

with an awareness of the presence of Jesus. We do that by reading the words of Jesus. We do that by praying and being mindful of Jesus.

2. Consider Him - The writer of Hebrews says when we are running our race and when things are hard... consider Jesus who endured the cross. Consider Jesus. When we think of what Christ has done for us, how can we live in stand by? Jesus would describe it this way "Count the cost." Count the cost everyday of serving or not serving Jesus. Consider him.

David Platt writes in Radical:

"We will not wish we had made more money, acquired more stuff, lived more comfortably, taken more vacations, watched more television, pursued greater retirement, or been more successful in the eyes of this world. Instead, we will wish we had given more of ourselves to living for the day when every nation, tribe, people, and language will bow around the throne and sing the praises of the Savior who delights in radical obedience and the God who deserves eternal worship."

3. Remember you are not alone. We move from stand by when we realize we are not alone. We struggle with commitment, but we must be reminded we are not being called to go alone. In fact, we are called to come along and we are called to be part of a people. The writer of Hebrews reminds us we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses. These are those who have gone before us and set us an example of commitment and sacrifice. We are in a long line of those who did not live in stand by.

I don't know about you, but I cannot stand by and watch others work. I cannot stand by and watch others have fun. I cannot stand by and watch others worship. I find in others the call to come and be involved. The same is true for the church. This church is calling you as a member of this congregation to stop living in stand by and join us in what God is doing in this place. This church is calling to you who have yet to make a commitment of membership and we are saying...stop living in stand by and join us and join God in what God is doing in this place and through these people. There is such joy to be found in this community of faith if you would just move from living in stand by.

4. Take the leap of faith. You can focus, you can consider Jesus, you can watch others... but sooner or later you have to take that step. You have to take the first step in the race marked out for you.

John Ortberg writes the forward to Jonathan Merits new book, *Jesus is Better than You Imagined*. In his forward, Ortberg makes a great observation and this is it:

"Where things are intersects with where things should be is where we find Jesus. At the point in life when we realize this is my life and then we realize this should be my life...it is right there that we find Jesus."

When we are tired of living in stand by and watching others live with courage, passion and commitment is the very place we hear the voice of Jesus saying follow me. You've got to take a step. Is it not time for you to take that step? How long are you going to live in stand by?



Living In Stand By

Acts 7:54-8:1, Hebrews 12:1-3

TRINITY PULPIT

The famous quote that is attributed to Edmond Burke says, "The only thing that is needed for evil to prevail is for good men to do nothing." So, it is when we live in stand by. In our text today, we have two individuals who at this point in their lives had chosen two separate paths of living. There was Stephen, the first martyr of the church, and then there was the young man Saul, who would become the great Apostle Paul... but not quite yet. At this point in his life, he was living in stand by.

Stephen had been arrested seized and questioned by the Sanhedrin. If we read Stephen's story, it sounds much like the experience of Jesus. We are told in chapter 6 that Stephen was one of the 7 chosen by the early church to make sure that the gentile widows were receiving the food they should receive. We are told that Stephen was a man full of God's grace and power and that he did great and miraculous signs among the people. However, opposition to Stephen arose in the Synagogue. These men argued with Stephen, but Stephen's wisdom was too much for them. Exactly what they argued about is hard to say. It was probably Stephen's call to a new way of thinking about God and worship. These men would have been very tied to Temple worship, and now Stephen was part of this new movement of following Christ that was calling all people to repentance and a disconnect from the Temple worship.

They plotted against Stephen, we are told in chapter 6, and they accused him of blasphemy. They stirred up the people and the elders and the teachers of the law so that Stephen would be arrested and brought before the Sanhedrin, which is essentially the Supreme Court of Judaism. We are told they produced false witnesses and said that Stephen spoke against the Holy Place or the Temple and against the Law of Moses. When asked about these charges, Stephen gave the Sanhedrin, the interpreters of the law of Moses, a history on the activity of God, the law of Moses and

the history of worship. Stephen proved he knew his history and the scriptures. His point through all of chapter 7 is that God cannot be contained in a place like the Temple. In fact, his closing argument is that the Most High God says, "Heaven is my throne and the Earth is my footstool. What kind of house can you build for me or where will my resting place be. Has not my hand made these things?"

