

## **Acts 6:8-7:60**

### **Baby Dedication – Elijah Cisneros**

Do you "Jonathan and Casey" accept this child as a gift from the Lord? If so say we do.

Do you commit to raising Elijah in accordance to God's word? If so say we do.

And do you dedicate your home in the Pursuit of Jesus to live for His kingdom and to rest His grace? If so say we do.

Lastly, do you the Body of Christ agree to support and encourage, and hold the Cisneros family up in this commitment made before God? If so say we do.

Let's pray for Baby Elijah.

## **Stephan's Stand**

Good morning church, it is a joy to be here with you all this bright Sunday morning.

Hello to those of you watching online, we are so happy to have you with us as well.

This morning we have a lot of reading to get through as we continue our study of the Book of Acts, we will pick it up where we left of last time in Acts Chapter 6 verse 8, and we will go through and finish Chapter 7 as well.

**Let's pray, and we will get into the teaching.**

It was a summer night in Lake Havasu in the year 2008 when Jess and I got a call from a friend's girlfriend.

He was one of the tradesman I had befriended on the Jobsite.

Jess and I had spent some time with them in their home, and we had been sharing Jesus with them for a couple weeks prior to this.

She was crying over the phone as her and my friend got into an huge argument.

She pled with us to go and talk with him, he was drunk and she was leaving him with their kids.

In those days, Jess and I were so zealous, we went into every situation hoping to be able to share Jesus with someone.

We did not think this through however, and should have waited until morning at the news that he was drunk.

But we came in in a hurry, like the Ghostbusters, but we were Gospel Bringers.

We stepped out of the car, and we saw him burning her stuff in the driveway, again another clue we should have handled things at a different time.

We got close enough to see that he had a .357 revolver in his hands, and he began pointing it at his head.

I told Jess to go back to the car, as I went into the garage with Matt, and I looked behind me to see my

wife not submitting to my command, she was right by my right shoulder.

It was not long before he started pointing the gun at me, and looking down the barrel of such a magnificently powerful gun did something inside me.

I had only been saved but just a few years, and I can say that night my faith was solidified in that moment.

I had no fear, but a surreal peace, and as I looked at the gun pointed at my head, it was slow motion all the sudden, and the thought instantly came to mind, "I might be going to see Jesus right now."

And it was such a strange peace, I had been in similar situations when I ran with the devil, and I always had a fear of death.

The peace quickly went away, when the barrel went toward my wife, and things began to speed up again.

We pled with him to give us the gun, and luckily his drunken grip was not too effective, he began shouting and flailing his arms around, and the gun slipped out of his hands, I knew that was my moment.

We had a bit of full contact ministry that night, as I put him through the wall, and Jess went for the gun.

I held him tight, at the time I was framing houses, so I had a bit of strength to give a tight squeeze, and as I held him there, I felt his body yield, and he began to weep like a little child pleading for us to help him.

Now, Jess picked up the gun to find that there was no ammunition in the thing, and all that drama was for nothing.

So we prayed with him, and I came back in the morning to help him patch the drywall I put him through, and I shared Jesus with him.

We eventually got to baptize him, although addiction continued to grip his life.

But the precipice of death, or thinking I was at that point, that revealed a powerful truth to my new life with Jesus.

The prospect of death really reveals a lot about who we really are.

And the moment of death for some it reveals a terrible and eerie fear, and for others a wonderful spiritual beauty.

I have been at the side of many death beds, and there is always a peace with those who know their Savior, and know where they are going.

There is not many things more terrible than seeing a man desperately trying to hold onto every breath of their life because they are terrified about what happens after death.

For the believer there is hope and anticipation, and there is no worry or fear.

John Wesley's last words were, "The best of all is, God is with us, the best of all, God is with us, the best of all is, God is with us. Farewell!" Hughes p. 102

Well this morning we will see the final day in the life of a man named Stephen, how he lived, what he spoke, and how he died.

You remember in the beginning of the chapter 6 we were introduced to 7 deacons who were commissioned to the physical work of distribution in the ministry.

Their purpose was for the church not to neglect the ministry, and to also free up the teaching leaders to teach God's Word.

