

## Acts of Jesus – part 16

There is a face I want to show you to begin with this morning---his is the face of a man garnered much attention in international circles. His name is Abdul Rahman and he was on trial in Afghanistan for being a Christian. Afghanistan is fiercely Muslim and it is against their law for any Afghani to be anything other than Muslim. The penalty of conversion is death. According to his own testimony, Rahman was working with Christian relief workers in Pakistan 16 years ago when he apparently heard of Christ and became a Christian. When he recently sought custody of his children from his parents, family members reported his conversion. Senior Muslim clerics demanded Thursday that an Afghan man on trial for converting from Islam to Christianity be executed, warning that if the government caves in to Western pressure and frees him, they will incite people to “pull him into pieces.”

“Rejecting Islam is insulting God. We will not allow God to be humiliated. This man must die,” said cleric Abdul Raouf. But Mr Rahman told the court: “They want to sentence me to death and I accept it, but I am not a deserter and not an infidel. I am a Christian which means I believe in the Trinity.”

--This puts a face for us westerners on a large part of Christianity today that is being persecuted for their faith in Jesus Christ.

--Do you realize that we are coming off the worst century in Christian history as far as Christians martyred for their faith is concerned?

--Names like Stalin, Hitler, Mao Tse Tung, Pol Pot as well uprising in the Congo and other places in Africa, and more recently the horrible treatment of Christians by Muslims in Sudan and the Middle East.

--This past century more Christians have died for their faith than in the previous 19 centuries.

--I say all to say this—martyrdom is not some bygone issue for the church it is a current issue and it has always been to a greater or lesser degree for the Church since the beginning.

### 1. Today we’re going to be looking at a person named Stephen—a believer, a deacon, and the first martyr of the Church.

--Acts 6:8-15

--First of all, what is a martyr?

--Our word comes from the Greek word martus which means simply--witness.

--Acts 1:8 “and you will be My witnesses (martyrs).” Don’t forget that because it makes an important point about Christian living.

--In time, it came to apply solely to those who witnessed for the Savior in their deaths.

--Technically, “Martyr” is not special classification among believers but a categorical one!

How many of us should lose our lives for the faith? Luke 9:23 “deny yourself and take up your cross daily and follow Me.”

How many believers did Jesus call to die for their faith? Rom. 12:1-2 “offer your bodies as living sacrifices”

--This is not “a way” to live the Christian life but the only way to live in obedience to the Savior.

### 2. What constitutes a martyr? We have an excellent example in this man called Stephen.

1. First of all, a martyr is a person full of faith. V. 5

--What does it mean that Stephen was full of faith?

--What about, “If you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain...” Who needs more faith than that?

--I think that the right interpretation of this lies with the other thing he was filled with “full of faith and the Holy Spirit.”

--Can’t have more of the Spirit, but you can be more under His control

--Similarly, it’s not a matter of more faith, necessarily, but it’s of a matter of being controlled by faith.

--“Walk by faith and not by sight” is not a matter of more faith in the sense of measure but more faith in sense of control.

It is also important for us to understand that faith is only faith when it is placed in the right object

--There is no real power in faith itself only in the object of faith.

--If your faith is in something that has no power or is known to fail, then your faith is worthless.

--Faith is powerful when the object of faith is God and His Word because God is powerful!!

--Faith is walking in the will of God confident in the sustaining power of God.

--Does faith control your life?

2. Secondly, a martyr is a person who knows the Book.

--Notice: Stephen proceeds to give a lengthy and pinpoint accurate Bible lecture to the Sanhedrin who have the equivalent of doctor degrees in theology (this is the longest speech in Acts).

3. Finally, a martyr is a person who is dead already!

--Which is harder: To die for Christ or to live every single day for Him?

--The price of living every single day for Him is often much higher!!

If we live to be 82, then we would be living approximately 30,000 days. If we represent a day with a dollar bill, then a life equals 30,000 dollars. Someday Jesus may ask a specific believer to go out and spend the whole 30 thousand at once like He did with Stephen. But every day Jesus asks every believer to spend that day/that dollar for Him.

--In either case, its martyrdom: **Rom. 12:1**

--Paul writes this about his life lived for Christ: **Gal. 2:20** -- Paul was put to death under the hand of Nero in A.D. 66, but Paul was dead long before that!!