

2/2/25

Sermon – Never Give Up Hope – Part 2

Scripture – Acts 7,8,9

Main Message – Spreading the Gospel is done **best** by your lifestyle – not the words.

There once was a man called Saul of Tarsus. He was of the tribe of Benjamin and though he grew up in a Greek setting, his parents and he faithfully followed the laws of Judaism. His life helped him to grow in stature and become a Pharisee. He also was a Roman Citizen, which is a rarity indeed and often cost a lot of money though he likely inherited it. He was highly educated in both the Law and the Prophets and the oral traditions of the Pharisees. He was a very zealous and effective persecutor of The Way, which is what the early Christians called the new religion.

Read Acts regarding Stephen chapter 6. (Make note of who Stephen disputed with, Those who say they are Jews but are not... they are everywhere)

Read portions of **Acts 7 in particular vs 51-60**. (Make note that if you can't beat the truth, then make up lies. Note that Stephen could have walked away, but he continued speaking the truth and calling them out in public with the truth. Stephen died speaking the truth. Stephen died begging the Lord to not hold this sin against them, Stephen's enemies. That is the faith of a Christian walking in the Spirit.

This is part 2 of Never Give Up Hope. So how can you win with truth when the lies, subterfuge and ultimately capital punishment (Death) comes against you? And what value is it? Let's read on.

Read 8:1-3 (Yeah Saul was quite the problem for Christians. They were desperate to eradicate the church. Let us not forget that Saul of Tarsus was extremely well versed in scripture such that we could not likely imagine. Yet he persecuted the church even though many were believers.

Read Acts 9:1-5 – There is nothing new under the sun. Lawfare had come in great earnestness against the early church and they suffered for it. Saul was chief among them, and he was an expert in the law. What hope do Christians have?

In Verse 5 there is a portion contained in the KJV that is not seen in many other versions. It reads, **“it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.”** The wisdom of Stephen, the number who believe upon Jesus and forgoing the traditions of men and focus solely on Scripture, was gnawing at Saul and the chinks in armor were falling away. Then Jesus came into his heart in a rush and changed everything.

Read 9:6-15.

Saul became a new creation, named Paul. With his knowledge, background, status as a Roman Citizen, the Faith was spread and churches established because of his path. Stephen basically had live a life of faith and die for that faith. Live your life as a Christian in full view. Spread the Gospel by your deeds and a few words. Never shy away from the church. Paul changed the world, because Stephen had perfect faith in God and the conversion of Paul from facing the Word Made Flesh put the world on a new path. Anyone have to wonder if Stephen is with God? Or Paul?

You reap what you sow. Ultimately Paul was executed in Rome by Emperor Nero for his Christian faith - which is the definition of irony.

When you are bold like Stephen, you can expect to make enemies. If you have faith like Stephen, you can be a part of changing the world. Like Stephen, you may not get to see it, but our Father in Heaven will see it. I'd chose that outcome **every single day**.