

Acts 6:1-7:17

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 04 January 2023

Preacher: Pastor Jared Bromka

[0 : 00] Lord, we lift up your word to you. And we want to hear from you. There's so much in here, Lord, we could look at and bog down on.

Not bog down, Lord, but I guess camp out on. Lord, as we move through this text, we want to move through it in a way that we see the series of events, Lord, and as you portrayed them to us by the Holy Spirit and learn the lessons, Lord.

Lord, most importantly, we want to know you. This is life eternal that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent. Lord, it's relationship. All of eternity is relationship, Lord.

It's knowing you. Lord, that starts now because we have eternal life. We put our faith in you. It's not something we hope for. We have it now. You tell us that we are currently seated with you in the heavenlies.

Lord, we long for the day when we will see you face to face. But, Lord, now we see through a glass dimly. Now we know in part. Until that day, Lord, may we stay faithful to hold on to what we know.

[1 : 03] That's your word, Lord. Thank you for it. In Jesus' name, amen. All right. Acts chapter 6. So if you remember, we've come through Ananias and Sapphira.

They were just done away with. We looked at how God purified his church, is keeping it pure because there's a very small root that has not yet grown into the full tree.

And so God is keeping the beginnings very pure. And then we saw when the multitude of disciples were put in prison and the angel came and opened the door and let them out. It's a good thing. And then they're put in prison again.

And they weren't let out so easily the next time. They were beaten after Gamaliel gave his advice that if this is God, it cannot be overthrown.

Refrain from these men and let them alone. If it's the work of men, we'll come to naught. And they agreed to that, I guess, because they didn't kill him. But they beat them and let them go.

[2 : 02] We saw how they departed, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer. Because suffering for Jesus always results in spiritual strength. And now we're into chapter 6.

And the first part of chapter 6 deals, we had that snapshot, if you remember, over in the end of chapter 4, the multitude of them that believed were of one heart.

In verse 32 through the end of the chapter, we had that snapshot of kind of like life in their early church. And how they were fellowshiping and living with one another.

Well, the beginning of chapter 6 is kind of a snapshot again, but it's kind of a snapshot of how they did ministry. It's pretty interesting. And we could definitely stay there a while, but we're not gonna. And then we'll get into Stephen and his appointment, his works, and then his faith, and then his trial.

Well, the goal is to get through chapter 6 and halfway through 7. But as we get into 6, there's a few things to notice. That more people create more problems.

[3 : 11] And now there's about 8,000 people. You know, that's just men. 5 to 8,000. So you could have like 10,000 people. We're also, this is probably three to five years into the life of the church.

It seems like it's just event after event after event. But I don't know who figures that, but supposedly it's three to five years in. Paul would currently be in the school of Gamaliel. Gamaliel, who just gave that counsel to let them go.

Paul would be still in his tutelage. And so we're gonna see, as we get through this, verse 2, we're gonna see to the problem that arises, leader initiated.

And verse 3, leadership directed. Verse 5, leaders affirm. Then verse 6, ratified through prayer. And verse 7, confirmed by God.

And we're gonna see how they do ministry as they go through this. We live in a world that doesn't like leaders. We don't like authority, right? It's like, oh, that's bad. I was thinking about it. Nobody wants authority in their life, but everybody wants the benefits of authority when they're struggling or when they want help.

[4 : 21] And it's like, well, I don't want anyone telling me what to do. But if I have a need, I expect you to provide it. It's like, well, it doesn't work that way. You know, you can't have both.

Because when you undermine authority, you're actually undermining your ability to receive any benefit from authority. So chapter 6 begins, and in those days, and so what days?

Well, these are the days of persecution. The church is beginning to be pressed and squeezed. They've just been beaten. This is not a very fun time, necessarily, to be in Jerusalem.

There's a lot of confusion, I think, and a lot of pressure. And in those days, when the number of disciples was multiplied, so if you remember earlier, God added to the church. Now it's multiplied, so it's increasing rapidly.

There arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration. So you have the situation, if you remember, everybody was selling what they had extra, bringing it at the apostles' feet, that it could be distributed.

[5 : 27] And here we see the process. So there was no welfare. There was no government support system. It was your family who would take care of you. Well, you become a Christian in that culture, and they have a funeral for you.

The Jews disown you. So you have these widows that have nobody to take care of them, to look after them. And so the church, the church stepped in for these believing widows.

But there is two types here. And here you see great potential for division. The enemy could use this to just wreck this church. But what a heart these people have.

They're so close to the Lord, so close to just listening to Him and following His Spirit. There arose a murmuring against the Grecians and the Hebrews. Philippians 2.14 says, do all things without murmuring and disputings.

1 Peter 4.9 says, use hospitality one to another without grudging. So what was it? Why were these Hebrews neglecting the Grecians? Well, who were the Grecians? Were they Greek? No, they were Jews, but they were Jews of the Hellenistic mindset.

[6 : 31] They were those who had bought into the Greek culture. And they had become believers. And so you had the Orthodox Jews coming out of Judaism, getting saved and becoming believers.

And then you had the more liberal Hellenistic Grecian Jews who were also being saved. And they became one. And they're in the church. But there's a noted division, a noted difference here.

