

Stephen, Sermon, Stones

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- [0 : 00] We're in the second in our four-part series called The Serving Seven, looking at the early life of the church from Acts chapter 6 to Acts chapter 8.
- I wonder if anybody here bears an uncanny resemblance to somebody else in their family. Now, if Reuben and Joshua were still here, they'd pay an uncanny resemblance to each other.
- Perhaps you look remarkably like a brother, or your dad, or your great-uncle Gilbert, or great-auntie Agatha. Put your hand up if people have ever said to you, you look like somebody else in your family.
- Keep your hand up if you thought that was a good comment and you really enjoyed it. It's a funny thing, isn't it? Family resemblance. So I thought we'd have a little quiz this morning. I'm going to show you a famous child.
- Well, a child of a famous person. And if you know who it is, put your hand up and we'll see. There's no prizes. But you're good anyway.
- [1 : 05] Okay, so who's that person's dad? Andrew Yardley. Tom Hanks. Look at that. Remarkably similar.
- These three boys, who's their dad? We're at school, so we need to put hands up. Charlie. David Beckham.
- Charlie is so up with pop culture. It's unbelievable. Who's this person's dad? Thane. Will Smith. Jaden and Will Smith.
- Who is this person's dad? Cristiano Ronaldo. I mean, the similarity is unbelievable.
- Two more. Who's this person's dad? Anybody. Brunsfield, I thought we were cooler than this.
- [2 : 03] Brad Pitt. Well done, Simone. You saved everyone's blushes. This is the freakiest one I found this week. Who's her mum? So it's the actress, Julie Ann Moore.
- I mean, that's scary, isn't it? If somebody, if your mum looked like that, I'd probably go for a different hair colour, a few other things. As we dive into our passage this morning, we're going to start to see that there's two great family resemblances going on.
- That the two groups of people in question look remarkably like people that have gone before. We're looking at this guy, Stephen.
- He has an incredibly short but incredibly inspiring account of his life. The name Stephen means Victor's crown.
- And you have to say, when we look and read about him in just this chapter and a half, we have to say that's a very fitting name. We were introduced to him just last week in chapter 6, verse 5.
- [3 : 13] When they had to choose seven people to serve. It says, this proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit.

And now in chapter 6, verse 8, Stephen takes centre stage. Chapter 6, verse 8 to chapter 6, verse 15. And all of chapter 7 are all about Stephen. And we're going to see that he's very worthy of study.

He is the ministry equivalent of a firework. He appears quickly. He goes up. He makes a big bang that has enormous consequences for the early church. And then quickly, by the end of the chapter, he'll be dead.

What we see is that Stephen bears an uncanny resemblance to Jesus. And we'll see that the Sanhedrin bear an uncanny resemblance to Old Testament Israel.

So let's read together. Chapter 6, verse 8, 1 to 15. 8 to 15. Now Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, performed great wonders and signs among the people.

[4 : 21] Opposition arose, however, from members of the synagogue of the freedmen, as it was called Jews of Cyrene and Alexandria, as well as the province of Cilicia and Asia, who began to argue with Stephen.

But they could not stand up against the wisdom the Spirit gave him as he spoke. Then they secretly persuaded some men to say, We have heard Stephen speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God.

So they stirred up the people and the elders and the teachers of the law. They seized Stephen and brought him before the Sanhedrin. They produced false witnesses who testified, This fellow never stopped speaking against this holy place and against the law.

For we have heard him say, This Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs Moses handed down to us. All who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel.

I think the first thing we see is that Stephen is living as Christ himself lived. What is Stephen spending his time doing? Well, he's spending his time teaching and doing greater miraculous signs.

[5 : 34] He is speaking the truth about Jesus, and God is working through him to do wonderful things to authenticate that message. That what Jesus spent his life doing, he now continues to do through Stephen.

Stephen strong in word and in deed. And chapter 6 verse 7 seems to be the catalyst for this opposition.

In chapter 6 verse 7, we read that a great number of priests were leaving the synagogue and turning to follow Jesus. This is greatly worrying if you're invested in Judaism.

They've already seen 7,000 defectors turn from Old Testament Judaism to serve the Lord Jesus, who they know is the Messiah. And now some of the people that are really into it, the leaders, are making that same journey as they cross the floor.

