

Study on Acts no.5

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Date: 05 May 1985

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[0 : 00] Let us turn now to the chapter we read in the Acts of the Apostles, chapter 7.

I am paying maybe particular attention to the account that we have at the end of the chapter of the death of Stephen, from verse 55 to the end.

But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing in the right hand of God.

And so on to the end of the chapter. But I want to look at it in the light of the account that we have of Stephen's defense here before the Sanhedrin.

Now, Stephen comes to the fore in the book of Acts. As one of the seven men commonly referred to as deacons, though the Bible doesn't speak of them as such, commonly referred to as the deacons who were appointed by the early church to look after the material affairs of the church in Jerusalem.

[1 : 31] And this section of the book of Acts is important because it gives us an insight into the organization of the church. At that time, it was necessary for the church to organize itself.

And here you have the first account of men being set apart for different functions. The apostles like Peter and James and John, these men were devoting almost the whole of their time now to preaching.

And here are now other men like Stephen and Philip who were appointed. They themselves preached as well, but they were to look after the material affairs of the church.

And the passage is important too because it tells us, quite candidly, that a rift developed in the church at the time.

And it developed because of what happened amongst one of the two classes of members who comprised the Christian church.

[2 : 38] There were two classes at that time in the church, Hebrews and the Hellenists. And it was from them that this second peril to the existence and to the harmonious existence of the Christian church arose.

We saw a few weeks ago the first peril that arose from within the church, namely the sin of Ananias and Sapphira. We saw that sin, the judgment that was meted out upon them, and the outcome of that.

There was a revival, another revival, another outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Jerusalem at that time. And now we're moving on quite a number of years from the day of Pentecost to this particular incident.

When these classes within the Christian church were growing. Now, let us look and see for a minute what we mean by Hebrews and Hellenists.

There were Hebrew Christians, members in the church, of course, men who were converted, and women, of course, converted from Judaism. And they were mainly Aramaic-speaking Palestinian Jews.

[4 : 06] The Hellenists, on the other hand, were Jews who had been away from Palestine for a long time and had returned.

And who preferred to speak Greek rather than Aramaic. And whose customs and culture, certainly in the eyes of the Palestinian Jews, may have smacked too much of Greek influence.

And the division arose mainly because of their linguistic and cultural outlook. I'm almost tempted to say that it is something akin to the growth that you do get in certain areas between Gaelic-speaking people and English-speaking Christians.

And here you had something almost akin to that in the church in Jerusalem. Now, these Hellenistic Jews were as poorly off as were the Palestinian Christian Jews.

Indeed, it was the Hellenistic widows who voiced their objection to what they thought was an anomaly in the distribution of money and food from the common fund.

[5 : 38] that they felt that they were being unfairly treated. And that they were being forgotten in the distribution from the common fund.

And this criticism, this objection and the complaint came to the ears of the apostles. And they suggested to the church and the church agreed that they should appoint seven men who would look after the distribution of food and money from this common fund.

That is why they are referred to as commonly as deacons. And it was from that situation that this man, Stephen, arose.

Now, though there were men appointed to look after the material affairs of the church, notice what is said about them. They were to choose out seven men, full of faith and of good works.

They were to be spiritually minded men. You see, the affairs of the church, the material affairs, the materialistic affairs of the church, were not to be handed over to businessmen.

[6 : 47] There are many people who think that the affairs of the church would be handed over to businessmen. Period. Now, that's all wrong. By all means, hand them over to businessmen as long as they are full of faith and of good works.

As long as they are full of the Holy Ghost. And one of them was Stephen. Another man was Philip. We'll have a look at him, God willing, next week. Now, Stephen, from chapter 6 here, seems to have concentrated his witnessing ministry amongst the Greek-speaking Jews who frequented the synagogue that he was associated with in Jerusalem.

Now, here's something else where we must stop. Just have a look at two places of worship that were in Jerusalem. The temple and the synagogue. Now, do you know the difference between the temple and the synagogue?

