

Standing Tall: Acts 6:8-7:60

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[0 : 00] It's great to worship with you all and Exalt and magnify the name of Christ together as a body I was listening to a podcast yesterday in which a round table of educated intellectual philosophic men We're talking with the meaning of life the purpose of life And as they talked I listened and took mental notes Because one of the things that separates believers from the world Is our definition our view on what this life is all about One of them said that ultimately the purpose of life is to become the best version of yourself But to find meaning and value in this body on this earth is that you would continually improve till you become the best version of yourself

Another one said that helping others altruism is the best way to think of value That your worth in life is directly correlated to the amount of help and support and care you give others and then another said These are true, but for me To become intellectually heightened To exercise the thoughts of the mind to the point where you become enlightened To reason with the world. That's the true purpose And these should not be shocking To any of us we think about the world But we're gonna see today's we're gonna see a man who demonstrates What the purpose of life is for the believer This man's name is Steven

And I get the blessing of having his entire testimony in one sermon his entire story And what Steven's testimony is gonna teach us about what life's value is Is that whatever produces his highest glory in our lives Also produces our highest pleasure But specifically Steven's testimony acts seven teaches us this That your life is Not your own Your life is not even yours It is his For you have died your dead you've died and your life your value your worth who you are It's hidden with Christ in God and when Christ who is your life appears then you also appear with him in glory As Paul says in Colossians 3

Steven lives this shows us this demonstrates this and dies for this Only one life will soon be passed only what's done for Christ will last says the poet So we're gonna do today is if you have your Bible open up to Acts chapter 6 We're gonna start in verse 8 And we have 68 verses to work through this morning So acts 6 verse 8 and we're gonna work all the way through the end of verse 8 and we're gonna work all the way through the end of chapter 7 And we're gonna see is that your life is actually not yours. It's his it's Christ It's his to do with what he will and that's the the purpose of a Christian life is to get to a place in your Development where you realize That the more I pursue my desires my wants what I think is best for me the more we get detracted from our true value

Our true mission, which is Christ He is my life and he owns my life So we're gonna see Steven prophesying and testifying to this idea in these many verses It says in verse 8 of chapter 6 and Steven Full of grace and power Was doing great wonders and signs among the people We see in the beginning part of chapter 6 that as a need arises in the church that pastor Scott talked about last week That there's certain sections or widows if you will of the church that are being overlooked in the daily serving of food That the apostles the elders if you will come and say we must devote ourselves to the teaching of God and to prayer But fine amongst yourselves godly men that are full of the spirit to do this task And they do through the power of the spirit They elect a number of men that are listed in the beginning of acts six

[5 : 24] And these men are elected as men that are filled with the spirit and ready for the role and task of deaconship and one of these men is Steven Now Steven I'm gonna call the most Major minor character in scripture of all of the lesser known lesser spoken of shorter text people in scripture He's one of the majors Steven is a character And I'm grateful that I did not put together scripture that I have no Authority in how we receive and what we receive a scripture, but he's someone that I selfishly wish would have had more time Because what we see is a short glimpse of a man that's filled with the spirit that's filled with power that is an absolute unit for the gospel he is

Absolutely taken by the grace and glory of God to the point where we see this narrative play out of his life And he he dies quickly But it's a beautiful picture that we see so let's see Who this man truly is?

Full of grace and power verse 8 says he was doing great wonders and signs among the people that as Pentecost has now come that the filling of the Holy Spirit has taken place that this man Steven Has been blessed with the ability to do wonders and signs to point to Christ And it says in verse 9 Then some of those who belong to the synagogue of the freedmen as it was called and of the sirenians and of the Alexandrians and of those from Sicily and Asia rose up and disputed with Steven But they could not withstand the wisdom in the spirit with which he was speaking Then they secretly instigated men who said we have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God And they stirred up the people and the elders in the scribes and they came upon him and seized him and brought him before the council And they set up a false witness who said this man never ceases to speak words against this holy place and the law

