

Series: "Church of Antioch: The Church that God Can Use"

DIFFERENT CHURCHES / PASTORS - future of the church / Growth?
how to get new people / reach out with the love of God in Christ

1 Reason People DO NOT COME - THEY ARE NOT INVITED
TO THOSE NOT FAMILIAR WITH CHURCH - LIKE MOST - AN EXCLUSIVE CLUB
strange customs, rituals, unfamiliar people, procedures

85% all come to Christ / BECAUSE SOMEONE THEY KNEW INVITED THEM
PERSONAL INVITATION BY FAR THE MOST EFFECTIVE METHOD OF GROWTH

95% all Christians - HAVE NEVER LEAD ANYONE TO CHRIST
WILL ETERNITY BE ONE OF REGRET - FOR ALL THOSE WE HAVE NEGLECTED?

THIRD PART OF GOD'S THREEFOLD PROMISE TO ABRAHAM

Gen 12:3 "all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

WE ARE BLESSED TO BE A BLESSING

HOW DOES A CHURCH DO IT? - see Book of Acts / WONDERFUL STORY
BIRTH, GROWTH, MISSION, STRUGGLE, VICTORY OF CHURCH OF JESUS

ONE CHURCH GREATLY USED OF GOD - ANTIOCH // STUDY IT AS A MODEL

"The Church that God Can Use" - TO GIVE AWAY HIS BLESSING

Acts 11:19-20 Now those who had been scattered by the persecution in connection with Stephen traveled as far as...Antioch, telling...Jews. {20} (AND) to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus.

DISCIPLES WHO CAME TO ANTIOCH WHERE HELLENISTS
raised as Greeks, shaped by Greek culture, spoke Greek language

THEY THOUGHT BIG - THOUGHT FRESH - TAUGHT TO DO SO BY STEPHEN

THOUGHTS TOO BIG, FRESH FOR MANY - THREAT OF CHANGE - CHALLENGED

NOTICE IT WAS STEPHEN WHO HAD IMPACT ON THESE WHO CAME TO ANTIOCH •
- HIS DEATH - ITS MANNER AND HIS MESSAGE

LOOK TODAY AT STEPHEN'S FAREWELL ADDRESS
WORD WE NEVER WANT TO HEAR SPOKEN BY OUR DOCTOR - FEARED WORD "C"
Big "C" Word SOME FEAR ALMOST AS MUCH - CHANGE!!

WE'RE CREATURES OF HABIT- LIKE THINGS TO STAY SAME - COMFORTABLE
WORLD OF CHANGE - EVERYTHING AROUND US CHANGES - WE ARE CHANGING

CHANGING PEOPLE IN CHANGING WORLD WILL CREATE A CHANGING CHURCH

ONE PLACE CHANGE MOST THREATENING - CHURCH - REFUGE / SANCTUARY

1. Ploys Employed to Challenge Change

MICHAEL GREEN "For any congregation that is at all settled, change is one of the hardest things to face. And yet it is a prime necessity. Had not those Hellenists been open to change there would be little or no missionary activity. We owe them an enormous debt. They have blazed for us a trail we may be unwilling to follow but follow we must. Unless there is openness to change in the modern Western church we will get nowhere. The message is plain. People have voted with their feet. They do not want to be where most of us currently are. I do not blame them. What excitement is there in a normal traditional church service? Are there not alternatives on Sunday morning? Our attitudes must change. Maybe our music must change. Our robes may well need to be discarded. Our building-based mentality may need to change. Our ministerial pattern of 'six days invisible, one day incomprehensible' needs to change. Our idea of one-person ministry needs to change. The only thing that does not change is a cemetery. Every living thing changes, and so will a living church. It is a very exciting thing to be a part of. But it must be open to change where the Lord indicates."

a. Argument MESSAGE WAS OPPOSED - CONSIDERED FALSE TEACHER

6:9 Opposition arose, however, from members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen... These men began to argue with Stephen

RELIGION BOUND FORMER SLAVES TOGETHER -SOMETHING TO HOPE/LIVE FOR
ANY CHANGE IN THEIR RELIGION WOULD BE A GREAT THREAT TO THEM

STEPHEN SEEN AS GREAT FOE TO THEIR STABILITY - SAME TRUE TODAY
MANY ARGUE HARD AND FIERCE AGAINST GOD AND HIS WORD - EX. JESUS

WHEN THEY COULD NOT WIN BY FAIR DEBATE - MADE FALSE...

b. Allegation

SIMILAR METHODS IN POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS - FALSEHOOD & SLANDER

Acts 6:11-14 Then they secretly persuaded some men to say, "We have heard Stephen speak words of blasphemy against Moses and against God." So they stirred up the people and the elders and the teachers of the law. They seized Stephen and brought him before the Sanhedrin. "This fellow never stops speaking against this holy place and against the law. For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs Moses handed down to us."

place law customs
BUILDING - RULES - POWER STRUCTURE // 3 most imp. things Church!

