

Acts 7:2-60

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[0 : 00] Over the past two weeks, we have looked at the brief life and ministry of Stephen, who is this very important transitional character in Luke's record and life.

The intensive work of the gospel is about to go forth here in the history that's recorded for us by Luke. The teaching of the apostles has been filling all of Jerusalem. Peter's been the primary character in the narrative. We're soon to see the shift from Peter to Paul as Paul begins to take the gospel to the Gentiles.

It leaves the wall, it goes out of the gate, and that hinges here on Stephen. The last two weeks, we've looked at Stephen's arrest and his inquiry. Chapter 6, verse 8 through 7, verse 1.

And you'll recall at the beginning of chapter 6, there's an issue that arises in the church. The widows of the Hellenists, that is the Greek-speaking Jews, are not being served, and so the first deacons are called, and Stephen is amongst them.

Not long after this, we see, beginning in verse 8, that Stephen has a broadening ministry, not the service of tables, but he's also doing great wonders and signs among the people.

[1 : 25] And we understand, as we are good students of the Scripture, that any time biblical signs and wonders are being done, they're accompanied by the preaching of the gospel. We see this as a consistent pattern in the life of Christ. We see this as a consistent pattern throughout the book of Acts.

And although it's not recorded here by Luke, it's proper to assume that. And we can see, beginning in verse 9, that this commotion begins between Stephen and some of the synagogues of the freedmen, the Cyrenians, the Alexandrians, and those from Cilicia and Asia.

These would all have been Hellenist Jewish populations. These were all Greek-speaking Jews. And they dispute with him, not about the things he was doing, but about the things he was saying.

And they, unable to dispute with him and withstand his wisdom, they raise up false witnesses, and they bring him before the council, the Sanhedrin, the religious ruling Jews of the day.

And the question is asked of him, chapter 7, verse 1, are these things so? What is the high priest referring to? The charges that are made against him, made in these three pairs, beginning in verse 11, and then in verse 13, and in verse 14.

[2 : 47] They're repeated and expanded upon. And the initial accusation made in verse 11 is that Stephen is speaking blasphemous words against Moses and God, or irreverent words against Moses and God.

And as we look in verse 13 and verse 14, we saw that he explains to us what this means. To speak blasphemous words against Moses is to speak against the law and the customs that were handed down by Moses.

And to speak blasphemous words against God is to speak against the temple. So the high priest asks the question, are these things so?

Defend yourself, Stephen. What do you have to say of these accusations? And we're going to look at his response and the result of his response this morning.

And before we get into our text, I want to remind you, I've asked you over the last two weeks to keep two general lessons in mind as we look at the life and ministry of Stephen. Number one, a life given in service to God is a life that is not wasted.

[3 : 55] I've shown you that God uses Stephen and the persecution that arises as a result of Stephen's life and ministry to spread the gospel across continents in the next generation.

And we're a result. Those of us who are found in Christ now are a result of the life and ministry of Stephen. So a life given in service to God is a life that is not wasted. And secondly, the significance of such a life cannot be measured by its short-term gains, its breadth, or its length.

This very short ministry, this ministry that doesn't seem to yield much fruit, ends in Stephen's martyrdom, has such great reach and effect. God uses it in such mighty ways. And as we consider our own lives beloved, we need to be thinking, is our life given in service to God the way Stephen's was? And have we been measuring the way in which we give our lives to God in terms of short-term gains, breadth, or length?

So I'm going to read the text this morning. Our text will be Acts 7, verse 2 through 60. Yes, verse 2 through 60.

[5 : 14] And there's a temptation at this point to not read the text. There's a temptation just to highlight some things throughout the text. And many faithful preachers have done that. And I find that to be an acceptable practice.

I'm not suggesting if you have a favorite preacher who doesn't read the entire text to you that he's wrong in doing so. But I feel compelled to read the entire text to you because the power that the Spirit wields in our lives comes from the Scripture and true things that I may say about the Scripture, but it's the Word of God that needs to be saturating our meetings together.

