

“HE STANDS FOR YOU”

Pastor Mike Corwin

TEXT: ACTS 7:55-60

GOD’S WORD: PSALM 31:1-5, 15-16

I – CRYING:

Having a baby in the house has reminded me of a simple rule of life. When they are hurt...they want their mother. When they fall, when they pinch their fingers in the drawer, when their pants are wet, when they are hungry, and when things just aren’t going their way they start crying and they want their mother before anyone else.

When you grow up you still have this instinct don’t you? When you don’t feel well, when you’re sick, when you break a bone, when you are worried about the test, when you don’t make cheerleader, or when you break up from a boyfriend or girlfriend...you want your mother. God put it in our genes to know that mothers can make everything all right. We recognize such things when we celebrate their special day today – mother’s day.

So now you’re an adult. But you still have bad days don’t you? You still get sick, you still break bones? The boss yells at you, you don’t get that raise, or worse yet you get laid off or fired. Or maybe your health turns for the worse. You need that operation. Chemo or radiation is on your agenda in the near future. You need heart bypass surgery or you have to change your eating habits or any list of other diseases or maladies that can strike the human body. Who do you call on now? Maybe your mother will still hold you and tell you it’s going to be okay. Or maybe a spouse or significant other steps in to take her place.

We all have those moments, times, disasters, or just problems where we need someone to call on to get us out of or help us cope with what life is throwing at us. The question is...WHO?

II – THE ISRAELITES KNEW:

As I read the Bible it becomes very clear that the Israelites in the Old Testament knew who it was they needed to call on during their times of trouble...GOD.

I find what is probably the best known example in the book of Exodus where God is calling Moses to go to Egypt and lead his people out of slavery. It is there that we read:

⁷ Then the LORD told him, “I have certainly seen the oppression of my people in Egypt. I have heard their cries of distress because of their harsh slave drivers. Yes, I am aware of their suffering. ⁸ So I have come down to rescue them from the power of the Egyptians and lead them out of Egypt into their own fertile and spacious land. ⁹ Look! The cry of the people of Israel has reached me, and I have seen how harshly the Egyptians abuse them. ¹⁰ Now go, for I am sending you to Pharaoh. You must lead my people Israel out of Egypt.”
Exodus 3:7-8(a) & 9-10 (NLT)

The people cried out in their troubles, God heard them, and God answered their prayers and set in motion a rescue plan to help them and comfort them.

The great Israelite King, David, knew who to call on when he had troubles. When he was being attacked or persecuted, when things weren't going according to plan, he called on God for help. That's what the Psalm he wrote and we read this morning was all about. It is to God he goes for protection. To God he goes to to be saved from his troubles. He asks God to listen to his pleas and to protect him. He sums it all up by saying that God is his rock and his fortress and it is in that place, with that God that he will be safe. David is saying it is God that he has faith in and trusts completely to help him through anything. Nothing else and no one else.

III – STEPHEN:

Our faith in God can teach us how to die in quiet confidence in God's love but also how to live trusting God and committing our spirits to him as David said in verse 5 and as Jesus quoted on the cross. This is the greatest show of faith that I can see someone making to entrust their spirits to the Living God and not just in death but in life too. I see this kind of faith in the person of Stephen in the book of Acts.

Stephen was one of seven men chosen by the Apostles to serve Jesus by serving the people. There was a complaint that some of the widows weren't getting their fair share of food rations each day. They decided they were supposed to be teaching people about Jesus, not running a food program, so they chose these seven to take care of this area of the ministry. Stephen was chosen and the Bible tells us that he was a man ***“full of faith and the Holy Spirit”*** (6:5). It even tells us a couple verses later that ***“Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, performed amazing signs among the people”*** (6:8).

Seems that Stephen was not just a waiter...he had the anointing of God on him and went about preaching and teaching. This caused others to question him and his knowledge and he got into an argument with him over some of his teachings. They couldn't win because of his wisdom so they got some others to lie about him and accuse him of being blasphemous. This got the people riled up as well as the church elders and teachers of religious law. This got him arrested and

taken before the high council of the church. As he stood before the council it says that they all stared at him because he “his face became as bright as an angel’s” which I’m guessing meant that the Holy Spirit was not only with him but all over him.

