

Acts 6:8-7:1

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: 29 May 2016

Preacher: Nathan Raynor

[0 : 00] Please take your copy of God's Word and turn to the book of Acts chapter 6. Our text for this morning will be Acts chapter 6, verse 8 through Acts chapter 7, verse 1.

And while you're getting there, let me just express to you that it's very good to be back with you this morning. The whole family took last week off just as we've struggled with our new little one.

If you don't know my family, we have a brand new baby boy in addition to our other two. And Silas has been a bit more challenging than the others.

We've had our what in the world do we do moments with him, but we're mostly filled with joy. Sam's here with him somewhere. I think she's already. Oh, she's here in the room.

How about that for now? She's here in the room. That's the fussing you're hearing over there. It's also very good to be back preaching with you again as I'm coming off a preaching break. I just want to remind you guys why we're doing that, why I'm taking these times of stepping away, not from my job in total, but from preaching itself.

[1 : 12] And they're twofold. Number one, we want you to want to come and hear the Word of God preached. Simply that. The truth proclaimed. And not necessarily by a particular person.

And I don't think that that happens here. It's not that I have some strange disillusionment that I'm being worshipped in any way whatsoever. But we want to get ahead of that kind of thing. We don't want you to show up and think, Ah, not Nathan.

Please don't ever think that. Praise God for the Word of God preached. The truth is proclaimed here. And I praise God for the depth of talent we have in that regard.

The second reason is simply that we need to let other people exercise gifting. I'm certainly glad to get up here week in and week out. It does grow tiring at times. But primarily, we need to let other men get into the process and work that gifting out and have the chance to share what God is working into them with you.

And so, you're going to see breaks like that periodically across the rest of the year. But all that said, I'm glad to be back. I'm glad also to be back, to begin this period of time of study and preaching on your behalf with a very important transitional character in the book of Acts.

[2 : 30] Come to the life and ministry of Stephen. Peter has been the primary character up to this point in Luke's narrative.

Continuing forward, we will observe the ministry of Peter in chapters 10, 11, and 12. And then his presence at the Jerusalem Council in chapter 15.

But the focus is beginning now to shift away from Peter as the primary narrative character to Paul.

We meet him first as Saul at the very end of chapter 7 and on into chapter 8.

And we see this shift through the end of the book then as Paul is the central figure in Luke's narrative. So, we have this record of Stephen's ministry and it's a short one.

And rightly so, because his ministry is brief. He is selected to serve as a deacon in order to serve the tables of the Greek-speaking Jewish widows at the beginning of chapter 6.

[3 : 36] And his ministry ends at the end of chapter 7. He expands his ministry as a deacon to that of a preacher and an apologist.

And the Lord sees fit to end Stephen's ministry by making him the first martyr of the Christian church. I appreciated this summary by Charles Spurgeon as I appreciate so much of his preaching and writing.

And I put it on the front of the bulletin for you to follow along. He preached, Stephen the deacon became Stephen the preacher. This holy man not only used such gifts as he had in one department, but having abilities for a more spiritual form of service, he laid them at once upon the altar of Christ.

Nor is this all. He had a higher promotion yet. When he had thus become Stephen the wise apologist and brave defender of the faith, he did not stop there, but he mounted to the highest rank of the Christian army.

He gained the peerless dignity, the foremost nobility, the brightest glory. I mean the martyr's name and honor.

[4 : 50] Stephen the deacon is first Stephen the preacher. And afterwards, Stephen, God's faithful and true witness, laying down his life so that he may seal his testimony with his blood.

So we have the opportunity to look at the life and ministry of Stephen, however brief. And we're going to do so across the next two weeks.

Today, I'd like to look at his arrest and inquiry. And the next Lord's Day, we'll look at Stephen's response and his death. And over the next two weeks, I want us to keep in mind two general lessons, general and broad lessons that we can learn from Stephen's life and ministry.

Number one, a life given in service to God is a life that is not wasted.