And differences aren't bad. But differences that lead to division, it's not the difference that's the problem. It's the fact that those differences are used to divide. And their widows were being neglected in the daily ministration.

So obviously there was something happening where every day there was something in process. They had come and developed a system by which to feed these people and to care for them. So the ministry is working.

It's functioning. And the word there, neglected, is comparatively. So the widows were, not that they were being neglected, but comparatively they weren't being cared for as well as the Hebrews.

[7 : 29] I don't know if that was intentional or if it was probably just that there was such a larger presence of Hebrews or Jewish believers that were in constant fellowship and contact with the Hebrew widows.

And the Grecian ones, it might be the kind of thing nobody really knew about them. No one knew them. One person maybe knew them. And they weren't getting their share as they were expected to.

So then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples. Interesting, the twelve, right? Who was the twelfth one? Matthias. So scripture recognizes him as legitimate because you hear people say, well, Paul should have been the twelfth, you know, not Matthias.

So Paul himself says, I'm one that's born out of due season. An apostle born out of due season. What's an apostle? What qualifies to be one of the twelve? Well, they had to be with Jesus. We know it from the beginning when Peter stands up and says, we must needs have one who's been with Jesus from the beginning, from the baptism of John and on.

So Jesus appears to Paul in person when he's in Arabia in the desert. And through that process, Paul says, I also am an apostle because of this special, in a sense, dispensation from the Lord to be one born out of due season.

[8 : 45] But the twelve called the multitude of the disciples and said unto them, you guys, you need to get along. You need to figure this out and come up with a solution because you shouldn't have division. This isn't right.

No. They came and they said, hey, we recognize the situation. Leader initiated. The leaders recognized it, but didn't try and fix it. They didn't say, well, okay, we're going to take care of this. They said it's not reason that we should leave the word of God and serve tables.

The word reason means pleasing in the Greek. It's not pleasing that we should leave the word and serve tables. Tables, excuse me. Leaders can't meet all the needs. And the greatest need is the word of God, right?

And so the leadership looks to involve the body. It's interesting. They recognize and they're saying it's not reasonable. It's not pleasing. It's almost a no-brainer for them to say, well, we would never leave the word of God to serve tables.

Where today it's almost like, well, there's so much more priority to these other things than the word of God. We have to do these other things. If we get to the word, we get to the word, but we have these other things that need to take place.

[9 : 52] We have our programs and practices and whatever. And even in our own lives, what place does the word of God hold? Do we look at it and go, well, it would not be pleasing to the Lord and it doesn't please me.

It's not something I want to do to set aside the word of God. My time in the word to be somewhere else. So they recognize there's an issue and they involve the body and they say, brethren, look you out among you.

Seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. And so we have leadership directed.

They directed it. They initiated it. They directed it. But then they left it to the body. And I don't know why seven. It's just like, why seven?

Why not 10? Why not five? Why not like, well, there's 12 apostles. We should have 12. I guess seven was sufficient. And they said, full of the Holy Spirit and of wisdom and of honest report.

[10:50] Man, can you think of seven people, you know, off the top of your head, who are of honest report, full of the Holy Spirit and full of wisdom. Like, man, Joe Fos, Chuck Smith is dead.

Billy Graham's dead. You know, right? You can, it's like, wow. Do you feel comfortable putting yourself in that place? Yeah. Pick me. I'm full of the Holy Spirit, full of wisdom and of honest report.

You know, right away, my conscience is going, well, what about that, that, that, and that? And it's like, oh, man. So these guys, it's like, this is the cream of the crop. What would we do if we found someone like this? Holy cow.

Let's like, make him a pastor. Let's make him a counselor. Let's make him an evangelist, a ministry leader. And so this is who these men are. And you think of Stephen. He's the one we're going to focus on. We're not going to really talk much about, eventually we'll talk later about Philip, but we don't hear about Proculus, Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicholas, who was a proselyte of Antioch.

We don't hear much about them, but all of these men qualified for that. And so they say, appoint these men. But we, the apostles say, we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.

[12:06] Constant attention to one thing, is what they're saying. Our purpose in this role God has given us is to give constant attention to this one thing.

1 Timothy 4.15 says, Meditate upon these things. Give thyself wholly to them, that thy profiting may appear to all. It's Paul who writes that later, right?

He says to Timothy, give yourself this thing, wholly to it. These men, the apostles, the disciples at this time, were saying that our purpose is to give constant attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.

That was expected, and it was appreciated, and it was pleasing to those who they're ministering to. We live in an interesting age where you have like, almost like, there's no middle ground anymore.

It's either like, you have the guy who's like, the, you know, full term, full life preacher who's just like, that's his career, that's what he's doing, he's getting paid to do.

[13:11] Which is fine. There's a benefit in that, for sure, because if these men couldn't give themselves continually to prayer and to the word, well, that would eventually hurt the health of the body. Having somebody, if you're a group of believers, and you want your body to be healthy, you need to recognize, well, what does scripture say?

That we're to be edified in the word. We're to gather together and not forsake the assembling of ourselves together. It's good to have someone who can give themselves constantly to that. Someone who can perhaps be visiting these widows, these shut-ins.