Well, roughly speaking, the difference was this. The temple was the place where the worship was offered in accordance with the mind.

Worship offered in sacrifice. This is where the sacrificial, ritualistic worship of God was performed in the temple.

[8 : 08] And there was only one temple in Jerusalem. And in the temple, there was also stated times of prayer. You remember that was in the morning, midday, and in the afternoon.

And the Christians, the apostles, always went up to the temple at these stated times of worship.

And it was around one of the pillars of the temple in the area of Solomon's porch that the Christian church gathered when they went up there to pray.

And this is where a lot of the discussion took place in the precincts of Solomon's temple, Solomon's, say, court or Solomon's pillar at the temple. The synagogue, on the other hand, and there were many synagogues in Jerusalem.

The synagogue was the place where people came together to hear the scriptures read, the psalms sung, the scriptures expounded.

And after the sermon where the preacher could be questioned by people who wanted to ask him questions, where a debate could ensue.

[9 : 12] And if I may say so, I think that this is something that we have really lost sight of in the Christian church. This is something that could be of great benefit to the church, where people could gather together after the service and discuss, if there is anything to discuss, discuss what has been said.

So that people will then come to understand better what has been said. As I said a few weeks ago, this is one of the great advantages of Christian fellowship. And I think myself that an area, and a congregation, a community, which lacks Christian fellowship based upon the truth that is being expounded in it, is missing an awful lot that could be of spiritual value to that community and to that fellowship.

And if I may address it to yourself as an individual, if you are here tonight, without that kind of fellowship in your life, I think you are missing an awful lot. You are a stranger to much that is good in the Christian church and much that is good that has always been in the Christian church.

There are some foolish people who seem to think that this kind of fellowship is something that is purely associated with religion and Lewis. It just shows their ignorance of the word of God and of the history of the church of God.

Well, the synagogue was a place where these things were done. The word read, expounded, and discussed. Now, that gives us then to understand that in chapter 6, verse 10, we read that Stephen, who belonged to the synagogue of the Greek-speaking Jews, always spoke and they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spoke.

[11:04] You see, every opportunity he had he witnessed in the synagogue. He spoke to the teachers, to the elders, and to the people. He spoke to them about the Bible. He spoke to them about Christ, rooted in the word of God.

He preached the faith, the Christian faith. And they argued with him, but they couldn't resist his wisdom. He was defeating them every single time. And this raised their ire. And do you know what they did? They trumped up charges and leveled them against Stephen. This is what they did to Jesus. This man says. And what do they say about him? Well, he is speaking against God. And he is speaking against Moses. And they stirred up the people. And the elders.

No. This was bound to stir up any Jewish community. To say that any man was speaking against God. To say that any man was speaking against the law of Moses.

[12:03] That was bound to stir up the people. And here you have now the beginning of real persecution for the church. The Sadducees, remember, tried to persecute them.

Tried to stir it up. But they failed. Why? Because the Sadducees weren't popular with the people. That was why. The Sadducees were a religious party who weren't popular with the people. But once the Pharisees got in on the act. And suggested to the people that these Christians were speaking against God. And speaking against the law of Moses.

The very things around which the whole life of the Pharisee and the Jew revolved. Once they laid these charges at the door. The persecution became real.

And violent. Bitter. And ultimately murderous. So the charges were trumped up. This man speaks against God.

[13:01] This man speaks against Moses. Now, what exactly do they mean by that? Well, they set up false witnesses. Remember, this is what they said.

They did with Jesus as well. How alike Jesus and Stephen are here. In their arrest. In their trial. And in their death. We'll see that in a minute. They stirred up false witnesses.

They got some people in. Who claimed to have heard Stephen saying this. He's speaking against this holy place. That is against the temple. And he's speaking against the law.

Now, this is what we've heard them say. That Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place. That is the temple. And that Jesus of Nazareth has changed the customs which Moses delivered us.

Now, to an extent, they were true. And you know that it is very difficult. It is always difficult to refute charges in which there are elements of truth.

