

A Sermon To Die For

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Date: 06 December 2015

Preacher: Jon Hueni

[0:00] Well, please turn in your Bibles to Acts chapter 6. Acts chapter 6. We're going to begin reading in verse 8.

! And we have an assignment to do. We have the entire chapter 7 to read. And you'll notice it's Stephen's speech to the Sanhedrin. So as we read, I'm not going to tell you what the main point is, or the two main points.

But what I want you to do is listen and see what Stephen is trying to get across. I want you to be active listeners while we read this large passage. Think of how the Sanhedrin listened. They were listening well, and they got his point.

Acts chapter 6 and verse 8. And we'll read to chapter 8, verse 1. And they did not stand up against his wisdom or the spirit by whom he spoke.

Then they secretly persuaded some men to say, We have heard Stephen speak words of blasphemy against Moses and against God. So they stirred up the people and the elders and the teachers of the law.

[1:34] They seized Stephen and brought him before the Sanhedrin. They produced false witnesses who testified. This fellow never stopped speaking against this holy place and against the law.

For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs Moses handed down to us. All who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen.

And they saw that his face was like the face of an angel. Then the high priest asked him, Are these charges true?

And this he replied, Brothers and fathers, listen to me. The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham while he was still in Mesopotamia before he lived in Haran.

Leave your country and your people, God said, and go to the land I will show you. And so he left the land of the Chaldeans and settled in Haran. After the death of his father, God sent him to this land where you are now living.

[2:39] He gave him no inheritance here, not even a foot of ground. But God promised him that he and his descendants after him would possess the land, even though at that time Abraham had no child.

God spoke to him in this way. Your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated 400 years. But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, God said.

And afterward, they will come out of that country and worship me in this place. Then he gave Abraham the covenant of circumcision, and Abraham became the father of Isaac and circumcised him eight days after his birth.

Later, Isaac became the father of Jacob, and Jacob became the father of the twelve patriarchs.

Because the patriarchs were jealous of Joseph, they sold him as a slave into Egypt.

But God was with him and rescued him from all his troubles. He gave Joseph wisdom and enabled him to gain the goodwill of Pharaoh, king of Egypt. And so he made him ruler over Egypt and all his palace.

[3:47] Then a famine struck all Egypt and Canaan, bringing great suffering, and our fathers could not find food. When Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent our fathers on their first visit.

On their second visit, Joseph told his brothers who he was, and Pharaoh learned about Joseph's family. After this, Joseph sent for his father Jacob and his whole family, 75 in all.

Then Jacob went down to Egypt, where he and our fathers died. Their bodies were brought back to Shechem and placed in the tomb that Abraham had bought from the sons of Hamor at Shechem for a certain sum of money.

At the time, as the time drew near for God to fulfill his promise to Abraham, the number of our people in Egypt greatly increased. Then another king, who knew nothing about Joseph, became ruler of Egypt.

He dealt treacherously with our people and oppressed our forefathers by forcing them to throw out their newborn babies so that they would die. At that time, Moses was born, and he was no ordinary child.

[4 : 54] For three months, he was cared for in his father's house. And when he was placed outside, Pharaoh's daughter took him and brought him up as her own son. Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action.

When Moses was 40 years old, he decided to visit his fellow Israelites. He saw one of them being mistreated by an Egyptian, and so he went to his defense and avenged him by killing the Egyptian. Moses thought that his own people would realize that God was using him to rescue them. But they did not. The next day, Moses came upon two Israelites who were fighting.

He tried to reconcile them by saying, Men, you are brothers. Why do you want to hurt each other? But the man who was mistreating the other pushed Moses aside and said, Who made you ruler and judge over us?

Do you want to kill me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday? And when Moses heard this, he fled to Midian, where he settled as a foreigner and had two sons. After 40 years had passed, an angel appeared to Moses in the flames of the burning bush in the desert near Mount Sinai.

[6 : 07] When he saw this, he was amazed at the sight. As he went over to look more closely, he heard the Lord's voice. Moses, I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Moses trembled with fear and did not dare to look. And then the Lord said to him, Take off your sandals. The place where you are standing is holy ground.

