

Acts 7:54-60

Those who look to the Lord are radiant in living and in dying (Psalm 34)

INTRO

We are going to start OLD SCHOOL this morning in reference to a classic toy. In a day in age inundated with gadgets for entertainment, I am one who enjoys timeless vintage toys that endure generations. The Jack in the Box I believe qualifies as one of these TOYS. You know what I'm talking about... NOT the fast food place with clever commercials, but the little music box with a closed lid and lever on the side that when you wound it round and round would cause music to play....If you played long enough...Jack would spring out,...un-expectantly out from the lid....leaping toward your face causing YOU to,...FLINCH in surprise. JACK was guaranteed to spring out,..however...the toy was designed so that you'd never know when that would be. That was the entertainment. The surprise OR...the 'FLINCH'... Buddy the elf, in the movie ELF, portrayed this so well. Remember that scene? CLASSIC...Buddy the elf had the job of testing all the Jack in the Boxes....A whole fleet of Jack in the Boxes were lined up next to Buddy the elf and one by one he would nervously TEST them by cautiously turning the lever till Jack would spring out causing Buddy to...WHAT? To FLINCH! in surprise. THE FLINCH. VERY Amusing in the use of that TOY...but not amusing when shooting your bow or firearm of sorts. In fact, you make every effort to control yourself, NOT to flinch. Any degree of flinching will inevitably cause your sights to veer off from what you are aiming at.

While shooting my bow, I can tell when it's a TRUE shot....when I haven't flinched. All remains calm and unchanged from the moment before,....at the point of release....and all the way as I watch the arrow fly and hit exactly where I'm aiming. My EYES were focused on my sight pin placed right over the bulls EYE...no flinch, clean shot and I hit exactly where I was aiming. IN A SIMILAR WAY...we see Stephen as a christian man, "whose eyes are ever toward the Lord" (Pslam 25:15). And,..he doesn't flinch...EVER. He is described as a man full of faith and full of the Holy Spirit. And all the way through the account of this snippet of his life he is one who embodies (Psalm 34:5) "Those who look to him (him the Lord) are radiant, and their faces shall never be ashamed." repeat verse. This is a glorious promise CHURCH...and it's a promise we see revealed this morning in the account of Stephen. A christian man "whose eyes were ever toward the Lord" and "whose face shone like an an angel" ...never put to shame. A man whose LIFE, as we've seen from the very first mention of his name, was RADIANT...full of grace and power and as we'll see this morning, remains radiant in dying. In living and in dying the radiance upon the faces of those who look to the Lord doesn't change....it simply remains. IT'S A CONSTANT. Whether it be in living OR in dying...if our eyes are upon the Lord, if we look to Him, 'His' radiance will reflect off of us and we will never be put to shame. Stephen displays this beautifully as an example to every christian. AN EXAMPLE OF:

- Those who look to the Lord are radiant in living and in dying -

We'll break up this morning's text in 2 parts representing the 2 categories all mankind fall into. - Those in Christ and those NOT in Christ. There is no other category. You fall into one OR the other. Under the rule and reign of Christ in your heart, united to him by faith and adopted into the family of God to be a fellow heir with him for all eternity... OR... unrepentant, unbelieving, still dead in your sins..not being with him so then therefore are against him and remain under the fury of his wrath where eternal judgement awaits. It's either / or...no 3rd option exists.

- Stephen portrays the christian, IN CHRIST, who is Spirit filled, eyes on the Lord and is therefore radiant;

- While Saul, NOT IN CHRIST, is one still in darkness, beholding God's glory as seen by the radiance of Stephen in living and in dying. He sees it remain constant.

BODY

Take a look with me now at verses 54 - 56 of ACTS chapter 7.

Part 1 - A man in Christ - Spirit filled, eyes on the Lord and is therefore radiant.

We pick up on the coat tales of Stephen (this man in Christ) - the coat tales of his speech in reply to the false accusations made against him. - read verses Stephen just finished providing a polished summary of God's redeeming work through the nation Israel. A summary ending with a retort giving way to CONCLUDE that he was a man of the word. Who knew God's word. This man 'IN CHRIST' - cherished God's word...HE had it well hidden in his heart, ingrained in his being for he wasn't reading from a MANUSCRIPT..he had no notes prepared to reference..NO he is a christian man, a man in Christ, FULL of faith of full of the Holy Spirit and clearly...FULL of the knowledge of God's word.

