in Egypt, at the Red Sea and for forty years in the wilderness.

- **Once again, GOD’S PROVISION. GOD’S DELIVERANCE. But even in the midst of the great miracles of the red sea, manna from heaven.. the people of Israel already start to grumble, rebel against Moses and against God.**
- **And with this grumbling and rebellion as a backdrop, God takes the second great step in this story. Through Moses God prophesies the coming messiah, and CONTINUES HIS COVENANT BY providing what came to be known as the Mosaic Cov/Law.**

37 “This is the Moses who told the Israelites, ‘God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your own people.’ 38 He was in the assembly in the wilderness, with the angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and with our ancestors; and he received living words to pass on to us. **(THE LAW)**

- **NOW Stephen lays out the evidence of the point he is about to make. EVEN AS MOSES is on the mountain receiving the Law- the law the Sanhedrin is so passionate to defend, at that same moment the people of Israel are fully turning their backs on God.**

39 “But our ancestors refused to obey him **(Moses, the law)**. Instead, they rejected him and in their hearts turned back to Egypt. 40 They told Aaron, ‘Make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who led us out of Egypt—we don’t know what has happened to him!’ 41 That was the time they made an idol in the form of a calf. They brought sacrifices to it and reveled in what their own hands had made.

42 But God turned away from them and gave them over to the worship of the sun, moon and stars.

- **What happened here? God provided the law, and it was rejected. The people of Israel chose their own wisdom over God, and the result was devastating.**

- **Proverbs 14:21 sums up this choice made by Israel.**

There is a way which seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death.

- **Then Stephen moves from Gods provision of the law, to the third great event, God’s provision of the temple... NOW.. temple very important- God gave them instructions on**

how to build it and what would happen inside of it... BUT THE PEOPLE missed the point, by thinking that the temple was something they had provided for God, rather than something God had provided for them.

– *Stephen quotes from Isaiah as he says*

“However, the Most High does not live in houses made by human hands. As the prophet says: “Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me? says the Lord. Or where will my resting place be? Has not my hand made all these things?”

– *And now, having made his case through Israel’s own history, Stephen delivers the indictment.*

51 “You stiff-necked people! Your hearts and ears are still uncircumcised. You are just like your ancestors: You always resist the Holy Spirit! – ***Even through all the OT, the Holy Spirit was at work.***

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 have betrayed and murdered him— 53 you who have received the law that was given through angels but have not obeyed it.”

- *THERE IT IS. There’s the big, giant piece of humble pie. Stephen proclaims: you are accusing me of coming against God’s law, but you yourselves, even though God gave you the law as a way of knowing Him.... You don’t keep it yourselves, and you never have.*
- *AT THIS POINT, the men of the Sanhedrin have a choice. Through Stephen, and using their own scripture, God has demonstrated what they need to hear, what they need to see. THE LAW MAKES NO ONE PERFECT. It never has. BUT NOW A BETTER WAY has been introduced- the Gospel- and this is the way by which we can truly come to know God, through Christ. WHAT WILL THEY CHOOSE?*
 - *Will they double down on their tradition, their control, the law, and their pride?*
 - *OR, WILL they humble themselves, open their eyes to the miracle of the Gospel, so that through the Holy Spirit they may see.*
- *If you know the story, you know that they chose the former. We will see that result next week as Stephen becomes the first martyr of the community of faith.*
- *BRING THIS TO US TODAY. This is a fascinating, and important, lesson from Biblical history... but what is the Truth God would have us hear into our own lives?*
- *As simple as this.*
- *There are times when we find ourselves fighting with our own pride, selfishness, rationalization, our own desire for control – maybe our own pain and fear- that keeps us from hearing and receiving what God would have us to learn.*
- *It could be something in our marriages. Maybe in our other relationships such as with our children, co-workers, friends, people that have authority in our lives. Maybe it’s a struggle in our personal life.*
- *Whatever it may be, God is working to open our eyes that we may see HE is our source of hope, joy, peace, freedom... NOT our ability to control the situation, whatever it may be.*
- *CHURCH! For us to hear, to learn, to enter the path of peace, hope, and freedom... there are times that we MUST LAY DOWN OUR PRIDE. When we must SURRENDER, stop fighting, TRUST GOD and come before him with a humble heart.*

- **HERE'S THE KICKER. MOST OF THE TIME, our need to humble ourselves before God will involve humbling ourselves before another person. Forgiving. Seeking forgiveness. Letting go of a grudge, a hurt... allowing God to soften your heart to bring redemption and restoration into a relationship.**
- **THIS ISN'T EASY, but we never have to do it alone. BY FAITH, we know God, in his Grace, is with us. When we humble ourselves before God and before others, we have the promise of Scripture that God is all about redemption.. he cares for us, we are not alone, and we can trust HIM to lift us up.**
- **In 1 Peter 5:5-7, we see this promise...**
All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, “God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.”⁶ Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.⁷ Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.
- **I'll end with this. Jesus spoke to his followers about the same people who would put Stephen on trial, and who would refuse this Spirit's invitation of the Gospel. In Matthew's recording, hear what Jesus says...**

Matthew 13:14-16 *In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: “‘You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving.¹⁵ For this people’s heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.’¹⁶ But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear.*