

Acts 7:44-60

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[0 : 00] Lord, we just lift up this night to you again, Lord, to give you your word, Lord, to give it up to you and to place it in your hands, Lord. Say, Lord, what are we? You are mindful of us.

Who is man that you are mindful of us? The son of man that you take note of him, Lord. Lord, as the heavens are high above the earth, so are your ways above ours. Your past finding out, Lord. And yet you've given us your word and you've placed it in our hands, Lord, to read and to understand. But, Lord, we know these things are spiritually discerned. And so we just give it back to you and say, Lord, would you instruct us? Would you teach us, Lord? As we've gone through the scripture and we went through Mark and saw the promise of the Spirit.

We've been through the beginning of Acts and have received the Spirit. And so, Lord, now we are asking you to just fulfill your promise, Lord, that you said the Spirit would bring all things to our remembrance, would guide us into all truth, would show us things to come.

So we trust you to do that. Thank you. In Jesus' name, amen. All right. So, Stephen, right, we remember his accusations against him, that he has stirred up the people by speaking blasphemous words against this holy place and the law, because he said that Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs which Moses delivered.

[1 : 23] And so then Stephen is given this defense and kind of gone through that. He showed us Moses. He's about to go through and show us the law. He's held up to us the example of so many of God's deliverers, how everyone was rejected by the people at that time.

And then Moses, a picture of that deliverer who was rejected and then came back around to bring deliverance and redemption. And that's like Jesus, rejected, but then comes back to bring deliverance.

Even though they rejected him, even though they put him to death, he came back. I was thinking about Stephen, just thinking how back where we looked in chapter 6, where it said they needed to find men full of the Holy Spirit, full of wisdom and of good report, who we may appoint over this business.

And so we have Stephen who went from serving the widows that were being neglected to the honor of standing for Jesus before the Sanhedrin, laying them out, and then being the first martyr.

And yet, nothing for Stephen, this is the same guy, right? It's the same guy who was waiting on tables who is now standing before the Sanhedrin. He didn't go through a course between now and then.

[2 : 37] He didn't just finish up, you know, his doctorate somewhere. Nothing special happened. It wasn't like, man, that message that last Sunday or whatever really moved me, and so now I feel ready to go stand before the Sanhedrin.

This was because he was a man, even before they picked him to wait on the tables, he wasn't unknown that he just became a believer. He doesn't have years of history as walking with Jesus. We're talking by the time he became a Christian and the church then needed him to step into the role of waiting on tables. What did he have, months under his belt? And this man was so filled with the Spirit and wisdom, had nothing to do with his calling or the position or place he was in. It had to do with his relationship with the Lord. And the fact that he grabbed on to everything that the Lord had. I was thinking of how, as Christians, once we're in the faith, we can get stuck on the wrong side of the cross sometimes.

Oh, Lily sent this verse the other day, and it's made me think of that. I've been mulling it over. And it's Hebrews 7, 19.

[3 : 46] For the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did, by the which we draw nigh unto God. But do I always believe that the law made nothing perfect? Or do I sometimes

think, well, law might make something perfect?

You know, not the Levitical law, but the law that I impose upon myself. You know, there's some type of perfection or some type of completion within my own walk that I can help God bring about.

We get stuck on the wrong side of the cross. You know, even as Christians, where it's like, no, that's done away. The law made nothing perfect. Then I was thinking, well, we get stuck on the wrong side of Pentecost so often, too.

Where we don't really realize the potential that we have in the Spirit. Stephen, when before he ever waited on tables, and I say wait on tables, guess what deacon means.

But before he was ever serving the widows, you know, he was filled with the Spirit. He had fully stepped into and appropriated to himself all that there was in this life of the Spirit.

[4 : 44] He was filled with the Spirit and of wisdom. He didn't wait for the moment. Where I think sometimes I get stuck on the wrong side of Pentecost. Where it's like, well, I'm still like waiting around almost.

Like, well, Lord, you know, when the time's ready. And it's like, no, Jesus says, all that I have is yours. I've left this promise to you. Appropriate it fully to yourself. And Stephen obviously did.

And so now he's come down into this account with Moses. And he gets into, they're in the wilderness. He's making his case, holding up to them this picture now of the law.

Because one of their accusations was that he spoke against the law. And he's going to point out here, he didn't speak against the law. The law was given and your fathers rejected the law. And so verse 38, this is he, Moses, that was in the church in the wilderness with the angel, which spake to him in the Mount Sinai.

And with our fathers, who received the lively oracles to give unto us. To whom our fathers would not obey. So here are these people who receive the law that the Jews at this time so venerate, so they say.

