

Theme: As You Are Going: The Church on Mission

Message: Holy Spirit Endowment – Acts 6:8-15

Aim: Being on mission needs HS grace/faith, power, & wisdom.

Intro: The word “endowment” means “a large amount of money (assets) given to an institution or cause;” or it can mean “a talent, quality or faculty furnished to someone or something.” Colleges often receive financial endowments from rich alumni. The United States Declaration of Independence declares that “all men (mankind – men, women, children) are endowed by their Creator w/certain unalienable rights... among these are Life, Liberty, & the pursuit of happiness...” Those rights are valued highly. We recognize that some people are gifted – endowed w/great intelligence (geniuses) or great athletic ability (professional athletes, Olympians). Did you realize that Christians are endowed w/gifts of great value & given great abilities, beyond their human nature? Theme: As you are going: the Church on Mission. It’s important to understand that this mission is beyond our means/abilities; but we have Holy Spirit endowment! Acts 6:8-15 [READ] This passage focuses 1st of all on I) **Stephen** - You may remember a few weeks ago, before Mission Conf, that Pastor Derek led us through the 1st part of this chapter concerning a conflict in the early Church between those called the Hellenists (Greek speaking Jewish believers) & the Hebrews (Jewish speaking Jewish believers). The Hellenists felt that their widows were being neglected in the “daily distribution” – what seems to have been a feeding program & or a dealing out of financial help. We know that the apostles instructed the people to choose 7 “*men of good repute, full of the Spirit & of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty.*” They did so & among the 7 chosen & appointed was Stephen, on whom our text today & next week focuses. While we read of Phillip in Acts 8, we really don’t hear any more of the other 5 deacons chosen along w/Stephen & Phillip. Does that mean they were duds, ineffective & nondescript, while Stephen & Phillip were special/set apart? I don’t think so. I believe the others would have been just as effective as Stephen & Phillip, & what Luke wrote about Stephen would have been true of each of the 7. But Luke didn’t focus on them, just as he didn’t focus on the other apostles after a bit, but only Peter, James & the new convert Paul. I believe Luke

zeroed in on Stephen, whose name means “crowned” because his story represents another chapter for the young Church. We don’t know how much time had elapsed since Pentecost, but the Church was growing & having influence. As we’ll see, Stephen was the 1st Christian martyr, but he certainly wouldn’t be the last. We don’t know anything about Stephen except what we read in these 2 chapters in Acts, but the description packs a punch. We read that God, thru Stephen, was “doing great wonders & signs among the people.” He & the others weren’t only managing the distribution of provisions. They were actively sharing their faith, preaching the gospel & ministering to those outside the church. Healings & deliverances were taking place. But wherever God is moving, Satan is sure to bring opposition. If we’re going to effectively be on mission for God, we will surely face opposition. But like Stephen, we can’t let that deter us from making disciples as we go. Stephen encountered opposition from a group of Hellenistic Jews – not believers. Freedmen/Libertines, according to Strong’s, were “Jews who had been made captives of the Romans under Pompey but were afterwards set free, & who although they had fixed their abode in Rome, had built at their own expense a synagogue at Jerusalem which they frequented when in that city.” There were Jews from Cyrene (NE Libya), Alexandria (N Egypt), Cilicia, the capital of which was Tarsus (where Saul/Paul was from), & Asia (“embracing Mysia, Lydia, & Phrygia). These all were in Jerusalem at this time & probably all part of the same synagogue. Together they “disputed” w/Stephen, arguing against the gospel he proclaimed & the Jesus he exalted. But, they “*could not w/stand the wisdom & the Spirit w/which he was speaking.*” So, they drummed up false witnesses against Stephen, who falsely accused him of speaking against God, Moses, the temple, the Law & traditional rites, etc. They stirred up the crowd against Stephen, seized him & dragged him before the council of the Jews – our old friends. Luke recorded something that must have been conveyed to him, perhaps by one like Paul. As everyone “gazed” at Stephen, his face glowed like an angel’s face – perhaps somewhat like Moses’ face glowed when he encountered the very presence of God, shaded but nonetheless overwhelming. II) Stephen wasn’t special; he was endowed. Again, Stephen was noted for being

“full of the Spirit & of wisdom;” “full of grace & power.” That word full/filled is “opposed to empty,” w/the picture of hollow vessels being completely filled, thoroughly permeated, lacking nothing. Stephen wasn’t necessarily a genius, endowed w/great intelligence or personal wisdom. He didn’t necessarily have any particular prowess or influence. The glow on his face wasn’t necessarily a “mild, soft, angelic look,” but, as David Gudzik wrote, “His face reflected the perfect peace & confidence of one who knows & trusts God. His face had the same reflected glory that Moses had as he beheld God intimately.” Stephen was endowed w/the Holy Spirit, w/grace, faith, power & wisdom. Certainly, the Holy Spirit Himself is an endowment from God the Father & the Lord Jesus Christ. In John 14:15-17 we read these words of Jesus: ***“If you love Me, you will keep My commandments. And I will ask the Father, & He will give you another Helper, to be w/you forever, even the Spirit of truth...”*** God has given us His Holy Spirit to be w/, w/in us. God the Holy Spirit w/in us; the power of God working in us; the gifts of God given to us by the Holy Spirit! The work of missions is the Holy Spirit’s work. The conviction of sin & enlightenment of one’s need of a savior & the very salvation of souls is the Holy Spirit’s doing. The giving of the right words to say is what the Holy Spirit delights to do. That peace in the midst of opposition & trial is a blessing of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit Himself is an endowment to the believer. The Holy Spirit then endows the surrendered believer w/grace. I say surrendered because our surrender to the working of the Spirit is key to the flow of His endowments, available to every follower of Christ, but flowing to/thru those who yield. Grace is undeserved favor – God’s favor. Regarding service to God & to others in His name, grace is the desire & power/ability given by God to do so. The Holy Spirit uses those who are yielded to Him. It’s a work of grace. Some translations have the word “faith” instead of grace. The Holy Spirit endows the surrendered believer w/faith – the ability to believe God still saves, that when His word goes forth from Him, even thru our lips, they will not return to Him void, but accomplish the purpose for which He sent it. It’s faith to believe that no one is beyond God’s reach & God can use even me. The Holy Spirit also endows the surrendered believer w/power – power to

stand even when opposed, & not back down or give up. Stephen had the power of his convictions. He had the God-given ability to stay on mission, to proclaim the truth even if others didn't want to hear. He had the power of love, the love of God w/in his heart for lost & for the gospel. Then too, the Holy Spirit endows the surrendered believer w/wisdom. Wisdom is "broad & full intelligence, devout & proper prudence in interaction w/those not disciples of Christ; skill & discretion in imparting Christian truth." It's not worldly or man's wisdom of which Luke is writing here, but Godly, Holy Spirit wisdom – wisdom which confounded Stephen's adversaries. All they could do is resort to lies & false accusations, & eventually physical violence, which admittedly didn't have immediate good results for Stephen, but produced great gains for the kingdom of God in God's economy. Stay tuned. The point is, III) **The mission of the Church, & of every believer, requires more than we have on our own.** To be on mission effectively, we need the Holy Spirit & Holy Spirit endowments. We need Holy Spirit grace, Holy Spirit faith, Holy Spirit power & Holy Spirit wisdom. The good news is that the same Holy Spirit who endowed Stephen with the gifts he needed to be the deacon, servant & powerful witness he was is w/, w/in us today. We can be on mission. We can make disciples as we are going. God wants to use us & will, if we are surrendered to Him & led by the Holy Spirit.