Somebody who has the ability during the week to do that. But that can go so far to where it becomes a situation where now it's more of a comfortable, expected thing. Well, you're going to be the pastor?

Okay, here you go. Here's your house. Here's your car. Here's your, you know, your monthly allowance, whatever. Then you have the other side of that, where you have, you know, where I'm in and Keller's dad, you know, we're bivocational.

Where it's like, man, I can't give myself wholly to the word and prayer because I work. There's a great benefit in that. And being able to relate more easily with the people you're ministering to, for sure.

[14 : 13] Like, yes, I know what that's like. But at the same time, it does create a more narrow window in which you have to be able to give yourself to these things.

So I don't know, were the apostles working? Were they not working? All I know is they were able to say, we need to constantly give attention to this one thing, prayer and the word. And I need to do the same thing.

Whether I'm working or not, it's always on my mind to be doing that. Giving myself wholly to what God's called me to as much as I can within the sphere of life he's put me.

And we all need to. What has God called us to? Not what has he called us to, like, to do for work or what has he called us to do, you know, in this life to provide. But what has he called us to do in the kingdom?

That's what we need to be wholly given to. Whether we are at the Y, whether we're working, you know, whether we're home. That still is the primary thing.

[15 : 13] And the saying, please the whole multitude. There's that word again, pleasing. And they chose, notice the names of these guys. Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Proculus, and Icanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicholas, a proselyte of Antioch.

All Greek names. So, you know, they were very wise in their choice here. They didn't go out and get a bunch of, you know, Hebrew guys with Hebrew names. And they were very sensitive to the need, sensitive to the people they were ministering to.

There was no reason to force upon them something that they were not comfortable with. And in ministry, our goal is always and should always be to edify the people and serve the people that God gives us to minister to.

It's never, well, I have a gift I need to use. Or, this is what I feel you need. The Lord doesn't do that in our lives, does he? He serves us and ministers to us in a way that we're comfortable with.

And he leads us on gently. And they set them before the apostles, verse 6. When they had prayed, they laid their hands on them. So the leaders affirmed their role in verse 5, saying, please the whole multitude.

[16 : 30] And then they ratified it through prayer. So they give God the opportunity to say no, essentially. They laid their hands on them and prayed. And the Lord could have said, mm-mm, not Philip.

He's out. But it's interesting that the Lord, you don't see in here any type of indication of a direct leading of the Spirit, of saying, well, the Spirit picked this one.

Like, you think of when Paul and Barnabas are praying in Antioch. And as it says, as we fasted and prayed, the Lord spoke and said, separate unto me Paul and Barnabas for the work of ministry that I have for them. You don't see that here.

But there's a recognition of the Spirit moving among the body that they can recognize who the people are that are serving and that are filled with the Spirit and that have a healthy relationship with the Lord.

I thought I had one other scripture. But I guess not. And by laying on their hands, that's a transfer of authority, as a sign of transferring authority.

[17 : 32] And the word of God increased. And the number of disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly. And a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith. So God confirms it. There's a confirmed work here.

The word of God increased. The number of disciples continued to multiply. And then a great company of priests were obedient to the faith. So these dudes who in the last chapter were beating them, now are being added to the faith.

Well, where do you think the witness came from to these priests? Well, maybe they came to church. Maybe they met them in the marketplace. I don't think so. I think maybe they saw the witness when they're being dragged before them and persecuted.

So this bad situation, this horrible situation where if I got out of it, remember they prayed and said, oh Lord, give us boldness that we may speak forth your word.

I would have prayed, oh Lord, let me never get in a situation like that and please protect me from the priests. But they recognized God's hand in it. And they were faithful to witness of the Lord to the priests.

[18 : 36] They were getting saved. They must have eaten up Caiaphas that there are priests who were getting saved and joining the church. So here's Stephen.

We know from verse 5, Stephen is a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit. It says specifically about him. And also we know from verse 3 who they were choosing. They were choosing people of honest report, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom.

So now Stephen comes on the scene. And you think if you're a Stephen and this is the type of person you were and the apostles come or whoever from the body is coming and they tap you on the shoulder and say, Stephen, we've got a job for you.

We need you to serve. The Lord's calling you. And he's thinking, yes, 13th apostle, baby. Right? He's thinking, finally, finally. Man, I'm full of wisdom and I'm full of the Holy Spirit.

It's about time someone recognizes this. I've been waiting. Oh, right. You know, it's like you go in the church. You've been there for a while. It's like, man. And the pastor says, hey, brother, I need your help.

[19 : 37] Oh, you recognize my gifts. Finally. Do you need me to preach? Teach? I mean, you know, I'm not really good with worship, but I'll give it a try. Whatever you need, pastor. I need to go clean the toilets.

Right? No, I'm not going to do that. Can you imagine Stephen that comes and says, hey, we need you to wait on tables, buddy. That's what a deacon is. Because we need you to take around this food to the widows that nobody knows.

And they're probably not going to be really happy right now. They're probably a little upset because they've been neglected. And we didn't mean to neglect them. It's just how it happened. And here you go.

Go take your basket of food around. And Stephen could have been bitter or frustrated. But, man, you just see the heart of this man is the person that you would want to be in any position to serve.