I have indeed seen the oppression of my people in Egypt. I have heard their groaning, and I have come down to set them free. Now come, I will send you back to Egypt.

This is the same Moses whom they had rejected with the words, Who made you ruler and judge? He was sent to be their ruler and deliverer by God himself, through the angel who appeared to him in the bush.

He led them out of Egypt and did wonders and miraculous signs in Egypt at the Red Sea and for 40 years in the desert. This is that Moses who told the Israelites, God will send you a prophet like me from your own people.

[7 : 15] He was in the assembly in the desert with the angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai and with our fathers, and he received living words to pass on to us. But our fathers refused to obey him.

Instead, they rejected him, and in their hearts turned back to Egypt. They told Aaron, Make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who led us out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him.

That was the time they made an idol in the form of a calf. They brought sacrifices to it and held a celebration in honor of what their hands had made. But God turned away and gave them over to the worship of the heavenly bodies.

This agrees with what is written in the book of the prophets. Did you bring me sacrifices and offerings 40 years in the desert, O house of Israel? You have lifted up the shrine of Molech and the star of your god Rephan, the idols you made to worship.

Therefore, I will send you into exile beyond Babylon. Our forefathers had the tabernacle of the testimony with them in the desert. It had been made as God directed Moses according to the pattern he had seen.

[8 : 26] Having received the tabernacle, our fathers under Joshua brought it with them when they took the land from the nations God drove out before them. It remained in the land until the time of David, who enjoyed God's favor and asked that he might provide a dwelling place for the God of Jacob.

But it was Solomon who built the house for him. However, the Most High does not live in houses made by men. As the prophet says, Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool.

What kind of house will you build for me, says the Lord? Or where will my resting place be? Has not my hand made all these things? You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears, you are just like your fathers.

You always resist the Holy Spirit. Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the righteous one. And now you have betrayed and murdered him.

You who have received the law that was put into effect through angels, but have not obeyed it. And when they heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him.

[9 : 43] But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. Look, he said, I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.

At this, they covered their ears and yelling at the top of their voices. They all rushed at him, dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. And meanwhile, the witnesses laid their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul.

While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. Then he fell on his knees and cried out, Lord, do not hold this sin against them.

And when he had said this, he fell asleep. And Saul was there, giving approval to his death. Our text this morning introduces us to the first Christian martyr, the first man, the first believer in the Lord Jesus, to lose his life because of his faith in Jesus Christ.

It was by no means the last martyr, as 11 of the 12 apostles of Jesus died a martyr's death, and millions since have been counted as sheep for the slaughter.

[11 : 04] Especially during the first three centuries of Christianity, many were put to death. They were called the killing times. And it's still happening in our world today.

And even recently, we have read of those being beheaded because of their claims of Christianity. Jesus said, If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also.

And so that number of martyrs for Jesus is not yet complete, but is waiting to be fulfilled. Now, Stephen's martyr, then, marks a step upward in the persecution against Christians.

It went from threat to flogging, and now to death by stoning. Up to this point, the churches enjoyed the favor of all the people in Jerusalem.

The man on the street, the general population, held Christians up in high esteem. It was only the religious leaders who had opposed them. But with Stephen, even that changes, and we find now that the people are also stirred up against him.

[12 : 16] Now, who is this Stephen? And what brought about this change of attitude in the people and his stoning? Well, Stephen, as we saw last week, was one of the seven chosen by the church to care for widows.

He was a Grecian Jew and was highly regarded by the believers. Verse 8 of chapter 6 says that he was full of God's grace and power. Now, what a man is full of is what comes out of him when he is bumped.

And when you bumped into Stephen, you didn't get what you deserved, you got grace. You got God's grace. Just as he had not been treated as his sins deserved, but had received grace, so he did not treat other people as they deserved, but as God had treated him in grace.

He was a gracious and a compassionate man. No wonder he was chosen as one of the seven deacons. He was also said to be full of God's power, power to work great wonders and miraculous signs.

That was God's supernatural vindication that this man's message is from heaven. He does what no man can do because he is bringing a message that no man has authored.

[13 : 39] This is my word. Listen to him. So he's a man full of grace and power and a message. And it wasn't for his kindness to widows, children, that he was killed.