[14:02] Always difficult. But you see, if you have a man who's clever with words. And who can twist words. He will put a thing in such a way that you find it extremely difficult to argue against him.

We're hearing plenty of that in our own day on television. For the past months, when you hear these men who are excellent manipulators of truth and of other people's minds.

And who present half-truths to people. You find it terribly difficult to argue against them. And this was Stephen's problem. That these people had so much of the truth in what they said.

True. He was speaking. And saying that the temple was going to be destroyed. It was true that he had said that Jesus had come to shed new light upon Moses' law.

That was true. But what they didn't say was this. That by destroying the temple. What Stephen meant was that God wasn't confined to one particular place in Jerusalem to be worshipped.

[15:15] That was what he was saying to them. And this is what really cut their hearts when they heard this. To hear someone say to them, a Jewish audience, that God was perfectly capable of manifesting himself apart from the temple.

They detested that. And this was the whole portion of his argument in chapter 7. As we shall see in a minute. And then, what they didn't say was this. They didn't tell the whole truth.

They didn't say that what Stephen meant by the law being set apart was that their law was not just the moral law. The Ten Commandments and the ceremonial law. But hundreds and thousands of words that were written over and above the law.

The commentaries that all these rabbis had written up over the centuries. And that they had added to the law of Moses. They didn't say that.

And this is what Stephen was getting at. That all this nonsense that they were building their hope for eternity on was just that nonsense. That there was only one way of salvation.

[16:21] It was through faith in Jesus Christ. And so Stephen begins his defense against these charges. I want to look with you first of all at his defense. His appearance during the defense.

They want to look a little more closely as the defense unfolds. And then particularly look at the death of Stephen as the outcome of his own defense. Defense.

Now I said that I mentioned already where they were right in the charge that they leveled against him. And where they were wrong. Now as Stephen stood up to speak.

We read that all they who were in the council saw his face as it had been the face of an angel. Now we're not exactly sure what this is meant to convey to us.

But I think that we'd be on safe ground if we were to assume here that his whole appearance changed as he spoke to them.

[17:23] There was an appearance of warmth and love and strength and repose. He was serving the Lord as he stood there in the face of his enemies.

And there was something about his very appearance that intrigued him. Have you ever seen a man like this? Have you?

Have you ever seen someone whose face is shining? Whose face has shone with the presence of the Lord as he spoke?

Have you ever seen it? I'm sure you have. I'm sure that you've seen people whose appearance seemed to change as they preached the gospel.

I knew of a man who preached once in Glasgow some years ago in the congregation of Govan Hill. And someone was in the congregation listening to him.

[18:27] And he had this experience as he saw, as he listened to that minister. He said his face glowed with the presence of God. That minister wasn't alive very long after that.

And you know, this was to be Stephen's last sermon on earth in the presence of his enemies. His last opportunity to present Christ to lost sinners.

And you know, the Lord was with him. That is what is meant when it says that his face shone like an angel. The Lord was with him. And the Lord was using him. And the glory and the presence of the Lord was shining through this man's very countenance as he spoke.

And what did he say to them? Well, what he said was this. Here we have something which is an apology. A Christian apology.

A Christian apology doesn't mean that someone is sorry for what is being said.

[19:39] It means just that someone is arguing for the rightness of the Christian faith. That someone is presenting arguments so that people will accept the views that are being presented.

And apologetics, maybe some of you have heard the term apologetics, Christian apologetics. It just means that people are presenting a defense of the Christian faith.

And Stephen's defense centered around two main thoughts. First of all, he says, God is not locally restricted.

You don't have to go to a temple in Jerusalem, he says, for God to speak to you. And there he rehearsed the whole of God's dealings with men in history. And he began where?

With Abraham in Mesopotamia. He began in a place where God had revealed himself to a man in the midst of idolatry. God, he said, revealed himself to Abraham.

[20:50] There was no temple. God, he says, revealed himself to Joseph. To Jacob and to Joseph. They had no temple. God revealed himself to Moses.