Something needs to be done. They're going to lose even more if they can't stop this Jesus movement in its tracks.

[6 : 37] And it's interesting because when they have this debate amongst themselves in the Sanhedrin, a Jewish teacher called Gamaliel stands up and says, if this is of men, it will die, but if it's of God, you won't be able to stop it because you'll be fighting against God himself.

Well, it seems that they're now going to weigh in and fight against God himself. And they're not going to fight by the Queensbury rules. They're going to fight dirty. And so it starts in the synagogue of the freedmen.

These Jews captured by Pompey in 63 AD, deported to Rome. They become this own separatist group of people who are Jews who speak Latin, which is quite unusual.

And then in the years that follow, they're freed. And a lot of their descendants move back to Jerusalem and they start their own synagogue. And this is where the real uprising comes against Stephen.

And see that they get the Jews from other synagogues, from the Cyrene synagogue and the Alexandria synagogue and the Cilician synagogue and the Asian synagogue.

[7 : 43] In fact, in the Talmud, it tells us that there's 230 different synagogues in Jerusalem. The Jerusalem is not, the Judaism of Jerusalem is not homogenous.

They're so fragmented. And isn't that so contrasting to what we see in chapter 6, verses 1 to 7? That there all Jews are brought together as one under the Lord Jesus.

Because religion breeds competition and there's winners and losers and division, but grace humbles everyone and means that there can be real unity. And so the opposition to the gospel grows.

Coalition come together. And they think, right, let's destroy this person, this person Stephen, in an argument. And so they began to debate.

But in chapter 10, it says they couldn't. They couldn't win. His logic was foolproof. His understanding of the scriptures was profound. And every time they stood up against him, they were the ones who left with their tail between their legs.

[8 : 54] And so what do most people do when they lose in an argument consistently? Well, you start to fight dirty. You start to fight under the table. It's the Moscow rules.

Verse 11, they spread rumors. Verse 12a, they raised a rabble. Verse 12b, they violently seized him. This word seized is literally the word dragged, which is very different to Acts chapter 4, verse 3, where Peter and John are summoned before the Sanhedrin.

This is all ramped up. This is a lot more aggressive. In 12b, they have a kangaroo court. What about being tried before a Sanhedrin who have a vested interest in you being declared guilty?

Verse 13, they produce false witnesses who make false accusations. You have to say that looks remarkably like Jesus. Jesus is strong in word and deed.

Everyone tries to trap him and they're the ones who end up being trapped in their thinking. And so what happens to Jesus? Well, they make false witnesses. They drag him before the Sanhedrin.

[10 : 08] They bring false accusations that will never stick. Stephen's life and Jesus' life bear an uncanny family resemblance. His words confound.

His miracles astound. His enemies are incensed. The Jews are sneaky. The witnesses are false. The accusations are untrue. And the jury is loaded. And putting together the accusations in this first bit, it seems that Stephen stands accused of four things.

And here they are. This is so important because this gives us a way to understand the sermon. The first one is this. He's blasphemed God. Look at 11b. We have heard Stephen speak blasphemous words against God.

Then look at the second accusation. He's blasphemed Moses. We have heard Stephen speak blasphemous words against Moses. The fact that they put Moses before God, I think, tells us something very illustrative of first century Judaism in Palestine.

The third accusation. He's spoken against the law. This fellow never stops speaking against the law. End of verse 13 and 14.

[11 : 23] And he's spoken against the temple. We've heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place. These are, in essence, the four great pillars of first century Judaism.

God, Moses, the law, and the temple. These are big deals on which the whole thing's founded. And they're saying, Stephen, you've railroaded the lot of them. You've trampled over every single one.

You are a clear and present danger to Judaism. So standing before this 71 strong Sanhedrin, Stephen has on his rap sheet the defamation of the four great things that these Jews hold dear.

God, Moses, law, temple. This trial makes Nixon's water gate look like child's play. These charges are heinous. And so he launches into a great defense.

We saw that he's spoken as Christ speaks in chapter 7. Sorry, the reference is wrong there. And so he speaks as Christ would speak.

