

Brushed Aside (Acts 7:1-8:1)

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- [0 : 0 0] Acts 7, Stephen's speech to the Sanhedrin. Then the high priest asked him, Are these charges true?
- To this he replied, Brothers and fathers, listen to me. The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham while he was still in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran.
- Leave your country and your people, God said, and go to the land I will show you. So he left the land of the Chaldeans and settled in Haran. After the death of his father, God sent him to this land where you are now living.
- He gave him no inheritance here, not even a foot of ground. But God promised him that he and his descendants after him would possess the land, even though at that time Abraham had no child.
- God spoke to him, and in this way, your descendants will be strangers in a country, not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated 400 years.
- [1 : 0 5] But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, God said. And afterward, they will come out of that country and worship me in this place.
- Then he gave Abraham the covenant of circumcision, and Abraham became the father of Isaac and circumcised him eight days after his birth. Later, Isaac became the father of Jacob, and Jacob became the father of the twelve patriots.
- Because the patriots were jealous of Joseph, they sold him as a slave to Egypt.
- But God was with him, and rescued him from all his troubles. He gave Joseph wisdom and enabled him to gain the goodwill of Pharaoh king of Egypt.
- So he made him ruler over Egypt and all his palace. Then a famine struck all Egypt and Canaan, bringing great suffering, and our fathers could not find food.
- [2 : 0 8] When Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent our fathers on their first visit. On their second visit, Joseph told his brothers who he was, and Pharaoh learned about Joseph's family.
- After this, Joseph sent for his father Jacob and his whole family, 75 in all. Then Jacob went down to Egypt, where he and our fathers died.
- Their bodies were brought back to the Shicham and placed in the tomb that Abraham had bought from the sons of Hamer at Shicham for a certain sum of money.
- As the time drew near for God to fulfill his promise to Abraham, the number of our people in Egypt greatly increased. Then another king who knew nothing about Joseph became ruler of Egypt.
- He dealt treacherously with our people and oppressed our forefathers by forcing them to throw out their newborn babies so that they would die. At that time, Moses was born, and he was no ordinary child.
- [3 : 1 7] For three months, he was cared for in his father's house. When he was placed outside, Pharaoh's daughter took him and brought him up as her own son.

Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action. When Moses was 40 years old, he decided to visit his fellow Israelites.

He saw one of them being mistreated by an Egyptian, so he went to his defense and avenged him by killing the Egyptian. Moses thought that his own people would realize that God was using him to rescue them, but they did not.

The next day, Moses came upon two Israelites who were fighting. He tried to reconcile them by saying, Men, you are brothers. Why do you want to hurt each other?

But the man who was mistreating the other pushed Moses aside and said, Who made you ruler and judge over us? Do you want to kill me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday?

[4 : 24] When Moses heard this, he fled to Midian, where he was settled as a foreigner and had two sons. After 40 years had passed, an angel appeared to Moses in the flames of a burning bush in the desert near Mount Sinai.

When he saw this, he was amazed at the sight. As he went over to look more closely, he heard the Lord's voice, I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Moses trembled with fear and did not dare to look. Then the Lord said to him, Take off your sandals. The place where you are standing is holy ground.

I have indeed seen the oppression of my people in Egypt. I have heard their groaning and come down to set them free. Now come, I will send you back to Egypt.

This is the same Moses, whom they had rejected with their words, who made you ruler and judge. He was sent to be their ruler and deliverer by God himself, through the angel who appeared to him in the bush.

[5 : 40] He led them out of Egypt and did wonders and miraculous signs in Egypt, at the Red Sea, and for 40 years in the desert. This is that Moses who told the Israelites, God will send you a prophet like me from your own people.

He was in the assembly in the desert with our fathers and with the angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai as he received living words to pass on to us. But our fathers refused to obey him.

Instead, they rejected him and in their hearts turned back to Egypt. They told Aaron, Make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who led us out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him.

That was the time they made an idol in the form of a calf. They brought sacrifices to it and held a celebration in honor of what their hands had made. But God turned away and gave them over to worship of the heavenly bodies.

This agrees with what is written in the book of the prophets. Did you bring me sacrifices and offerings 40 years in the desert, O house of Israel?

