

A Deadly History

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: 24 August 2025

Preacher: Gabriel Wong

[0:00] Good morning, everyone. I'm intentionally speaking a little quieter because I've been told I'm really loud in the mic. But yeah, good morning, everyone. It's great to worship with you all today. I'm excited to preach the word to you today.

But first, let me ask a question. What do you think is the most dangerous thing a Christian can do? What's the most dangerous thing a Christian can do? The real answer has got to be complacency, unbelief that hardens you beyond repentance.

Aside from that, what else is dangerous? You might think of things like going as missionaries to war zones or smuggling Bibles into closed countries or being radically generous with your money.

Those are all costly acts of faith. But today, when we read the book of Acts, we'll discover that one of the most dangerous, most radical, most life-threatening things you could do is to give a history lesson.

Give a history lesson. Today, in the book of Acts, we'll meet one of the church's first deacons, a man named Stephen. He was a servant of the church and a man full of the spirit and of wisdom, full of grace and of power.

[1:14] Yet Stephen was murdered in broad daylight by a mob of angry Jewish leaders. And what was his crime? What got them so angry? It was a history lesson, teaching history.

In response to some allegations, Stephen opened up the Jewish scriptures. That's what we call the Old Testament of our Bibles. And he connected the dots in Israel's history, from Abraham and Joseph to Moses and all the prophets.

And he did that to prove a point. And our question today is, what is in this history lesson? What is in the Old Testament that is so offensive and so radical that cost Stephen his life?

And what does that mean for us today? And with that, let's stand as we read the passage today. We stand as a gesture of reverence for God's word. And let me give you a heads up.

Stephen wasn't very short-winded. So I hope you brought some comfortable shoes. It's going to be a long speech. And so I've, yeah, let's invite Aidan and Melissa to read with me.

[2:16] Because it's a long passage. I'll be the narrator, so I'm going to narrate this passage. And they'll take turns, Aidan and Melissa being Stephen. So let's stand as we read the word of the Lord together. This is from Acts chapter 6, verse 8 through to the end of chapter 7.

And Stephen, full of grace and power, was doing great wonders and signs among the people. Then some of those who belonged to the synagogue of the freedmen, as it was called, and of the Cyrenians and of the Alexandrians, and those from Cilicia and Asia, rose up and disputed with Stephen.

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

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

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

[3:25] And the high priest said, Are these things so? 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 to the land that 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 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, even though he had no child.

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 for 400 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 to 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 12 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.

[4 : 52] 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.

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, 75 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 brought for a sum of silver from the sons of Hamer and Shechem.

But as 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 that they would not be kept alive. At this time, Moses was born, and he was beautiful in God's sight.

[5 : 52] 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.

When he was 40 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 Egyptians.

He supposed that his brothers would understand that God was giving them 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 and 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 40 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.

[7 : 03] I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob. 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 have heard their groaning, and I've come down to deliver them. And now come, I'm going to send you to Egypt. This Moses, whom they rejected, saying, Who made you a ruler and a judge?

This man got 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 40 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 to 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.

[8:08] As for this Moses who led us out from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him. 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 40 years in the wilderness, O house of Israel?

You took up the tent of Moloch and the star of your God, Rephan, 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, bought it in with Joshua when 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 the 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, says the Lord?

[9:19] Or what is the place of my rest? 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 father 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.

And you who received the laws 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. 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 the sin against them.

[10:24] And when he had said this, he fell asleep. This is the word of the Lord. Let me take a seat. Lord, we thank you for your word. And we trust that your word has power to give life, to point us to your only son who died for the sins of the world.

Show us his glory. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. A deadly history. That's the topic for today in Stephen's speech. Now, who is Stephen?

He's one of the first deacons. We spoke about that last week. Deacons are people who serve the church, taking care of administration and practical needs. And one of the deacons they chose was a man named Stephen.

Stephen was someone serving the church, giving food to the poor. And in chapter 6, verse 8, it says that Stephen is full of grace and power. He's full of faith, full of the spirit. He's a good guy. But in spite of that, some people couldn't stand him.

