

Stephen's Defence

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[0 : 00] My thanks to David and Jean and Crawford and John. Thank you. Well, this morning we're continuing in our series on Acts.

And bear with us, folks. This is the longest section that we're going to be in in this whole series. So we're going to get there somehow before lunch. And those three readings didn't represent the whole passage, actually, either.

But we'll get there. But first, let me tell you a little story. You're probably all familiar with the fable of the tortoise and the hare, yes?

So the hare is mocking the tortoise for being so slow. The tortoise challenges the hare to a race. To which the hare finds this absolutely ridiculous and hilarious.

And accepts. So they get going. And the hare is out of sight in no time. While the tortoise slowly, surely plods along.

[1 : 05] So fast is the hare, actually, that he decides to have a little nap along the way. Thinking that it's even funnier that he could have a sleep and still win the race.

However, the tortoise doesn't sleep. Just keeps going on slowly, steadily. And eventually passes by the sleeping hare without him noticing.

And by the time the hare wakes up and realizes that the tortoise has passed, it's just too late. The tortoise is too close to the finish line. And the hare cannot catch up and win the race.

The tortoise wins the race to the astonishment and despair of the hare. Now, imagine. Imagine before the race, you were given a little tip about the tortoise.

Some betting man gave you a tip about the tortoise. A very convincing insider persuaded you to back this tortoise in this race. Put your money on the tortoise.

[2 : 12] In fact, not only that, put everything you've got on the tortoise. No two-way bets. No playing it safe. Get your mortgage on the tortoise.

You'd be thinking, surely not. But the man was convinced and he said he knew something about this. So you're like, okay, okay.

I'll put everything on the tortoise. The starter pistol goes. The hare's away. And you just feel like a fool. What have I done?

The tortoise is trundling along and the hare's out of sight. Now, it might seem foolish. At that point. Now you're thinking for sure the tortoise just does not have a chance against the hare.

But even more than that, you begin to question what you've done. How much trouble you're going to get into of your wife when she finds out you've put everything on the tortoise. What have you done putting everything on the line for that painfully slow little creature?

[3 : 21] But here's the thing. And we're going to explore this throughout. When the world tells you that Jesus is the wrong one to back. Which the world does. We must remember that like the hare, the world is asleep.

We must remember that. And this is going to become apparent as we go through this. So Acts chapter 7. Of all the speeches and acts. And Acts is a book of speeches and movements. Why is this one the longest?

Why is Luke recording this one? I mean, it's not even from the lips of an apostle. One of the chosen witnesses. Why this? What does it tell us?

What does Luke make this the longest speech and acts for? What's going on around this particular speech and acts? We know it's long. We've already had three readings. And we've not even got to the full speech.

And these, remember, seven chosen men of which Stephen was one of. Were chosen to serve tables while the apostles served the word. So what is this man Stephen doing with this really long speech?

[4 : 34] Well, look at the movement. For instance, in Acts chapter 6, we've moved from Hebrews to Hellenists as well. From 12 specific leaders to an additional seven as well.

And I believe it's no coincidence that the movement comes right before a geographical movement. From Jerusalem out into the Hellenistic regions. And isn't this what Jesus said in Acts chapter 1?

Jerusalem and then all Judea and Samaria and into the ends of the earth. And so it's interesting that one who effectively makes that movement happen is a Hellenist.

Stephen and Philip. And how do they do it? By their words. And so the question remains, why them? Why are they preaching if the twelve were chosen by Jesus to be his witnesses in all the earth?

And why are they preaching if they were chosen to serve tables? So that the apostles could preach? Well, an important thing to remember, particularly here Luke draws attention to.

[5 : 39] Is that everything about this person Stephen is like Jesus. Everything about him is like Jesus. So there's this group of synagogue folks who are disputing with Stephen.

And they were Jews from outside of Jerusalem just like Stephen was. Remember Paul is from Tarsus as well. So there's a reason to think that Paul's probably around at this point.

