**Unstoppable - wk 11 – Standing Ovation**

**Acts is Jesus: The Sequel. Luke Vol 2 – The “what now?”**

**Acts 1:8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”**

**They began to experience supernatural growth.**

**Chap 7 – begins a dark turn of events that births amazing fruit.**

**There will always be those that praise God for the Gospel and those that oppose it! So offended, they seek to destroy those who believe it.**

**Acts 6:8 Now Stephen, a man full of God’s grace and power, performed great wonders and signs among the people. 9 Opposition arose… who began to argue with Stephen. 10 But they could not stand up against the wisdom the Spirit gave him as he spoke.**

**They brought false testimonies and lies against Stephen - that he was blaspheming God, the Torah, Moses, the Temple and customs. All charges that brought death. Lie after lies…**

**(After a long trial of lies) 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. (peace and clear conscience, God’s in control) Acts 7:1 Then the high priest asked Stephen, “Are these charges true?” 2 To this he replied: “Brothers and fathers, listen to me!**

**He did not justify himself – or argue. They weren’t interested in the truth. But he answered them, “Full of God’s grace and power” – lead by the wisdom of God – he preached truth.**

**It’s the longest recorded sermon it the NT. Why so long? A final word to Pharisees and Sanhedrin exclusively. It was Prophetic!**

**Its details suggest that it was notes from someone present. Luke or Paul. We will read it all. Possibly most verses I’ve read in a sermon (51)**

**What he tells them are stories they are familiar with, maybe not for us. (What does – like a broken record mean?)**

God and Abraham **(Genesis 12-25)**

**Stephen’s sermon – Acts 7: 2 To this he replied: “Brothers and fathers, listen to me! The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham while he was still in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Harran. (w/out a temple, w/out the Torah, w/out Moses, w/out the customs) 3 ‘Leave your country and your people,’ God said, ‘and go to the land I will show you.’ (Genesis 12) 4 “So he left the land of the Chaldeans and settled in Harran. (Not the promise land) After the death of his father, God sent him to this land where you are now living.**

**Stephen is highlighting that God did not need a Temple. God is not restricted to physical places.**

**5 He gave him no inheritance here, not even enough ground to set his foot on. But God promised him that he and his descendants after him would possess the land, even though at that time Abraham had no child.**

* **Our relationship with God is based on faith not outward evidence**

**(Like material possessions and present economy)**

**Abraham never made an idol of God’s blessing or promise – which is what the Pharisees were doing.**

**6 God spoke to him in this way: (Genesis 15) ‘For four hundred years your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated. (this is God’s plan – for the people he loves and has chosen) 7 But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves,’ God said, ‘and afterward they will come out of that country and worship me in this place.’**

* **God’s sovereign hand is at work in our trials and circumstances for future generations – all to his glory.**

**God is always in control. And yet people will be held accountable for their own actions**

**8 Then he gave Abraham the covenant of circumcision. And Abraham became the father of Isaac and circumcised him eight days after his birth. Later Isaac became the father of Jacob, and Jacob became the father of the twelve patriarchs. (Circumcision was the sign of the promise passed down. And BTW – none of the 12 inherited the land – it was their children just as God told Abe)**

* **God is faithful to do what He says He will do. Guaranteed.**

**He can be trusted fully & completely to follow thru on His word**

God and Joseph **(Genesis 37-50)**

**9 “Because the patriarchs were jealous of Joseph, (12 sons of Jacob – 10 were jealous of bro) they sold him as a slave into Egypt. But God was with him 10 and rescued him from all his troubles. He gave Joseph wisdom and enabled him to gain the goodwill of Pharaoh king of Egypt. So Pharaoh made him ruler over Egypt and all his palace. (The sovereignty of God at work in brothers’ choices)**

* **Our relationship with God is based on faith not outward evidence**

**(Like pain, suffering, trials, & troubles - whether in pit, prison or palace)**

**Joseph had no home – but God was with him.**

**11 “Then a famine struck all Egypt and Canaan, bringing great suffering, and our ancestors could not find food. 12 When Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent our forefathers on their first visit. 13 On their second visit, Joseph told his brothers who he was, and Pharaoh learned about Joseph’s family. 14 After this, Joseph sent for his father Jacob and his whole family, seventy-five in all. 15 Then Jacob went down to Egypt, where he and our ancestors died. 16 Their bodies were brought back to Shechem and placed in the tomb that Abraham had bought from the sons of Hamor at Shechem for a certain sum of money. (The only land Abraham owned in the future promise land was a burial plot. The rest was by faith)**

* **God’s sovereign hand is at work in our trials and circumstance for future generations – all to his glory.**