For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and will change the customs that Moses delivered to us Engaging at him all who sat in the council saw that his face was like the face of an angel Now we need some background about what's happening. What's taking place in our story because Steven as a deacon newly born As a deacon newly elected newly appointed by the Holy Spirit for the church As he goes out with grace and power. He does great wonders and signs among the people and just like his Savior There's opposition from the Jews and it says that some of those who belong to the synagogue of the freedmen in a synagogue that During exile and captivity of Israel in Babylon They needed a place to worship but the temple was unavailable

Obviously so local assemblies were created within the Jews and they created this need for a Synagogue which is a local place of worship think of it as Synagogues in Jerusalem of which there were hundreds upon hundreds think of it as local church Buildings that have assemblies of people So the synagogue was during Jesus time and it says that this synagogue that came against him was filled with freedmen and there's a list of Ethnicities that are involved but the point here of the freedmen is that these are Hellenistic Jews Jews who Have taken on the Greek culture trick taken on the Greek society They've lived as a part of it and specifically that these freedmen had once been enslaved under various masters Chiefly the Romans and At some point we're not told the background that these men have been Freed from their slavery and now seek to worship according to Jewish custom and

[9 : 55] These are the very people who see Stephen working power and And signs and miracles and they come against him and As these Jewish This Jewish enclave comes against Stephen it says verse 10 They could not withstand the wisdom in the spirit with which he was speaking Which speaks to the character of our subject Stephen It's not just that they could they heard him and got angry It's not just that they didn't agree with him and so they got mad The text says that they could not withstand his wisdom and the Holy Spirit that as they debated as they talked as they argued as they Discussed with him Jesus who he's proclaiming and doing signs miracles for as they discuss these things they lost That Stephen overwhelms them with wisdom God given yes wisdom truth all through the Holy Spirit

What's so vital about this is as this teaches us That the power of the spirit Cannot be overtaken Cannot be suppressed Spirit wins And when we submit ourselves to him in his power he uses us as vessels of righteousness for his glory So we see in verse 8 to 15 is a man who Luke describes as Intimate with Christ through the following definitions In verse 5 of chapter 6 we're told that Stephen is full of faith that he's full of the Holy Spirit In verse 8 we're told that he's full of grace and he's full of power and in verse 10 We're told that he speaks wisdom and he speaks by the Spirit

Did you hear that description of Stephen that in his short little section in Scripture Luke comes and Luke is a very descriptive writer He loves detail and he says this about Stephen. He's full of faith. He's full of the Holy Spirit He's full of grace. He's full of power. He speaks wisdom and he speaks by the Spirit That's a conclusive list an exhaustive list if you will of the character of this man Stephen Look at three points for this text and the first is this That intimacy with Christ generates intensity for his mission Intimacy with Christ generates intensity for his mission That although we are not privy to the private devotional life of Stephen That we don't see his daily routine as he wakes up We don't see necessarily the beginnings of his prayer life his involvement in

Bible studies we don't see that this man seeks Christ all throughout the day and praise without ceasing as Paul says We don't see any of that particularly, but we do see the evidences of that reality in his life that it's clear that this man is intimate with Christ And that because of his intimacy with his Savior Jesus There is generated within him through the power of the Spirit an intensity for Christ's mission And one follows the other Do you want to be someone who's used for Christ's mission?

Namely to proclaim the gospel to make disciples to take his truth and the knowledge of him to the ends of the earth And if you say yes, I want that I want my life to be Christ. I want to be hidden in Christ with God Start with block number one intimacy Shirley Stephen would not be described as full of faith grace power spirit and wisdom if he was not daily fellow shipping and abiding in Christ We cannot expect to be used mightily by God when we are not intimately acquainted with him and his ways In essence intimacy with Christ can come about by many different ways and forms and fashions But ultimately my encouragement to us if you want someone who wants to do who desires to be intimate with Christ to get alone

[14:57] Get alone with God get charged up by his power his wisdom his grace the things we see that Stephen has And the reason I say get alone Fellowships important the church is important and we always Want that but there's something about getting alone with God that tells us that we are alone Alone with God that tests my metal that when no one sees when no one knows Do I pursue Christ at that level?

