

Seeing the Heavens Open *Acts 7*

Topic: Discipleship
Subject: What results when we see the heavens opened?
Complement: We don't crave earthly things.
Purpose: The listeners will crave God more than earthly things.

Introduction

1. Interest:
 - a) Stephen Tong preached a message that really touched Michael Shen when he spoke of Peter leading 3000 people to Christ in only one message.
 - b) His namesake, Stephen, also preached a message but received 3000 stones!
2. Need: Would you prefer to be Stephen or Peter? Actually, later Peter also died, but he died a longer, slower death on a cross upside-down.
3. Subject: What results when we see the heavens opened?
4. Background: The church had grown remarkably up to this point in the book of Acts and, therefore, was deemed a threat to the establishment.

I. Jesus went into heaven before Stephen's message.

- A. A Thai preacher took a Hong Kong preacher on a long hike in Thailand. He instructed him, "However, the hill we will climb once was a battlefield and is full of mines. Please let me go first and stay three meters behind me. Then step exactly where I step, as you will know it is safe." For three hours the men trudged up the mountain, and then also came down safely to tell the tale.
- B. Jesus has gone before us, risking his life and also showing us the way.

II. Stephen saw heaven open and Jesus welcoming him (7:54-56).

- A. Messianic Jews realized that they were no longer required to obey the Mosaic Law.
- B. The Pharisees rejected this teaching since their whole livelihood was based on the temple, so Stephen challenged their hardness of heart (7:51-53).
 1. "You stubborn people! You are heathen at heart and deaf to the truth. Must you forever resist the Holy Spirit? That's what your ancestors did, and so do you! 52 Name one prophet your ancestors didn't persecute! They even killed the ones who predicted the coming of the Righteous One—the Messiah whom you betrayed and murdered. 53 You deliberately disobeyed God's law, even though you received it from the hands of angels."

2. Stephen actually preached this message with love balanced with truth—not in anger but while filled with the Spirit.

III. The greatest gift God has given us is the Spirit.

- A. The Trinitarian God works together, so the fullness of the Trinitarian God lives in us!
- B. Every one of us has the Spirit, so God poured out his love to us through his Spirit in abundance (Rom. 5:5).
- C. Therefore, to have the Spirit means to have God's love—so, like Stephen, we see heaven opened in our lives.
- D. This is why Stephen committed his spirit to God. As David did this (Ps. 31:5), so Jesus did it (Luke 23:46), and finally Stephen did it (Acts 7:59).

Conclusion

1. A man committed adultery and, when discovered, confessed his sin to his wife. She was determined to forgive him, but wondered whether to do it only after she saw his repentant heart. Then she realized that God does not wait for us in this way, so through her tears she forgave him. She suffered much and others said, "Are you sure you really want to forgive him? Is he really repentant?" She responded, "When I do this as what God wants me to do, I truly experience God."
2. It is the same for us. When we do not harbor hatred but grant forgiveness to others, others misunderstand us while at the same time we see heaven opened.
3. Stephen Tong was once preaching in the Philippines, telling them about John Sung. Some called him a crazy man as he wore many layers of clothes. His outer garment said "pride" and he took it off. Then underneath the next level said "greed," which he preached on as he took it off. Other layers followed until he finally had a white garment that said "Jesus" on it. John Sung asked people to come up in groups to confess pride, greed, adultery, etc. A Chinese lawyer and ambassador from Beijing watched with amazement, knowing that people were willing to die without ever confessing their sin. He wondered how people could be so willing to confess with tears, even publically. He was so amazed that he trusted Christ himself, went to Hong Kong for seminary, and became a preacher.
4. When we see the heavens open, we no longer crave the things of the earth (Main Idea).