So I think it's important for us to actually open the text and actually read the text and consider it before I begin to make comments about it. Yes, I timed myself.

It takes about seven minutes to read the text. That's not too long. Let me ask, you know, I'll try to read it well for you. I'm reading from the ESV.

You may find if you don't have an ESV, it's hard to follow along. You might want to just listen. If you have an ESV, it may help for you to follow along. But let me ask that you try to clear your mind and engage in what's actually happening.

[6 : 22] So here's Stephen standing before the Sanhedrin. They would have sat in a semicircle around him. Seventy men, high rulers of the day, dressed in their fancy garb.

This was the Supreme Court of the day. The high priest sitting behind him. He's asked this question. These accusations have been made. Are these things so?

And Stephen says, and he doesn't really defend himself. I don't want to say that at the outset. He doesn't really give a defense, but he launches into this speech. So let's listen carefully as I read.

Beginning in verse 2, and Stephen said, Brothers and fathers, hear me.

The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia before he lived in Haran and said to him, Go out from your land and from your kindred and go into the land I will show you.

Then he went out from the land of the Chaldeans and lived in Haran. And after his father died, God removed him from there into this land in which you are now living. Yet he gave him no inheritance in it, not even a foot's length, but promised to give it to him as a possession and to his offspring after him, though he had no child.

[7 : 36] And God spoke to this effect, that his offspring would be sojourners in a land belonging to others who would enslave them and afflict them four hundred years.

But I will judge the nation that they serve, said God, and after that they shall come out and worship me in this place. And he gave him the covenant of circumcision.

And so Abraham became the father of Isaac and circumcised him on the eighth day. And Isaac became the father of Jacob and Jacob of the twelve patriarchs. And the patriarchs, jealous of Joseph, sold him into Egypt.

But God was with him and rescued him out of all his afflictions and gave him favor and wisdom before Pharaoh, king of Egypt, who made him ruler over Egypt and over all his household.

Now there came a famine throughout all Egypt and Canaan and great affliction, and our fathers could find no food. But when Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent out our fathers on their first visit.

[8 : 37] And on the second visit, Joseph made himself known to his brothers, and Joseph's family became known to Pharaoh. And Joseph sent and summoned Jacob, his father, and all his kindred, seventy-five persons in all.

And Jacob went down into Egypt, and he died, he and our fathers. And they were carried back to Shechem and laid in the tomb that Abraham had bought for a sum of silver from the sons of Hamor in Shechem.

But at the time of the promise drew near, which God had granted to Abraham, the people increased and multiplied in Egypt, until there arose over Egypt another king who did not know Joseph.

He dealt shrewdly with our race and forced our fathers to expose their infants so they would not be kept alive. At this time, Moses was born, and he was beautiful in God's sight.

And he was brought up for three months in his father's house. And when he was exposed, Pharaoh's daughter adopted him and brought him up as her own son. And Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and he was mighty in his words and deeds.

[9 : 42] When he was forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brothers, the children of Israel. And seeing one of them being wronged, he defended the oppressed man and avenged him by striking down the Egyptian.

He supposed that his brothers would understand that God was giving him salvation by his hand, but they did not understand. And on the following day, he appeared to them as they were quarreling and tried to reconcile them, saying, Men, you are brothers.

Why do you wrong each other? But the man who was wronging his neighbor thrust him aside, saying, Who made you a ruler and a judge over us? Do you want to kill me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday?

At this retort, Moses fled and became an exile in the land of Midian, where he became the father of two sons. Now, when forty years had passed, an angel appeared to him in the wilderness of Mount Sinai in a flame of fire in a bush.

When Moses saw it, he was amazed at the sight. And as he drew near to look, there came the voice of the Lord. I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob.

[10 : 42] And Moses trembled and did not dare to look. Then the Lord said to him, Take off the sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy ground. I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and I have heard their groaning, and I have come down to deliver them.

