

The First Christian Martyr

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: 13 December 2015

Preacher: Jon Hueni

[0:00] Acts chapter 7. And we're going to begin reading at verse 9 and read through the end of the chapter.

! Remember, Stephen is giving his defense before the Sanhedrin. And again, it's a long passage, and so I want you to listen for what Stephen is trying to get across.

Listen for his argument. Chapter 7, verse 9. 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. So he made him ruler over Egypt and all his palace.

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.

[1:12] 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.

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.

For three months, he was cared for in his father's house. 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.

[2:26] When Moses was 40 years old, he decided to visit his fellow Israelites. He saw one of them being mistreated by an Egyptian, 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? 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 a burning bush in the desert near Mount Sinai.

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

[3:35] Moses trembled with fear and did not dare to look. 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 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 and 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.

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.

[4:42] 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 Raphon, 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.

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.

[5:58] 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.

When they heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. 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.

[7:04] 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.

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. When he had said this, he fell asleep. Some people die from bullets and bombs.

Other people die from heart disease and cancer and car accidents. But Stephen died for something he said.

Words that so enraged the Supreme Court and people of Israel that they all rushed at him and drug him outside and stoned him to death. And we say, what in the world did he say?

[8:14] What was it that gave him and brought upon him the honor of being the first Christian martyr? Well, according to the charges that were made against him, it was what he said against the temple, that Jesus would destroy it and change the customs that Moses had passed down in the law.

For you see, the temple and its ceremonies were never meant to be permanent. They were but shadows that were pointing the way and preparing people for the coming realities that were in Jesus Christ, the Messiah.

But the Jews were so clinging to the shell of the temple and so superstitiously attached to that building that they could not even imagine proper worship happening without it.

Now, I remind you that for a thousand years, the temple at Jerusalem had been the center of worship in Judaism. And it was there that they had the priests and the sacrifices and the prayers.

It was there of all the places on the earth. It was in their temple that God manifested his presence in the Shekinah cloud. And this is what made the temple so dear to them.

[9 : 37] But it sinfully fed their religious pride and their superiority over the Gentiles, feeling a sense of Jewish privilege that the temple is ours and this God is ours, i.e. not yours.

But the temple was not only the center of worship, it was also a huge financial benefit to the city of Jerusalem. As during the festivals, the population would swell from 150,000 people all the way up to as many as a million, it's estimated.

And so during those festivals of Passover and the Day of Atonement and Pentecost and other feast days, you have all these people coming to Jerusalem to the temple.

And of course, when they come to the temple, they must eat and they must stay somewhere and they must shop in the markets. You know what a home football game at Notre Dame does for the surrounding economy.

No wonder all Jerusalem was up in arms against Stephen. Their whole economy was built on temple traffic. As well as the priests, they themselves had turned the temple, remember, into a marketplace and were making money on the temple.

[10 : 56] So this was their golden calf, this temple. It was their economy. It was these priests' sense of significance. What are they without the temple and all of its customs?

So any threat to the temple was striking at the pocketbooks as well as the pride of the Jews. And they called such words that he was speaking against the temple, blasphemy against God and Moses, punishable by death.

Well, Stephen's defense before them makes two major points. As he stands before the Supreme Court of Israel, the first point we saw last week was that true worship, that is where God meets with men, true worship is not confined, not confined or limited to the temple and its ceremonies.

And so Stephen has pointed out in their own history that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and Joseph, and Moses, and Joshua, and David, all worshiped God, all were blessed by God without any temple in Jerusalem.

It didn't even exist. And yet God met with them and he met with his people in far-off places like Mesopotamia and Egypt and Midian, even the backside of a desert far from the promised land and without any temple.

[12 : 24] And so Stephen's point is just as true worship existed before there was any temple, so once the temple is destroyed, true worship will also exist and continue.

As that old temple would be replaced by a new spiritual temple of Christ's body, his spirit-filled people from all nations.