And there's people, you know, I know that have just hearts for ministry. Anything you ask them, they would do. And I hope someday they have a heart like that. So Stephen, full of faith and power.

[20 : 42] Verse 8, he did great wonders and miracles among the people. And so he's a, what would we get the term deacon from here? This is where Paul eventually will say, you know, deacons and elders.

1 Timothy 3.13 says, when speaking of deacons, it says, For they that have used the office of a deacon, for they that have used the office of a deacon well, purchased to themselves a good degree and great boldness in the faith, which is in Christ Jesus.

Interesting scripture. So Stephen, proving out that scripture, that they who have used the office of a deacon well, purchased to themselves a good degree and great boldness in the faith, which is in Christ Jesus.

And so there's something that when you step up to the calling and ministry, whatever it is, a deacon is just a servant, is just someone who just serves, who just waits on table, a waiter essentially.

When we serve faithfully, there is a spiritual reward, a spiritual result that happens. There's boldness and faith. And Stephen is a beautiful example of that.

[21 : 43] He did many miracles among the people. In verse 9, So this synagogue, again, recognize the names.

Those are Greek names, Grecian names. They're probably people who used to be his friends, probably people he went to synagogue with until he became a believer and part of the church. And so they now begin to dispute with him and argue with him.

And they say, Stephen, we know you. We remember you. We know you when you used to, oh, you're so religious. Remember what we used to do after synagogues, Stephen? We know you. But they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spoke, because religion cannot hold a candle to true righteousness.

And so the wisdom and the spirit, he was a man filled with the spirit and wisdom. If only they had read verse 3, they would know that they were specifically looking out, guys, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom they could set over this business.

And now they're coming against him. Verse 11, Then they suborned men, which said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God. And they stirred up the people and the elders and the scribes and came upon him and caught him and brought him to the council.

[23 : 02] So who's they? Well, this is those guys of the synagogue, probably in conjunction with Sanhedrin. They hired men to stir up these people.

And they spoke these lies against Stephen. It made me think of some scriptures in Proverbs. I was thinking of, I've written my Bible, don't be hasty. You know, they're so hasty to accuse him. And it works.

And then, oh my word, did they get laid out in chapter 7, when he just cuts through them and lays them out with this account of the history of Israel, showing how, so chapter 7 is, he uses Abraham, Joseph, and then Moses to give example of how God chose the most unlikely and God's deliverer was always rejected by God's people.

And he lays them out. And it's going to tell us, again, that they were cut to the heart. So don't be hasty. Proverbs 18.7 says, A fool's mouth is his destruction, and his lips are the snare of his soul.

Proverbs 18.17, He that is first in his own cause seems just, but his neighbor comes and searches him out. Proverbs 20.25, It is a snare to the man who devours that which is holy, and after vows to make inquiry.

[24 : 23] That makes me think of politicians. It's a snare to the man who devours that which is holy, and after vows to make inquiry. You know, how many inquiries are taking place?

Oh, we'll look into that. And it's just, it's just an excuse to just kind of stick it in limbo for years. And then 1 Timothy 5.22, Lay hands suddenly on no man, neither be partaker of other men's sins.

Keep yourself pure. So the idea of laying hands on is you are transferring authority, and essentially saying, I and this person I'm laying hands on are one in decision making. And so, these men were hasty.

They thought, we've got him. We'll stir up the people. And they set up false witnesses in verse 13, which said, This man ceases not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the law.

For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered unto us. So, I looked for that, and that doesn't really exist.

[25 : 24] Daniel 9.26 says, And after three score and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself. And the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary.

That's not speaking of Jesus. That's speaking of the Antichrist. And the end thereof shall be with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined. So, it's talking about the sanctuary and the city being destroyed, but that's not referencing Jesus.

And Jesus never said that. The closest thing he said, in John chapter 2, verse 18, the Jews said unto him, What sign do you show unto us? Seeing that you do these things, he had cleansed the temple.

Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this temple and building, and will you raise it up in three days? But he spake of the temple of his body.

So, there's nowhere where he ever said, Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered. Right? They took a little bit of truth, and they mixed it and twisted it, until it said what they wanted it to say, to meet their own ends.

[26 : 35] And so here's Stephen in the midst of all of them. And all that sat in the council, so this council, we looked at that before, who was the council? The whole council was brought together, the whole Sanhedrin, when they had the apostles and the disciples there.

Gamaliel, Paul would have been there, at this time Saul of Tarsus. And all that sat in the council, looking steadfastly on him, saw his face, as it had been the face of an angel.

And they all thought, uh-oh. Maybe that wasn't such a good idea. The truth will always outshine the lie. Chapter 7.

Then said the high priest, Are these things so? And Stephen said, I'm glad you asked. And he said, Men and brethren, and fathers hearken.

Proverbs 15, verse 1. A soft answer turns away wrath, but grievous words stir up anger. The tongue of the wise uses knowledge aright, but the mouth of fools pours out foolishness.

[27 : 41] A godly appeal. Stephen gives a godly appeal to these men. He doesn't come at them angrily. He's not frustrated. He's not bitter. And he's going to lay out this amazing account of Israel's history, focusing on that, throughout Israel's entire history, they always rejected God's deliverer.