[5 : 56] Where Jesus said to them, you do set aside the commands of God to keep the traditions of men. They present a picture of desiring God's law. And he says, well, you're just like these people.

At that time, they received the law, the lively oracles of God. Spoken through the voice of God to Moses, to the people. And yet, they would not obey, but thrust him from them.

And in their hearts, turned back again to Romans. Sorry, back again to Egypt. I said Romans, because Romans 10.10, so I was looking at my reference, says. For with the heart, man believes unto righteousness.

And with the mouth, confession is made unto salvation. And so there's that, the inward which, or the outward which responds to the inward. The inward always comes first, the outward then reacts to it. And then these people, you can see what was in their heart.

Their heart returned to Egypt. It's interesting, the scripture says it turned back into Egypt. Not just back to or back towards, but back into. Their heart was already back in Egypt, even though their bodies weren't.

[7 : 02] And they said unto Aaron, make us gods to go before us. For as this Moses, which brought us out of the land of Egypt, we wote not what has become of him. And they made a calf in those days and offered sacrifice unto the idol and rejoiced in the work of their own hands.

And that's the definition of blasphemy. Blasphemy is to denigrate God and raise something else in its place. And whenever we lower God at all, in our estimation, something will be raised above him. Because there's nothing above God. God is the highest. You can't lower him without raising something else in his place. You can't just lower everything all together. You're like, well, I don't think very highly of God. And I don't think very highly of anything. No.

Nature abhors a vacuum, right? You're going to have something that's paramount. Proverbs 1, I don't want to misquote it. And it says, The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction.

That wording there for fear of the Lord is actually the principal part. The fear of the Lord is the principal part. But fools despise wisdom and instruction. And so the principal part, the principal thing is God.

[8 : 09] And out of that flows everything else. In this instance, he's saying, you know, wisdom and instruction. Because the fool has said in his heart, there is no God. So if I don't have God, and God is the principal part of wisdom and instruction, well then, obviously, I can't actually have wisdom and instruction.

But anyway, so God is the principal part. And here, as they lower God, blasphemy is to speak in place of God something else, right?

And so they rejoiced in the work of their own hands. And then God turned, or changed the direction, and gave them up to worship the host of heaven. As it is written in the book of the prophets, O you house of Israel, have you offered to me slain beasts and sacrifices by the space of forty years in the wilderness.

Yea, you took up the tabernacle of Moloch and the star of your God, Rephaim, figures which you made to worship them, and I will carry you away to Babylon. Our fathers had the tabernacle of witness in the wilderness, as he had appointed Moses speaking, as he had appointed, speaking unto Moses, that he should make it according to the fashion he had seen.

So what he's going to do now, he's going to, remember they said he speaks against this place, that he's going to change the customs, and that Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place, and she'll change the customs Moses delivered.

[9 : 25] He's now going to show, he's going to make this connection between, we got Moloch, the calf, and then he's going to bring in the tabernacle and the temple. And he's going to show how, what they have done to the tabernacle and the temple, the Jews at this time, who are interrogating Stephen, they've essentially lowered it to nothing more than just an idolatrous symbol.

Just as in the wilderness they wanted a calf, they wanted something they could grab onto to represent God, that meant God's blessing was with them, that God's leading and direction was with them. They now have taken this, you know, temple that they were so proud of, and it had no meaning anymore.

All it was was, it might as well have been something to their god, Moloch, or Rephin, or Remephan, or whoever that was. And so he says, So it was the physical witness of God on the earth.

It was the first physical representation of God's presence on the earth. It was a tabernacle and the Ark of the Covenant. If you remember in Samuel, when Eli's sons, Hophni and Phinehas, they went out with the Ark into battle to the Philistines.

They thought, oh, we're losing, so we'll bring the Ark. They might as well have had a golden calf, because in their minds that's all it was at that time. It was just something by which we can identify God is with us.

[10 : 51] It doesn't matter if God actually was, or our hearts were, or our relationship with him. We just want something that's going to give us the win. And they took it out, and it did nothing for them. In verse 45, Which also our fathers that came after, brought in with Joshua, says Jesus, but it's Joshua, Which also our fathers that came in after, brought in with Joshua, into the possession of the Gentiles, whom God drove out before the face of our fathers, unto the days of David.

And here, I think, where eventually, it's interesting, when we get to where Stephen just all of a sudden bursts out, in verse 51, you stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart. And then it's going to say that they're gnashing on him with their teeth.

That just means like a grinding of teeth, just like, a frustration. And the wording in the Greek is actually like a continual continuation. It's not like they just started. So as he's giving this defense, he's watching their countenance.