Stephen sees this and begins to preach it. And those are the words for which he'll die. But Stephen pursues a second line of thought throughout this selective history of the Jews.

And it's this, and this is what we're going to see this morning, that in spite of all their privileges, Israel had perpetually rejected God and his deliverers.

They had continually rejected the very ones God sent to save them, like Joseph and Moses is who he hones in on. And this rejection had reached its climax in their recent rejection of God's own son, the deliverer, the Savior from heaven.

[13 : 32] And by this rejection, Israel proved themselves unworthy of being God's people. They forfeited the privilege of having his dwelling place among them.

They drove him from their presence. So Stephen's point is this, it's not Christianity that rejects God and blasphemes God.

It's rather you, you rulers, you nation of Israel, you are just like your unbelieving fathers before you. So the Jews' rejection of God's deliverers that he sent to them was foreshadowed in their history.

It's a pattern that Stephen notices and so he brings it to their attention. Consider the saviors, the deliverers God sent to you and your fathers. He begins with Joseph. He was God's chosen deliverer.

Sent to the twelve sons to save the twelve sons of Jacob and their families to keep them alive during the famine. Now, how was God's deliverer received by his own brothers?

[14 : 36] Verse 9, they were jealous of him. You remember that, kids? They were envious of his coat and of the special favor his father had for him and they hated him and they wanted to kill him and in the end they sold him into slavery in Egypt.

Oh, but God rescued him there in Egypt and blessed him and raised him up to deliver his people and when severe famine struck the whole region there was grain in Egypt and Joseph's brothers came to buy grain.

Well, you remember the story but note, God's chosen deliverer, the one to save his brothers from starvation was the one they hated or jealous of and wanted to kill.

Even so, when God sent his son as deliverer and savior to Israel, his own brethren according to the flesh, they hated him and wanted him dead.

And even Pilate, the Roman governor, knew that it was out of jealousy, out of envy that they had handed him over to him. They were jealous of his favor with the people.

[15 : 44] They were jealous of the popularity and the crowds that were coming to hear him. You see, this rejection of God's deliverer was foreshadowed in Joseph. It goes way back to their beginning as a nation.

It was also foreshadowed in Moses and he spends most of the time on Moses because that's the one they trusted in and that's the one they accused him of blasphemy against. So here's Moses. He was God's chosen deliverer too, wasn't he? He was the one sent to set them free from bondage in Egypt and he too was a type of Christ. Moses was born at a time when the persecution against God's people was at its height and they were killing babies and when the Lord Jesus came they were killing babies in Bethlehem's vicinity too, weren't they?

But God protected Moses in the little bulrushes in the basket and then Pharaoh's daughter takes him into her home and God protects him and brings him up.

Where? In Egypt. And the little Lord Jesus is whisked away. Where? Into Egypt and protected there by God from those seeking to destroy him.

[16 : 58] And so when Moses was 40 years old he visited his fellow Israelites as their deliverer. He leaves the palace he goes out among the slaves and he found one of his own being mistreated by an Egyptian.

So he went to his defense and killed the Egyptian. When he did so we're told what he thought.

Verse 25. Moses thought that his own people would realize that God was using him to rescue them. But they did not. Surely they'll know I'm God's deliverer. But they did not. And so the next day when he was breaking up a fight between two brother Israelites the deliverer Moses was pushed aside and asked who made you ruler and judge over us.

They rejected their own God sent deliverer. And so they were left to perish in their slavery because it would be 40 years before Moses would come back. And by then many of these men would have been dead.

Well this was the same rejection that the Lord Jesus received wasn't it? When he came as deliverer and savior into the very world that was made to him and he had every right to believe that surely his own will realize and recognize who he is and that he's here to save them.

[18 : 15] But they didn't. And he came to his own but his own received him not. They rejected him. They didn't know who he was. And just as they said to Moses who made you judge and ruler over us so they said to Jesus by what authority do you do these things?

who made you ruler? We will not have this man to rule over us. You see the foreshadowing of the rejection of Christ in Moses.

