

SUMMER 5 - Men Filled with the Spirit

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 18 January 2012

Preacher: Andrew Reid

[0 : 00]

... .. We pray also not only that we'd understand it, but that we would hear you speak through it, and by your Spirit we might respond appropriately.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. ... The situation was very grave. German troops had already taken Czechoslovakia, and they had invaded some of the Baltic states, and Belgium and France had fallen, and attempts had been made by Hitler's forces to cross the channel to England.

Now, desperate measures were needed if the enemy was to be beaten. And so it was that Winston Churchill came up with a new and very cunning plan. It consisted of five parts.

First, deliberate deception would be used. Thousands of bits and pieces of false information would be deliberately and surreptitiously circulated. A highly plausible but entirely false picture of allied capabilities and intentions would be created.

[1 : 18] Second, security and counterintelligence operations would be mounted to outwit German intelligence services. Third, attempts would be made to divide German intentions.

Fourth, barrages of clever but plausible propaganda, lies and fiction would be used to lower enemy morale and to drive a wedge between the leadership and the people.

Fourth, and fifth, stealth would be used to organise, arm and to control French, Belgian and Dutch underground groups on the ground.

Guerrilla warfare and blatant sabotage would slow down or even halt German reaction in the invasion of the north of France. The key to the plan was, of course, deception.

Cunning, careful, strategic and secret deception. And it worked. And so it was that only when the thunderous roar of massed allied guns began the bombardment, did the Germans know where and when the invasion had begun.

[2 : 30] Friends, when you are at war, desperate measures, desperate times demand desperate measures. And in the Bible, God makes clear that he and his people are at war.

We, God's people, are caught up in what is a cosmic conflict. We are at war. And the goal is world domination. And our enemy is the master of deception.

He is as cunning as the devil because he is the devil. Now, when you are at war, you need to be shrewd. In the words of Jesus, we are in the midst of wolves.

And so we must be as shrewd as serpents and as innocent as doves. Friends, today I want to help you to be shrewd as serpents. And I want to help you by looking at this passage from chapter 6 of the book of Acts.

And then we'll move on to chapter 7. Now, at first glance, the verses that we're going to look at first, those of the first verses of chapter 6, look very innocuous. They look a bit like housekeeping in the early church.

[3 : 41] You know, getting a few things organized and so on. But as we dig below the surface of this passage, we're going to see that they reveal God's weapons and strategy in a war against the evil one.

And in these passages, these passages will also reveal some of the cunning plans that the devil uses to oppose or weaken the forces set against him.

Friends, these verses will, if we listen carefully, arm us for battle. They will equip us for war. They will help us not to be deceived by the master of deception.

So let's see what God has to teach us from this passage. And first, let's get acquainted with the background. Now, perhaps you remember how the book of Acts started. There were a bunch of disciples wondering what on earth would come next.

Then Jesus gave them their brief, their marching orders, as it were. They were to be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth. And he then equipped them for the task by pouring out upon them his spirit.

[4 : 39] Three thousand became Christians on that first day. Their numbers continued to grow. Look back at the previous chapter. Look back at verse 14 in the previous chapter, in chapter 5.

This is one of Acts's famous summary statements. It tells us that believers are being added to the Lord. The church is growing. And as you read Acts, these sort of verses appear time and time through Acts.

As God's word goes out, people are converted. And the church grows. This is the normal condition. I suspect that's one of those reasons for the summary passages.

It's to say, this is what happens. This is the normal condition. This is what happens when God's word of the gospel goes out. Now look at chapter 5, verse 42. It tells us that the apostles were working hard at teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.

And then chapter 6, verse 1 tells us that this preaching has, well, its normal result. The disciples increase in number and the church grows. Then come threats to God's purposes through his church.

[5 : 44] Now the first threat you'll see in these verses is a threat to unity. You see, the ancient world was like our world. It was full of ethnic divisions.

Sometimes these divisions were on the basis of religion. At other times race. At other times language. And when people became Christians, there was always a danger that they would bring these divisions with them.

And we can see it here in verse 1. Look at what happens. The term Hellenists probably refers to a group of Jews who have been born and reared outside of Judea.

They were probably suspect as being more Greek than Hebraic in their orientation and their outlook. Anyway, the charge is that the widows from this group are being overlooked.