And now, come, I will send you to Egypt. This Moses, whom they rejected, saying, Who made you a ruler and a judge? This man God sent as both ruler and redeemer by the hand of the angel who appeared to him in the bush.

This man led them out, performing wonders and signs in Egypt and at the Red Sea and in the wilderness for forty years. This is the Moses who said to the Israelites, God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers.

This is the one who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the angel who spoke to him at Mount Sinai. And with our fathers, he received living oracles to give us.

Our fathers refused to obey him, but thrust him aside, and in their hearts they turned to Egypt, saying to Aaron, Make for us gods who will go before us. As for this Moses who led us out from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.

[11 : 54] And they made a calf in those days, and offered a sacrifice to the idol, and were rejoicing in the works of their hands. But God turned away and gave them over to worship the host of heaven, as it is written in the book of the prophets.

Did you bring to me slain beasts and sacrifices during the forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel? You took up the tent of Moloch, and the star of your God, Raphon, the images that you made to worship, and I will send you into exile beyond Babylon.

Our fathers had the tent of witness in the wilderness, just as he who spoke to Moses directed him to make it, according to the pattern that he had seen. Our fathers in turn brought it in with Joshua, and they dispossessed the nations that God drove out before our fathers.

So it was until the days of David, who found favor in the sight of God, and asked to find a dwelling place for the God of Jacob. But it was Solomon who built a house for him.

Yet the Most High does not dwell in houses made by hands, as the prophet says, Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me, said the Lord, or what is the place of my rest?

[13 : 06] Did not my hand make all these things? You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit.

As your fathers did, so do you. 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.

You who received the law as delivered by angels, and did not keep it. Now when they heard these things, they were enraged, and they ground their teeth at him.

But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. And he said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.

But they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and rushed together at him. Then they cast him out of the city, and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul.

[14:07] And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And falling to his knees, he cried out with a loud voice, Lord, do not hold this sin against them.

And when he had said this, he fell asleep. Beloved, this is God's Word to us. It was written for His glory, and for our good.

We would all do well to listen to it, in order to believe its promises, and obey its commands. Now, there's a lot before us. I certainly can't, and won't deal with this verse by verse this morning.

We'll try to take it thematically. And I want to use kind of a simple structure for such a large text. I'd like you to hear that structure in advance. You may not be able to write this down just yet, but I want you to hear it just so you know where we're headed.

Now, structure will be in four parts. First, Stephen's brief history of Israel. Second, Stephen's conclusion from Israel's history. Third, God's approval of Stephen's conclusion.

[15:15] And fourth, the council's reaction to Stephen's conclusion. So Stephen begins in this speech, not really a defense as you'll soon see, but in this speech to give a brief history of Israel.

And that is the major portion of our text, verse 2 through 50. And just as an aside, I find it really astounding that he's standing before the religious elite of the day and he repeats to them their history.

But he does so to make a point, as we'll see in his conclusion. He begins in verse 2 by saying, Brothers and fathers, hear me.

And I want to note this because it's the candor of the way in which he's speaking and the heart that follows along with it.

Stephen shows in this, by calling them brothers, his solidarity with them. He recognizes that he himself is also a Jew, that this is his history that he is about to speak. And he also shows them respect in calling them fathers.

[16:21] And this sets the tone for what he's about to say. And he goes through a number of characters, kind of high points in Israel's history.

And he begins with Abraham in verses 2 through 8. And in speaking about Abraham, Stephen emphasizes the divine work of bringing Israel to be and to be in the land in which they're currently dwelling at this time.

He emphasizes the fact that while Abraham was the means, that God was accomplishing his ends through the life of Abraham.

Let me draw your attention to verse 4. Abraham's commanded to go to the land. Verse 4 says, Then he went out from the land of the Chaldeans and lived in Haran, which is about halfway to where he was supposed to go.

And after his father died, look at the way that Luke records this, the words of Stephen, and God removed him from there into this land in which you are now living.

[17:23] Stephen recognized that God was sovereign over redemptive history, over the history of Israel themselves. He emphasizes this as he speaks about Abraham to begin with.