They argue against him. And in verse 10, it says they could not withstand the wisdom and the spirit with which he was speaking. And so in verse 11, they secretly instigated men against him. And they stirred up the people and the elders and the scribes.

[11:32] And they came upon him and seized him and brought him to the council. They didn't like him, so they brought these accusations against him. There's three big accusations. Number one in verse 11, blasphemy against Moses and God.

Number two in verse 13, blasphemy against the law. And number three, blasphemy against the temple. It says in verse 13, we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place, the temple, and change the customs, the law that Moses delivered to us.

So those are the three big accusations brought against Stephen. Blasphemy against God, the law, and the temple. That's the context for his speech. And so Stephen is before this council on trial.

They list off all these charges. And in chapter 7, verse 1, it says, The high priest said, Are these things so? Now at this point, Stephen does something that reminds me of my wife, Jojo.

First off, verse 15, it says that his face was like the face of an angel. But secondly, she has this habit. You know how people say long story short? Like Jack and Rose, they fall in love, things happen, but long story short, Titanic sank.

[12:44] It's quick, it's simple, long story short. Well, Jojo instead likes to say short story long. That's her catchphrase, short story long. I'll ask, what did you have for lunch?

And next thing, she's telling me how she ran into a glass door or spilled bubble tea on the MTR. Ten other things except for the question. And then she'll say, oh, short story long.

I ate some spring rolls. Short story long. And in the same way Stephen's accused of these three blasphemy against these things, the high priest asks him, are these things so?

This is a yes or no question. But Stephen replies, short story long, let me give you a history lesson. Buckle up because it's Bible time. And he goes on to drop the longest speech in the book of Acts. Now, to be fair to Stephen, he's summarizing over 2,000 years of history. It's long, but really, he did make a short story long. You're not here for 2,000 years listening to that. And also, if you ask Jojo, she'll tell you.

[13:45] When you ask the question, I can't give you the answer right away because I have to set the scene. You need to feel the story, feel the motion so that you can taste the spring roll that I ate for lunch.

And it's the same for Stephen. He brings them on this journey for a reason. There's no quick answer because they're asking the wrong question. Stephen's saying, you think I'm blaspheming against God?

Well, you've missed the point of all of history. You've missed the point of all the scriptures. It's not about the law or one location. It's about the Lord, the Lord Jesus Christ.

And you're the blasphemers. You're the ones blaspheming God because you've rejected God's anointed ones. And let me show you that through your history. And that's why he goes on this speech.

And so Stephen starts with the history of Abraham. He begins with Abraham because Abraham was the first Jew. He's the father of all Jews. And Stephen's going right back to the beginning of the nation of Israel to say, I'm not a blasphemer.

[14:50] I don't blaspheme God. I fear God. He says in verse two, brothers and fathers, hear me. The God of glory appeared to our father, Abraham. Stephen's saying, he's the God of glory.

I worship the God of glory. How could I be blaspheming him? Now throughout history, one major way that God shows his glory is by freely choosing to bless those who haven't earned it.

The Jewish people began when God appeared to Abraham with a promise. Go out from the land, from your land and from your kindred and go into the land that I will show you. Out of all the people on the earth at that time, God chose Abraham.

Before Abraham had done anything or obeyed God, God chose Abraham and God gave him a promise in Genesis 12. To your offspring, I will give you land and I will make you a great nation. And in you, all the families of the earth will be blessed. That's how the nation of Israel starts. That's the start of the Jewish people. The God of glory had a promise for Abraham and for his descendants.

[15:55] But God's plan wasn't all smooth sailing. He also promises in verse 6, Abraham's offspring would be enslaved in a foreign land for 400 years. But I will judge the nations they serve and they shall come out and worship me in this place.

And so long story short, that's Abraham. That God will show his glory in fulfilling his promise to save his people. And the expectation of all the Old Testament is to see how God will be faithful to that promise even when things go sideways.

Can you see in Abraham this echo of Jesus? Now after Abraham, Stephen moves on a few generations to Joseph. Joseph is Abraham's great grandson.