In other words, Stephen says how ridiculous to think we can contain the Spirit of God into our man made structures. He closed with an accusation by telling them that they have a history of killing the prophets and now they have murdered the Righteous One the Messiah Himself. When they heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. In that moment, Stephen saw heaven's throne room itself and not only saw God, but also saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God. "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."

This was more than they could bear. To suggest that Jesus was God and at the right hand of power of God. To suggest that God was not one, but that Jesus and God was the same. They yelled at him, rushed at him, dragged him out of the city and stoned him. Even his death is Christ like. For in his moment of death, Stephen on his knees prayed that God would not hold their sin against them.

Stephen was a man who was all in. He was a follower of Jesus who did not live life in stand by. Stephen, the first martyr of the church, is a picture of incredible commitment and courage. There is a telling phrase in the text where we are told that Jesus stands at the right hand of God. Standing is an active term. It is a term of anticipation, activity and concern. When we are concerned we rise up and we become intent. Even in heaven Jesus is not in stand by. He is not biding his time.

Jesus looks upon His servant Stephen as if to



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stand in ovation for his courage and to welcome him into His presence. There is something that inspires us more than when we witness a person who is living out their convictions. It has been said that the blood of the martyrs is like fertilizer on the seed of the gospel. So, it is with Stephen. They thought by killing Jesus they could stop God's redemptive work, but they could not. They thought by killing Stephen they could stop the gospel, but they could not. The world has always thought that if they yell loud enough or cover their ears long enough or threaten enough and yes, even kill enough... it can silence the good news. However, the good news of God's love is the greatest force in all of history, and the resurrection of Jesus so transforms history that there is nothing that will prevail against it. Even our world has yet to understand this great truth. Yet, we catch glimpses of it when we see people like Stephen who refuse to just stand by.

Contrast Stephen for a moment with the young man Saul. We know who Saul becomes and in some way this is Luke's moment to introduce us to a new character in the story of the church. It will be the character in the establishment of the early church. We are introduced to the great Apostle Paul in a seemingly unheralded manner. We are told in Acts 7:58 that they dragged him (Stephen) out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul. Later in Chapter 8:1 we read, "And Saul was there, giving approval to his (Stephen) death."

Notice something about Saul at this moment in his life. He is not picking up stones. He is not shouting as far as we know. He is simply watching the coats of those who are stoning Stephen. Luke tells us that by being there and by doing nothing he was an accomplice and giving approval. Yet, at this moment he is simply there. He is living in stand by. Now soon the persecution of the church will start and Saul will get involved and be a leader in the persecution of the church, until he meets the resurrection Jesus in a vision on the way to Damascus. Yet, Saul in some ways seems to be late to the persecution. It is almost as though he is weighing his options. He is looking for the acceptable way. He is looking for the popular way. He is living in stand by.

The only thing that evil needs to triumph is for good people do nothing. I want us to be honest this morning with ourselves and ask the question if we are living in stand by when it comes to our faith. It is easy for us to live life on the sidelines, cheering every now and then, giving approval every now and then... but still live life in stand by mode.

Just like Saul's stand by, living had consequences that

day for Stephen so our stand by living has consequences. David Platt in his book Radical comments:

"The price is certainly high for people who don't know Christ and who live in a world where Christians shrink back from self-denying faith and settle into self-indulging faith. While Christians choose to spend their lives fulfilling the American dream instead of giving their lives to proclaiming the kingdom of God, literally billions in need of the Gospel remain in the dark"

What keeps us in stand by mode when it comes to our faith? I can think of three deterrents. There is fear, lack of passion and lack of commitment. There is fear. We are fearful of being judged, we are fearful of being ridiculed, we are feared of not being accepted, we are fearful of being different. We are fearful and rightly so. Stephen's courage brought him death. Jesus' life led him to the cross. The disciples all died in some way as a result of their faith. As Stephen says "was there ever a prophet you did not persecute?" Jesus reminds us that he would be persecuted just like the prophets before him and he reminded his disciples that they would suffer in the same way. There is much to fear. Yet, the Bible is filled with this reassurance from God. Do not be afraid. Over and over again the message from God, when God shows up is do not fear, do not be afraid. Fear can keep us in stand by living our whole lives.

