

Acts Chapter 6

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[0:00] So this is our, what's the date today? August what? August 9? Okay, August 9 session, so thank you for being here.

The next thing you know, kids will be going back to school, what, in a week or so. That would be a lot of relieved parents, won't there? Football and marching bands are out there. Oh, yeah. Well, a doctor was examining a woman who had been rushed to the emergency room.

And he took the husband aside and grimly said, I don't like the looks of your wife at all. Oh, me neither, Doc, said the husband, but she's a great cook and really good with the kids.

And this is one of my favorites. The graveside service just barely finished when there was a massive clap of thunder, followed by a tremendous bolt of lightning, accompanied by even more thunder rumbling in the distance.

The little old man looked at the preacher and calmly said, well, she's there. He's got a wife that's going to make an impression wherever she goes.

[1:18] Wow. Okay, if you'll look at your text in the book of Acts, we've concluded chapter 5. Unless there are unattended things there that you want to address, we will consider Acts chapter 5 as completed and move into chapter 6.

But once again, let me remind you of the transition between the chapters that often robs us from maintaining the continuity.

And we want to keep all of this together, so be reminded that after the crucifixion and after the ascension of Christ, the kingdom which Christ came to provide, the kingdom for which Christ came to die to establish the legal basis for its erection, is still viable for the nation of Israel.

It is still something that is within the realm of the possibility. And that is very, very important because the kingdom that Christ came to provide, in my opinion, was never actually offered before he died.

The basis for its offering was not available before he died. That's why we keep finding the phrase in the Gospels, started by John the Baptizer, the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

[2:51] It is at hand. It is at hand. That means it is near. It is close by. But never in any case did they say, this is it. The kingdom has arrived.

Because it never had. But it was always near. And that's the message that John was preaching. That's the message that Christ continued to preach. That was the message that the twelve were commissioned to preach.

The point is that it is really important, is that message continued to be preached after the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ.

The opportunity for Israel was still available. The two things that have to happen before the kingdom can be realized, and by the kingdom we're talking about God reversing the curse and bringing in the virtual utopia to earth that man has always longed for and dreamed for.

It is the regaining of paradise that was lost in the garden. That's the kingdom. It is the millennial reign. It is the earth being fixed from its brokenness.

[3:53] Two things need to happen. Christ needed to die to provide the legal judicial basis for God reversing that. And he did. And Peter tells them in Acts chapter 2, God has performed his part.

Now Israel, it's up to you. The ball is in your court. On the basis of what God has done through Christ, you as a nation need to repent. You need to change your position, your mind about Jesus being the Messiah from your point earlier that he was not the Messiah and that led to your crucifying him.

You've got to reverse that. And if you do, we find this in Acts 2 and in Acts 3, God will send Christ back again and this kingdom program will resume.

But that was never done. The answer of the religious establishment for Israel was more rejection and more persecution of those who were proclaiming the message.

You've got to understand how deeply entrenched the religious establishment in Israel was. And they were not about to be moved from their position.

[5 : 05] So, they could not silence. They could not answer the message of the apostles. And they could not silence them.

So, they began beating them and mistreating them, imprisoning them, flogging them, and so on. And we see that chapter 5 closes out with this in verse 41. Well, verse 40, it says, they took his advice, that is, Gamaliel, who offered the sage wisdom that you really ought to back off of what you're thinking about doing to these men.

because if these guys are just one more group of insurrectionists and God has nothing to do with it, this whole thing is just going to peter out.

It'll come to naught anyway, just like the others did. But, and perhaps this is a long shot, Gamaliel is saying, but if perchance what these men are doing and saying really is of God, then the net effect is you're actually fighting against God.

So, my advice to you is leave them alone. Don't do anything. And it was good advice. But we are told in verse 40 that they took his advice after a fashion and after calling the apostles in, they flogged them and ordered them to speak no more in the name of Jesus and then released them.