They always rejected the promised one. And he said, Men, brethren, and fathers hearken. The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia before he dwelt in Haran.

And he said unto him, Get thee out of thy country and from thy kindred and come into the land which I will show you. A couple things there. He starts specifically with he appeared unto Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia before he dwelt in Haran.

He didn't start with when he was in Haran, he left Haran. He starts with when he was in Babylon, a pagan. God chose a pagan. You know, because Abraham, oh, our father Abraham.

And Jesus said, God can raise up stones. You know, God can raise up sons from these stones unto Abraham. So Abraham, who was he? He was a pagan. And God appeared unto him and gave him a promise.

[28 : 55] And he said, Get thee out of thy country and from thy kindred and come into the land that I will show you. If we turn over to Genesis chapter 12, we'll see that promise.

Verse 1. Now the Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country and from thy kindred and from thy father's house unto a land that I will show you.

And I will make of you a great nation and I will bless you and make your name great and you shall be a blessing. And I will bless them that bless you and curse them that curse you. And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

So Abraham departed or Abram departed as the Lord had spoken unto him. What in there is the condition for God to do this to Abraham?

Do you see any condition? There is none. He just showed up. I always think of like Abraham the father of faith. Abraham obeyed so well.

[30 : 04] He left. You know, he followed God. He didn't receive the promise. He then took Isaac and took him up onto the mountain and sacrificed him. But it struck me at one point when I was looking at I think it's in Hebrews 6 where it talks about the promise and Abraham receiving the promise.

That Abraham, God just showed up to him and said, I'm going to promise you all these things and I'm going to do it. That was it. That's all he did. Abraham didn't deserve it. He hadn't been seeking God.

God just showed up and said, here's my promise. Will you receive it? And that's what he does for us. Under the new covenant with grace, God comes and says, here's my promise. Here's a promise of eternal life.

Here's the promise of peace and grace and a new heart. Here's the promise of Christ in you, the hope of glory. And we just receive it. It's a promise. The promise shaped Abraham's entire life and yet he never received it.

But the promise of God given freely. Romans chapter 4. I'm going to kind of read verse 3, 13, 16, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22.

[31 : 10] So I'm going to jump through there. But the whole chapter speaks of this. But just listen to this. For what says the scripture? Abraham believed God and it was counted unto him for righteousness.

Abraham believed God. I think in my mind I always substitute in there obeyed God. Abraham obeyed God and it was counted unto him for righteousness. No, he didn't. He did not obey him. He believed him.

God came with a promise and said, Abraham, I'm going to do this in your life. And Abraham said, I believe you'll do that. I believe it. And God counted that for righteousness. Then after that, as we saw in Genesis 12, Abraham then departed as God had spoken unto him.

The action came afterwards. Faith without works is dead, but faith comes first. Abraham believed God and was counted unto him for righteousness. For the promise that he should be the heir of the world was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.

Therefore, it is a faith that it might be by grace. To the end, the promise, excuse me, to the end, the promise might be sure to all the seed, not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham who is the father of us all.

[32 : 26] And it makes sense. Abraham didn't have any law he obeyed. He just believed God and God accounted it to him for righteousness. So how could a law come in afterwards that establishes righteousness? It doesn't make sense.

So Paul is saying, it's not of the law, it's the same faith by Abraham, who against hope believed in hope that he might become the father of many nations according to that which was spoken.

So shall thy seed be. Again, God spoke it and Abraham believed it. And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead when he was about a hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb.

Think of ourselves, our own bodies, our own self. You know, what ability do you have? What ability do I have? And Abraham considered not his own body now dead because he had God's promise.

God's promise superseded the deadness of Abraham's body. God's promise in our life supersedes the deadness of my sin and myself and my flesh and my pride and all of that. God's promise supersedes that.

[33 : 27] And all I have to do is believe it. He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief and unbelief hits hard and can make us stagger. But he was strong in faith giving glory to God and being fully persuaded that what God had promised he was able also to perform and therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness.

Crazy. Crazy. Abraham's a perfect example not of righteousness but of faith that leads to righteousness. Abraham made all kinds of mistakes and problems but he believed the promise and the promise shaped his life.

And so God calls Abraham and Stephen's using this to hold this picture up and say look at this guy Abraham. God's promise came to him he believed it and he received righteousness and he was a pagan. I mean and the Jews look at him as this is their father of their faith and so he's holding him up and saying this is not someone you would generally accept.

He said unto him get thee out of thy country and from thy kindred and come into the land which I will show you. This speaks very personally to me right now as you know we step out to plant a church because he's saying come into the land that I will show you.

I would never tell you to come somewhere I'm not already there. I'm not going to say hey come to my house and I'm not there and I'm not going to invite you to let's say Pat's house. Hey let's all go to Pat's house and I'm not going to say hey come to Pat's house but I'm not there but I don't live there.

[34 : 52] You know that's not my place to say that. It doesn't make sense unless I'm going to be there already. And so here God is calling Abraham into a place he already is. He's saying come into it.

I'm already there Abraham. I've already prepared the way. I already know everything that's going to happen there and I've got it all set. You just come. Come into it. Then came he out of the land of the Chaldeans and dwelt in Haran and from thence when his father was dead he removed him into this land wherein you now dwell.