He had no temple. Moses had a wonderful experience in the wilderness when he saw the burning bush. And God spoke to him out of the burning bush. And he had no temple.

It was Moses, right enough, he said, who built the tabernacle. That wasn't a temple. David didn't have a temple. He wanted to build one. But he didn't have one. But God spoke to him. Solomon, it was, who built the temple.

But God had spoken to many hundreds of people before he ever spoke to Solomon in the temple. And remember, he says, God is not confined to a building made with hands.

Heaven is my throne, says the Lord. The earth is my footstool. What house will you build me, says the Lord? Is there a house in which I can be confined?

[21:51] Is there a house in one place only where I can rest? No, he said, because my hands have made all these things. He says, you've got to get away from the idea that God can be found only in

your temple.

I wonder how often much of that spirit at times pervades our thinking. That God can be discovered only where we are. That he's only in a free church building. Or in an FP building. Or in a Church of Scotland building. We bless God that he's not confined to any building. And there are some people in this building tonight. I have no doubt you have met the Lord.

In places which were not church buildings. Many of our forefathers met the Lord where? On their knees on the moors. On their knees in the pyres.

That's where they met the Lord. It wasn't that they didn't hold the house of God in high repute. They did. They did. And they honored it. But there were other places where they saw the Lord.

[22 : 56] And this is Moses' argument with these people. He says, you're fools. To think that you can only find God in the temple. God, the very history that you have in your hands, tells you that he has revealed himself to people through the ages in other places.

And the other thing, the other main thought of his defense is this. That the law of God has been given and has pointed forward to our coming Savior.

I've just seen a minute. He doesn't mention the name Jesus. But everything he says is pointing the people away to the Lord Jesus Christ. He's pointing them away from our religion which is based purely on superstition.

A religion that confines itself to the temple. A religion that is based purely upon the offering of this sacrifice and that sacrifice in the temple. A religion that is built upon do, do, do, do.

And he's pointing them away to the Lord Jesus Christ who came into the world. Moses, he says.

You say that I'm against the law of Moses. That very Moses that you pride yourselves in. That was the very man who said, God is going to raise up a prophet like unto me.

[24 : 12] And he's making them ask the question, who is this prophet? And he's directing them to the only one it could possibly be. And connected with that main thought is this.

That their fathers had always been rebellious against the revelation of God. God had revealed himself to them. God had come into their lives and had redeemed them.

Through Moses. Through Joseph. Through Moses. He had redeemed them time and time again. He had revealed himself to them.

He had redeemed them. And how had they reacted to both revelation and redemption? They had rebelled against the authority of God. That, he says, has been your history from time immemorial.

And he says, you are the same today. You've got the same history. You are a stiff-necked people. You are a rebellious people. Same as your fathers were.

[25 : 13] That is the thrust of Stephen's defense here. God, he said, can reveal himself to me and to you and to anybody else if he cares. God has given a law to direct us to the Christ who is a fulfillment of the law.

You people have been rebellious all your history against God. And you're rebellious today. And you won't accept his revelation and his redemption in Christ.

That was the thrust of a sermon. What was the outcome? Well, they gnashed on him with their teeth.

They cast him out of the city. They cried out of the loud voice. They put their hands to their ears.

Are there some of you here tonight like that? Some of you may be with your hands in your ear.

You don't like the word being preached to you. Oh, there are people like that in church. You notice them from the pulpit. I must say that I feel for you myself.

[26 : 18] Many a day I sat like that in a church in Lewis. With my hands to my ear.

Because I didn't want to hear what was being said. My friend, the Bible is telling you the most wonderful story you've ever heard.

Take your hands away and listen. You never know how God may bless it to your heart. These people, they put their hands to their ears.

They cried out. They ran on him. They threw him out of the city. They laid their clothes at the feet of a young man called Saul.

They gathered a heap of stones and they began to stone this man. They stoned him to death. This was no ordinary death.

[27 : 19] Look at what is said. Stephen, being filled full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven. He saw the glory of God and Jesus standing on the right hand of God.