STEPHENS ACCUSERS ALLEGE HE WANTS TO CHANGE ALL 3!!
EXTREMELY SERIOUS ALLEGATION - NOTHING MORE IMPORTANT TO JEWS
TEMPLE AND THE TORAH / WORSHIP AND THE WORD
GOD'S MEETING PLACE AND GOD'S MESSAGE

TYPICAL OF THE DEVIL'S ATTACK - mixes half truth in his lies

JESUS WAS BRINGING CHANGE TO BOTH THE TEMPLE AND THE LAW
BUT IT WAS CONSTRUCTIVE NOT DESTRUCTIVE / POSITIVE NOT NEGATIVE

PERHAPS HIS ENEMIES MISUNDERSTOOD THIS STATEMENT OF JESUS

John 2:19-21 Jesus "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days."...the temple he had spoken of was his body.

BECAUSE HIS BODY - THE TRUE TEMPLE OF GOD - WAS CRUCIFIED
NOW AS THE RISEN LORD INVITES WORSHIPERS FROM EVERYWHERE

REGARDING THE LAW OF MOSES - JESUS TAUGHT

Matt 5:17 "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.

Romans 10:4 Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

JOHN CALVIN "No harm can be done to the temple and the law, when Christ is openly established as the end & truth of both of them"

c. Annihilation - COULD NOT STOP THE MESSAGE / KILL MESSENGER

Acts 7:57-58 At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, {58} dragged him out of the city and began to stone him.

WE MAY NEVER KNOW THE CONSEQUENCES OF OBEDIENCE
MORE MARTYRS IN 20th CENTURY THAN PREVIOUS 19 CENTURIES COMBINED

NOT SURPRISING THAT JESUS APPEARED TO STEPHEN - HE KNEW THE DRILL
HE HAD BEEN THE OBJECT OF SAME THREEFOLD VICIOUS TACTIC

John 15:18-16.2 "If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own...a time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering a service to God.

LET US NOT ONLY BE AWARE THAT THIS THESE ARE THE WORLD'S TACTICS
LET US ESPECIALLY BE CAREFUL THAT WE NEVER USE THEM OURSELVES

2. Preaching that Explained Change

MASTERFUL ANSWER TO QUESTION OF THE HIGH PRIEST

Acts 7:1 "Are these charges true?"

OLD TESTAMENT BASIS - SCRIPTURAL PROOF - OF HIS RADICAL GOSPEL

4 MAJOR PERIODS OF HISTORY OF ISRAEL / 4 MAIN CHARACTERS

a. Abraham - God's Grace and Promise

LONG BEFORE THERE WAS A TEMPLE OR A LAW - God was with His people

Acts 7:2 "Brothers and fathers, listen to me! The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham while he was still in Mesopotamia

DID THEY KNOW THE TRUE AND LIVING GOD IN MESOPOTAMIA?

Joshua 24:2 'Long ago your forefathers, including Terah the father of Abraham and Nahor...worshipped other gods.

GOD CALLED A PAGAN, IDOL WORSHIPER, TO BEHOLD HIS GLORY = GRACE

WHO WERE THESE SONS OF ABRAHAM TO CLAIM MERIT BEFORE GOD - MERCY

WHERE WAS THEIR HOLINESS, RIGHTEOUSNESS, AND WORTH IN GOD'S SIGHT

Romans 4:2-3 If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about--but not before God. {3} What does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."

b. Joseph - God of Protection and Provision

IF IT IS A SHOCK TO THESE GOOD JEWS TO REMEMBER GOD WAS IN MESOPOTAMIA - FURTHER SHOCK TO LEARN THAT GOD WAS IN EGYPT

LIKE TELLING AN ISRAELI JEW TODAY -
GOD WANTS TO BLESS IRAQ, AND SYRIA, AND LIBYA

NO SURPRISE! - THAT IS THE MANDATE OF ABRAHAMIC PROMISE

Genesis 12:3 "all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

Acts 7:9-10 "Joseph WAS TAKEN TO EGYPT...God was with him {10} and rescued him from all his troubles.

JOSEPH TESTIFIED TO HIS BROTHERS OF GOD'S PROVIDENCE

Gen 50:20 You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.

HIS LIFE IS ONE GREAT EXAMPLE OF THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD

Romans 8:28 we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

AGAIN THE MESSAGE TO PEOPLE AFRAID OF CHANGE IS CLEAR
GOD WAS WITH JOSEPH THROUGH ALL THE CHANGES AND CHALLENGES

WHAT CAN WE HOLD ON TO DURING ALL THE PAIN OF CHANGES
WHAT COULD JOSEPH HOLD ON TO? - THE LAW AND THE TEMPLE!!
OUR ONLY REFUGE IS THE GOD OF JOSEPH

c. Moses - God of Change and Continuity

LONGEST PART OF SERMON - life in 3 40 year periods
BECAUSE ACCUSED OF NOT RESPECT MOSES AND FOLLOWING HIS TEACHING?