[12 : 30] Then the high priest asks Stephen, are these charges true? The high priest is inviting Stephen to give in a defense. And what a defense he gives. Because he starts by telling them the truth about God.

7 verse 2 to 16. Let me read this. To this he replied, brothers and fathers, listen to me. He's showing reverence to them. He's saying we're brothers.

We both get Judaism the same way. And fathers, because these are the ruling court. The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham while he was still in Mesopotamia.

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

He gave him no inheritance here, not even enough ground to set his foot on. But God promised him that he and his descendants after him would possess the land, even though at that time Abraham had no child.

[13 : 36] God spoke to him in this way. For 400 years your descendants will be strangers in a country, not their own. And they will be enslaved and ill-treated. But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves. God said, and afterwards they will come out of the country and worship me in this place.

Then he gave Abraham the covenant of circumcision. And Abraham became the father of Isaac and circumcised him eight days after his birth. Later Isaac became the father of Jacob and Jacob became the father of the twelve patriarchs.

Because the patriarchs were jealous of Joseph, they sold him as a slave into Egypt. But God was with him and rescued him from all his troubles. He gave Joseph wisdom and enabled him to gain the goodwill of Pharaoh, king of Egypt.

So Pharaoh made him ruler over Egypt and all his places. Then a famine struck all Egypt and Canaan, bringing great suffering, and our ancestors could not find food.

When Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent out our forefathers on their first visit. On their second visit, Joseph told his brothers who he was. And Pharaoh learned about Joseph's family.

[14 : 39] After this, Joseph sent for his father Jacob and his whole family, 75 in all. Then Jacob went down to Egypt, where he and our ancestors died. Their bodies were brought back to Shechem and placed in the tomb that Abraham had bought from the sons of Hamor at Shechem for a certain sum of money.

What Stephen has in essence done there is he's done a Jewish debate. He starts chronologically. He starts with Abraham. Abraham. And what he lays out is a totally orthodox understanding of Jewish history.

How, by the sovereign call of God, Abraham left his home and went to the place that God had promised. He stops in Haran, waiting for terror to die.

When terror has died, God moves him on again, and he enters the promised land. He then takes us to Joseph and the fact that Joseph's brothers were ratbags. And they threw him in a well, and they sold him to the Ishmaelites, and he ended up in Egypt.

And yet God was faithful. And he rose up in Potiphar's house, and then he was thrown in prison. And then from prison, he rose to Pharaoh's court in the end. And God had foreplanned this so that he might be there to save his family when the famine struck.

[16:00] Stephen is saying this is Rabbi 101 stuff. We think the same about this. You saying I blaspheme God, let me tell you, my understanding is the same as yours.

I'm utterly orthodox on this place and stuff. But notice this isn't just a defense. That into the mix he throws the fact that these patriarchs, these people that many of the Sanhedrin had descended from, they were ratbags.

They missed it. They missed who Joseph was. They were the ones who threw him in a well. They were the ones who got him deported to Egypt. He shows them that they're flawed.

He shows them that their rose-tinted review of history is not right. And so he just opens up the line of conflict.

He says Abraham failed to trust the promise of God. He needed to be moved on from Harrah. He says Joseph's brothers were jealous. He says God was faithful throughout. This is the warning shot across the Sanhedrin bow that as we move on in, Stephen's defense will see growing bigger and bigger, which will eventually get Stephen killed.

[17:18] He's giving them some hard home truths that they look remarkably like their ancestors. But Stephen's just getting started. Because he's going to go on and tell them the truth about Moses.

Verse 17. As the time drew near for God to fulfill his promises to Abraham, the number of our people in Egypt had greatly increased. Then a new king to whom Joseph meant nothing came to power in Egypt.

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

For three months he was cared for by his family. When he was placed outside, Pharaoh's daughter took him and brought him up as her own. Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action.

When Moses was 40 years old, he decided to visit his own people, the Israelites. He saw one of them being ill-treated by an Egyptian. So he went to the defense and avenged him by killing the Egyptian.

[18:23] Moses thought that his own people would realize that God was using him to rescue them, but they did not. The next day Moses came upon two Israelites who were fighting. He tried to reconcile them by saying, Men, you are brothers.

Why do you want to hurt each other? But the man who was ill-treating the other pushed Moses aside and said, Who made you ruler and judge over us? Are you thinking of killing me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday?