Verse 8 says, Abraham became the father of Isaac and Isaac became the father of Jacob. And by the way, God also gave Jacob, this guy Jacob, a new name Israel. That's why it's called the nation of Israel.

And Israel had 12 sons, one of which was Joseph. The 12 tribes of Israel, you might have heard of the Levites. That's named after this brother Levi or Judah or Benjamin.

[17:03] The 12 tribes of Israel were named after these brothers and those were Joseph's brothers. Now the point in bringing up Joseph is to show that God is faithful to his promise.

Despite Israel's obedience. Stephen was accused of blaspheming God and the law. And Stephen's saying, no, you, you're the ones breaking the law. You're the ones blaspheming God by rejecting his appointed one.

Even from the beginning of Israel, the founding fathers, these 12 patriarchs, they were disobedient. What happened was that Joseph was the favorite child. And his brothers, the patriarchs, they thought to themselves, hey, our dad really loves our brother.

That's a big problem. Right? So they got together and said, our father loves him dearly. There's only one possible solution. Let's kill him. Let's kill him. But then the elder brother, Reuben, heard about this and said, whoa, whoa, whoa.

We can't kill Micah. That's a bit much. Right? Let's sell him into slavery instead. Let's sell him into slavery instead. Isn't that messed up? The founding fathers of Israel, they got together and sold their brother Joseph into slavery, into Egypt.

[18:11] But did that thwart God's purposes? Look what verse 9 says. The patriarchs, jealous of Joseph, sold him into Egypt. But God was with him.

God was with him. Despite being trafficked into slavery, despite his brother's disobedience. No, disobedience is too weak a word. Despite his brother's evil, God was with him.

And because God was with him, Joseph prospered. Verse 10 says, God gave Joseph favor and wisdom before Pharaoh, king of Egypt, who made him ruler of Egypt and over all his household.

Through a dramatic series event, we don't have time for it, but it could be a drama even. There's love, there's lies, there's betrayal, everything you need for a drama. God took Joseph from slave and prisoner to be ruler in charge of everything in Egypt, second in command, next to Pharaoh.

That's the God of glory being faithful to his promise. But God's blessing wasn't just for Joseph. In a great reversal, Joseph ends up saving the brothers, the exact brothers who sold him into slavery.

[19:20] Verse 11 says, Joseph's brothers would have died from this famine. If they stayed there, they would have died from this famine.

Their only saving grace was that the brother that they had sold into slavery, that they wanted to kill, ended up ruling over all of Egypt. And God gave him the wisdom to store up food in preparation. Israel was sinful right from its founding fathers. Israel was sinful right from its own. Those brothers hated the one who would end up saving them. But their disobedience, they couldn't thwart God's purposes. Instead, they were part of God's purposes.

In Genesis 50, Joseph tells his brothers, What you meant for evil, you meant evil against me. But God meant it for good. That's the point of Joseph, long story short.

We constantly disobey God. But what we mean for evil, God meant it for good. And can you see in Joseph an echo of Jesus?

[20:23] We have Abraham, Joseph, nix up Moses. So because there was food in Egypt, Israel, the whole family, they moved to Egypt and ended up thriving.

It says the people increased and multiplied in Egypt. But with time, there arose over Egypt another king who didn't know Joseph. The Egyptians forgot about Joseph. And all they saw were a threat to the people.

As the Israelites prospered and multiplied in their land. And so the Egyptians, they thought, hey, we need to control them. So they forced the Israelites into slavery.

They forced them into slavery to control them. And they even went so far as to commit genocide on the Israelites. Killing baby boys. Every baby boy, we'd kill them. In order to wipe out this nation.

While at the same time, keeping that adult slave labor. That's the death and slavery and bondage that Israel was stuck in. Remember, God made this promise to Abraham.

[21:24] Verse 6 says they would be enslaved and afflicted for 400 years. But God says, I will judge the nations that they serve. And after that, they shall come up and worship me in this place. So in verse 17, as the time of this promise drew near, Moses was born.

God kept Moses from being killed in this genocide. And even had him adopted by Pharaoh's daughter. Growing up in Pharaoh's household. God's plan to deliver Israel out of oppression was through the hand of Moses.