This was all to settle a dispute between the Hellenist or Greek Cultured Jews and the Hebrews.

These chosen men were fully qualified men, and it is interesting that a Deacon had pretty much the same qualifications as an Elder or Pastor would have today.

You see it is all about Calling not Position.

If your Calling is in the Cleaning Crew, and you serve in that position with integrity and unto God with all your heart, then it is a Great Calling.

The best thing for the health of the Church is for each of us to find our place, and serve the Lord with all our hearts void of any ambition or false piety.

When we do, we move forward with Great Strives in our work for the Lord, and like we saw last week, the Word of God will spread in the most effective way possible.

Now, as we move on and finish Chapter 6 and move into Chapter 7, we will be given an amplified view of one of these Seven Deacons.

And we will see here, position within the Church never limits what God can do with your life and ministry.

Stephen the table server will have a profound and historic ministry.

He will deliver the longest recorded sermon in the Bible, and my challenge this morning is not to make this the longest sermon that I have ever preached.

Stephan means crown, and it is the Greek Word for the reward given to a civic leader or to the crown of glory given to a victor in the Olympic competitions.

And Stephan will wear the crown of being the first Christian Martyr.

He will die standing firm in his faith in Jesus, and he will die at the hands of the same treacherous men who killed his Savior.

So let's get into the text... we will start with verse 8 of Chapter 6...

### **Stephen Accused of Blasphemy**

6:8 And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people.

Look at the testimony that this table server in the church had here.

Stephan was a man full of faith and power, who did great wonders and signs among the people.

Remember when they were selecting these ministry leaders a prerequisite was that they be filled with the Holy Spirit.

We see Stephan was a man of faith, meaning he was Christian, and maybe you think that that is a no brainer, for Christians to serve in ministry.

But understand something about the professionalism of our day, the filling of the Holy Spirit and a person being saved sometimes is a secondary issue to talents and ability.

I have heard pastors boast how they no longer raise up servants from within their ministry, but they hire people straight out of college now or outside of the church to do the work of the ministry.

I have even heard of churches hiring secular musicians to play on their worship teams, they don't even love Jesus, yet they are being entrusted to lead people in worshipping Jesus. Makes no sense.

Stephan, was no such hireling, he was a man whom God approved through signs and wonders, and he was a man filled with the Holy Spirit.

He was a man mighty in the Spirit and as we will see a man mighty in the Word, his devotional life was disciplined.

He is Christ like in his actions and in his passion for truth.

And this here shows us that the power of the Holy Spirit was not only for the Apostles but for all believers.

None of us can live a truly victorious Christian life without the Holy Spirit indwelling and empowering us.

Stephan had no ambition, he was satisfied serving the Lord waiting on tables.

We are told in **Zech. 4:10 For who has despised the day of small things?**

I think of my Pastor, Pastor Ray in Havasu, he knew he was called to be a pastor, and yet he served in the parking lot ministry for years, his own pastor never inviting him to the pastoral training class, and yet he stayed faithful serving with all joy and committed, and not despising the days of small things.

Of course God through various circumstances eventually called him to pastor a church.

Jess and I never had ambition to serve in the pastorate in fact one lady once prophesied over us just after we got saved, and said I would be a pastor one day, I thought she was a crazy lady, and that is how I referred to her.

Then it all reversed after I knew I was called to the ministry, Satan sent people into my life that said I would never be a pastor.

I was all mixed up, so we never pursued the position, God brought us to it.

Don't despise the days of small things, just be faithful where you are... nothing is small in God's eyes, He is just wanting faithfulness on your part.

So, as God is doing these signs and wonders through Stephan, and using Stephan powerfully, we read now starting in verse 9...

9 Then there arose some from what is called the Synagogue of the Freedmen (Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and those from Cilicia and Asia), disputing with Stephen. 10 And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke. 11 Then they secretly induced men to say, "We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God." 12 And they stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes; and they came upon him, seized him, and brought him to the council. 13 They also set up false witnesses who said, "This man does not cease to speak

blasphemous words against this holy place and the law; 14 for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs which Moses delivered to us." 15 And all who sat in the council, looking steadfastly at him, saw his face as the face of an angel.

