

# OPEN HEAVEN

Part 9 • August 25, 2024 • Pastor Jason Smotherman

## **EPHESIANS 1:9-10 ESV**

*Making known to us the mystery of His will, according to His purpose, which He set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in Him, things in heaven and things on earth.*

## **JUDGES 16:6 ESV**

*Tell me where your great strength lies, and how you might be bound, that one can subdue you.*

## **ACTS 2:40-47 MEV**

*<sup>40</sup> And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation." <sup>41</sup> Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. <sup>42</sup> And they continued steadfastly (they were devoted) in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. <sup>43</sup> Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. <sup>44</sup> Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, <sup>45</sup> and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. <sup>46</sup> So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, <sup>47</sup> praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.*

## **LET STEPHEN'S CHURCH BE MY CHURCH**

Samson's story ends in a very familiar setting for the American Church today.

A young man seeing Samson (the picture of the Church) walking in circles with no power.

We are in a similar state.

The younger generation viewing the church as walking in circles talking about the once great power. We are thankful for our heritage, but we need fresh oil.

Samson's fall is similar to the modern churches fall.

We are teleported to a crucial question asked by Delilah in Judges 16:6.

Samson had been seduced, sourced, and separated from his power.

**Seduced:** *The allure of the world took his eyes of his source (The Nazarite Vow)*

He even operated for a short time in his power, until he didn't.

Backsliding takes time, until it doesn't.

**Sourced:** *A Sensual Spirit found his strength was tied to his Holiness.*

It's uncomfortable to talk about in church, but we must.

Sex, money, and an influence peddling Spirit have seduced the church and taken us away from our power. Many think they want the church to tone it down, you don't. The moment the church tones it down, the enemy will turn it up. When he is allowed to turn it up, he kills, steals, and destroys.

Holiness is less about what I'm not touching as much as it is about what I'm allowing to touch me. When Samson broke his vow, what was recorded in scripture was not that he touched Delilah but that Delilah touched him.

**Separated:** *Samson didn't even know it. He wist not that the Lord was departed from him (Judges 16:20).*

It never happens in one step. There comes a day when your choices become your decisions. We need catalysts like the young man who helped Samson re-position himself between the pillars. We need calibration.

Compare that to Stephen's Church.

## **STEPHEN'S CHURCH WAS ALIVE AND GROWING.**

There was joy (vs 41). They were teachable, pliable, and people were being added (vs. 41).

People aren't a threat when God is in the midst.

**There should always be room for the one more.**

The one more doesn't need to be like you to have value.

When the church adds people, it doesn't mean that your value is decreased. It means your spot is needed more than ever.

In reality, you must become what someone was for you when you arrived.

**A candle loses nothing of its light by lighting another candle.**

You must understand: People don't come pre-discipled. When a new person arrives, you are part of the vehicle that disciplines them to their destination.

## **STEPHEN'S CHURCH WAS DEVOTED**

### **1 CORINTHIANS 4:1 ASV**

*Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God."*

In this verse, Paul calls himself a "minister."

This is the Greek word **huperetas**, a vivid term that conveys the essential attitude necessary to get a job done — especially the work of the ministry.

It also denotes the essential attitude a person must possess to become successful in any sphere of life.

Interestingly, this word **huperetas**, translated "ministers" here, was used in classical Greek society to describe low-class criminals.

These criminals were so low, so detestable, and so contemptible that they were outcast and removed from society. Often they were assigned to the bottom galleys of huge shipping vessels, where they literally became the engines of those huge ships. And the harsh assignment given to these criminals wasn't temporary either. They were sentenced to live the rest of their lives in the darkness below the deck — endlessly rowing, rowing, and rowing. Their entire existence was devoted to keeping that ship moving toward its ultimate destination!

These **huperetas** were officially called "under-rowers" because they lived and rowed down in the bottom of the ship. Day after day, their job was to heave those massive oars forward and backward, pushing them through the water to make the ship move through the sea.

Devotion is what moves the church forward.

Yes the anointing.

Yes the Holy Spirit.

BUT in the end it's the faithfulness and devotion of Jesus' people that row the church to its final destination.

Devoted in good seasons, bad seasons, in conflict, in struggles, in victories, in unity in mission and purpose. They were devoted to God and each other.

## **STEPHEN'S CHURCH WAS TOGETHER.**

They were not together because they were all alike.

They were together because they were alike in their love for Jesus and each other.

Together is a difficult thing to attain if love is not the center of your relationships.

Let me illustrate with the Word association from last week.

An English publication offered a prize for the best definition of a friend, and among the thousands of answers received were the following:

- "One who multiplies joys, divides grief."
- "One who understands our silence."
- "A volume of sympathy bound in cloth."
- "A watch which beats true for all time and never runs down."

But here is the definition that won the prize:

- "A friend—the one who comes in when the whole world has gone out."

### **STEPHEN'S CHURCH WAS WALKING IN THE MIRACULOUS**

The most important thing that must happen when you pray for someone to be healed and a miracle to take place: They must feel loved.

Many people in wanting to see miracles miss the greatest miracle: loving your neighbor.

God will not send miracles to a flower bed, where envy and strife are present.

So our prayer is that let this church be like Stephens.

So make us like Stephen.