Now, this is just a charge of prejudice, isn't it? And it therefore needs to be dealt with. This is the first threat to this new group of growing Christians, prejudiced within their ranks, which threatens their unity.

[6 : 47] But this threat raises yet another one. This threat is a threat to the focus among the apostles. Look at verse 2. The apostles get the whole community together. They explain it to the people.

And they say this. It is not right that we should neglect the word of God in order to wait on tables. Now, the apostles, let me say, are not saying that waiting on tables is beneath them.

I don't think that's going on. They're simply saying their focus is to be elsewhere. That is on preaching and on prayer. Because it's that that is behind the very growth of the church that we are seeing.

It is their role as apostles and leaders. They are meant. This is meant to be their focus before God. They are to spend their time doing some that are not to spend their time doing some of the routine administration, because if they do that, the focus which God wants them to have will be under threat.

Preaching is central to conversion and growth. Prayer is central to conversion and growth. So the apostles need to give their time to it. So there are the two threats.

[7 : 55] A threat to unity within the whole church and a threat to gospel proclamation by the apostles. In verse 3, the apostles lead. But they also involve everyone else.

Great picture, really. They want everyone else to own what goes on. And so look at their suggestion in verse 3. Therefore, friends, select from among yourselves seven men of good standing, full of the spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint for the task.

While we, for our part, will devote ourselves to prayer and to serving the word. You see, the apostles knew that gospel ministry is crucial. They knew they know their place in it.

However, they're realistic also about the need to meet social needs within the community. They know they need godly people to do this. And the people can see the wisdom in it.

And they hear the suggestion and they own it. Look at verse 5. It says that the apostles' suggestion pleased the whole gathering. By the way, I wonder if I could just make a little aside before we move on.

[8 : 58] Last Sunday, we did talk about the question of social justice and balance. Well, this church gets it right. Did you notice that? Its leaders know where their focus should be on proclamation and prayer.

And they will not neglect that. However, they will also not let social issues go unaddressed. They are important. They need to be addressed. Let's get back to our passage.

Verse 5 tells us that the congregation finds these godly men. They choose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit. And they choose six others with him. And they appear to be people who are already at work amongst the Hellenists.

And they bring these men to the apostles. The apostles lay hands on them. They commission them for the task. And through their actions, two threats to the community are dealt with swiftly and efficiently. The threat to focus is met by the apostles maintaining their focus on proclamation and prayer.

And the threat to unity is met by the appointment of seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit, to oversee the distribution of food. And verse 7 tells us the result.

[10 : 01] Look at verse 7. The word of God continued to spread. The number of disciples increased greatly in Jerusalem. And a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.

I wonder if you can hear what is being said. The central and normal condition of the church is growth. It is people coming to know Jesus as Lord and Savior.

And that normal condition is met by maintaining one thing and one thing alone. It is maintained by evangelism. That is by the proclamation of God's word about Jesus Christ.

And the result of these decisions made in these verses is that that continues. The word of God continues to spread. And the church continues to grow.

And the gospel does what it does in all the world, according to Colossians 1. It bears fruit and increases. Friends, there's a story.

[10 : 58] Now, let's put it in a larger theological context. I began this talk by saying we're at war. It's a war that has a goal. Paul says in Ephesians 1, verse 10, that God's goal since the beginning of creation, since before the beginning of creation of the world, has been to gather together in Christ all things in heaven and on earth.

In other words, it's to bring people to know Jesus and submit to him. This is God's primary concern. This is where his heartfelt desire lies.

And the main reason for accomplishing this is proclamation. So, let's think about this for a moment. If this is God's primary concern, where do you think the devil's primary concern is going to be?

It's obvious, isn't it? If he's as cunning as he is, if he's strategic as he is, if he's clever as he is, where do you think he's going to be putting his greatest effort?

Well, he'll be putting it at stopping God's plans that are focused on Jesus. He'll be putting his greatest efforts at stopping the proclamation of Jesus. He will be working hard to make sure that the word of God does not flourish.

[12 : 21] Now, Satan is not always identified in the book of Acts, but he has been at work in Acts already. He's been referred to. Look back at chapter 5. Look at verses 1 to 5.

You'll find that what happens is corruption enters into the congregation. The source of it is explicitly identified in verse 3. Satan is the source of Ananias' actions.