It wasn't for his supernatural, miraculous works that he was killed. It was for his message, the testimony about Jesus. Jesus. We'll look at that sermon to die for this morning.

We read in verse 9, opposition arose, however. This gracious man, you would think everyone would love him, right? Opposition arose, however. Do you see the change?

Are we surprised? By now in Acts, we shouldn't be, should we? We would rather expect it because we've seen that wherever Jesus is building his church, Satan will be sure that there is opposition to tear it down.

And we see it again now, not coming within the church as the opening verses of chapter 6, but now again coming from without. Indeed, it arose from a Jewish synagogue of Greek-speaking Jews like Stephen.

[14:53] Greek-speaking Jews from foreign lands who had grown up outside of Palestine but were now settled in Jerusalem. It's interesting that one of the places they had come from was Cilicia.

And we will learn later in chapter 9 that Saul was a Jew from the city of Tarsus in Cilicia. And here he is in Jerusalem now.

And it could very well be that it was Saul of Tarsus' own synagogue that brought the initial opposition to Stephen.

One thing is for sure, Saul saw and heard things this day that nothing could erase. Well, these men began to publicly argue with Stephen.

But it was like running into a train. They could not stand up against his wisdom or the Spirit by whom he spoke. He was not only full of grace and power, but he was full of God's wisdom and spoke powerful words because of the Holy Spirit dwelling within.

[16:05] Now, this brought the argument to a critical turning point in the debate. What do you do when you run into a superior wisdom that proves you're wrong?

Well, you humbly admit it. And you grow in wisdom and you become wiser still, right? Not with these men. They were too proud for that.

It would be too costly for them to admit. So instead, they changed their tactics from argumentation to misrepresentation. And they misrepresented Stephen.

They secretly persuaded some men to say, We heard Stephen speak words of blasphemy against Moses and against God. Now, those were killing words because blasphemy against God was punishable by stoning.

So what we see is that these Jews were not seeking after the truth in their debate. They were simply seeking to win an argument and see Stephen's blood shed. Even when bested by the truth, they revealed that their commitment was not to the truth, but to preferred lies.

[17:18] And with their lies, they stirred up the elders and teachers of the law, mainly Pharisees. But they also stirred up the people. And that's the first time that we see the general population against the Christians.

And they arrested Stephen and they hauled him off to appear before the high court of the Sanhedrin. Same court that Jesus appeared before, that Peter and John had appeared before, and the apostles.

Now, in the past, this court had been kept from killing Christians. Why? Because the people held them in such high regard. And they were even afraid if they put them in prison or persecuted them, that maybe the people would stone them, the Supreme Court.

But you see, now that the people were against the Christian, Stephen, they no longer feared putting him to death. And that's why they had no qualms of killing him now.

That's what they wanted with all these apostles and Christians. But now, they had the people on their side. It's the same court that sought false witnesses against Jesus months earlier, with the same charge of blasphemy, remember?

[18:33] False witnesses are again produced in this Supreme Court. And they said, this fellow never stops speaking against this holy place. Now, that's the temple where the court was proceeding, within the temple precinct.

We've heard him say that Jesus, this Jesus, will destroy this place, this temple, and that he will change the customs Moses handed down to us. We can hear the echoes of Jesus' own words, can't we, destroy this temple, and in three days, I will raise it up.

What did Stephen say that so stirred up the people and the Supreme Court against him that they would not be satisfied until he was silenced forever under a pile of rocks?

Well, we can learn what he said, both by the charges that were made against him, and then by the defense that he gave to those charges. The length of it, we had it read, it's a long portion, the length of it indicates Luke's conviction of its importance for the Christian community.

And so we're going to take two weeks on this passage. But notice that the charges centered on what Stephen had said against the temple, even that Jesus would destroy this holy place, and what he had said against the law of Moses that he would change, Jesus would change the customs that Moses handed down to us.

[20:00] Now, no doubt there were elements of truth to their charges, as indeed Stephen spoke about these very things, about the temple and about the laws of Moses.