But you can guess what happened looking at Israel's history. Once again, Israel rejected God's appointed one. They rejected Moses. They do this many times actually.

But Stephen gives two examples. One was when Moses was 40. He saw an Egyptian beating up an Israelite. Moses broke up that fight and ended up killing the Egyptian. Verse 25 says, Moses supposed that his brothers would understand that God was giving them salvation by his hand. But they did not understand. Instead of looking to Moses to save them, accepting that deliverance God was bringing them, they snitched on Moses. And Moses had to flee from Egypt into the land of Midian.

[22 : 37] That's the first time they rejected Moses. And next, another 40 years, God appeared to Moses in the burning bush and sent Moses back to Egypt once again. To say, let my people go. Let my people go.

But Pharaoh wasn't willing. And so God sent plagues, 10 plagues. There's blood, frogs, bugs, disease, hail, darkness, and death. Until Pharaoh was forced to say, go get out of here.

You guys have to leave. That's how God delivered Israel out of slavery. But at the Red Sea, when Pharaoh regretted all this, he regretted letting his slaves go.

He sent, Pharaoh sent an army to chase after them. And God delivered them once again. They had their backs to the wall at the Red Sea. But God split the Red Sea and Israel walked through on dry ground.

Imagine that. Instead of taking the MTR to TST over there, God split Victoria right in half. You saw the water part into two. And you walked right down the middle with walls of water on both sides.

[23 : 39] Imagine if you saw God do that. But do you know what happens three days later? Three days after seeing God split the Red Sea.

Do you know what they complain about? They complain there's no water. They complain there's no water to drink in this desert. There's no water to drink. We're going to die in this wilderness.

After just three days. Three days after walking through the sea on dry ground. Watching God split the waters into two. They're complaining it's too dry. There's no water.

How quickly they've forgotten about this God of glory. And fast forward a few months. Moses goes up Mount Sinai to receive God's law.

And remember, one of the accusations against Stephen was that Stephen was blaspheming the law. This is the law that Moses was receiving. And literally, as Moses is on the mountain receiving that same law, do you know what Israel was doing?

[24 : 38] Utter rebellion. They took all their jewelry, made it into a golden calf, and said, These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you out of the land of Egypt.

Are you kidding me? You guys are worshipping a cow? Right? That they taped together five minutes ago? Three months after seeing God split the red seat and throw all these plagues.

You're worshipping a cow that you made with your hands? Are you kidding me? Right? Just months after that. After seeing all that. You might as well just pull together all the pocket lint in your back pocket.

Scrunch it in a ball and say, Behold your God. That would be no different. What are you doing worshipping a cow? And all that is just as God is giving them the law.

How stupid. How rebellious. Right? And so long story short, Stephen is saying, You want to talk about blasphemy? Our fathers were the ones with both the ingenuity and the wherewithal to find a way to simultaneously blaspheme God, Moses, and the law all in one go.

[25 : 45] That's who our fathers is. That's our history. And that's the constant pattern in the Old Testament. That God is faithful to his promises.

He is so good to Israel, yet they are so eager, so eager to disobey. See how they wandered in the wilderness for 40 years because of disobedience.

See how they were exiled to Babylon. See how the temple was destroyed because of disobedience.

Stepping back and looking at Israel's history, the picture you see is a people who day after day and time after time are shown so much favor from God, yet are constantly rebellious, constantly disobedient, constantly rejecting him.

That's the history lesson. Now at this point, we can look at the Old Testament nodding our heads and say, Yeah, yeah, that was pretty silly. I can't believe they did this. Cool stories. But that's when Stephen turns and points the finger.

He says in verse 51, You stiff-necked Angang people, uncircumcised in heart and ears. You always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you.

[26 : 55] And he's saying, I'm not just telling you stories. This is not just history. It's meant to hit closer to home. This is your history. This is what your fathers did. And not just your fathers, but as your fathers did, so do you.

You're the sons of these rebellious people. An apple doesn't fall far from the tree. And as we read this today also, we should allow Stephen to turn the finger to us. That we're no different.