As we come to the conclusion of Stephen's life next week, we'll see that God sovereignly uses Stephen's martyrdom for the explosive expansion of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

[6 : 09] His death is the catalyst that sets off so much gospel reach and response. A life given in service to God is a life that is not wasted.

And secondly, the significance of such a life given to God cannot be measured by its short-term gains, its breadth, or its length.

The significance of a life given in service to God cannot be measured by its short-term gains, its breadth, or its length.

So with those two things in mind, let's look at our text this morning. Acts chapter 6, beginning in verse 8 through chapter 7, verse 1. And Stephen, full of grace and power, was doing great wonders and signs among the people.

Then some of those who belonged to the synagogue of the freedmen, as it was called, and of the Cyrenians and of the Alexandrians, and of those from Cilicia and Asia, rose up and disputed with Stephen.

[7 : 18] But they could not withstand the wisdom and the spirit with which he was speaking. Then they secretly instigated men who said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God.

And they stirred up the people and the elders and the scribes, and they came upon him and seized him and brought him before the council. And they set up false witnesses who said, This man never ceases to speak words against this holy place and the law.

For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and will change the customs that Moses delivered to us. And gazing at him, all who sat in the council saw that his face was like the face of an angel.

And the high priest said, Are these things so? Beloved, this is God's word to us.

It was written for his glory and our good. And we would all do well to listen to it in order to believe its promises and obey its commands. Now, our text this morning, I would like to look at in two ways.

[8 : 26] Number one, the details of Stephen's arrest. And number two, the Stephen who was arrested. The details of Stephen's arrest.

And number two, the Stephen who was arrested. So number one, the details of Stephen's arrest.

We begin out here, after him coming off, we get this explanation of him being called as a deacon, this early church that's meeting in Jerusalem for the sake of serving the tables of the widows, of the Hellenist Jews, that Stephen is not only serving tables.

He is also preaching. We have a deacon here who preaches. And some have supposed that the calling of these men at the beginning of Acts chapter 6 were not the calling of deacons, was not the institution of that office, but rather the institution of the office of elder.

Because Stephen was preaching. Elders must be able to teach. That's a qualification that's given for an elder.

But that does not mean that no one else can have that qualification. In fact, deacons and all believers, whether or not they hold an office in the church, whether or not they are especially gifted to teach in a setting like this, are to be preachers of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

[10 : 03] Don't miss that. And what a great encouragement that is to us that Stephen, chosen to be a deacon, I will argue, to serve the physical needs of the church, was also a preacher.

Stephen, the deacon, preached. If you're looking at the text carefully, you might be saying, on what basis do I come to the conclusion that he's preaching?

Because it doesn't actually say explicitly that he preached. But recall that we have noted in our study of Mark, if you've been with us for quite a while, seen the record of Jesus' ministry, and in our study of Acts so far, that signs and wonders were always intended to validate the message of the gospel.

The preaching of the good news of Jesus Christ always accompanied signs and wonders being performed. Signs and wonders were meant to cause people to take notice of the preaching. God uses the preaching of the gospel to work the greatest of miracles. And beloved, we cannot miss this. God is still in the business of working miracles in that He changes hard hearts to ones that beat for Him.

[11 : 25] There is no greater miracle that has further reach than hearts changed toward God. So, the fact that Stephen is performing great wonders and signs necessitates that he was also preaching.

So, first, I come to a conclusion from that. Second, I come to it because of the way in which he's opposed. Note the opposition that comes to him for this.

He's not opposed because he's working miracles. Verse 9 speaks of a select group of men from a variety of the Jerusalem synagogues.

We see, then, some of those who belong to the synagogue. I take that to mean that those who were versed in debate, those who were of high training from each of these synagogues, the synagogues of the freedmen, we get this parenthetical by Luke as it was called, and of the Cyrenians and of the Alexandrians and of those from Cilicia and Asia rose up and disputed with Stephen.