But they misrepresented his words as being blasphemous against God. Now, here's the situation. Stephen had seen not only that Jesus Christ was the Messiah, but it seems that he saw clearer than others of his time the implications of the gospel, the sweeping changes that were made by this work of Christ, and especially how his coming had forever changed the long-established worship in Judaism, how that Christ had brought an end to the sacrifices and ceremonial laws of Moses, how Christ's death and resurrection meant the end of the temple in Jerusalem, and its replacement by a new spiritual temple not made with hands, even the body of Christ, the universal people of God in whom God dwelt by his spirit, and that God's acceptance of worship does not depend, therefore, upon the place in which it is offered.

Now, all of this would be seen and stated much clearer later on in Paul's apostles, epistles, and in the book of Hebrews, but here in an early date, it seems Stephen saw more clearly and preached more clearly the implications of the gospel upon the temple and the ceremonial law.

Let me illustrate it this way. You married couples. On your wedding day, you entered into the state of marriage. You came as two, made a covenant before God and the witnesses gathered, and you left as one.

Although you are officially married at that point, did either one of you realize the implications, the ramifications of what it means to no longer be two, but one?

[22:07] No! I hope you had at least a clue about what that meant if you had some premarital counseling, but it's only as you began to live with each other that you came to see the implications, the ramifications of what it means for the two of you to be one, and you say, well, that changes everything.

It changes what I do on the holidays. It changes what I do when I get home from work. It changes how I spend my hard-earned money. It changes this and that and the other, and after your first anniversary, you say, I didn't realize how much this would be changed just because the two of us are one.

Well, it was something like that for these early Christians. They saw God had opened their eyes to see that Jesus of Nazareth was indeed the Messiah, the promised Savior. They put their trust in Him, and they were believers.

They were saved. They were Christians. But they did not understand all the implications and ramifications of how that would change their worship, the place of worship, the ceremonies of worship.

All that would take time to trickle down into their minds and hearts as the Spirit of God gave them increasing knowledge of it. Had not Jesus said to the Samaritan woman at the well when asked, which is the proper place to worship, we Samaritans say here on Mount Gerizim, you Jews say down in Jerusalem.

[23:41] And Jesus said, believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. For a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for this is the kind of worshipers that God seeks.

And had he not said wherever two or three are gathered in my name, wherever they're gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them.

And when his disciples pointed to the beautiful stones in the temple of Jerusalem, he said, as for what you see here, the time will come when not one stone will be left upon another.

Every one of them will be thrown down. Indeed, the temple would be destroyed. And it happened in 70 AD. Now these changes proved to be more difficult for Hebraic Jews who grew up in Jerusalem and in the temple surroundings, more difficult for them to grasp as we find in the book of Acts. Acts is a transitional book then that's going from Old Testament Judaism to New Testament Christianity. Yes, there's continuity from Judaism to Christianity.

[24:54] Christianity is the flower of which Judaism is the bud. Christianity is the reality of which Judaism is the shadow, the type, the picture.

Christianity is the fulfillment of which Judaism was the promise. There is continuity between bud and flower, but there is also discontinuity.

Not everything that was done in Old Testament Judaism is to be done in New Testament Christianity. Christianity is the same and there are some great changes especially concerning the temple and the ceremonial law.

That's exactly where Stephen's problems came. But we'll see that even Peter had difficulty understanding these changes, didn't he? The ramifications of the gospel.

It's not just for Jews, the Gentiles. God will do amazing things just to teach Peter and bring him along. We'll find in Acts 15 that it nearly split the early church of Jerusalem and Antioch and they had to hold a council over this same kind of thing.

[26:00] What changes have happened to the true religion because Jesus has now come and lived and died and risen and ascended? It's the major issue, one of the major issues going on in the book of Acts and we'll bump into it often as we proceed.

But it would require great patience and careful instruction in the church at Jerusalem. And that's what Christ is doing. And that's why Luke is recording Stephen's sermon.

The Lord Jesus is bringing his infant church to maturity and understanding the ramifications, the changes that his coming has brought upon their worship.

So Stephen is one of the first, at least on record, to firmly drive a wedge between Judaism and Christianity. Though Christianity had its roots in Judaism, it is not just a continuation of it as if nothing had changed and it's just business as usual.

And when Stephen pointed out these changes, he hit a raw nerve in Christless Judaism. They not only had not accepted Jesus as the Messiah, they were enraged at Stephen for saying that their beloved temple was now insignificant and had been replaced by a new spiritual temple of God in Jesus Christ.