And although he was trained by Gamaliel, he is a recent passive, a rather passive school. Stephen's punchy speech is probably one of the things that pushes Paul over the edge.

I don't know if you know later on when Paul's giving his testimony, he says that Jesus said to him, Why do you kick against the goads? Why is it so hard that you kick against the goads? The pricks?

You know, I think Stephen's speech, Stephen himself was probably one of those things that was poking at Paul's heart. But he wouldn't listen. And so Stephen seized and dragged before the court with these accusations leveled against him.

[6 : 46] What are the accusations? Well, first accusation is this. We heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God.

Then the people are stirred up. Stephen's seized false witnesses are set up. Sounds familiar, doesn't it? And they say, This man never ceases to speak words against this holy place and the law.

For we've heard them say that Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place. And he'll change the customs of Moses that he delivered to us. Everyone's watching. This is a court scene.

It's not a church service. Stephen's not delivering a sermon. He's delivering a defence. He's in the court. Everyone's watching. How do you plead? That's what they say, isn't it?

Acts 7 verse 1. The high priest says, Are these things so? What do you say for yourself, Stephen? Now he could have said at that moment, Yes, they are so.

- [7 : 48] You've caught me. That's right. He could have also said, No, they're mistaken. They've got it wrong. He could have even stayed silent. But instead, he brings up the past.
- Sometimes that happens in an argument, doesn't it? Someone brings up the past. It's usually for a point. So there's some really important things about their own history that they're forgetting. Certain things they misunderstand when Jesus taught.
- And now the very same things from the mouth of Stephen. A follower of Jesus filled with the spirit of Jesus. And Stephen's not surprised at what happens after this.
- He knows that despite his wisdom, his speech won't get many handshakes or applause or compliments. Because he knows what they did to Jesus, his Lord. Didn't Jesus say that that would happen?
- They do this to the master. Will they not do it to the servants? And so many Christians, you see, Stephen does what the spirit does when it fills a person.
- [8 : 53] When the spirit empowers a person, the spirit empowers a person to speak. And that's what Stephen does. And so many Christians, and I've been there myself, are nervous about sharing the gospel.
- About speaking truth, especially in sticky situations. What if I say the wrong thing? What if I don't know what to say? What if I'm too afraid? Or what if my mind goes blank?
- Or what if I offend somebody? Or what if I get myself in to bother? Are we relying too much on ourselves? To do what Jesus said the spirit would do through us?
- Has Jesus not equipped us with his own spirit to help us? To do the whole gospel speaking thing? There's no Christian who cannot speak a truth about Jesus.
- No one. Because the spirit is within us, helping us. And not that it will always be eloquent or polished. But we must trust what Jesus is doing, even with us.
- [9 : 57] Now, I know we've done some readings. I'd like to read Stephen's speech and try to do it in the way that I think he would have delivered it. Because I want us to understand why he says what he says in the way that he says.
- What it means and how the things that he says absolutely smash through the accusations. So we'll make comments along the way. And if you want, you can have it in front of you to follow along.
- But we'll read this. And remember, there's four counts of blasphemy. Blasphemy against God, against Moses, against the law, and against the temple. And you don't get much more blasphemous than that.
- So that's what to have in mind when we go through Stephen's speech. The controversy is over what he's saying about God and about Moses and about the law and about the temple. And that what he's saying centres about this man, Jesus of Nazareth.
- And so Stephen's history speech is not full or chronological, but specifically tailored to deal with these false accusations and show how they, the ones that are accusing him, are actually the guilty ones, like their forefathers.
- [11 : 04] And also, this is what to look out for as well as I read Stephen's speech. Luke is writing to a particular audience far removed from this. Luke's readers, see, these were people who were under pressure from the Jews, wondering if they'd backed the wrong horse, as it were.
- You're, you're, you're, you're way off following this man, Jesus, doing this Christian thing. You're way off. This is historical Judaism. What are you doing running off with this? The pressure that these people were under, like us today and in every age when the world says that Christianity is the tortoise.