He had a vision. And he spoke. Behold, he said, I see the heavens open and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God. And as they stunned him, he called up and he said, Jesus, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.

And as he was dying, he cried with a loud voice, Lay not the sin to the charge. And the Bible sums it up eloquently.

He fell asleep of this wonderful man of God. Look at it just before we close here tonight for a minute.

And look at what is said here. The most notable peculiarity, says the S.H. version of Stephen's death, was that it was full of Jesus and full of Jesus in four ways.

[28 : 33] Jesus was seen. Jesus was invoked. Jesus was trusted. And Jesus was imitated. He was first of all seen.

He looked up steadfastly into heaven. Now you know that this phrase is used again at the beginning of the book of Acts. Remember it? The disciples at the ascension looked up steadfastly into heaven, but they saw nothing.

Jesus had gone. Here's another man. He looks up steadfastly into heaven. And what does he see? The heavens opened. Jesus sitting at the right hand.

As Jesus standing on the right hand of God. Now, this is the first appearance to any man in the Bible of Jesus after his ascension to the glory of heaven.

And whatever has Stephen had, it must have been some kind of ecstatic vision. An indescribable vision. A sensible manifestation to him of the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[29 : 41] And what does he say? Someone of you are to ask Stephen, Stephen, what is it you see? I see, he says, the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God.

Now, these are wonderful words. Do you know why? Because it's the only man in the Bible to use the term, the only man in the New Testament to use the term, the Son of Man of Jesus.

Apart from Jesus himself. You know what the Son of Man is used often in the Gospels? By Jesus. The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which is lost. The Son of Man has come not to be ministered unto, but to minister.

The Son of Man has come to give his life a ransom for many, and so on. And here's another man who says it. The Son of Man. What does that mean? It means Jesus alive in heaven in our nature. It means Jesus clothed with glory as the one who was rejected while he was in the world. The Son of Man. The significance of these terms was that he was in the world suffering.

[30 : 50] He was in the world being put to death. He was in the world ministering to people. He was in the world being rejected by people. And he was in the world crucified by people.

And that same Jesus is seen by Stephen in the glory of heaven. I see the Son of Man.

There are many people in the world today who don't believe either that Jesus was in the world or that he is alive tonight in heaven. The thrust and the emphasis of the New Testament is that it is the same Jesus, the same rejected representative of man who stands tonight in glory.

And the other significance of what he says is that he saw the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God. Standing on the right hand of God.

Now, the significance of that is this, that every time Jesus is presented to us in the Bible in heaven, he's sitting. Sitting at the right hand of God.

[32 : 04] And how then do you reconcile the two things? Well, it's not too difficult at all. You see, when the Bible speaks of Jesus sitting at the right hand of God, we have to understand that this Jesus in heaven tonight, having completed the work given him to do.

You see, that's the idea of sitting down. That's the way in which it is used in the New Testament. It's as though you were finished your own work. Say you're on a nine-to-five job and you came home at half past five.

You're absolutely exhausted. You finished the work that you had to do that day. You come into the house and you sit down. Your work is finished. That's what it's meant when Jesus pictured us one who sits at the right hand of God.

God gave him a work to do in the world. He finished it. What's the significance of this then? He's seen standing by Stephen. Well, there are some who suggest that this is what it means. That here's someone now who's seen by Stephen coming to his aid.

Coming to his assistance. You see, Stephen was in great danger. They had laid hold of him. They were dragging him out of the city. They were already gathering the stones. Jesus knew that this

man was facing death.

[33 : 13] And how better to assist a man facing death than to show yourself as one coming to his aid. Standing, coming to help.

Coming so that he would avoid the stones? No. That he would avoid death by martyrdom? No. But coming to assist him with grace that would enable him to die.

The way he wanted to die. And I believe that this is what Jesus does for people in death. That is what he does for the Christian as he passes through the valley of the shadow of death.

You and I, my friend, have no conception of what happens in the consciousness of a person in the throes of death. You who are in the medical profession will know this.