He's seeing them just tense up. And now he throws in this word that the land of Israel, that they so valued, it was the Gentiles' land. Guys, we're living in the land of the Gentiles.

It's just that God gave it to us. Here he says, this possession of the Gentiles, whom God drove out before the face of our fathers. So the place of God's presence is not nearly as important as his presence.

[12 : 14] What was their tabernacle? What was their temple? What is the land? It's nothing without God. Who found favor, speaking of David, before God, and desired to find a tabernacle for the God of Jacob.

But Solomon built him a house. So he brings in, David had a heart because he had a relationship with the Lord that he desired. Yes, he wanted to, he wanted to build something for God.

He didn't, Solomon did, as he goes through the history. And then he hears his point, verse 48, how be it, the Most High dwells not in temples made with hands, as says the prophet. So David's desire was to build something.

And essentially God said to David, there's nothing you can build, David. There's nothing. Don't make the mistake that the tabernacle or the Ark of the Covenant has any value by itself.

It's just because God has chosen those means. Don't think that the law has value by itself. Don't think that being a Jew has value by itself. Because as he's just pointed out, look at all these people that have rejected God's Messiah.

[13:19] And I was thinking about what's ours. Do we have a physical symbol or representation of God's presence? You know, I wonder what it could be. We do. You know, I have my Bible. You know, I got my wife, my children, and my Bible.

Don't mess with them in that order. Right? I have its own little protective case to keep it in. And if it ever got eaten up or something, I'd get it rebound because I have so many notes in it. And I can make the mistake that, well, this is, this is God's representation of his favor towards me because I have a Bible and I read it.

And so God must love me. I read it every day. So he must really love me. And I, but it's not. This is, this is in a sense, take this for what it means, nothing.

You know, this leather, this ink, this paper is nothing. It's only communicating to me the actual word of God, which is the ideals, ideas, and thoughts behind it.

And then only one given life by the spirit. How many people use the word? We were just talking about this earlier today. The circus church in America is people that use the scriptures to just, wow, all kinds of crazy stuff.

[14:28] They use a little bit of truth and a whole lot of error to get you to give money or whatever it is. So I can't, I can't stand up there and just because I'm holding this, unfortunately people will see that and they will be deceived at times by these preachers and think, well, the man's got his Bible and he's yelling and he, you know, that doesn't mean I have God's presence, this physical representation.

And so, as he says here in verse 49, heaven is my throne and earth is my footstool. How are you going to fit me in a little box? You're going to put me in that temple when heaven is my throne and earth is my footstool?

I mean, heaven's not even his home. He says heaven's his throne. How big is his house and how big is his world? So God prioritizes this relationship above religion.

And then he says, or what is the place of my rest? What is the place of God's rest? It's not in a building, it's not in a place, it's not in a book per se, right?

It's in that relationship with the Lord. That's what brings us rest. Stephen had something these guys had never even come close to having. And they're like, we've got the oracles, we got the temple, we got it all.

[15:47] What do you got, Stephen? And yet, if we looked at when he first started his defense in the end of chapter 6, and all that sat and the council looking steadfastly on him saw his face as if it had been the face of an angel.

They should have all gone home right then. Yeah. But they doubled down. Has not my hand made all these things? So the Lord is saying, and Stephen is saying, guys, all that you have is from the Lord, but they didn't recognize it back then and you're not recognizing it now.

What are you holding on to that you think is yours? And the Lord says, my hand's made this. So if God's made it all, then the location must be completely immaterial to the Lord. Why would he choose a location if he encompasses, we're told all through Psalms, that he inhabits the entire earth, the whole earth is filled with his glory, then why would he try to pinpoint his location to somewhere like Israel or Jerusalem?

What would be the point? Well, it's for us, right? It's not for him. It's for us. He's in all places, but he gives us places, focal points, right? He gives us his word.

I can sit down and I can open and I can read it and I can have a point of contact with the Lord. Yes, I can speak with him all day long, but I can also take those times to set aside those places that he says these, you know, how often we read through scripture, like especially in Psalms where I woke with the morning, you know, that I waited early at your gates to meet you.

[17:14] Jesus would go off and off early to pray. So we have these moments God gives us. He established a week, six days of work, one day of rest, right? That day of rest for us to come and to meet with him.

For his benefit? No, for ours. So his hand has made all these things. And then I'm sure Stephen had a lot more he was going to say, right? He's just kind of flowing.

The Holy Spirit is just speaking through him. He's excited. And then I think it's just as he's looking at these guys and their faces and he's just watching the resistance in them, their hard hearts.

And he just bursts out. You stiff-necked and uncircumcised and heart and ears, you do always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you.