He then moves on to Joseph. I promise we're going to move quickly through these characters. Verses 9 through 16, in which Stephen expresses his understanding in God's sovereignty and bringing about Israel's movement to Egypt.

The fulfillment of this promise that was given to Abraham, that there would be a people that would rule over them. Verse 9, And the patriarchs, jealous of Joseph, sold him to Egypt, but God was with him and rescued him out of all his afflictions and gave him favor and wisdom before Pharaoh.

Sold into slavery, later put into a jail, sees visions and dreams, interprets things for Pharaoh, and he's put in charge of the whole land and in the process of gathering in and preparing for this famine that was going to come.

This is the way in which God brings and brings about the promise that the great nation that he's bringing forth in Abraham would be ruled over in a foreign place.

[18 : 40] Stephen then spends the majority of his speech on Moses. Remember the accusation made against him that he's blaspheming against Moses. Verses 17 through 44.

He speaks of God's work in Israel's increase and the slavery. Verse 17. But as the time of the promise drew near which God had granted to Abraham, the people increased and multiplied in Egypt.

We read about that this morning to the children until there arose over Egypt another king who did not know Joseph, who didn't have favorable opinions of Joseph and his people.

Stephen expresses his understanding in God's selection of Moses to redeem the people from their slavery. The first part of verse 20. At this time, Moses was born and he was beautiful in God's sight. Verse 35. This Moses whom they rejected saying, who made you a ruler and a judge? This man God sent as both ruler and redeemer by the hand of the angel who appeared to him in the bush.

[19 : 52] This man led them out performing wonders and signs in Egypt and at the Red Sea and in the wilderness for 40 years. This is the Moses who said to the Israelites, God, speaking of Christ, will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers.

So Stephen is very aware of God's selection and use of Moses. Stephen emphasizes Israel's rejection of God. Beginning in verse 39.

It speaks that the fathers refused to obey the commands of God given to Moses. They thrust Moses aside and their hearts they turned to Egypt. You recall that they made a golden calf.

Moses has not been up on Mount Sinai for very long but they're very worried about what has happened to him. So they make a calf and they worship that calf.

Verse 42 says, but God turned away and He gave them over to their worship, the host of heaven, as it is written in the book of Prophets. This is Amos 5, 25-27.

[20 : 55] Did you bring me slain beasts and sacrifices during the forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel? You took up the tent of Moloch, a false god, and the star of your god, Raphon, a false god, the images that you made to worship and I will send you into exile beyond Babylon.

And so you see that Stephen in his speaking of Israel's rejection of God as their rebellious activity that that continues on, right?

All the way to the prediction of Amos that they would go into exile in Babylon. It happened in the forty years in the wilderness and it was still happening. He briefly speaks about Joshua and David and Solomon.

A little rapid fire verses we get in verses 45 and 50 to speak about God's dwelling place. The tabernacle that God had instructed them to build, a place where His Shekinah glory could exist, later became a temple dreamed up by David, accomplished by Solomon.

But then he's very quick to say, speak the words of the Lord from Isaiah 66, 1 and 2. God says, heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool.

[22 : 13] What kind of house will you build for me, says the Lord, or what is the place of my rest? Did not my hand make all these things? And what he's saying is that I'm not limited to this temple, this place.

You remember the accusation made, right? You were blaspheming against the temple itself. So he sweeps through the high points of their history, making these clear points.

God has been in control. God has been moving. God has been establishing. God has been commanding. And Israel has been rebellious. So you have to read this.

I'm coming at it, you know, from the beginning, but you have to read it from his conclusion. They become enraged with the things that he is saying to them. They're furious with them.

And why? Because it concludes this historical sweep in verse 51 through 53. He's been driving to this place as he's been speaking all along.

[23 : 18] You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in hearts and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute?

And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the righteous one. Think just recently of John the Baptist in our study of Mark. Whom you, the righteous one, have now betrayed and murdered.

You who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it. So remember these accusations that are made against him.