We have here now men from the synagogue of the Freedmen gathered together.

Freedmen were Jews from the Dispersion, who were once in captivity who had formed their own synagogue, they would be prominently Greek speaking Jews, and it was perhaps Stephen's former place of worship.

Interesting too, Saul who became the Apostle Paul, his hometown was Tarsus located in Cilicia mentioned here, and he too likely attended this synagogue as well here in Jerusalem.

We will see at the end of Chapter 7 Saul giving his approval to Stephen's death.

Here we are told that a dispute broke out, or really a debate, the Greek word means discussion.

And listen if you have ever been to the Middle East, you will understand this is their normal communication.

It is nothing like I have ever experienced, and it is my least favorite part about traveling to that part of the world.

Just buying a piece of bread leads to a debate on what it should cost, and a fierce back and forth happens until a deal is brokered over the bread, and then a handshake and transaction.

Last time, I had a man physically holding me in his shop trying to sell me a souvenir, and I had to grab the little big man, and kindly move him out of my face, and to the side so I could find someone else to barter with, as he shouted at me telling me how I wasted his time.

Nothing is discussed politely and it is a bit of a culture shock to us here in America.

I tried to reason with some of the shop owners about our culture, and how the sales to these tourist would go up if they just seasoned their sales pitch with a little sugar.

But it was to no avail, this kind of dialogue is engrained in them from centuries ago.

So we can picture this kind of communication about faith and salvation, and Stephen standing his ground, but we see he is perhaps infuriating them further by his calm spirit, Luke notes that he had the face of an angel.

He is a man full of the Spirit, and the fruits of the Spirit are listed for us in **Gal 5:22-23 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control...**

And church, please know, opposition will always come against Truth, we should expect it.

When we make our stand with Christ and speak boldly about our Savior, we will experience persecution.

And Stephen sets the standard here, he did not get worked up over it all.

Here it got so bad for the opposition, that it says they could not resist Stephen's Wisdom, of course given to him as promised from the Holy Spirit.

Jesus assured His followers in **Luke 12:11-12** "Now when they bring you to the synagogues and magistrates and authorities, do not worry about how or what you should answer, or what you should say. 12 For the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say."

Stephen a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit was too great of a challenge for them, and since they could not debate him victoriously, they begun to make up lies about him.

And he quietly listened as charges were brought against him.

Notice the accusations match that of those that were falsely hurled at our Lord Jesus.

They accused him regarding their pride and glory their Temple, and against their traditions with Moses.

And he sat there with the radiance of the presence of God, with his face shining like an angel.

They were red faced angry, and he was patient and waited for his time to speak.

So now we move into Chapter 7, starting with verse 1...

### **Stephen's Address: The Call of Abraham**

7:1 Then the high priest said, "Are these things so?"

Now this is what we call in evangelism an open door, these are the kinds of questions we hope for as believers, one that requires the questioners to listen to our response.

Now, understand Stephen is before the council or Sanhedrin, the High Court of the Jews, and these are the very same men, and the very same high priest that sent Jesus to the cross for our sins.

This is a hostile and dangerous court, and Stephen knows that like Jesus, they would look to kill him for a wrong response here.

But we will not detect an ounce of fear in Stephen, he is willing to accept the outcome no matter what, for the sake of Truth and His Savior.

And his response, and long sermon show us the knowledge and study time this young table server was filled with.

He has an in-depth knowledge of Israel's History and their traditions, and even the Old Testament.

And Stephen will attack the Jews on three of their most sacred ideals, and the source of their greatest pride, the Promise Land, the Law, and the Temple.

Kent Hughes refers to them as Judaism's three sacred COWS.

The first sacred cow Stephen goes after is their Land.

And he will first use Abraham and then the Twelve sons of Jacob to prove that blessing came to them outside of the Promise Land.

He will also reveal how God met with even Moses outside the Holy Land.

Let's read verses 2-36...