As Israel was disobedient, so are we. As Israel was stiff-necked, so are we. And how so? How can we see that? One way is, aren't we just all so forgetful?

Everybody's religious. Everybody's super religious with a vibrant pair of life right before an exam. Or a job interview. Or when something goes wrong.

But after you pass that exam, we don't need God anymore. Or we just boast in ourself. Hey, look at me. Look at the exam I passed. Look at the career that I worked hard for. And God's thinking, what are you doing?

[27 : 52] Why are you worshiping a cow? Right? When we think of sin, we often think of things like getting drunk or pornography or lying. And that's all sin. But beneath it, all of that, at the root of sin, comes from a heart that fails to see and savor the God of glory.

The God of all these promises. At the core of sin is a mistrust of God and idolatry. It's replacing God and prizing cheap substitutes.

Cheap substitutes that we create. A cow even. More than the God of glory. That is sin. And we're so willing in our nature. We're so willing to receive from God.

To receive his gifts. But then forget about him. And turn his gifts into idol. All that gold that they took and made into a cow. Those were things. That's the jewelry God made the Egyptians give them.

They took his gifts and turned it into an idol. Right? We pray hard.

[28 : 55] We pray hard for a job. But then next we say, I worked so hard for this. I deserve that trip to Thailand, to Japan. Sorry, I can't make it now to Life Group. I'm too busy.

I can't come on Sunday. Using the gift that God's given us. Or actually we might say, I don't need God. I don't believe in him anyway. How forgetful are we? The greatest commandment God gives us is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, your mind and strength.

But how many of us are content sitting eight hours at our desk without even a thought of God? And that happens all the time. That happened to me. Aren't we forgetful? Prone to wander.

Think about some of the idols in your life. Because we all fall short of the glory of God. But the Old Testament doesn't just point out our sin.

It points out our need for a savior. The Bible makes us look into the darkness. Not just to condemn us and put us in the darkness. But so that when our eyes adjust to it, when the light comes on, it shines even brighter.

[30 : 02] And that's the point of the Old Testament. So ultimately what gets Stephen killed is in verse 52. And saying that Jesus is the righteous one. Jesus is the righteous one.

He's the Messiah promised in the scriptures. He's the fulfillment of all God's promises to save us and take away the sins of the world. But what did you do? You killed him. You killed him and rejected him.

Just as you did with Joseph. Just as you did with Moses and all the prophets who were pointing to him. He's the son of God. And you blasphemed God by killing his only son.

We've seen in Stephen's speech, the signpost to Jesus. There was God's promise to Abraham. That Abraham's offspring, through Abraham's offspring, all the families of the earth will be blessed. And that promise found its fulfillment in Jesus. In him, salvation was offered to all nations through his death on the cross. Jesus is also the better Joseph.

[31 : 00] Just as Joseph was betrayed by his brothers. Jesus was betrayed by his close friend, Judas. Jesus suffered and died on the cross to save those who sinned against him.

To save the people who nailed him to the cross. And that was all according to God's sovereign plan. That wasn't an accident. What we meant for evil, God meant for good.

The greatest evil ever committed in the world. The murder of God's own son. Was meant for the greatest good. That all who believe in him may be forgiven and have life.

Jesus is the better Moses. He's the one who frees us from slavery and bondage to sin and death.

Jesus is the one that Moses was speaking of when he said, God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers.

And Jesus is the righteous one in verse 52 that all the prophets were announcing. He's the savior that all the Old Testament was pointing to. That's the whole point of this history lesson.

[31:59] To show our sin, but also to show our savior, the Lord Jesus. There is no other name given under heaven by which we may be saved. So let us not just look at Israel's history.

Let's also look at our world with histories of war and conflict and evil committed. And also at our own lives. I could try to do good all I want, but inevitably I will fail.

We all need a savior. So today, if you haven't put your faith in Christ today, if you hear his voice, don't harden your hearts. Don't be like the Jews who rejected him.

Don't resist the Holy Spirit. Don't be stiff necked. Turn to Jesus today and he will give you life.