611. Blasphemous words against Moses and God. Stephen's conclusion is to say it is not I who have offended God, but you.

What a defense. The accusation you're making against me is not true, but it is true of you. It is not I who have spoken against Moses, but you and your disobedience and your failure to keep the law. [24 : 21] It is you that has blasphemed the law and Moses. He calls them stiff-necked people, which is a reference to Exodus 33, 1-6.

And I'd appreciate it if you'd turn there quickly with me. The second book of your Old Testament, Exodus 33. And I'm doing this for you.

I want you to see the conclusion. I want you to really wrap your mind around the accusation that he's making against these religious elites. Exodus 33, verses 1-6.

This is immediately following chapter 32, Israel worshipping the golden calf. This is what happens on the very heels of that event.

The Lord says to Moses, verse 1, Depart, go up from here, you and the whole people whom you have brought up out of the land of Egypt, to the land of which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, To your offspring I will give it.

[25 : 25] So go ahead, pick up. You're in the desert of Sinai, pick up and take off. Go to the place that I promised you. Verse 2, I will send an angel before you, and I will drive out the Canaanites, the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites.

Go up to a land flowing with milk and honey, but I will not go up among you, lest I consume you on the way, for you are a stiff-necked people.

Now, what that means is that there are people who are not willing to bow to the will of God. So what he's saying to them is, you have been so disobedient. I have redeemed you.

I have led you out. I have taken you from slavery and brought you to this place. I've called your servant Moses up onto the mountain. I have given him the law. And you have turned and you have worshipped a golden calf.

I better stay behind because if you guys keep up with this and I'm with you, I'm going to consume you with fire, right? You will die. I cannot go with you. Verse 4, When the people heard this disastrous word, they mourned, and no one put on its ornaments, which means they didn't adorn themselves, they weren't joyful.

[26 : 33] For the Lord had said to Moses, Say to the people of Israel, You are a stiff-necked people. If for a single moment I should go up among you, I would consume you.

So now take off your ornaments that I may know what to do with you. Therefore the people of Israel stripped themselves of their ornaments from Mount Horeb onward. It's significant that Stephen accuses these men of being stiff-necked people.

He's saying, You are just like your forefathers who worshipped wrongly. They worshipped the golden calf in the desert of Sinai. He goes on to say that they're uncircumcised in hearts and ears. Their flesh had been circumcised as Jews, but they weren't clean before God. He's saying to them that you are as unclean as the Gentiles. You have no part in the things of God.

He says that they always resisted the Holy Spirit. They've never been obedient just as their fathers. All of the messengers of God, the prophets of God, were persecuted by you and your fathers.

[27 : 39] Killed the ones that announced the righteous one. Now you have killed the righteous one. You received the law, but you have never kept the law.

It's a massive accusation. A bold accusation. We spoke last week and the week before about Stephen's courage before these people. A spirit-filled courage to speak such words to them.

Now, beginning in verse 54, we're going to see God's approval of Stephen's conclusion. So he comes to this conclusion.

He gives this speech. History of Israel. He comes to this conclusion. You are wicked. Just as Israel has been wicked. You need Christ. But you killed Him.

Now, when they heard these things, they were enraged. And they ground their teeth at Him. I don't know that I've ever been that mad. They ground their teeth at Him.

[28 : 42] But verse 55, but he, full of the Holy Spirit, gets a vision. He gazes into heaven and he sees the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.

And verse 56, he makes that known to them. So he sees it, verse 55, and verse 56, and he said, Behold, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.

Now, there are 17 New Testament references to Jesus being at God's right hand. The right hand is the place of honor next to the King.

It's the place of authority. Jesus is seen 17 times at the right hand of the Father. We should be familiar with this. Four of those 17 verses describe Him simply as at God's right hand. We don't know exactly the position of His session. That's the old word for this. His being at the right hand of the Father. His session. Four verses simply at God's right hand.

[29 : 47] 11 describe Him as seated. And this is meant to show the completed work. He's not active. He's seated. He's currently sitting.