2 And he said, "Brethren and fathers, listen: The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Haran, 3 and said to him, 'Get out of your country and from your relatives, and come to a land that I will show you.' 4 Then he came out of the land of the Chaldeans and dwelt in Haran. And from there, when his father was dead, He moved him to this land in which you now dwell. 5 And God gave him no inheritance in it, not even enough to set his foot on. But even when Abraham had no child, He promised to give it to him for a possession, and to his descendants after him. 6 But God spoke in this way: that his descendants would dwell in a foreign land, and that they would bring them into bondage and oppress them four hundred years. 7 'And the nation to whom

they will be in bondage I will judge,' said God, 'and after that they shall come out and serve Me in this place.' 8 Then He gave him the covenant of circumcision; and so Abraham begot Isaac and circumcised him on the eighth day; and Isaac begot Jacob, and Jacob begot the twelve patriarchs.

### **The Patriarchs in Egypt**

9 "And the patriarchs, becoming envious, sold Joseph into Egypt. But God was with him 10 and delivered him out of all his troubles, and gave him favor and wisdom in the presence of Pharaoh, king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house. 11 Now a famine and great trouble came over all the land of Egypt and Canaan, and our fathers found no sustenance. 12 But when Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent out our fathers first. 13 And the second time Joseph was made known to his brothers, and Joseph's family became known to the Pharaoh. 14 Then Joseph sent and called his father Jacob and all his relatives to him, seventy-five people. 15 So Jacob went down to Egypt; and he died, he and our fathers. 16 And they were carried back to Shechem and laid in the tomb that Abraham bought for a sum of money from the sons of Hamor, the father of Shechem.

### **God Delivers Israel by Moses**

17 "But when the time of the promise drew near which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and

multiplied in Egypt 18 till another king arose who did not know Joseph. 19 This man dealt treacherously with our people, and oppressed our forefathers, making them expose their babies, so that they might not live.

20 At this time Moses was born, and was well pleasing to God; and he was brought up in his father's house for three months. 21 But when he was set out, Pharaoh's daughter took him away and brought him up as her own son. 22 And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and deeds.

23 "Now when he was forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren, the children of Israel. 24 And seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended and avenged him who was oppressed, and struck down the Egyptian. 25 For he supposed that his brethren would have understood that God would deliver them by his hand, but they did not understand. 26 And the next day he appeared to two of them as they were fighting, and tried to reconcile them, saying, 'Men, you are brethren; why do you wrong one another?' 27 But he who did his neighbor wrong pushed him away, saying, 'Who made you a ruler and a judge over us? 28 Do you want to kill me as you did the Egyptian yesterday?' 29 Then, at this saying, Moses fled and became a dweller in the land of Midian, where he had two sons.

30 "And when forty years had passed, an Angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire in a bush, in the wilderness of Mount Sinai. 31 When Moses saw it, he

marveled at the sight; and as he drew near to observe, the voice of the Lord came to him, 32 saying, 'I am the God of your fathers — the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' And Moses trembled and dared not look. 33 'Then the Lord said to him, "Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground. 34 I have surely seen the oppression of My people who are in Egypt; I have heard their groaning and have come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send you to Egypt."

35 "This Moses whom they rejected, saying, 'Who made you a ruler and a judge?' is the one God sent to be a ruler and a deliverer by the hand of the Angel who appeared to him in the bush. 36 He brought them out, after he had shown wonders and signs in the land of Egypt, and in the Red Sea, and in the wilderness forty years.

So first Abraham is mentioned to show that although he lived in the Land, he received none of the promises himself.

In fact when God revealed Himself to Abraham he was in Mesopotamia, and was called by God to leave the land of the Chaldeans.

The point Stephan is trying to make is that God blessed Abraham even before he set foot on the Holy Land, the Land was not the Blessing.

In verses 9-16 Stephen then used the Twelve sons of Jacob to prove this even further.

God blessed them through Joseph in Egypt, when the only part of the Holy Land that they had possessed at that time was the family tomb.

And Stephen's final strike against the Land, was his example of Moses.

God met and took care of Moses outside of the Holy Land, in Egypt, and finally in Midian.

Moses was commissioned near Mt. Sinai, and God called the ground there Holy Ground, this was outside the Promised Land.