**What Joe’s bros did to hurt him God did to save them all. It was part of the plan to save future Israel = Jesus.**

**Which is his third point again.**

* **God is faithful to do what He says He will do. Guaranteed.**

**He can be trusted fully & completely to follow through on His word.**

God and Moses **(Exodus)**

**Acts 7:17 “As the time drew near for God to fulfill his promise to Abraham, the number of our people in Egypt had greatly increased. 18 Then ‘a new king, to whom Joseph meant nothing, came to power in Egypt.’ 19 He dealt treacherously with our people and oppressed our ancestors by forcing them to throw out their newborn babies so that they would die. 20 “At that time Moses was born, (at an appointed time) and he was no ordinary child. For three months he was cared for by his family. 21 When he was placed outside, Pharaoh’s daughter took him and brought him up as her own son. 22 Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action.**

* **Our relationship with God is based on faith not outward evidence**

**(Like government control and political abuse)**

**God was with Moses and where is Moses – not Jerusalem – but in a wicked place and wicked city. Egypt.**

**23 “When Moses was forty years old, (at an appointed time) he decided to visit his own people, the Israelites. 24 He saw one of them being mistreated by an Egyptian, so he went to his defense and avenged him by killing the Egyptian. 25 Moses thought that his own people would realize that God was using him to rescue them, but they did not. (Even then he wanted God to use him – but it was not the time) 26 The next day Moses came upon two Israelites who were fighting. He tried to reconcile them by saying, ‘Men, you are brothers; why do you want to hurt each other?’ 27 “But the man who was mistreating the other pushed Moses aside and said, ‘Who made you ruler and judge over us? (at the time no one) 28 Are you thinking of killing me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday?’ 29 When Moses heard this, he fled to Midian, where he settled as a foreigner and had two sons. (For the next 40 years)**

**Stephen is implying just as the Hebrews first rejected Moses, so too you reject Jesus, the rightful ruler and judge over you.**

* **God’s sovereign hand is at work in our trials and circumstance for future generations – all to his glory.**

**What Joe’s bros did to hurt him God did to save them all. It was part of the plan to save future Israel = Jesus.**

**30 “After forty years had passed, (at an appointed time) an angel appeared to Moses in the flames of a burning bush in the desert near Mount Sinai. 31 When he saw this, he was amazed at the sight. As he went over to get a closer look, he heard the Lord say: 32 ‘I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.’ Moses trembled with fear and did not dare to look. 33 “Then the Lord said to him, ‘Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.**

* **Our relationship with God is based on faith not outward evidence**

**(Like a desert – feel alone and distant – or when you are hiding)**

**God was with Moses and where is Moses – not in a temple – but in a wilderness – speaking through a burning bush.**

**(God says) 34 I have indeed seen the oppression of my people in Egypt. I have heard their groaning and have come down to set them free. (Just as he told Abraham) Now come, I will send you back to Egypt.’ (Stephen emphasizes - Moses was called and commissioned by God) 35 “This is the same Moses they had rejected with the words, ‘Who made you ruler and judge?’ He was sent to be their ruler and deliverer by God himself, through the angel who appeared to him in the bush.**

* **God’s sovereign hand is at work in our trials and circumstance for future generations – all to his glory.**

**Moses wilderness was a season God planned – so that at just the right time – he would deliver them.**

**Acts 7:36 He led them out of Egypt and performed wonders and signs in Egypt, at the Red Sea and for forty years in the wilderness. 37 “This is the Moses who told the Israelites, ‘God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your own people.’ (Deuteronomy 18:15 – Moses prophecies of Jesus) 38 He was in the assembly in the wilderness, with the angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and with our ancestors; and he received living words to pass on to us.**

* **God is faithful to do what He says He will do. Guaranteed.**

**He can be trusted fully & completely to follow through on His word.**

**Big jab is surfacing. Just as they rejected Moses – and God called him! You reject Jesus – and Jesus is greater!**

God and Israel **(Exodus – Deut - Numbers)**

**Acts 7:39 “But our ancestors refused to obey him. Instead, they rejected him and in their hearts turned back to Egypt. (They did not want what God wanted) 40 They told Aaron, (Ex 32) ‘Make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who led us out of Egypt—we don’t know what has happened to him!’ 41 That was the time they made an idol in the form of a calf. They brought sacrifices to it and reveled in what their own hands had made.**

**Stephen is implying - much like you – you ignored what God wants and turned the temple into an idol. What about you?**

**42 But God turned away from them and gave them over to the worship of the sun, moon and stars. This agrees with what is written in the book of the prophets: (Amos 5) “‘Did you bring me sacrifices and offerings forty years in the wilderness, people of Israel? (No!) 43 You have taken up the tabernacle of Molek and the star of your god Rephan, the idols you made to worship. (Wicked false idols that included sexual perversion and sacrificing babies) Therefore, I will send you into exile’ beyond Babylon.**