So he goes off to Midian and 40 years later God appears to Moses in the burning bush and sends him back to Egypt to deliver his people. It's the same Moses whom they had rejected.

That's emphasized. You see it in verse 35. 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.

So you see he was sent once and they said we don't want him. Who made you ruler and judge? God made him ruler and deliverer and sent him as his deliverer over the vote of Israel.

[19 : 29] God made Moses their deliverer. and so he came back and he led Israel out of Egypt and through the Red Sea and through the desert in 40 years for 40 years.

In the same way that the Jews rejected Jesus saying we'll not have this man to rule over us yet he was made king however wasn't he? The stone that the builders rejected was made the headstone of the new temple that God was building.

Well as Moses comes back the second time how was he received? They sent him away when he was 40 years old. Now he's coming back to lead them out of Egypt and through the desert into the promised land.

How did they receive him? Maybe all they needed was a second chance. Not so. You remember how they received him. They rejected him.

Moses on Mount Sinai he went up to receive the living words from God and to pass it on to them. So how did they receive Moses as he came down with God's word? Verse 39 our fathers refused to obey him.

[20:42] That's Moses. They refused to obey Moses. Instead they rejected him and in their hearts turned back to Egypt just like Lot's wife turned back to Sodom. So these that had been sent a deliverer Moses said we'd rather go back to Egypt as for this and so they said to Aaron make us gods who will go before us as for this fellow Moses.

Do you hear their derision in those words? As for this fellow Moses who led us out of Egypt we don't know what has happened to him. Rejection again you see of God's sent deliverer Moses.

There were times that they were so angry with him they wanted him dead and were ready to stone him. Who? The very deliverer who had to go before God and mediate for them because God was ready to wipe them all out and he prayed for God to have mercy on them.

That's the one they rejected and wanted to kill. people. So he brings the words of God to them and they reject him and his words.

Instead of obeying his words what did they do? As he comes down from the mountain he finds them worshipping a golden calf. And Stephen points to this crucial event in their history because it was the beginning of that long checkered history of Israel's idolatry.

[22:00] An idolatry that would eventually take them right out of their place and into captivity beyond Babylon. And so God's response to their rejection of his deliverer and his words is given in verse 42 that God turned away from them and he gave them over to the worship of the heavenly bodies.

Do you know that God sometimes punishes sin with sin? Giving men up to their own evil desires. Withdrawing his restraints.

Leave him alone. Just let him alone. No more grace. No more mercy. No more restraints. Just let him go. Give him what he wants. Idols they want. Idols they shall have.

And so he turned away from them and he punished their idolatry by giving them over to their idolatry. And so they go down the slope of idolatry. From the golden calf to the twinkling stars to the shrine of Molech.

The one they offered their boys and girls to in the fire. That's what they want. That's what they will have. And their idolatrous rejection of God was so bad that God turned from them and left them and sent them far from his earthly dwelling place into foreign exile.

[23:25] The lesson be careful what you do with God and his word and his deliverers. If you reject him for your God's substitutes he might just give you over to them and to the eternal judgments that they bring.

So Stephen he's being charged with blaspheming Moses. He only speaks of Moses with honor. But now he turns the tables you see on his accusers and he's shown them that they belong to a nation with a long-standing history of rejecting Moses, God's deliverer, and the bearer of God's word.

And now Stephen comes to his closing application. He's surveyed selectively their history to make his point. Israel has always been rejecting her deliverers.

and now he comes and he levels his gun at the people in front of him. Now, what does all this say about you? Well, you are just like your fathers.

Wow! Those are not politically correct words. Neither are the ones that follow. You are not the exception. You are no different. You're just like them.

[24:44] You're even one up on them, for you have rejected the very Son of God, the righteous one himself, God's only deliverer from sin and hell. And this was the rejection of all rejections, the climax of their anti-God hearts.