[6 : 53] You have lifted up the shrine of Moloch and the star of your God, Raphon, the idols you have made to worship. Therefore, I will send you into exile beyond Babylon.

Our forefathers had the tabernacle of testimony with them in the desert. It had been made as God directed Moses, according to the pattern he had seen.

Having received the tabernacle, our fathers under Joshua brought it with them when they took the land from the nations God drove out before them. It remained in the land until the time of David, who enjoyed God's favor and asked that he might provide a dwelling place for the God of Jacob.

But it was Solomon who built the house for him. However, the Most High does not live in houses made by men. As the prophet says, Heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool.

What kind of house will you build for me? Says the Lord. Or where will my resting place be? Has not my hand made all these things?

[7 : 59] You stiff-necked people with uncircumcised hearts and ears. You are just like your fathers. You always resist the Holy Spirit. Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute?

They even killed those who predicted the coming of the righteous one. And now you have betrayed him and murdered him. You have received the law that was put into effect through angels but have not obeyed it.

The stoning of Stephen When they heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.

Look, he said, I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God. As this they covered their ears, yelling at the top of their voices.

They all rushed at him, dragging him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul.

[9 : 07] While they were still stoning him, Stephen prayed, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. Then he fell on his knees and cried out, Lord, do not hold this sin against them.

When he had said this, he fell asleep. Amen. Do I need to read the first?

Oh, okay. And first aid. And Saul was there, giving approval to his death. Well done, Irene, for I think our longest reading here at PCBC English so far.

Thank you for reading along. My name's William, one of the pastors here, and it is a privilege to open up this part of God's word. Will you pray with me now? Let's ask God for wisdom to help us.

our great God and the Savior. We hear these words, and some of us, we confess our lost, confused.

[10 : 12] We wonder how this could speak to us today. But your word is powerful, so we plead with you to help us to see, just like Stephen did, Jesus.

Help us to fix our eyes on him and the glory of God and not to brush aside your message today. Would you be with us now? In Jesus' name. Amen. We hate being brushed aside.

I want you to imagine you're at the checkouts, self-checkouts, at countdown, maybe later tonight, and then someone cuts in front of you, right, jumps the queue so that they can get in first to check out.

That's hard. That's annoying. Maybe you're on your phone and maybe you're on a dating app. Don't know who of you are on there. And someone swipes left on you.

Ooh, we hate being brushed aside. Maybe it's a friend of yours you've known for years and you've been trying to keep in touch with them, but actually, you've just learned that they've actually been ignoring you on purpose.

[11 : 22] We hate being brushed aside. Or maybe it's actually someone in your family, someone close to you, and they're brushing your opinions aside. They're not listening to what you have to say or contribute.

They might even say, you're so young or you don't know what you're talking about. We hate being brushed aside. To brush aside others is bad enough, isn't it?

But what happens when we do this with God's messengers or even God himself? I think that's what we see in this chapter of the book of Acts.

Obviously, we're going through the whole book of Acts this year. At PCBC English, we don't skip the hard bits and we don't skip the long bits either. So that being said, this is 61 verses, and so I don't want to preach for 61 minutes.

So we are going a bit of a flyby today. And maybe a bit of recap for those of you who weren't here last week. Last week, we saw how one of the servants of the early church that were picked as a church tried to organize itself to really spread the word and the message of Christ.

[12 : 32] One of the servants, his name was Stephen, went out and started to boldly proclaim the gospel. And then what happened was that he was then charged by the religious leaders with two things.

Acts 6, 13-14 reminds us he was charged with preaching against Moses and the customs that was handed down through him and the priesthood and so on.

And he was also charged against preaching against God and his temple, accusing him of being like Jesus who said he could destroy this temple, this religious building that was the pride of place for the Jewish people at the time in Jerusalem.

Two charges, preaching against Moses and his law and customs, preaching against God and his temple. And so in verse 1, that's what the high priest is referring to. Are these charges true?

I want you to imagine a scene where Luke, our historian, is set up. There is Stephen and he's standing against hundreds of religious leaders all assembled together, the Sanhedrin, to listen and to see him face up to these charges.