When Moses heard this, he fled to Midian, where he settled as a foreigner and had two sons. After 40 years had passed, an angel appeared to Moses in the flames of a burning bush in the desert near Mount Sinai.

When he saw this, he was amazed at the sight. As he went over to get a closer look, he heard the Lord say, I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Moses trembled with fear and did not dare to look. Then the Lord said to him, Take off your sandals for the place where you are standing is holy ground. I have indeed seen the oppression of my people in Egypt.

[19 : 23] I have heard their groaning and have come down to set them free. Now come, I will send you back to Egypt. This is the same Moses they had rejected with the words, Who made you ruler and judge?

He was sent to be their ruler and deliverer by God himself. Through the angel who appeared to him in the bush, he led them out of Egypt and performed wonders and signs in Egypt to the Red Sea and for 40 years in the wilderness.

He now jumps forward in the chronology in the remembering Israel's history and he sets upon Moses whom he was accused of blaspheming. And again he points out that his understanding is perfectly orthodox.

He's not speaking against Moses in any shape or form. He is just applying it to them. But he also points out that when Moses tried to deliver the people, they totally missed it.

When prematurely he takes matters into his own hands and kills the Egyptian, it was not God's people who rallied around him. In fact, they rejected him as a leader and he fled to Midian.

[20 : 36] They accused Stephen of blaspheming Moses and Stephen says, No, my understanding is as yours is. But then starts to sow the seeds of doubt.

Moses came as a deliverer and your ancestors rejected him. Is that not kind of like what you're doing to Jesus right now? Who's come to deliver you and yet you have rejected him.

He starts to point out as well that Moses was flawed. He jumped the gun. He was a murderer. And so blaspheming Moses is nothing at all because Moses is just a mere man chosen graciously by God to be involved in his plan.

And then Stephen starts to address the law in verses 37 to 43. This is the Moses who told the Israelites, God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your own people.

He was in the assembly in the wilderness with the angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai and with our ancestors and he received living words to pass on to us. But our ancestors refused to obey him.

[21 : 46] Instead, they rejected him and in their hearts turned back to Egypt. They told Aaron, Make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who led us out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him.

That was the time they made an idol in the form of a calf. They brought sacrifices to it and reveled in what their own hands had made. But God turned away from them and gave them over to the worship of the sun, moon and stars.

This agrees with what is written in the book of the prophets. Did you bring me sacrifices and offerings for 40 years in the wilderness, people of Israel? You take up the tabernacle of Moloch and the star of God, Rephan, the idols you made to worship.

Therefore, I will send you into exile beyond Babylon. And yet again, Stephen says, My understanding of the law is orthodox. It was delivered by God to Moses.

See that he calls them living words. This law was living words to tell Israel what their God was like. But see how Stephen flips it again.

[22 : 56] Because he says, Right at the outset, Right at the outset, Sanhedrin, your ancestors, Old Testament Israel, they didn't want to hear it. In fact, they thought they'd quite like to make a golden calf and bow down and worship that instead.

It's not me, says Stephen, who's blaspheming God or Moses or the law. It's you who are just like your ancestors.

You're failing to put it together. And the only reason you're still God's people is because God is gracious. Because left to you or me, we would have given up ages ago.

And then I love this quote from Amos. We're all now experts in Amos. Because he takes them on from Sinai to the wilderness wanderings.

And he said, God was so gracious, he gave you a tabernacle to worship him in the desert. And so when you got up in the morning and undid the flaps of your tent, you went off to the tabernacle to worship.

[23 : 55] But in your tent at night, when the flaps were down, you brought out all the Egyptian gods from under your pillow. You're so duplicitous. You're not worshipping God at all, you Sanhedrin.

You're just worshipping things that you have made. You're photoshopping your history. And it's putting you in great peril because you missed who Jesus was.

They're getting hot under the collar, but here's the howitzer that comes in in verse 44. Our ancestors had the tabernacle of the covenant law.

With them in the wilderness. It had been made as God directed Moses, according to the pattern he had seen. After receiving the tabernacle, our ancestors under Joshua brought it with them when they took the land from the nations God drove out before them.