* **God is faithful to do what He says He will do. Guaranteed.**

**If God says judgment follows disobedience – it will follow, guaranteed.**

**Implying you are rejecting what God is doing – you will be rejected by God. God will not be mocked - Galatians 6:7 - Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows.**

God and Joshua **(Joshua)**

**Acts 7:44 “Our ancestors had the tabernacle of the covenant law with them in the wilderness. It had been made as God directed Moses, according to the pattern he had seen. 45 After receiving the tabernacle, our ancestors under Joshua brought it with them when they took the land from the nations God drove out before them. It (the tabernacle and Ark) remained in the land until the time of David, 46 who enjoyed God’s favor and asked that he might provide a dwelling place for the God of Jacob. 47 But it was Solomon who built a house for him.**

**48 “However, (quoting 1 Kings 8:27, 2 Chronicles 6:18, Isaiah 66:1) the Most High does not live in houses made by human hands. As the prophet says: 49 “‘Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me? says the Lord. Or where will my resting place be? 50 Has not my hand made all these things?’**

* **Our relationship with God is based on faith not outward evidence**

**(Like a temple or church)**

**They turned the temple into an idol – when you love something greater than God, it will always keep you from Jesus.**

**Almighty omniscience of God is not about and has never been about a building – a location or a place. God can you find you wherever you are. Wherever you go. You can’t escape him.**

God and YOU! **(Now he makes it personal)**

**Acts 7:51 “You stiff-necked people! (20X prophets in the OT called Israel) Your hearts and ears are still uncircumcised. (Deut 10:16 – it was always about the heart – about faith) You are just like your ancestors: (ones who reject what God is doing) You always resist the Holy Spirit! (A slice right to the heart – I can imagine their faces and tempers)**

**52 Was there ever a prophet your ancestors did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. (Jesus Christ) And now you have betrayed and murdered him – (they killed the messengers of Jesus – but you killed Jesus!) 53 you who have received the law that was given through angels (God’s messengers / prophets) but have not obeyed it.”**

* **God gave you the law – you rejected the heart of it**
* **God gave you the temple – you turned it into an idol**
* **God gave you the Messiah – and you killed him!**

**Peter previously said a similar thing, but also added that Jesus had risen from the dead – and you can’t stop him!**

**Stephen stands there using scripture to call them to repentance!**

**Their response**

**Acts 7:54 When the members of the Sanhedrin heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. (still rejecting the Word of the Lord) 55 But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, (they were filled with rage – Stephen was filled with the HS – what a difference Jesus makes) looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. 56 “Look,” he said, “I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.”**

**Stephen sees Jesus! Only time Jesus is mentioned standing at His throne – it’s as if Jesus was standing in honor – standing ovation. Jesus is standing with Stephen! Knowing full well what’s to come.**

**(That statement declared the majesty of Jesus as God!) 57 At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, (bum rushed – all attacked – word means a raging mob) 58 dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. (Usually stripped naked, thrown in a pit, boulder after boulder, rock after rock, broken bones, fractures, face contusions - bloody mess) Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul. (Saul officially introduced by name - he was in charge of this)**

**59 While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” 60 Then he fell on his knees and cried out, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” (2 similar phrases Jesus spoke) When he had said this, he fell asleep. (Only to wake up in glory)**

**No malice – no rage – no revenge – no cursing – only the peace of God – and grace & mercy for his accusers and killers.**

**What would cause a man with so much evil put upon him to act such a way? Knowing Jesus.**

**This fulfills what Jesus warned John 16:2-3 Yes, the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service. And these things they will do to you because they have not known the Father nor Me.**

**With that Stephen became the first martyr. He sealed his testimony in blood. The first recorded person in history to die for the sake of Jesus.**

**What follows is more intense persecution and violent deaths, but so does a miracle that changes the world forever.**

**And an even greater revival begins - All from one guy who raised his hand and said - I'll serve at the table. I’ll hand out food.**

**Four Lessons To Take Home**

1. **Our relationship with God is based on faith not outward evidence**

**Possessions, position, pain, political power, or a place.**

1. **God’s sovereign hand is at work in our trials and circumstance for future generations – all to his glory.**

**God is always at work in the circumstances to accomplish his perfect purpose. God is at work even when we don’t / can’t see it.**

**It was the ministry and message of stephen that God empowered that brought his death.**

**God is in control of time – all the time! We often don’t understand God’s timing because we cannot see the bigger picture as He does and what he is accomplishing.**

1. **God is faithful to do what He says He will do. Guaranteed.**

**His word is true. God does not lie. Jesus is the only way - no other.**

**The promise of grace by faith is true and the promise of judgment for the unrighteous is true. Guaranteed.**

1. **Even in the face of accusers and false accusations – in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit, we can stand in mercy and grace.**

**We can and we must forgive.**

**This is what Jesus applauds.**

**Do you believe that?**