[13 : 48] One spirit-filled servant standing before kind of like a national assembly, like a parliament, and he is being accused of these two things and they're both treasonous against your country type charges.

And so what follows, if you've just heard from Irene, which she read really well, is the longest sermon actually recorded in the book of Acts. And so again, we won't dig behind every verse and person and place, but if there's a sentence we could use to describe Stephen's sermon, maybe we could sum it up like this.

Stephen's sermon is all about this, stop brushing aside the Savior. Stop brushing aside the Savior. I get this from verse 55, I'm sorry, verse 51, where Stephen charges him, you always resist the Holy Spirit.

And we know from the book of Acts that the Holy Spirit in the book of Acts is pointing to the risen Lord Jesus. And so what we have here is Stephen saying, stop brushing aside the Savior.

What makes people brush aside the Lord Jesus, the risen Christ? Who speaks truly for God? Is it Stephen or the religious people of his time?

[15 : 07] In fact, where can I find God? Does he live in a temple? Or does he live with his people? These are the kinds of questions that the speech, the sermon addresses. And these are questions that we have answers to, too.

And so, I think to really get to grips with the sermon, we want to get to grips with it, I think, I want to suggest a couple of sections to this chapter. So, I'm going to go through it, really, we're just going to look at Stephen's kind of summary of, yeah, Stephen's summary first, and then we'll probably just zoom through that from verse 2 to verse 43.

So, let's look at this large section first of all. Again, to our ears, this recap of Israel's history, it sounds long, it sounds foreign.

If you haven't read the Bible before, maybe you felt it was a little bit boring. But what Stephen is doing here, if I can try and explain, he's letting Israel's own history accuse the Jewish leaders.

He's letting Israel's own history accuse the Jewish leaders. What Stephen is doing is kind of like this. Okay, when you add a friend on social media, what's the first thing you often do?

[16 : 20] You scroll through their old posts, don't you, right? You check them out, you stalk them a little bit to see if they're legit, you see who they say they are, or what they like, that sort of thing. This is essentially this long section up to verse 43.

This is Stephen saying, let's scroll through our past, okay? I'm going to show you who's in the wrong. If we could sum up Stephen's long section of his speech, we could sum it up in three different sections based on three different characters, right?

He talks first about Abraham a little bit, and then Joseph, and then Moses, right? So, if there's a way to sum it up, we can look at it that way. So firstly, we see that Abraham, he served a God whose promises are kept.

We see that from verse 2 to verse 8. And good practice when you want to address a really big group of important people, you address them respectfully, right? Verse 2, brothers and fathers, listen to me.

And so first, right, he stresses from verse 2 to 8 their common ancestor, Abraham. We dove into a little bit, dug into a little bit of a story in the series in Genesis.

[17 : 28] We heard that little snippet from the start of his story. He was called out by God, right? To go from his country, his father's house, and his land, right? To the land that God would show him.

And in recounting Abraham's life in these verses, Stephen is emphasizing that God has made big promises to him and his descendants, right?

We see this actually in verse 5 explicitly. He gave him no inheritance here, not even a foot of the ground, but God promised him, Abraham, that he and his descendants after him would possess the land, right?

And this is a promise he made when Abraham had no kids at the time. And another thing that tells us that Abraham's story is meant to make us think about promises and how God keeps his promises is that in verse 8 he mentions the covenant of circumcision.

Covenant is just a fancy way to say a promise that God's make. A promise that God's makes. You see, the God of the Bible, I think, right from the get-go is not a distant God who doesn't care about his people.

[18 : 39] He makes promises to his people and he keeps them. Right? That's how Stephen starts off. He's just emphasizing, look, you and I, I'm talking to all of you Jewish leaders, we have a common ancestor, Abraham.

And look, we worship a God who keeps his promises. Verse 9 onwards, Stephen kind of pivots and starts talking about someone else, Joseph, right?

And here we hear that Joseph, he served a God who delivered his people. Good old Joseph, left the dead by his brothers and yet a sovereign God raises him up to deliver his own people from starvation.

In a series of events which you can read in the book of Genesis, chapter 37 onwards, you really just see how God's hand is continually on Joseph right through the hardest moments when he's in prison and right to, he's raised up to be the prime minister of Egypt.