[6 : 39] No doubt thinking, well, we have really taught them a lesson and I'll bet that'll be the end. We won't hear any more from them. But that was not to be, of course.

So, they went on their way from the presence of the council, that's the Sanhedrin, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for his name.

rejoicing over the fact that they were in a position where they could take the blows and the beating in the name of and for the sake of Jesus Christ.

I suspect it would be a hard thing to be thankful for persecution. But they were. And the thing that made them that way was because they knew what they believed was true.

And no opposition and no beating is going to change that. These were men who were absolutely, absolutely mesmerized by the truth of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

[7 : 54] And all they wanted to do was proclaim that reality at whatever cost may be involved. Because never had there been a message like this to proclaim.

And they want to spend and be spent in proclaiming it. And every day in the temple and keep in mind guys, the Jewishness of this whole thing, we've got no Gentiles involved here at all.

This temple is the temple. And it is where a lot of this action has taken place. They go back to the temple which is a veritable hot spot for them.

Because it's from the temple that they've been arrested on different occasions. But they know that's where the people are. That's where the people are. So you go where the people are and you proclaim this message daily, every day in the temple and from house to house.

This was table conversation in a lot of homes. They kept right on teaching and preaching and note what their message is.

[9 : 01] Jesus as the Christ. Yeshua HaMashiach. Ever since he came on the scene and was introduced by John the Baptist, the only burning question for the whole nation of Israel was whether or not that Jesus of Nazareth was the one promised by Moses and the prophets.

Is he the one? John the Baptist even announced him as such. Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Introduced him as the Messiah to Israel.

But when Jesus did not make steps to establish that kingdom and John ends up in prison John and Jesus were second cousins their mothers were first cousins John even has some second thoughts.

Have I got this thing all wrong? Here I am in jail and he sent his messengers to ask Jesus find him and ask him are you the one who should come or ought we to be looking for somebody else?

Find Jesus and ask him have we got this thing all wrong? Is it possible that you are not really the Messiah? and Jesus said you go back and tell John that the lame walk and the blind receive their sight and the deaf hear and the poor have the gospel preached unto them go back and tell John that and I suspect that when John's disciples went back and reported that to him John is saying okay okay and he went under the executioner's axe convinced of that truth but John confusion arose over the fact that if Jesus is the Messiah and he's come to set up the kingdom where is it and why am I in jail here and I'm one of the good guys and he ought to be busting me out of this place

and taking over everything but John perhaps did not understand that the first leg that has to be accomplished is not merely the arrival and proclamation of the [11 : 23] Messiah but the death of the Messiah John perhaps did not really understand that and suspected a number of others didn't either but now that that has been accomplished the only other thing that needs to be done is that Israel needs to embrace Jesus as their Messiah and what's the big deal about that it is because Jesus Christ was a minister to the circumcision to confirm the promises God gave to the fathers Abraham Isaac and Jacob and that's why that was so very very important so we read then they kept right on teaching and preaching that Jesus was in fact the Messiah and fellas I want you to understand how divisive this thing must have been remember Christ in the gospel said I came I came to divide Christ was not a uniter except for those who believed in him they were united in a common faith in him but he also was a divider because people were on one side or the other of

Christ and so it is today nothing has changed he is still a divider men still line up on one side or the other of Christ and in this chapter chapter 5 where they're teaching and preaching this in every house these are people who are convinced that Jesus is the Messiah and they are invited into homes personal private homes for meals and to carry on these conversations and to have a little Bible study and you may be sure that there were people there who didn't buy it they weren't convinced that Jesus was the Messiah people within the same family and we see this today in our own culture when there are very controversial issues that arise and you have family gatherings you will have people in a large family who are on one side or another politically religiously you've got people in a given family who are for abortion on demand and people in the same family who are opposed to abortion on demand that's divisive people have different opinions about things and it can create difficulty it can create discomfort it can create awkwardness it can create everybody's kind of walking on eggs don't say anything about such and such because uncle so and so is here and we don't want to offend him or upset him or start a big family row you think they didn't deal with this of course they did just like here in the