Do you see how that all fits together? Full of Faith, Full of the Holy Spirit and Full of the knowledge of God's word. They are three cords that cannot be broken. STEPHEN is a beaming bright light of Christian MANHOOD.

Lord knows what other work God would have accomplished through him had God not called him home early through Martyrdom. STEHPEN was one who "studied himself approved and rightly handled the word of truth" (2Timothy 2:15). Stephen was confident in the Lord, God was with him..EVER NEAR and therefore he was BOLD in "giving to every man an answer of the hope he has in Jesus...and he does so with gentleness and respect" (1Peter 3:15). He begins his reply in verse 2 of this chapter by saying 'brothers and father's, hear me... Respectful and gentle, but uncompromised in BOLDLY proclaiming the gospel of JESUS CHRIST. He shows this Christlike humility to the false witnesses set up by those gathered in the council...the same council as before whom Gamaliel advised to leave the apostles alone. Have you ever been falsely accused?

Pointing out errors done or feedback to where improvements can be made is difficult enough to swallow...but being falsely accused. Knowing beyond a shadow of a doubt that your ACTIONS are JUST, you are innocent of guilt, and are of a pure motive to then be accused of wrong doing. How did you feel in those moments? Tranquil, given to smile and express peaceful joy OR do you feel your BLOOD pressure rise...your Heart Rate increase... unable to prevent the flood of words rapidly building WITHIN wanting to erupt from your lips to DEFEND YOURSELF! Isn't that more likely how we feel under false accusations against us? What example does Stephen emulate? He doesn't flinch...remaining compromised...with a bridled tongue...he boldly speaks with GENTLENESS, RESPECT and ON the authority of God's word 'with a face that shone like and angel' for he was one 'with His eyes ever toward the Lord' (Psalm 25:5) in LIVING and in DYING (Act 6:15).

This council now, LOOKING upon Stephen and HEARING him reply to their false accusations, DID NOT MISS his clear rebuke of them in his conclusion. They respond like scoffers (Proverbs 13:1) "not listening to his rebuke" so instead their rage against the apostles back in chapter 5 further escalates. They are SO enraged they are literally in a state of apoplexy...they can't even speak...what a picture...they are grinding their teeth at him...grrrrr...almost beast like in behavior. BLIND madness of sin.

Stephen, HOWEVER, remains...unaffected...he doesn't flinch...WHY? His eyes remain FIXED on Jesus. Seeing through the 'eyes of faith' then...steps into....further clarity...as he SEES the heavens open up.

No one else is stated as seeing it...Stephen alone sees the heavens open up.

(Verse 55) "But he (Stephen), full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God."

This is not a vision in the sense of being an illusion. In no way do I take this to be so. NO, what Stephen was seeing was the Spiritual realm breaking through into that time and space to "welcome" Stephen into The Kingdom of God. It says that Stephen saw it...NO ONE else saw it...he...in that moment testified to it! (Verse 56)...”And he (Stephen) said, “Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man 'standing' at the right hand of God.”

Now I so desperately want you to get this with me church. Pay CLOSE attention. How does he see Jesus? STANDING....Standing at the right hand of the throne of God. He's not sitting. Though we know from scripture that after JESUS accomplished the work of salvation by dying on the cross. AFTER he rose again from the GRAVE and ascended to HEAVEN....he what (Mark 16:19, Hebrews 1:3 & 10:12,12,2 Col 3:1, Ephesians 1:20) and several other passages ALL reference the same thing....”He (Jesus) sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” “Sat down...HIS WORK is finished. So what is He (Jesus) doing standing here at the right hand of the throne of God? Only these 2 verses in the WHOLE Bible portray Jesus doing so. Why is that? Please see with me THAT THIS account in Stephen's life is an account for all genuine Christians TO SEE what will be experienced in the dying. In the dying only..NOT DEATH. Jesus tasted death for us. (Hebrews 2:9) “But we see him (him Jesus) who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God (listen) he (he Jesus) might taste death for everyone.” He tasted it for you!..those UNITED to him by FAITH...He tasted death for you! We will never know what death is. (Colossians 2, Romans 6) Those in Christ have been buried with him in his death and also raised with him in his LIFE... ressurected life. The new birth. Being BORN again. The old man.. not in Christ...is DEAD to us...is crucified with Christ as Paul states in (Galatians 2:20) “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ (CHRIST) who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by FAITH in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”