[27:26] And that the long-established customs of Moses indeed had been changed concerning the ceremonies of worship. These Christless Jews were still clinging to the temple and its ritual.

They had quickly replaced and patched up that torn veil, remember it, Jesus' death. the veil was torn in two in their temple. But somehow they had patched it or replaced it and it was carrying on as if Jesus had never come.

And so the religious leaders rejected the idea that Old Testament Judaism in its worship and its temple were temporary things. They had made them permanent.

They had turned the types into the realities. They had turned the means into the ends and their clinging to the types as permanent and missed the realities that they pointed to.

That is, they made a Savior out of the institution of the temple and its worship and they rejected the real Savior whose blood alone could save them from all their sins.

[28:32] Well, the result was a superstitious attachment to the temple in Jerusalem. And it wasn't anything new. It had been with Israel. You can read in Jeremiah chapter 7.

They were saying the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord. And Jeremiah says you steal, murder, commit adultery, lie, worship, bail, and then you come into the temple.

The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, and you say we are safe because this is where God dwells and he's for us and we're his people. As if God's presence in the temple guaranteed his blessing and protection.

As if blessing was mechanically tied to that temple area and its sacrifices, that if we just have the temple, we've got God in the box.

We've got his protection, his blessing. That's the kind of superstition they attach to the temple and to its sacrifices. Didn't matter how they lived, as long as they came to the temple and were in the right place at the right time doing the right things, well then God will be pleased with us.

[29:38] It was Israel's superstitious error. And Stephen put his finger upon it. It's from the charges made against Stephen that we learn what his message is, but it's also by the defense that he made in chapter seven in answer to the high priest's question, are these charges true?

Now what Stephen offers is not a defense of himself but of Christianity against the charges made against it. And so he uses their own Old Testament scriptures to show that Christianity is not opposed to God and Moses as accused, but it is rather the fulfillment of the Old Testament scriptures.

Now there's two major themes running through chapter seven and his speech. We're going to take one today, the other next week. The one we're going to notice today in his speech is this. True

worship is not confined to the temple and its ceremonies.

True worship cannot be confined to the temple and its ceremonies. God's presence and blessing cannot be restricted to any one place, namely the temple.

The Jews of Stephen's day could not even imagine true worship without the temple and its ceremonies. And to say otherwise was regarded as blasphemy against God and Moses.

[31:00] Well Stephen says this doesn't even line up with your own history. And so he begins with father Abraham and he shows how God met with him where? Not in Palestine, not in Jerusalem, but in Mesopotamia, far from the promised land.

And he revealed himself to Abraham there. That's what he does in the temple. He reveals himself to men and he did it in Mesopotamia. And he saved him and blessed him long before the temple existed.

So you see how Stephen and his fellows are so stuck on the temple and he said well your father Abraham didn't have the temple. He was in Mesopotamia. And yet the life of faith flourished in our father Abraham.

And then the true religion continued without a temple during the lives of Isaac, Jacob, and the twelve patriarchs. Indeed they would live for four hundred years in a strange land before coming into the promised land.

All without a temple. And then when Joseph was sold as a slave in Egypt. Verse 9 says God was with him there. Where? Not in the temple in Jerusalem but in Egypt.

[32:09] God rescued him there. He gave him wisdom and favor with Pharaoh there. And so Joseph was not heard and helped because he prayed in the temple or prayed toward the temple at Jerusalem.

There was no temple yet. And it was still in Egypt that God raised up the deliverer Moses. And God was with him in the little basket on the Nile and protected him and instructed him.

And then when he fled to the backside of a desert in Midian, God appeared to him there and revealed his glory to him there. Not in Jerusalem, not in the temple, but in a burning bush.

And kids, there's a story in the bush. Israel under the persecution of Egypt was like that bush. It was burning but not consumed.

And why not? Because God was within her even as God was in the bush revealing himself to Moses. God with his people down in Egypt, not in Jerusalem.

[33:22] And here at the burning bush the Lord said to Moses, take off your sandals. The place where you are standing is holy ground. Now to the Jews of Stephen's day, there was one place that was holy.