But the church deals with it. And look at the results in verse 14. More believers are added. Then persecution threatens the church in the second half of chapter 5. Verse 29 to 32 says the apostles won't let persecution stop them.

They will obey God's command to preach, and God will supply his spirit for the task. So in verse 42, they didn't cease to teach and preach Jesus as the Christ. The result is there in chapter 6, verse 1.

The number of disciples grow. Now, in our passage, a new thread has emerged. We've seen it. Disunity and lack of focus. And again, it's dealt with thoroughly and swiftly.

[13 : 24] The results recorded in verse 7. Satan's wiles are thwarted again, and the word of God continues to increase. And the number of disciples of Jesus grows. So what can we learn here?

Can you see what the author of Acts is trying to teach us repeatedly? He's urging us, line up with God. Line up with God's concerns.

He's seeking that we have the same focus as God. That we are aware of the wiles of the evil one and combat them by not allowing anything to distract us from our primary purpose of making disciples of Jesus.

Friends, I think this passage has very timely words for us. You see, the modern church is under the most subtle attack of the evil one. It is an extremely cunning path, even though it's not a new one.

It is extremely cunning because it is extremely plausible. Let me explain the strategy. The first temptation you see for the modern church comes from outsiders.

[14 : 27] We don't like getting bad press like everyone in the world. So we're very conscious of how outsiders see us. And you see, outsiders know what they want to see.

They want a Christianity without the gospel, basically. In other words, they want a Christianity that doesn't speak so much about Jesus, but is mainly about action without words.

That's what they want. Now, we must indeed act in a way that's consistent with God's justice and compassion. We must, but we must not neglect our primary commitment. Primary commitment is clear.

Speak the good news about Jesus to our world. Tell the world, repent. Tell them, you're sinners. Christ has died for you. God demands you turn to Jesus, lest you suffer eternal separation from him.

But unfortunately, we have been conned. Our churches put other things first. And so our churches are emptying out. Before long, they become no more different than the Rotary Club or whatever.

[15 : 27] No one sees their need of Jesus. No true conversions take place. And the number of Christians dwindles.

But that's not the end to the devil's wiles. You see, God not only has a goal that people come to know Jesus, he's also got a means by which this happens.

Now, in your Bibles, have a look. Just flip to Romans chapter 10. Romans 10 and verse 17.

For it says, So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ. But I ask, have they not heard?

Well, indeed they have. Their voice has gone out into all the world and their words to the end of the world. Now, friends, God's means for people to come to know Jesus is proclaimers.

[16 : 31] Now, proclaimers of the gospel come in all shapes and sizes. That's the wonder of it. They are ordinary people at work, at home, rearing children, in the community.

But we modern Christians also set aside people for the task. And we pay them to be professional preachers of the gospel, if you like. Now, given Satan's scheme is to stop preaching the gospel, what do you think his most effective strategy would be?

Well, it would be to cause the full-time gospel worker to turn aside from that task, wouldn't it? You don't have to be Einstein to work this one out. But it is to say, let me give you some scenarios.

It is to say, we're looking for a new minister, and we need counselling, so let's have a minister who is a counsellor. Or we need an administrator, because our church is growing, so let's have a minister who is an able administrator.

Or we need our minister to be this and that, because this is where we are. And the minute we do it, Satan has the upper hand. For he's done what he set out to do.

[17 : 41] He's dragged the minister out of his study and away from prayer. He's caused him to be so busy with other activities that should and could be done by others, that he can't do the very thing he was trained to do, or should have been trained to do.

But friends, this passage has a message for us who are members of churches as well. I hope everyone here is a member of a church. I wonder if I might just use our church as an example.

You see, we're a growing church. We've got eight congregations. We have booming needs. And many of those needs are good and right ones. But the danger is that these booming needs will take away our focus on proclamation.

Or the constant demand to be this, or to have this or that latest trend will take away our focus on proclamation. No, friends, if we are Christians, then we are God's people, God's representatives, God's means for bringing people to know the Lord Jesus.

And we ought not to let anything threaten that. But let me give a last word from this passage to myself and to all who are pastors. And here are my words to myself and other full-time pastors here at Holy Trinity.

[18 : 55] And I'm going to let you listen in to my words to myself. Now, if... Yeah, let me put it this way. As I speak to myself in a moment, I want you to listen.