These are a select group of men from a variety of the Jerusalem synagogues. You could think of synagogues in this day while the primary worship of the day in Jerusalem happened at the temple, synagogues were much like seminaries, places of theological training.

[12 : 51] And there were no less than 480 synagogues in Jerusalem in these days. And they had them of all kinds of variety. These five are all synagogues of Greek-speaking Jews.

Now, if you missed last week, the Hellenists, the Greek-speaking Jews, were those who either were already living in Gentile lands from the dispersion, therefore they spoke Greek as a primary language, right?

And they were being brought back in or they had started there and moved back in and there was kind of a bit of a class separation as a result of this. So, we find that Stephen's primary ministry is to the Greek-speaking Jewish widows and therefore he's being opposed by Greek-speaking Jews.

The synagogue of the freedmen, the freedmen, were made up of descendants of Jewish slaves that were captured by Pompey in 63 B.C. and taken to Rome.

They were later granted their freedom, therefore the name Freedmen, and they formed a Jewish community living there in Rome. But this is a synagogue located in Jerusalem of these people who would travel to Jerusalem in order to be educated in theology.

[14 : 12] The synagogues of the Cyrenians and the Alexandrians, both major cities of northern Africa which had large Jewish populations. Again, a synagogue in Jerusalem for these people.

The synagogues of Cilicia and Asia in much the same way were Roman provinces in Asia Minor. Of interest at this point, the Apostle Paul was from Tarsus, which is a town in Cilicia.

Recall that he was a student of Gamaliel, which we've seen previously in chapter 5. And he was likely part of the debate that's going on.

He's likely one of the people standing here and opposing. He's likely one of the people that helps recruit liars to bring false charge against Stephen as we see him at the end of chapter 7 standing, residing over Stephen's martyrdom.

So there's this opposition and it's coming against teaching. Verse 10 says, but they could not withstand the wisdom and the spirit with which he was speaking.

[15 : 25] They were unable to handle him in a debate. They were unable to best the power of God at work within him. They were incapable without the illumination of the spirit of God to fully comprehend the scriptures.

They've been trained in it. Masterfully trained. Stephen is likely a lay person but he has the spirit of God and the power of God at work within him to help him understand this book that had been taught to him from a child.

And he lays it out for them and they're unable to debate with him and so what do they do? They turn to deception. They have no other way to stand up against him and so they turn to deception and they bring up these false charges in secret and hidden places.

They instigate men. They recruit false witness against him and they make these charges against Stephen in three pairs. And we see them in verse 11 and verse 13 and verse 14.

Verse 11 blasphemous words against Moses and God. Stephen is speaking these blasphemous words against Moses and God. Verse 13 He won't stop speaking words against this holy place and the law.

[16:43] And verse 14 this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and will change the customs that Moses delivered to us. And the way these accusations are brought the pairs expand on the original accusation that Stephen is against Moses and against God.

That is they go on to make these accusations to say to speak blasphemous words against Moses is to speak against the law and the customs handed down by Moses.

And to speak blasphemous words against God is to speak against the temple. Now these charges weren't altogether false.

Stephen was certainly not being blasphemous but he was preaching the gospel. So he was teaching that righteousness could not be found in the law or in the traditions and that temple worship would never atone for sin.

He was teaching that these things were a shadow of the thing that has come in Christ. Stephen was preaching the gospel.

[18:04] He was speaking of the person and work of Jesus Christ. And that's why it's so offensive to them. We've said this in previous weeks that went against the world system which their religion was a part of.

It flew in the face of it. And they could not have him tear down their religious worship. Stephen preached that people must believe in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

And I don't know if you've been noticing me across the last month saying that often that phrasing person and work of Jesus Christ because beloved it's not enough to believe in one and not the other.

We must believe that Jesus is who he said he is. That he is the son of God. That he is the Messiah the chosen one of God. The one who was sent to take away the sins of the world.