It was Palestine and Jerusalem was especially the holy city and the holy place was the temple. And God says to Moses, in a Midianite desert, take off your sandals because the place where you're standing is holy ground.

what made it holy? Simply this, that God revealed his glory there to Moses. Far from the holy land where there was no temple yet built in Jerusalem, but that spot of sand in the desert is called holy ground because of God's holy presence revealed there.

But it was only temporary holy ground. it didn't remain holy forever. It didn't remain a holy place. When God no longer revealed himself there in his special presence, it became as common as any other spot in the desert.

And there's an important lesson there for Stephen's hearers because the temple was only holy ground as long as the Lord's presence was revealed there. But when the glory of the Lord's presence departed and Ichabod was written above the temple, it was no longer a holy place.

[34:54] It was no longer special. It was no longer needed in the worship as the place in which people met with God. And when God brought Moses and his people out of bondage in Egypt and established his worship among them, it was not in a permanent temple but in a tent, wasn't it?

A tabernacle. Not some permanent holy site, but something that could be pitched in many different places. And so he met with his people in a moving tabernacle that traveled with them in the desert for 40 years, showing that God's presence and blessing is not tied to one place.

Jesus, where'er thy people meet, there they behold the mercy seat. Where'er they seek thee, thou art found, and every place is hallowed ground. Moses, in whom Stephen's hearers trusted, lived his entire life outside of the promised land without a temple, and yet God was with him and blessed him and received worship from him.

Verse 44 tells us of this tabernacle that Moses made it as God had directed him according to the pattern that he had seen. In other words, Moses' tabernacle was just a copy, just a shadow, but the true pattern, the true tabernacle, Hebrews tells us, is set up by the Lord in heaven.

So even the temporary tabernacle was meant to lift the minds of the worshippers up off the things of the earth and to see that there is a God in heaven and there is a Savior in heaven and it will be by him alone in his sacrifice that we sinners can meet with God through faith in Jesus Christ.

[36:38] Moses' tabernacle, you see, was just temporary, meant to lift our faith up to the heavenly realities. The physical parts of the tabernacle were never an end in themselves, but pointed always to the spiritual reality.

And that same movable tabernacle of God's presence went with Israel and continued with Israel under Joshua as they went into the promised land where God drove out the enemies before them and the tabernacle remained in the land right up to and including the lifetime of David.

So what's Stephen saying in all of this? He's pointing out that for the first 1100 years the true religion existed within Judaism without a temple. And that included the most important people in Israel's history.

Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, and Joseph and Joshua and David. These are Israel's finest and they all lived and worshipped God just fine without a temple.

So the true religion is not so tied to a place, to the temple and its ceremonies as Stephen's hearers believe. True worship does not even need there to be a temple in Jerusalem to exist and to flourish in God's people.

[38:06] Now to say so was blasphemy in their minds but Stephen is saying this is not blasphemy it's just the truth and it honors God and Moses through whom he spoke.

Well he's brought us right up to David. David wanted to build a house for the Lord to replace the tabernacle but God told him it would be one of his sons who would build the house for his name. And so his son Solomon built the temple. And at its dedication Solomon prayed but will God really dwell on earth? The heavens even the highest heaven cannot contain you how much less this temple that I have built.

So even as Solomon built the temple a more permanent structure than the tent or the tabernacle even then he realized that the most high does not live in houses made by men as if you can confine him in this temple as the heathen gods seem to be confined in their temples.

Stephen quotes the Lord's word through Isaiah heaven is my throne the earth is my footstool. Now kids think of that he's putting it in a picture if heaven is his chair and the earth is just a little footstool where's the house you're going to build somebody that's that big?

[39:25] It's folly to think that any man made house could somehow contain God's presence and confine it to that area one place like the Jews were thinking of the temple in Jerusalem this is where we've got God.

That was their superstitious error. If they had the temple then they had God in the box and if they just physically went to that holy place and went through the physical motions of its ceremonies in the right place at the right time doing the right things then God was indebted to bless them whatever their heart's condition and life might look like.

Well yes God did have Solomon build a house for him but the temple was never meant to be a permanent place where God met with men. The temple too was a shadow a type a picture that pointed to the spiritual realities in Christ just as the tabernacle had done.