THIS IS exactly what Paul is referring to. Eternal life begins in-Christ- NOW!. Not when we get to heaven, BUT NOW. Please OWN this beloved. JOHN also urges the christian to know this same truth in his 1ST epistle. (1John 5:11,20). “And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.” “And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true; and we are 'in' him who is true, 'in' his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.”

Those 'in Christ' who look to the Lord are RADIANT in living and keep the same shine upon their faces in dying as THEY face their Lord, the Son of man, 'standing' to greet them into His Kingdom.

Stephen, prepared in heart and mind to meet the Lord I believe, in these moments captured here, I believe he knew they were going to kill him,... and he had absolutely NO FEAR....he..did...not..flinch... No hint of FEAR of DEATH whatsoever...rather he was enraptured by seeing the glory of God and his risen Lord Jesus standing at the right hand of God to welcome him into his Kingdom.

How do YOU face death? How OUGHT a Christian face death? If we (born again christians) are not of this world but rather sojourners in it...EXILES...pilgrims passing through...as the Bible teaches that we are....then when death is knocking at our door, wouldn't it be the fitting response to confidently open it knowing whom you will SEE on the other side? Think of the contrast between a stranger approaching your door who looks threatening OR acts threatening...showing clear evidence of INTENT to HARM. Fearful thoughts are likely to come leading you to arm yourself or in the least find a place to hide while you CALL 911.

But if it's one here in the family of PILLAR....a beloved grandparent you haven't seen for a long time, someone along those lines....YOU REJOICE! You eagerly get up to open the door and greet them. One of my favorite moments at community group is when we first arrive to Caleb and Meagan's home. Their children Micah, Jane, Ethan and Judah are always vividly expressing their excitement that we've arrived. Sometimes the door seemingly opens of its own accord as we approach,...as ONE or a couple of the children are cleverly being playful with us...hiding behind the door to give the illusion that it opened on its own...THEY ARE WELCOMING US...along with their parent's, but in their special playful way, they are welcoming us. Typically eager to show us something new they accomplished or received that day. Most recent was MICAH showing US his new Bible he received on the day he was baptized. They are welcoming us with undeniable delight. I LOVE IT!..and similarly...when a christian walks through that door passing from this life into the next...we know whom we will first see, are eyes can and should be on him NOW each and every day, and therefore can face that passing through with shining glory...looking to Him unwaveringly, without flinching, whereby reflecting HIS radiance (Psalm 34) in that time of death.

NOW, the christian doesn't seek death or be infatuated with DEATH. But they ought not be grappling onto this LIFE to take any and all extreme measures to extend additional days. And extend is the best one may do...but in truth...are we able to extend even a minute? NOT according to the Bible (Matthew 6:27, Luke 12:25). All creation...EVERY heart beat and breath of life is held in God's hand (Deuteronomy 32:39, Act 17:26, Luke 12:20). (Colossians 1:15-17) God is the one that determines the number of our days. It is he who gives life and takes it away. (Psalm 89:48) "What man can live and never see death?"... the Psalmist writes. The CHRISTIAN, however, can face the departing from this world..can face DYING...and entry into the other with peace and joy that surpasses understanding. The christian makes use of helpful means of God's common grace provided through physicians and medicine. Luke, the author of Acts was a physician himself...a medical doctor called to the ministry of Jesus. Gifted physicians and the development of medicines and treatments are gifts to be stewarded with thankfulness to God for, BUT NOT clung to as our hope.

