

Domestic Blindness

Stephen is full of grace and power - serving the Lord - taking care of people - then he is telling people about Jesus Christ - Jews of Libya, Egypt, and Turkey debate Stephen - Arrest Stephen - Then he lights up like an Angel. Glory of God rests upon him.

1 Then the high priest said, "Are these things so?"

Then the high priest said: The high priest mentioned here was probably still Caiaphas, the same one who presided over the trial of Jesus (Matthew 26:57).

Are these things so? The high priest invited Stephen to explain himself in light of the accusations in Acts 6:11-14. Stephen was accused to speaking blasphemous words against Moses and God, and against this holy place [the temple] and the law. Additionally, they accused him of saying that Jesus would destroy both the temple and the customs delivered by Moses.

Stephen doesn't defend himself - Witness for Jesus - regarding the temple you can't put God in box - God can meet people wherever He wants. Regarding the Law - no one has ever been able to keep the law - Regarding destroying the Temple, yes you rejected Jesus just like the nation of Israel has always rejected her deliverers.

Stephen takes them through a vast majority of Israel's history to make his points.

Read Acts 7:2-50

Stephen's first point is - I don't think we need the temple to find God. Abraham found God and didn't need a temple. God was with Joseph in Egypt, and he didn't have a temple. God met Moses out in the wilderness of Midian in the midst of a burning bush. Not Temple there. David wanted a Temple, God was in no rush, you can't do it. Even after the temple was built - Stephen Quotes Isaiah 66

Acts 7:48 "However, the Most High does not dwell in temples made with hands, as the prophet says: 49 'Heaven is My throne, And earth is My footstool. What house will you build for Me? says the LORD, Or what is the place of My rest? 50 Has My hand not made all these things?"

"A single thread runs right through the first part of his defence. It is that the God of Israel is a pilgrim God, who is not restricted to any one place...If he has any home on earth, it is with his people that he lives." (Stott)

God can't be put in a box - even if it is a big box like the temple.

But this would lead to confusion (problem), because in the temple, is where the sacrifices are made for sin. How can you meet God unless you obey the law and when you disobey the Law, make sacrifices.

Second - Stephen turns to the Law -Abraham didn't have the Law, slow obedience, waited til his Father died. under Moses you didn't obey the Law, under Aaron you didn't obey the law - Amos says you didn't obey the Law.

The Law of god is good, says Stephen - The Law of God is important, it should never be broken or dishonored.

You can't put it aside, ignore it or marginalize it. The real problem though is you have never obeyed it. And you never will obey it.

So if we are saved by keeping the Law - we have a huge problem. We do need to obey the Law but we can't.

Third - Stephen pointed out an obvious pattern in the history of our people - every time God sends a deliverer, that deliverer is rejected, and persecuted by the very people he was sent to save.

Look at Joseph - appointed by God to save his family - and yet he was sold into slavery by that very family.

Moses was appointed to deliver his people out of Egypt - when he first asserted himself - they rejected him and he had to flee to the wilderness to save his own life.

Stephen's message was plain: "You have rejected Jesus, who was like Moses yet greater than him, and you deny that Jesus has any right to be a ruler and a judge over you."

Moses promised that there would come after him another **Prophet** and warned that Israel should take special care to listen to this coming **Prophet**. But just like Israel rejected Moses, so they were rejecting Jesus, who is the **Prophet** Moses spoke of.

David is appointed to be the true king - and yet for a major part of his life - he is on the run from the king of Israel.

The Evil Farmers - Matt 21:33-46

Each individual should consider for themselves how they should *accept* Jesus, and not reject Him. They should receive Him as their Deliverer, the One who can rescue.

Vs 51-53 -Summary and shows us the problem and the solution:

51 "You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you.

Stephen rebuked those who rejected Jesus as stiff-necked (as Israel is described in passages like Exodus 32:9), and as uncircumcised in heart and ears (as Israel is described in passages like Jeremiah 9:26).

Uncircumcised heart - spiritually hard heart - you do all the external rituals - you make sure you are in compliance with all the laws - but your hearts are filled with fear, and pride and cruelty. It hasn't worked.

Vs 53 says - you have not kept the law - you need a new heart - you need to be born again - you need something you don't have.

The solution - the summary of everything he has been saying -

52 Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers, 53 who have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept it."

Stephen is saying - I am all for the Law - but you can't fulfill the Law - so what is the answer - the Righteous One - The Just One - this is the crescendo of his sermon.

54 The Jewish leaders were infuriated by Stephen's accusation, and they shook their fists at him in rage.

The council was angry, but because Stephen's message had hit the target.