You'll hear us say that here on Sunday mornings often. Jesus seated at the right hand of God. Interceding even now for us. 11 verses describe Him as seated.

And then we have two. Right here together. Verse 55 and verse 56 describing Him as standing. But why?

Now some have suggested that He is standing giving Stephen a standing ovation. That He's standing in approval over what is happening.

Stephen's the first Christian martyr. Some have suggested that He's standing in order to welcome Stephen knowing that He's about to be martyr.

[30 : 48] And I think these are all fantastic thoughts. You may be familiar with them. You may have heard this. They're fantastic but they're not exegetically faithful to go, huh, standing?

How interesting. I wonder why. Oh, well, Stephen, a man approved. Right? Full of the Holy Spirit.

But if you look carefully at the very next verse after He says this, they are even more furious.

You notice verse 57? They cry out with a loud voice and they stop their ears. Literally, they put their hands over their ears because they did not want to hear Him say anything else.

Why is this so enraging to them? So think about that. Think about the accusation He's already made. Right? Verse 51 through 53. He's made this accusation.

They're mad. He sees a vision. He shares the vision. They get even more mad. And then we know that He's martyred as a result. That's your context.

[31 : 54] Right? If we're going to be faithful, studying the Word, the context helps us. you may recall just up in verse 49, He quotes from Isaiah 66, 1 and 2.

God says, Heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool. Does that ring any little flags going off, bells going off, anybody's footstool? Footstool? Where else do we hear that type of thing? How about Psalm 110.

1? Not too much earlier. Not too much time earlier in the book of Acts. Peter's used this reference on the day of Pentecost. Chapter 2, verse 34 and 35.

Psalm 110. 1. The Lord says to my Lord, God says to Christ, sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool.

There's some clue here. Okay. Alright. What's going on? Who are these listeners? What would have been their understanding of the Scripture? Would this have been significant to them that Jesus is standing at the right hand of God?

[33 : 00] They would have been familiar with Psalms like Psalm 68. 1. God shall arise. His enemies shall be scattered and those who hate Him shall flee before Him.

God will stand up. And when God stands up, His enemies will scatter. God will stand up. And Isaiah 3. Verse 13. The Lord has taken His place to contend.

He stands to judge the peoples. So the vision that Stephen sees here is a continuation of his indictment. His in turn accusation to these men who are before him.

These men who have now heard the Gospel preached in multiple ways and at multiple times. He's saying to them, you wicked Israelites. You who killed Christ and will not now believe in Him as your risen Savior and Lord.

He will stand and He will judge. It's a much different picture than a standing ovation, isn't it? It's being painted of our Lord.

[34 : 13] Prophet, priest, king coming judge. To judge Him. This is why they are so enraged. He's heaping up accusation on them.

This is why they cry out with a loud voice. They stop their ears. Remember, these are the older men, the esteemed men, the well-dressed men, the wealthy men.

They fly into a rage at this accusation. This is God's approval. Stephen's conclusion.

The council's reaction to Stephen's conclusion. Verse 57. I've mentioned already. Cry out with a loud voice. They stop their ears. They rush together at Him. Luke simply records verse 58.

Then they cast Him out of the city and stoned Him. We get the introduction of Paul, now known as Saul, likely one of the witnesses. It was tradition that the witnesses in a trial would be the first to throw stones.

[35 : 18] They lay their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul. Saul. And then we picture the way in which Stephen dies. As they're stoning Stephen, he calls out in much the way that Christ did to God, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.

Looking to the greater joy that he was going to have being with Christ forever and falling to his knees, he's cried out with a loud voice, Lord, do not hold this sin against them. Repeating the words of Christ on the cross. And when he had said this, he fell asleep and thus we are witnesses to the first Christian martyrdom.

And just as they had killed the prophets before, the ruling Jews now murder Stephen. And it is a great injustice. And they kill Stephen by the traditional way that Jews would have executed a death sentence.

