

TITLE: HOW WELL DO YOU HANDLE REJECTION?

TEXT: ACTS 7

INTRO: Jesus said to go into *all* the world, even though He had said, “few there be” who would obey. So Jesus sent us on a mission that He knew would be *relatively* unsuccessful. As Christ's messengers we are rejected a very high percentage of the time. How well do we handle this rejection? This is really the topic of Stephen's sermon in Acts 7:2-53.

I. INTRODUCTION (v. 2-8):

- A. Obedience of Abraham (v.2-4)
 - Stephen uses their history to appeal to them. Start with what we have in common (Paul does this in ch.13).
- B. Promise to Abraham (v. 5-8) - Land promise & seed promise (v. 5-7); Covenant of circumcision (v. 8)
- C. These events are told by way of introduction to the main point of the sermon (the body – v. 9-50). In this history he will present a common thread through each point – rejection.

II. BODY (v. 9-50):

- A. Example of Joseph (v. 9-16)
 - 1. (v. 9-10) Rejected by his own brothers, but delivered by God. Sold for 20 pieces of silver (Jesus was sold for 30).
 - 2. (v. 11-16) Through Joseph (the rejected member of the family), God provides for Jacob and his family.
- B. Example of Moses (v. 17-43)
 - 1. (v. 17-36) Rejected during Egyptian bondage
 - a. (v. 17-22) Moses' birth – hidden to avoid death. So in a sense, Moses was rejected even as an infant!
 - b. (v. 23-29) Moses' initial rejection by the Israelites. (v. 27) “who made thee a ruler & a judge over us?” God's chosen leader is rejected – but maybe because they don't yet know he'll be their leader. Surely *later* they won't reject him!
 - c. (v. 30-36) Moses' delivery of the Israelites – (v.30f) Burning bush; (v. 35) Irony–God sent the one they had rejected. (v.36) “He brought them out....” So here's a leader, rejected even before becoming a leader, coming out of Egypt, to take his people to the promised land. This is a type of Christ – rejected before becoming a leader (in his hometown- **Lk 4:16-30**), coming out of Egypt (Mt 2), trying to lead His people to the ultimate promised land.
 - 2. (v. 37-43) Rejected during wilderness wandering
 - a. (v. 37-38) Reminder of who this Moses is. He is the same Moses who promised a leader (**Deut 18:15f; Acts 3:22**), and he is the same Moses who delivered the law that *you Jews* claim to follow! This is who I'm talking about – your leader.
 - b. (v. 39-41) Idolatry w/the golden calf at Sinai. Moses went to Sinai, received God's approval & the law, then was rejected. Jesus went to the mount of transfiguration, received approval as lawgiver, then was rejected. Nothing's changed!
 - c. (v. 42-43) Idolatry with the tabernacle of Moloch (god of the Moabites to whom parents sacrificed their children). These were rejections of God & Moses, who forbade idolatry through the 1st commandment (no other gods before me).
- C. Example of the house of God (v. 44-50)
 - 1. (v. 44-45) Tabernacle – You had God with you, in the tabernacle, up to the time of David.
 - 2. (v. 46-47) Temple – David wanted to build it, but Solomon did. Note there was never an indication that *God* wanted it!
 - 3. (v. 48-50) God's dwelling place – He doesn't live in houses made by hands! He doesn't need His creation to create for Him! Why bring up the tabernacle & temple? How are they examples of their rejection? This sermon began as a result of false claims against Stephen (**6:13-14**) – saying he claimed Jesus would destroy the temple. This would be devastating to them, because the temple was an icon to them. But this is not what it was all about! God never dwelled in houses made by hands (the ark was a representation of Him). The Jews rejected God & His leaders by focusing on the temple! Catholicism & many denominations are also very visual religions (the icons, statues, huge buildings that impress people). These things validate in their mind that what they're doing is right. But God isn't there. He's in the hearts of the obedient.

III. CONCLUSION (v.51-53):

- A. Main point: You always reject the Holy Spirit, just like your fathers (v. 51)! How? By rejecting His messengers (v. 52-53)! Your very actions of rejection show you to be like your fathers who rejected the prophets. And this action itself in part shows that Jesus was indeed the Messiah!
- B. This sermon resulted in their murdering of yet another prophet! But this murder resulted in the preaching of the gospel more (8:4)!
- C. **When God's leaders do things God's way, they have *always* been rejected by God's people!** This is a sad statement, but it is fact! It has always been this way, and it seems that it will always be this way. Stephen makes this point in order to show that Jesus was God's leader whom Moses foretold in Deut 18. The Messiah would be rejected (evidenced not only by the history of God's leaders, but by predictive prophecy)! “Open your eyes and see it!” is what Stephen is trying to say. “Plus, your persecution of me is a good sign that I'm a man of God!”
- D. Not everyone who is persecuted is godly; but **those who are godly are persecuted!** John the baptist (**Mt 14**), disciples rejected (**Mt 10:17**–“*beware of men: for they will deliver you up...and scourge you*”); James killed (**Acts 12**); Paul was persecuted everywhere he went; church rejected (**Rev 2:10**); ***Mt 5:10-12**; **2 Tim 3:12**. Today nothing has changed. Those who hold to the truth of God's word are rejected. But what should be the result of this rejection? Stop preaching? **Or preach even more (8:4)?**

CONCLUSION: Looking through the Bible (especially at Stephen's sermon), we see that *most* of the rejection received by God's leaders came from those who were *supposedly* God's people! He called them stiffnecked & uncircumcised in heart, **always** resisting the HS. He shows us that one of the characteristics of God's leaders has always been rejection by God's people. Jesus was rejected in the same ways!

Today, we need to recognize that if we're going to be a part of Christianity, we too will be rejected (2 Tim 3:12), even by those claiming to be God's people. Most of us already know this. So how are we going to handle it? The prophets kept preaching (even when they were persecuted). The apostles kept preaching (even when they were persecuted). What will you do when you're rejected...again?