He's watching the work of the word of God work upon their lives. And so to some we are a savor of life unto life and to some a savor of death unto death.

[18 : 14] And unfortunately for these guys, they begin to just kind of shrivel up. But you stiff-necked and uncircumcised and heart and ears. That's a work of the Spirit. Only God can open our heart and ears.

He proves it by saying you resist. The Holy Spirit's right now through Stephen saying to these guys, listen, let me open your ears. Let me open your hearts. And he's watching them resist the Holy Spirit.

He says, So he's saying, you men, you stand here in judgment of me and yet you have the blood of all the prophets on your hands.

And now, worse than that, it culminated in the death of the Messiah, of the promised one. You have been now murderers and betrayers who have received the law by the disposition of angels and have not kept it.

Ouch. Ouch. So, where it says here that, you have slain them which showed before of the coming of the just one of whom you've been now murderers and betrayers.

[19 : 35] So the judgment upon them, Stephen only pronounces this judgment essentially upon them only after rejection. Right? Verse 51, they rejected. It was a visible sign of rejection. He could tell they had rejected and so now the judgment comes.

It can seem like, man, he's throwing this in their face. No, they had every opportunity to repent and we're going to find out eventually as we get into the beginning of chapter 8, some men seem to because verse 2 says after he was killed, devout men carried Stephen to his burial and made great lamentation over him.

That's not indicating the believers, the church. That indicates like, almost like some of these men who are actually part of this. So it's having an effect and we know it's going to have a far-reaching effect with Saul.

But anyway, you've received the law by the disposition of angels and you've not kept it. How much worse is it when we have received, not from angels, but we've received from the Son himself, we've received the Word of God essentially right from his mouth and by the Holy Spirit and I don't keep it. You know, it's not that the judgment on them wasn't that they just weren't keeping it and trying. It was that they had rejected. The enemy comes to us and whispers and says, you failed, you're not keeping it.

[20 : 51] You're no different than this person over here rejects. But we're not rejecting. We are those who desire to keep God's Word. And so when he heard, when they heard these things, they were cut to the heart.

They gnashed on him with their teeth. Faith comes by a hearing and hearing by the Word of God. So if I hear the Word though and it doesn't respond in faith, what does it result in? Well, it results in this.

They were cut to the heart and then they gnashed on him with their teeth. Doesn't mean they ran over and chewed on him. Like I said, it just means they're, ugh. I think at this point they're just like loud and just like, like, no, shut up.

You, you don't know what you're saying. They're just all in an uproar, you know, very flamboyant and I can't believe this. No, tearing, pulling their hair out, who knows what. And in the middle of all that, here's Stephen. I love that picture because here you have in the middle of all of this noise, in the middle of this persecution and trial and the enemy, Stephen is in peace and who does he see? Jesus. He's fellowshiping. The idea here of steadfastly looked into heaven, it's like, it's where it says when Peter betrayed, was, not betraying, but denying Jesus and then the one girl comes, a servant girl and says, it says she looked on him steadfastly and said, surely you're one of them.

[22 : 20] It's like she's studying him, like, I know you're one of them. That's the same wording here, that he's steadfastly, he's studying, he's like, whoa. So in the middle of all this, who's he see?

Who's he spending time with? And that's great encouragement for me. That, there's, you know, we think of in Psalm 23 where it says that he prepares a table before us in the presence of our

enemies.

Where's the last place you want to eat? In the presence of your enemies, right? You know, when they have ceasefires in the middle of wars, they don't all go out and then like, eat right next to each other. That's not too smart.

But here, he's standing here, he's looking up into heaven, he saw the glory of God and Jesus standing on the right hand of God. I read some commentaries to try and figure out what glory of God means specifically and the best I can get is it's the glory of God and it's not explained much more, so don't try and add much more to it.

But essentially, my thought is he's, at this moment, he's part of another world. His heart, his mind, his eyes have completely, and look at the faithfulness of the Lord.

[23 : 24] Stephen, well done. You did it. You stood up for me. You said what you needed to. And then, he's now already being ushered into the presence of Jesus.

The rest is just gonna be, you know, needs to play out. But he's already there. Turn to Hebrews 10. tells us what Jesus is doing right now in Hebrews 10.

Verse 11, I've written there this, a new purpose to the priesthood, right?

Jesus is our high priest. At one time, the priest was to do what? Make sacrifices. The same ones many times. Jesus, once for all, made that sacrifice. And now there's a new purpose to his priesthood, where he ever lives to make intercession for us.

He sits at the right hand of the Father. If you look in Psalms, a lot of times it'll say, you know, that the Lord holds me, he holds me by my right hand. I mean, well, I know one of us is here left-handed.