You'd be foolish to back it. We must remember that like the hare, the world is asleep. And Stephen's speech will expose that fact. So here we go. The high priest says, well Stephen, how do you plead?

Are these things so? Stephen says, brothers and fathers, hear me. the God of glory appeared to our father, Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, not here, before he lived in Haran.

And he said to him, go out from your land and from your kindred, go into the land that I will show you. 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.

[12 : 34] Yet he gave him no inheritance in it. No, not even in this land. Not even a foot's length. But promised to give it to him as a possession and to his offspring after him.

Though he had no child. After God spoke to this effect, that his offspring would be sojourners in a land belonging to others who would enslave them and afflict them for 400 years.

But I will judge the nation that they serve, said God. And after that, they shall come out and worship me in this place. And he gave him the covenant of circumcision, yeah, of which you hold dearly to.

And so Abraham became the father of Isaac and circumcised him on the eighth day and Abraham and Isaac became the father of Jacob and Jacob of the 12 patriarchs. And the patriarchs, our fathers, who you love, jealous of Joseph, this is what they've done.

They sold him into slavery. Sold him into Egypt. But God was with him in Egypt. Not with the patriarch, with him in Egypt.

[13 : 48] And he rescued him out of all his afflictions. And he gave him favor in Egypt. And wisdom before Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, who made him, Joseph, who was sold by our fathers.

He 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 their second visit, Joseph made himself known.

Not the first visit. On the second visit, Joseph made himself known to his brothers. Joseph's family became known to the Pharaoh. And Joseph sent and summoned Jacob, his father, and all his kindred, 75 persons in all.

And Jacob went down to Egypt and died. He and our fathers. And they were carried back to Shechem and laid in the tomb that Abraham had bought for a sum of silver from the sons of Hamor and Shechem.

[14 : 55] 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.

And he dealt shrewdly with our race and forced our fathers to expose their infants so they would not be kept alive. At this time, Moses was born.

And he was beautiful in God's sight. 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. Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and he was mighty in his words and deeds.

And 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 at that point 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.

- [16 : 12] Why do you wrong each other? But the man who was wronging his neighbour thrust him aside, saying, Who made you ruler and 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 a 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 look. Then the Lord said to him, Take off your 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.

I have heard their groanings and I have come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send you to Egypt. This Moses, this Moses whom they rejected, saying, Who made you a ruler and judge?

- [17 : 24] 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.

Just like Jesus. Just like the apostles. Just like Stephen. And at the Red Sea and in the wilderness for 40 years. This is the Moses who said to the Israelites, God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers.

This is the one who was in the congregation of the wilderness with the angel who spoke to him at Mount Sinai. And with our fathers, he received living oracles given to us. our fathers refused.

They refused to obey him but thrust him aside. And in their hearts they turned to Egypt saying to Aaron, Make way for us. Make for us a gods who will go before us.

As for this Moses who led us out into the land of Egypt, out from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him. Well, do you not know what has become of Jesus?

- [18 : 32] They made a calf in those days and offered a sacrifice to the idol and were rejoicing in the works of their hands. But God turned away and gave them over to worship the hosts of heaven as it is written in the book of the prophets.

Did you bring to me slain beasts and sacrifices during the 40 years in the wilderness, O house of Israel? This is what you did. You took up the tent of Moloch and the star of your God, Rephan, the images that you made to worship.

And I will send you into exile beyond Babylon. Our fathers had the tent of witness in the wilderness, just as he who spoke to Moses directed him to make it according to the pattern that he had seen.

Our fathers in turn brought it in with Joshua when they dispossessed the nations that God drove out before our fathers. So it was until the days of David who found favor in the sight of God and asked to find a dwelling place for the God of Jacob.

But it was Solomon, his son, who built a house for him. Yet the Most High, the Most High, does not dwell in houses made by hands. Don't be ridiculous.