Which is why Jesus says in Matthew 6 when you pray go into your room shut the door bar the sight of your prayer from others and Pray to your father who is in secret and your father sees in secret will reward you That intimacy with Christ Starts when we're alone with him This is not a new concept it's not even a new idea because Jesus himself the son of God Fully divine also fully human but this fully divine man. You know what Jesus does That the 1423 after he dismissed the crowds he went up on the mountain by himself To pray and there he was alone Luke 5 16, but he would withdraw To desolate places to pray by himself mark 135 and rising very early in the morning while it was still dark He departed and went out into a desolate place and there he prayed Luke 6 12 and in these days he went out to the mountain to pray and all night he continued in prayer to God Matthew 14 13 when Jesus heard these things he withdrew from them in a boat to a desolate place by himself and prayed That intimacy with God even for Jesus starts when he's alone and not just alone Did you notice how many times the term desolate place was used?

Desolate God wants our heart And one of the ways that he pulls us to himself Is when we're alone because then he's all we have Learn to get alone to be intimate with Christ There's a lot of ways to do this Some of these work for me that I'm about to say some of them don't work as well. Maybe some of these will work for you But things like the dwell app I've used on my commutes before to turn it on and scripture will be read to me in my 15 minute commute one way and the other 30 minutes of scripture saturating my mind as I drive Find a memorization buddy to recite passages together with Join a Bible study of which we have many in this church do the work in your alone time to prepare your heart and mind To come with those other Bible study years having been prepared in yourself by your heart Learning to pray at a ration and it's giving when you are alone with God and prayer

And maybe refuse supplication for a time Jesus tells us to ask and it will be given we are called to supplicate We're called to go to God with our requests and we ought to but why is it that in my life So often my prayers even when I'm by myself turn into God I need and I want and I must have and I need you to intervene on my behalf I've noticed in my life that sometimes the most powerful prayers I've ever had Are the ones in which I force myself to only adore To only To only dwell on his goodness and give him thanks Intimacy with Christ requires a heart of desire A heart of humility And I know we tend to think of devotional life as duty But rather I want to encourage you think of your devotional life as delight It's not something I must do but it's something I

[19:18] Get to do Get to do it's something that I delight in And as we delight in God and we delight in his presence and his word and his truth and his life that we receive through all of these things What happens is we gain an intimacy with Christ that leads to an intensity for his mission Which is why when you look at this text you see a man who Is filled with power grace wisdom spirit and goes against these Jewish Opposers And it says they had no argument against him How do you argue?

With a man that's fully convinced of the mission of the gospel you don't and Stephen is a great example for us So let's finish reading the next couple verses here. Let's look at verse 12 and they stirred up people and the elders and the scribes and they came upon him and seized him and brought him before the council And it says they set up false witnesses in other words. We've lost the argument with Stephen. I can't beat him I can't even talk over him. I can't do anything to beat this man. So what are we going to do? Let's attack him This isn't happened at all in our society today You ever lose an argument? What do you want to do? You know what? You're right. I concede You're right I will change my thoughts and my ways. Thank you. We're not good at that. Are we?

What do we do? We find a way to attack the person whether it be directly or indirectly by gossiping talking bad about them Or living in bitterness that I they beat me And that's what we see here by these men They set up false witnesses that say things about Stephen that are not true that will make him look even worse before the sanhedrin in the sanhedrin is the council of all of the authorities and leaders in Judaism That as he goes for the council it goes before 70 plus Jewish leaders who all know their Torah who all know the promises of God who all believe that they are following and expecting and waiting in faith for God But as we know Jesus calls them a brood of vipers and hypocrites He goes before them and these accusations