[24 : 50] But most of us are right-handed and it represents in the scripture. The hand. Anyone else left-handed? No, that's okay.

But it represents the hand of like, usually the hand of strength and determination. So if God's got you by your right hand, what's that only leave free? You know, or if you're left-handed, he's got you by your left hand.

But that leaves your left hand free and his right hand free. If you're walking with him and he grabs you by your right hand, so your hand of strength is now in his. All you got left is your left hand.

And I can't do much with mine. And he's got his right hand free. Right? So he's at the right hand, the place of power and position and strength of the Father. And so every time the enemy comes and is like, I saw what they did.

I saw what they did. You know, Jesus leans over and says, hey, hey dad, now, now. That's covered too. Don't worry about that one. But what is he doing?

[25 : 48] He sat down at the right hand of God. Why did he sit down? The work was finished. He could sit. It was over. And yet here we see with Stephen, as Stephen looked steadfastly into heaven, he saw the glory of God and Jesus standing on the right hand of God.

And he said, behold, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man is standing on the right hand of God. Now they're mad as hornets.

They don't like anything he's saying. But it isn't until this moment that they just lose it. Then they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and ran upon him with one accord.

That word, wording, ran upon him, it's the same wording where when the swine in Mark, they ran down the hillside and into the lake. It's a mob. These are the respectable Sanhedrin and they are rushing at him, screaming and plugging their ears.

I mean, this isn't demonic in response to this. So they cannot deny the reality. So all they can do is try and drown it out. Stephen sees Jesus standing.

[26 : 54] I thought it said he was sitting. So why does he stand? Well, some have said that Stephen was given the honor of being the first martyr. So Jesus is welcoming him. That's true. I mean, those are cool things, but I kind of usually shy away from where Jesus shows favorites.

Like, unless it's explicitly stated in Scripture that's the purpose. Jesus, you know, like we're told by Paul, you know, that he was an apostle born out of due season.

So we have to occlude him in the apostles. We can't say the 12 apostles. Well, then Paul was just a really good evangelist. No, he says that God called him as an apostle born out of due season. And you can be tempted to be like, he was the greatest apostle ever.

But he says of himself, I'm the least. So there doesn't seem to be favoritisms. Jesus went out of his way to point out the least of these.

And if you give a cup of cold water into the least of these, you will not lose your reward. I like to think that Jesus stands every time someone's coming into heaven. That he just stands up just like, just like he's going to come with a shout like, yes, I can go get them.

[28 : 00] I think, you know, every time someone comes into heaven, he's standing up and he's like, yes, we got another one. Here they come. You can do it. Good job. And Stephen got to see a picture of that to kind of strengthen him for this last bit here.

They rushed upon him with one accord. And in John 16, let's read this here.

It says, in the beginning of the chapter, Jesus says, so this would be during his last supper as he's giving instructions to his disciples, his final words.

Okay. He says, John 16, John 16, verse 2.

And verse 3, And that's why I always struggle with the idea that somehow we can, as believers, as those that are identified with Jesus, one with him, that somehow we can join with the world and be part of that system and that it's gonna, it's not gonna work well.

[29 : 34] What fellowship has light with darkness? Where Jesus said, they've not known you, they don't know you because they've not known the Father nor me. And the time will come where they think they will do God's service.

Well, that's about to happen here in the early church. And it's about to happen in the latter day church where we're in as well. Where they're beginning to not put us to death, but they think if they can silence us, they're doing a favor to humanity.

So they ran upon him, a big mob, and they cast him out of the city and stoned him. So I looked into the stoning process because it's all it just kind of says. They cast him out and stoned him.

We get a little bit about what happened and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet whose name was Saul. We'll come back to that. And they stoned Stephen who was calling upon God and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.

And he knelt down and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. When he had said this, he fell asleep. Now, I was reading, I don't know if I still have it up, that traditionally the stoning.

[30 : 52] Sorry. Anyway, I guess I didn't have it up. That they would take them out of the city and then when they were like so many paces from the place they're going to stone him, they would say, confess, confess and repent so that you may, you may, you know, not be cut off.

They would still kill him. But then the idea was that they would not be like sent to hell or whatever. And then as they got closer, they have one more chance. And if he didn't, supposedly they would put them in a hole that was twice the height of a man.

And they would, one of the one accuser would push him from behind the person so they would fall in the hole. And if that killed him, great. If it didn't, then they would roll him over onto his back, the person they were stoning.

And the other accuser would drop a stone on his chest. And if that didn't kill him, I mean, if that killed him, great. If not, then everybody else would throw stones and kill him. This is not that, exactly, because it says, he knelt down so he was standing and cried with a loud voice, saying, lay not this into their charge.