And through all these events, God, he keeps his promises, right? Even the promises to Abraham, he keeps them through Joseph. He's here protecting his people. The significant part here that Stephen brings out though is verse 9.

[19 : 55] He's emphasized one aspect. Did you notice? He says here, because the patriarchs were jealous of Joseph, they sold him as a slave into Egypt. Here's Stephen starting to build his case.

God keeps his promises. He uses his people to deliver Israel. And yet, God's deliverers are mistreated. They're brushed aside.

This is the first time he mentions this. And then when Stephen moves on to Moses' life, okay, so this is from verse 17 through to 43. It's a really big chunk.

It seems like Stephen wants to bring up the same point, okay? Because here's Moses. He's beautiful to God. Verse 20. He's trained in all the wisdom, right, of Egypt.

He's powerful in his deeds. He becomes Israel's deliverer, rescuer. And yet, what do we see in Stephen's speech?

[20 : 56] He emphasizes how, right? Verse 26, verse 25, that Moses too was rejected by his own people. There's a scene where Moses steps in and he meets his fellow Hebrews and they're having a fight and he says, hey, break it up, break it up.

And then they said, but then they brush him aside. They brush him aside. And they say, who made you ruler and judge over us? And it's interesting, Stephen, in verse 35, you notice, repeats this same phrase.

This is the same Moses whom they had rejected with the words, who made you ruler and judge. To Stephen, you see, standing in front of the Sanhedrin, this is a key point. Right through the Bible, God's deliverers keep being rejected and brushed aside.

to the point that even as Moses, while he's on Mount Sinai, he's receiving God's founding documents, words, living words to obey, all right, words to run a whole nation, the Ten Commandments and so on.

What are the Israelites doing? They're brushing him aside. They're brushing him aside. Firstly, they're refusing to obey him. verse 38 tells us, right, Moses is up there and the rest of the people, they are, verse 38 says, they rejected him and in their hearts, they turned back to Egypt.

[22 : 30] What a sad case of brushing God aside. Pining for Egypt, worshipping a golden calf. It seems so surreal, right, that they would worship a golden calf.

I don't know who watched the Commonwealth Games opening ceremony. There was just a scene where there was a big bull and they dragged it out and they were dancing around it. It was just like art imitates Bible at that moment.

It was that, but worse. Remember who Stephen is preaching to here. It's Jewish leaders, people who know their Bibles in and out.

It's as if Stephen is standing in front of like a pastor's conference and accusing them of not knowing the history. Accusing them of copying and imitating all those people back in the Bible who were brushing aside God and his message.

Stephen is, he seems like he's on the defense. He's trying to, has to defend his charges, but he's actually on the attack. He's basically saying, you want to accuse me of betraying Moses? Actually, you don't know your history.

[23 : 43] Even Moses told us to look for a prophet in his own name. And yet you have brushed him aside. There, Stephen is saying that Moses even spoke of Jesus who was to come.

Moses told us to look for a prophet in his name. There Moses is referring to Deuteronomy 18.15. All right. And there's this hope that someone as wise as Moses, as powerful and righteous would speak.

Look out for him, people. And yet, the people by murdering Jesus Christ have brushed him aside. I wonder if we can fall into the same trap.

I'm sure that in a group our size, some of us brush Jesus aside again and again. Some of us brush Jesus aside week in, week out.

Sure, we may come to worship. We may talk about being a Christian from time to time. but some of us, if we're honest, if we examine how we really live our lives, we brush Jesus aside.

[25 : 08] Maybe for some of you, you've grown up in church your whole life. Think of how many people have lovingly shared the good news of Jesus with you and yet, when no one's looking, when it's just between you and God, you're running to golden calves, idols that cannot save you.

It doesn't matter if you actually physically are singing praises of Jesus. What's going on in our hearts? What is the golden calf that you turn back to?

Is it that good grades will save you? Is it that a successful career, finding a life partner, starting a family, will all these things save you? You half listen to the people who bring you God's word week after week and yet, your search history even right now is showing you a different story.

Don't swipe left on God. Don't brush aside his living words. This is Stephen's summary up to this point.

And look, we can clearly see he's not against Moses, is he? He knows Moses' story even better than the Jewish leaders. In fact, Stephen actually stands in his shadow and he's accusing the Sanhedrin.