Would rile the council before he even gets to them This man's going to talk about Jesus about breaking the temple speaking against Moses And it says in verse 15 gazing at him all who sat in the council saw his face Like the face of an angel which is a direct callback by Luke to the face of Moses As Moses meets with God on the mountain and comes down and his face shines radiates with the glory of God That the very men who claim that we have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God That as he stands before the council before his sermon His face shines like Moses because of God the irony Verse seven or verse chapter seven verse one

I want you to notice normally there would be a massive speech by one of the high priests or a big accusation by them or a pointed question About what is it you really believe and I really believe that this high priest and the council is probably thought through how they're going to deal with this and How they're going to attack Steven and come at him and notice I love this and the high priest said are these things So and almost immediately I love this it says Steven said That as he stands before all of them one against 70 80 90 Are these things so Steven says?

[23 : 28] Brothers and fathers Hear me He's excited He's ready. He's prepared and he wants this opportunity So first of all we see intimacy with Christ generates intensity for his mission that Steven is excited He's holding nothing back when it comes to the gospel and Christ. He's going to go all the way to the end preaching proclaiming Christ with intensity But not only this Secondly Secondly we see that knowledge of Christ generates readiness for his mission knowledge of Christ generates readiness for his mission That intimacy produces intensity But knowledge generates readiness and this is a call for all of us To recognize that knowledge is of value It is of worth and for the disciple. We must know that which we believe so that we can proclaim that which is true

And here's what Steven does He looks at these men He looks at these men And he says brothers and fathers Respecting them Like even considering them brothers and my fathers and it's a term of respect That he would look to them and say I see you as men who have been made in the image of God I want to respect you and acknowledge who you are Hear me And Steven gives one of the most powerful sermons in all of scripture And it's bookended in glory God's glory Which tells us what is the driving factor for Steven's life what drives him God's glory look at verse two with me. He says this the God of glory

He begins the sermon by not just saying God But he uses this very specific title the God of glory the one who I see is all Glorious that God and then he bookends the sermon if you look down in verse 55 He finishes a sermon and then we see this that he saw the glory of God That by some measure when we view and acknowledge God as the God of glory we see him and he reveals himself to us as the God of glory I love that So what we're gonna do If we're gonna read this together, I'd encourage you to have your Bible to open up Acts seven we're gonna read the entire sermon and if you're wondering why are we doing this just summarize for me I have a conviction And many may not all share it But one of my convictions is the public reading of scripture which Paul commissions Timothy to do

I believe that There's real merit in publicly reading scripture together that when Paul says that Timothy in verse three sixteen of Of second Timothy that all scriptures breathe out by God and

profitable for teaching for reproof or correction for training and righteousness That we we know this verse But what's also important about this verse is that even the mere reading of scripture mere is that term lightly even reading scripture is enough for us to be reproof corrected trained and taught So we're going to read All of steven serman from start to finish. Please open up your bible with me follow along Take a deep breath stretch if you need to act seven starting in verse two And steven said brothers and fathers hear me The god of glory appeared to our father abraham when he was in mesopotamia Before he lived in heran and said to him go out from your land and from your kindred and go into the land that I will show you

Then he went out from the land of the calvines and lived in heran and after his father died God removed him from there into his land which you are now living Yet he gave him no inheritance in it not even a foot's length But promised to give it to him as a possession into his offspring after him Though he has no child And god spoke to this effect that his offspring would be sojourners in a land belonging to others who would enslave them and afflict them 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 And so abraham became the father of isek and circumcised him on the eighth day And isek became the father of jacob and jacob of the twelve patriarchs And the patriarchs jealous of joseph sold him into egypt but god was with him And rescued him out of all of his afflictions and gave him favor and wisdom before ferro king of egypt Who made him ruler over egypt and over all his household

