



Can We Be Friends Now?

Enter Paul

Barbara Brown, MSE (BB): Good morning, everyone. So glad you could join us and I pray all is well in your world and ask God to take you through anything you're going through for His honor and glory and your freedom and deliverance.

Dr. Tom Taylor (TT): Yesterday we ended in *Acts 1* and I really jumped on poor Brother Peter. I pray I didn't offend you, but look at him in *Acts 2*, when the Holy Spirit falls on the disciples, now Apostles, and Peter rises up and gives his first speech under the anointing. He uses prophecy from *Joel* and precedents from *Psalms*, but he is full of the Spirit and he's being guided by the Spirit so that his speech is not from himself but a word from on high.

It is such a marvelous contrast to Peter's speech that we read yesterday in the first chapter of *Acts*, and if any of that left a bitter taste in your mouth, this, I pray will counteract that so that you don't think I was just ragging on Peter.

So, here's Peter in *Acts 2*; we begin in verse 14. Now, the Holy Spirit's already fallen. They've already been speaking in tongues to the marvel of all around who were from other countries, but they heard him speaking in their own language.

So now in verse 14:

**14 Now Peter, standing with the eleven, lifts up his voice and declaims to them:
"Men! Jews! and all who are dwelling at Jerusalem! Let this be known to you, and
give ear to my declarations,
15 for these are not drunk (the guys you've just seen speaking in tongues, they're not
drunk as you might imagine, or as you take it), for it is the third hour of the day. (In
other words, who's going to be drinking at this hour?)
16 But this is that which has been declared through the prophet Joel:
17 'And it shall be in the last days,' (God is saying) 'I shall be pouring out from My
spirit on all flesh, And your sons and your daughters shall prophecy, And your youths
visions shall be seeing, And your elders dreams shall be dreaming,**

18 **And surely on My men slaves and on My women slaves in those days shall I be pouring out from My spirit,' and they shall be prophesying.**

19 **'And I will give miracles in heaven above, And signs on earth below, Blood and fire and vapor pillars of smoke,**

20 **The sun shall be converted into darkness And the moon into blood Ere the coming of the day of the Lord, The great and advent day (other versions[say], 'the great and fearful day,' something like that, 'great and terrible day').**

21 **And it shall be that everyone, whosoever should be invoking the name of the Lord, shall be saved.'**

22 **"Men! Israelites! Hear these words (now we're back to Peter): Yeshua, the Nazarene, a Man demonstrated to be from God for you by powerful deeds and miracles and signs which God does through Him in the midst of you, according as you yourselves are aware (you saw it, you heard Him) –**

23 **This One, given up in the specific counsel and foreknowledge of God, you, gibbeting by the hand of the lawless, assassinate,**

24 **Whom God raises, loosing the pangs of death, forasmuch as it was not possible for Him to be held by it.**

25 **(He's quoting again:) "For David is saying to Him, 'I saw the Lord before me continually, Seeing that He is at my right hand, that I may not be shaken.**

26 **Therefore gladdened was my heart, And exultant my tongue. Now, still my flesh also shall be tenting in expectation,**

27 **For Thou wilt not be forsaking my soul in the unseen (Peter's still quoting from the Psalms), Nor will Thou be giving Thy Benign One to be acquainted with decay.**

28 **Thou makest known to me the paths of life. Thou wilt be filling me with gladness with Thy face.'**

29 **(Now Peter's speaking for himself under the anointing still:) "Men! Brethren! Allow me to say to you with boldness concerning the patriarch David, that he deceases also and was entombed, and his tomb is among us until this day.**

30 **Being, then, inherently, a prophet, and having perceived that God swears to him with an oath, out of the fruit of his loin to seat One on his throne,**

31 **perceiving this before, he speaks concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that He was neither forsaken in the unseen, nor was His flesh acquainted with decay.**

32 **(This Yeshua) This Jesus God raises, of Whom we are all witnesses. (When he says, "We all are witnesses," he's talking about he and the other guys, the 11.)**

33 **Being, then, to the right hand of God exalted (this is where we saw Him go), besides obtaining the promise of the holy spirit from the Father, He pours out this which you are observing and hearing.**

34 “For David did not ascend into the heavens, yet he is saying, ‘Said the Lord to my Lord, “Sit at My right

35 Till I should be placing Thine enemies for a footstool for Thy feet.””

36 “Let all the house of Israel know certainly, then, that God makes Him Lord as well as Christ (in other words, God makes Him Lord as well as the Messiah, the Anointed) -- this Yeshua, Whom you crucify!” (He's talking to Jews here and they were there when the throng called for Yeshua's life not giving up the idea of crucifying, rather clinging to the declaration, “Crucify Him! Let Him be crucified!” So they were there. They may have been among the people shouting that.)