But they would. The reason stoning was so bad, if you remember, when Ahab takes the vineyard from Naboth, Naboth's vineyard, and Jezebel says, don't worry, I got this, buddy.

[32 : 06] And she goes and has people talk against him. Same kind of thing, a bunch of evil things. He blasphemed against God and against Moses and the law. So they take him out and they stone him. And then Elijah comes and says to Ahab that where the dogs licked up the blood of Naboth, they shall yours.

Because when they got stoned, they were taken without the city or out the camp. They were stoned and left without a burial. And it was extremely disgraceful in this culture to be left without a burial.

Because if you couldn't be buried, the idea was your soul couldn't be at rest.

And so here they're bringing Stephen out and they are stoning him. This is completely in disregard to Roman law because they're just taking this matter into their own hands.

And they're still stoning that happens. It happens in Islamic countries mainly. They will still stone people. But if you think of this process, you can see he's still very with it.

It wasn't like the first hit took him out. You know, and you gotta, it's gonna take a lot of stones to kill someone. You may be able to knock them unconscious or do a lot of damage, but it's gonna take a

bit to kill them.

[33 : 15] But my point in all of this is, Stephen seems completely unaffected by this. Not that it's not hurting and not that he's not feeling it, but like, you don't, Jesus doesn't allow you to look into heaven and see him standing on the right hand of the Father and then, and not be like, I got you, buddy.

You know? He's essentially like, I got you. You're gonna make it. I'm with you. And so Stephen is going through this. There's an experience and a presence of the Holy Spirit that I've never had because I've never been in this position.

You know, we've read about the martyrs that were burned at the stake and that were singing praises to God the whole time and they eventually had to go over and like cut their heads off or whatever to get them to stop.

What happens when you are in pain? You know? You stub your toe and it hurts real bad.

Everything stops. The world stops. Doesn't matter what you were doing. It stops. If you're holding a baby, you hope you don't drop it.

Right? Oh, I remember many times when the kids were little like doing something like that and being like, you don't want to scream because you're on the way. You don't want to make the kid cry. It's like, Sue, take the baby.

[34 : 22] Right? The world stops when you're in pain. So, um, what about if you're being burned at the stake? I don't think at that point you're consciously going, all right, I'm gonna, I'm gonna sing praises to Jesus.

I'm gonna tough it out. Uh-uh. I wouldn't be able to tough it out. No way. There's gotta be a work of the Spirit that happens, right? And that's what's happening here with Stephen. And this is gonna wreck a certain man who we just read about there.

So, Saul is there. Verse 58, here we have Saul, our introduction to him. And he's, and the witnesses laid down their clothes at the young man's, a young man's feet whose name was Saul.

Young man there doesn't mean like a young boy or a teenager. It means in the prime of life. Like this, this guy, he has reached the pinnacle. And he's gonna tell us that later on. There's some other scripture where he's gonna tell us all about this pinnacle he felt like he had reached at that time.

But was he stoning him? No, he wasn't gonna get his hands dirty. Oh no. And then, when he had said this, back to verse 60, he fell asleep.

[35 : 34] And so Stephen's ability to say, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. You know, what a heart. Was that his heart all along? I think so. I think that was the heart of this man before he ever waited on one widow.

I think this was just who this guy was. And the Lord gave an opportunity to bring this out before these people and before Paul, Saul particularly.

And then it says he fell asleep. Scripture uses that word a lot for death. Sue and I were having this conversation recently about dying and people dying. And I remember I was saying, I heard a teaching by this one pastor one time and he was saying, how do we know what death is like for the believer?

We don't know because we've not gone through it. But, how do you know the Lord isn't right there? And just, with such grace and mercy and the experience at that time, how do you know what it's like?

And then the scripture describes it as he fell asleep. Well, I've never fallen asleep painfully or hard, you know, usually it's a gentle kind of thing. And I think it's to encourage us, even in this situation where the first martyr has just been taken out by stoning, the Lord looks at it like he just fell asleep into his arms.

[36 : 40] Jesus stood up and received him. And Stephen stepped into eternity. And we will just do four verses in chapter 8 just to set the tone.

So, and Saul was consenting unto his death. Turn to Acts 26. Saul would have been part of the Sanhedrin.

He would have been part of those gnashing their teeth, rushing on him. It's hard for me to picture Gamaliel there. I hope he's not, but he, I don't know where he would be otherwise.

It's sad that a man who had such potential could have been there, who had his own opportunity to respond to what the Lord was doing at this time and kind of just chose, chose to be indifferent.