[28 : 44] Now there came a famine throughout all of egypt and canaan a great affliction that our the fathers could not find Food but when jacob had heard that there was grain in egypt He sent out our fathers on their first visit and on the second visit joseph made himself known to his brothers And joseph's family became known to ferro and joseph sent in some in jacob his father and all this kindred 75 persons in all and jacob went down into egypt and he died He and our fathers and they were carried back to shechem and laid in a tomb that abraham had sought or bought for a Some of silver from the sons of hamore and shechem But as the time of the promised jr. Which god had granted to abraham the people increased and multiplied in egypt until there arose over egypt Another king who did not know joseph. He dealt shrewdly with our race and forced our fathers to expose their infants So that they would not be kept alive At this time moises was born and he was beautiful in god's sight and he was brought up for three months in his father's house And when he was exposed ferro's daughter adopted him and brought him up as her own son

And moises was instructed in all the wisdom of the egyptians and he was mighty in his words and his deeds When he was 40 years old that came into his heart to visit his brothers the children of israel and sing one of them being wronged He defended the opposed the oppressed man and avenged him by striking down the egyptian He supposed that his brothers would understand that god was giving them salvation by his hand But they did not understand and on the following day he appeared to them as they were quarreling and tried to reconcile them saying Men you are brothers. Why do you wrong each other?

But the man who was wronging his neighbor thrust him aside saying who made you a ruler and a judge over us? Do you want to kill me as you killed the egyptian yesterday? At this retort moises fled and became an exile on the land of minion where he became the father of two sons Now when 40 years had passed an angel appeared to him in the wilderness of mount sinai and a flame of fire and a bush When moises sought he was amazed at his sight and as he drew near to look there came the voice of the lord I am the god of your fathers the god of abraham and of isek and of jacob And moises trembled and did not dare to look Then the lord said to him take off the sandals from your feet for the place where you were standing is holy ground I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in egypt and have heard their groaning And I have come down to deliver them and now come I will send you to egypt This moises whom they rejected saying who made you a ruler and a judge?

By this man god sent as both a ruler and redeemer by the hand of the angel who Appear to them in the bush. This man led them out performing wonders and signs in egypt And at the red sea and in the wilderness for 40 years. This is the moises who said to the israelites God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers This is the one who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the angel who spoke to him on mount sinai and with our fathers He received living oracles to give to us our fathers Refused to obey him but thrust him aside and in their hearts. They turned to egypt saying to erin make for us gods Who will go before us?

And for this Moses who led us out from the land of Egypt? We do not know what has become of him? And they made a calf in those days and offered a sacrifice to the idol and were rejoicing in the works of their hands But God turned away and gave them over to worship the host of heaven as is written in the book of the prophets Did you bring to me slain beasts and sacrifices?

[32 : 27] During the 40 years in the wilderness oh house of Israel You took up the tent of Moloch and the star of your God and 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 spoke to Moses directed him to make it according to the pattern that he had seen our fathers in turn Brought it in in Joshua when they dispossessed the nations that God drove out before our fathers So it was until the days of David who found favor in the sight of God and asked to find a dwelling place for the God of Jacob But it was Solomon who built the house for him yet the most high does not dwell in houses made by hands as the prophet says Heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me says the Lord?

Or what is the place of my rest? Did not my hand make all these things? You stiff-necked people Uncircumcised in heart and ears You always resist the Holy Spirit As your fathers did So do you Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute?

And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the righteous one Whom you have now betrayed and murdered You who received the law As delivered by angels And did not keep it Just for the service I was in there trying to print my manuscript off And the printer was being a printer And it wouldn't print and Jay comes in and looks at me and says Eric what what?

I cannot print my manuscript Oh Do you need help? I'm not sure if I can print it I'm not sure if I can print it I'm not sure if I can print it Oh, do you need help?