And if it's become obvious that I've forgotten later on, what I'd like you to do is remind me. I give you a license to remind me. If other pastors, if your pastors in your churches forget, then maybe you can gently remind them as well.

Okay, here we go. Here are the words from this passage that God speaks to me. Andrew, God has called you to minister the gospel. Hopefully, your ministry will be blessed by me here.

However, I want you... I want to urge you not to lose sight of what is really important. God, my main concern is winning people for Christ, my son.

And this means proclamation and prayer. So, Andrew, take this word from me, from Acts, for you.

[20 : 02] Make sure you give your main focus to this. Your main focus is to be bringing the word of God to God's world and to God's people. Your main focus is to be praying for the progress of this word and for its impact upon God's people.

You must devote yourself to the word of God and to prayer. Andrew, this is my word to you today. Now, friends, I wonder if I can now just turn to you who are members of churches.

If you've been listening to my word to myself, then I wonder if I might close by asking you to help me or the pastor of your church. The best way you can help and care for me as your own pastor is to help me keep my focus.

Pray for me to be a man of God and of prayer. And ask me, how's it going, Andrew? You know, I don't know that I've had anyone in 18 months ask me from the congregation at the front door how my prayer life is going.

You should be. Ask me, how am I finding time for preparation? You should be asking me. Ask me how it's going.

[21 : 18] I give you permission to do it. I love to have people ask me because then I know that they're going to ask me again. That might help motivate me a little. I beg you, please check up on me.

Rebuke me when I'm not doing it. Gently urge me to focus on the essentials. All your own pastors. Encourage us to spend more and more time in the word of God.

And when I'm doing it well, affirm me. And you're very good at this, I might tell you, those of you from Holy Trinity. But ask me also how I'm going with my prayer life.

And free me up so I can give attention to the right things. Don't load me and other pastors up with lesser things. Help us to be leaders after God's own heart who are devoted to the word of God and prayer.

So please, make this your daily prayer for us. We desperately need your prayers in this area. For as this happens, God's word will do what it does in all the world.

[22 : 26] It will bear fruit and increase. And the devil will be outwitted. And God will be glorified. Now we're going to move on to chapter 7. But I've worked you fairly hard.

We've got a lot to do tonight. So I'm going to get you to stand. Get some blood flowing just for a minute. Don't wander off. And so just for about a minute, stand.

Greet the people around you if you don't know them. Or even if you do. And just stretch your legs. Now let's refresh our minds about Stephen.

See, this is his chapter. But remember, Stephen is mentioned back in chapter 6 as well, verses 1 to 7. He's one of those men chosen by the apostles to distribute food.

What strikes me about some of these men is that they don't spend much time distributing food. They go out and preach the gospel. But after all, that's not surprising because he said to be full of the Holy Spirit. And remember, when you're full of the Spirit, you want to speak about Jesus.

[23 : 23] So the apostles solve the dispute. They choose these men. And Stephen's one of them. He's a man known to be wise. Verse 3 says this. Now look at verse 8.

It tells us some of the characteristics of this man, Stephen. He's a man full of grace and of power. And now look at what happens. 1. Stephen does wonders and signs.

Verse 8. 2. He encounters opposition from members of a Greek-oriented and probably Greek-speaking synagogue called the synagogue of the freedmen. Verse 9. The wisdom of the Spirit which qualified him for the task of serving tables.

Well, it's evident in his preaching as well. He says his speaking. Verse 10 says his speaking was clearly powerful and persuasive. Again, it's not surprising. You're full of the Spirit. That's what you're going to be doing.

4. Since his arguments could not be beaten, people decided to bring false charges against him. Verse 11. 5. These charges caused a very public stir which resulted in Stephen being brought before a religious court.

[24 : 25] And in verses 13 to 15 we're told the charges that are brought. Now notice them. They're very important. Charge 1. He speaks against God's law and the temple. That's what they say.

See it again in verses 11 and 13. In verse 11 he said to speak against Moses and God. This is a little different in verse 13. He is said to speak against the law and the holy place.

Charge 2. He is drawing people away from traditional faith and toward Jesus. You can see this in verse 14. Now when you put the two charges together, they are very serious, aren't they?

