

Sunday, March 15, 2026

Stephen

Acts 6:8-8:4 (ESV)

- You ever have those moments, where you have been singing along to a song your whole life and then one day you realize that you've been singing the wrong lyrics all along??
- I remember there was a great commercial years ago where a bunch of people were trying to singing along to Elton John's "Rocket Man"
 - It start off with one guy singing "Rocket Maaaannnn....burnin' out this useless telephone."
 - Then a girl singing "Hair is gone"
 - Someone else singing, "Cheap Cologne"
 - Another singing, "Motor Home"
 - Then it cuts to a couple in a car, promoting it's crystal clear stereo system, and the guy

sings the right lyrics, "Rocket Mannnnnn
Burning out a fuse up here alone"

- Then the wife says, "Ohhhhh burning out a fuse, up here alone."
- Then the husband says, "I told you it wasn't provolone"
- One of the worst times it ever happened to me was when I was in a car with my pastor in Shelby and we were listening to Toby Keith's "Shoulda been a cowboy"
 - Now I'll go through a country music phase every once in a while
 - I recently just got a Chevy Silverado so you know I've been on a full country kick since I got it
 - Going full Hickorian now
- But I have been listening to and hearing "Shoulda Been a Cowboy" since Ms Candy was blasting Bob 94.9 Country Radio on the bus ride to and from school every day when I was a kid

- And Toby came on, the nostalgia kicks in and I'm singing at the top of my lungs, "I SHOULD BEEN A COWBOY, SHOULD LEARNED TO ROLLLL AROUND"
- And skips stops the music and says, "What did you just say?"
 - I said, "What??"
 - He said, "Shoulda learned to what??"
 - "Roll Around"
 - He said, "Bro, it's rope and ride"
 - I said "No it's not, I've been listening to this song for 20 years!"
- But the chorus came back around, he turned it up and sure enough, I had been singing it wrong for all of this time
- And I have yet to live that one down
- But just like we can hear the same song over and over again, and mis hear the lyrics, in the same way, for thousands of years people have been hearing the Word of God, and reading the

Word of God and completely missing what it is actually saying.

- Mainly, we'll miss it because of what our main focus is
 - A historian once point out the biggest differences between the centuries in America
 - He said, in the 18th Century the focus was on living for God
 - In the 19th Century, the focus shifted to living for Country
 - Then in the 20th Century the focus shifted on living for Self
 - *"And we will spend most of our lives trying to reprioritize what we are primarily living for."*
 - You see, all three of those aspects are important, but if we get them out of order we'll miss what we are supposed to be seeing, especially with the Word of God

- *If we are primarily living for self, we will twist the word of God and make it about ourselves*
 - *If we primarily live for country, we will politicize the Word of God to fit an agenda*
 - *But if we primarily live for God, we will actually get it.*
- We saw in the beginning of Acts chapter 6, that the apostles, when faced with a problem, took the opportunity to set the priorities of the church.
 - And in them, in this order, the priorities of the church are:
 - 1. Prayer and the Word of God
 - 2. Unity
 - 3. Serving Tables
 - And this passage is actually where we get our core values from.
 - 1. GIVE HOPE: Hope is Primarily found in prayer and the Word of God
 - 2. CREATE COMMUNITY: United around the Word of God
 - 3. Then and only then can we effectively Serve the tables or: BE THE CHURCH
 - It has to stay in that order, because some would argue that we the church should be focused most on outreach, missions, and serving....however what good would it do if we can feed a mouth but cannot properly feed a soul.
 - “Man should not live on bread alone, but every Word that comes from the mouth of God”
 - Now, guys like Stephen and Philip that we are going to be studying the next two weeks, were appointed, in their primary roles within the church was to serve the tables...however, it is evident that their primary focus *in life* was still prayer and the Word of God
 - The problem was, the leaders opposing Stephen were all living for either self, or country...and have completely missed God,

even when He was standing right in front of their face.