Marcy and I's daughter Grace had appendicitis. Had it not been for the common grace provided in healthcare professionals and their intervention and the tools to do it...apart from God doing a miraculous healing...she would likely have died. My Father has had two hip replacements and my younger brother...one. I went from seeing them walking with a limp in chronic pain to them behaving as if they never had hip problems to begin with. Joel was given regular blood transfusions to sustain his life during his illness, Mary underwent successful treatment for breast cancer, Jackie has made tremendous strides in recovery since her stroke through rehab...Gabriel and Ezekiel have both benefited from ear surgery to enable them to properly hear. Benjamin's fragile life as a premature newborn was aided greatly by healthcare professionals and their tools.....And I know there are more examples that could be shared of GOD's common grace given through which He works. All this doesn't change THE FACT that we know who holds life and death in His hands. Pray for God's wisdom to be granted in our making use of them but always keeping them in their proper place. IF God chooses to bring healing, improvement, relief through these means,...then PRAISE God for giving man the ability to develop and learn such remarkable things. REJOICE in God as you thank them for helping you. Say "I've been praying for you. Asking God to give you wisdom and ability in your care of me." We ought to be praying so, RIGHT? So why not share it? Praise God for THEM and THEIR care whether or not they look to Jesus as their Lord and Savior. EITHER WAY.... give glory to God!

IF the doctors are stumped and healing, help, relief come through prayer alone...no explanation available for the doctors to chart on...EVEN BETTER..right? Praise God!..."He performed signs and wonders'....'put this in your chart. "God's people Prayed in the name of Jesus and God healed in the name of Jesus." 'Chart that.'

And lastly, if healing, relief, improvement don't come...IN FAITH, 'entrust your souls to a Faithful creator' (1 Peter 4:19) and IF death is being faced, then pray to God to face dying as Stephen did. Having your eyes set (Colossians 3:2, Matthew 6:21, Luke 12:34, Hebrews 12:1-2) on the glory of God in the Heavens and Jesus your Lord standing...from His seat on the right hand of the throne of God to welcome you into His Kingdom. What a beautiful picture our Lords gives us here. (Romans 8:34) He who is seated at the right hand of the throne of God, interceding for us..... stands from His seat to welcome one of his elect whom He (JESUS) tasted death for...His elect are now going through that door of death....passing through death..NOT tasting it..NOT experiencing it,..BUT passing through.....(1 John 5:24) at conversion the christian already "passed from death to life" Jesus, says it plainly "Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. 'Has' (present tense, has eternal life NOW!)...He does NOT come into judgement, BUT HAS passed (at the time of conversion) passed from DEATH to LIFE."

It is He (JESUS who spoke that promise) who is 'standing' TO BE the first one to welcome you into His Kingdom. Not your long lost loved ones who have gone on before you...if IN CHRIST, they will be one of the citizens of the saints who are in Heaven...BUT it's our Lord, it's our Lord whom we will FIRST see....and I wouldn't have it any other way. He whom first loved us and laid down his life for us. Him who though we don't see now we believe and love (1 Peter 1:8) WILL BE the first we meet as we see the glory of God in the Heavens the very twinkling moment we depart from this world and enter into the eternal Kingdom.

Part 2. SAUL is introduced. Saul, who is NOT IN CHRIST, still in darkness, and beholding God's glory as seen by the radiance of Stephen in living and in dying.

Let's start by seeing what the COUNCIL, in a state of apoplexy...not able to speak as a result of such intense RAGE.....How does Stephen's reflecting of the Lord's radiance impact them? (Verse 57-58) read - Still NO words used but the grinding of teeth EXPLODES into acts of rage. Still unable to formulate words as a result of intense anger SO they cried out loudly and covered their ears to silence all they were hearing...Aaaaggh! They couldn't take anymore of it. And NOT ONLY his words BUT Stephen himself. The unflinching radiance of Christ shining forth from him only revealed more plainly their DARKNESS and they couldn't..they couldn't take it anymore. They hhaated the light Stephen was emanating because it exposed their darkness so they drowned his words out with shouting, refused to hear anymore and rushed at him in single force like a BRUTE MOB...taking him out of the city to stone him..KILL him.