Taking people away from law and temple. Drawing people away from traditional faith. They strike at the very core of Jewish faith. These are the very things though. Notice that Jesus himself was charged with.

The very things. Anyway, let's look at how he defends himself before the council in chapter 7. I love his speech. It is absolutely brilliant.

[25 : 25] Because it just draws people in. And they can tick all the boxes as they go along. But he plants little time bombs in the speech. That are set to go off at the end. First thing he does, goes through Jewish history.

Very good thing to do when you're with Jews. And when he does so, he basically tells the people gathered that the history of Israel is full of some very interesting lessons.

And lesson number one is this. You can see this weaved through the talk. God is a moving God. He has never been tied to a temple. This is my summary of what Stephen says.

In fact, most of his crucial work has been done away from permanent structures. In verses 1 to 8 he talks about Abraham. God worked with Abraham and Abraham didn't even own the land.

He owned a little plot to bury his wife in. Then God worked through Joseph. Verses 9 to 16. And where was Joseph at the time? Not in the land.

[26 : 22] But outside it. And there were no... Well, he didn't have any Jewish temples there. That's lesson number one. God worked through patriarchs without land and without temple. Lesson number two.

Jewish people have not taken well to Moses and the law from the very first time they met him. Look at verses 17 to 22. When Moses first comes on the scene, he was reared not in a Jewish household, but in an Egyptian one.

Verses 23 to 29 are told. When he first turned up to visit his Jewish brethren, he was kicked out. They didn't want to have anything to do with him. Verses 30 to 34 tell us that when God appeared to him, it wasn't on Jewish ground, but...

At Mount Sinai. There was no temple there, but a burning bush. And God sent him back to rescue his people. Then Stephen reminds them of what happened when Moses came from God to speak to God's people and be their agent of rescue.

They rejected him. But he still went on to rescue them. And through him, God gave them great oracles. But the Jews resisted God and Moses and made an idol.

[27 : 41] And they regularly turned to idolatry throughout their history. Oh, yes, they had a tent of meeting. And eventually they had a temple. But when the temple was consecrated, Solomon made clear that God doesn't live in such things.

Stephen's speech climaxes in verses 51 to 53. Look at his summary. This is a summary of the history of God's people. You stiff-necked people.

Uncircumcised in heart and ears. You are forever opposing the Holy Spirit, just as your ancestors used to do. Which of the prophets did your ancestors not persecute?

You killed those who foretold the coming of the righteous one. And now you have become his betrayers and murderers. You are the ones that received the law as ordained by angels, but have not kept it.

Can you see what he's saying? He's saying, your history of rebellion, it is long and it reaches its pinnacle in one event. Their beloved Moses prophesied about a coming prophet.

[28 : 50] This one that they reckon he's spoken against prophesied the very coming of Jesus. And when the Messiah came, that they prophesied about. The very people present here became his betrayers and murderers.

They broke the very commandments that God gave them through Moses. For the commandments said, thou shalt not murder. But they murdered him.

They disregarded one of God's greatest, Moses' greatest promises. They disregarded and betrayed the very one he had prophesied about. Can you see this is a crushing, crushing, crushing sermon.

Can you see what Stephen's saying? Can you hear the condemnation? He's saying the history of Israel shows that God's people are sinners and rebels. And that history has not stopped.

It reaches its climax in this dastardly deed. Now, in the old days, the old Israelites rejected and kills prophets. But in these days, he says, they do even worse than that.

[29 : 57] They don't just kill prophets, they kill Messiahs. Messiahs. It's awful. It is potent. It is shocking. He is telling the Israelites that if anyone is against God, it is not him.

But the very people present in the council. If anyone is against Moses, it is not him, Stephen. But them. And they are just the same as their ancestors, but worse.

They received the law of Moses, ordained by angels. And did not keep it. Verse 54 tells us the inevitable reaction. I mean, you can see what's coming, can't you?

And it is the same as it has been throughout Israelite history. Indignation. Rage. But Stephen doesn't stop. He pushes on the way he began. Full of the Holy Spirit. He stares into heaven.

He sees the glory of God in a vision. And there he sees Jesus. And I want you to notice something. What is Jesus doing here that you don't often see him doing after his death and resurrection?

[31 : 03] He is standing. Not sitting. He is standing at the right hand of God as what? Judge. Standing also to vindicate this, his servant.

