

Acts 6:8-15

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[0 : 00] Today is what is often referred to as Palm Sunday. Jesus comes into Jerusalem as welcomed by the crowds, the creator of the world.

What I'd like us to do to do that is, I just want to encourage us, let's applaud him. That's what we're doing, saying, hey, you're worthy of it all, yes. And we love you and we welcome you in, and we want to celebrate who you are.

So we're going to just applaud Jesus. If you'd like to join us, feel free to do so. We love you, Lord. We welcome you here today, Lord. We delight ourselves in you. You're worthy of it all.

You're worthy of it all. Thank you. Wonderful, wonderful. Please take your seat.

Well, hi there. My name is Andrew. If you've not met, I'm one of the leaders here in Harvest Church, part of the leadership team here in Harvest Church. And it's my privilege today to be sharing God's word with us.

[1 : 20] And we're going to be digging into Acts chapter 6 again. If you have a Bible, you may want to turn to it. And you can read from your Bible, but it will also appear on the screen.

So you're very welcome just to watch and look. Today, the passage I've been given is Acts chapter 6, verses 8 to 15.

And what I'd actually like to do is read a bit outside of that as well. What I'd like to do is focus on this person called Stephen.

Now, actually, last week, Tim mentioned Stephen in his preach. He was one of the seven people who were recognised, who are notably full of the spirit and wisdom.

We read in Acts, the early part of Acts 6. I just want to consider a little bit more about Stephen, because in two weeks' time, then, Christine will also be looking at Stephen's martyrdom and his death as he stoned to death, and his speech to the Sanhedrin.

[2 : 26] And he's a really major character. And I think sometimes we can forget how important his example is to us. He's a man who, in so many ways, reflects the character of Jesus, reflects Jesus.

Some people, some commentators even said he's the perfect witness to Christ, as he demonstrates a life sold out for God, fully surrendered to God and his spirit's leading.

And, of course, he's also known as Christianity's first martyr. And so, I'm just going to draw on a few passages. And the first one is this.

In Acts 6, where we get this list of people, Stephen is the only person who gets an extra description there. And he's described in this way, A man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit.

A man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit. I don't know about you. I just think, oh, I'd like to get to know him. Wow, he must be quite some guy. He used to be described in that way.

[3 : 35] A man full of faith and the Holy Spirit. A man who clearly served the church well. He wasn't one of the apostles, and yet he served the church well. He was part of the church which grew exponentially in this season.

And, yeah, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit. I wonder what Luke, the author here of Acts, means when he says full.

Full of faith and the Holy Spirit. I think sometimes we can use words and don't really think about them. What does it mean to be full of faith and the Holy Spirit?

Well, for me that means there's probably no room for anything else. If I'm filled full, that means I'm ready to overflow. There's no room for anything else.

I'm defined by, I'm shaped by what I'm filled with. You meet somebody who's full of hatred and you know you've met that person. You meet somebody who's full of joy and you know you've met that person.

[4 : 34] Here, he's described as a man full of faith. Wow. And full of the Holy Spirit. Ooh. Been a great person to meet.

A man full of faith. Well, faith when put into action, which faith is, we're told to do, James 1.22, makes a difference. And he did. He made a difference among all the people. He was part of this team.

And as we'll go on to read, he made a difference in other ways. A man full of the Spirit also changes everything. A man who's walking by the Spirit. Allowing the Holy Spirit to direct his ways.

Elsewhere we read this, Acts 6 verse 8. Now Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people.

And I'd like to suggest to you, the Holy Spirit brings grace alive in us. As he's full of faith, that is, he's put his trust in God. He's full of the Holy Spirit.

[5 : 40] And the Spirit brings God's grace to life in us. What do we mean by grace? We'll come back to that in a moment. And also a man full of God's power, who sees miraculous signs and wonders amongst the people.

Did miraculous signs and wonders amongst the people. Wow. I don't know about you. I think this is a key guide to get to know. To look at, to understand a bit of his life.

And then in Acts 6.10, we're told this. That the, they could not stand up against his wisdom or the Spirit by whom he spoke.