So even Abraham the father of faith didn't obey fully. He waited until his father died. He was supposed to leave and he went with Terah. Terah, Lot, Abraham, Nahor I think had died by now.

They left Mesopotamia and came into Haran. So you can just see Abraham being like guys God showed up and gave me a promise.

Which God, Abraham? Or Abraham, which one? Well, the one true and living God. How did he speak to you? What was the oracle? What was the ritual? What was the... No, he just spoke to me.

[35 : 54] Well, I'm going to go here. Okay, we'll come with you. Let's go. He's going to bless you. We'll get some of that. I always wanted to see Haran anyway. So they go to Haran.

And then after his father had died he removed him into this land wherein you now dwell. God's promise. God makes a promise. God's promises never ever fail. Just like God's will can never be thwarted.

We say, well, I'm not experiencing the promise of God. Well, that's not because God's promise fails. That's because you're not partaking of the promise. Am I going to partake and receive the promise?

Am I going to walk in the promise? Am I going to walk in God's will? God's will and promise will continue. Right? If I don't, he says it many times to many people in scripture, you know, if you don't, God will raise up someone else.

I think Gideon, he tells him that. God's promise is there for all of us to partake of to the full if we will. And so Abraham, or Abram at this time, he kind of holds himself up.

[36 : 53] But as soon as he's willing to walk forward in God's promise, God doesn't withhold anything. And he gave him none inheritance in it. No, not so much as to set his foot on.

Yet he promised that he would give it to him for a possession. Abraham was shaped by the promise. His whole life was shaped by what God was promising him.

Every choice he made. Yet he promised that he would give it to him for a possession and to his seed after him when as yet he had no child.

And so here we have the promise given and then we have the after of the promise. Between the promise given and the promise fulfilled is the after of the promise. It's when we go from the promise given to the waiting.

It's the trial. There's always the after of God's promise. God will give us a promise. He'll take us to the heights and He'll speak to our hearts and we're like, yes! And then He kind of withdraws to test our faith because faith is not faith unless it's tested.

[37 : 55] There's no such thing as untried faith. And so God will step back and He'll try our faith. He'll let the promise shape us and make us until we're at a place where we are able to receive the fulfillment of that promise.

And so the promise came before the possibility. There's no possibility for this promise. He said, I'm going to give you a child. And Abraham's like, great! Sarah's barren. And eventually, Abraham can't produce children anymore either.

The two of them. And yet God's promise still stands in the face of the impossibility. And God spoke on this wise, that His seed should sojourn in a strange land and that they should bring them into bondage and entreat them evil four hundred years.

Great! And the nation to whom they shall be in bondage will I judge, said God. And after that shall they come forth and serve me in this place. Phew! We kind of went down there for a minute but we came back up.

Hallelujah! Well, not so much hallelujah for the people who were in bondage, who lived their whole life in bondage. They go down into Israel or into Egypt and they're going to be in bondage for four hundred years.

[39 : 01] Well, what about the generations that never experienced anything but bondage? What about them? Were they experiencing the promise of God? Was that still the promise of God? Yes, it was. It was still the promise of God.

God's promise cannot fail or change or be thwarted. And at any point we can experience God's promise. Does not mean that we will partake of every part of the fulfillment of that promise but we have God's promise from Him.

Just as Abraham did from the very beginning when God appeared to Mesopotamia and said, here's my promise. It was as good as done. He had the fulfillment and fullness, the completeness of God's promise.

Whether he ever experienced the complete fulfillment in this life or not. He got to experience all of God and all of God's promise. In verse 8, And he gave him the covenant of circumcision.

And so Abraham begat Isaac and circumcised him the eighth day and Isaac begat Jacob and Jacob begat the twelve patriarchs. Again, here's what Stephen pointed out. Circumcision was really big to the Jews, right?

[40 : 06] To their culture. Ugh, you are the uncircumcised. Well, here he's pointing out Abraham wasn't circumcised either. He was a pagan and until God just gave it to him as a gift, as a covenant, something he just gave him to set him apart, Abraham, by his own righteousness and holiness, could not partake of that.

It meant nothing until God gave it meaning. And he gave him the covenant and then Isaac begat Jacob in verse 8, and Jacob begat the twelve patriarchs, a bunch of upstanding dudes, and the patriarchs moved with envy, sold Joseph into Egypt, but God was with him and delivered him out of all his afflictions.

Psalm 105, write that one down, says this about Joseph. Joseph. Joseph. Joseph. Joseph. Joseph. Joseph. Joseph. Joseph. Joseph. Joseph. Joseph. Joseph.

Joseph. Joseph. Joseph. Joseph. Joseph. Joseph. Joseph. Verse 16.

Speaking of what God did in Egypt. It says, valor was called for a famine upon the land. He, when he sent the whole staff of bread, he sent a man before them, even Joseph, who was sold for a servant, whose feet they hurt with fetters.

