



## THE STONING OF STEPHEN - THE FIRST CHRISTIAN MARTYR

*"Being filled with the Holy Spirit, Stephen looked toward heaven, where he saw the glory of God, and he said, look, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!"*

*Acts 7:54-60*

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**Old Testament Reading - 1 Chronicles 16:8-36**

**New Testament Reading - Revelation 7:9-12**

## **How Should We Then Live "The Celebration of Our Salvation" 1 Peter 1:3-12**

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The epistles of Peter were written to Jewish Christians living in Roman provinces inhabited by pagan Gentiles.

- These believers were experiencing bitter hostility and outright persecution for their expressed faith in Jesus as the Messiah and, therefore, their Savior and Lord.

- Peter’s exhortation to them was clear: Rather than focus on their temporal humiliation, they were to concentrate on their eternal salvation, for it was to such suffering they were called.
- The application to Christians today could not be more explicit:
  - If we respond to our troubles the same way as unbelievers, where is the authenticity of our faith?
  - How we handle our troubles is how God reveals the authenticity of our faith to others, and draws them to see their need for a Savior.
  - Therefore, rather than complain about the circumstances of our temporal lives, we should celebrate the gift of our eternal life.

The outcome of our faith in Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord was the eternal salvation of our souls. John 3:16

- The very moment we were saved, we were redeemed from our sins, rescued from hell, and reserved for the glories of heaven.
- Today’s Christianity has been redefined to focus on the Lord’s provision, protection, and deliverance from temporal problems.
- Even Christ’s suffering is viewed more as His martyrdom than the pre-ordained price for our eternal salvation. Acts 2:22-25
- If our faith in Jesus Christ is based on His temporal blessings, sooner or later, that humanistic faith will not be sufficient, and, like Peter, we will run away from Christ in shame when faced with persecution.
- However, the assurance of our salvation gives us joy in this life, the hope of a better life, and freedom from fear, no matter what happens to us.
- Peter exhorted these Christians to live up to their calling and to view the temporal persecution they were called to endure through the lens of the eternal salvation they would enjoy.
- **Rather than bellyache** about their temporal persecution, **they should celebrate** their eternal salvation.

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**“The focus of the Christian life is not about what God can do for us, but what He has already done for us, in giving us everlasting life.”**

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## **Salvation is the theme of the Scriptures:**

### **1. Salvation was the Theme of the Prophet’s Study – Vs. 10 – “Of this salvation, the prophets inquired, searched carefully, [and] prophesied.”**

- Peter was referring to all of the prophets from Moses to Malachi, including those who wrote their prophecies down in books as well as those who boldly spoke as God’s voice.
- Peter said they studied “carefully,” because they were writing about a subject they could not humanly understand.
- They knew the salvation of lost man was the most critical issue of life. So, guided by the Holy Spirit, they determined to discover the who, what, when, and where that act of salvation would occur.

- They knew about the fall of man in the garden, and they understood the judgment of God upon man's sin.
- They knew God was a redeeming God who promised Eve that One would come through her seed to be her Savior.
- They saw hints of that substitutionary sacrifice when God killed an animal to cover Adam and Eve's nakedness and when He provided a ram to save Abraham's only son.
- They saw God's promise, God's pattern, and God's provision, and they knew, one day, those pictures would become a Person who would give us life to save lost man from his sins.
- The prophets knew the Messiah would establish His kingdom upon this earth and He would be the everlasting King.
- This study consumed them; **it was their life's passion** – they wanted to know everything there was to know about this God who loved them so.

## **2. Salvation was the Theme of the Holy Spirit's Revelation – Vs. 11 – *“The Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow.”***

- Peter said no prophecy of Scripture was a matter of the prophet's personal interpretation, but rather they were carried along by the Holy Spirit and inspired to write the truth about God's plan for the redemption of man.
- Peter said the Spirit of Christ, which is the same as the Holy Spirit was sent from heaven to guide them in their search for truth.
- The Holy Spirit revealed how the Messiah would suffer, and the prophets recorded the Spirit's revelation in Psalm 22, Psalm 69, Isaiah 52 and 53, Daniel 9, Zechariah 12 and 13, among many others.
- In Luke 24, Jesus referred to these writings in his conversation with the men on the road to Emmaus. ***“Oh, foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all the prophets have spoken. Then, beginning with Moses and the prophets, Jesus explained all the things concerning Himself in the Scriptures.”***
- If the timing and manner of Jesus' birth, death, resurrection, and ascension were not according to and in fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies, Jesus died as a martyr and not our Savior.

## **3. Salvation was the Theme of the Apostle's Preaching – Vs. 12 – *“To us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you, by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven.”***

- The Apostles were as consumed with preaching the gospel of salvation as the prophets were in predicting it.
- The apostles preached Christ crucified, risen, and returning!
- The Apostle Paul said he had “determined” to know nothing among them except Christ crucified.
- Observations from 18-hours of sermons from the pastors of the nine largest churches in America (*Nine Marks Article by Colton Carter*)
  - The gospel was, at best assumed, for it was never fully presented, explained, or offered.
  - Sin was rarely mentioned other than as a hindrance to one's self-improvement.
  - God's judgment for sin was never mentioned.
  - Repentance was not presented as being urgent or necessary as evidence of salvation.

- The Bible was referenced but never read in such a way to allow the Scriptures to speak.
- There was no mention of a hell to avoid or heaven to gain.
- The underlying theme of all the sermons was how to overcome hindrances to one's self-improvement or self-actualization.

#### **4. Salvation is the theme of the Angel's Interest- Vs. 12 – *“Things which angels desire to look into.”***

- Angels are aware of God's plan for the redemption of lost man and they have assisted in some ways to accomplish it.
  - Angels announced the coming of the Messiah to Zechariah and Elizabeth, then to Mary and Joseph, and then to the Shepherds near Bethlehem.
  - Angels assisted Jesus in the wilderness while He was tempted, and they were there when He was nailed to the cross and when He rose from the grave.
  - Angels rejoice each time a sinner is saved.
  - Angels will return to this earth with Christ.
- However, since angels are already totally holy, their interest in God's plan for our redemption is to see how it will be used to bring glory to God forever.
- God will display His redeemed before the heavenly host to demonstrate His mercy, compassion, and forgiveness, specific attributes about which the angels do not understand.