- “And Stephen, full of grace and power, was doing great wonders and signs among the people. Then some of those who belonged to the synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called), and of the Cyrenians, and of the Alexandrians, and of those from Cilicia and Asia, rose up and disputed with Stephen. But they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking. Then they secretly instigated men who said, “We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God.” And they stirred up the people and the elders and the scribes, and they came upon him and seized him and brought him before the council, and they set up false witnesses who said, “This man never ceases to speak words against this holy place and the law, for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy

this place and will change the customs that Moses delivered to us.” And gazing at him, all who sat in the council saw that his face was like the face of an angel.” -Acts 6: 8-15 (ESV)

- Now, remember, Stephen was one of the Greek-speaking Jews, or Hellenistic Jews. So he would regularly attend the greek-speaking synagogue which was the synagogue of the Freedmen as mentioned in verse 9.
- Now, the leaders of this synagogue don't like Stephen coming in with the Gospel and disrupting things there like the apostles had been doing in the temple
- So they try to argue and dispute with him, but, one of my favorite phrases from this book is, *“They could not withstand the wisdom and Spirit with which he was speaking.”*
 - So essentially, they didn't like what he had to say, but he made too much sense to sensibly disagree with

- And the way he carried himself calmness and integrity made it impossible for them to accuse him of any wrong doing
- So what do they do? They can't contend with him in public conversation, so they secretively attack his character.
- They go around town, and find the like-minded people that see things like they do, the ones they know get the most riled up, "And say, pfft, you hear what Stephen said today?"
 - "No I wasn't there what happened?"
 - "Well you missed a doosie....now he's saying these blasphemous things. He's saying that Moses and the law don't matter anymore, that this Jesus is going to come back and destroy the Temple and smite us all...you shoulda heard it"
- Then they get enough people riled up, and angry, they form a mob, and take him to the council,
- Now, things have been brewing for this council. First they put Jesus on trial and got Pilate to sign off on His execution.
 - Then instead of squashing His following, this movement is flourishing.
 - Then the guys that were with Jesus while He was on earth, are now leading the people.
 - They have had them brought in multiple times, threatened and beaten them, but it just keeps getting worse!
- Now, the common ordinary men, the greek speakers even, that never even met Jesus are now preaching in His name!
- It's a stark contrast from Acts 5 that says, ***"Now many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles. And they were all together in Solomon's Portico. None of the rest dared join them, but the people held them in high esteem. And more than ever believers were added to the Lord,***

multitudes of both men and women” -Acts 5:12-14 (ESV)

- Well now, there are some that are daring to join them. Not only the apostles are preaching and performing signs and wonders but now even guys like Stephen are doing so!
 - Something is going to have to give for this council at some point.
- But they are listening to all of these witnesses coming forward, accusing Stephen, and they probably know that they are fabricated lies.
 - It probably directly reminds them of Jesus’ trial. They know what they did, and they now see other’s doing the same thing
 - But as these people are spewing these blatant lies, twisting things that he said to fit their narrative, the look over at Stephen and all of the council saw that he had *the face of an angel.*
- Man, what was that like? Was it just his demeanor, was there an actual glow? I don’t

know, but Luke tells us that even in the midst of his false accusations, he had this Heavenly aura about him, and the council couldn’t look away from.

- Ironically, this language brings the mind to the times that Moses would come back from meeting with God, and his face would be glowing. It would freak the people out, so he would wear a veil.
 - So Luke wants his reader to know, that Stephen who is being accused of blaspheming Moses, is actually a lot more like Moses than they know.
- So eventually, the high priest speaks up and says, ***“And the high priest said, “Are these things so?” -Acts 7:1 (ESV)***
 - Now, Stephen could have just said, “No!” “They’re lies, it’s not true, what I really said was....”
 - But Stephen wasn’t interested in defending himself. No, he is about to live out what

Peter encourages us to do when he said, **“... always [be] prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect,” -1 Peter 3:15 (ESV)**

- Now we are in the midst of a trial in which Stephen will present his defense.
 - He is being accused of blaspheming Moses, blaspheming God, blaspheming the Temple, and blaspheming the Law
 - And in his defense, Stephen is going to show the things they have been mishearing in the Scriptures for so long.
- **“And Stephen said: ‘Brothers and fathers, hear me. The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran, and said to him, ‘Go out from your land and from your kindred and go into the land 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 in which you are now living.’” -Acts 7:2-4 (ESV)

- So Stephen start this out by saying, “The God of Glory” which the only other time that God is referred to as the God of Glory is in Psalm 29, so in doing so, Stephen is showing his honor and reverence for God and the Scriptures. He’s not here to blaspheme them.
- Then, he’s being accused of blaspheming the Temple, in which they would say is the only place that you can meet with God—but he directs their attention to the fact that God met with Abraham, in Mesopotamia, out in the middle of nowhere, long before the Temple was ever even a thought.
- But nevertheless, God met with him, and promised him a land for his people that he would never see.