In fact the greatest miracles in Israel's history took place in Egypt and at the Red Sea and in their desert wanderings, not in the Holy Land.

Stephen stuck down one sacred cow here, two to go...

The next stronghold in the Jewish religion he went for was the exaltation of the Law and the reverence of Moses.

Look now at verses 37-43...

### **Israel Rebels Against God**

37 "This is that Moses who said to the children of Israel, 'The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your brethren. Him you shall hear.'

38 "This is he who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the Angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and with our fathers, the one who received the living oracles to give to us, 39 whom our fathers would not obey, but rejected. And in their hearts they turned back to Egypt, 40 saying to Aaron, 'Make us gods to go before us; as for this Moses who brought us out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.' 41 And they made a calf in those days, offered sacrifices to the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their own hands. 42 Then God turned and gave them up to worship the host of heaven, as it is written in the book of the Prophets:

'Did you offer Me slaughtered animals and sacrifices during forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel? 43 You also took up the tabernacle of Moloch, And the star of your god Remphan, Images which you made to worship; And I will carry you away beyond Babylon.'

Stephen's argument is based on the words of Moses himself, out of **Deut. 18:15** "The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear,"

Moses himself foretold of the day when Jesus would be raised up, a Prophet like Moses.

The Jews hope of redemption went beyond Moses to this Prophet that they rejected, Jesus Christ.

Stephen pointed out too that the Jews historically rejected Moses and the Law anyway.

And for those of you Wednesday Night attendees, we are seeing this very clearly in Israel's history.

They had real trouble living up to the Law of Moses.

Even right after God did incredible signs and wonders in their deliverance out of Egypt, they almost immediately went into idolatry, as Stephen reminds them of Aaron's golden calf.

The Law and Moses could never save the Jews, and even Moses told them to look for another Prophet.

And the second sacred cow is crushed here...

The final and third sacred cow that Stephen crushes will be their magnificent Temple and all of its Glory...

Starting in verse 44...

### **God's True Tabernacle**

44 "Our fathers had the tabernacle of witness in the wilderness, as He appointed, instructing Moses to make it according to the pattern that he had seen, 45 which our fathers, having received it in turn, also brought with Joshua into the land possessed by the Gentiles, whom God drove out before the face of our fathers until the days of David, 46 who found favor before God and asked to find a dwelling for the God of Jacob. 47 But Solomon built Him a house.

48 "However, the Most High does not dwell in temples made with hands, as the prophet says:

49 'Heaven is My throne, And earth is My footstool. What house will you build for Me? says the Lord, Or what is the place of My rest? 50 Has My hand not made all these things?'

They thought God was with them because of the Temple, Stephan reminded them what the prophet Isaiah said in...

Isa 66:1-2

Thus says the Lord:

"Heaven is My throne,  
And earth is My footstool.

Where is the house that you will build Me?

And where is the place of My rest?

2 For all those things My hand has made,"

God could not be housed in anything built by man's hands.

God desires a personal relationship with each and every man.

The Temple could not save them anymore then this church building can save you.

1 Cor. 6:19 Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?

Jesus brought a New Way for man to relate to God on this earth.

Stephen masterfully brings down their whole system.

And all the sacred cows were slain.

The Jewish rulers thought they were something because they were in the Promised Land, they had the Law of Moses, and the Temple was in Jerusalem.

And in one fall swoop Stephen broke it all apart.

And after doing so, Stephen will now have the upper hand, and he will bring the message home and he will all but sign his own death warrant here.

### **Israel Resists the Holy Spirit**

51 "You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you. 52 Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers, 53 who have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept it."

Stephen calls out their rigid and unchanging hearts, they were stiff-necked, never able to hear truth or obey it.

Their hearts were uncircumcised, meaning they were still led by their fleshly desires.

They missed their own Deliverer, Jesus, and just like their fathers persecuted the prophets of old, they murdered Jesus.

We can picture Stephen standing as firm as Rock, looking fiercely into their raging eyes, as he stridently tells them they are responsible for the death of their own Savior.