And so he describes them in the very same words that the prophets used to describe the Old Testament Israelites. First word, stiff-necked, verse 51.

Use 17 times of Old Testament Israel in the Old Testament. Stiff-necked. And so a mother is saying, little boy, I want you to look at me when I speak with you.

And he stiffens his neck. And he's not going to look her in the, he's not going to be corrected, you see. He's rebellious.

He's stubborn. He's set in his ways. He's hard-hearted. That's the word God used. God hand-picked for the nation Israel. stiff-necked people.

[25 : 49] Uncircumcised in heart and ears. That doesn't land any better than the first word. You remember Israel bore the sign of being the special people of God.

Out of all the people of the world, this nation was his. And it was seen in the sign, the physical sign on every male Israelite, the sign of circumcision. And it marked them out as set apart from all the peoples of the world.

These people are gods. They belong to him. Heart, soul, mind, body, lock, stock. They are gods. That means everything about them is devoted to God. They live for God.

They use their ears for God. They use their mouths for God. They use their hearts for God. Their minds for God. Their hands for God. They're his. That's what circumcision meant.

Cutting away that fleshly life of living for self and sin. They live for God. And now the charge comes that you are uncircumcised.

[26 : 49] Uncircumcised in heart and ears. Your hearts are devoted to your idols, to yourselves, and your ears. They're not tuned in to God's channel, to God's word.

No, they're tuned in to another word. The devil's word, your own word, the world's way. Uncircumcised.

You may have the outward physical sign of circumcision, but in reality, you're no different from the uncircumcised nations. You're just like the heathen, the pagan nations.

So circumcise your hearts and do not be stiff-necked any longer, Deuteronomy 10, 16. The language of the Old Testament is now being used of his hearers.

Stiff-necked, uncircumcised, just like your fathers, you always resist the Holy Spirit. In other words, this is not an occasional slip-up on the part of Israel.

[27 : 52] It is their characteristic behavior. You always resist. Now, we use those terms in a way that is probably a sinful exaggeration when we're accusing our spouse or children or parents and we say, well, you always resist the Holy Spirit.

Now, here's the truth of their rejection. Notice it was not just rejecting Moses in his words, but rejecting God, the Holy Spirit, who sent Moses and who, through Moses, was wooing them and calling them to repentance.

They fought against and resisted the Holy Spirit. Do you know, whoever you are, you cannot resist God's word without resisting the person of the Holy Spirit.

He is speaking to you in his word, and when you don't obey, you're opposing, you're fighting God. Remember the words of warning by Gamaliel? Better leave these guys alone lest we find ourselves fighting against God.

Anybody who is not submitting to this book is fighting against God, resisting, opposing the Holy Spirit. And so Stephen now sees in his accusers the age-old pattern of Israel's rejection of her deliverers, treating God's Messiah just as their fathers had treated Joseph and Moses and all the other prophets that God sent to draw them to salvation.

[29 : 28] And so he says, as it were, name one of the prophets that your fathers did not persecute. Name just one. You can't.

There aren't any. Your fathers persecuted them all. They even killed those who predicted the coming of the righteous one. The prophets who were sent with the good news.

The righteous Savior is coming to save you. and your prophets thanked them with swords and stones and saws.

Oh, but you, you have outdone your fathers because you have betrayed and murdered the righteous one himself. The very one the prophets spoke about, the very one God sent, his own son. You have betrayed and murdered the only one who can save from sin in hell. The righteous one. There is no other righteous one.

[30 : 31] No, not one. Only he is righteous and therefore only he is qualified to have a righteousness to give to poor believing sinners. And only he is righteous enough to be the sacrifice to atone for all their unrighteousness.

And you betrayed and murdered him. For Christ died for sin once for all, the righteous one for the unrighteous to bring us to God.