- Eventually God gave him a son, who would have a son, who would go on to father the 12 Patriarchs of Israel.
- ***“And the patriarchs, jealous of Joseph, sold him into Egypt; but God was with him and rescued him out of all his afflictions and gave him favor and wisdom before Pharaoh, king of Egypt, who made him ruler over Egypt and over all his household. Now there came a famine throughout all Egypt and Canaan, and great affliction, and our fathers could find no food. But when Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent out our fathers on their first visit. And on the second visit Joseph made himself known to his brothers, and Joseph's family became known to Pharaoh.” -Acts 7:9-13 (ESV)***
- So God had chosen Joseph to be a type of savior and deliverer for the people of Israel that God would use to save them from severe famine...but the great Patriarchs that the tribes

of Israel were named after, rejected him. Why? Because they were jealous.

- *Remind you of anything? In Matthew it says that Pilate was trying to get Jesus released because he knew that the only reason Jesus was handed over to him was because of the jealousy of the council*
- *In Acts 5 it says that the council was filled with jealousy when they arrested the apostles.*
- So Stephen is saying, “I’m just saying....these jealous patriarchs, had Joseph sold off and shipped off, supposing he was dead, but Joseph revealed himself upon the 2nd visit and saved Jacob and the whole family.
- Then all 75 of them came out to live in Egypt and be saved from the famine.
- ***“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. 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 forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brothers, the children of Israel. And seeing one of them being wronged, he defended the oppressed man and avenged him by striking down the Egyptian. He supposed that his brothers would understand that God was giving 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, saying, 'Who made you a ruler and a judge over us? Do you want to kill me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday?' At this retort Moses fled and became an exile in the land of Midian, where he became the father of two sons. "Now when forty years had passed, an angel appeared to him in the wilderness of Mount Sinai, in a flame of fire in a bush. When Moses saw it, he was amazed at the sight, and as he drew near to look, there came the voice of the Lord: 'I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob.' 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 have come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send you to Egypt.” -Acts 7:17-34 (ESV)

- So now, God has raised up and called another deliverer....and again He didn't need a Temple to do it.
 - God's presence made that very spot Holy Ground, not the structure.
- But yet, even this deliverer was rejected at first
- ***“This Moses, whom they rejected, saying, ‘Who made you a ruler and a judge?’—this man God sent as both ruler and redeemer by the hand of the angel who appeared to him in the bush. This man led them out, performing wonders and signs in Egypt and at the Red Sea and in the wilderness for forty years.” -Acts 7:35-36 (ESV)***

- Stephen goes on to explain that even within those 40 years and being delivered from Egypt, they still rejected Moses again.
- While Moses was getting the law that they hold so dear, their ancestors were making Aaron build from them a golden calf to worship!
 - Stephen says that their hearts turned back to Egypt.
 - In Exodus 33 God refers to them as a stiff-necked people
 - In Deuteronomy 10, they are instructed to circumcise their hearts and no longer be stubborn and stiff necked.
 - The rules and the laws, mean nothing if God doesn't have their hearts
- Then Stephen directs his message back to the Temple again
- Because you see, God never asked for the Temple

- He had them build for Him a tabernacle, a modest, mobile dwelling place for the presence of God
- God has always been a mobile God, He has never been confined to a space
- But it was David who asked God if they could build Him a temple and Solomon was the one who actually had it built but even Solomon said during the dedication of the Temple: ***“But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain You; how much less this house that I have built!” -1 Kings 8:27 (ESV)***
- No matter how grand, spectacular, and glorious the temple or any place of worship could ever be....it could never box God in.
- That’s why Stephen quotes Isaiah 66 when he said: ***“Yet the Most High does not dwell in houses made by hands, as the prophet says, “Heaven is My throne, and the earth is My footstool. What kind of house will you***

build for Me, says the Lord, or what is the place of My rest? Did not My hand make all these things?” -Acts 7:48-50 (ESV)

- So Stephen is not blaspheming anything!
 - They are the ones that have been mishearing, misreading, misrepresenting, and mis-teaching the Word of God. Because they have been missing what the Word of God was all about!
 - Because if you take the entirety of Scripture from Genesis to Revelation and you do not make Jesus as the central theme of it, you will completely miss what God is saying and doing
- That’s why Stephen uses two old testament figures that arguably foreshadow Jesus the most.
- **JOSEPH SLIDE:**
 - Joseph was favored by his father and his brothers hated him for it

