

Fix Your Eyes On Jesus (Stephen, A Faithful Witness)

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Date: 23 March 2025

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[0 : 00] Thank you for tuning into this message preached at Karis Church. The Word of God is to be lived. May you receive direction from this message that will be a lamp to your feet.

So I'm reading from Acts chapter 7, verse 51 to 60. Use stiff-necked and 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? They killed those who foretold the coming of the just one, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers, who have received the law by the direction of the angels and have not kept it.

When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with their teeth. But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and said, Look, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.

Then they cried out with a loud voice, Stop their ears, and run at him with one accord. And they cast him out of the city, and stoned him.

[1 : 28] And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man called Saul, and a stone-staving, as he was calling on God and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.

And then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, Lord, do not charge them with this sin. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

What a testimony. When he had finished, he fell asleep. I'll be taking it from verse 54.

We'll make a few references to 51 and 52. But the scripture says, When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart. They were cut to the heart.

This is not the first time that the word of God is being preached, and people are cut to the heart. But the implication can be different. Because in Acts chapter 2, when Peter preached, verse 37, people were cut to the heart.

[2 : 32] The scripture says, And when they heard this, they were cut to the heart. Just as these ones were cut to the heart. And their response was, Peter and the rest of the apostles.

Men and brethren, this is the people who were being cut to the heart, hearing the word of God. And it was a similar preaching, because I took time to look at what Peter was saying. Peter also brought an accusation against them, that they had denied Jesus, they had rejected Jesus.

The same charge Stephen laid at their feet. And the response of the hearers of Peter said, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Whilst these ones refuse to hear it, block their ears, and charge to kill this man.

Sometimes the truth hurts. Sometimes the truth is uncomfortable. But it has to be told. It has to be told.

You may have come across situations where you heard the truth. Sometimes a good friend tells you something. Sometimes a good brother tells you something. And you have heard over a period of time.

[3 : 36] The truth sometimes is not pleasant. But it has to be spoken. Stephen could not change the word of God. No preacher has the authority to alter any aspect of the word of God.

When it suits you, wear it. Oh, wear it. Because it's supposed to bless you. It's supposed to change you. It's supposed to transform you. It's supposed to do you good.

And Stephen was looking at them and saying that, verse 52 said, Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the people, the vessels that God sent to the people of Israel to tell them that, in actual fact, their first prophet, Moses, they drove him to his

death.

They drove him to the point that God said, you just come out before you just lose this calling. Where the promise that God gave Moses that we are going to the promised land, Moses the leader didn't make it.

He did not make it to why? The same people. Complaining and complaining. They drove, please, don't drive your pastors to make a wrong decision.

[4 : 44] Let's not drive our pastors to prophesy what God has not said they should say. To make promises, that is not in scripture. To promise you that when you come into salvation, everything will be okay.

It's not true. It's not in the Bible. It's not in the Bible. We will definitely have peace with God. How that is expressed, nobody can tell. But in the end as well, we will be in glory.

Hallelujah. But they drove Moses to the point that he took steps that was not pleasing to the Lord. He actually, the Lord said, speak to the rock.

Because of these people, all consistently murmuring in his ears all the time. Take us back. Take us back. Take us back. We don't want this. We don't want this. We don't want this. They were speaking against God, but it didn't matter to them.

As far as they didn't like what was happening, they had to speak out. There are times I know there are things that it's not everything you say. Yeah. It's not everything you like that you have to, you know, or you don't like that you have to make an issue about.

[5 : 45] Yeah. For those of you who are not married, even a few of us who are married, it's not everything you call for meeting. Okay. We got to talk. Too often. We got to talk. Soon we got to talk. It's not going to make any impact.

Once I got to talk, say, okay, later. Yes, because we've used, we got to talk for a long time. Now you threaten people. We have to talk. We have to sit there. We have to sit down. They are not afraid anymore.

But these were people who were very, very stubborn. And the description Stephen gave them, it said, stiff-necked people, meaning you can't turn them, but the neck is supposed to be turned. The neck is supposed to turn.

It's supposed to help for vision, you know, whether good or bad. It's supposed to help you to interact with your environment. But you cannot, not even God, God could not even turn them.

We know in history that Isaiah was cut into a thunder. The same prophets who was prophesying the man of God. Jeremiah was stoned to death.

[6 : 51] They stoned Jeremiah to death. Zachariah was killed between the temple and the altar. Doing his work, they killed him. Stiff-necked people. But they were the people of God.

They were the people of God. If you looked at the Amorites, the Amorites are not the people of God. If you look at the Edomites, they are not the people of God. If you look at the Moabites, they are not the people of God. These were the people of God, but this is a description.

Is it possible that you can be a Christian and be a stiff-necked Christian? That the word of God cannot turn you from things that are contrary to God. You can't hear a preaching and say, I hear the word of God, I will change.

Even if you feel you are not able, God give me grace. You can't easily be amongst the people of God, part of the people of God, and still have a stiff neck. Stiff neck that you cannot change your ways.

In verse 54, it said that when they were cut to the heart, instead of having a reaction of repentance, they rather gnashed their teeth.

[7 : 59] In some versions, the NLT said, they shook their fist with anger, with rage. You can imagine. He's amongst the hindrance. The high priest is, this is a serious, because at the beginning of chapter 7, it's a high priest asking him, are these things true?