Wow. Wow. The rulers, the people who are in opposition to him. They could not stand up against his wisdom or the Spirit by whom he spoke.

A man of great wisdom. And you'll see much more of that when he, when we explore his preach, or effectively his preach to the Sanhedrin in two weeks time.

[6 : 41] Christine does that. Which is a wonderful confession of his faith. And the story of God's people are just amazing, wonderful passage of Scripture.

A very rich passage of Scripture. But also the Spirit who enables him to speak. So I'd like to draw three things. From these passages, I'd like to draw three things for us to focus on.

Each of these, we need to understand, build on each other. Faith. Trust in God. That's what faith is. It's trusting or putting our trust in God.

It's a fundamental starting block. I wonder how, full of faith, what's that mean for you today? Are you full of faith?

Stephen, full of faith seems to suggest an absolute trust in God. In other words, the battle for who's in control of his life has been won.

[7 : 44] And it's God. It's God who shapes his worldview. It's God who helps him to see what's going on.

It's God who shapes his life, his thinking, his actions. He's put his faith in God. This isn't just, I put a little bit of my faith in God. He's full of faith in God.

Now, I don't know about you, but when I read this, I have to admit that at times, I'm not full of faith in God. At times, I think the better question would be, how much faith have you got in God?

Or do I even have faith in God at this moment in time? Perhaps some circumstances going on. Am I full of faith? Wow.

Full of faith. Totally surrendered to him. I mean, the Bible doesn't seem to have grades of faith, does it? But it's clear it's something the disciples struggled with at times.

[8 : 53] And we can read that in some of the Gospel accounts. I wonder, how do you get full of faith? When I think about it, for me, it's when I choose to fix my eyes on Jesus.

When I choose to fix my eyes on God. When I make choices to say, yes, you are faithful God. God is described that way. God is, he's described as the faithful God.

Deuteronomy 7 verse 9. God who is faithful. 1 Corinthians 1 verse 9. We need to encounter him to know he's faithful.

And to surrender ourselves to him. If we don't encounter him, whether that be through the scriptures, by spirit, through prayer, through worship. In fellowship, we tend to lose our focus on how faithful he is.

And how much we can put our trust in him. Faith leads somewhere. How much faith have we got at this moment in time?

[9 : 56] It's a question that's good to ask ourselves. Am I full of faith in God? That doesn't mean I have to work harder. Am I going to accept who God is? Am I going to consider who he is and gaze

on him?

And such that, hey, I just want to put my trust in him. Absolutely and totally. We've got a dear friend at the moment in our church, Ron, who's quite ill. I say quite ill.

Very ill. And Margaret's here. It's lovely to have Margaret with us this morning. Bless you. And they're going through a tough journey. Ron has a brain tumour. I can't go into the full detail of it. But what I love is whenever I seem to get a message from them, it ends with this. God's in control. That's faith in God. Whatever's going to happen, God's in control.

I wonder how we're doing with that in our lives. Is God in control? Is our faith in him? Or are we getting overcome by our circumstances?

[10:53] Is our eyesight being taken off God and perhaps into what's going on in our life today? The challenges, whatever. Well, friends, we can't just put our faith in God in a vacuum.

We need to look at God. We need to consider him. That's why reading the Bible is so important. Why being filled with his spirit who draws us into intimacy with him. Prayer, worship, those are all things.

They're expressions of faith which draw us closer to him. And allow us to grow in our faith, our trust in God. For Stephen, it results in this.

It results in surrender to God. Faith results in surrender. What does surrender mean? Well, saying, hey, God, I recognise who you are.

And I want you to be in control. I want you to be in control. I don't want to be in control any longer. I want you to be in control. And we see that part of that surrender is that, therefore, Stephen is full of God's Holy Spirit.

[11:58] How about you? I long to be full of God's Holy Spirit. I often use this analogy. I'm going to mention it again. Apologies if anybody gets bored by my sailing analogies.

But being full of the Spirit is like a sail on a boat. Being full of the wind, which propels the boat along. But the person at the helm of the boat, that is you at the helm of the boat, you can decide whether that sail is full of the wind of God or empty by how you steer the boat.