- [19 : 42] The prophets said that 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?

You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit as your fathers did you do also. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute?

And they've killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered. You who receive the law as delivered by angels and yet did not keep it.

Now when they heard these things, they were enraged. They ground their teeth at him. But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God. And Jesus, standing at the right hand of God, and he said, Behold, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.

But they cried out with a loud voice. They stopped their ears and they rushed together at him. And they cast him out of the city and they stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul.

[20 : 55] And as they were stoning Stephen, they called out, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. Falling to his knees, he cried out with a loud voice, Lord, do not hold this sin against them.

And when he said this, he fell asleep. And then Luke goes on to write, Saul approved of his execution and there arose that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem.

They were all scattered, all of them throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria except the apostles. And devout men buried Stephen and made a great lamentation over him. But Saul was ravaging the church, entering house after house.

He dragged off men and women and committed them to prison. Now doesn't that sound like a dreadful defeat for the church?

Up to this point, the movement's seen massive success. Thousands have been joining the Jesus movement, thousands upon thousands experiencing great success in Jerusalem.

[22 : 00] Even when they got into trouble, things would work out good. More and more people were believing. The church was growing bigger every day. They were fearless and full of joy until a young preacher was executed.

What a blow to the church. The whole church was scattered. Scattered and hunted down, imprisoned and tortured. See, up to this point, it wouldn't have been too difficult to invite someone to church, would it?

Up to this point, it was hugely attractive and successful. But now it's taken a fearful turn. Instead of joy, there's mourning. Instead of gathering, there's scattering. Where is God in all of this?

What is Jesus doing with this church? I thought he was the risen Lord. Where is he? But if you read on, you'll see that Jesus' mission is very much on track.

Seems like a blow to the church on the ground, but Jesus is very much in control. He did not lie when he said, I will build my church and nothing, not even the gates of Hades will prevail against it.

[23 : 09] See, it might seem like today there are things prevailing against the church. Sin inside the church at times, persecution outside, people being scattered from the church, the church not being able to gather, people being imprisoned and killed.

But the efforts of those against Christ only serve to advance his kingdom. They only do that because Jesus is Lord. See, Jesus doesn't want you to do what you think, what you think, or what the world deems successful and strong.

Jesus doesn't want your success or even your strength. He wants you. Jesus doesn't want crowd pleasers and world lovers. He wants gospel proclaimers.

The proclaimers. Would you walk 500 miles? Sorry. It's not in your success that the gospel advances. It's not even in your strength that the church grows.

It's in your weakness and your death. See, being faithful against the current and even faithful unto death. Look again at Stephen's trial and death.

[24 : 20] What seems like a terrible blow to the success of the mission looks in many ways like the death of Jesus. Both Jesus and Stephen had opponents who couldn't withstand their wisdom.

They have people and leaders against them. They are both attested by wonders and signs. They are both brought before the Sanhedrin and the high priest. They are both falsely accused by false witnesses.

and they are both accused over the issue of the destruction of the temple and the man-made nature of it. They are both questioned by the high priest. They are both charged with blasphemy.

They both speak of the Son of Man and glory. They both commit their spirit. They both cry out in a loud voice and they both pray for forgiveness for their executors. It's no coincidence Luke hasn't falsely made Stephen out to be like Jesus.

He does it for a good reason. See the Holy Spirit has conformed Stephen to be like Jesus in word and deed and even in death. Not only does this push the mission forward but here's the wonderful thing Jesus is standing right there to welcome Stephen into heaven.

[25 : 36] Standing well done good and faithful servant the world is not worthy of you. See up to this point the activities centered around Jerusalem and particularly the temple.

Jesus said you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and this is what happened in Acts 1 to 7 and the church wasn't around the temple because they thought that it was still the center of worship or God's dwelling.

They're not at the temple because they think God is particularly there. See this was the mistake of the nation and so they not only worshipped at the temple they practically worshipped the temple itself like an idol as though it could contain God.