You murdered him. You've received the law, verse 53, but you have not obeyed it. These are the men who are boasting about the law and condemning Stephen for saying that sinning and

blaspheme against Moses and the law and saying that you're saying that Christ will change the customs of the law handed down to us for Moses.

And he just looks at them and says you have received the law but you have not obeyed it. Because one of those commands in the law was you shall not murder and you murdered the righteous one. So you see Israel's rejection of their Messiah Savior was foreshadowed throughout her history. and Stephen is saying your rejection of the righteous one is a game changer.

[31 : 53] By it Israel forfeits the privilege of being God's people and having his dwelling among you. So the temple was destroyed by the Lord Jesus and the veil was torn in two and in 70 AD it would be demolished at the hands of the Romans.

They forfeited the privilege of being God's people having his dwelling among them and so the temple was destroyed and its ceremonial laws were changed by Jesus Christ and the kingdom of God was taken from them and given to a people who will believe in the righteous one and who will bring forth the fruits of righteousness to his praise.

And they Jews and Gentiles alike that believe become the new temple in which God dwells by his spirit. that's the new temple that takes over this brick and mortar as we say temple in Jerusalem. Does this sort of thing happen today? I believe it happens every time a sinner continues another day in rejecting Jesus. What were the Israelites doing?

They were rejecting the ones that came to save them. What were they doing when they rejected Christ? They were rejecting the one that came with eternal life in his hands to give them, to redeem them from sin and hell.

[33 : 14] And every moment that a sinner pushes Jesus off and says not now, they're doing the same thing. Rejecting who? The one who has eternal life to give to those who are a breath away from eternal torments.

Well, the Supreme Court of Israel then, not Stephen, is the one that had rejected God and Moses. And they stood condemned by the very law of Moses in whom they trusted. And even as Stephen spoke, his words were finding their mark, cutting them until they had heard enough and they could take no more.

They were furious and gnashed their teeth at him like a pack of snarling wolves and we have the agitation of the Supreme Court contrasted with the serenity and the composure of Stephen.

Here they are snarling like a pack of wolves and Stephen full of the Holy Spirit. Oh, that's important. Never forget that about Stephen. It says at the beginning when it introduces us to it and it says it here at the end.

[34 : 30] He was a man full of the Spirit. And he looked up to heaven and he saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. Now, this Spirit of whom Stephen was full, he's the comforter that Jesus had promised to send.

And Stephen, full of the Spirit who'd come to comfort him, was given a unique supernatural comfort on this occasion. Just the help he needed at just the right time.

Special dying grace, if ever there was such. And it seems that this was more than just seeing into heaven by faith like you and I must do. We see into heaven as by faith we read of that place.

And faith lays a hold of it as something that's real even though we don't see it. Seems like it was more than that for Stephen this day. But that Stephen was given a special vision by which he actually could see right into heaven.

There is but a thin veil, brothers and sisters, between this world and the next. And it was that veil that was opened up. And he saw the outshining of the glory of God.

[35 : 43] And there at his right hand stood Jesus. And what Stephen saw he testified to. He spoke about. Aren't you glad that Stephen told us what he saw?

This is for us, brothers and sisters. This was grace for him in the dying hour. But it's also for us. We don't have the heavens open like Stephen did.

But we have the words, the inspired words that came from one who did have the heavens open. And now by faith we look into that place every day that we live and in that day when we come to die.

So Stephen tells what he saw. Look, I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God. Now Stephen saw further than the apostles themselves saw on the day that he ascended into heaven.

Remember, they're watching him and all of a sudden he starts rising up, up, up. He goes and they're watching until finally he goes into the clouds and they could see him no more. And Psalm 110 tells us what happened on the top side of the clouds that day that the apostles could no longer see.

[36:50] And David says, I'll tell you what happens. The father said to his son, sit here at my right hand. It was coronation day in heaven and he took his seat at his father's right hand as king of the universe.