Yeah, I need help And it did print and I have my notes praise God But I am Shamed by Stephen Because Stephen is doing wonders and signs and he's taken by force by the freedmen and he is accused by them and brought before the council And I'm really grateful that Stephen had written out this entire sermon in preparation for this event and he pulled his sheets out and read it Now hang on Everything we just read was from the heart and the mind of Stephen Knowledge of Christ generates readiness For his mission that as Stephen gives this sermon it's a result of hours and hours of dedication of pouring over the scriptures Seeing the picture of redemption from start to finish

[35 : 38] All that he preaches is from his mind and his heart That he knows scripture And he didn't just know what he internalized its rich historical patterns The history of Israel played out in one sermon the the founders of the faith Explained he comprehended its redemptive themes and correlated the promises of God to Fulfillment in the personal work of Jesus Christ. I hope you heard that and saw that in his sermon And what Stephen does Is he looks at the entire history of God's people and he comes up with a biblical theology of redemption What is biblical theology you ask It's learning to trace the interconnectedness of biblical themes And the light of their advancement and contribution to the overall biblical story

The book that we read you guys is not a disconnected series of stories that offer advice or encouragement Alone But the book that we read from Genesis to Revelation and for Stephen's case The Old Testament the entire Old Testament even points to the arc of redemption That this book from start to finish is only as good as the Savior who redeems it And Stephen looks At the men of the faith and he says Abraham and Isaac and he talks about the promise that's given to Abraham And he talks about the covenant of circumcision and blessing that's given to him And it's going to be fulfilled by God as a faithful God who fulfills his promises who fulfills the promises to Abraham Jesus Then he goes to Jacob and Joseph and he talks about a chosen nation who will be his people Who brings the people of God into the family of God through his sacrifice

Jesus Then he looks to Moses and he talks about Moses being called to shepherd and lead God's people And they reject and they disobey and they rebel and who is the one who is the true fulfillment of the role of shepherd over God's people Jesus Then he talks about David and Solomon and the fact that David and Solomon As a king and as a builder of the temple Jesus Makes us to dwell in the temple through the power of the spirit and causes a Rule and reign of an eternal throne over David through the line of David and over Israel forever Jesus That the entire accounting of what we just read for Stephen was all to build up to the climax of his sermon Which is the phrase you killed the righteous one

And in so doing Stephen builds a case that is absolutely beautiful that from the start to the end Jesus is the key to scripture And that is Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and Moses and David and Solomon Did great things for God and he used them mightily for his purposes What is the ultimate truth about them and us?

We are not the righteous one There is only one righteous one and this is Jesus And for Stephen he's in love with Jesus Which is why a knowledge of Christ generates readiness for his mission. Do I know what the Bible teaches?

[39 : 47] Do I know that Jesus is the answer and the fulfillment of God's Redemptive purposes for his people Part of being a faithful witness of the gospel means that we take the heralded word of God that's given to us and we faithfully convey it And knowledge of the word of God knowledge of how to read it and what it says is essential if we want to have an impact in his kingdom Peter says in first Peter 3 15 in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy Always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that you have That is in you, but do it with gentleness and respect. It's almost as if Peter was thinking of Stephen when he wrote that verse Stephen gentleness respect

Preaches Christ as Lord and as holy and makes a defense to all who ask him for the hope of Christ to redeem all of scripture The term apologia is used here for defense, which is where we get our term apologetics Speaks of verbal defense logic and reason I'm gonna Double down on all of this by saying Stephen Was not just a disciple not just a preacher not just an evangelist not just a deacon But Stephen was an incredible Theologian Theology matters And life matters and practicality matters and living Holy and trying to just do my best for God Matters and I've lived phases of my life where I say the theology is big and cool, but I'd rather just do the meat and bones And yes, there's a beauty to that simpleness, but please Take time to study God's word to know theology to see the Christocentric thread of all of scripture Just as Jesus in the road to Emmaus and Luke says that all scripture Concerns him he explained all scriptures concerning himself meaning all the scripture points to Jesus John 5 here's what Jesus says is you search the scriptures because you think they give you eternal life, but the scriptures point to me In other words Biblical theology Interconnects Redemption With Christ Law without Christ is legalism Prophecy without Christ is superstition Proverb or wisdom without Christ Is mere advice

Psalms or song without Christ is tedious romanticism narrative without Christ is secular humanism Holy scripture without Christ is worthless It ceases to be holy and it ceases to be scripture We must commit ourselves to reading God's word interpreting it applying it With the lens of Christ as redeemer See maybe saying Eric, okay, that's great. How do I read the Bible?