The temple was theirs and in it they thought that God was theirs. The temple can't contain God. Not even this earth can contain God.

And see we mustn't think like that either. See neither can we contain God in a building made with human hands. Nor can we presume on God's grace and claim sole possession of him as if he owes it to us or as if he cannot show his grace elsewhere.

[26 : 51] In fact we cannot do very much at all with God but thank God that he can do much with us. So the church was around the temple a lot because it was their mission field.

They'd been gaining ground particularly when Stephen was preaching in chapter 6 it says that even a great many priests became obedient to the faith but then the nation did to Stephen what they did to Jesus.

What they did to John the Baptist. What they did to all the prophets. What they did to Moses. What they did to Joseph. What they have always done.

Except the difference is this time they should no longer be confused about whether Jesus is the Messiah. Jesus has been raised as the Messiah.

And him his resurrection has been the biggest thing that everyone's been going on about since. The apostles have been proclaiming this with great power. With wonders and signs many come into faith ever since.

[27 : 53] People being miraculously healed. Miraculously set free from prison. There's nothing stopping this movement. And so once more it comes to a head. And filled with Jesus spirit.

Conformed to be like Jesus. Stephen walks in the footsteps of his Lord. And this is the final chance for the nation. What are you going to do? Do you not see that he is Lord?

Jesus is the true temple folks. That's what they didn't get. Jesus is the place where heaven meets earth. In him God is dwelling with man.

Emmanuel. But the lack of belief in Israel and in the world, the lack of belief isn't because it's unbelievable.

Rather it's because the nation and the world is asleep. So what their fathers did, they do also. They've always done that. They always will. It's no surprise then that after Stephen's death, all the activity leaves the temple.

[28 : 58] Jerusalem and goes out to Hellenists and Gentiles. People have a choice. We all have a choice. There's responsibility. Jesus does not endorse their actions.

But nevertheless, Jesus is in control. He is Lord and his plan is underway and nothing's going to stop it. So don't feel sorry for Stephen. As Jesus said in Revelation 2.10, be faithful unto death and I will give you the crown of life, which is a very fitting reward for Stephanos, whose name means crown.

And Jesus stands. The one who is seated at the right hand of God is standing, ready to welcome Stephen away from that world and into his presence. And likewise, he'll be there for any one of us to welcome us in.

The thing that they just didn't get was that God cannot be condemned. He doesn't dwell in houses. They've been rejecting God all along. It's been evident in how they've treated those who God has sent.

See, Joseph was chosen to bring salvation, but his brothers, the patriarchs, rejected him. Moses was chosen by God to bring salvation, but the people rejected him.

[30 : 15] And interestingly, Stephen brings out the fact that they reject them at their first coming, but recognize them at their second. Joseph came to them, but they sold him into slavery. On their first visit, they knew him not, but he was made known on their second.

He was finally known when it was undeniable that he was ruler. Likewise, Moses came to them at 40, supposing that they would understand that God was giving them salvation by his hand, but they didn't.

They rejected him. He went to Midian, and he returned after 40 years, and it was evident who he was. And this is the same with Jesus. People have rejected the world, the nation, has rejected Jesus, but he is coming again, and there will be no denying who Jesus really is.

Jesus is coming again, and this time he will be recognized by all. And Stephen uses the same kind of wording in verse 35 about Moses, as Peter does in chapter 2 about Jesus.

Stephen says, this Moses, whom they rejected, God sent as both ruler and redeemer. Remember, Peter said, this Jesus, whom you crucified, God has made him both Lord and Christ.

[31 : 31] And so their faulty theology is exposed. You want your history? This is your history. You always resist the Holy Spirit. You always reject God. You have always rejected those who God sent.

You who love Moses so much, you who rely on him and the law and circumcision, even him, even he called you stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart. You who love the temple so much and think because of it that God is with you, God doesn't dwell in houses made by man.