Jesus tells the story of the talents and three servants are given a disproportionate amount of talents. One is given 5, one 2 and another just 1. The ones with 5 and 2 go out and gain more talent. The one with just one took his and hid it in a hole in the ground. When the master returns the two with more talents are rewarded for their stewardship, but the one with one talent presents the one talent back to the master and the master calls him wicked, lazy and there is severe punishment. When the servant gives the reason for his lack of production do you remember what he says, "I was afraid."

What is fear keeping you from doing when it comes to your faith? Jesus says to us, "Fear not, I am with you."

A second obstacle that keeps us living life in stand by is a lack of passion. It is not that we don't have beliefs or that we do not have some convictions, but we have lost our passion for God. If we look to our text today we find Stephen as a man with great passion for the Gospel. He is described as a man full of grace and power and the power of God was evident in his life everywhere he went. Standing before the Sanhedrin he spoke with great passion. It would be his passion for the gospel that would lead to his death. Yet, he would rather die filled with a

passion for God than to stand by.

In the book of Revelation there is the letters to the seven churches. The first letter is to the Church at Ephesus and the last is the letter to the Church at Laodicea. The first letter commends the church for their faithfulness, for their sound doctrine and for their perseverance, but Jesus says one thing I hold against you. You have forgotten your first love. They had much right. They had the right beliefs, the right actions, they were being faithful... but they had lost a passion for their faith and for God.

In the last letter to the churches, to the church at Laodicea, Jesus says I know your deeds and you are neither hot nor cold. Your faith is luke warm so I spew you out of my mouth. I wish that you were either hot or cold. Here was their problem. Jesus says you say to yourself I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing but you do not realize how pitifully poor you are... blind and naked. Jesus was telling the church at Laodicea that they had become comfortable and thought they had arrived when really they were in great need of God.

These two churches in so many ways epitomize the church in America today. We are wealthy, we have the right doctrine, we are faithful, and we are here when others are not. We are keeping the faith, but we have lost our love for God. We have become comfortable to the point we don't realize our need of God's power in our lives. We have lost our passion.

My friends, when we loose our passion for God we find ourselves living in stand by.

The third obstacle I would mention is that of lack of commitment. We live in a culture where commitment means until something better comes along. Those of who are of the boomers and builders like to look at our children, the millennial, and say they lack commitment. To be true, the millennial are redefining commitment. In a new business insider survey only 18% of millennial said they expect to be working for the same company for any period of time. CEO's are concerned how they can attract and keep young employees. In other areas of life, commitment comes much harder as well. We find commitment harder to come by in regards to relationships, marriage is much later now and there is a reason why most of the housing that is being built

around North Hills is rental apartments and not for sale units. It is all about commitment and long term.

Yet, before we get on our high horse and begin to bemoan the state of the millennial, let us be reminded that their behavior is learned behavior. They watched over 50% of all marriages of their parents end. They watched so called commitment between Corporate America and the employee. They have watched people get hurt who were committed. They have watched churches hurt people and people hurt others in the church. Why would they want commitment?

We live in a stand by culture. We live in a time where we stand and watch and wait for the better thing... the better offer to come. No wonder we struggle when it comes to faith when Jesus says come and follow me. If you follow me and turn around you are not worthy to be my follower. A lack of commitment can keep us living our whole life in stand by.

How do we get off stand by? Hebrews 12 might be a key for us. The writer says, "Since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles us and let us run the race with perseverance. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus and the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross scorning its shame and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider Him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and loose heart."

Here is how we get off stand by living:

1. Focus - if we are going to run the race marked out for us, we are going to have to focus. The writer says fix your eyes on Jesus. We begin with focusing our lives on Jesus.

Robin and I learned how to Paddle Board a few years ago and our instructor gave us some important tips. One was this, when standing up and rowing we need to keep our eyes on the horizon and not look down at the water. It was amazing how easy this sport was, once we kept our eyes up and on the horizon and not on our own feet and the water below. So the first thing we need to do is focus by getting our eyes on Jesus. What does that mean?

Notice Stephen says, "Look I see the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." Stephen focused his view on Jesus. I think that simply means we live each in every day

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