So he's amongst the topmost people, the people of authority in Israel, and these men of dignity. It's like you've gone to parliament. You know, some countries, I've seen some countries where parliament, people are fighting and throwing shoes, you know, and all manner of things.

But usually, parliament is a place of, exactly, they are honorable people, it's a place of good behavior, good conduct. You know, you let your speaking do the cutting.

No, no, no, these people, instead of responding if they believe contrary to what the man was saying, what Stephen was saying, no, not the, no, rather they were raging, gnashing teeth, like, I'm

sure some of us would have come into a space where you've heard the truth, and instead of having a level of brokenness, you are looking at the person who is telling you and saying you don't qualify to speak into my life.

Yeah. Some parents have experienced it, to say that your children are telling you something, you realize that on this occasion, they are wiser than you. And instead of being humble, to receive, it might be God speaking to you through them.

[9 : 31] You refused. Sometimes, it can even affect somebody in leadership position, in church, sometimes even a non-believer, that you think, of course, they are on their way to hell, you're on your way to heaven, so you are better than them.

Yeah. Yeah. And like Cyrus, there may be an instrument in God's hands for your help, but you gnash. There are things that we all do that we don't want to receive instruction or correction. We don't want to receive the truth. But that is where we part from God. That is where we part from God because Stephen was in actual fact from my last week's message was an instrument God was using to transition the people of Israel.

And unfortunately, they miss God. They miss God. So the gnashing of teeth and all these things is good. It would have been okay if it ended up in them receiving the word of God and coming along. But the pain, well, of course, there's somebody who had a different testimony, so it's still standing there. When we go further on in Acts, we'll see that at least one person, at least one person saw something different.

[10 : 44] Eventually, the Lord used that moment to remind him that he can't fight against God's mission. But most of them missed out because their necks were so stiff.

Their ears were not circumcised. Their hearts were not circumcised. These were people who believed in the circumcision. They believed in the circumcision. It was a covenant that up till today, they are one of the people who make sure, this is still part, is a statement in Genesis chapter 17. The Lord made a covenant the Lord cut with Abraham. And since they know they connect so much with Abraham, this is a covenant that still remains up till today. But unfortunately, they kept it only for physical conformity.

But rather, oh God, that was just a sign. That was just a physical thing for them to be able to know there will be a time coming that God will require circumcision not only of the foreskin but the foreskin of a heart.

So that your heart is not hardened, God will take out the hardened heart and give you a soft heart. You can be a Christian hearing the word of God being watered over you again and again and you still harden your heart.

[11 : 55] He said, if you hear my voice, harden not your heart. I mean, the Christian can harden their hearts. You can resist the truth of God. They can refuse to change.

As you're hearing the word of God, you're still saying to yourself, yes, there is no, you're not asking God, God, actually, I'm struggling on this matter. Can you help me for my next step? Because you know, as you see the word of truth, you know that you stand contrary to God.

How, Lord? Sometimes you're struggling. We all have things we were battling with but our response is not to say no. Our response is to say, Lord, help me. Lord, help me.

Lord, help me. There are some things that cannot persist in our lives. As we read the word of God, we are a church that by God's grace, we read the word of God all the time, the preaching of the word, we are consistently looking to scripture.

God will be speaking to you on many things, many things. Your response to that will indicate whether this circumcision is only for physical conformity and not transformation of hearts.

[13 : 00] Transformation of hearts. That is what God is looking for. They gnashed at him. They shook their fist in rage. Verse 55, but he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.

This is the portion that to be honest blessed me so much as I was reading over and over Acts chapter 7. It said, but him being full of the Holy Spirit.

Stephen was an evidence of what Jesus told the disciples because when you look back in John, we read the book of John not too long ago. From John chapter 12, Jesus started to wrap up his ministry and he started talking about the end was coming but we go all the way in the 20s.

But from there, in John chapter 14, Jesus told the disciples that he's going to pray that the Father, he's going to go but the Father will send them another helper.

Jesus saw himself as a helper. He said, the Lord, he's prayed that the Father will send them another helper. John 14, 16, that he may abide with you forever. So physically, I will leave but my spirit is going to come and abide with you forever.

[14:14] In John chapter 14, verse 26, he said, when the helper comes, he will teach you all things and bring into remembrance all the things that I have said to you. Meaning that I've said a lot of things.

Naturally, you're likely to forget some things. However, the spirit of truth, the helper, when he comes, he will teach you all things and bring to remembrance. If they had the Holy Spirit, they would have remembered that this is already written.

What is happening is already written. But Stephen, by God's grace, we're seeing that he was full of the Holy Spirit. In John chapter 15, when the scripture talks about abiding in the vine and later on, it goes to talk about the world will hate you.

But in verse 26, it goes on to say that when the helper comes, he will testify of me, Jesus, and then he will bear witness. Meaning that he will help you to be a witness. And the Holy Spirit will help us to bear witness just as Stephen was doing.

And then we jump into Acts chapter 1, verse 8. Of course, now Jesus has gone to the cross, died, ascended, and he told them something in Acts chapter 5, verse 8. Then we see the manifestation of it.

[15:21] It said, and the Holy Spirit will come upon you, receive power when the Holy Spirit come upon you, and you shall be witnesses of me. So Stephen is witnessing, but I'm trying to help you to see the source of it.

