**The Joy of Sacrificial Witness**

**The Word**

Read together Acts 6:8-7:3 and 7:44-60

**The Big Idea**

Stephen’s trial and death is a profound representation of Christ’s own trial and death. Being sent as Christ’s witnesses often means sacrifice and suffering, but the joy of the Lord can make the suffering redemptive.

**Questions for Discussion**

1. Stephen’s trial and death are remarkable for a number of reasons. What about his story impacted you the most and why?

2. Our series in Acts is about living as sent people, not settled people. As you consider living more faithfully as a sent person, what specific form of suffering (or risk, challenge, sacrifice, etc.) would you need to embrace more fully?

3. On Sunday we talked about the idea of redemptive suffering. Share a time when you’ve witnessed redemptive suffering in someone else’s life in a way that impacted you.

4. Consider the two promises Jesus makes in Matthew 28:18-20 as he calls his church to make disciples of all nations: 1) All authority has been given to him 2) He is with us always. How would embracing those two promises impact the way you’re approaching your life right now?

**Sermon Outline**

I. Introduction

A. Are we living sent or settled lives?

B. Stephen exhibits a purpose-driven death, and Luke tells his story in such a way as to inspire us to live purpose-driven lives

C. The Greek word for “witness” is “martus” from where we get “martyr”

II. The Passage

A. Stephen’s speech

1. He rehearses Israel’s history and addresses the two specific charges laid against him in Acts 6:13-14 (against the temple and the law)

2. God has never been confined to a temple

3. The story of Jesus is not a departure but rather fulfillment of God’s story

 B. Notice the similarities between Stephen’s experience and Jesus’ experience

 1. The trial

- same group of leaders, false witnesses, the charge of destroying the temple, and their inability to find a just reason to execute him

 2. The death

- “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit” and “Lord, do not hold this sin against them”: same posture as Jesus

 C. Jesus’ revelation to Stephen (v. 55)

1. In his physical reality, Stephen is alone, surrounded by powerful men who have all the authority

2. But spiritual reality is opened up, and he knows Jesus is with him and Jesus has all the authority

 2. Stephen’s statement in v. 56 weaves together two OT figures

a. The Son of Man from Daniel 7:13-14 who receives an eternal kingdom

b. David’s “Lord” who receives the honor of the right hand of God in Psalm 110:1-2

III. Reflections on the Story

A. Acts is about witnesses who follow the Great Commission (Mt 28:18-20), trusting that Jesus has authority over every situation (“All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me”), and that he is with them in every situation (“I am with you to the end of the age”). These witnesses re-present the truth, love, and suffering of Jesus to the world.

B. Stephen is an example of redemptive suffering

1. Colossians 1:24: Paul saw himself as filling up what was lacking in Christ’s sufferings. He’s an embodied example of suffering for Jesus for those who weren’t there to actually watch Jesus suffer on the cross.

2. Consider how the love and suffering of Jesus was manifested in Paul’s life (2 Corinthians 4:7-11)

3. We fill up what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ when we share his love and truth with others and suffer as a result (we might suffer being inconvenienced, burdened, persecuted, etc.). Our love-driven suffering gives people a tangible experience of the suffering of Jesus

 4. Stephen’s suffering had a profound impact

 a. Potentially on Saul

 b. Certainly on the early church (see 8:1, 4)

 c. Even on us 2000 years later

 5. Redemptive suffering

a. The world thinks suffering is either worthless or possibly helpful in making us stronger

b. But the Bible has a category for suffering that brings redemption to others as they see the faithful, loving suffering of believers

c. Church history is full of stories of men and women who suffered much for the sake of Christ, and their faithful suffering had a profound impact on others.

d. We shouldn’t seek out suffering, but “We are all called love people in a way that takes risks. And by our risking they can see, in our willingness to be inconvenienced, lose comfort, or even suffer for them, the very nature of the afflictions of Christ that were offered for them.” – John Piper

e. Consider the example of John Robertson McQuilkin who retired from his presidency at Columbia International University to care fulltime for his wife, Muriel, who suffered from Alzheimer’s Disease.