No official verdict given in the his trial, NO appeal, NO further questioning, just fierce unrestrained rage to extinguish this light beaming brightly before them. YET, Stephen's light remained. DID NOT diminish in the least...he DID NOT flinch. And one approving of these actions, no less guilty, but beholding Stephen's radiance remain a constant in living and in dying. Standing there, watching this all take place was SAUL.....He watched and consented to the false witnesses carrying out this murder of Stephen by stoning, taking off their garments allowing them to throw these stones with all their might..no restrictions...full range of motion to ensure the stones throne would be lethal...effectively killing him. How awful of a death that is? This isn't a baseball thrown your way while up to bat. A ball you are ready for...to swing at, or to watch go by, or brace yourself courageously to be hit by that you may get on base...OR the frightful duck!... We've all seen this right? The fearful impulse while up to bat by the blazing fast hard ball heading the batter's way. Whether it be little league or Major league baseball... we all have likely seen a batter's reflexes put to the test...fast muscle twitch fibers engage furiously to throw the batter out of the oncoming hardballs course to their body...sometimes to the ground. Just knocks them down! Imagine not one hard ball,..but several DENSE, perhaps jagged ROCKS hurled your way with aim to hit and kill you. That's horrifying...and

SAUL ...SAUL gave full consent to it, to the stoning by his act of watching over the garments of the men carrying it out.

SAUL...a young man at the time..unconverted and witnessing what was taking place to Stephen. Now take into consideration who this young, unconverted man is at this time and place. He learned under Gamaliel (Acts 22:3) "according to the strike manner of the law.....," Gamaliel..remember him back in chapter 5? He was that respected teacher of the law who when he motioned to speak...the room silenced with a ready ear and didn't hesitate in heeding his counsel. This is who Saul was educated under concerning God's Law. The best of the best of the Old Testament Scholars at that time. SAUL was his pupil and was zealous for God in keeping the LAW. He himself, later on as a converted follower of Jesus, writes concerning himself (Galatians 1:14) how he was advancing in Judaism beyond many of his own age.....so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers." In Philipians 3:6 he testify's that "...he was blameless as to righteousness under the law." SAUL was an 'A' student. Aced all the tests...exemplified Judaism beyond many who were older than him. Men that simply by virtue of age, had the advantage of time and experience under their belt to gain greater knowledge in keeping with the traditions of Judaism...many of such men were surpassed by this young man Saul in Judaism. SAUL, in this place and time...thought he was doing right...Get this church. He thought he was doing right. That's all he wanted to do. He thought his life was pleasing to God. But he was still in darkness, unconverted, still blind to his need of a savior, NOT IN CHRIST.

BOY is that common place today. Men and women who are quite moral, upright citizens. KIND, generous, thoughtful, hardworking, express and show care for good things in this world, family, safety in our communities, schools, feeding the hungry. Investing in children's lives. Stand up for the weak and vulnerable...ALL good things.. BUT remain in darkness, are NOT IN CHRIST. Believe that such a life is worthy of acceptance into God's Kingdom, APART FROM CHRIST. Believe that a self based righteousness is sufficient for God being pleased with them. They don't see their need of a SAVIOR. Have NO conviction of sin leading to repentance.

We meet these individuals every day. Are you one of these individuals? Individuals like Saul, who is not 'IN CHRIST', but beholding one who IS. Later, Saul 'would' go on to be converted and take the name Paul. But only after his encounter with the risen Lord. Only after he came FACE to FACE with God's Holiness and his sinfulness. Like Paul, all must come to terms with their depravity if there is any hope for salvation. They must encounter the Lord Jesus and see the 'LIGHT of the world' expose 'their' darkness, the darkness of their heart, their depravity, their sinfulness and need of a savior. When this occurs, the converted sinner responds like Paul does (Philipians 3:7-11). "But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead."

The converted sinner wants nothing of their old life. The life that was NOT 'in Christ'. It profits them nothing in regards to eternal life. Anything they once considered as gaining God's favor is now see as refuse...They recoil at the thought of thinking such works would earn God's favor. They weren't living for Him...They were living for self. The converted sinner knows that they are exceedingly guilty before a Holy God and full deserving of His Just Wrath for their rebellion, and arrogance toward Him. The christian sees now that their is no life apart from Christ. True life, eternal life,..begins in knowing him now and being found in Him who the Father sent to save US from ourselves. He (JESUS) bore the punishment for our sin on the

Cross and lived the perfect sinless life in our place...a life we are unable to live...he lived it for us and it's his righteousness earned in which, by faith in his name, we MAY stand 'in',...stand before a holy God who, because of the work of Christ, does NOT compromise His Holiness by extending forgiveness to the repentant sinner and accounting to them the righteousness of His Son,...Jesus Christ. Only 'IN CHRIST' through faith is this possible...and I therefore, like Paul... I want to know him and the power of his resurrection and become like him in his death... AMEN.