By the course you take on the boat. And do I position myself to be full of God's Holy Spirit? Do I make those choices as I put my trust in God?

Do I make those choices of surrender? Yes, God, you are God. You are my Lord. And I want you to be in control. So I position myself to be full of your Holy Spirit.

So I surrender myself to you, Lord. I position myself to be full of your Holy Spirit. I long to be filled with your Holy Spirit. And God loves to fill his people with his Spirit. There's no question about that.

[13:05] Scriptures are very clear. You may want to look in Luke chapter 10. It describes how much the Father loves to give his Holy Spirit.

And the Spirit in turn draws us to know more of the Father's great love. More of his grace. More of his mercy. That takes me on to the third aspect I want to mention.

Grace. God's lavish love revealed to us in Christ's obedient sacrifice. He told this. His divine power has given us all we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him.

His Spirit has given us all we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him. Wow. We won't be lacking anything if we draw on the grace of God.

If we enjoy God's grace as we recognize all that he's done. And we welcome that in our lives and we say, Yeah, I love your grace. I love the fact you love me.

[14:09] I love the fact that you've welcomed me into your family. Am I full of God's grace? How's that come out to others? How's it overflow in your life to others? Do people, when they meet you, go, Wow, they're different.

They're not the same as the rest of the world. We start by putting our faith in God. As we fix our eyes on him. As we surrender ourselves to him and allow him to come and fulfill us with his Holy Spirit.

He stirs up the grace of God in our lives. Which in turn, for me, which in turn makes me want to go, Hey God, I just want to focus more on you. And so these three things, they interact with each other. It's not like it's step one, step two, step three. They all interact with each other. As I consider more of the greatness of God. As I surrender more of myself to God. I understand more of his grace and mercy in my life.

And I welcome his spirit more in my life. As I welcome his spirit more in my life. I'm stirred closer to the Father. And I understand how much the Father loves me. And I'm secure in the love of God.

[15:11] Look at Galatians chapter four. I'm a child of God. And as a child of God, I know I'm loved by God. Oh wow, do I want to put my trust more and more in our heavenly Father.

Put my faith more and more in God. Can you see how these three things, they work together? They work together. Now the end result of all of this, as you read in the rest of the account.

Which I'm not going to read just today. But you can. What I'm not going to read is this. Signs and wonders. Power. Wisdom. Ultimately, the ability for him to go and be martyred for his trust in God. Full of God's grace. His Holy Spirit's power. What an example to us. What a very provocative example to us. And in a few minutes, we're going to celebrate God's grace revealed in Christ. Through taking communion together in just a few minutes. And before that, we're going to have a song of surrender. And I want to encourage us, let's use that as a way of surrendering ourselves to God.

[16:20] I was saying, yeah, God, I do really want you to be on the throne of my life. I do want you to be in control of my life. But just before we do that, I want to bring a response. I want to ask this question.

Is Stephen's life a model we can follow? Because I think sometimes we can look at people in the Bible and think, oh, yeah, but they were special. And I'm not. And my suggestion to you is this. There are three things which we can all take steps in to be more and more like him, but ultimately more and more like Christ. Full of faith in God.

Surrendered fully to his Lordship. Full of the Holy Spirit. Full of the Holy Spirit. Secure in God's love. Full of his power.

Full of God's grace. Defining how we live. Can we have the band back, please? That would be wonderful. So we're going to come and we're going to continue our worship of God.

[17:25] We're going to continue to gaze upon him. And in probably five or so minutes time, we're going to break bread together, reminding us of the sufficiency of Christ's death on the cross for each and every one of us.

That we can surrender ourselves to God. I just want to pray for us. Father, we look upon Stephen, we say thank you for his amazing example to us.

We're inspired by his life. But more than that, we're inspired by Jesus. Because he was just imitating him. Draw us closer to you, we ask today.

Stir faith in our heart to trust you. Help us to see your greatness. And that we can surrender ourselves completely to you. Fill us with your Holy Spirit.

Oh, Spirit of God, full of fresh on each and every one of us. And fill us with your grace. That we'll be defined by your grace, your love, your mercy over our lives.

[18:32] In Jesus' most precious name. Amen.