Because when we see about how amazing this whole thing is, it's not really of man. It's not, as I say, he's a testimony, an evidence of the teachings of Jesus from John that the Holy Spirit is coming, and he's going to help you.

He's going to help you to be a witness. He's going to help you. Even if the world hates you, you will still stand as a witness because I'm sending the helper. In Acts chapter 2, they waited on the Lord, verse 4, and on the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came.

So when he came upon them, Jesus said, told them in Acts 1, wait, and you receive the Holy Spirit. Acts chapter 2, verse 4, they waited, and they received, the promise was fulfilled. In Acts chapter 4, when they were being attacked, they prayed, and they were filled with the Holy Spirit once again, and they had boldness to speak the word of God.

Acts chapter 5, interestingly, the church was growing, and some people made some moves, and we saw the workings of the Holy Spirit to sanitize the church. The story of Ananias and Sapphira. And Peter said exactly that.

[16:27] Why do you lie to the Holy Spirit? Then we come to Acts chapter 6. Amazing. And so now the church is growing. And this promise that Jesus spoke about, that he will ask the Father to send, he, the Holy Spirit, is already at work.

And the church is growing, and they need deacons. We've heard this teaching already. And so they say, they're less sick men of good reports, good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit.

And then in verse 5, then Stephen is spoken about, singled out, and spoken of, and it says Stephen, full of faith and the Holy Spirit. So I'm just giving you a background of Stephen's qualification. What Jesus said would take for a person to be a witness.

It would take the Holy Spirit, the infilling of the Holy Spirit, for a person to be full of the Holy Spirit. And then Stephen comes into, I'm sure he got saved in Acts chapter 2. He stayed, and stayed with them in Acts chapter 4, when they were praying for the infilling of the Holy Spirit, he received his portion.

Acts chapter 5, he saw the work of the Holy Spirit. And now, in Acts chapter 6, he has become a man full of faith and full of the Holy Spirit. The point I'm trying to make is, over the time that he's been saved, and as he was partaking of the promise of Jesus Christ that he would ask the Father to send the Holy Spirit, he has now become a man full of the Holy Spirit.

[17:48] The man who was serving the tables, ordinary work. The man who was full of the Holy Spirit, serving tables, was now going to face such an attack.

And what was going to help him to survive, remain, somebody who continues to bear the testament of Jesus Christ, be a faithful witness, was still being full of the Holy Spirit.

It wasn't going to take anything else. At that point, he wasn't going to ask, can you give me my deacon cloak? because I feel an unction in the cloak. Okay? And so, when I wear this cloak, I can speak boldly.

No. In that moment, yeah, there was no special cross he could put on and say that, if I put this chain on, I feel the unction. I can be a better witness.

who he had become after being saved and walking with God and being full of the Holy Spirit, it's exactly the person who was going to face this huge attack that was actually going to take his life.

[18 : 53] And so, as we are doing different things in church, it's the same person you're going to be when you are faced with the questions of life. Who you have taken time to become.

It won't be a different person facing the enemy. It's not going to be a different person. So, you can't say that, I don't need too much anointing to operate the camera. I'm only taking pictures.

You must be full of the Holy Spirit. It's not at the reserve of pastors or preachers or people who lay hands. Every one of us must seek to be full of the Holy Spirit because on the day of difficulty, adversity, the day of challenge or even the day God grants you a great life transforming opportunity to make a stand for his purpose and for his kingdom, you must have been full of the Holy Spirit all through your journey.

All through. It wasn't a different person. The same Stephen serving tables was the same Stephen being a faithful witness in such a difficult time. The same. His description has not changed.

Full of the Holy Spirit. So, when we see this amazing testimony, we also have the opportunity to have the same testimony because the Holy Spirit Stephen had is no different from the one we received when we came to Christ.

[20 : 15] Same Spirit. What is more important is whether we are full of the Holy Spirit or we check him out when we need him to show up and show up mightily.

The way you build matters. The way you're living your life matters. In moments of ordinary living, it matters. On your daily activities, day by day, when you wake up, you go to bed, you wake up, go to bed, it matters.

Those are seasons where we have to be building, building, being intentional, working with the Holy Spirit, working in the Word, abiding in him so that we can remain consistently full of the Spirit.

I don't know whether Stephen knew that that was the day he was going to die because Peter had preached being at the Sahindran and he made it. He came out. Yeah, he escaped.

So Peter made it for whatever reason. That was Stephen's last days. I don't know if he knew but how he had prepared himself made sure he survived.

[21 : 21] He finished well. He finished well. In Matthew chapter 7 verse 24 to 27 talks about the wise builder and the foolish builder.

There's a way you build that the Bible describes you to be wise or to be foolish. You see, everybody's building but God looks at you and says, this one is wise, the other one is foolish. Why? Because of how you're building. How you're building, the foundation upon which you're building. Whether your house is being built on the rock which is Jesus Christ or you're building on sand.

And so we are all busy. We are serving God but one person's testimony is wise building and another person's testimony is foolish building. For men, we are all building but for God, one won't survive, the other will survive.

The Bible is not a stammer. It repeats it, ten virgins, five were wise, five foolish. They were all going to the feast. Everybody didn't make up. Put on their nice clothes.

