

Approaching God

Read this portion of Psalm 10 and begin with an opening prayer

The LORD is king forever and ever; the nations perish from his land. O LORD, you hear the desire of the afflicted; you will strengthen their heart; you will incline your ear to do justice to the fatherless and the oppressed, so that man who is of the earth may strike terror no more. (Psalm 10:16-18)

Not only does this Psalm provide encouragement for Christians who grow overwhelmed with evil in their world; it calls them us to pursue what the Lord calls true religion—to care for the “orphans and widows in their affliction” (James 1:27). Because we’ve been rescued from our own distressing sin and darkness and made sons and daughters of God, we are to pursue others who need rescue and help as well. Start in prayer today by remembering this sweet, and high calling.

Acts 6:1-15

Passage Introduction:

Acts 6 introduces Stephen, the first martyr of the Christian church. The first half of the chapter records a division that emerged in the early church and the establishment of a diaconate in order to resolve that problem. Stephen was among those first deacons. The second half of the chapter focuses on Stephen’s evangelistic ministry and the opposition that begins mounting against him—opposition that will ultimately lead to his martyrdom at the end of chapter 7.

Bible Reading, Study & Meditation

Start with Engaging the Text: Take a few minutes to highlight, circle, or underline key words.

My Notes:

Acts 6:1-15 - 1 In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenistic Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. **2** So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, “It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. **3** Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them **4** and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.” **5** This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. **6** They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. **7** So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.

vs. 15 - In the Bible, angels are not sweet, “cherubic” creatures, seeking to bring cuteness to a room. They are messengers of God. They inspire awe and fear. Their purpose was to bring a message from the one true God. This is the ministry of the word of God.

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8 Now Stephen, a man full of God’s grace and power, performed great wonders and signs among the people. **9** Opposition arose, however, from members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called)—Jews of Cyrene and Alexandria as well as the provinces of Cilicia and Asia—who began to argue with Stephen. **10** But they could not stand up against the wisdom the Spirit gave him as he spoke. **11** Then they secretly persuaded some men to say, “We have heard Stephen speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God.” **12** So they stirred up the people and the elders and the teachers of the law. They seized Stephen and brought him before the Sanhedrin. **13** They produced false witnesses, who testified, “This fellow never stops speaking against this holy place and against the law. **14** For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs Moses handed down to us.” **15** All who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel.

Questions for Reflection & Meditation

- What does this passage today show me about God for which I can thank or praise him?
- In this passage the disciples are in danger of becoming diverted from the task to which God has called them to. How are you susceptible to the same danger? What sort of “good” things can divert you from the “best” things in following Jesus?

Key Takeaway:

What truth do I most need to remember from today’s passage? How would this truth change my life if I took it seriously? Why might God be bringing this truth to your attention today?

Close in Prayer:

When Luke says that Stephen had the face of an angel he was commenting on his role as a true messenger of the word of God. Luke is not asking us to picture Stephen with an angel-like face, but rather, with an expression that denoted his determination to speak God’s word fearlessly, faithfully, and forcefully to the end. Pray that this might be true of you as well today.