When the World Opposes the Church January 29, 2023

*Acts 6:8-15, 7:57-60 Series: Unstoppable Church*

I cannot give you the formula for success, but I can give you the formula for failure, which is: Try to please everybody. – Herbert Bayard Swope

Intro: Ivan Provorov takes the heat

Myth #1: If I start at the bottom, I’ll stay there

1. Stephen served tables so the apostles could preach

v. 2 *It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables.*

v. 5 *they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit*

1. Humble service is the path to greatness in God’s kingdom

v. 8 *And Stephen, full of grace and power, was doing great wonders and signs among the people.*

v. 10 *they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking*

Philippians 2:3 *Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.*

* Have you ever faced an Ivan Provorov moment?
* Why would someone who could preach as persuasively as Stephen help take on a widows’ food distribution ministry?
* Why is humility such an essential requirement for being used by God?

Myth #2: If I’m nice, everyone will like me

1. How could they not like me?

v. 15 *And gazing at him, all who sat in the council saw that his face was like the face of an angel.*

1. Jesus’ followers can expect the same opposition Jesus faced

v. 9 *Then some of those who belonged to the synagogue … rose up and disputed with Stephen.*

v. 11 *they secretly instigated men who said, “We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God.”*

vv. 12-13 *they stirred up the people and the elders and the scribes, and they came upon him and seized him … and they set up false witnesses*

John 15:20 “*A servant is not greater than his master.” If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you.*

1. When people’s power and beliefs are threatened, they react

v. 14 *we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and will change the customs that Moses delivered to us*

Matthew 10:16 *I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.*

Luke 6:26 *Woe to you, when all people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets.*

1 Peter 2:20 *For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing …*

* How could people justify stoning someone whose face shone like an angel?
* Jesus promised us persecution. Why are we still surprised when it comes?
* How do we know whether it’s our godly convictions and not our own sin and stubbornness that’s causing our persecution?

Myth #3: If I’m cancelled, it’ll all be for nothing

1. Stephen taught the church how to die like Jesus

Acts 7:57-58 *But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together at him. Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him.*

Acts 7:59 *And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.”*

Acts 7:60 *And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” And when he had said this, he fell asleep.*

1. Stephen taught the church how to speak under pressure

Acts 8:1 *And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.*

Acts 8:4 *Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word.*

* Jesus had already showed us how to die for the faith. What did Stephen’s death accomplish that Jesus’ didn’t?
* What should be different about how a Christian dies?
* How has seeing the way that godly Christians have died affected you?
* Where do you most need courage to witness for Jesus?

Study ahead: Next week, we’ll study Exodus 1:1-22

Notes