But Stephen is given to see what David talked about and what the apostles didn't see. It's true. He's there. I see him standing at the father's right hand.

Well, this is a verification, you see, of his exaltation, of his coronation. His kingly reign in heaven. Oh, how good it was to show this to Stephen in his dying hour.

How good it is that he spoke of it, that we might have it in our hearts when it comes our time to die and in our hearts today, right now.

It was shown to him for our sakes. It's a scene. What he saw is full of encouragements. Heavenly realities. They're so encouraging.

[37:57] For persecuted saints on earth. Now, there's several things that are unique here. First is Jesus' title that he uses. The son of man. I see him.

The son of man. Now, that was Jesus' favorite way of referring to himself. He referred to himself more often than any other title as the son of man.

But we don't read of any man in the gospels referring to him as the son of man. except for Stephen, right here, right now. This is the son of man whom Daniel saw in vision in chapter 7.

When he says of the son of man that he approached the ancient of days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory, and sovereign power. All peoples, nations, and men of every language worshiped him.

His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away. And his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed. Stephen says, I see him.

[38:59] The one who on earth said that he was the son of man. I see the son of man there. The right hand of God reigning with all authority, all sovereign power given to him.

Not just as the king of the Jews, but the king of all nations. All peoples. peoples of every language. This is the one who had been rejected and crucified by Jews and Gentiles in league together.

But look at him now. We see Jesus crowned with glory and honor. Look, you saints. The sight is glorious. See the man of sorrows now. From the fight return victorious.

Every knee to him will bow. And Stephen sees it. Dear beloved, this is well for us to lay hold of this truth by faith.

Our Lord Jesus is reigning on the throne today. He's there. He's not a king in waiting. He's seated. He's been put on the throne of God.

[40:08] He's been given the highest place. And he's there for us. Do you know that's why all things work together for our good?

Because he reigns over all things. He's not just a little king here. He's the sovereign son of man that Daniel spoke about. He's there.

He's there for you, believer, to see that all things in your life work together for your good. And that's why nothing can happen to us in this world without his permission.

No sickness, no temptation of the devil, of the world, of my own flesh. No sin, no act of terrorism, no death. Nothing can happen. He protects me so well that apart from his will not a hair can fall from my head.

Indeed, that everything must fit his purpose for my salvation. He reigns over it all. What a comforting thing for Stephen. What a comforting thing for us today.

[41:13] Jesus' title, the son of man. But then there's Jesus' posture is also unique. I see the son of man standing at the right hand of God.

It's the only place in the Bible where it's put like that. What is the usual posture that we see or we hear of in the Bible when it speaks of Jesus at the right hand of God?

He's sitting, isn't he? Seated at the right hand of God. We see that over and over. But here's, Stephen says, I see the son of man standing at God's right hand.

Surely there's a reason for this anomaly and this unique phrase. What is the comfort that flows from a standing Jesus at God's right hand?

Well, I believe there's at least two strands of comfort. He's standing to defend Stephen before the court above. Think about the scene. Here is Stephen.

[42:16] He's appearing before the Supreme Court of Israel and he's all alone. It's one against the 70. Plus the vicious onlookers with none but himself to speak in his defense.

Every other voice is accusing him this day. You've blasphemed God and Moses. You're worthy of death. Stephen is given to see into heaven and there's one standing there who is his advocate before the only court that matters.

And he's standing there to defend him. He is Jesus Christ, the righteous one, who speaks to the Father in his defense.

Ah, what a comfort in the midst of the accusations of this world. I know that while in heaven he stands, no tongue can bid me thence depart. There's my righteousness.

There's my acquittal before God in that holy court above. That's the court that matters, not this one. And Jesus is standing there, standing to defend him, but standing to welcome him home.

[43:25] When this persecuting world concludes that Stephen is not to fit any longer, not fit to live any longer on earth, King Jesus stands to welcome his brother home to heaven.

