

Morning Overview

Lesson: *The Man Who Looked into Heaven*

Lesson Objective:

Our story today is about the life of Stephen. The much-admired servant of the early Church is maligned by a vicious group of religious leaders. These religious leaders are out to destroy Stephen, but this does not influence Stephen. Throughout our story it is oft repeated that the Holy Spirit was with Stephen, or he was full of the Holy Spirit. Despite the tough times, trials and even persecution, we can rest assured, like Stephen, the Holy Spirit, God Himself, is always with us.

NB: Please look to the Acts trifold to help explain how the Holy Spirit grew the Church as well as what goes deepest to the heart goes widest to the world. Each week the lesson will contain a small part from previous week's lesson to help kids remember previous stories.

Teaching Summary:

- God's promises do not change despite circumstances, people and even our inability to believe them. God keeps His promises even when we do not trust Him or follow His commands.
- God has promised to always be with His people. He is with us through the presence of the Holy Spirit.
- The Church is growing, but also experiencing persecution.
- With the growth of the Church, help is needed to care for the widows. Stephen is among those chosen to help.
- Stephen is full of wisdom given by the Holy Spirit.
- Different religious sects are jealous and angry with Stephen. They go about lying and spreading rumors about him.
- Stephen is brought in to meet with elders and scribes. He tells about Israel's past and how they rejected God's prophets and rejected Jesus too.
- The crowd gets angrier with Stephen and decides to kill Him.
- Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, sees Jesus in Heaven.
- Stephen forgives the crowd as they begin to stone him.

Scripture: Acts 6-7

Scripture Memory for October:

We must obey God rather than men. (Acts 5:29b) ESV

Craft: Heart of Stone

Supplies: Wooden heart, pebbles, verse sticker, magnet, glue, red marker

- Instructions:*
1. Color one side of heart red.
 2. Place sticker and then magnet on opposite side of heart.
 3. Place glue on one half of red side of heart.
 4. Dip heart in pebbles so they stick to heart.



If child has already done craft first hour, have them work on a coloring sheet.

Story

Transition

Boys and girls, in our story today we have a person who acts very courageous, which is a good thing! But the story ends on a sad note. Let's find out more about our story today...

The Prison Doors Open

Last week our story ended with the Apostles standing before the high priest and all of the important people in the city. The high priest said to the Apostles, "We strictly charged you not to teach, and yet you are teaching! The whole city of Jerusalem has heard your teaching and you intend to blame us for Jesus' death!" Peter and the Apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men." Peter went on to tell the high priest and the important people that God raised Jesus from the grave. Peter told the crowd of leaders, "You killed Jesus by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him at his right hand as Savior!" Peter told the leaders that Jesus had come so God's people could turn from their evil ways and be forgiven of their sins. The Apostles were witnesses to all Jesus had done in His life. Now that Jesus was in Heaven, the Holy Spirit was sent to help the Apostles tell others about Jesus' life. Only God can give the Holy Spirit and He gives it to those who obey Him. Peter and the Apostles' lives were saved by a man named Gamaliel. He told the high priest and others that if Peter and the Apostles were truly from God, there would be no way of stopping them. The Apostles were beaten, told not to speak in the name of Jesus ever again, and then let go. The Bible tells us the Apostles went their way rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name of Jesus. And every day, in the temple and from house to house, the Apostles did not cease teaching and preaching that Jesus is the Christ, the Savior of the World!

The Man Who Looked into Heaven

The Bible tells us that in the days that followed the Apostles beating, many people were becoming followers of Jesus. Lots of people came to believe in Jesus. A problem came up though. Many people needed help, and especially widows. Widows are women whose husbands had passed away. No one was taking care of them! So, a couple of men were chosen to care for the widows. One of the men's name was Stephen.

The Bible tells us that Stephen was "full of grace and power," and did "great wonders and signs among the people." But some people who did not like Stephen decided to argue with him. They did not like that the Holy Spirit had given Stephen so much wisdom. These angry people came up with a secret plan. They began to tell lies about Stephen. "We have heard him tell lies about Moses and God," they whispered to other people. The lies spread, and more and more people became angry with Stephen! The elders and scribes had Stephen come before them. People came forward to tell lies about Stephen to the Elders and Scribes. "He says Jesus will destroy this Temple and will change the laws of Moses!" But Stephen waited his turn to tell the truth. The High Priest turned to Stephen and said, "Are these things true?"

Stephen stood up and preached to everyone gathered there. Most of the people did not believe in Jesus, that He was God's Son and came to save the world.

Stephen began with Abraham. God had promised Abraham children, land and to always be with him. God would protect Abraham; anyone who blessed Abraham, God blessed but anyone who hurt Abraham, God would punish. Stephen spoke of Isaac and Jacob, and God's promises to them.

Stephen spoke of Joseph and how God was with him in Egypt. God kept His promise to bless those who bless the children of Abraham. Pharaoh was kind to Joseph, and Egypt prospered. But as Joseph passed so did the memory of him; a new Pharaoh came and was cruel to God's people. God punished Egypt. God raised up Moses to deliver His people from Egypt and to bring them into the Promised Land. Stephen told the crowd all the things Moses did, and yet God's people rejected Moses and turned against Him when they were in the wilderness.

Stephen told of Joshua, David and Solomon. Then Stephen said something that made the whole crowd angry. He said, "You stubborn Jewish leaders! You have not given your hearts to God! You won't listen to him! You are always against what the Holy Spirit is trying to tell you. Your ancestors were like this, and you are just like them! Your fathers tried to hurt every prophet who ever lived. Those prophets said long ago that the Righteous One would come. But your fathers killed them. And now you have turned against the Righteous One and killed him. You received the law of Moses which God gave you through his angels. But you don't obey it!"

The Bible tells us when Stephen said these words the crowd became very angry. But Stephen was not saying words to please the crowd; he was saying them because it was filled with the Holy Spirit and wanted to please God. The Bible goes on to tell us that Stephen looked to Heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.

And Stephen said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." But the angry crowd cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together at him. Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the crowd laid down their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul. And as the angry crowd stoned Stephen, he cried out, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

Stephen wanted to obey God more than men. He did just that by telling others about Jesus and then being obedient to Jesus. God was with Stephen in the very end. God will never leave us even in the bad times.

Questions for Review

- Who was our story about today?
- What was Stephen's job?
- Why were people angry with Stephen?
- What did they accuse Stephen of doing?
- Who did Stephen tell the elders and scribes about?
- Who did Stephen tell the angry crowd they had killed?
- What did the angry crowd do to Stephen?
- Who did Stephen see standing in Heaven?