37 Now hearing this, their heart was pricked with compunction. (He's talking about the crowd that just heard Peter speak.) **Besides, they said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “What should we be doing, men, brethren?”**

38 Now Peter is averring to them (he's declaring to them, testifying to them), “Repent and be baptized each of you into the name of (Yeshua the Messiah) Jesus Christ for the pardon of your sins, and you shall be obtaining the gratuity of the holy spirit (meaning, the Holy Spirit will come on you just like it's come on us).

39 For to you is the promise and to your children, and to all those afar, whosoever the Lord our God should be calling to Him.”

40 Besides, with more and different words, he (that's Peter again) conjures and entreated them, saying, “Be saved from this crooked generation!”

Once the Spirit had come on the Apostles, they became authoritative in their speech and anointed by God to perform many signs, wonders and miracles, while, at the same time, drawing huge numbers of converts from the Jews in the region.

And one of these converts was a man named Stephen, who was admired and loved by all, except of course, the Jewish religious hierarchy. And Stephen really let these guys in the hierarchy have it with the whole story from Moses through Christ and pointedly said more than once about Yeshua, **“Whom you crucify.”**

This was, by the way, a big impetus for so many in the area to confess faith in Yeshua, because, as you recall, they had been among those, as I said earlier, who may have been calling for Yeshua's death and told Pilate specifically, **“His blood be on us and our children!”**

So here comes Stephen, in Acts 7, a young man recently added to the number of believers, who was among those chosen to wait on tables. Wherever this assembly was and wherever they were meeting, they had to appoint some people to wait tables. There were too many for the Apostles themselves to be doing it, and the assembly themselves decided it wasn't really appropriate for them (for the Apostles) to be doing it; they had other, better uses for their time.

Well, Stephen got snatched up by the Jewish religious hierarchy to answer for his faith and he let them have it with both barrels! He recited to them practically the whole history of the nation of Israel from the Exodus out of Egypt to the present time. I'm just going to read the last part of Stephen's indictment (that's what it is really), which will result in his being stoned, and it also results in Paul's introduction when he was still known as Saul.

One of the patterns you'll see here has been repeated throughout the Old Testament, and also when Yeshua walked as a Man; it's still going on today in many cases. When people in authority don't like a message they're given, usually by a prophet, then they try to silence the messenger, rather than learn from the message.

It's the stupidest thing I've ever seen, but it happens throughout the Scripture and I actually saw it in real life clear back in, gosh, the early 80s. I helped get a book published and I also assisted the author closely day by day in getting him out into the media using a PR firm in New York of course, but nevertheless I was side by side with him going through this adventure. [The] climax really of that whole tour, which took several months, was when this author went toe-to-toe with Jerry Falwell. Now, if you're too young to know that name, look it up. He was the founder and first President of Liberty University in Virginia; his son is now the president.

Jerry Falwell was invited to be on the same interview show; it was called "Sally Jessy Raphael." Again, she's not around anymore, but she was *very* popular *then*. This time Jerry Falwell was there to debate face-to-face, toe-to-toe, literally. They faced each other and were close enough to reach out and, if they had wanted to, slug each other.

The premise of the book that this man was speaking about had to do with the salvation of all mankind, which we'll get to, so you can imagine how much trouble Jerry Falwell would have with this whole idea. It flies in the face of most of Christian traditional teaching. So when they were face-to-face, the author with whom I worked, he was as calm as a cucumber, really articulate because he had no territory to protect or defend. "This is what the Scripture says. This is what the original language says. Why are we saying anything different?" And this author, he'd been trained in a seminary; he knew full well what the Bible he grew up with said, but he couldn't support it given what the original language said when he investigated it.

Falwell, on the other hand, had everything to protect and defend. His whole career was based on that some people would be saved and some people would not, in which case they're going to go straight to hell and that's where they're going to be for eternity in torment. "That's what the Bible says," at least his. So the point is, when he's confronted with this completely different idea, supported, nevertheless, by all the language in the Scripture, Falwell could not bear it, and it was so fascinating to watch. He could not debate anything based on fact or merit or Scripture, not one time. The only thing he could do was call into question this author's credentials, his lifestyle, his character, the training he received.

Falwell was reduced to a red-faced name-caller; that's all he could do. Meanwhile, the whole time, my author was just sitting back relaxed, smiling, watching Jerry Falwell just go off the rails. What a testimony to when you know that you know that you know about what you're talking about. Anybody can say anything they want, it doesn't change you at all. "This is what it says; I'm not making it up." This is what happens when people in authority don't like a message they're given, they'll try to silence the messenger, rather than learn from the message.

So here's Stephen now, from Acts 7:51 and on, he's saying:

51 "Stiff-necked and uncircumcised in your hearts and ears, you are ever clashing with the holy spirit! As your fathers, you also!

52 Which of the prophets do not your fathers persecute? And they kill those who announce before concerning the coming of the Just One (he's talking about Christ there), of Whom now you became the traitors and murderers –

53 who got the law for a mandate of messengers, and do not maintain it!"