GOD WITH MOSES THROUGH THE CHANGES OF HIS LIFE

from Court of Pharaoh - to Wilderness of Sinai Desert

from being a Prince in Egypt - to Patriarch of Israel

from being a Law Breaker to becoming a Law Maker
from being Rejected by his people - to being Revered as Leader

from national ignorance of their God while in Egypt
to national intolerance of anyone who did not follow God

from the Sworn Covenant Oath of allegiance and obedience
to the Sinful Compromise and Orgy around a Golden Calf

Acts 7:25 Moses thought that his own people would realize that God was using him to rescue them, but they did not.

HE WAS MISUNDERSTOOD DELIVERER THEN AND HE STILL WAS AT THIS TIME

John 1:17 For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

WOULD THAT EVERY JEW SAY THINGS AS CLEARLY AS PHILIP

John 1:45 Philip found Nathaniel and told him, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law...Jesus of Nazareth"

BECAUSE THEY DID NOT THEY WERE PUNISHED

John 5:45 "But do not think I will accuse you before the Father. Your accuser is Moses, on whom your hopes are set.

d. David and Solomon - God is King of the Universe

RECOUNTS GLORY DAYS OF ISRAEL'S HISTORY - MONARCHY, TEMPLE, LAND

IF STEPHEN'S ACCUSERS ARE RIGHT - WOULD HAVE CAPTURED GOD - TAMED
NOT ONLY WAS HE JUST THEIR GOD - BUT HE LIVED IN THEIR BOX

SEEN THREAD RUNNING THROUGH THE SERMON -

God was in Mesopotamia with Abraham

He was in Egypt with Joseph

God was in Midian with Moses

HE WILL NOT BE TRAPPED IN A BOX OR A BUILDING MADE BY MEN

DURING LIFE OF THIS CHURCH - ABOUT 1850 - PLANS FOR THIS BUILDING
FIRST BUILDING - PREVIOUS 4 MEETING HOUSES / THATCHED STRUCTURES
CAN HEAR TRADITION KEEPERS "building, we never had a building!"

Acts 7:48-50 "However, the Most High does not live in houses made by men. As the prophet says: {49}
"Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me? says the Lord. Or where will my resting place be? {50} Has not my hand made all these things?"

ONLY PLACE ON EARTH WE CAN SAFELY SAY GOD IS - WITH HIS PEOPLE

ALL KINDS OF PEOPLE - dignified or dirty, simple or sophisticated young or old, civilized or cannibalistic, literate or lunatic

CHARLES SWINDOL - we will have three surprises in Heaven

1. Who is not there 2. Who is there 3. That we are there

e. Stephen - God of Justice and Truth

TRUTH IS CONVEYED BY HIS CONTENT AND HIS BOLD CONVICTIONS
PEOPLE HEARD AND HATED BOTH THE MESSAGE AND THE MESSENGER

CLOSED WITH A BOLD WORD OF JUDGMENT - INTENSITY OF GUILT

ACCUSED BY MOSES - he too called his hearers "stiff necked"

RESIST THE HOLY SPIRIT - inspired Scriptures / illumined them

IGNORED THE ANGELS - the messengers of God's Covenant

REJECTED THE MESSIAH - Righteous One to whom Scripture points

THEIR RESISTANCE TO CHANGE WAS NOTHING LESS THAN REJECTION OF GOD
ALTHOUGH THEY KILLED THE MESSENGER / DID NOT SILENCE THE MESSAGE

STEPHEN LIVES ON LIKE ABEL

Hebrews 11:4 by faith he still speaks, even though he is dead.

3. People who Embrace Change

a. Full of the Spirit SPIRIT OF GOD INITIATES CHANGE

WHEN THE APOSTLES TOLD THEM TO SELECT SERVANTS

6:3 choose 7 men...who are known to be full of the Spirit

Acts 6:5 They chose Stephen, a man full of...the Holy Spirit

SPIRIT OF GOD HOVERED OVER WATERS AT CREATION BRINGING ORDER

BY CONTRAST STEPHEN CHIDED HIS HEARERS

Acts 7:51 "You always resist the Holy Spirit! / THREATENED

EVEN UNTO THE END v. 55 Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit

b. Full of Faith FAITH INVOLVES CHANGE - GROWTH

Acts 6:5 Stephen, a man full of faith

COULD EVEN PRAY FOR THOSE WHO MURDERED HIM/ SAW GOD'S PERSPECTIVE

c. Full of Wisdom WISDOM INTERPRETS CHANGE / NOT ALL CHANGE GOOD

APOSTLES FURTHER INSTRUCTED THAT THESE SPECIAL SERVANTS

Acts 6:3 be full of...wisdom

DEMONSTRATED IN HIS BOLD AND POWERFUL PREACHING

Acts 6:10 they could not stand up against his wisdom or the Spirit by whom he spoke.