[26 : 31] You accuse me of changing Moses' customs. Aren't you the one who are brushing aside God's living words? That's the main part of the chapter.

Stephen summarizing the story of God's people. Stephen then goes on to actually keep schooling the Sanhedrin. Actually, he turns up the heat.

So the second part of our sermon, I want to share how from verse 44, Stephen kind of goes for a direct strike. I couldn't think of another word that started with an S. Sorry. So a Stephen strike.

Tell me if you can come up with a better one. So from verse 44 to 53, he really just starts to go on the offensive. Now, when I say tent, I don't know what comes to mind.

Maybe you picture camping out in, I don't know, the snowy mountains. Maybe it's, you know, glamping, you know, by the beach in the summer.

[27 : 32] When I say tent, I don't know what comes to mind. Well, the word tent is actually really special to God's people because for much of their history, the way God would live and be present with his people was not through his Holy Spirit in us, but the way he would dwell with his people was through a very special tent called the tabernacle.

And that's what Stephen brings up here, right? Verse 44. Our forefathers had the tabernacle of the testimony with them in the desert. So here, Stephen's kind of shifting.

We talked about Moses and now he's going to talk about where God lives specifically, right? And he says, back in those days, God would come to be with us through a very special tent, the tabernacle.

And it might be a bit hard for us to imagine, right? Is this how God lives with his people? Because it's so different for us today. But when the Christ Church Cathedral collapsed about 10 years ago, you can have a look, that's kind of what it still looks like, a bunch of people got really upset when a few years later the Anglican church who owned the building said, we're going to just tear this building down, we're going to start and build a new one.

People just got really upset, even non-Christians, even people who had never worshipped God before or had no real interest. They said, no, don't tear it down. To some of these people, removing the tent, as it were, was a real attack on the city's identity.

[29 : 11] And so what Stephen is up against is this, rumors had been going around, spread by some sneaky people in the last chapter. Rumor had spread that Stephen was, you know, the good news he was preaching, you know, as this new upstart group of people who followed Jesus.

He was preaching this, you know, destroy the tent, destroy the temple, you know, this thing that King Herod built, you know, this grand thing that in Jerusalem people would flock to and stuff, just destroy it.

That was what they were accusing Stephen of saying. And so Stephen addresses this issue head on in this section. Now you may not realize this, but actually Stephen is trying to preach in a real cross-cultural way.

I mean, there's a few things going against Stephen here. One, we learned last week, he's, you know, he's a Greek speaking Jew. Okay. So he's kind of like, I don't know, he's kind of like a second generation Chinese person.

So not fully Chinese, but, you know, trying to speak into all these people of an older generation. So that just kind of, imagine Stephen being in that situation. And yet, perhaps because of his bicultural background, what Stephen can see is what all these Jewish leaders were missing.

[30 : 32] God cannot be put in a box. God cannot be put in a box. You see his accusation because Stephen then quotes specifically, right, he refreshes them on the history on how God lived with his people.

And then verse 48, he's very specific. He says, however, the Most High does not live in houses made by men. And then he quotes Isaiah, one of our prophets, Isaiah 66, who says, heaven is my throne, the earth is my footstool.

What kind of house will you build for me, says the Lord? Where will my resting place be? Has not my hand made all these things? Translation, don't you leaders know your Bible?

Don't you know even Solomon said his temple could not contain the God of the universe? Why are you then acting, living, worshipping as if this brick and mortar building, referring to the second temple, this Herod's temple, why is this temple the only place God meets with his people?

This is Stephen saying, look, I agree with you, God lives and dwells with his people, but I disagree with you that he only lives in this particular building.

[31 : 50] And you know what, maybe what Jesus could have said was this, look at Jesus around you. He could have perhaps invited the Sanhedrin to say, look, look at this new community, 5,000 people, and look at how God is dwelling in them, helping them feed the poor, the hungry, the widows that are being overlooked.

Can you see this radical community? This is where God is living. This is where God is present. Don't brush it aside. I mean, that would be a really nice, friendly way to say it, wouldn't it?

But he doesn't. Verse 51, you stiff-necked people with uncircumcised hearts and ears.