I heard a quote recently. It doesn't have anything to do with it, but that tolerance leads to indifference. I like that. That tolerance leads to indifference, a lack of care. So we press tolerance on everybody today.

[37 : 43] But anyway, Acts 26, verse 10, Paul says this. Well, verse 9, he says, I verily thought with myself that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth, which things I also did in Jerusalem.

Many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests, and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them. And I punished them often in every synagogue and compelled them to blaspheme, being exceedingly mad against them.

I persecuted them, even under strange cities. This is there in verse 10, it tells us that as they were being put to death, I gave my voice against them. His voice was included in this death of Stephen. And at that time, there was a great persecution against the church, which was at Jerusalem. Up until now, it was just the apostles, the kind of like close-knit group of disciples around Jesus.

Peter and John had been put in prison, the rest of the apostles that one time were, and they were beaten. But this indicates an organized and a prolonged persecution. This isn't just a reaction, this is, this is, let's go after them.

[38 : 56] And, they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea, Samaria, except the apostles. So remember where we saw that phrase in the beginning of Acts, Acts chapter 1.

Jesus says, in verse 7, it's not for you to know the times or the seasons which the Father has put in His own power, but you shall receive power after the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you shall be witnesses unto me in Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria and unto the uttermost parts of the earth.

Doesn't that sound great? Sounds awesome. And then when the Lord plays that out, it wasn't how they expected. Kind of makes me a little nervous. Like, yeah, Lord, you want us to plant a church? It doesn't always play out like you expect it to. But here they are sent out, just like He promised. He said, I would send the Holy Spirit on you. He did. It's interesting because He says, it's not for you to know the times or the seasons.

They didn't know the time or season that was coming, this time of persecution. But He sent the Holy Spirit first before that time came. And then, sure enough, they're sent out, not exactly how they were expected.

[40 : 01] They were all scattered abroad. And that word scatter, it can mean like scattered, like you, you lose it, you throw it and lose it, or it can mean like scattered, like sowing seed. And that's this one. They were scattered abroad throughout all the regions of Judea and Samaria except the apostles.

The apostles stayed in Jerusalem. And devout men carried Stephen to his burial and made great lamentation over him. So it was against the law, against Jewish law to make lamentation, to grieve a condemned man.

And it also would have been against their law to give him a burial, like we just talked about. So the wording here, these devout men who made great lamentation, it almost seems like these could have been people that were in the Sanhedrin that are like, oh, I regret that.

That he had made such an impression on them. as for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering into every house and hailing men and women committed them to prison.

It emphasizes here women, that like this has gotten so bad that not even, you know, being a, having, being a woman is safe. I mean, that sounds strange to say today because that's how we live today, but there was a time where it was women and children first, where men gave their lives and sacrificed for those God put in their care where, so Paul was just ripping families apart and making havoc of the church.

[41 : 26] The scripture says it made havoc of the church and it did, but look how God used that to send the gospel out. Therefore, they were scattered abroad, they that scattered abroad went everywhere and preached the word.

They went where they could. That's how I read that. If you don't realize the context, it's like, oh, they were scattered abroad and they just went everywhere preaching the word. God used this just to send people out. This wasn't good.

This was hard. This was quick, kids. Get in the mule, you know, get, we're heading out. No, don't grab anything. Let's just go. You know, they just tore apart that house down the street and oh my

word, they're going to see the Christmas card from us to them and it's got, you know, joy to the world, the Savior's come.

Let's go. Let's get out of here. And they just scattered and they went, everywhere that they could go. And then next time we'll get into Philip. We'll have a little segue with Philip and then Saul will have his conversion and then we'll be right back into Peter's story which will kind of continue on with his bringing the gospel to the Gentiles and then from there we will shift back to Paul and we will stay with Paul through the rest of Acts.

You know, who wrote Acts? Luke. Well, Luke wasn't there. So, who told him about Stephen's trial? [42 : 55] It would have been Paul. These words were etched in this man's mind. He came, he was able to relay this back to Luke and you can imagine the tears as he's telling, you know, as he's saying and when Stephen said you stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears you do always resist the Holy Spirit as your fathers did so do you.

He's like, and I consented to his death. He's like, but he saw Jesus. He got to see Jesus and I couldn't take it and, you know, and then, oh, and then I killed all these other people and I, it's crazy. When we get to where he's converted, like this man, he didn't have a guilty conscience because he goes from hauling them to prison and forcing them to blaspheme to like, he's in the synagogues and the people in the synagogues are going, wait a minute, wasn't he coming here to take these people and now he's preaching to us Christ?