Psalms 119:98 Your commands make me wiser than my enemies, for they are ever with me.

d. Full of Grace and Power EMPOWERED TO BRING GOD HONORING CHANGE

Acts 6:8 Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people.

G. CAMPBELL MORGAN - Grace and Power "sweetness and strength...merged in one personality"

FULL OF = CONTROLLED BY / UNDER THE CONTROL OF GOD
HIS SPIRIT - WISDOM - GRACE AND POWER // A GOD CONTROLLED MAN

COPE WITH CHANGE - BE FULL OF GOD - PERSON OF HIS WORD AND PRAYER
NOT A SERMON HE HAD TIME TO STUDY FOR / WORD FILLED HEART & MIND

WHEN FULL OF GOD - HIS WORD - HIS SPIRIT - HIS GRACE & POWER

NO ROOM IN HEART FOR ATTACKING - REVENGE - RESISTANCE TO CHANGE

6:15 All who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen, & they saw that his face was like the face of an angel.

LEARNED JEWS KNEW SOMETHING ABOUT SUCH A FACE

Ex 34:29 Moses came down from Mount Sinai w/ the 2 tablets in his hands...his face was radiant because he had spoken with the LORD.

SURELY WAS IRONIC AS THEY LOOKED AT THEIR ACCUSED PRISONER
SUPPOSEDLY GUILTY OF DISHONORING MOSES - FACE SHONE LIKE MOSES

2 Cor 3:14-18 their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away.

NOT THREATENED BY CHANGE - HIS SOURCE OF SECURITY / SELF WORTH
MEANING FOR HIMSELF AND HIS LIFE - CAME ONLY FROM GOD

CHANGE WAS NO THREAT BECAUSE GOD NEVER CHANGES / SECURE IN HIM

LIFE IS NOT FULL OF EMPTY RITUALS AND DEAD TRADITIONS
LIFE IS FULL OF GOD - NO FEAR OF CHANGE - EMBRACE GOD IN CHANGES

4. Promises which Endure Change

NOT EVERYTHING CHANGES "I the LORD do not change. Malachi 3:6

Matthew 24:35 JESUS SAID "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

TWO UNCHANGING TRUTHS RUN THROUGH STEPHEN'S MESSAGE

a. God is With His People GOD W/ STEPHEN AS HE WAS MARTYRED

F.F. BRUCE "Stephen has been confessing Christ before men, and now he sees Christ confessing his servant before God"

JESUS IS NOT IMPASSIVELY SITTING DOWN SOMEWHERE FAR AWAY
Acts 7:56 "Look," he said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."
FRIEND WHO STICKS CLOSER THAN A BROTHER

STANDING - REACHING OUT - WITH US IN ALL OUR STRUGGLES

Acts 7:60 While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."

"I will build my Church" IS NOT A BLANKET ENDORSEMENT OF EVERY LOCAL CONGREGATION - EVERY WELL INTENTIONED MINISTRY OR PROJECT

THE CHURCH OF JESUS WILL NOT BE BROUGHT TO GLOBAL EXTINCTION

MOST CONCENTRATED EFFORT TO STOP XTIANITY THIS CENTURY - CHINA

BEFORE MISSIONARIES KICKED OUT - PERSECUTION BEGAN - 4 million

AFTER DECADES OF SUFFERING AND SLAUGHTERS - 50 to 100 million

Matthew 28:18-20 go and make disciples of all nations...And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

HE IS WITH US AS WE'RE GOING / NOT GOING - LEAVES US BEHIND!

b. God will Bless His Word

Acts 7:5 But God promised him that he and his descendants after him would possess the land

Acts 7:17 "As the time drew near for God to fulfill his promise

Acts 7:42 This agrees with what is written in the book of the prophets

Isaiah 55.11 so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.

CHARLES SIMEON - Holy Trinity Church in Cambridge
preached gospel for 10 years to locked pews - members boycotted

people stood in back and at open windows - weather permitting

JOHN STOTT "Change is painful to us all, especially when it effects our cherished buildings and customs, and we should not seek change merely for the sake of change. Yet true Christian radicalism is open to change. It knows that God has bound Himself to His church (promising that He will never leave it) and to His word (promising it will never pass away). But God's church means people not buildings, and God's word means Scripture not traditions. So as long as the essentials are preserved, the buildings and traditions if necessary can go. We must not let them imprison the living God or impede His mission in the world."