Jesus Christ is the greater son of David who would build a house for the Lord and the house that he built is a new temple. He says my body is that temple and the body of Christ is that temple in whom I dwell by my spirit.

God was said in Isaiah to not only dwell in a high and holy place but also in hearts that are humble and contrite and that tremble at his word. Stephen sees something of this reality and he sees that right now in front of him this new spiritual building is being built by Jesus Christ the son of David.

[41:08] With each conversion another stone is being put into this building and the building is going up. This is the temple made without hands and as the fulfillment of the old temple this temple the spiritual temple replaces and abolishes the old temple.

There was a reason why the veil was torn in two. It's over. It's done. We don't need it anymore. And now that temple becomes as common as any other building in Jerusalem.

Just for saying those things Stephen was to pay with his blood. But true worship cannot be confined to the temple and its ceremonies.

enemies. It was always something temporary. It was just another stage, just another phase of God's unfolding drama of salvation.

But the Jews had made it the permanent stage. This is it, they said. This is what it's all about. The temple at Jerusalem. And Stephen is saying, no, brethren.

[42 : 16] There was true worship before the temple was ever made and there is now true worship going on after the temple has been made redundant. But these Jews are still clinging to it.

It's like a broken record. And some of you will have to ask your parents what that means. But there was a needle and this iron or this nylon record that had grooves in it.

And as long as everything was alright and it went around, the needle just kept moving right on into the middle and you got the whole song. But if a piece of grit or a bent or a bump in the nylon happened, then every time that that piece got around to that needle, instead of going on with the song, it would just bump it right back into the same groove and you'd hear the same line of the song over and over and over again.

Now God's got a wonderful story of salvation and it culminates in Jesus Christ being the temple and his people being that temple in which he dwells by his spirit.

And he's going to bring phases along all the way leading to that. That's the beauty. That's the end.

That's the goal. That's the reality. The temple is just one phase of it.

[43 : 30] But the Jews could not get out of that rut. And they said, this is it. There is nothing else. And they stayed in that rut and Stephen pointed it out to them.

No, the temple is redundant. God was pleased for a time to reveal his glorious presence in the temple.

But his glory has departed from Israel's temple. Because Jesus has made the one sacrifice for sins. And no more are needed.

And any more that are made are blasphemy against him. You see, he's turning the whole thing upon them. The temple's over, man.

It's fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth, whom you betrayed and murdered. Well, the Jews rejected the kernel, Christ, and so they claimed to the outward husk.

[44 : 36] That's all they got is the temple. Jesus told the Samaritan woman at the well that the temple and its ceremonies were never meant to last, that true worship never did, nor does it ever happen where the worshiper does not engage him spirit to spirit.

Faith always looks beyond what is seen, the temple and its ceremonies, and focuses upon Christ, the reality behind the temple. And only in that way is his presence known and enjoyed.

Well, there's something else going on here. This message of Stephen was also the Lord Jesus' way of preparing his church to fulfill his last command. But you see, as long as the temple was the center of worship, which it was in that phase of Israel's history, as long as the temple at Jerusalem was the center of worship, folks would be discouraged from venturing out too far from the temple, wouldn't they?

They've got to get back for worship and for the festivals. But now that the temple is no longer central to worship, the church is no longer to huddle around the temple in Jerusalem, but is to pull up stakes like Father Abraham and move on out as Jesus directed them in Acts 1-8, on out to the ends of the earth, because it's just as easy to worship God there as it is in Jerusalem.

God is preparing his infant church to see that we can go to the nations and plant churches there because wherever two or three are gathered in, there is the temple and Jesus meets with them.

[46 : 29] That's the glory in the temple, Jesus in the midst of his people. temple. And so we'll see how all of this is leading up to the gospel, leaving town, leaving Jerusalem, and going out to the nations beyond.

We'll see next week how Stephen winds all this message up in application to his hearers. But what does it have to say to us as we close? Just this, don't miss the Lord Jesus in worship.

worship. He's been the center of worship from the beginning. These Jews missed him altogether and clung to the outward forms without the Savior.

But it's all too easy for us to miss him too. I know that because I have missed him in worship before. many people in churches today across our land are missing him.