54 Now, hearing these things, they were harrowed in their hearts (they were just torn because it was true), and gnashed their teeth at him. (Again, they're focused only on him, not on what he said.)

55 Now possessing the fullness of faith and holy spirit looking intently into heaven, he (Stephen) perceived the glory of God, and Yeshua standing at the right hand of God, 56 and said, "Lo! I am beholding the heavens opened up, and the Son of Mankind standing at the right hand of God."

Barbara, would you give the insight that you had when you read this some long time ago? That He's standing, Yeshua is standing.

BB: When I read that long, long ago, it's like, I just wondered if there would ever be a time in my life that Yeshua would stand up for. Jesus stood for Stephen. It's the only time in Scriptures that you read of Him standing. He was watching. He was being with him. He was standing up to welcome Stephen. He was standing up in appreciation, in honor. Stephen is the only one; Jesus stood up for Stephen.

TT: The reason that's important is because you'll remember when Yeshua was taken up into the clouds, He was *seated* at the right hand of God. We don't see Him changing that position until now.

Well, let me go back and reread 56: Stephen said, **"Lo! I am beholding the heavens opened up, and the Son of Mankind standing at the right hand of God."**

In verse 57 now:

57 Now, crying with a loud voice, they press their ears and rush on him with one accord.

58 And, casting him out, outside the city, they pelted him with stones.

And the witnesses put off their garments at the feet of a young man called Saul.

59 And they pelted Stephen with stones, while he was invoking and saying, "Lord Yeshua, receive my spirit!"

60 Now, kneeling, he cries [out] with a loud voice, "Lord, Thou shouldst not stand against them this sin!" And saying this, he was put to repose.

Remember, repose is death. He was put to death, stoning, being stoned to death; that's got to be horrific.

So now in Acts 8, we begin meeting Saul:

1 Yet Saul was endorsing his assassination. (He was endorsing Stephen's assassination. He stood right there, watching over everybody's coats.) **Now in that day there came to be a great persecution of the ecclesia which is in Jerusalem, and they were all dispersed among the districts of Judea and Samaria, save the apostles.** (The apostles stayed right where they were.)

2 Yet pious men are Stephen's pallbearers, and they make a great grieving over him.

3 Now Saul devastated the ecclesia; going into the homes, dragging out both men and women, he gave them over to jail.

It's almost incomprehensible how threatened the religious authorities were by Yeshua's followers; almost as much as they were by Yeshua Himself! They really could not stand the overthrow of their power structure and the source of their personal wealth, by the way, which they'd built up over several generations, over centuries, since the end of the Old Testament probably or soon thereafter. This whole pharisaical...the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Sanhedrin, none of that was going on in the Old Testament. Somewhere between the end of *Malachi* and the first verse of the New Testament, a whole lot of twisted stuff had to happen to create that hierarchy.

Anyway, they rejected wholesale, the long-awaited Messiah Who had stood among them and heralded the salvation that they had looked for, and the kingdom that they had expected to arrive. Yeshua just didn't look or sound like they expected. They expected the Messiah to come in power and authority like a conqueror, and they missed or ignored all the signs of His arrival in the first place.

Now, when Stephen truthfully recounted Who Yeshua was and their culpability in His death, they simply could not bear to hear it. And there was Saul, standing by, guarding the cloaks of those stoning Stephen, and bearing witness to it, he was endorsing it.

I'm going to read again Acts 8:3: ***“Saul devastated the ecclesia; going into the homes, dragging out both men and women, he gave them over to jail.”*** Saul didn't just persecute, he *devastated*. And later Paul writes that he “ravaged” the ecclesia.

Here's what Paul says in *Galatians 1*:

13 For you hear of my behavior once, in Judaism, that I inordinately persecuted the ecclesia of God and ravaged it.

14 And I progressed in Judaism among many contemporaries in my race, being inherently exceedingly more zealous for the traditions of my fathers.

Saul's inordinate persecution means, “*exceeding all reasonable limits, excessive,*” and ravaged means, “*savagely destroyed.*” Saul was the archenemy of all believers in Yeshua. This is why his radical conversion, which we're about to witness, was such a stumbling block and a point of confusion and contention among the early believers, and the Jewish hierarchy too! Saul was not trusted by either group! But that's just like the Father, to pick the *most* unlikely person of all to become His greatest messenger, apart from Yeshua. Talk about something about which everyone would have said, “*Oh, God would never!*” Well obviously, God did *exactly* what never would have entered anyone's mind, Jew or believer.

Well, it's time to witness Saul's conversion and his radical transformation from an inordinate persecutor and a ravager to an evangelist. And we'll pick that story up in *Acts 9* when we meet again.

Until then:

***May YaHoVeH bless you and keep you;
May YaHoVeH light up His face toward you
and be gracious to you.
May YaHoVeH lift His face to you
and appoint peace for you.***

Amen.