The converted sinner responds in such a way. Paul responded this way. But here he is (still known as Saul) before his conversion, sharing in the guilt of killing innocent blood. His conversion didn't come until later while on the road to Damascus. BUT, though not in the moment realizing it, how much of an impact did Stephen's Christ exalting testimony, in living and in dying, how much impact does it have on him? SAUL learned under Gamaliel. He clearly is present at Stephen's stoning. Safe to SAY he had intimate knowledge and witnessing of Stephen's life and WORDS. We know from (Acts 22) that one of things that burned in Saul's memory that God used to humble him and keep burning hot his ZEAL for Christ was this account here in scripture, approving of the stoning of Stephen...and then, SOON TO COME in the passages ahead, his vehement persecution of 'The Way' ..of the church. (Psalm 64:6) "Deep is the inward heart and mind of man" and only the Lord knows what we ponder deep within. These memories were DEEP in the heart and mind of Saul and had lasting effect. What in your life, or WHO in your life has had weighty impression upon you and influences you now? (potential CG -discussion) Past experiences...maybe it's sin you know you are forgiven of but still feel the hurt of it. These CAN BE redeemed and used by God or they can be paralyzing and feed the pride of SELF pity.

Stephen had no idea what God was going to do through Saul. NO IDEA. His eyes remained fixed on Jesus...on that which is above. While SAUL stood there beholding this full of Faith and full of the Holy Spirit christian man...Stephen remained constant, unflinching, with his eyes set on him who is above. So much so that while the stones are being hurled at him...striking him fiercely he actually mimics our Lord's words from the cross while being crucified. (Verse 59 & 60) our final passages - read. - ...Here is what our Lord spoke from the cross. To those casting lots for his garments...Jesus said - (Luke 23:34) "Father forgive them, they do not know what they do." And then his final words (Luke 23:46) Then Jesus, calling out with a 'loud' voice, said. "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" And having said this he breathed his last.

In those final moments of dying, Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, EYES on the risen Lord, cried out for all to hear (most certainly including Saul) Stephen cried out while falling to his knees, unable to stand because of the pelting of stones having their intended effect ending his life... HE cried out nearly the same phrasing our Lord did while on the cross during his final breaths of life on this earth. Stephen's radiance in living and dying shown forth in his reflection of Jesus whom HE NEVER lost sight of. His eyes of faith set on Jesus while living became increasingly clear in his dying. He embodied what Paul described in (Galatians 2:20) referenced earlier "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." THAT'S IT! That is what we see shine forth brilliantly in Stephen. His old life was dead to him...crucified with Christ...and the life he was living in the flesh is the life of Christ in him he lives by faith with eyes of faith set on him who loved him and gave his life for him. And when Stephen transitions from life of faith in Jesus Christ here on earth to being present with him in His Kingdom....SCRIPTURE provides a lovely and trembling account of the dimness of faith breaking away into sharp clarity as he enters into his presence. Stephen no longer is looking to him by faith BUT NOW sees him face to face. "And all who saw him..ALL who saw him, saw that his face shone like an angel." So it is with each one of us WHEN we have our eyes set upon the Lord.

CONCLUSION- I'll close with these final thoughts -

In living and in dying. IN LIVING...the things in this life that are a very real part of life, don't affect us...we are able to, as recently shared to me by a dear brother...we are able to have perpetual peace in any and all of life's circumstances. Perpetual peace that continues all the way through OUR DYING where we know who waits for us on the other side. Having sat down at the right hand of the throne of God, interceding for you in prayer while you fight this fight of faith, a fight you are assured the victory because the one praying for you has already attained it. IT IS HE, who will stand from his seat and greet you at your entrance into His Kingdom. And only the Lords knows WHAT IMPACT His light reflected from you as you look to the Him WILL HAVE on those who hear your words and observe your life. Stephen, a man full of grace and power, full of faith and the Holy Spirit had lasting impact...left unforgettable MARKS on the lives of others for the good of God's church and for the glory of His name. We, HERE AND NOW, are given our stage in history where the theatre of God's grace in our lives plays out EACH and EVERY day in the words we speak and in our conduct BOTH in living and dying. Like Stephen, keep your eyes set on HIM that those watching you will be beholding HIS radiance.