That's what the Old Testament is pointing to.

Now, if you remember, there's also one more accusation you haven't talked about yet. Stephen was accused of blaspheming God, Moses, the law, and lastly, the temple.

[32:58] The temple. Now, to address accusations against the temple, Stephen says, the point of what Stephen is saying is, is that God is bigger and more glorious than you think. You care so much about the temple?

Well, you can't confine him to the temple. You can't put God in a box. He's bigger than you think and he can't be served by human hands. Stephen says in verse 48, he quotes the Old Testament saying, 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, says the Lord? Or what is this place? What is the place of my rest? Did not my hands make all these things?

In other words, Stephen is saying, who do you think God is that you would put him in a box? Who do you think God is? He is the Lord most high. Heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool. You know, we live on one planet, the planet earth, out of eight planets in the solar system, out of hundreds of billions of stars in the Milky Way. And that's just one out of trillions of galaxies in the observable universe.

[34:03] These numbers don't even make sense to my head. But the Lord says, the Lord most high says, heaven is my throne. The billions of billions of stars, each one of them that could burn you into a crisp if you even got within thousands of kilometers.

They all exist to declare the glory of God. They are his throne. And the earth is his footstool. We're just tiny creatures living on his footstool in a tiny speck of an island on his footstool that we call Hong Kong.

We're minuscule next to him. We're tiny. The question that we should be asking is, what is man that you are mindful of him and the son of man that you will care for him?

Who are we to think that we can confine the God of glory and control him and put him in a box? No, our God is in heaven and he does all that he pleases.

Now what does that mean for us? How do we minimize and distract from the glory of God? I think the key to that is a few words in verse 48.

[35:15] The most high does not dwell in houses made by hands. He doesn't dwell in houses made by hands. In verse 41 it says, they made a calf and they were rejoicing in the work of their hands.

We minimize God. We confine him when we elevate the work of our hands. God becomes small when we try to make ourselves big and try by our own abilities, our own power, our own righteousness, our own morality, our own ethics.

And when we do that, we turn ourselves into this golden calf, worshiping ourselves, the work of our hands, thinking that by our good behavior, we could twist God's arm to do our will to bless us.

Do we ever try to earn from him, to bargain with him? God, if you give me this job, I will do X, Y, Z, I will serve you. I will give 10% of my money to you.

Or God, I serve on the worship team. I stack chairs. I read the Bible. I've even memorized a lot of it. I pray. That means I've earned my way into the good books, in your good books, right?

[36:27] That means you owe me something, right? Do you ever find yourself with the attitude that I'm doing good and I deserve from God?

To that, God says, no. Did not my hand make all these things? Did not my hand make all these things that you claim to earn?

Who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid? For from him, through him, to him are all things. To him be the glory forever. Amen. God won't allow us to put him in a box and think we can twist his arm and earn favor with him through religious duty and ethical morality.

And if we think we can, we will rob God of the glory that he's due. And so that's why when Jesus came, that's why they were giving, they were accusing Stephen in the first place.

When Jesus came, he said, you destroy this temple, tear this temple down, and in three days, I will build another one, not made with hands. I will build a temple not made with hands.

[37 : 33] Jesus was saying that he came to destroy this distorted religion that they built around this temple, which was a good thing, but they built this religion around this temple that worships our accomplishments, our works, the works of our hands, our sacrifices, thinking that we could earn our way to God just by offering him things and by doing good behavior.

Jesus says, I will tear down that temple and build another one in three days. See, the gospel, what Jesus has done for us, it's the good news of grace, free, unmerited grace.

Jesus died to accomplish what we could not, what we couldn't do with our own hands. And so he calls us to trust him, rely on him, put our faith in him alone, not the work of our hands.

That's Stephen's response to the accusation of the temple. You can't put God in a box. You can't twist God's arm. For my own glory, I will do it, declares the Lord.

He's the God of glory. And when we truly understand that God is this big sovereign God and our salvation is a free gift that we don't earn, it changes everything.

[38 : 49] It changes everything. It frees us from trying to earn his favor. We can't earn. Who can give a gift to God? It's all the work of his hands.