It remained in the land until the time of David, who enjoyed God's favour and asked that he might provide a dwelling place for the God of Jacob. But it was Solomon who built a house for him.

[25 : 03] However, the Most High does not live in houses made by human 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 where will my resting place be? Has not my hand made all things? The last accusation that they level at Stephen is that he's spoken against the temple.

And what he does here is absolute genius. Stephen gives them a lesson in the evolution of the temple from a tent in the wilderness to the splendour of Solomon's temple.

He says the tabernacle was built according to the specifications of God. They had the tabernacle for all their 40 years of wilderness wanderings.

They crossed the Jordan with it. It was in Israel as they conquered the land. And it was only at David's time that David said, I'd like to make a house for you, God.

[26 : 06] But God said, David, you've got too much blood on your hands. Let's leave it for Solomon. Now Solomon's a little bit of an embarrassment. He was greatly wise, but he was a great womanizer as well.

And it was through those seeds of rebellion that the kingdom is split. The problem is, of course, is that that temple, Solomon's temple, was destroyed.

And this is Zerubbabel's temple that was built after the exile in the book of Ezra. But the other problem is, is that the actual temple they're actually in now was not just Zerubbabel's temple.

It was extended and expanded by Herod the Great. Herod the Great of Christmas. He built loads of extensions. In fact, the Sanhedrin room they're now in wasn't even part of the original temple.

This is a bit of an embarrassment. They're saying you spoke against the temple and Stephen is saying, well, which temple? Because you've had a lot. And God seems a lot less united to them than you are.

[27 : 10] You've actually started worshipping a premises rather than the God who built all things. And he says you're so small-minded as if God could live in a house.

God made absolutely everything. Why do you think it's totally bound up with a premises? And so Stephen is telling them that your view of God is too small.

You've domesticated him. You've put him in a box. And it's now just obeying laws and rules. It's very awkward. Stephen stands condemned about four things.

You've spoken against God. You've spoken against Moses. You've spoken against the law. You've spoken against the temple. And Stephen says, I haven't. The problem is not with me. The problem is with you.

Now I think if he stops there, they all shake hands and said, well played. You really are as good at debating as we thought. But he finishes because now the accused becomes the accuser and he tells them the truth about them.

[28 : 14] How about this for the conclusion of a sermon? You sniff-neck people. Your hearts and ears are still uncircumcised. You are just like your ancestors.

You always resist the Holy Spirit. Was there ever a point a prophet your ancestors did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the righteous one.

And now you have betrayed and murdered him. You have received the law that was given through angels, but you have not obeyed it. You stiff-necked people.

The idea of being an oxen, that it doesn't matter how hard you pull on the rein, it will not divert from the trajectory that it's on. We still have that phrase today, don't we? We sometimes call people a stubborn old mule because they can't be turned once they've made up their decision.

That's what Stephen is saying about these people, your stubborn old mules. That you're so wedded to Judaism, you've totally missed the point. You're just like your ancestors.

[29 : 14] You persecuted the prophets. You killed everyone who predicted Jesus was coming. And even when Jesus turned up, you killed him. You murdered your own Messiah because you're so stiff-necked and calloused.

What a way to finish. You're wayward like the patriarchs. You're disobedient idolaters like the exodus generation. You're duplicitous like the campers at Sinai.

You're small-minded about God. You bear the family resemblance of Old Testament Israel. You persecuted the prophets. And you missed and murdered the Messiah. It's not actually me who's on trial, says Stephen.

It's you. And you're all guilty. You're uncircumcised. You may as well be Gentiles because you're ignorant of all these things. You've arrogantly chosen other things and self over Jesus.

What a sermon. He stands accused of four things and he flips the table and says, no, it's you. You're all guilty before God.

[30 : 20] Well, you start telling religious people that their religion's not working. They don't like it. And so verse 54, and then we're finished.

When the members of the Sanhedrin heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.

Look, he said, I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God. At this, they covered their ears and yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, dragged him out of the city and began to stone him.

Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul. While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. Then he fell on his knees and cried out, Lord, do not hold this sin against them.

When he had said this, he fell asleep and Saul approved of their killing him. On that day, a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.

[31 : 26] The last thing about Stephen is he died like Christ died. He died outside of a city. He died because religious people wouldn't hear what he said because they were stubborn.