You are just like your fathers. You always resist the Holy Spirit. Was there ever a prophet your fathers didn't persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the righteous one.

And now you have betrayed and murdered him. You, who have received the law that was put into effect through angels, but have not obeyed it. This is Stephen's strike.

[33 : 03] He's built up his case, right? Agreeing with the Old Testament, agreeing with the history of the Jewish people, now he strikes hard at the synedrin before him.

To call these Jewish leaders stiff-necked, uncircumcised, it's like using, you know, it's like using words that have to be blotted out.

It's that kind of offense to the Jewish people. Stephen is trying to expose how they had turned Herod's temple in Jerusalem into an idol.

into something they valued more than anything else. Stephen is basically saying, if God is everywhere, like our scripture says, how dare you confine him to a box?

If God speaks through his righteous prophet, Jesus, how dare you crucify him like a criminal? He's not trying to win friends or influence people here.

[34 : 07] He is calling out the leaders. for the hurt, the sinful idolatry that they have been committing these years. And so, yes, it stirs them as we see the end of that chapter 2, a terrible, terrible response.

But as Stephen brings up this point, right, don't put God in a box. We do well, PCBC English, to pause and consider that point for ourselves.

God's love. Because what are some ways that you and I perhaps have wrongly put God in a box?

how have you put God in a box? How have you assumed how God should work, where he should be present, where he shouldn't be present?

Do you have only a certain way you think that church should be run? Do you have only a certain image of when God shows up? when we follow a particular list of songs, when we do a certain sequence of things, when we follow a certain tradition?

[35 : 19] Is that the only time when God shows up? Does he only show up in certain churches and not others? Have we even crossed that far? Do we not worship a Savior, though?

The Lord Jesus Christ, who himself challenges man-made laws and traditions all the time? You follow the Gospels, you see him time and time again.

He heals on the Sabbath, he touches the sick and unwell, he openly declares, you think those foods are unclean? I say they're clean. Look at your heart instead. He is happy to eat with sinners, those who society has rejected.

But then do we put God in a box and say, only so and so as well. come. Maybe if Stephen were here today, maybe he would warn us, God is not only present at PCBC English or in a Baptist tradition or in a charismatic service.

God has always been with his people through his promises and his presence. Whether in the wilderness of Canaan, whether in Egypt, Jerusalem, he is present with his people, not in bricks and tiles and mortar.

[36 : 45] If ever one day we don't worship in this building anymore, God has not left the building. He travels with his people in Christ. Christ. So don't brush aside the Savior.

Let us not put God in a box where he does not need to be, where he cannot be contained. God has done. As I was preparing this sermon, I just reflected on how so many people that I've known from earlier in my life have brushed aside the Savior.

Have brushed aside the Savior. I first heard the gospel when I was 17 years old. And it's over half a life ago. And some of the people who prayed a prayer, accepted Jesus in their life.

Some of them are far away. They brush aside the Savior week after week, day after day. How tragic. How tragic.

I don't know about you. If you are here, you're tempted to brush aside the Savior, can I plead with you? don't brush him aside. Don't brush him aside.

[38 : 05] Stephen would plead with you, look at what God has done through the past. Don't put him in a box. Some of you, others, maybe you do follow Jesus.

You're just trying to cling on. These have been hard years. Maybe you're struggling with a sin that you can't seem to shake off. Maybe there's a battle raging that you keep facing and you keep losing.

I don't know what it is. The Lord knows. I think Stephen would say to us, God would say to us, keep fighting. Don't brush aside the Savior as you fight.

Or maybe you're here and you're at a crossroads in your life. You know, you know in your heart that God wants you to do something, to follow Him more deeply, maybe to make a drastic decision in your life so that you can follow God's call on your life.

You know you should and yet this, this, this, what about this? What about what they will say? Can I plead with you?

[39 : 19] Don't brush the Savior aside. Stephen strikes directly, doesn't he? He cuts into our hearts. He challenges us with his words.

And finally, for the next last few minutes, we have the last few verses of the chapter, don't we? And here I think we get Stephen's swan song. If you don't know what a swan song is, there's an old myth that actually a swan only makes a noise when it's about to die.