- Jesus was favored by His Father and the world hated Him for it (Matt. 3:17)
 - Joseph was sold by his brothers for silver
- Jesus was sold by his disciple for silver
 - Joseph was wrongly accused and sent to prison
- Jesus was wrongly accused and sent to the grave
 - Joseph was faithful and came out of prison and was given all power and authority in Egypt
- Jesus was faithful on the cross and came out of the grave and was given all power and authority in Heaven and on Earth
 - Joseph may have sat down at the right hand of Pharaoh
- But Jesus sat down at the right hand of the Father
- **MOSES SLIDE:**
 - Pharaoh attempted to kill Moses as a baby
- Herod tried to kill Jesus as a baby (Matt. 2:16)
 - Moses left his royal position in Egypt to identify with the people of God
- Jesus left His royal position in Heaven to identify with us (Heb. 2:17)
 - Moses was rejected first time and accepted the 2nd time
- Jesus was rejected the first time, and according to Zechariah He will be accepted the 2nd time (Zech. 14:9)
 - Moses became a shepherd
- Jesus is the Good Shepherd (John 10:11)
 - Moses was the mediator of the Old Covenant
- Jesus is the mediator of the New Covenant (Heb. 9:15)
- Which is exactly why Moses said: “This is the Moses who said to the Israelites, ‘God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your brothers.’- Acts 7:37 (ESV)

- This is what this council is refusing to see!
- Stephen isn't blaspheming! They're just repeating history!
- And now Stephen flips the court room. They thought he was on trial, but now he switches from defense to prosecution after presenting his case:
- ***“You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered, you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it.” -Acts 7: 51-53 (ESV)***
- Now the ESV says that when they heard this they were enraged. But that is actually a poor translation
- More accurately: ***“When they heard these things they were cut to the heart, and they***

gnashed at him with their teeth.” -Acts 7:54 (NKJV)

- When the Word of God is presented clearly and truthfully, it cuts to the heart.
 - That's why the writer of Hebrews says that the Word of God is sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing between soul and spirit, judges the thoughts and intentions of the heart.
- However, when the Word of God cuts to the heart and demands a response there are only 2 responses that one will give.
- That response will either be repentance or anger.
 - To be lethargic about it means that the Word has not yet cut to the heart.
- So people will either hate it, or submit to it.
- And you can see the stark contrast of the responses:
 - You have one, who has submitted to the Word of God, facing injustice with the face of

an angel, clearly and calmly presenting truth.
Presented in such a way that cuts to the heart

- And those who have been cut to the heart decide to act just like their ancestors did.
- Once again they are rejecting a man of God, who is obviously reflecting His glory and presenting His truth
 - Luke says that they are so angry that they gnash their teeth, they stop their ears.
 - Filled with so much anger and hatred, that Stephen must know what's coming next.
- ***“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.” -Acts 7:55-56 (ESV)***
- Now, this is interesting because Stephen see's Jesus standing

- Every other mention of Jesus in Heaven has Him seated.
- The position of completed work.
- However, you have to understand that in ancient culture, the Throne Room also served as the Court Room.
- *And in the court room, only two people stand during a trial. The prosecutor, and the defense, the advocate.*
 - John tells us that we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous
 - Hebrews tells us that He always lives to make intercession for us.
- As one pastor stated, “As Stephen is confessing Jesus before man, Jesus is confessing Stephen before the Father.”
- And verse 59 says: ***“And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” And***

when he had said this, he fell asleep.” -Acts 7:59-60 (ESV)

- 2 of the same exact things that Jesus said on the cross
- It's not hard to see, as Joseph and Moses were foreshadows of Jesus, Stephen was a reflection of Jesus
- **Like Jesus:**
 - **Stephen was killed because of Jealousy (Matt 27:18)**
 - **His Trial was unjust and based on lies (Matt. 26:59-63)**
 - **He showed how the scriptures were all about Jesus, as Jesus did in (Luke 24:27)**
 - **He stayed calm in the midst of conflict (Mark 14:53-65)**
 - **Rebuked those who needed it clearly and with authority (Matt. 23:13)**
 - **He responds like Jesus does as he is dying (Luke 23:34)**

