

University Heights Church
of Christ
445 Columbia Ave.,
Lexington, KY 40508
(859) 255-6257
www.uheightschurch.com

WORSHIP SERVICES

Sunday

Bible Study: 9:45 AM

Worship: 10:45 AM; 6:00 PM

Wednesday

Bible Study: 7:30 PM (This is immediately followed by a short worship period)

First Friday of Each Month

Singing: 7:30 PM

LEADERSHIP

Elders

David Collins

John Thompson

Troy Antle

Evangelist

Adam Litmer

Deacons

Richard Brundige

Matt Thompson

Adam Litmer

Bill Morelan

Jim Parsons

Pat Seabolt

Adam Daniels

Jamie Powell

In need of prayers

Jim Parsons, Rick Small, Bobbie Atkisson, Edith Huffman, Diane Thompson, Karen Spivey, Jeff Howerton (also his aunt), Rhonda Boyd (and her sister, Dorothy), Paul Atkisson, Lois Weatherholt, Cassie Neel, Keia Burton, Robert Brundige, Valerie and Barry Boyd, Erlene Young, Larry Sells, Evelyn Damron, John Blessing, William Roberts, Paul Lyda, Annie Allen, Elijah Ossege, Chassey and Paisley Seabolt, Tammy Goble, Veronica Bowman, Cindi Bradbury, Jennifer Strutz, Steve Stewart, Linda Humphrey

University Heights Messenger

Volume 11--Number 3

January 20, 2019

“Lord Jesus, Receive My Spirit”

Adam Litmer

Stones, large and heavy enough to tear flesh and break bones, slam into Stephen’s body time and again. In just a few seconds he is a mass of bruises and lacerations. Moments later his bones begin to fracture. It will not be long before his legs give out and he falls to his knees. (Acts 8:60)

What was his sin? What had Stephen done to earn such an excruciating death? Simply this: he had spoken uncomfortable truths to those who did not wish to hear it. He had reminded the self-righteous leaders of the sins of their fathers in resisting the Holy Spirit by persecuting and killing the prophets. From there he showed that they themselves had committed an even greater offense by betraying and murdering the Righteous One of whom the prophets had foretold. (8:51-53)

It wasn’t as though any of them could deny these charges, either. They loved and respected their forefathers deeply, yet they could not deny that they had generally treated the prophets atrociously. Instead, they claimed that they themselves would have done better had they been there. (Matthew 23:29-30) It wasn’t as though they could deny the

impact of Jesus. His ministry and works remained fresh in the city's memory and the church wasn't about to let them forget. His death was even more recent than His ministry and the saints certainly were not letting anyone forget about that. They continually pointed to that empty tomb outside the city; a tomb anyone could easily visit with a short walk. They kept claiming that Jesus had risen from the dead and the leaders could not disprove it because the body was gone despite having posted a guard of trained soldiers. What's more, the same signs and wonders Jesus had done were being done by the apostles.

Stephen simply pointed out these obvious and verifiable truths. Perhaps this event passed through Paul's mind years later when he wrote to the saints in Galatia these famous words: *Have I then become your enemy by telling you the truth?* (4:16) Without question Stephen became *their* enemy that day. It cost him his life.

But is that fair? Stephen was standing for the truth. Before this mob that hated Jesus and stubbornly denied what His works obviously declared, Stephen boldly stood for Him. Why should he have to die? Where's the fairness in it?

However long the stoning lasted would be excruciating for Stephen. What came next would cause him to forget the pain in a moment. (2 Corinthians 4:16-18; Romans 8:18) Is *that* fair? Even though his last breath was given in defense of Jesus Christ and truth, had Stephen earned eternal glory as a just wage? Stephen had sinned in his life so glory could never be his

through earning any more than it can be ours. Was it fair that he receive it anyway? No. Praise God grace is not about fairness!

As his life bled away, Stephen cried out, *Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!* (59) Praise God the faithful can face the moment of death with such peace and victory! Stephen had stood for his Lord and, blessedly, his Lord stood for him. (56)

Was this a prayer to Jesus or was Stephen addressing Him directly as he gazed upon Him? Those who believe it was a prayer often say there is no real reason to believe otherwise besides holding to a "traditional" teaching. They point out that the vision appeared in the city while the stoning occurred outside. (55-58) Those who say Jesus was being addressed directly in the vision often say that it is an assumption to claim the vision faded before Stephen's stoning because the text does not say it did. They also point out Jesus taught that prayers were to be directed to the Father in Jesus' name. (Matthew 6:9; John 14:13-14)

I have not the time or space to consider the particulars of the question here. Suffice it to say that Jesus is addressed is beyond dispute, whether one claims this a prayer or not. That we address Jesus often in our songs is equally beyond dispute. For the purposes of this article let us choose to focus on the magnificent grace and love that allows us to address Him at all.

There is yet one statement more from Stephen. We will discuss it, Lord willing, in an upcoming article.