A swan only makes a noise when it's about to die. And so we talk about a swan song when we hear someone's final words because here we are told of Stephen's final words before he is murdered.

So what are they? And what can we learn from them? When they heard this, verse 54, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven, saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.

Look, he said, I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God. Here is the Jewish council, not very happy, been accused of a lot of things.

[40 : 38] God and the people of God announcing that he can see the Son of God. He can claim to have that authority to see God himself.

That just tips them over the edge. To this furious mob of leaders, Stephen has blasphemed God. He has said something so, so offensive to them.

Stephen is identifying himself with the risen Lord Jesus here. And so, he gets what he got. His Jewish opponents, they mob him, they drag him outside the city, just like Jesus, and they execute him as if he was a religious traitor.

I suspect not many big money teachers, people who need to keep a mega church running, will camp on this verse and sit on it.

How could they? Clearly, this is a spirit-filled servant, right? We're told this in the text. And he is not assured of safety, security, or earthly prosperity.

[41 : 59] He dies. He is martyred. And in one sense, this cuts against our pain-pleasure culture. But in another sense, we should not be surprised.

Later in the book of Acts, it says, those who want to follow Jesus will be persecuted. We may share lots in common with our culture around us. We may relate, wow, with our friends and family in many ways.

But if you and I are truly faithful to live our lives and to share that Jesus is Lord and no one else, you should expect to be made fun of, accused.

You should expect that people will mock you, despise you, write angry letters. If you're on social media, perhaps, block you, perhaps they'll even kill you in certain contexts.

But when you and I are brushed aside because of Jesus, don't despair. Don't despair because God is still sovereign because we will hear in the book of Acts how his plans for his church still prevail.

[43 : 19] will. So hold fast to him and join in with the suffering servant Jesus, our Lord. Because here's the secret.

What motivates Stephen to stand firm until the end? What helps him not to brush aside God, the Savior, like his peers?

verse 55 tells us his eyes are fixed on the risen Lord Jesus. He prays with and to the risen Lord Jesus.

In his final moments, he too prays for his killer's forgiveness, as we see here with Stephen. Stephen is so fixed on Jesus that he just imitates his life to the end.

[44 : 29] That is how you and I will stand firm to the end when we fix our eyes on Jesus. It's the only way. Wherever you're at, whatever your situation, what you and I need the most to stand firm as a believer is exactly the same as Stephen.

We look to Jesus. For every look at yourself, your depression, your lust, your family dramas, for every look at everything that troubles you or hurts you, take ten looks at the Lord Jesus, because that's how you will keep going.

that's how you will cling to our Lord like Stephen did. That is how you will be faithful to the end, because only Jesus is able to save you to the uttermost.

And I think Luke includes that final detail, doesn't he, in this passage that gives us hope. Here, the witnesses who execute Stephen, they are watched by a young Jewish leader whose name is Saul.

Luke tells us he was there, hearing Stephen's testimony, seeing his reactions. And I think here we're meant to wonder, how will this shape this guy?

[45 : 52] What will Stephen's testimony do to a person like Saul? Spoiler alert, it will change the world.

But for now, I think we're meant to wonder, how might the death of one witness for Jesus, one martyr, bring life to countless others? How might you, dying to the Lord Jesus, bring life to countless others?

Not all of us will walk the same road as Stephen. We live here in New Zealand. We probably won't have to give up our physical lives yet. But you can be sure that God will use our rejection for his glory.

You can be sure that our suffering will not be wasted as we follow Jesus. So don't make the mistake the Jewish leaders did. Hold fast to Jesus.

Don't brush him aside. For his sake, all our other dreams and goals are meaningless. For his sake, let's fix our eyes on the Lord Jesus together.

[47 : 01] Let's pray. Amen. Father God, we thank you because even as we have heard Stephen's testimony, our worries in this world, they started to grow strangely dim.

As we looked upon Jesus, so glorious, so mighty, so loving, as he hung on the cross for our sins, we see someone who is worth following to the bitter end.

And whatever troubles we have in our life, help us never to brush you aside, Lord. For your sake, for your glory, all of our small, pointless ambitions can be brushed aside.

Father, we pray all these things in the name of our Lord Jesus. Amen. Amen. Amen.