

The Cornerstone of Forgiveness

Acts 6:1-9; 7:2a, 51-60

Introduction

Stephen says two things while being stoned that remind us of Jesus when He was crucified. In **verse 59** of our **Acts** reading, Stephen says, *“Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.”* This reminds us of Jesus in **Luke 23:46**, when He said, *“Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit!”* Then in **verse 60** of our text, Stephen says, *“Lord, do not hold this sin against them,”* reminding us of Jesus in **Luke 23:34**, when He says, *“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”* But when you think about it, why shouldn't Stephen's words remind us of Jesus? We read in **verse 5** that Stephen was *full of faith and the Holy Spirit*. The Greek word *pleres* means full, abounding in, complete, completely occupied with. It carries the meaning of being controlled by. Stephen is allowing himself to be controlled by or led by the Holy Spirit. Since he is following the leading of the Spirit up until his death, it should not surprise us that his words echo those of Christ on the cross. Stephen is pointing us to Jesus, so we look at what the other two readings today say about Jesus.

Cornerstone and Stumbling Block

We read in **1 Peter 2** that Jesus is a stone. Peter says that Jesus is *the stone the builders rejected* and that He *has become the cornerstone* (**1 Peter 2:7**). Who was Jesus rejected by? He was rejected by the religious leaders of the Jewish nation. What were they builders of? They were supposed to be building the house of God. Jesus was rejected by them, and God has made Him the cornerstone of the house of God.

Cornerstone of the Church

This makes Jesus the cornerstone of the church. The cornerstone is the foundational stone on the corner of the building. It is the most important stone in the building because it ties everything together. Jesus ties everything together because He brings Jews and Gentiles together as the family of God, the household of God, the church of God.

Stumbling Block to the Disobedient

Along with being the cornerstone of the church, Christ is also a *stone of stumbling* and a *rock of offense* (**v. 8**). People stumble over Him because they *disobey the Word*. (Read **1 Corinthians 1:21-25**). Christ is a stumbling block to unbelievers because He doesn't fit the mold of this world's wisdom. Let's face it, salvation by the cross of Christ just doesn't make sense. The world's thinking is, *what kind of a God would send His only Son to die for people who are so bad?* It's just not logical. There must be another way, a better way, a way that makes more sense.

The Way

But Jesus Himself said in our Gospel lesson today, *“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me”* (**John 14:6**). Notice, Jesus doesn't say that He is *a* way. He says that He is *the* way. That's exclusive. Jesus is the only way to heaven and salvation. He is the one and only truth. All the truths of man are nothing when compared to Jesus. And because He is the truth, we

can believe what He says. Jesus is also the only source of life. He is the one who gave us physical life and He is the one who gives us spiritual life.

The Way of Forgiveness

The way to heaven and salvation is through the cross. That's the way of forgiveness. And forgiveness is what we need. *All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23)*. There is no getting around it. We are all sinners and God cannot stand sin. He can't abide a single iota of it in His presence. For us to have life, we must be forgiven. That's where Jesus and the cross come into play. Christ bought our forgiveness with His blood shed on the cross. He's paid the wages of sin. He died in our place, so that our sins are forgiven.

The Cornerstone of Forgiveness

So, we see that Christ is the cornerstone of forgiveness. That's the foundation the church is built on. We are all sinners, but we are sinners saved by grace. Martin Luther's term for what we are as members of the church was sinner/saints. Just as a cornerstone draws everything together and makes the building secure, Christ draws everything together and makes the church secure through His forgiveness. Luther said that salvation by grace through faith in Christ alone is the pillar of the church and if we lose sight of that, we lose the church.

Means of Grace

We access this forgiveness through the Means of Grace. God works through His Word, Holy Baptism, and Holy Communion to bring us this forgiveness and life in Christ. They are the cement that holds us to the **CORNERSTONE OF FORGIVENESS**. Hear the Word. Receive the body and blood of Christ. Be attached to Jesus, the Cornerstone through Word and Sacrament.

*And the peace of God,
Which surpasses all understanding,
Will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*