What does it mean to be the Righteous One - the Just One - The One who fulfills the LAW.

How do you fulfill the Law? - Jesus fulfilled the law by being the climax to that whole pattern - saviors being rejected - every other savior - Joseph, Moses, David - delivered their people in spite of their rejection - Jesus delivered his people through the suffering, rejection and death.

Jesus fulfilled the Law for us - How do you fulfill the law - any law - you either obey it or pay the penalty.

Stop light - obey or pay the ticket.

Jesus lived the perfect life - love God the Father with all his heart mind soul and strength, and loved His neighbor as Himself - no human being has ever done that other than Jesus. He earned the blessing of eternal life through obedience.

BUT then Jesus went to the cross - He was rejected, betrayed, denied, suffered and died - took the penalty that we deserved, because of our disobedience - so that when we believe in Jesus - He becomes our Righteous one - He becomes our righteousness - the moment of belief - all of the penalty for our disobedience - is imputed (credited to, assigned to) to Jesus, and all of the blessing that comes with his perfect righteousness is imputed (credited, assigned) to us.

Jesus fulfills the purpose of the Temple - by being the final sacrifice - Jesus is the bridge between God and humanity - He is the final temple - He is the righteous one, the fulfiller of the law - and He if you believe in Him will give you that new heart.

55 But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed steadily into heaven and saw the glory of God, and he saw Jesus standing in the place of honor at God's right hand. 56 And he told them, "Look, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing in the place of honor at God's right hand!"

The persecutors are furious - Stephen sees Jesus standing at the right hand of God.

Throne room = court room.

Jesus is not just seated at the right hand of God - many places in the bible it tells us that Jesus is seated at the right hand of God, [Matthew 26:64](#), [Colossians 3:1](#) because the work of salvation is finished. There is no more work to be done to accomplish our salvation.

Here, Jesus is standing in the throne room - heavenly courtroom. Jesus stand to talk, argue, make an appeal, be an advocate for Stephen -

FF Bruce- says - While Stephen was confessing Christ before men, Christ was confessing Stephen before God. *Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven* ([Matthew 10:32](#))

1Jo 2:1 My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.

Heb 7:25 Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.

When you believe in Christ - when you are in Him, your sins given to Him, and His righteousness given to you - when the Father looks at us in the courtroom - what does he say

No heavenly courtroom - no justice - if there is no justice - despair - doesn't matter what you do - accident - all going to burn out - no courtroom - all is meaningless - if there is - we can't even live according to our own standards.

Our hope - heavenly bench of justice - our advocate - Jesus - I passed my righteousness to them - I paid their penalty. Can't punish again, can't demand payment again.

Why is this such a long sermon - 5-6 times longer than any other sermon in the book of Acts - Luke the author of the book of Acts - was extremely diligent to gather the accounts of eyewitnesses.

58b And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul.

The apostle Paul was consenting to Stephen's death - Paul was part of the execution party - he held their coats while they did their bloody deed. Paul gave approval to Stephen's death.

Paul must have remembered Stephen's sermon, it must have sunk deep into his heart by the Spirit of God - Because all of the major themes of Paul's theology expounded with great detail and articulation find their roots in Stephen's sermon.

57 Then they put their hands over their ears and began shouting. They rushed at him 58 and dragged him out of the city and began to stone him.

Paul's was used by God to change the world. Stephen changed the world. Not just by what he said, but also by how he suffered.

59 As they stoned him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." 60 He fell to his knees, shouting, "Lord, don't charge them with this sin!" And with that, he died.

When Stephen spoke - His face was like the face of an Angel - He was incredibly bold - He was not afraid of telling them the truth - but there is no ill will toward them either - while they stoned him - Stephen prays for them. His heart is filled with love for his persecutors.

Stephen displayed the same forgiving attitude that Jesus had on the cross (Luke 23:34). He asked God to forgive his accusers, and he made the promises loudly and publicly.

Paul never saw anybody like this before - what he said, how he suffered.

Ability to handle suffering - depends on what your meaning of life is - live for kingdom of God - glory of God - no matter what tragedy comes your way - your meaning of life - reason for living - the foundation of your soul will always remain intact - untouchable.

Living for your own personal freedom and happiness - then when suffering comes - you destroy your meaning in life - disintegrate.

St. Augustine - we all love things, but do we love things in the proper order. All of our problems come from misplaced, disordered, out of priority loves - somebody once summarized Augustine - only love of the immutable will bring tranquility - only if the thing you love the most, can't be taken away from you, can you possibly face life with tranquility.