Well done, good and faithful servant. Isn't it good that Stephen told us what he saw? The leaguered, battered Christian, when everything on earth looks discouraging, do this.

Lift up your heads. Look to the heavens. Look what's going on on the other side of the clouds. See your Savior there, reigning, omnipotent over all things that concern you.

And he's reigning for your good and your greatest good, your likeness into, your transformation into the likeness of Jesus himself. He's reigning for that end. Lift your eyes of faith and see him there to defend you before the Father and every accusation brought against you.

See him there praying for you, offering himself as the blood sacrifice to deserve every prayer, everything he asks for you. See him there to purify all your work and your worship to make it pleasing to God's sight, in God's sight.

[44:43] See him there to protect you. See him there to send you mercy and grace in your time of need. Look and live. The scene in heaven is of tremendous comfort for the saints.

What is going on right now? But it wasn't just described for our sakes. It was also, Peter, or Stephen, also tells what he saw for the sake of the Sanhedrin and all who were listening that day, the unbelievers.

You remember, just less than a year earlier, this same court had Jesus Christ on trial. And the same high priest, Caiaphas, was frustrated. He was getting upset that Jesus was silent before all of their false witnesses that they brought against him.

And he charged Jesus under oath, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God. And Jesus replied, yes, it is as you have said.

But I say to all of you, in the future, you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven. And at that, the high priest tore his robes and said, what further need for witnesses?

[45:52] You've all heard him, it's blasphemy. And they started to spit at him and beat upon him and turned him over to Pilate to be killed. Now, here's Stephen standing before the very same high priest in the very same high court.

And he says, look, he's there, the Son of Man at the right hand of God, just like he said. Oh, what a word spoken as a witness to these unbelievers who had heard Jesus himself say it.

Their murder of him could not keep him off the throne of God. They have a living king and judge waiting for them. You know, so do you and I. A living king and judge.

Be sure you are in Christ when he comes again in all his father's glory. Well, as Stephen mentions Jesus being at God's right hand in heaven, it's like all hell broke loose and these Jews were stirred to act more like wild beasts and devils than like men and covering their ears and yelling as loud as they could so as not to have to hear another word from this man.

They all rushed at him, dragged him out and began to stone him. The law required that the ones who witnessed against him be the first to throw the stones and they laid their outer clothes.

[47:15] They didn't want to be restricted by a coat and they took them off. They wanted to get to get him good and so they began to stone him and they laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul and as the stones were pelting him, Stephen was praying.

Now remember what supreme thing we've heard about Stephen. He was a man full of the spirit. What does a spirit filled man look like? Well he looks a whole lot like Jesus.

That's what we learn. The same spirit that lives lived in the Savior lives in this man Stephen and the spirit lives in the believer to transform the believer into the likeness of Christ and so you can see it in the way they live and you can even see it in the way that they die.

Stephen lived looking unto Jesus and he now dies looking unto Jesus and this likeness to Jesus is now seen so brilliantly in Stephen as he dies because like Jesus he died praying.

Notice his two requests. First one for himself. Lord Jesus receive my spirit. He sees Jesus and he talks to him. Lord Jesus receive my spirit. just like Jesus when he was on the cross said Father into your hands I commit my spirit.

[48:43] It was an act of faith that to die is to have our spirit go to be with God and Stephen like his Savior believes he was a man full of faith and full of the Holy Spirit and he prays and he says Lord Jesus receive my spirit.

Death isn't the end. death is just my entrance into your presence. He who lived by faith in Jesus now dies by faith in Jesus entrusting his soul into his keeping.

There is no better place to entrust your soul than in the Savior Jesus. Do you commit yourself to this Savior every day? Do you entrust yourself to him?

Do you commit yourself to him to be received through him? To be saved by him? To be kept and made ready for heaven by him? If so you'll be ready to do it again when you die.

Lord Jesus into your hands I commit my spirit. Receive me. Here I come. As one old Puritan said here comes another sinner. Catch me.