That was the final nail in the coffin, these murderous men had a reputation to uphold, and Stephen was fully aware of the danger, but fearlessly lays out the truth.

He was doomed to die, but for Stephen, that was no doom at all, but a privilege.

He had lived like Jesus, spoke like Jesus, and now he will gladly die like Jesus.

### **Stephen the Martyr**

54 When they heard these things they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with their teeth.

“A preacher knows that he is in trouble when the congregation begins to frown, but he is in worse trouble when they grind their teeth!” Hughes p. 106

These men here had enough, they could not outwit Stephen, their lies could not defeat him, and they were cut to the heart by the truths that he railed against them.

Teeth are being gnashed, and growls are going forth, and this has gotten dangerous for our beloved table waiter.

And he remains unmoved here...

55 But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, 56 and said, "Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!"

Although humanity rejected Stephen's message and final stand, it brought Jesus to His feet with arms wide open ready to meet His First of millions of martyrs.

Stephen refers to Jesus as the Son of Man, a title Jesus used often for Himself, a Messianic title, the Jews would know it well.

Stephen was of one heart here with His Savior, the deepest bond, that of suffering, what powerful communion this is.

This vision of his Risen Lord gives Stephen what he needs to finish out his legacy and ministry here on earth as he finishes well.

Look now starting in verse 57...

57 Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord; 58 and they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man

named Saul. 59 And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on God and saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." 60 Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not charge them with this sin." And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

Remember these were the most respected and dignified aristocrats, and here they are turned into vile, murderous animals.

They acted illegally, brutally, immorally, but they had no remorse.

Fredrick Buechner describes this scene this way:

“Stoning somebody to death, even somebody as young and healthy as Stephen, is not an easy task. You do not get the job done with the first few rocks and broken bottles, and even after you get the man down, it is a long, hot business. To prepare themselves for the workout, they stripped to the waist and got somebody to keep an eye on their things till they were through. And the man they got was a fire-breathing arch-conservative Jew named Saul, who was there because he thoroughly approved of what they were doing.”

Frederick Buechner, *Peculiar Treasures* p.162

And Stephen ended the scene with the same Grace Jesus showed upon the cross, this was the Overflow of Christ's Spirit running through Him.

Grace is God's unmerited, unconditional favor, and Stephen lived it out in a powerful display.

You see death reveals what each of us truly is, Stephan until his last second here on earth lived for Christ.

He did what Jesus would do, said what Jesus would say, and died as Jesus died.

He stood tall, not on pride in himself, not with an ego of a learned man, he did not stand tall on his own wisdom and in his own strength.

In the end his last stand was on the Grace of God.

I wonder if today was your last day here on earth, what would be written of your legacy.

Where are you making your stand in this life, what do people see in you, in your ministry, in your witness?

I hope that they would see our God's matchless Grace.

So, Stephen's death is recorded here for us, the first to die for our Lord Jesus, the first of many throughout history for whom this world was not worthy.

Was Stephen's death worth it, well, the Apostle Paul might think so, his life was deeply impacted by it.

It was the death of Stephen that tormented his memory, perhaps this is even what Jesus was referring to when Jesus called Paul into the ministry when He said in...

**Acts 26:14 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.'**

It may be that Stephen's death kept goading this zealous student of Gamaliel.

Saul could not shake the memory of this moment, and it kept nudging him and leading him toward the throne of Grace.

And you see, this is the kind of witness you can leave behind as well, when like Stephen, you live full of faith, full of the Holy Spirit, and full of God's Word.

Jesus' Passions become our Passions, although they will be unpopular, they can be effective.

We have nothing to lose when we go all in for the Cause of Christ, because the best is beyond this life, this is why we can live with no fear of what this world can do to us.

Paul said in **Phil 1:21 For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.**

Here on earth we live for Him, and in eternity we will find nothing was lost in this life.

Church this is the Truth Stephen puts before us this morning, there is nothing in this life worth holding onto compared to what is to come.

I'll end with this verse, this perspective Jesus gave to us...

**Matt 16:24-27 "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. 25 For whoever desires to save his life will lose it,**

but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. 26 For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? 27 For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works.

Let's pray...