Like he was like, he was changed in that moment. But at this point, he wasn't and I was thinking that he would have been the one who would have relayed this to Stephen. So what do we learn from Stephen?

Well, that we need to have a really good working knowledge of scripture. Well, yes, we need to be in the word. I think what we learned from Stephen is back in chapter 6 that he was known as a man full of the Holy Spirit, of honest report, and full of wisdom.

[44 : 20] And they said, hey, we can trust him. We can trust him with something like taking care of the poor, taking care of feeding these people. And he was faithful and little, God will make, give charge over much.

And the other thing I love is in the middle of all of this, here he is looking up, Jesus just says, kind of looks down, he says, it's okay, I got you. I'm going to be with you.

And so, whatever our trials, turmoils, and struggles are, in the middle of them and all that noise, the Lord is right there. And I have to read this just because I really like it.

I sent this today. I was reading this book by this guy, I don't know. I read a lot of books that someone suggested in a Bible study or another book, a guy I really like, and he says, this book really impacted me.

So then I end up getting it and reading it. This was written in 1906 and it's called The Still Voice and Other Meditations or something. But in there, he says this about the voice of the enemy and I thought it was one of the best descriptions I've heard of how Satan's voice differs from the Lord's.

[45 : 27] And I was thinking of it in light of Stephen, how all the voices and the noise and all of that and yet he knew the Lord's voice. He knew what he looked like and he got to partake in that moment. He says, in the first place, the voice of the enemy is excitable and produces a spirit of restlessness and rush.

On the other hand, the voice of the Lord is quieting and produces a spirit of rest and peace. This is a good test to distinguish between God's voice and Satan's voice. When the devil speaks, he sets you in a big whirl.

When the Lord speaks, he produces tranquility of heart and mind. Even when the Lord's voice is corrective, it does not disturb the calm serenity of your communion. At the same time that the Lord tells you of your fault, he shows you the blood that will wash it away.

To be chastened by the Lord is in itself a blessing. On the other hand, the devil fills you with condemnation without revealing the blood of cleansing. He tries to make you see the dark picture of your evil heart but gives you no bright vision of Jesus.

In the second place, the enemy always wants you to be in a great hurry in deciding a matter and tries to condemn you for any delay. On the other hand, the Lord always gives you time to think it over and then come to a decision.

[46 : 41] In the question of guidance, the voice of the Lord leads while the voice of the enemy drives. The enemy pushes while the Lord gently impels us. He led them on safely so that they feared not.

As a general thing, the enemy will try to make you act upon impulses rather than upon settled principles. I just like that because it just made me think of a picture of Stephen in the midst of the pressure from the enemy and these men who felt like, we got to take this man out.

Is this calm? I mean, there's no indication he was ruffled at all until he gets to that one verse and he's just like, you uncircumcised, just stop resisting. And then in the middle of that he gets to see Jesus.

Man, you know, that's a good place to be in the middle of our trials seeing Jesus. So, Father, we thank you that there's nothing too big for you, Lord.

Thank you that every trial ahead of us you've already gone into. I think when you told them, you shall receive power after the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you'll be witnesses unto me in Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria and to the uttermost parts of the world.

[47 : 47] And someone's sitting there thinking, wow, I can't wait for that to happen. When, Lord? And then, maybe a couple years later, they're packing up their stuff, loading their kids in the van and thinking, this is not how I expected this to go.

We're going to Samaria, yes, but we gotta get out of here. I was thinking we'd go on a missions trip to Samaria and come back home. I don't wanna live there. And yet, there they go being sent out. And Lord, we're gonna see though that this gospel, because of that, is just spread across the world, Lord. And today, it's happening again. How many, Lord, have been uprooted and displaced, Lord? This isn't, you know, the home of my birth. Lord, you uprooted us and brought us here. But Lord, I can't imagine being anywhere else than following you in these last days, Lord.

There's only a little bit of time we're gonna be with you. Just like Stephen. I mean, would you have chosen anything else when they came to him and said, hey, we need you to help over here with these widows. They're not being fed. You're Greek or of a Greek origin.

[48 : 48] They are. Would you help out? You know, there was the call of God in that. Who knew that that had such implications in his life, Lord? Let us not despise those small things, Lord, when we hear the voice of God.

And Lord, keep us on the right side of the cross and the right side of Pentecost where you've accomplished all the work, Lord. There's no profit, Lord, any longer. In our efforts, In our abilities. And Lord, there's also no need to try in our own effort and ability because we have the Holy Spirit. Pray that you fill us and take us home, Lord, to each be Stevens in our own world. And thank you, Lord, that we are all Saul's and that you have made us Paul's.

In Jesus' name, Amen.