

## SESSION 5

# RESCUERS

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## WHAT PRICE CHRISTIANITY?

### I. THE RESCUE OF: CASSIE BERNALL

The unthinkable happened on April 20, 1999, in a suburban high school near Denver, Colorado. Not one student who stepped through the doors of that high school ever dreamed of what would take place that fateful day, least of all Cassie Bernall. Not one student who sat in class that day considered that 14 of their friends and 1 teacher would be gunned down in cold blood before the bell rang to dismiss, least of all Cassie Bernall.

Seventeen year old Cassie was a quiet girl who had two loves in her life. The first love was her Jesus. But this wasn't always the case. Years earlier Cassie had lived the life of a defiant young teen. The Holy Spirit, however, had other plans. His fire burned in her soul with a love for Jesus. The second love was for her writing. Her two loves came together in these beautiful words she wrote: "Now I have given up on everything else—I have found it to be the only way to really know Christ and to experience the mighty power that brought Him back to life again, and to find out what it really means to suffer and to die with him." What beautiful words to come not from the feathered pen of a degreed theologian, but from the ballpoint pen of a high school junior.

These words would come shockingly true the afternoon of April 20 while sitting in the library at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado. It was on that day that two young thugs armed with hate in their minds, guns in their hands and demons in their hearts came face to face with their classmates, including Cassie. These two young men turned the peaceful halls of this school into a bloody war zone. They wielded their deadly firearms with vengeance and spite, gunning down student after student until they finally came to young Cassie. They shouted out, "Does anyone here believe in God?" just as if Satan himself spewed out the words. Quietly and confidently Cassie stood up and announced, "Yes, I believe in God."

"Why?" the young gunman asked. But before she could answer, he put a bullet in her head. Cassie died instantly. Her life ended there. There would be no more days or nights for Cassie. No dates, no proms, no beach parties, no wedding, no children and grandchildren, no career, no laughs, no fun, no friends, no nothing ever again. She'd never have the chance to say "I love you," to her parents again. Not even a "Goodbye." Her life on earth took seventeen years to build and only a few seconds to end. If ever there was someone today who could proudly wear the badge of MARTYR, it was Cassie Bernall...born 1981, died 1999.

## II. THE INTRODUCTION: STEPHEN, THE FIRST MARTYR

Just a moment ago we called Cassie Bernall a modern day martyr. She certainly was not the first martyr, nor will she be the last. Today's account takes us back to the days of the early Christian church. Picture if you will that Jesus had already ascended into heaven as written in Acts 1. Pentecost had also taken place as seen in Acts 2, and the apostles had replaced Judas. Also past, is the court telling Peter and John not to preach in Jesus' name and the horrid sentence of death given to Ananias and Sapphira because of their lies. Our account begins in Acts 6:1 and continues through Acts 7.

## II. THE FACTS BEHIND OUR BIBLE STORY: THE HISTORY OF STONING

Stoning was the ordinary method of capital punishment dating back thousands of years. It was used not only by the Hebrews, but also by the Macedonians and the Persians. The execution took place somewhere outside the walls of the city. Here the witnesses laid their hands on the accused's head to symbolize that they were guilty of a severe crime. The cloaks of those stoning were removed to allow for better arm movement while throwing the stones (see Acts 7:58). Often the witnesses to the crime were the first to cast the stones. The stones were then hurled hard and fast until the accused was dead. Sometimes the body was placed on display for all to see the rewards for one's deeds. It was often true that the dead criminal would not be allowed a place in the family grave.

## IV. THE ACCOUNT: READ BY SECTION AND ANSWER THE QUESTIONS AFTER EACH PART

### **Acts 6:1-7**

1. Why did the disciples feel it was necessary to select the seven?
2. Who were the seven men chosen?
3. What is unusual about the mention of Stephen?
4. What group of men were remarkably added to the church as Christian believers?

### **Acts 6:8-13**

1. Why and by whom was Stephen being closely watched?
2. Why did Stephen win all the arguments?
3. How are verses 12-14 similar to the arrest and conviction of Jesus?
4. What do you think "his face was like the face of an angel" means?

### **Acts 7:1-53** (Select a volunteer to rise and deliver the speech as Stephen might have)

1. Why did Stephen repeatedly speak about Moses? (See Acts 6:14)
2. What comparison did Stephen make between Moses and the prophets and Jesus?

### Acts 7:54-60

1. What did Stephen see as he looked into heaven?
2. Why did the men need to cover their ears?
3. Why is verse 59 very significant?
4. How are Stephen's words in verses 59 and 60 similar to Jesus' words on the cross ?
5. Amid all the yelling by the accusers, amid all the noise and commotion of the stoning, what was Stephen still able to do? (See end of verse 60)

### V. THE DILEMMA: SIX CARDS FOR APPLICATION AND INSIGHT

(Have each student choose a number from 1 to 6. Each student is to find the paragraph which corresponds to the number they previously wrote down. Then write a paragraph answering how they would handle the scenario. Compare answers.)

- No. 1 How would you react to this scenario: You are sitting quietly in a high school library when a gunman breaks through the library doors. You duck beneath a desk to get out of the line of fire. You hear the gunman yell, "If anyone believes in Jesus let him stand up now!" What would you do?
- No. 2 Give an example in your life when you had an opportunity to stand up for your faith but didn't do so.
- No. 3 How far does the Lord expect us to go to stand up for him? Did Stephen and Cassie go too far?
- No. 4 Why could it be said of both Stephen and Cassie that they were really in a win-win situation?
- No. 5 If your life was on the line, as was Stephen's, could you witness as he did? Why or why not? Should we be able to do such a thing?
- No. 6 Why do you think amid all the violence at the end of Acts 7, that Luke, the writer of Acts, ends it with the thought that Stephen simply closed his eyes and fell asleep? How can this serve as a comfort for us when we face death some day?

### VI. CONSIDER THIS

Have students consider this riddle:

*If Stephen was first as a martyr true,  
Who do you think was number two?*

The answer is in Acts 12:1,2.

## VII. CLOSING DEVOTION, DISMISSAL AND REFRESHMENTS

*Prayer: Dear loving Father. Thank you for letting Cassie, Stephen and Ken Davis share the great love they had for you with us today. Give us the strength to stand tall as your ambassadors. Just knowing that heaven will be our reward is far greater than we sinful creatures could ever dream of. Forgive us when we lose sight of your unconditional love. We ask this in the name of Jesus, who has promised to prepare a place for us in heaven. Amen.*