We also must believe in his work. We must understand that he lived a perfect life. That he fulfilled the law in himself. That he has righteousness that's granted to us by faith.

[19:16] We put on his righteousness and that his sacrificial death paid the penalty for our sin.

Both are important. The person and the work. We must believe that Jesus is the Christ and that his active and passive obedience has brought us into right relationship with God.

And this is the gospel that Stephen is preaching. This is the offense to the world system in which he lived. Now, the story of Stephen is used by Luke.

And I don't mean that he makes the story up or that he conveniently puts the story in this place. But under inspiration, Luke writes this account and uses the story for a very important transition in the book of Acts.

I want to show you that. At this point in the story, God is about to turn loose the church. The beginning of chapter 8, persecution ramps up and the church is scattered.

God is going to take the gospel of Jesus Christ in a single generation across three continents.

[20:28] The gospel goes forth in a radical way and it's about to happen right here on the cusp of that. And here the story of Stephen is this transition between the two. The gospel is going to go from Jerusalem to the world.

At the beginning of chapter 8. In Acts 3, chapters 3 through 5, we see the effect of the gospel as it's spreading throughout Jerusalem.

Like the teaching is everywhere, like many, many thousands, possibly tens of thousands have converted to faith in Jesus Christ. It's spreading even in the face of opposition, even in the face of the arrest and the beating of the apostles.

The gospel is going forth throughout Jerusalem. The primary message of their preaching is that God's blessing is found in Jesus, not in temple worship.

Beginning after temple worship, right? As a shadow of a former thing. God's blessing is ultimately found in Christ. Now, in Acts 6 and 7, the life and ministry of Stephen, the proclamation of the

gospel leads to Stephen's trial and his death.

[21 : 42] The opposition to the gospel, even as it's gone forth before this in Jerusalem, right? In the face of opposition, the opposition cranks way up. We see the first martyrdom, the first death for the cause of Christ.

Leads to his trial and to his death. And the primary message of Stephen's preaching is that God has never been limited by the temple. Always try to contain him in a house, put him in a container, but it's never been limited to that.

His influence has gone forth far, far, far beyond. So, look to Jesus for God's blessing. And we're going to see, beginning in Acts chapter 8, through the end of the book, through chapter 28, that the effect of the gospel is that it spreads beyond Jerusalem, goes beyond the Jewish population, that in Abraham, all the peoples of the earth might be blessed.

And the primary message of the gospel, God's blessing is for all who will believe in Jesus Christ. And so, that's where we stand in this gap. And that's why the offense of him speaking against the temple is so massive at this point.

It's a tipping point for them. We're not going to see a lot of conversation about the temple beyond this, but that's why it brings this whole event and the first martyrdom to such a head in this.

[23 : 09] And then just note, just as I'm kind of walking through the passage, verse 15 and 7-1, and gazing at him, all who sat in the council saw that his face was like the face of an angel.

This picture of gazing, some of your translations might say staring, would be a good word for it. It's not a kind gazing, right? They're set him in the midst of the council and they're staring him down.

They see that his face was like the face of an angel. Take that to mean that his face was illuminated. And the high priest said, of these accusations, are these things so?

And next week we'll see him launch into his, it's not much of a defense. He kind of instigates himself, but his speech following that question, are these things so?

So those are the events. This is the things that happened in his arrest. Let's look at secondly now, the Stephen who was arrested. What kind of man was Stephen?

[24 : 09] What was his quality? He is certainly a saint that we should emulate. We need to observe this brief little record, the life and ministry of Stephen.

We would all do well to look like Stephen. And I think even a better question would be how was the gospel of Jesus Christ shaping him.

Beloved, if you are in Christ, if you are indeed in Christ, you are being changed one degree of glory to another.

We're getting a little better. There's sanctification, right? It's what that process is called. We're improving bit by bit. And it doesn't always feel like that in a day. I know that, and I'm there with you in that.