United States during the Civil War when you had people on both sides of the issue pro and anti-slavery and so on so these are all dynamics that figure into the mix here now we're starting a new chapter at this time in other words same continuity same time frame at this time while all this stuff was going on in chapter 5 while the disciples were increasing in number and the reason they were increasing in number was because they continued preaching Jesus was the Messiah in the temple they continued these little house meetings where Christ was set forth as the Messiah and of course all they had to appeal to was the Old Testament but remember on the road to Emmaus in Luke 24 when we are told that Christ when he revealed himself to the apostles or to the disciples on the Emmaus road that he showed them all things from Moses and the prophets in the scriptures those things pertaining to himself he went through a litany of Old Testament passages which was all they had New Testament didn't even exist but the Old Testament certainly did and in the Old Testament throughout from Genesis to Malachi there are references to the coming Messiah and he took them to those references in the Old Testament and pointed out to them things concerning himself that's what's going on in these little house churches in these gatherings they all had familiarity with the Old Testament and they were appealing to the Psalms they were appealing to the writings of Moses they were appealing to what what 2 Samuel 7 says and to Psalm 89 and all of these references and Isaiah 53 they're going over these things and they are plugging in Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah and the disciples were increasing and a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews but I want you to note very carefully they are Hellenistic Jews but they are still Jews now what is a Hellenistic Jew Hellen is simply a word that means Greek these are Greeks they are Greek speaking Jews they probably could not speak Aramaic or the Hebrew language but they spoke Greek and there were a whole lot more people that spoke Greek in the Mediterranean world than spoke Hebrew Hebrew is a very minority language still is but virtually everybody spoke Greek if you were in the Mediterranean world in the first century and you were fortunate enough to speak two languages you can almost be sure that one of them would be Greek thanks to the efforts of Alexander the Great hundreds of years earlier he Hellenized or he

[17 : 18] Grecianized the whole Mediterranean world and Greek became the language of commerce the language of trade the language of art and science and everything else they were all speaking Greek so you got a bunch of Jews who are speaking Greek and because there is a

language barrier their needs are not as well cared for among the Hebrew speaking Jews as it is among the Greek speaking Jews for the simple reason communication problems consequently these Greek speaking Jews were often overlooked in their needs and nobody is ministering to them because you have got this language barrier I can't understand what these people are saying so they couldn't communicate and as a result their needs were not being met and what were their needs well they were physical the widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food keep in mind they had no food banks they had no welfare program they had nothing like that but they had accepted the

Old Testament principles of families caring for their own that was a very important aspect of Judaism you do not see your brother or sister be destitute of daily food as long as you can meet the need you do it and this was ingrained into Judaism from the law of Moses in the Old Testament and Paul reiterates this when he writes to Timothy and says that if any man does not provide for his own he is worse than an infidel and that means he's worse than one who has no faith at all because this was considered a very top door item you care for the needs of others when they cannot care for themselves so these people were being neglected in the daily serving of food and the twelve the apostles summoned the congregation of the disciples and said it is not desirable for us to neglect the word of

God in order to serve tables we recognize that these people have a legitimate need and it needs to be met but we've got to prioritize our agenda and we cannot afford to take the proclamation of the gospel and neglect it and lay it aside and get this food bank running and get all of these people served so the principle of delegation comes to the fore and it's a good thing the twelve some of the congregation told them it's not desirable for us to do that but select from among you brethren seven men of good reputation first of all you've got to get some men who have character about them who are reputable people this is no place for rip off artists and people who will line their own pockets and take care of themselves at the expense of everybody else so you get men who have already established themselves in the community as being men of good character who can be trusted with responsibility and they are full of the spirit that is they have a priority about spiritual things and of wisdom whom we may put in charge of this task but we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word that's the principle purpose that they adopted and they saw the legitimacy of it and the necessity of it and they are hurrying to fulfill it and the statement found approval with a whole congregation that is the whole aggregate number and they chose