[22 : 26] So all of that was not an issue but God was looking at them and saying, five of you, you are foolish, five of you, you are wise. So they all, and they all arrived at the wedding just as the groom had not arrived.

Some of you, when you are marrying, it's like the whole world must wait for you. Yes. But five of them, the scripture describes them as foolish. Why?

Because of the way they prepared. The invitation was for all ten but five knew that there's a way we have to prepare that when we go we will have need of extra oil.

They didn't prepare for that and so as much as they dress nicely, as much as they put themselves together, as much as they actually turned up, they missed out. How you build matters?

Just making a confession doesn't guarantee the best of God. Yeah. Making a confession out giving my life to Christ, just church attendance has its blessing but it doesn't guarantee the best of God.

[23 : 23] God isn't interested in how you're building. So his people, he's calling them some wise and some foolish. But we see Stephen, he had taken time to build himself.

He was full of the Holy Spirit in Acts chapter 6 when he was first introduced to the scriptures and today in his day of dire challenge, tests, he's still full of the Holy Spirit.

And the scripture said him being full of the Holy Spirit gazed into heaven. The King James said looked steadfastly. And so please, let's not forget that in the meantime, these people are still throwing their fists with rage and Stephen is not trying to hide himself.

You know, in the Greek cup when they were throwing at the person, the person's trying to cover his face. That's not Stephen. It's a nice depiction of how bad the stoning is but that's not Stephen.

Stephen is still, the scripture says, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God.

Then King James said, he gazed steadfastly. So imagine, I'm seriously looking focused like this and all these people surrounding me throwing fists, gnashing their teeth.

[24 : 35] He must take the Holy Spirit. He's not trying to cover himself. He's not trying to say, oh please guys, can I finish, can I land? He's not, nothing.

No, yeah, where are my guys, can you please raise a prayer for me? Nothing. This is what amazes me that nothing could distract him. He was gazing, he looked steadfastly, he was fixed.

Must be something he was seeing that made the natural lose its relevance. There must be something that he was seeing that was more than his very life.

There must be something and the scripture says it's not something but he said he saw the glory of God and Jesus standing. His gaze was fixed at a location, the location was heaven.

The location, which is heaven, had an atmosphere, it was full of the glory of God and in the atmosphere, Christ was central. He saw Jesus standing.

[25 : 41] He saw Jesus standing. He was so fixed. He was so fixed. He had set his face like a flame. He was so fixed like Jesus in Gethsemane was so fixed.

He knew what was coming but he was so fixed that he must get to the cross. So fixed. I can imagine what exchange was happening between Jesus and Stephen.

Jesus saw the people attacking him but in that moment it did not matter. In that moment it did not matter. I can imagine what Jesus saw, the same thing the father saw with Jesus on the cross.

It pleased him that Jesus should die like that. His wrath was satisfied and I'm sure it pleased Jesus that Stephen should finish like this.

What a beautiful sacrifice. What a sweet spelling offering that must have been. Jesus knew that Stephen would die and today he'll be with him. It didn't matter just like Enoch walked with the Lord and he was not so close, so fixed that nothing here matters anymore.

[26 : 56] so aligned, so in tune, so connected, so in sync that nothing else mattered. It didn't matter.

I might not say this is your moment of departure. That's not what I'm saying but it's almost like when it's like what value do we place on our relationship with Jesus will determine the things we allow to distract us in this life and in this journey.

The value we place on our connection with Jesus, how we are in sync with him, how we please him, what sacrifice we offer him will determine what we allow to distract us.

So when you are serving the Lord in the house of the Lord and somebody, whether the devil is using them or they're just unaware, willingly or unwillingly, yes, whether it's a recruitment drive that they have also or headhunted, how do those things distract you?

Determines the value you place on Jesus on your relationship with him. What sin you give into determines is an evidence of the value you place on your relationship with Jesus.

[28 : 11] Oh yes, because the Holy Spirit has a way of helping. I said he would not be tempted beyond what you're unable to take. He would take. God has given us that promise.

He will not allow you to be tempted beyond. And it's because and he provides a way of escape. And so there's nothing. He said, anybody who is drawn away is drawn by his own lusts. And so, it is your last first and you didn't submit your last to, oh Jesus.

Even Joseph who did not have the Holy Ghost said, how can I do this against God and sin against God? This wicked thing and sin against God.

His relationship with God mattered to him. So as sophisticated as Potiphar's wife was, as sophisticated as she was, as nice as it would be to experience and encounter this, he looked at and said, ask, nah, I can't do this against God.

It's fine because Potiphar is a high man. And in Egypt, in those days, they were very sophisticated. Have you seen the eyeliner we are still doing today? They were doing it back in the day in Egypt. [29 : 23] All the braids we do today, they were still back in the day. This is thousands of years ago. Egypt was already a forerunner when it comes to eyeliner and braiding.

Oh yes. Look at how Esther was being prepared for the king. So it tells you that in those days there is a way.

It's not today that you know, whatever, but Lord help us. But these are a wife of a very important man with resources at her disposal.

And they are not nine to five wives. And so their job was to make sure they are prepared for the master's use. Yeah.

Joseph said, I can't do this thing. Why? He plays value on his relationship with God. Because he didn't say, I can't do this thing against Potiphar.