Redemptively how do I read it? Christologically how do I see that all scripture points to Jesus? Like you're saying is he under every rock? My answer is no don't seek for one of the nails of crucifixion under the stone and the story of Joshua But there's a way to see The metanarrative redemption in all scripture three easy points when you study the Bible or you read it first answer this question How does the text point to the sinfulness of man?

[43 : 58] How does the text unveil the need for sinful man to be saved? Secondly, how does the text fit into the redemptive story of the Bible?

If you're studying Judges and the wickedness contained in Judges, maybe you would say this connects in the arc of redemption by doubling down and revealing how much mankind needs an ultimate savior If you're reading the Psalms and you read about David praising God and asking for God to be his rock to be his shield to be his His protection you see that that genre of scripture that Psalm can fit in the metanarrative of redemption by a plea for salvation And a hope in the coming Messiah to bring protection to be a rock to be a redeemer And on and on thirdly ask how does the text reveal the need for atonement?

How does the text show that someone has to die? That someone has to be the sacrifice? How does the text reveal the grace of God given to us?

Stephen does this Lastly, we're going to finish the third point with this identification with Christ generates sacrifice for his mission identification with Christ generates sacrifice for his mission Stephen preaches he condemns the Sanhedrin he calls them stiff neck people a term used of Israel by God after the golden calf idolatry And he says you're uncircumcised and hard in ears which would have been very very offensive to a Jewish audience As your father did so do you you've killed the prophets you've persecuted them and now Jesus has come as as a prophet as one who is given by God for your salvation and you killed him You received the law as Lawgivers and did not

keep it end of the sermon

You thought you've understood scripture you thought you've understood the law you thought you've understood and lived according to what is necessary to be blameless under the law and yet you didn't even keep it and you killed the one who did This is his sermon and then it says this here's the recompense that Stephen gets for these words verse 54 now when they heard these things they were enraged and they ground their teeth at him But he full of the Holy Spirit gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God Identification with Christ generates sacrifice for his mission Do you think as Stephen stood before the Sanhedrin the thoughts went through his head that if I proclaim Christ and condemn these men as sinners I may die

[47 : 20] I guarantee you that was in his mind That this may not go well for me But you know what Stephen is so intimate with Christ he's so knowledgeable of Christ and what the Bible teaches that if he decides full identification with Christ is necessary that I will identify with him to the nth degree so come hell or high waters or in his case death Here's Stevens Christ likeness this is beauty At the transfiguration Jesus face says was altered Luke tells us that Stevens face is also altered In Luke 20 Jesus silences his Jewish opponents with wisdom and power are the terms used by Luke and now it acts you know what it says Stevens silence his Jewish opponents with wisdom and spirit

And then if we keep reading which we will hear at verse 55 full of the Holy Spirit he 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 open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God But they cried out loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together and this is responsive like toddlers they literally plug their ears we don't want to hear what you're saying and they run at him to stop him from talking And then it says this verse 58 then they cast him out of the city and stoned him and the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul now see the Christ likeness verse 59 and as they were stoning Stephen he called out Lord Jesus receive my spirit same way in which Jesus commits his spirit to the father before death and then it says and falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice as the stones are hitting do not hold this sin against them

Jesus asked for the forgiveness of his persecutors Stephen has chosen a full identification with Christ even if this means the end all disciples of Christ are called to die and some are called to perish He may be thinking what in the world did he just say and say one more time all disciples of Christ are called to die and some are called to perish You and I are called to die Luke 9 and he said to all if anyone would come after me let him deny himself take up his cross daily and follow me for whoever would save his life will lose it but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it

We're all called to die brothers and sisters and for some they are called to perish to die like Stephen But for those of us who want to follow Christ and identify with him what is necessary that Stephen illustrates and shows with a way he's so Christ like fallen in need of saving but so Christ like at the end of his life here we see that it's time to die to ourselves For sakes striving to be or to do righteousness die to sin abandon former desires abandon former wants goals idols that prioritize selfish means of raising me up that's what my life is I want myself to be raised up I want to die to that I die so that Christ may live in me and I choose Christ in his ways through the spirit this is Stevens testimony calling to us we're all called to die some are called to perish and then it says he fell asleep

