The Stoning of Stephen

Getting to know you…

1. Where do you feel safest? Is it a town, a place, or maybe a circumstance… Share with the group where you feel safe and why.

1. What's your default when you feel like you need protection from something or someone? How do you protect yourself from the unknown?
2. Do you have any questions or comments from Pastor John’s sermon this week? What are they? What stood out to you?

Digging Deeper

This passage shows the circumstances that caused Stephen’s martyrdom. While reading the passage in Acts, it’s difficult not to be overwhelmed with how quickly things went from good to terrible. Stephen went from preaching to defending himself, to being cut off, *mid-thought*, straight to stoning. Acts 7:55 shows Stephen’s reaction to the anger his testimony caused the religious leadership in front of him. He looked to Heaven and saw something amazing. He saw that Jesus was at the right hand of God! This image no doubt encouraged Stephen, reminding him that the hard part was over – Jesus had defeated sin! Stephen, when seeing that he was facing danger and certain death, *looked to Heaven for protection and comfort*. Suppose we truly live a life of sacrifice and service to Jesus. In that case, we will often end up in situations where we might be in a similar level of danger, be it physical, emotional, professional, or otherwise. Sharing Jesus may end a relationship, or a career, or even cause death. With that in mind, let us *look to Heaven* this week by studying scripture that shows us the Lord’s protection.

Deuteronomy 31:6 (ESV)

6 Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the Lord your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you.

1. How *should* this passage impact our reaction to difficulty in life while we obey God’s direction?
2. Every Christian on this side of Heaven is going to be flawed when it comes to relying on the protection of Jesus. What steps can *you* take to strengthen your confidence in this protection?

Isaiah 54:17 (ESV)

   17 no weapon that is fashioned against you shall succeed,
    and you shall refute every tongue that rises against you in judgment.
This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord
    and their vindication from me, declares the Lord.

1. This passage talks especially about weapons and slander being unsuccessful against the Lord and His people. How is this encouragement different from what we read in Deuteronomy? How is it helpful in our pursuit of following the Lord?
2. Where in this passage can we be sure that protection is promised to *us?* What group of people are being talked about here?

Taking it Home…

1. Stephen was called to do a dangerous thing: Share the Gospel. While we at Point Harbor don’t necessarily have the same danger today, we often shy away from sharing because of “perceived” danger. What is currently preventing you from sharing your faith in a meaningful way – beyond “Hey, you should come to church….”
2. What would it look like for you to practically apply the above two passages to your situation? What, specifically, do you think you need to stop worrying about?
3. How can we take Stephen’s example to heart and look to Heaven in times of danger?
4. With this passage in mind, how can your Point Group pray for you?