[30 : 22] Though Potiphar was a good master to him. I can't do this against Potiphar. But he said, I can't do this wicked thing against God. When David sinned, he said, God, it is you I've sinned against.

He had killed a man and taken his wife. But he still said, it is God I've sinned against. The value we place on our relationship with God and how central God is in our lives makes choices so easy.

Not that it's easy in terms of we don't feel the effect, but it's easy because we know the bottom line. It's easy because we know that there are some things we just can't do.

There are some things, it doesn't matter the price, it's still worth paying the price because this is for God. This is for God. Stephen gazed so intently.

His look was so steadfast, he was so fixed on Jesus that the earth lost its influence. It didn't matter anymore.

[31 : 24] He was a deacon, he served the tables, he was a respectable man in the church community. God was actually using him in ways that other deacons the scripture doesn't record that they were being used.

God was in all of that, his main focus was Jesus. Was Jesus. When it comes to the things of the supernatural, your focus matters.

Your focus matters. Your heart's position matters. When it comes to the things of God, your focus matters. Your heart's position matters. It matters. We can relate to an example when you're looking for a red car, all of a sudden.

When you're looking for something in particular, all of a sudden you see it everywhere. I think guys who are into cars, when you start looking at the car on YouTube, and you go online and you start watching a car, all of a sudden you see everywhere you go.

You never knew there were so many of those cars. Anything you are into, it's easy to spot it.

Anything. Whatever you see physically, anything you are into, so easily you spot it.

[32 : 31] It's an indication of what your heart is set on. It's an indication of what your heart is set on. And so if your heart is set on pleasing the Lord, distractions don't have influence over you.

It doesn't matter how they come, because for you, your occupation is Christ. Occupied, your focus is Christ. Your determination is Christ. It cannot be broken.

And we saw the source is the Holy Spirit, being full of the Holy Spirit. So the scripture is not asking you for something that you can't do. It is asking you to rely on the Holy Spirit, for the Holy Spirit to fill you, and it will come easily.

Our focus is so crucial when it comes to what God can do with our lives. Because the more you are distracted, there's no way that you are distracted and running at a fast pace.

When you look at people who run 100 meters and stuff like that, you won't see anybody running 100 meters and looking left, right, and center. We only saw one using bolts when he was finishing one, and started looking around.

[33 : 32] But even the other points, why could he afford looking around? He didn't need the speed anymore. But when he needed the speed, there was no way, no way he could be looking around.

As soon as you start looking left, right, you're done. You're done. And so when you say you are a Christian, you must be fixed on that. You have to set yourself that there's a race ahead of me that I've got to run.

Yes, the day you walked, whether you did it in your bedroom, you walked out to an altar, wherever you got saved, that was the day that you had to set your heart that this is it. Because all this thing is

non-scoring.

Non-scoring is not counting for anything. It's not counting for much. Apart from you really gave your life to Christ, we'll see you in heaven, but outer darkness likely. All this in between, there's provision.

That's why I took time to let us see how Jesus made the provision for us before he left so that whatever race that is set before each one of us, we can run. Stephen is an example of how difficult a race can be.

[34 : 41] But he was able to run his race and finish well because he had the Holy Spirit, full of the Holy Spirit. Our focus matters. There's nothing, you can't receive anything heavenly if your focus is not in line with the Lord.

God. In 2 Kings, we quote this a lot. Elisha asked for a double portion of the spirit that is on Elijah. He was asking for something that was spiritual, that was beyond the normal, that was supernatural. He said, I want a double portion of the spirit that is upon you. It wasn't going to take bread and butter to get that. It was going to take a certain focus, a certain attention, steadfast looking, that he said, if you see me go, you will catch it.

It was a sign of how to catch the supernatural. It was teaching us how to catch the supernatural. That if you want to have something of God that is not in the norm, that's not the ordinary, that's not human, your focus matters.

What you're gazing at matters. The apostles got to the lame manor, the beautiful gates in Acts chapter 3 verse 4. They gave a very simple instruction.

[35 : 52] They said, look at me. You need your focus. You got to connect. We need to click. Something of the supernatural is about to happen. Your focus matters.

Your focus matters. You are looking for silver and gold. We're going to give you a changed life. Something only God can give. He said, let's connect. Your focus, your gaze, what you're looking at matters.

Peter in Matthew chapter 14, sees Jesus walking on water and he said, master, bid me to come. And Jesus just said, come.

As long as he was looking at Jesus, he was okay. As soon as he shifted his gaze, what he was doing was highly supernatural. It is not normal for a human being, a fisherman, without any sophistication, just walk on water.

That's supernatural. supernatural. But that was not going to happen. Just giving high fives, chatting, chewing gum. No. Jesus said, connect, come, come, come, come.

[36 : 51] And he said, he took a step and moved towards Jesus. But then he started seeing the boisterous the water. And all of a sudden, he lost his focus, he lost the miracle.

He lost his focus and lost the supernatural. Second Corinthians chapter 3, verse 15. This is a scripture we know well. It talks about, it gives an example of when Moses met the Lord, spoke to the Lord in Exodus chapter 34, verse 29 to 35.

We were reading 2 Corinthians chapter 3, verse 15. The Bible says that, but even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their hearts.

No more Moses just wearing a veil. But a veil lies on their hearts. Nevertheless, when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now, the Lord is the spirit.