It doesn't always feel that way in a week or maybe even in a month or possibly in a year. But if we zoom way back, we take God's perspective on our lives, our trajectory is toward holiness.

[25 : 10] It's away from sinfulness and it's toward holiness. This process is called sanctification. The biblical view of sanctification, and I unapologetically say that, the biblical view of sanctification is called progressive sanctification.

It means that we continue to plod that course. We continue to move in that direction, to look more like Christ. And it is taught in the scriptures as a synergistic process.

And by that I mean that both God and us are involved in this process. We're both involved. That's what the scripture teaches. At times, it really seems to be an apparent paradox.

You've heard that phrase before. A paradox is a statement that is, at least it seems to be on the surface, self-contradictory. The scripture doesn't conflict with itself, so it's an apparent paradox.

It's not, but it seems to be. And many people have tried to wrestle through the logic of these things, and many heresies have arisen from it.

[26 : 20] If not heresies, at very least, erroneous teaching on the matter. There are some things that are very difficult for our minds to reconcile. So we step back away from the scripture, and rather than standing over it in judgment, we stand underneath it and let it speak to us.

Why has God revealed himself to us? Why has he shown us the process of sanctification in this way? The way that the gospel works in to us holiness. I can't give you all the answers to that.

I don't know that I have all the answers or that I have the time this morning, but I appreciate that the scripture itself doesn't always try to wrestle it out. There's a wonderful example of this if you'd like to

see it, Philippians chapter 2.

Paul states the one and the other side by side. Now let me just sum up, if you're turning there, what I mean by this. We are being perfected by the power of God and the gospel of Jesus Christ through the working of the Spirit in our lives.

We would of course give all glory and honor to Christ in the process of that. We don't take the ownership for that kind of thing, but you were not made perfect by sitting around. It doesn't happen.

[27 : 30] You don't sit on your hands and go, well, God said he's going to do it. Just waiting. I promise you that God will never animate you in the morning and cause you to swing your legs out of bed and cause you to pick up the scripture in a way that you're not part of your faculty, right?

That you go and you open it and you begin to read it and you go, what is happening to me? I don't even know what's going on right now. But I will say when you wake up in the morning and you swing your legs out of bed and you go and you open the scripture and you begin to read it, that God has worked in you for this very thing to happen.

You get the apparent paradox in play. So listen to what Paul says, Philippians chapter verse 12, man's responsibility, verse 13, God's empowering work.

Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence, but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.

Why? For it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. Verse 12, you work, verse 13, God works.

[28 : 38] So how is it that he does this? And this takes place in our lives in four broad areas, and I promise I'm coming back to Stephen, because it's working in Stephen's life, in four broad areas.

We could classify these in many different ways. There's a lot of wonderful books on it that classify what's often called the means of grace. I like to call them habits of grace, because we play apart in these things.

So there's other ways to categorize this. I'm going to categorize it in four broad areas, and we're going to talk about this a lot in the coming year. And those four areas are gospel conviction, gospel character, gospel community, and gospel commission.

You've already got to memorize, because they all start with C. Gospel conviction, character, community, and mission. These are means of grace, or habits of grace, as I prefer.

Things that we are involved in, and God uses them to bring about holiness in us. And so I want to look at Stephen and see how the gospel was at work in these ways.

[29 : 52] So number one, gospel conviction. Let's back up in our text just a little bit to Acts 6, 5. The disciples are presented with this solution to the issue of the tables not being served, and it pleases them, and they choose Stephen, a man full of faith, and of the Holy Spirit.

The response that Stephen gives to the council in chapter 7, the full speech that he gives shows that he had faith that God ruled history.

He believed in God's sovereign rule. Now, I know we haven't read the text, but we're going to get there next week. I encourage you to read it this week and see that Stephen had faith.

He believed that God ruled history. He believed in a sovereign plan. He could say with Paul, as Paul says in Romans 14, 8, for if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord.