Prayer - Snippet of Stephen's life..wasn't born this way...don't know much about him outside of this account. A life to strive to emulate. Rejoice and be thankful when it's evident and don't condemn yourself when it's not...but also don't remain there. Acknowledge where your at and look to and begin moving towards, where you need to be. Reset your focus of life on Christ. He hasn't left. He is still there. Return to him and purpose with all your strength,heart, mind, body and soul to be set on him and his Kingdom without flinching.

COMMUNION

Christianity is not morality. Though the obedient christian is MORAL. Christianity is FIRST and foremost peace with God, Forgiveness of sin, Eternal life, Reconciliation with the Father whom we can now be in fellowship with again because of the blood of the new covenant. Through JESUS, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkling of his blood whereby we may be sanctified...cleansed of all unrighteousness. Sin may be confessed and forgiveness can be extended because of the work of Christ. His body was broken and his blood was poured out that God who is Holy, who is Just...doesn't compromise His Justice by showing mercy. For those 'in Christ'...united to Christ by FAITH...God's justice for our sin is completely issued out on JESUS in our place. The atoning work of Christ. And furthermore...as if that wasn't enough...JESUS'S sinless, perfect obedient LIFE lived,...by which the Father is well pleased is accredited to us by that same FAITH. - A righteousness that depends on FAITH. Such amazing GRACE. Those 'IN CHRIST' proclaim God's magnificent work of salvation through his Son Jesus when we partake of the sacrament of communion. The table is prepared, with the bread representing his body that was broken and the cup representing his blood that was shed on the cross for those 'in Christ' the elements are prepared to come and partake declaring his death till he returns.

Benediction - 2 Peter 1:

Family

Table Talk



June 24, 2018

Family Discussion

- Time for a staring contest! Choose a partner and see who can stare the longest without blinking.
 - After a victor is revealed, do it again, but this time take turns blowing a soft puff of air into your opponent's face with them knowing. Are they able to not blink? Probably not since God designed our eyelids to immediately close at the slightest stimulation of our eyelashes as a protection for our eyes.
- Our God is so cool.
 - While staring at one another, did you notice some details of your opponents face that you haven't noticed before? What were they?
1. As followers Jesus Christ, we are to keep our eyes fixed on him with eyes of faith (unflinching) till we are in his presence and can behold him face to face. The following passages below in God's word help instruct us in how we are to do that.
 2. What are some things that could cause us to flinch/blink..or, get our eyes off of Jesus? What are the things that will help us keep our eyes on Jesus?
 3. In the Christian's life there are times when our eyes get diverted from where they ought to be and are taken off the Lord Jesus. When this happens, don't stay there.
Remember Lamentations 3:21-26 "....God's mercies are new every morning...." repent and return to Him who has never left.

GOD'S TRUTH

Those who look to the Lord are radiant in living and in dying!

Key Verse

"Those who look to him are radiant, and their faces shall never be ashamed."

Psalm 34:5 (ESV)

TABLE READING

Lead your kids into God's Word...

1. Psalm 119:5,6; Colossians 3:1-17; Matthew 6:19-21; Hebrews 12:1-3



Scripture Memory: John 15:20

"AND THESE WORDS THAT I COMMAND YOU TODAY SHALL BE ON YOUR HEART. YOU SHALL TEACH THEM DILIGENTLY TO YOUR CHILDREN, AND SHALL TALK OF THEM WHEN YOU SIT IN YOUR HOUSE, AND WHEN YOU WALK BY THE WAY, AND WHEN YOU LIE DOWN, AND WHEN YOU RISE. YOU SHALL BIND THEM AS A SIGN ON YOUR HAND, AND THEY SHALL BE AS FRONTLETS BETWEEN YOUR EYES. YOU SHALL WRITE THEM ON THE DOORPOSTS OF YOUR HOUSE AND ON YOUR GATES." - DEUTERONOMY 6:6-9 (ESV)