[49:50] And as they snarled and threw more rocks Stephen fell to his knees and he cried one last time not now for himself but for his persecutors. Lord do not hold this sin against them.

Like his Lord Jesus he returned good for evil. They gave him stones he gave them prayers for forgiveness. As our Lord prayed when they crucified him Father forgive them for they do not know what they are doing.

It's not a coincidence that Stephen dies praying like his Savior. He lived his life looking to Jesus and studying his Savior and his life and his death and seeking to put his feet into the footprints of Jesus and to grow into his likeness.

The spirit of God producing that kind of life and heart in him and now when he dies we should not be surprised to see the marks of his Savior. And even in his prayer Matthew Henry says prayers can preach and Stephen's prayer preached the gospel to his enemies.

and they learned that Jesus Christ is God because you only pray to God and he prayed to the Lord Jesus. And they learned that what they were doing was sin. Lord don't hold this sin against them but they also learned that there was grace for sinners and it's found in the Lord Jesus.

[51:14] Forgiveness of sins. Well this stoning of Stephen is not the place you'd expect to find the greatest preacher and missionary that ever lived.

It's the first mention of him in the Bible a young man named Saul was there. For all he saw and heard that day he was approving of Stephen's death and would not and would go on to violently persecute the church of Christ.

But as someone has said the outcome of an event is rarely known when it happens. And we know this prayer of Stephen was answered in the life of Saul even after Stephen had died. Do you know that prayers made in this life are not forgotten or canceled once we die?

Stephen's prayer is answered after he dies in the forgiveness of Saul of Tarsus who was holder of the coats that day. Pray on brothers and sisters your prayers are heard and answered by God in his own time.

And we also learn that the saints are indestructible until it's God's time for them to die but there is a time for them to die some younger than others some die by martyrdom and sometimes it is more glorifying to God to have his saints die the martyr's death than it is to have his saints protected and that's what we're seeing here.

[52:41] It's not like Jesus had failed to protect no there's there's something better for him and that's to glorify me in his death. Those are the words John spoke about Peter when the Lord spoke in John 21 about Peter he referred to the death by which Peter would glorify him.

There is a way to glorify God in death. In other words there is a will of God to do and a will of God to suffer. Stephen did the will of God as he took care of the widows in the congregation as he

preached but he suffered the will of God when he died looking unto Jesus.

it's time to suffer his will by being stoned to death. No, we don't get to choose which it will be and when to do God's will or to suffer God's will.

Our Lord and King will choose for us enough for us just to be ready and willing for whatever he chooses because he brings grace for whatever he assigns.

Does God have you doing or suffering this morning? Maybe a little of both. Know this, God is glorified as much by his people suffering his will as he is by people doing his will.

[53 : 59] Maybe you don't have the energy to be out and doing. Maybe now you're suffering. Do it unto Jesus. Do it with gratitude. Do it with a sweetly submissive spirit. Do it with praise for his name.

He's glorified. Oh, that in all things, whether we live or whether we die, may it be that Christ might be magnified in our bodies to the praise of his name.

Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, this was a long sermon that Stephen preached before his death and we see in it your faithfulness, your grace, your love to send deliverers to Israel over and over again and in it we see your grace toward us.

We thank you that though we rejected you not once, not twice, but hundreds of times that your grace and your patience was greater and sought us and found us and drew us.

We now worship you as rejecters of Jesus who've been forgiven by his blood. We thank you that he still is the deliverer of those who've rejected him. I gather many into your arms this day, Lord Jesus.

[55 : 13] And oh, so fill us with the Holy Spirit that we might live looking to Jesus and might die looking to him and we might bear in this life and every day that we live more and more of the marks of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And we pray in his name. Amen. Amen. Amen. We'll forego our closing hymn. May the Lord bless us. Look, you saints, the sight is glorious.

See the man of sorrows now. He's in heaven and he's there for you. Amen.