And where the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all with unveiled face, beholding us in the mirror, the glory of the Lord. This is exactly what Stephen saw.

[38 : 02] The same, he was beholding the glory of the Lord. And what happens there? We will be transformed. What you're looking at will determine what you become.

Into no other image, into the same image. Stephen looked so much at Jesus. Now, he has become a reproduction of Jesus. The focus, full of the spirit of Christ, that he looked to Jesus, connected to Jesus, and nothing else mattered.

Transformed to the same image. In that moment, they became one. It was okay for him to leave. It was okay. He had become one with the Lord. So, what you're looking at on a daily basis, when they say that that's why you are encouraged to have a vision board if you want to undertake something. Why? Because what you continue to look at, you will be able to make happen. Anything you continue to look at, anything you continue to fix your gaze on, you will become. You will become. In James, tells us, what should we look at? We, the believers, should look at this perfect law of liberty. And that when we look at it, it shouldn't be like somebody who looked into the mirror and

walked away forgetting what they looked like.

[39 : 17] So, that way you can never be blessed. You can never have the best of God. But if you can fix your eyes in the perfect law of liberty and not be a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the word, he said, that man is blessed.

That man is blessed. And so, we look to the Lord who is the word and we will be transformed into that image. It can seem so far, but what do you look at consistently on your YouTube page, on your Instagram?

Today, that's what a lot of our spare time we focus on. That's why it's catching our sights. It's taking our sights. It's taking our sights that the vision of God is being clouded.

God is good. Yeah. It's become a battle for so many of us. So many believers have become slaves to the social media.

It's one of the things that is easily besetting us. It's become a weight. It's become a weight. It's taken away. We don't even have time to meditate on God or the scriptures.

[40 : 26] We don't have time. We don't know that art anymore because you are meditating on somebody's content. You're fixing your eyes on somebody's content. And when they designed the content, they didn't think that you're a Christian seeking God.

Yes. When they designed that, they were not thinking that, oh, this one is likely to have, even though I'm a non-believer, it's likely to have some Christians watching this, so let's make sure that they don't miss God.

No. That's not what you're thinking about. And we have fallen prey. So many of us have become slaves. Slaves to this. And it's something that we have to fight because it's blocking your vision. It's blocking your vision. You can't see God. You can't see Jesus. You can't gaze steadfastly on Jesus. It's after the best of God in your life.

It's after your unique relationship with Jesus. At the end of the day, that's what the devil is after. Not just your time, even though your time is your life. But it's after your relationship with Jesus.

[41 : 31] That's what, at the end of the day, you're going to lose. You know, sometimes you do it and you say, all right, oh, I've spent ten minutes, oh, let me move on. No, that's ten minutes. But the devil is pulling it together at the end of the day that it will disturb, distract,!

undermine, weaken your relationship with Jesus. And so we have to consistently gaze. His heart longed for the Lord. It didn't matter what was happening around him.

As I'm talking, I still hope that the image hasn't left you of people gnashing their teeth at him, throwing angry fists at him, but he's still gazing on the Lord.

God. We know the scripture, Hebrews chapter 12, verse 1 and 2. It says, therefore, since we are surrounded by this great cloud of witnesses, I guess it's from Hebrews 11, speaking about that cloud of witnesses, it said, let's lay aside every weight and sin that easily besets us, looking unto Jesus.

He's the beginner and the finisher. He's the one who starts, who gave you life, new life, and is the one who we'll meet and go and be with at the end of the day. He said, he's the author and the finisher of your faith.

[42 : 49] Fix your eyes on him. Fix your eyes on him. That is the only way you go through the challenges, the ups and downs of your walk of faith.

Fix your eyes on him. The scripture says that in Luke 7, verse 7, it said, ask and it should be given, but the other one is seek what you're looking for. What you're looking for, you will find.

What you set your eye on, you will find. What you're looking for, you will find. Jesus is our perfect example. So the Bible helps us to understand that since he's the author and finisher of our faith, we should set our eyes on him.

And so Stephen, his eyes, his gaze, still fixed on Jesus steadfastly, has not been shaken. But what is happening around him? He has not been distracted by what is happening around him.

And what does he see? He sees the glory of God. He sees Jesus standing at the right hand of God. Verse 56, and he said, what he was seeing has not become his confession.

[43 : 53] He said, look, I see the heavens opened. What a privilege. The son of man standing at the right hand of God. his preoccupation had become his confession.

What had consumed him has become his confession. The scripture says that as a man thinker, so is he. So the things that you set your heart on, you set your mind on, the things you're thinking of, you are becoming that.

You are becoming that. If you set your heart and your mind on the word of God, you are becoming that. If you set your heart on things of the world, you are becoming that. You are in the conveyor, you are in the process, you don't realize, you are in the process of becoming what you have set your heart on.

The things you think about on a regular basis. If you are in a marriage and you say, my husband is no good, oh, you would definitely have a no good husband. Not because it's not of quality, but it's what you think.

So that's what you see. What becomes your preoccupation is what you confess. And what you confess is what you become. The Bible says that out of the abundance of the heart in Luke chapter 6 verse 45, the mouth will speak.