Welllllll, when you’re under the influence of the Holy Spirit there’s not much left to do but testify to the Good News of Jesus and that’s what he does in Chapter 7. He first gives them a history lesson in their own faith citing the stories of Abraham, Jacob, and Joseph. He reminds them of the story of how Moses was used by God to deliver their people from slavery in Egypt. But he also reminds them of their sinful natures and past as these same people turned on God and made a golden calf in the desert to worship. He then brings their greatest king, David, into the sermon as well.

But then he calls them on the carpet for being a stubborn people. Calls them heathens and recalls how they treated the prophets God had sent to his people to try to get them back on track. Even when he sent his own Son to save them all they betrayed and murdered him.

Well that didn’t go down well with the council. Matter of fact it says they were infuriated by his words and became enraged.

TEXT:

And that’s where we pick up the story with this morning’s text...

Acts 7:55-60 (NLT)

⁵⁵ But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed steadily into heaven and saw the glory of God, and he saw Jesus standing in the place of honor at God’s right hand. ⁵⁶ And he told them, “Look, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing in the place of honor at God’s right hand!”

⁵⁷ Then they put their hands over their ears and began shouting. They rushed at him ⁵⁸ and dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. His accusers took off their coats and laid them at the feet of a young man named Saul.

⁵⁹ As they stoned him, Stephen prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” ⁶⁰ He fell to his knees, shouting, “Lord, don’t charge them with this sin!” And with that, he died.

Evidently Stephen didn’t care that he had offended them. He was telling them the truth and it was their problem if they didn’t like it. As he looked up to heaven and told them about the glory of God he was seeing it put them over the edge.

They rushed him, grabbed him, and drug him outside and began to stone him. They were proper about it. They took their coats off and handed them to a young Pharisee who was standing there. He was named Saul and would later become the Apostle Paul.

Stoning was no not a pleasant death. It usually meant they put you in a hole in the ground and then threw rocks...not stones or pebbles, but large rocks, until your body was broken; you were dead, and covered by rocks.

But look at what Stephen did, even during a time of violent persecution and death. He was so trusting in God and in love with Jesus that he quoted the Words of Jesus on the cross as he asked Jesus to receive him spirit and asked him to forgive those who were killing him.

But it's in another part of this story and text that I see the answer to who to trust and call on when you need help of any kind. In verses 55 & 56 it says:

⁵⁵ But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed steadily into heaven and saw the glory of God, and he saw Jesus standing in the place of honor at God's right hand. ⁵⁶ And he told them, "Look, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing in the place of honor at God's right hand!"

This is one of those times where if you're not reading the Bible closely you'll miss an important piece of information. In the Apostles Creed we heard Pastor Brad recite to us last week in tells us that Jesus "ascended into heaven where he sitteth on the right hand side of God the Father." Matter of fact everyplace I see it mention Jesus in heaven with God it says that he is sitting on his right side. But here...when Stephen was in trouble...when Stephen was being murdered...when Stephen needed him most it says that Jesus STOOD UP!

V – HE STANDS FOR YOU:

Do you see it? Do you grasp it? The person you can call on no matter what's happening to you is Jesus, your Lord and Savior. If you have faith in him, if you trust in him, if you love him, then he loves you too. And when you need him the most HE STANDS UP FOR YOU!

It is kind of scary right now. The world is changing in ways we've never seen. More people have dies in our country than those we lost in the Vietnam War. New cases of Covid-19 are still happening. We can't shop or visit the way we used to. We don't know if our grocery/meat supplies will last. We don't know what's going to happen to our paychecks or economy. We don't know if one of our loved ones may be a victim. We don't know what the new normal will end of being. These are all surrounded by questions and uncertainty.

But I do know this, believe this, and have put my faith and trust in this...GOD HAS HEARD OUR CRIES AND JESUS IS ALREADY STANDING UP FOR ALL OF US. SOMEHOW THROUGH IT ALL WE WILL SEE HIS GLORY. AMEN