So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord. And he had this conviction of that that allowed him to press into. Remember, he's going around doing signs and wonders, and he's preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ already in the face of opposition.

[31 : 06] He already knows that it's happening. We've already had Peter and John arrested. We've already had the apostles arrested And flogged! They're being told, do not speak in the name of Christ.

And this man of conviction, trusting in the Lord's sovereign rule, presses on in to these things. Stephen had faith that Jesus was the fulfillment of messianic prophecy.

He believed, was convicted that Jesus was, is, the Christ. Acts 7, 52, the end of his speech.

Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the righteous one, whom you have now betrayed and murdered.

He knew that Jesus is the Christ. He was convicted of that. Stephen believed that Jesus had risen and was at the right hand of the Father, and that he would stand and judge the earth.

[32 : 12] Again, Acts 7, verse 55 and 56, full of the Holy Spirit, Stephen gazes into heaven, sees the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and he says, behold, I see the

heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.

He believed in the promises of God found in the Scripture. He was a man of conviction because he knew the Scriptures and he believed them.

He knew the Scriptures and he believed them. Stephen was also full of the Holy Spirit. He was filled up with the Holy Spirit.

And as we have said before, the opportunity for this is not unique amongst followers of Christ. We don't have varying classification of Christian, those who are filled and aren't filled.

If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, you have been baptized in the Spirit and we all have the opportunity to be filled. And it should not be a rare occurrence or reserved in any way.

[33 : 22] To be filled with the Spirit is to have the Word of Christ dwell in you richly in a way that brings about change. Romans 8, 3 and 4.

For God is done with the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin He condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who walk not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.

The great evidence of being filled with the Spirit is obedience. Being so captivated with Christ that we are obedient to His call.

It's following our Lord. I've read this to you before, I just love it too much not to read it again. I think this may be number three in the book of Acts. Dan Phillips, a contemporary pastor, said this, Show me a person obsessed with the Holy Spirit and His gifts, real or imagined, and I will show you a person not filled with the Holy Spirit.

Show me a person focused on the personal work of Jesus Christ, never tiring of learning about Him, thinking about Him, boasting of Him, speaking about and for thrilled and entranced with His perfections and beauty, finding ways to serve and exalt Him, tirelessly exploring ways to spend and be spent for Him, growing in character to be more and more like Him, and I will show you a person who is filled with the Holy Spirit.

[34 : 54] Not to be the normative part of our Christian living, that we be people of faith who are filled with the Spirit of God, and we see the evidencing of that in obedience. We hold our lives up to the Scripture, and we go, yes, I find myself in this, failing at times, but moving progressively away from my sin and toward holiness.

So what part do we play in gospel conviction? What's our part? If it's synergistic, right, being perfected by the gospel, what part do we play? We read, and we study, and we meditate on the Word of God.

Beloved, we're to be a people of the Word. We're to be saturated by this book, and it's not nearly as difficult as we all make it out to be. We make far too many excuses for our biblical illiteracy.

The number one I hear is time management. I just need you to pray for time management. Not what you need prayer for. You need prayer for the idolatry of your heart.

It's a worship issue. The fact that we don't take this thing up and read, and I'm in the boat with you guys, right? It's an issue of worship. It's an issue of priority. My old self is an idol factory.

[36 : 14] I picture it that way in my mind, little smokestacks, chukka, chukka, chukka, chukka, turning out, new things for me to worship. It takes all these varying forms all the time. God has built a new wing, right?

And it produces righteousness. And he is working at destroying that part of the factory that I seem so bent on keeping running. And you know why we don't get in here and read this more often? Because this screws up the idol factory, right? It throws wrenches into the idol factory. It puts the brakes on that production, and it messes with our worship of ourselves. that's why you don't pick up the word of God.

That's why you don't read it more. It's an issue of worship. Beloved, we need to be in this book. And I know it can be daunting. It's so big and there's so much to learn and understand.