But they didn't do it in the proper manner. He's stoned, it would seem, that a great group of men standing around him hurling rocks at him. The way that it was meant to be done is he was actually meant to be thrown off a cliff.

[36 : 27] And if that didn't kill him, a huge stone was supposed to be thrown from the cliff. And if that didn't kill him, then smaller stones. They're so angry. They're not even going to wait to do it properly.

They simply take him outside of the city and begin to beat him with rocks. It's a major injustice even by their standard and certainly by ours as we know him to be a follower of God, a man whose message should have been heeded and listened to.

After this, this great persecution that arises, it goes forth from there. We're going to look at that in some coming weeks. The church is scattered. God uses the death of Stephen in such a magnificent way.

So what's the application for us this morning? You fall into two categories this morning. You either have placed believing faith in Jesus Christ or you have not.

And I'm always concerned that in the place that we live and in the day that we live that there are many who think that they have and haven't. Beloved, if you've placed believing faith in the personal work of Jesus Christ, you have been changed.

[37 : 40] You are not different in degree. You are now different in kind. Enemy of God now a friend. Able to worship him. Able to not sin. Your life will be progressing in holiness.

You will be able to put off sin and put on righteousness by the empowering work of the Spirit. Your life will change. You need to ask yourself this morning which category you fall into.

For those who have not placed believing faith in Jesus Christ, I want you to hear two points of application from this text. Number one, encouragement. God is long-suffering.

This major history that's laid out in these high points by Stephen. God is patient. God is patient. God is patient with his people. Peter puts that this way in 2 Peter 3.9, The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness.

but is patient towards you. Not wishing that any should perish but that all should reach repentance. Be encouraged that God is patient with you.

[38 : 43] Let this morning be your time of turning to him because of his great love, his steadfastness that he's shown you. That that love would compel you to love him in return to believe in Christ for the salvation of your soul.

Second point of application for those who have not placed believing faith in Christ is a warning. God will not be patient forever.

God will not be patient forever. Christ will return and he will judge. And I don't want any of you to be in the category of these men.

I don't want any of you to find yourself at the retribution end of Christ's judgment. God will not be patient forever.

Notice here that Stephen filled with the Spirit does not offer repentance to the council. When he indicts them he says you are guilty and Christ will judge you but he does not offer them repentance.

[39 : 53] It had been offered before. I'm sure they had heard the gospel message in many ways and at many times specifically Peter offers it to them in Acts 4.12 He says then there is salvation in no one else for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be

saved.

But it is not offered now. You have not placed believing faith in Jesus Christ. Let today be the day of your salvation. Believe that he died on your behalf.

That he is raised at the right hand of the Father seated for now interceding for you to stand one day and judge those who don't believe in him. And for those of you who have placed believing faith in Christ I remind you of the general lessons given weeks ago in two points of application salvation for you.

Number one a life given in service to God is a life that is not wasted. We find our great purpose and our high value in being disciples of Jesus Christ and in giving our lives the way in which he gave his life.

Not specifically necessarily to die on a cross but emptying ourselves for the sake of others for the high purpose of the glory of God. A life given in service to God is a life that is not wasted.

[41 : 16] All the activity of our lives that's not focused on the kingdom is wasted energy and effort. Turning to dust. The things that we will build that have nothing to do with the kingdom will one day disappear.

Secondly, the significance of such a life cannot be measured by its short-term gains, its breadth, or its length. So beloved, I would just encourage that as you submit yourself to the will of the Lord, Lord.

Do not look to others and the significance of what they're doing, the significance of their ministry, the particular positions that they hold, the acclaim that they receive. There are many followers of Christ that are getting their glory now.

Put it off. Invest in it later. Serve faithfully Christ in all of the spheres in which you walk, whether it be here together with us, with the church, whether it be at your workplace as you do the daily grind for the glory of God.

and the short-term gain of your boss. Be with your classmates, your roommates, your spouse. Seek to lay your life down for the sake of the kingdom.

[42 : 24] Let's pray together. Let's pray.