• ***And as Jesus's death built the church, Stephen's death would launch the church.***

- If you remember back to chapter 1, Jesus told the 120 that they would be His witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.
- But up to this point, the witnessing has only been happening in Jerusalem.
 - The movement wasn't moving
 - And God had been supernaturally protecting this church in it's formation. Angels busting guys out of prison, the Holy Spirit killing deceivers in the church, signs and wonders happening that we see causing thousands to come to faith and be baptized.
- But now, it seems God lowers His protection a bit. And He does so, in order to get the movement, moving.
- We see in chapter 8 verse 1, ***“And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea***

and Samaria, except the apostles” -Acts 8:1 (ESV)

- Now the 2nd region of the great commission is being impacted! And we know this to be the case because in verse 4 Luke tells us:

“Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word.” -Acts 8:4 (ESV)

- They didn't go about hiding, they went about being His witnesses in Judea and Samaria just as Jesus had commanded
 - Jesus' crucifixion couldn't stop them, arresting and beating the apostles couldn't stop them, and stoning Stephen wouldn't stop them either.
 - In fact, it would only further God's will.
 - Because just like Joseph told his brothers in Genesis chapter 50, “You meant it for evil, but God used it for good.”
 - That's why we can NEVER forget or look past the truth that we serve a God that works ALL things out for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purpose

- Because even when the enemy enacts evil on God's people, He can still work His purposes through it.
- That's why we are more than conquerors through Him who loves us
- Some may read this account about Stephen and think that he lost...he died, they silenced him!
- But Stephen didn't lose. Oh no, far from it. Jesus was standing there, welcoming him home into his victory.
 - Because the whole purpose of this movement was not to grow the church. That's just a means to an end. The ultimate goal is to get people to Heaven, and Stephen was the first one that got to go.
 - We will only think he lost if we don't truly believe that to live is Christ and to die is gain.
 - And God would use his death for his gain to be welcomed home in heaven and also for

the great gain of spreading the Gospel on earth as well.

- Think about it: How did Luke, get such detail of Stephen's speech here?

- This is the longest recorded sermon or speech recorded in the entire book. Longer than any we see from Peter or any of the apostles!
- Remember Luke was a doctor who kind of turned into an investigative reporter, and he told Theophilus, his benefactor, that he has carefully investigated everything that he has written in order to write in an orderly sequence.
- So who did he interview about Stephen?

- Well verse 58 says, ***“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.” -Acts 7:58 (ESV)***

- Now Saul as we'll talk about in more depth the week after next, was Gamaliel's star pupil

- A rising star in the Pharisaical world.
- But he would go on to be known as the Apostle Paul, the greatest missionary of the Gospel the world has ever known outside of the Person of Jesus Himself.
 - And Luke would accompany Paul on his missionary journeys
- And I can imagine, on at least one of those long boat rides across the sea... Luke sits down with Paul, as he recounts the day that he most regrets in his life.
 - It is so burned into his brain, he remembers his face looking like an angel, he remembers almost word for word the entire speech that Stephen preached to the council that day.
 - And he too was cut to the heart along with everyone else.
 - And he was just a protege at the time, he didn't throw a stone, but he held their coats.

- And he can't get over how Stephen died. Pleading for the Lord to not hold his death against them.
- Now he was wrestling with something within himself, but couldn't quite put his finger on it. But he's honest with Luke, he did approve of the execution.
- And he doubled down and began to hunt down other's like Stephen himself, men or women it didn't matter.
- But he still never forgot.
- And once God got ahold of him and changed the entire trajectory of his life, most scholars agree that Stephens sermon actually greatly shaped the theology with which Paul taught.
 - Paul goes into great detail in Romans about how Israel repeated history by rejecting Jesus as their Savior and Messiah
 - In Corinthians and Ephesians he expounds on how God is not limited to a temple but His people and His church are temples
- Like Stephen, he would teach in depth about how the purpose of the law was good, but because we couldn't keep the law — the law pointed to our need for Jesus!
- So Stephens death not only launched the Gospel message into Judea and Samaria, but it would also impact Paul who would eventually get the Gospel message to Rome which would get the Gospel message sent out to the Ends of the Earth as well.
- What the enemy means for evil, God uses for good.
- And no form of human or demonic opposition can ever stop the will and purposes of God.