It literally says when the members of the Sanhedrin heard this, they were cut to the heart. Exactly what happens when Stephen preaches his sermon in Acts chapter 2. But this time they're not crying, what must we do to be saved?

They're crying, we must kill him. We won't listen. They started gnashing their teeth, you know, like when you upset a cat and it goes, that's what's going on here. They drag him outside of the city.

They don't have authority to kill him, but it doesn't matter. This man must die. He's a real clear and present danger to us. He looks and he sees heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God, which is really interesting because when Jesus stands before the Sanhedrin, he tells the high priest that you'll see me.

You'll see heaven open. The Son of Man standing at the right hand of God coming on the clouds of heaven. It seems to have happened. And they take him out and they stone him.

[32 : 43] Now, stoning people's hard work. I googled it this week. How long does it take to stone people? I wonder what GCHQ made of that. It takes over an hour.

Sweaty work in a hot climate, so they lay their coats at Saul's feet. Why do they lay it at Saul's feet? Because he's the head honcho. He's the guy approving this.

He's the guy who says, let's not go to see the Romans to get an imperial edict. Let's just do it. Give me your coats. Get on with it. Let's silence him. And then how does Stephen die?

Lord, do not hold this sin against them. That's remarkably like Jesus, isn't it? Father, forgive them. For they know not what they're doing. This is a devastating *deja vu*.

But we see in Stephen someone who lived as Jesus lived, spoke as Jesus spoke, died as Jesus died, and so forth things. Very quick, a sentence each.

[33 : 43] Choices. We've all got a choice to make. Is what this says about Jesus true, or is it not? Some of us, like Old Testament Israel, are ardently resisting what we're coming to know is true.

That we think, actually, if I turn to Jesus, there's a lot of stuff that I need to give up. A lot of behavior I need to change. There's people I need to tell who may not be too happy.

And so I wonder, are we? Are some of us, like those stiff-necked Sanhedrins, not changing course? I'm not going to turn around and turn to Jesus.

Maybe that's you. Maybe that's somebody you know. Well, let's pray that they would not continue on in futility. There's a real challenge as well. A real challenge that we see Old Testament Israel bear the family resemblance of Old Testament Israel, Israel, and we see that Stephen bears the family resemblance of Jesus.

I wonder, whose resemblance do we bear? Do we live like Jesus lived, speaking of him, trying to do his work with him, empowered by the Holy Spirit?

[34 : 55] Or do we look exactly like we did before we met Jesus? See that there's a real cost. Stephen, in this passage, plays an absolutely flawless game.

He tells nothing but the truth, the whole truth. He tells the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. And yet he's killed for it, and there's a real cost to telling people the truth about Jesus.

And then, as we're going to see next week, there's a consequence. Stephen is the first martyr, but there's going to be many more in church history to come. And as we read in the second half of 8, chapter 1, it is this that catalyzes Christianity to go global.

That the apostles stay, but everyone else spreads. And suddenly the message is going to get out there as it's couriered by people that have been expelled from Jerusalem and now are going to go to Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

It will get to Scotland. And why will it get to Scotland? Because it was catalyzed by this. It's very true that God will bury his messengers, but he'll never bury his message.

[36 : 01] And he'll even use the martyrdom of his messengers to amplify his message from east to west and across the world. Why don't I pray?

Father God, we think of those martyrs under the altar of God who cry out, How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?

God says, Just a little while till the blood of the martyrs is complete. Father, we thank you for the many people in history who have loved Jesus most even to the point of death.

Father, we thank you that Stephen was the trailblazer of martyrdom because he loved Jesus most, he looked like Jesus most. And Father, that meant that it cost him everything.

And yet, Lord, thank you that he's with you and I pray that the lessons we've learned this morning from his life about the choice we must make to follow Jesus, the real challenge to live all of our lives for Jesus, Father, the real cost there is involved in that.

[37 : 23] And Lord, that we might be involved in taking this message out from this place, Lord, into Brunfield, into Edinburgh, into wherever we live, even to the ends of the earth.

Father, thank you that your message is unstoppable. So Lord, would you amplify it through our lives, we pray. In Jesus' name. Amen.