That there are people entering into a stage in life where you can't communicate with them. You don't know what they are able to hear of what you're saying to them are about.

[34 : 11] But there's one thing absolutely certain. That those who are the Lord's are being ministered unto at that particular time.

Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. And when they may not be able to communicate anything to you, little do you and I know of what wonderful communications God is giving to them at that particular time.

The Son of Man standing, standing to receive him, standing to assist him, standing to encourage him, to encourage him.

And there are situations in life when you and I need this encouragement. We need this help. And this is the great encouragement for the believer tonight. That Jesus reigns and that he lives.

And that he lives as a sympathetic high priest. Who has never in all his history allowed one of his people to go through any particular trial without his assistance.

[35 : 19] And without his aid. Standing to help. Standing to meet.

There wasn't much time between the then and the now. Between the now and the then for Stephen. There wasn't much time between time and eternity. The veil was very thin.

He saw the Lord. Standing. Waiting. Waiting to help. And above all. Waiting to receive.

A place of honor. A place of power. A place of worship. Standing at the right hand of God.

And what did Stephen do? Well, this is what he did. As they began to stone Stephen. Verse 59.

Stephen. Called on God and said, Lord Jesus.

[36 : 20] Receive my spirit. And. This tells us, you see, that he was a man who knew that he needed help.

And he knew where he found it. He called. The word calling here means. That he's calling for help. Calling for help. And notice. Did he say, Lord. Don't let them stone me.

No. No. But he said, Lord. Receive my spirit. In other words. Give me grace to put my spirit in thy hand. You see how reconciled he was to the will of God.

How different at times. With you and with me. Lord. Help me. How are you going to do it? Lord. Do this. Do that. Take me away from here. Put me there. Give me these experiences.

Take the others away from me. Oh. For grace to be reconciled to the will of God. And those of you who have grace in your heart know what I'm talking about. He called.

[37 : 19] For help. And he called. Saying. To the Lord Jesus. Does it bother you at times? Who do you ought to pray to? Should you pray to God.

The Father. God. The Son. Or God. The Holy Spirit. Well my friend. It depends on the condition. Of your heart. At that particular time. He was a man. He had no difficulty. But praying to the Lord Jesus.

He was a man. He wasn't scratching his head in death. Wondering if Jesus was divine. Wondering if Jesus was in heaven. He knew it. Do you know that tonight?

That the Lord lives in heaven above? Do you know that Jesus is divine? Do you know that he has such power. And such strength. That you can cry to him.

You can pray to him. Well. Stephen did. As someone put it. Dying Christians. Are not troubled with questions. As to the deity of Christ. They know.

[38 : 16] That the Lord reigns. And the Lord lives. And they knew. Stephen knew. Who he could call. To an almighty and a divine savior. Was needed.

God. Ah. It's not the same. People. Everyone doesn't die like that. You know that. Hume. The Scottish philosopher. David Hume.

The infidel. He died. He was a brave man. He could bust. You see. He died. Telling feeble jokes. On his deathbed. Rousseau.

He died. Do you know how he died? Railing. Against. The almighty. Voltaire died.

With a mixture of. Implications. And. Blasphemies. And supplications. On his lips. Didn't know what to say. In death. Many a person has died.

[39 : 17] Blaspheming God. Curshing God. Many a person has died. In great terror. Many people face death tonight. They don't know what to say.

And they don't know who to say. And they are genuinely afraid. Many a person has cried. Help me. And they don't know who they are saying that to.

I was always. And I don't tell this because of its emotional value at all. Rather because of the pathos that is associated with it. I always remember.

A health visitor in Paisley. Telling me once. About a woman's deathbed in hospital. A very young woman. And her husband was with her.

And all she had in death. Was crying to her husband. George. Don't leave me. Don't leave me. That was all. That was all. You know my friend.

[40 : 16] That's an awful way to face death. If you have no one that you know. Or even. If you have no one. You can turn to. But someone that you know. Whereas here's one in heaven tonight.