And he lets the people know. Stephen lets the people know what he sees. He says, look, I see the heavens open. And the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.

It is blasphemous language to everyone present. And in their rage, they break the law again. They forget the very law they accuse Stephen of breaking. And they break it themselves.

And they drag him out of the city. And they stone him. And as he dies, Stephen commits himself to the Lord. It is one of the few prayers in the New Testament addressed to Jesus. There aren't many of them.

See if you can count them one day. He says, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. Then he echoes the voice of his Lord and the love of his Lord for his people.

[32 : 04] He says, Lord, don't hold this sin against them. And then he dies. And a young man looks on. And his name is Saul. And chapter 8, verse 1 tells us he approves of the act.

Now, let's just see the results of all of this. Outlined in verses 1 to 4. Persecution erupts. Jews are scattered. But verse 4 says what? That this results in further evangelistic activity outside Jerusalem.

And this in turn leads to further persecution by Saul. Friends, this is our story. Or this is the story. So what do we make of it? What does God teach us from these events?

I want to begin by getting us all to ask ourselves what's going on here. What is it that the Jews are doing? Well, they are doing something when you look at it.

It's just so very human. The nation of Israel in its history had codified and restrained God's way of working. They had put God in a neat little package or box.

[33 : 11] And they had prohibited him from breaking out. The temple was an example of such a box. And what Stephen said in his overview of history was that God had never allowed himself to be so restricted.

I love the point where David says to God, I'll build you a house. And God says, not on your life. I'll build one for you. You see, God's always on the move.

Always putting bombs under people. Always challenging them. Always forcing them to move on. But let's be not too harsh about our ancient spiritual ancestors.

After all, what they do is just so human, isn't it? And what they do, we are so prone to also do. We Christians can also be dragged into the very same sins.

We too work out who we think God is. What we think God is like. And we put God in our neat little packages. We put them in man-made boxes.

[34 : 14] And we use these boxes to stop him breaking out. It's as though we say to ourselves, I don't believe God is like that. Have you ever heard that language? I don't believe God is like that.

God can't, won't, will not do this or that. God must only act this way in these situations. Now, that would be okay if we had warrant from Scripture to say these things.

But I reckon, lots of times I hear people saying this, they have no warrant from Scripture that I can find. Often our restriction of God has no warrant in Scripture. And when we act and we think in this way, we are just like our spiritual ancestors.

We have become unteachable. And when we're challenged to change our thinking, what do we do? Well, sometimes we engage in rage, anger, aggression, and demands that things be brought into line.

Friends, listen to Stephen's sermon. Hear his words. We are children of Abraham. We are sisters and brothers of Jesus. We are children of a moving God. A God who will not be kept in little boxes.

[35 : 22] A God who threatens because of his movability. We are the children of a moving God. So let's go with him. Did you notice that happens in the Gospel constantly?

Do you remember that little phrase? Some of our versions cut it out these days, which is really unfortunate. Jesus is traveling and says, And immediately he. And immediately he. And at once he. And at once he.

And it just goes on and on. And he's always on the move, isn't he? And then he heads toward Jerusalem. You see, let's go with Jesus. Let us allow him to lead us where he wills.

And that's the first thing our spiritual ancestors did. They refused to allow God to be a moving God. But what else did they do? Well, they tamed God in another way. You see, they tamed this movable God by tying him down to buildings and traditions and institutions.

And the history of the Christian church demonstrates that Christians have done similar things. We have built the equivalence of temples.

[36 : 21] In some churches, they're even made to look like temples. We've adorned them with stained glass and fixed pews and fenced off areas. There's still one or two of these in Melbourne if you look in the right places.

And don't think for a moment that if you meet in some other rented accommodation, you're exempt from this. Go to a church freshly started and then revisit it in 10 years' time.

And what you will find is there may be no stained glass windows because these days they're in big barns. No fixed pews. But things will have become fixed in other ways.

People will have begun to nail things down. Traditions will have begun to have become laws. And these laws, in some cases, may even have begun to become idols.

Human sin will show itself in our being shackled to tradition. Friends, listen to Stephen. God has never allowed himself to be confined in this way. History shows us.

[37 : 23] Check it out in the Bible. I think he almost has a distaste for buildings. For traditions. For time-honoured ways of doing things.