[45 : 03] So you've set your heart as your thinking is becoming your preoccupation, is becoming you, the same is what you're going to confess. You can't confess what you don't think about. Sometimes we can have the tendency of repeating things, but it doesn't have power, it doesn't have the effect of results.

You know, some people can tell you things, you look at them and they're like, where'd you get this from? This is not you. Yeah, you're rattling something to us. We know that you don't carry this weight. It's like what Archbishop said, forgive me.

And so he confessed who his eyes was fixed on, who he was gazing. He said, I see the heavens open, the son of man standing at the right hand of God.

And when they heard this in verse 57, they cried with a loud voice. voice. They blocked their ears. Those uncircumcised ears, they blocked it too.

What is wrong with you? You need the word to enter. To remove that clock, whatever is choking it, the word must enter. No, they refused, they rejected.

[46 : 09] They said no. They said no. We don't want this. We don't want this. They should have even given a chance to think about it. So, Stephen, why do you say this?

Yes, these things you said, indeed, you said, but why? Show us in the scriptures. Take us through the scriptures. Even though you've said a lot from Moses all the way to the temple, we don't still get it because we see the temple there.

So show us. No. Rather, they fought against us. Look, their state was bad. Just as our state was bad. That is why the good news is good news. Because if we don't have the good news, we have very bad news.

Very bad news. The state of man is bad without God. Without having heard the good news and received the good news, every man is leading to eternal domination.

Doesn't matter how high, how low. We know that God is not a respecter of persons. It doesn't matter what matters is have you heard the good news? And when you hear the good news, don't harden your heart.

[47 : 16] They could not perceive the ways of God. even though they stayed with the scriptures for so long. They had just the letter of it. They didn't have the spirit of it. But we know that the letter kills.

It's only the spirit that gives life. And so even though they were handling the letter, they didn't have the life of what they were handling. And therefore, that meant their death. somebody needs the good news.

Because outside the good news, the situation is bad. That's why Stephen referred to them as people with uncircumcised hearts and ears.

They had hardened their hearts and clogged their ears from hearing the word of God. It can happen to the best of us. Harden our hearts and clog our ears.

the very things that you know God is speaking to you about, you behave, you didn't hear it. It happens to the best of us. Yeah. There are things that normally, you know, the normal way of life, when you don't expect, sometimes when it's a major thing, you die for Jesus.

[48 : 21] Oh, yes, please kill me. I'm ready. I will die for Jesus. Most of us, the way I see you, you love Jesus, you will die for Jesus. It's not a problem at all.

Today, you say, oh, I surrender. But it's the small things. But the funny thing, the Bible says that how can you love God and you don't love the brother you see? He said, for that I call you a liar.

He said, yeah, he said, yeah, yeah, I don't believe in your love if I can't see your love evident in the small things in a brother or in a sister. In the same way, as much as you say you die for Jesus, God doesn't believe it if you can't obey the small word that he's giving you.

The small, small ones, the ones that he's been pricking you and pricking you, been going around this mountain again and again, again, you're going for the walls of Jericho to come down. You've got the same instruction. You've been going out, you've gone past seven times, seventh day, again, Jesus said, you didn't pass.

Okay, let's start again. You've done it and you know exactly what God is dealing with you on.

You've heard it again and again, but you've hardened your heart, hardened your heart.

[49 : 29] There are some people God has told you forgive, let's go. Some people God actually told you, make an effort and reach out. Not just forgiving your heart, me I've let go. God is saying, go to that person.

You refuse. He said, after all, I didn't do anything. Yeah. There are some things God has put on your heart address. Some things God has said, do this, do that. You've even heard other people advise you to do.

God spoke to your heart, you behaved, you didn't hear it. And then one day, a brother told you that, you know, this thing, I think you should do that. You heard it, you behaved that, you gave all kinds of excuses and said, oh, okay, but you never did it.

Up to today, it's a standing order that God said, this has to be fulfilled. And we all know when God is speaking to us. If we pretend we can't hear, he will send somebody to come and tell you.

A situation will tell you. You can even see a signboard and you know God is speaking to me. You know. But you refuse. We can all be caught in this hardened heart.

[50 : 26] Heartened hearts. So we look at them and we think that these people, what's wrong with them? It's describing us. In some instances, it's describing us.

They run with one accord. Wow. Run. I'm like, these are men of dignity. Honorable men. Now they're running towards one guy.

Why? Because they've hardened their hearts. So now they are blind. They can't see what they're doing. They can't see anymore. They can't see what they're doing.

They can't see God in the picture. Because of their hardened hearts. So they run in verse 58. And they cast him out of the city and stoned him.

And the witnesses lay down their clothes at the feet of a young man called Saul. As we saw, God's haven't touched on stone in last week. But it just reminds us of how Jezebel got the land, neighbor's inheritance from him.

[51 : 32] Stephen had one inheritance, Christ. We're not going to take it away from him. He wasn't going to allow that to happen. You can do whatever you want to do. But his inheritance was him.

His hope was him. His future was him. His everything was Jesus. And so he wasn't going to let go of that. Your threat was not going to do anything to him.

In 1 Kings chapter 21, the king Ahab has decided he wants a piece of land to grow some vineyard and hopefully, I guess, have some nice wine for his enjoyment.

So really, all of this is leading to just drinking wine. I can't understand. If you look at it, we can make a big fuss about little things. As a king, could he not get wine from anywhere?