The Lord Jesus Christ. Alive with power from the dead. The saviour of the world. The God man. Who can save.

And who can help. And Stephen knew it. Lord Jesus. Help me. And then. Jesus was trusted by Stephen.

Lord he says. Receive. My spirit. As I said earlier. He doesn't say. Spare me. No. But he says. Lord. I trust thee.

You know. If ever you needed a God. To trust in. You need one. As you enter the world. Of spirits. You need one.

[41 : 20] As you enter the spiritual realm. There's no one else. Unless. You have him. And I think it's because of that. That the psalmist could say.

Therefore he says. Though I pass through the valley. Of the shadow of death. I will fear no evil. For thou. Art with me. Lord. Receive.

My spirit. Remember what Jesus said. To the father. I commit my spirit. Into thy hand. Here's the same spirit. Here's the same sentiment. Lord.

I trust thee. Said Stephen. To the Lord Jesus Christ. And then finally. Jesus. Was. Imitated. You know. I love these words here.

Here. In verse. The words that you have there. In verse. 60. He kneeled down. And cried. With a loud voice.

[42 : 17] You know what these words are. They're in the gospels. Speaking about the death of Jesus. He cried. With a loud voice. And do you know what he cried. With a loud voice. And I believe this is what Stephen cried as well.

It is finished. Jesus cried. It is finished. And here's a man. Crying. In the throes of death. Lord. It is finished. And so he was saying. I have finished. My work. What is his work? His work was to proclaim. The Lord Jesus Christ.

To witness to the glory of a savior. And he died. Speaking of a savior. He died. In harness. As we put it. In harness. And I believe myself.

That this is where. I fully believe. That every servant of the Lord Jesus Christ. Would want to die in harness. Want to die in the act of.

[43 : 16] Proclaiming the Lord Jesus Christ. And I know that there are no more wonderful moments. On the face of this earth. For such a person. That these moments. When in the liberty of the spirit of God.

He can speak. Fully. And freely. About the savior. Of sinners. And this is how Stephen died. With a loud voice.

He cried. As he spoke. And he cried also. In the spirit. And in the very attitude. Of prayer. Outward the gate. The same as the Lord Jesus.

They took him outside. The city. They did that with Jesus well. Outside the city. As though they weren't fit. For the city. Of Jerusalem.

And he died like Jesus. Praying for his enemies. Father. Lay not this sin. To the charge Lord. Remember Jesus. Father forgive them.

[44 : 15] For they know not. What they do. And you know what Augustine said about this. Prayer of Stephen's. Came across this today. Do you know what Augustine said about this. Prayer of Stephen.

Now you just think of this. They laid. They laid their clothes. As they threw the stones at him. They laid their clothes. At the feet of a young man. Called Saul. And that young man. Heard this prayer. Father. Lay not this sin. To the charge. You know what Augustine said. If Stephen. Had not prayed. Paul. Would never.

Have preached. Isn't that wonderful. What do you think he meant? He meant that Saul of Tarshish. Was God's answer.

To Stephen's prayer. That's what he meant. Very shortly after this. Saul himself. Was converted. And he never forgot Stephen's death.

[45 : 11] He never forgot his own part. In that death. He never forgave himself. That there had been a party. To the murder. Of this gracious. And godly man.

And this man. Prayed for him. Who was the enemy of Christ. And Christ heard. The prayer of Stephen. And he converted Saul. How wonderful.

Ah you know. I wouldn't be surprised. If there are enemies of Christ. In this church tonight. I know there are. I know there are. Whosoever is not with me. Is against me.

You know my friend. There are people praying for you. Here tonight. People praying for you. Ah would that you would become. A friend of Christ tonight.

Jesus has no friends. In this church. But those who were. Enemies of his grace. And of his name. For when we were yet enemies. All of us. Christ died.

[46 : 09] For our sins. Father. Forgive them. Will you pray that prayer. For yourself tonight. As others pray it for you.

Father. Forgive. Me. This man. Saul was converted. And he was going to carry. Stephen's message.