He never asked for a temple. That was never his plan and could never contain him. Instead, you worship the temple like you worship the golden calf.

That's your history. See, Stephen's theology here is correct because it was given to him by the Spirit of God. Moses said a prophet like him would come.

That's Jesus. The law would be fulfilled in a man. That's Jesus. The temple was a shadow of things to come. That's Jesus. When the substance comes, the shadow is no longer needed.

[32 : 36] When the reality itself comes, the shadow disappears. And so everything turns away after this point from the temple in Jerusalem. And they reject Jesus through Stephen.

They still reject the proper understanding of what it's all about. And although it looks like a defeat, it's actually a defeat on the part of the nation. Although there's death and persecution, the people mourning instead of rejoicing, the people being scattered instead of gathering, although this all looks like the church got weaker, it actually served to move the mission to the next phase, Judea and Samaria.

You've not backed the wrong horse. Although we don't experience this kind of persecution here today in this country, we're actually the outliers in the history of church.

Persecution is more normative elsewhere in the world, certainly throughout church history. But nevertheless, the world is like the hare, always mocking Christianity.

Christianity. And like Noah, they mock the ark of salvation because they doubt that the flood of judgment is really coming. Jesus is coming a second time.

[33 : 48] Like Joseph and Moses, he will be recognized as Lord by all. So folks, never underestimate what Jesus is doing with you, with this church.

This church is his church and you belong to him. you are not unstoppable, but you are his and he is unstoppable. You don't need to be strong, you are his and he is mighty to save.

You don't need to be successful, but you are his and his mission never fails. You don't need to build the church yourself, it is his church and he will build it. And even if it looks weak, never think that weakness is something that he cannot or does not use.

what we must do is speak the good news. Speak about Jesus, even in our weakness, even in our stumbling, even when we feel useless, because he has given his spirit to do that.

And when it looks like everything is going wrong, when things look weak, when you feel weak, when you feel like you're losing and it looks like defeat, remember the cross and what came of that.

[34 : 57] the Son of Man is standing at the right hand of God. Jesus is in control. See, he walked through weakness and death and that is where he was victorious.

He's the risen Lord. His mission is his and the people are his and we belong to him and a great many others belong to him as well. They just do not know it yet.

It's like when Paul is in Corinth and Jesus says to him, stay here. Against the tide of persecution, stay here. There's many people in this city who belong to me and they need to hear.

Folks, there's a great many more people that belong to Jesus. They just don't know it yet. But by his spirit we go out and proclaim the good news, his people will come. This church is his and he will build it.

And if it looks weak, let us not be fooled. If it seems long, let us remain sober and awake. If it leads to death, let us always remain faithful for it's leading to glory and we will be welcomed by our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

[36 : 04] Let me pray. Lord, may you help us by your spirit to live as you lived and die as you died.

Help us to rely not on our own strength or success but on your spirit and grace. Help us not to doubt but to be confident in your truth. Help us not to be intimidated but loosen our lips that your spirit may speak through us.

And Lord, help us not to cling to life but to let the spirit lead us to be faithful through weakness and death, knowing Christ will be glorified and knowing that he will welcome us home when he sees fit.

May you be glorified, Lord, for you truly are Lord and Christ. May the whole world know it. May your name be known, not just among us but across all the earth.

We pray in Jesus' name for his glory. Amen. Thank you. Folks, at times it might seem like the church is the tortoise going slow and left behind, like the world has raced ahead, like we need to catch up and get with the times.

[37:18] But make no mistake, the world is asleep to the things of God. But this is what Jesus has said. Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me to repay each one for what he has done.

I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end. Blessed are those who wash their robes so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates.

The Spirit and the Bride say come and let the one who hears say come and let the one who thirsts come and let the one who desires take the water of life without price.

He who testifies to these things says surely I am coming soon. Amen. Come Lord Jesus, the grace of the Lord Jesus be with you all.

Amen.