Don't worry about it. Pick it up today and tomorrow and the next day and you will be enriched by it. I can promise you that. Study it. Study it often. Study it well.

[37 : 14] Read it and let it read you and you will be changed by it. Gospel conviction produces gospel character.

It produces gospel character. Verse 8, Stephen's full of grace and power. He's doing these wonderful works. Verse 10, this opposition to him couldn't withstand the wisdom and the spirit with

which he was speaking.

He's full. He's amply supplied with grace. He's amply supplied with power. He's amply supplied with wisdom.

Not in a vacuum but because of the spirit of God using the word of God to work in and through his life. And he is courageous.

Gospel character. Thing we can note of Stephen. He is courageous. First for preaching the gospel at all in this environment. Knowing full well that there was an opposition against them.

[38 : 19] Beloved, we are in the same place. You don't experience opposition to the preaching of the gospel because you're not preaching the gospel. He sits amongst this council, 70 men, the high court of the day, plus the high priest, and they sit in a semicircle around him and he stands in the midst of him and they stare him down.

Verse 15, they're gazing at him, they're staring down. Have you ever been in your life in a situation where you're being stared at? A wonderful little example of poor Graham falling off the stage this morning and so embarrassed because everybody, at least he thought everybody, was looking at him.

At the dinner table sometimes, my four-year-old Judah will go, why is everybody staring at me? And we'll go, because you're talking, what's wrong with you? But he suddenly gets super self-conscious and really, and it's difficult to stand up in that kind of environment, right?

Everybody's staring at you and this is such a higher degree of that, right? He's on trial, right? They have been warned. We have already seen that they wanted to kill the apostles.

And here he is and he stands amongst them and when they see his face, he's not hiding his face, he's looking back and his face is shining like the face of an angel.

[39 : 37] What courage! And we'll get into next week his speech and man, is it good. Right? He holds no punches. Right? This Stephen, the deacon of the church standing before the high religious rulers of that day and boy does he go for the jugular.

His face is glowing in the midst of their stares. And there's only one other person in biblical history that this happens to and that's Moses in Exodus 33.

Remember he asked to see the glory of God. God says that if you fully see my glory, you'll die. So he lets him see his back and just that causes his face to shine for days. The people of Israel can't even look at his face it shines so bright so he wears a veil but slowly over time that fades away.

I think the same thing is happening here with Stephen and I'm reaching a little bit but I believe that that's what's going on in this case that he's shining like one of God's shining ones, one of the angels.

in response to this great opposition and this glaring that they're doing on his part these men of darkness they see a man of light.

[40 : 47] I think it helps us get some idea about this. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians chapter 3 beginning of verse 7 now if the ministry of death carved in letters on stones we're talking about the law the law brings death convicts of sin now if the ministry of death carved in letters on stone came with such glory that the Israelites could not gaze at Moses' face because of its glory so the shining the glory of God shining out of his face they couldn't gaze at his face which was being brought to an end verse 8 will not the ministry of the spirit have even more glory?

For if there was glory in the ministry of condemnation the ministry of righteousness must far exceed it in glory indeed in this case what once had glory has come to have no glory at all because of the glory that surpasses it the gospel of Jesus Christ verse 11 for if what was being brought to an end came with glory much more will what is permanent have glory so Stephen stands as this man of gospel character at the cusp of the launching out of the gospel of Jesus Christ and I think that's why God does the same thing that he did with Moses in letting his face shine as well in the same way so we see gospel conviction and we see gospel character in Stephen's life and for the sake of time we're going to pick up the last two next week but I'm going to find a way to do that which would be gospel community and gospel commission beloved we need to take careful note of Stephen's life we need to ask ourselves what part are we to play in the perfecting of our lives lives lived that are not wasted and are lived for the kingdom of God for the glory of God the service of the gospel for the love of others around us what do we need to pick up and do what is our part in sanctification that the gospel might have its effect in us and through us to those around us let's pray together