Far. Far afield. The same emphasis. The same thrust. With the great blessing of God.

Accompanying him. Just now word. Notice the final description. The Bible gives us. Of the death of Stephen. He fell.

Asleep. He fell asleep. He fell asleep. You know.

[47 : 09] I can't remember who said this. It might have been Spurgeon. It's very like something that he would say. We. He says. We wept.

When we were born. Though all around us smiled. And the Christian. He says. Smiles. When he dies.

Though all around him. Should weep. And that's what happened with Stephen. He fell asleep. He died. And that's the way that the Bible speaks of.

The death of the Christian. We shall all. Sleep. What does it suggest to you? Well I think it suggests to you. The continuation of life.

You see the person asleep tonight. Is living in this life. As he was before he slept. The Christian. Sleeps. He sleeps.

[48 : 10] Into. The eternity that awaits. He lives. On. For us. They're dead. But in another sense.

They're alive. You can see of them. What the psalmist said. I shall not die. But live. And shall the works of God. Disgust. It suggests.

Continuation of life. It suggests. Rest. Satisfaction. From the fatigue. And the toil.

Of life. You're tired. So you go to sleep. You're at rest. In this life. The Christian who has died.

Is at rest. In the life beyond. No more sighing. As the Bible says. No more sorrow. No more tears. No more pain.

[49 : 07] No more work. In this life. Just. The service. The service of God. In the life. To come. It suggests.

Something else. To us too. It suggests. That. For the persons. Asleep. There's going to be. A day. When they will awake. And those. Who have slept. Into death. In this world. Have awakened. On the other side. Of time. And eternity. That's where they are.

Tonight. With the Lord. Jesus Christ. But there's something else. They're going to awake. Another day. On the day. Of the resurrection. Their souls.

Will be reunited. With their bodies. And they will be forever. With. The Lord. And you know. That's what brings in the element of hope.

[50 : 01] And comfort. For us tonight. As we think of those. Who have slept. In Christ. As we think. As a congregation. And I said in the morning.

Just in closing here tonight. To pay publicly again. My own tribute. In your name. To the one who was so much a part. Of this congregational scene.

In years gone by. As we mourn tonight. The passing. Of a former office. A church officer. And a brother elder. In the session. Where are these people.

Who fall asleep in the Lord. Where are they? They're in heaven above. What are they doing? Their souls are at rest. From all the anguish.

Of this life. But engaged. In the glorious service. Of heaven above. That's what it is. They fell.

[51 : 01] Asleep. That's all. They're away. From all that burdens. You tonight. And all that burdens. Me. They're doing.

They're doing. They're doing. And they're doing. Perfectly. And they're doing. For many a day. For many a day. I think. In this world. They're doing tonight. Well. They're doing tonight. Perfectly. What they were doing. Imperfectly. Here. praising the Lord and serving the Lord.

How would it be with you tonight if you were called in the midst of your service and if I were called?

Have you the courage to stand up in the name of your Lord Jesus Christ?

Have you the courage to be true to your convictions? Have you the courage to witness in the face of opposition, in the face of the disdain that comes to you for the sake and for the name of Jesus Christ?

Do you prepare to die? Do you have this hope in your heart facing eternity? Do you have this conviction in your heart born of the reality of the things of the Spirit of God?

[52 : 19] Do you know that Jesus is alive? Can you call on him tonight to assist you? And can you face the prospect of death tonight knowing, well, if it comes, I believe I can place my spirit in his hand and I believe that in him I too will fall asleep.

Is that your hope? As you live tonight on the very brink of eternity and little do you and I know how near eternity can be.

when Stephen stood up that day to speak to the Sanhedrin, he didn't know that in a matter of minutes he was going to be in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ.

He didn't know it. But when he realized it, he had no fear. He committed himself to the Lord. Oh, my friend, one final appeal and one final question.

Can you and I do that tonight? A man would think to just all wavelengths but must even have Spo Mommy and let hit that Eloerte in Font point J Hm just going