All the evidence, I think, points toward God constantly overthrowing our old ways of doing things. Replacing old ways of doing things.

Turning buildings. Sorry, we tend to do these things. And sometimes what we do is we turn our buildings into mausoleums. Some of the buildings that are grand around the world that were built by grand Christian folk wanting to honour God are now empty except for the tourists.

Because they no longer preach the gospel. You see, Jesus puts new wine into new wineskins.

And if and when you try to tie him down anywhere here at Holy Trinity in the churches you go to, he will do what he's always done. I think he'll break out somewhere. He's a moving God.

[38 : 29] He cannot be tied down by humanly constructed mechanisms. But there's still more to learn from this passage. Let's dig down just a little more. You see, these are the early days of the Christian church.

And there are signs that the early church is already becoming comfortable with where they are. You mightn't see it. We're only up to chapter 7, aren't we? Surely not. But no, they are.

You see, the command of Jesus in Acts 1 told them that they were on a mission. They were inheritors of his mission. They were to go into all the world in need of saving.

But where have they got to so far? Jerusalem. Jerusalem. They're still there. They're moving God.

Had the whole world in view. And so, this is the irony of it. They're moving God. Use the martyrdom of this man.

[39 : 25] To push them out of Jerusalem. It's an incredible thing, isn't it? Friends, we also are like our ancestors. So, the danger is we begin to feel comfortable here or in your own churches.

We have nice churches in nice eastern suburb Bible belts surrounded by friends. Atmosphere is comfortable and friendly. Friends, how many of you became Christians here at Holy Trinity, for example?

I know some did. I know a number of you did. But how many of us have been reached for Christ by members of this congregation? Let me put it another way.

Where are your non-Christian friends and where are the people you work with and your neighbors? Friends, there are signs, I think, all across this part of town that here in our comfortable Bible Belt churches, we are too comfortable and too secure.

There is a city out there. Our suburbs are changing underneath our feet. And they're changing. There are different people. And this world and its people need the saving gospel of Jesus Christ.

[40 : 30] And we have it. And yet we sit here often, enjoying, quite rightly, learning from God in Bible teaching.

But we must take it and use it. Friends, let me have a word to you who are from Holy Trinity. How well do we welcome strangers here?

Do we talk well to those who are new? Do our neighbors know that we are Christians? Have we ever told them about Jesus? Do we love it that newcomers are from different backgrounds to us?

Do we love it that they bring their children, even if those children disturb our accepted ways of doing things and our accepted traditions? Friends, we're children of a moving God.

We're not children of an overweight, wealthy God who never moves out of his lounge chair. He's a moving God. If I can push the analogy to just a little bit close to the edge, we're the children of a trim, moving, athletic, sacrificial and action-filled God who gives his all for his world.

[41 : 43] He's so inclined toward action that he sends his son. The eternal son of God becomes a man. The eternal son of God becomes dependent on a mother. He lives as one of us.

He dies as one of us for us. And we are his brothers and sisters. We are children of this father. Where is the family likeness?

We need to make sure we have it. Friends, are we those who have left all to follow Jesus? And you can do it here. You don't have to go to Mongolia to do it.

You can do it even here. But I wonder, often in our younger generation, for example, where are those willing to lose their lives to gain Christ?

Are we willing to do that? Where are those who are willing to go the way of the cross? Where are those who, like their Lord Jesus, have no place to lay their heads? See, we're children of a moving God.

[42 : 43] Children of Jesus who left his father for our sake. So where are you in all of this and where are you going? And are you going to take the risk of following this moving God and his moving son?

Let's pray. Father, we thank you for the reminder from Stephen that you're not easily tied down.

That you have a purpose in your world and you're constantly moving toward it. Father, we see what you have accomplished in your son.

And we see you moving further in your world to ensure that he's honored and loved. Father, we pray that we might go with you. Father, we pray that we might go with your son and that our lives might look like his.

Father, we pray this for the sake of your world. And we pray it in Jesus' name. Amen. Friends, we've got time here for you to come and pray.

[43 : 55] So you can use that mic or this mic if you like. And we'll just have, you know, as many people pray until there's a bit of a silence. And then Heather will come and wrap things up for us.

So just feel free. Let's all pray silently. But if you want to pray out loud, then please come and come to one of the mics.