It frees us from trying to earn his favor. But it also compels us to give him everything at the same time. Stephen understood this. He knew that God can't be put in a box.

That God is the God of all. And if that is true, then God has a rightful claim on every part of our lives. He is Lord of all. And for Stephen, that understanding had a very real cost.

It ends up costing for Stephen everything, even his life. Let's read in verse 54. Just like that, just like that, we have the first Christian martyr, the first Christian to die for his faith in Christ.

Stephen knew that you can't put God in a box. And if that is true, then that means that Jesus is Lord and he demands your entire life, all of it. Not just Sundays.

[40 : 16] Not just our spare time. Not just a quarter of our attention. Not just our scraps. He demands everything. It was Hudson's Taylor that said, Christ is either Lord of all or he is not Lord at all.

He is either Lord of all or he is not Lord at all. Is Jesus the Lord of our lives? Is Jesus the Lord of everything in our lives? That means that he's Lord of our relationships.

He's Lord of our finances. Lord of our university decisions. Lord, when no one's watching you at home, he's Lord of your time. He's Lord of all.

What area of our lives are we holding back from surrendering to him? What areas are we tempted to put God in a box and say you can have everything except for this?

Even when we're serving him, he's Lord of all. He can't be boxed up into a corner that we build up by our own hands as a temple for him. You see, the irony of the gospel is that the gospel presents to us a free gift.

[41 : 27] It's freely given that we can't earn but demands so much more than we imagined. The gospel tells us that we can't work for anything, that we must surrender everything.

The gospel tells us that we can't earn our way to God. We're lavished with grace. But it's not a cheap grace. It's a costly grace as Bonhoeffer put it. Costly grace is grace that costs God the life of his son.

And costly grace is the treasure hidden in the field. When we see Jesus, when we see his worth, he is the treasure hidden in the field. For the sake of it, a man will go in his joy, sell all he has, and buy that field.

He will give up everything because it's worth it. As Dallas Willard put it, grace is not opposed to effort. It's opposed to earning.

Grace doesn't mean that we don't work. It just means that we don't work to earn anything from God. Those who are controlled by grace instead say, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is in me.

[42:35] So what's the most dangerous thing a Christian can do? Follow Jesus. To accept this free gift. Because when we do that, Jesus bids us come and die and find our life in him.

Following Jesus costs Stephen his life. And following Jesus will cost yours. Maybe not in martyrdom. Maybe you won't be stoned to death, being killed like Stephen. But following Jesus requires us we deny ourselves, pick up our cross, and follow him.

What area of our lives are we holding back from Jesus that we're not willing to surrender, that we're just trying to box up and hold back. Now suppose you do want to follow Jesus.

You want to give him everything. What are some ways we can do that? Really quick, there are three things that we can learn from Stephen. Three ways that Stephen endures and gives up his life. Number one, hold the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

To follow Jesus, we need to see the glory of God through Jesus. In verse 55, Stephen gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.

[43:49] How do we find the strength and resolve to follow Jesus even at the cost of our lives? I don't have enough goodness in my heart to do that. I don't have enough goodness in my heart to give up my life.

That strength only comes from seeing and savoring the glory of God through Jesus. How do we do that? Well, Stephen looked into heaven and he saw the glory of God. We can't always do that.

That's not something I can do every day. But before Stephen looked up in heaven, he looked down and opened up the scriptures. He opened up the Bible. That's something we can do every day.

That's where he saw the glory of Christ. Stephen showed us in his speech that all the scriptures are about Jesus, even the Old Testament. And sometimes the Old Testament can seem distant or be hard to understand.

But Stephen points us, he tells us that the point of all of it is to roll out this red carpet for Jesus' arrival. So when we read the Bible, look for Jesus in it. Stephen showed us some ways.

[44:45] When we read the Old Testament, we can see it shows our sin and our need for a savior. It shows our sin, our helplessness, and our need for a savior. It shows us darkness so that the light is brighter.

So we can see that. And also we can look in the Old Testament for God's promise of salvation. That God is faithful to his promises, even to those who don't deserve it.