Many people have a pinnacle moment in their lives were a vitally important decision perhaps with life altering ramifications presents itself My dad had one of these in his early twenties he was in class at SPU in the business department and as they were talking about business some guy young guy comes in comes into the class and says hey can I have a second teacher and he says sure He goes to the front of class and he says hey I will hire every single person in here right now full time job to work under me I'm starting up a company but it means you have to quit school out of nowhere and my dad said one person went brave person my dad thought about it went no no that's not wise I'm going to school here in Pantwish and no that man was Bill Gates and the one guy that went with him is now a multi millionaire and as I grew up and heard more about the story and realize what my dad said no to that you realize yes Eric I realize thank you

[53 : 15] What's the question I asked my dad dad if you could go back in time to that moment would you change your decision he says not for a second because he graduated and then the following year he got married love of his life and in the following 10 years he had seven children of whom he loves greatly not for a second for Stephen this pinnacle moment in his life is acts 7 his entire life God has been preparing him to be intimate with him to know him to identify with him so

that his mission would be advanced through the moment in time for Stephen to stand before the council and choose do I preach Christ or not and for Stephen if we were to go to heaven right now and ask him I am confident Stephen would you go back and choose something else you realize you got stoned right Stephen and confident would say not for a second and maybe today this moment this Sunday morning right now is one of those pinnacle moments for someone in this room and I'm asking you to stand and make a decision to either preach Christ like Stephen did right now or sit and remain silent but here is the decision for all of us and perhaps for someone this is your pinnacle moment life has value but only if Christ is our life choose to die to yourself today and live in Christ or choose your own life of dissatisfaction and the striving and self worship last thing I'm going to say is that the beauty of what Stephen gives the beauty of the testimony he has in this story has immense ramifications because in the next following verses it says a persecution broke out and the church for the first time in its early history is hunted but not only this there's a certain man who's present there who I won't get into for a time whose name was Saul and this man was present for Stephen's final choice to proclaim Christ and die knowing that it's not his life but it's Christ's life so he will give it to Christ and die and this man Saul was in a hearty agreement to kill him but would be saved and pulled by the grace of God from his sin into newness of life on that road to Damascus and this man Saul I guarantee as he writes about sacrificing all denying ourselves choosing Christ who is our life who by the way is one who wrote that thought

Paul would go on to be one of the most intimate knowledgeable identified with Christ person we see and Stephen in some sort illustrated that and mentored him in that before he even came to Christ so Paul writes this I taking on Stevens identification I have been crucified with Christ it is no longer I who live I my life is dead it's gone it's away it's no longer but now Christ lives in me and the life that I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself up for me I read a poem at the beginning of this I only read the first half I want to read the second half now only one life will soon be passed only what's done for Christ will last here's the second stanza and when I am dying how glad I shall be if the lamp of my life has been burned out for the life of the living. Stephen's lamp was burned out for the sake of Christ and I pray that we as a church would plunge into the darkness plunge into the unknown plunge into the the absolute despair of the world that we live in and we would choose Christ as our life Lord thank you for this morning thank you for the example of Stephen I truly cannot tell you enough how grateful I am that you include his testimony and his story in this book but greater than Stephen greater than Isaac greater than Jacob greater than David greater than Solomon is the righteous one Jesus Christ the greatest I pray as a church as we sing songs and we study your word and we fellowship in the hallways and we go out and we reach out to our coworkers to our families to our friends that wherever we go we would take the knowledge of Christ with us and that there would be nothing that would keep us from identifying fully with Jesus Christ help us to crucify ourselves to die to ourselves to deny ourselves and put on Christ teach us this Lord and in so doing may we live for your glory thank you for this body in this fellowship for the encouragement that it is to all of us and to myself and then we pray amen