He could even cut a deal with Naboth and say, Naboth, when you harvest, I want half of your wine. There were so many ways he could have gone about it. But human beings, our hearts are callous.

[52 : 34] Just want to take it just away. Sometimes you don't even know. We don't know how bad we are. When Nathan went to David and described David's condition to him, David rose up and said, this man must be dealt with.

Yes. Because what? Somebody had one sheep and then another person had a whole lot and has gone and taken it. And how? Who is doing this under my government? We need to deal with this. The Bible says, then Nathan said to David, you are the man. You are the man. The Bible has a way of always describing us. It will catch all of us one way or the other.

It said, you are the man. Look at the way you are fighting for justice for this unknown person. You didn't have that mercy on your soldier. Somebody so loyal that he will not go to his wife even because he said, I can't do this.

My colleagues are on the battle front so I can't go home and go and enjoy my wife. And you kill a man like this. Loyal. Committed. To the cause.

[53 : 37] And you didn't see you're wrong. When this was being described, you thought it's somebody else. Somebody far. Let's deal with that person. Said, it is you. It is you. We all have moments like this.

But David's advantage was he was able to see it and repent. He repented with tears, sackcloth, and ashes. He was able to repent.

The Lord dealt with him by killing the child. He was okay with it. The moment the child died, the scripture says David got up and took a shower and got on because he knew that the justice of God had been satisfied.

That was okay. So his losing of the child wasn't a problem at all. He prayed before. But if the justice of God is satisfied, that's okay. We move on. We have to be able to sacrifice the things that is important.

If it satisfies the Lord, if it pleases the Lord, we have to be ready to sacrifice it. God bless you. So Naboth was killed. They set up a fast using spiritual things for evil purposes.

[54 : 39] They set up a fast and set people against him to come and give a negative witness. It's exactly what's happening here. People brought a witness, a statement that Stephen had blasphemed and he had not.

The end result was just to have wine, was just to take his heritage, which is it's not going to happen. When it comes to Stephen, he said, it's not going to happen. Take my life. You can't take my Jesus. Take whatever you want.

You can't take Jesus away from me. I won't change my confession. I will bear a witness. He was a faithful witness to the end. Faithful witness to the end. So verse 59, they actually went ahead and stoned him.

They stoned him. But the beautiful thing that we see Stephen do, these are his very final moments. He said he called on Jesus. He called on Jesus in Acts chapter 2, verse 21.

He said he shall come to pass that anyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. And he cried out on Jesus. He did exactly that. He said the Lord, calling on God and saying, Lord Jesus.

[55 : 49] Saying, Lord Jesus. Saying, Lord Jesus. Saying, Lord Jesus. He cried out and said, Lord Jesus. Amen.

He didn't take away the stoning. And neither did he break his focus. All this, his focus, all through this, his focus remained.

They had pushed him, taken him out of the city. Still his focus still remained. All the way to the very time that they began stoning him. He's at a point of death.

And he's still calling on the name of Jesus. He's at the point of death. And he's still calling on the name of Jesus.

At the end of the day, that is what will matter. When we all lie down 120 years after your birth, may your confession still be Lord Jesus.

[56 : 48] Lord Jesus. Lord Jesus. Because that has been your confession all your life. Lord Jesus. Lord Jesus. Lord Jesus.

He's our everything. There's nothing without him. Life is meaningless if we don't have Jesus. May we at the end be able to say, I serve the Lord.

I walked with him. It was all that mattered. He helped me by his spirit. But we served the Lord. We walked with him. We loved him. We obeyed him.

We had communion with him. We set our focus on him. We looked on to Jesus, the beginner, in the end. And at the end, we still hold on to Jesus.

Lord Jesus. Lord Jesus. Steve, he knelt down. He knelt down. I don't know what strength he had at that time to kneel down.

[57 : 44] But in his very last moment, he cried out, don't hold this against them. Don't hold this against them. The same prayer Jesus prayed, said, Lord, don't hold this against them.

I believe this is about forgive them. Because forgiveness must, it has to be recognized that you've done something wrong, and then you're forgiven. This one, he said, let it not be recorded. Let it not be recorded.

So if you're struggling with forgiveness, somebody's saying, let it not be recorded. There's no issue. There's nothing. Why? Full of the Holy Spirit. Full of the Holy Spirit. He's not special.

He's not special. He's different because he allowed the Holy Spirit to fill him. But not because he was special. He wasn't special. The only demarcation, the only difference he had was that he was full of the Holy Spirit.

And so, in 2 Timothy chapter 4, it said, the same Paul who saw the demise of Stephen is also coming to the end of his journey.

[58 : 45] And he says, I have fought a good fight. I have finished the race. I have kept the faith. I have kept the faith. He also had to fight his own fight.

He saw somebody's end. His end was coming. One day, his end came. And what was his testimony? Stephen called on the Lord. He said, I fought a good fight. It's been a fight, but I fought. It was a good fight. It was worth fighting. He said, I have finished the race that was set before me. He had a race. It may have been tough. I'm sure it was tough. God promised him, what you have done to my people, I will show you things you would have to suffer for my name. So his race was tough. But he said, I finished it. And he kept the faith. What a testimony. May be our testimony in Jesus' name. Amen. Thank you. Thank you.

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