Stephen oh this is quite a guy Stephen in the next chapter is going to become the first martyr of the Christian faith and he must have been something he was some kind of a fellow I tell you a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit and Philip we'll be reading about him in chapter 8 with the Ethiopian eunuch and so on and Prochorus Nicanor Timon Arminas and Nicholas a proselyte from Antioch Nicholas was not born a Jew he was a Gentile but he had converted to Judaism that's why he's called a proselyte any non-Jew any Gentile who wanted to become a Jew could do so he would have to subscribe to the

Shema here oh Israel the Lord our God is one Lord Deuteronomy 6:4 he would have to abandon pagan deities and false gods he would have to submit himself for ritual circumcision which would be performed by a Jew and he would be circumcised and then he would offer an offering to the Lord at the temple then he would be embraced and received into the Jewish faith as a proselyte he would be accorded all of the privileges and benefits of a full-fledged Jew because now he is a Jew and that is Nicholas who was a proselyte there was a step back from that and there were many of those too they were called God fears we'll see in chapter 10 Cornelius is a Roman army officer and he is a God fear that is one who has not been circumcised but has embraced the tenets of Judaism concept of one God etc but he is not a full-fledged

[23 : 48] Jew he is just a sympathizer or a God fear and that will be the status of Cornelius a little bit later so let's read on Nicholas is a proselyte from Antioch and these they brought before the apostles and after praying they laid their hands on them this laying their hands on them was an official ceremonial way of the apostles identifying with these seven men and I'm sure it was a public ceremony we do much the same thing today whenever we ordain someone to the ministry to the gospel ministry there is a time of investigation and a time of questioning and once they have been approved for ordination then they're usually elders or deacons or whoever the church uses like that and they come forward and they gather around this man who is being ordained and each one lays their hands upon him now this does not impart any mysterious power or authority or wisdom or

anything else what they are doing when they lay hands on that individual is they are taking a stand with him they are identifying with him they are saying we support this person's call and activity into the ministry and that is they are aligning themselves with that individual and that's exactly what's happening here and they are kind of legitimizing the situation by laying their hands on him and we're told in verse 7 and the word of

God kept on spreading and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem and look at this next phrase guys and a great many of the priests I think we can safely say that these priests who were of course after the order of Levi and Aaron these Jewish priests would have probably been for the most part much more skilled and much more knowledgeable about their scriptures than the average person so when a priest became convinced that Jesus was the Messiah that's really significant because he had more baggage but he also had more learning more appreciation more understanding and it would take a lot more to convince a priest that Jesus was the

Messiah than it would just an average everyday layman but the evidence presented for the Messiahship of Jesus and his bodily resurrection from the dead was so compelling that many of these priests came to the position of where they said maybe this is going to get me in a lot of trouble but I just cannot deny the evidence it is so overwhelming I have to buy into this thing because I'm convinced that it's true Jesus is the Messiah and I'm going with that and many of them would do that at a great personal cost but it's very significant a great many of the priests we aren't told how many but it certainly sounds like there's more than two or three a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith all that means is they were responding in a positive way to the information about Jesus the Messiah his death burial and resurrection and those who did not come to that position remained in a sphere of disobedience and those who embrace it are coming into a sphere of obedience just as these faiths are as these priests are and Stephen full of grace and power was performing great wonders and signs this word sign in the Greek is simeon it's a word from which we get the word semaphore flag system they use in the Navy to send signals a simeon is a signal or a sign among the people and the significance of signs was never for the sign itself but was always for what the sign pointed to in fact we use the word like that today don't we when we are in a strange setting and we don't know exactly where we're going one of the first things we look for is a sign sign will maybe an arrow pointing and such and such and if you're in a strange place and you're looking for a men's room hey there's a sign men's room arrow pointing that way now the sign is not what you're looking for and it's not what you're going to see it's not what you want but it tells you where what you want is it points the way that was the purpose of the miracles and the signs in the

