

Acts Week 11 | Joy in Death
Redemption Hill Church | Simon Murphy
Sunday 29th March 2009

Acts 7.54-8.1: Then tell the story in a graphic way.

How can you die with such **joy and peace**? Stephen isn't one extreme example of this! **Jesus** himself said 'Father forgive them, they know not what they are doing', and the early church had a reputation that attracted keen interest "they die well"! **How can you die well?**

For the answer, I must tell you the story of a man by the name of **Jim Elliot**.

Matthew 16.24: *"If anyone would come after me he should deny himself, pick up his cross and follow me."* We think that this 'cross we are to bear' is suffering. But it's an **instrument of death**.

The invitation of Christianity is an **invitation of death!** We start our walk with Christ by dying.

Galatians 2.20: *"I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."*

I hope this is not news to you and that you didn't come under false pretenses! Our Lord and example died, and we are called to follow Him!

I almost hear an objection 'but Jesus came that we might have life and have life to the full'. And this is true, but we sometimes think that the life that Jesus came to give us is an **upgrade of our old life**. It's like **Life Version 2**. Some bug fixes. You had this car in life 1, well in life 2 you get this car.

But scripture doesn't tell us that the life Jesus came to give us is an upgrade. It's not an improved life, it's a **NEW** life. And people who live two lives at one time, we normally call them schizophrenic, hypocrites, or multiple lives – one family here, another there.

For us to live this new life, we must die. **And why must we die?**

The old life we once lived was hostile to God. It was sold to sin. We don't need an upgrade, an overhaul, no improvement will do! **The old must go, the new must come!** **2 Cor 5.17:** *"If anyone is in Christ he is a new creation, the old has passed away, the new has come".* You may be here and feel like you need some help. **You don't need help, you need to die.**

The bible makes it clear that we die to ourselves. **We so identify with Christ's death** on the cross that it is **as though it is our own**. We reckon ourselves dead to sin, and alive to God.

Romans 6.3: *"Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ have been baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life".*

This means coming to the end of ourselves in our **desires, our dreams, our will, etc.**

This is subtle. Me as a pastor. 1 Cor 15.31: *I die daily.*

This is going to take FAITH. **Matt 10.39:** *"Whoever finds his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it". This is the great paradox of the Christian life".*

Faith **comes as you see God's unfolding plan is history.** Stephen had seen something of God's workings in History. He saw that life was bigger than Himself. "History is your story".

What does this new life look like?

Following Jesus (this is what Stephen did).

John 21.22: You follow me! We follow him in miracles, teaching, seeking and saving the lost.

We become like Him as we know Him, worship Him. Faith can't be in theory, it has to be real.

We have a new King, His will is to be done in our lives! Oh that we would have the same attitude as Paul. **Acts 20.24: 'but I do not count my life as of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish the course and the ministry I received from the Lord Jesus'.**

Jesus knew that the disciples would suffer in their following of Him. John 15.20 : If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also'.

Col 1.24: Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, the church'.

"There is no sustained, loving witness to Jesus without sacrifice" John Piper.

He calls us to follow him in his sufferings because this life of joyful suffering for Jesus sake shows that he is more valuable than all earthly treasures that the world lives for.

If you only love Jesus for what he will apparently give you, then who do you really love? Who is the King of your life? But if you suffer with Him you prove that he is your ultimate treasure and you ultimately glorify him.

I would be lying to you if I told you that no one here will be martyred one day. 65% last cent.

Following Jesus is costly and worth it. Jesus is totally upfront about the cost. Some of the best Christians I have led to Christ have been those who have stumbled over the cost. (Luke 14.28)

You would only suffer for something precious, a **treasure. He saw Jesus.**

He becomes precious to us, lovely, awesome, all **consuming!** The object of highest value. When we see his value, we gladly bow our knee!

The implication of treasure is **Joy. His life fills us. Consumes us. The joy of the Holy Spirit in our lives.**

Heb 12.2 For the joy that was set before Him he endured the cross, scorning it's shame.

There is an incredible peace and joy that comes when you have not a care in the world... when you died you are free to live entirely for Jesus, no other concerns, and you have his Joy in your heart. You can stare death in the face, because death loses it's sting, you can say with Paul "to live is Christ and to die is gain". Death is winning, not dying.

"He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep, to gain what he cannot lose". Jim Elliot

We can know and love God because the perfect one died and laid down his life. For not his own reason, not because he needed new life, but for us. So we don't do it to pay for sin, we do it for joy's sake, we do it to gain Christ and the new life that comes as a result, and to show the world His all surpassing awesomeness.