And we're at danger as well. It's so easy. It can happen without trying. Just bring your eyes and ears and mind to rise no higher than the physical elements of worship.

[47:45] Just get your body in the right place at the right time doing the right things. Just focus on the people singing, the man up front, the worship team up front, rather than on God.

The man reading the scripture, the man praying, the man preaching, the music, the building, the worshipers around us. And suddenly the most important one of all is forgotten.

And we've come and we've gone and we've not met with him. Oh, but I went to church. That's Phariseeism. That's what the Jews were doing in Stephen's day.

We go to the temple, to the temple, to the temple. We're safe because we heard the word of the Lord. James says, no, you're deceiving yourselves. If you don't do it, you've just fooled yourself to think that you're better for going and hearing the word of God.

Don't attach any spiritual relevance or importance or grace to physical objects, to a building, to the temple of the Lord, to some holy water, to some holy bread, some holy wine, some holy man, some holy blessing that is supposed to flow from his hand to ours.

[48:59] There's one holy one who meets with his people and pours from his hands blessing upon blessing upon his believers, those who have trusted in Jesus.

Jesus. Yes, it's possible to miss him, the Lord Jesus, who comes to meet us, whom having not seen, we love, and having not seen, we believe in.

So listen to him, brothers and sisters, as he speaks to you in the preaching and reading of his word. Tremble at his word.

Talk to him in the prayers as the brothers lead us. Sing your songs to him. Bring your praise and thanksgiving to him.

Give him your tithes and offerings. Fix your thoughts upon Jesus and by faith draw help and strength and encouragement and truth and grace from him who is the fountain of all blessedness.

[50:09] true worship is having personal dealings with the living God in his son Jesus Christ. And all else is just the form of religion.

The form. A lot of it in Jerusalem in those days. A lot of it in Christian America today. A lot of it could be right here among us unless we come hungering and thirsting to meet with the Lord Jesus.

Jesus. Is that how you come? Your eyes on a Sunday morning. Oh Lord Jesus you're going to meet with us today. I'm hungry for you.

I want to meet with you. I want to hear you. I want to give you my thanks. I want to pour out my love my gifts my praise to you. I want to hear you talk to me. Don't let me miss you.

You come hungry for Jesus and you'll go home full and God will be glorified. don't miss your living Lord in any part of the worship.

[51:12] He comes to meet us and when two or three wherever two or three are gathered together in his name there I am in the midst of them. I'm here to meet you he says.

And that changes everything in worship. Treasure him. Adore him. Even as we sang to him this morning. And my lost friend. Are you satisfied to worship without Jesus Christ?

Dissatisfied with the outward trappings of worship without Jesus and dealings with him? Are you satisfied to live without Jesus? Can you not see how that is the essence of your sin and offensiveness to God?

He has taken the jewel of heaven his own son and sent him to be our savior. And we have said boring. I see no glory in him that I should want him.

Oh that God would open your eyes and cause you to see that he is the only savior there that there is. And if you're to be saved you must come to him. He's here this morning.

[52:17] He's here with salvation blessings to give to anyone who receives him and relies on him alone for salvation as he's offered to you in the gospel.

Come. Come to me he says. You who are weary and heavy laden and I'll give you rest.

Take my yoke upon you. Learn from me. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light. And we found it so. Haven't we saints? We have found it to be a glorious yoke to be joined to Jesus.

And if you come to Jesus today and are joined to him by faith you'll become part of this temple in which the Lord dwells by his spirit. Until we see him face to face.

And we come to know worship in a whole nother level. Another phase. Won't we? When we see him face to face. Let's pray. Thank you Lord Jesus for not shunning the virgin's womb.

[53:28] Not shunning this wicked world to come and to live and to die here. Thank you that you went through the judgment seat of the Sanhedrin and the death of the cross in order to save us.

Thank you that you would come here and condescend to come here and meet with us and to talk to us. Thank you for the gift of faith by which we are sure of what we hope for and certain of what we cannot see.

Give that faith to many more to treasure you above everything else. Father thank you for giving him.

Holy Spirit thank you for opening our eyes to him.

Lord Jesus thank you for being our Savior and Lord. We pray in your name. Amen.