New Testament the the goal and the objective was not in the sign itself but it was always in what the sign pointed to what the sign stood for what was behind the sign and that was the basis of the miracles and Stephen was very gifted and was producing a lot of signs and the people were really enamored with it but some men and here we have a but conjunction of contrast in verse 8 things are going great and very positively but some men from what was called the synagogue of the freedmen including both Cyrenians that is people from Cyrene and Alexandrians and these are people from Alexandria Egypt and some from Cilicia and Asia that is

Asia minor or modern day Turkey rose up and argued with Stephen we don't buy that that is not true what you are saying is wrong you are leading the people astray and blah blah blah and they are giving Stephen a hard time and yet they were unable I love this verse I just love it they were unable to cope with the wisdom and the spirit with which he was speaking they could not answer him and they could not answer his arguments every time they came up with an objection Stephen had an answer and shot them down this is reminiscent of our Lord's encounter with the Pharisees and the scribes and so many occasions when they would try to trick him or try to make him look bad he would come back with a simple answer that would just absolutely demolish them and embarrass them publicly and this is exactly what's taking place with Stephen as they present their objections [31 : 26] Stephen has got answers and Stephen's answers they can't answer they can't refute them so what are you going to do when you really don't want to hear what this man is saying and you don't want to do what he is demanding but you cannot answer his arguments what are you going to do kill him kill him get rid of the man if you can't answer the message kill the messenger and we'll see that's exactly what's going to happen we'll take that up in our next session together had you a question or comment anybody no no this was the freed men of the synagogue was a

number of men who had previously been in a slave capacity but who through whatever means had obtained their freedom usually they bought their freedom by saving up their money and paying for their freedom to get out from bondage and apparently there was a congregation of these people who were former slaves but now they are freed men yeah yeah yeah

Jacob yeah laying his hands on his sons yeah and it also goes back good point John it also goes back to the priest laying hands on the animal on the goat to be sacrificed and laying hands on the goat that was to become the scapegoat sent off into the wilderness and when the priest does that and prays over them he is identifying with that animal and what it is going to accomplish whether it is sacrifice or the scapegoat or whatever it's a matter of identifying another comment Richard never cease to never cease to amaze me how religious people are so violent and so hateful yeah yeah so resentful and I mean you're right you're right that's that's true well I'll tell you what I think the reason for that is the reason

I oh yeah I've known church leaders to be so hateful yeah yeah and they're the ones that are playing that hands laid on and all that it almost you do is cause me to lose well absolutely because you expect better things from those people but you need to understand fellas and this is a driving motivating force and it is really powerful because there is nothing that compels and impels people more than an ideological position and this is so important I'll tell you what it is to understand it is necessary to understand this to be able to understand the rationale for radical Islam this is what drives radical Islam it is an ideology they are ideologues and when you take a religious ideology then you are absolutely convinced that you are acting on behalf of God himself and if you really really believe that it can easily justify your strapping a bomb to yourself and blowing yourself to pieces in the name of your

God that is exactly what drives these people fanaticism is ideological and it is so powerful if somebody if somebody is driven by personal wealth or to gain some assets of the world you're not going to find that person strapping a bomb on themselves they want to be around to spend it they don't want to move on but when you are convinced that God is behind it and that you giving yourself to this cause as a martyr will result in untold benefits for you in the next world fellas I want to emphasize this it doesn't make any difference whether that is true or not doesn't make any difference all that matters is the person who is doing it believes that doesn't matter how wrong he may be does he believe that because if he does that's what motivates him and that's the power of ideology and if you're up against an ideological enemy who doesn't even care whether he physically survives the battle you've got a real enemy there to contend with and that's exactly what we have today in militant Islam words be