[41 : 34] He was laid in iron until the time that his word came, the word of the Lord tried him. And verse 18, where it says he was laid in iron, means more literally, his soul came into iron, or iron entered his soul. And it says the word of the Lord tried him until it was time for the word to be fulfilled. God's promise, God's word, it has its purpose and its effect. And so here Joseph, in the midst of this, God delivered him out of all his afflictions. And his brothers who sold him, I was looking back at the account in Genesis, and it says that they hated him because Isaac loved him, or sorry, Jacob loved him more than all his brothers. But it doesn't say that they envied him, because verse 9 here says the patriarchs moved with envy, sold Joseph. The word envy doesn't come in until after he tells his two dreams. And then it says his brothers envied him, but Jacob hid all these things, pondered all these things in his heart. So it seems like that their envy was a spiritual envy, that they envied that they could see God's hand on his life, that the promise was upon him, that the blessing through Abraham was upon Joseph. And you can see that their envy was because of the dreams and visions that he had. Again, rejecting God's chosen one, rejecting the one through whom God is working.

And he delivered him. But yet God delivered his chosen one and gave him favor and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh, king of Egypt. And he made him governor over Egypt and all his house. What qualifications did Joseph have to be governor? None. It just says, again, gave, verse 10, and God gave him favor and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh. Joseph was daddy's boy.

Joseph was thrown in a well. Joseph was sold. God gave him favor with Potiphar over his house. God gave him favor in the prison. Then God gave him favor to rule over Egypt. I don't think being ruling over Potiphar's house, managing that and managing the prison was like, well, I'm ready for the next step, baby. Bring on Egypt. I'll manage the whole country. I got this.

The point, I think, was for Joseph to learn that God could supply all that he needed in each one of those situations. You know, well, Lord, you blessed me here in Potiphar's house. Thank you. I'm in prison. And God showed Joseph, I can be with you here, Joseph. And I can give you just as much favor and ability here. So when it came time then, when Pharaoh said, well, who is more wise than you will set you over Egypt? He didn't go, oh, I don't know if I took that business course. You know, he's like, hey, God is faithful. He'll supply all I need.

And he made him governor over Egypt and all his house. And now there came a dearth over the land of Egypt and Canaan and great affliction. And our fathers found no sustenance in the promised land and yet not partaking of the promise. But when Jacob heard that there was corn in Egypt, he sent out our fathers first. And at the second time, Joseph was made known to his brethren and Joseph's kindred remained known unto Pharaoh. Then sent Joseph and called his father Jacob to him and all his kindred, threescore and fifteen souls. Jacob went down into Egypt. He died there. And our fathers, Egypt, always a picture of the world, always go down into Egypt and the world always brings death. And so Jacob goes down into Egypt and dies there. Verse 16, and were carried over, Jacob was, into Shechem and laid in the sepulcher that Abraham bought for a sum of money of the sons of Emor, the father of Shechem. It's the only piece of property Abraham ever owned in the promised land.

[45 : 19] Never actually owned any of it. But did he have God's promise? Yes, he did. He had all of God's promise. None of it was withheld. Even though he didn't experience the fulfillment of the completion of that in his lifetime, and neither did the people that are going to go down to Egypt, we experience a greater fulfillment because we're this side of the cross. But even we won't experience the fullness of it. Remember when Paul talks about the rapture, and he talks about those that have died in Christ, and they were afraid, like, oh no, you know, the day of the Lord's already come. And he said, no, no, no, no. We will not prevent them who've fallen asleep. He said, but the dead in Christ shall be raised first. The idea is that nobody's going to get anything without anybody else, right? There's a fulfillment coming that we're all going to get to take part of.

Those that have died didn't miss out, and now somehow we get to fulfill the fulfillment of it. And the same as we die, we will not miss out. The fulfillment is for all of us.

We will not prevent them, and they do not prevent us. So God's promise, fully ours, but not always fully realized in this life. And when the time of the promise drew near, which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt. What promise? Well, back in verse 6 of chapter 7, God spoke on this wise, that his seed should sojourn in a strange land, that they should bring them into bondage and treat them evil for a hundred years. But the greater promise, which was, that in blessing I will bless you. You shall be a blessing to many nations, and to many people, the father of many nations. So the time of the promise was drawing near. Woo-hoo! Yes! God's promise is drawing near. Look what happens as God's promise approaches.

Till another king arose, which knew not Joseph. The same dealt subtly with our kindred, and evil entreated our fathers, so that they cast out their children to the end that they might not live.

Then comes in Moses. We're not going to get into Moses tonight. So as God's promise draws near, first of all, we find out God has a promise clock, because it said when the time of the promise drew nigh. So God has a promise clock that's tick, tick, tick, tick, ticking. And then also what appeared super terrible was in reality just a setup for God's promise to be fulfilled. As God's promise drew closer, the fulfillment of it, it got worse. And when Jesus came the first time, what do we find when he shows up? Like this super heightened spiritual activity, demonic activity. And we went through Mark, right? Every other verse seemed like somebody getting their demon cast out of them. What do we see in Revelation?

[48 : 05] When Jesus comes back, we see a heightened demonic activity. What are we seeing in the world today? It just seems like evil is running rampant. People are celebrating the most basest and evil and demonic of things. And you can look at that and go, oh, that's so depressing. Or you can look at it and go, God's promise must be drawing near. The promise clock's going click, click, click. And so the enemy's working overtime, because he knows God's promise is drawing near. God is about to deliver his people out of Egypt. So what does Satan do? He doubles down to try and destroy God's people, because he doesn't have much time and deliverance is coming. God's promise. Let's finish up in...