That's what Stephen demonstrated in his speech. He's faithful to his promises. He's so good to those who don't deserve it, ultimately through Jesus. So we can see his glory through the Bible. Number two, to follow Jesus, let us be filled with the Spirit. Verse 55 says that Stephen was full of the Holy Spirit. And that's how he saw the glory of God. We can't savor and treasure the glory of God without the Holy Spirit.

We can't open up the Bible and see his glory without the Holy Spirit. So let's pray and ask the Spirit, ask the Spirit to show us who God is. And when we live and serve, let's not do it by our own strength, but rely on the Holy Spirit.

[45:52] And number three, we can just follow Christ's example of faith. We call Stephen the first martyr, but he wasn't really the first Christian to die. He was simply following Jesus.

Stephen wasn't the first to be accused of blasphemy, of destroying and dishonoring the temple. He wasn't the first to be full of the Spirit, seeing the glory of God. He wasn't the first to say, Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.

Or Father, forgive them, for I know not what they are doing. Stephen was free to let go of his life because his Lord laid his life down for him. Remember, sin is a mistrust of God, believing the lie behind the idols.

Well, Jesus went to the cross with full confidence in his Father, full belief that laying down his life was worth it. For the joy that was set before him, he endured the cross, despising the shame, seated at the right hand of God.

Following Jesus comes at a cost. It'll cost our time, our money, everything, but it is worth it because we get to know Jesus. Great is your reward in heaven.

[46:53] And so we covered a lot today, 2,000 years of history. Abraham, Joseph, Moses, the prophets, ultimately all pointing to Jesus and it can feel like a lot.

But if you forget everything else, remember this. The speech that got Stephen killed, this whole history lesson, the entire point of the Old Testament, the point of this church, it's all about one thing.

Long story short, it's all about Jesus. It's all about him. And the question for us then is simple. Is our life all about Jesus?

Is our life all about Jesus? Don't reject him. Don't put him in a box. Show in your life that he is Lord of all.

That's what Stephen did down to his very last breath. Can we do the same? Can we do the same church? Let's pray. God of glory, we seek your face.

[48:07] God of glory, we confess. We've sinned against you. We can do nothing on our own. We have turned aside, bowled against you.

We thank you that time and time again, you've shown us your goodness. All my life, you have been faithful. And throughout all of history, you have been faithful. And you are faithful to your promise, fulfilled in Jesus.

And so we trust in him. Lord, we pray, fill us with your spirit that we can see your face and cling to him and serve you, follow you with all our lives, not just a part of it.

We want you. Help us. In Jesus' name, amen. Amen. Verse 35, it says, full of the Holy Spirit, he gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.

Lord, as we wrap up today, we read in this first instance where you're not just seated at the right hand of God, that in fact, you are standing at the right hand of God.

[49:31] And this is the only occasion that we've seen the standing ovation of you yourself, Jesus.

Lord, as we live this life, as we go on from this day, as we seek the approval of our partners, of our friends, of our bosses, our CEOs, our parents, Lord, remind us to be like Stephen who put his hand up to say, hey, I'm here to serve.

I'm here to be the first deacon thinking he's going to give this life to you to serve you. Little did he know that he would be standing in your very steps looking at you, getting the standing ovation from Jesus Christ himself.

The moment that people were stoning him, he saw only you. So Lord, let us not live for the standing ovation of anyone else but you. And Lord, you standing and you seated at the right hand of God just means that you are alive and well, that you are our advocate, that as we are praying to you right this moment from the gathering and admiralty, that you are praying for us, you are interceding for us.

And Lord, if we truly could hear that and see that, Lord, there's nothing that we need to be afraid of, there's nothing that we need to be anxious of. We have complete freedom. We have complete fullness of joy, of peace, knowing that you are faithful and that, Lord, that this church was not built yesterday, Lord, it was built from before the foundations of the earth.

So we thank you. We pray, Lord, that as we go from this place that we have the heart of Stephen, here to serve, here to die to self, living for you, living for your standing ovation, Lord, in Jesus' mighty, mighty name we pray.

[51:03] Amen.