Turn over to Hebrews chapter 6, if you would. So 2 Corinthians chapter 1, verse 19 says, I like, though, the end of verse 19 where he says that Jesus was not yes and no, but in him was yes.

Jesus is always yes. Lord, are you really that good? Yes. Like Lily quoted that scripture. You know, my grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in weakness.

Always, Lord? Yes. You'll never leave me or forsake me ever? Yes. No condemnation? Yes. Always yes. Hebrews chapter 6, the writer of Hebrews, um, talks about Abraham and the promise at the end of chapter 6, um, verse 13.

For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself, saying, surely blessing, I will bless you, and multiplying, I will multiply you.

[50 : 19] And so after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise. Always. The promise, the after, the patient endurance, and then the obtaining of it. Abraham obtained the promise. Wait a minute. Abraham bought one field in Shechem to bury Sarah in.

How did he obtain the promise? Because the promise wasn't the land. The promise was righteousness. The promise will always come, but only after. For men verily swear by the greater, and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife.

Wherein God willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath. So God wants us to be assured in his word.

Well, what was the oath? Well, on top of all the promises, and the word of God, is Jesus. As he says here, that because God could swear by none greater, he swore by himself.

So we have the word of God, and the promise of God, and then, we continue reading, wherein, verse 17, God willing more abundantly, we already read that, verse 18, that by two mutable things, the word and the promise, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for a refuge to lay hope, sorry, who have fled for a refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us.

[51 : 47] We have God's word, and God's promise, and the effect of God's word and his promise in our life is a strong consolation for those of us who have fled for a refuge to lay hold upon the hope that is set before us.

The hope, what is the hope? The hope of the oath and the word. The hope that God's promise and God's word are backed up by each other. Then on top of all that, which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters into that within the veil, whither the forerunner is for us entered.

Even Jesus made a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. So that hope, which we have as an anchor of the soul, the promise and the word of God, in the person of Jesus, Jesus takes that in through the veil as the anchor for us, for our hope and our promise.

God, by two immutable things that he cannot lie, he swears by himself with a promise that his word is true, and then on top of that, he gives us Jesus, the high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek, who in Jesus, all the promises of God are yes and amen.

And so Stephen holds up to these guys all of that and says, you've rejected this every single time. And the key to their reaction is Acts 7, 52, or 51, he says, you stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, you do always resist the Holy Spirit as your fathers did, so did you.

[53 : 17] Which of the prophets have you not persecuted? And they have slain them, which showed before of the coming of the just one, of whom you have been now the betrayers and murderers.

So we find out that those who resisted Joseph, we'll look at Moses next time, and Abraham, they were resisting the Holy Spirit. They were resisting the same promise given to Abraham, where Abraham believed God and it was counted to him to righteousness.

And then we're told in Hebrews that Abraham, after patiently enduring, obtained the promise. He obtained Isaac. And within Isaac, all of the promises are fulfilled.

Did Abraham get the land? No. Did he get thousands of descendants in his lifetime? No. Was he the father of many nations? No. But in Isaac, all of that was culminated. He had Isaac, so he knew he was going to have all of that.

We have Jesus. So we know we have everything that is encompassed in Jesus as our hope and our promise. So obviously I've been tripping out about the promise of God a lot lately. But let's pray.

[54 : 22] Thank you, Lord, for another opportunity to look at your word, Lord. Thank you for this great man of faith, Stephen, willing to do the smallest of tasks, Lord, for your glory, filled with the Spirit.

Lord, what does that say to us? That for the smallest thing that we do for you, we need the filling of your Spirit. We need to be filled with wisdom, Lord, with understanding. But Lord, you tell us we are.

In Ephesians, it says that you give unto us the spirit of wisdom and understanding and the knowledge of you. Thank you, Lord. Thank you for the promises of God. That is a promise to us that we can turn around and Jesus says, yes, yes, that one's yours too.

Thank you, Lord. Help us to live and walk in the promises of God like Abraham who believed and it was accounted to him for righteousness. Lord, as much as he was willing to live by the faith in that promise and in you, was as much as he got to partake, Lord, of the promise in his life.

And it's the same for us. We have all the promises and all the fullness of God in Christ Jesus. What has withheld us? What's not given to us? We look at great men of the faith.

[55 : 29] Those we were thinking of when we thought of like, who could be filled with the men who are full of wisdom and full of the Spirit. You can think of maybe these people. But all they are is just people who've realized there's more of the promise to partake of.

They've leaned into that. They've given up the things of this world to make more room for the promise. We have that same promise, Lord. We have your word promised to us. And then, Lord, we have Jesus who was given to us.

Who was given to us as life and hope and has gone within the veil as the anchor of our soul. I pray for each one of us here tonight, Lord, as we go home and throughout this week, Lord. Lord, let us partake in your promise.

When the promise is given, Lord, do not be frustrated when the afterwards comes, the trying, Lord. Through patience and endurance, we receive the promise, Lord.

We love you and thank you. And in Jesus' name, amen.