

# The Witness of Stephen

by Les Wheeldon

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*The sermon explores the significance of the death of Stephen in Church history, God's desire for the gospel to be heard, and the importance of knowing God.*

**Duration:** 1:11:08

**Scripture:** Acts 7:51, Acts 8:5, Acts 8:30, Acts 9:5, Galatians 5:16

**Topics:** "Stephen"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of giving away one's possessions and living a life free from sin. He tells the story of a man who was told by Jesus to give away his wealth but chose not to, and as a result, he never enjoyed his money again. The preacher highlights the idea that once the word of Jesus comes to a person, they are considered dead and must seek resurrection life. He also shares the story of a man who exemplified forgiveness and love by not confronting his neighbor when they encroached on his property, ultimately leading to the neighbor's repentance. The sermon concludes with a discussion of the apostle Paul's conversion and the transformative power of encountering Jesus.

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## Transcript

In this particular phase of the history of the Church, this is of course the beginning of Church history, as to the Apostles. It continues on beyond it and we can read about it later on in other books, but of course this is God's account of Church history. When you read the Bible, you read God's version of history.

And of course it always shows you things that newspaper reporters don't tell you. For example, it tells you about angels, and it tells you about the arts of prayer, things like this, and so on. But here we are in chapter 8, and I'll just read the first verse of chapter 8. Saul was consenting to the death of Stephen.

And at that time there was a great persecution against the Church, which was at Jerusalem. They were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the Apostles. And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him.

As for Saul, he made habit of the Church entering into every house, and dragging men and women, committing them to prison. And therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere, preaching the Gospel, or gossiping the Gospel. And Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ to them.

And so we've got a little turning point in the history of the Church. If you know anything about the Book of Acts, you'll know that really the revival that came through the day of Pentecost was confined nearly entirely to Jerusalem. That was the scene of the great revival.

There were other things happening, which if you read these pages you'll know. But mainly the revival took place in Jerusalem. And it was as if God, and it was about 3 to 4 years that this took place, 3 years, 4 years, between Acts chapter 2 and Acts chapter 8. It was as if God was giving the people of Jerusalem another chance.

And in the end of chapter 3 it tells you this, just something to put it in the words of Scripture. It tells us this, that Peter preaching says this, To you, first, God, having raised up his son Jesus, sent him, again through the apostles, to bless you in turning away every one of you from his iniquities. And that he spoke to the people of Jerusalem.

He said, you killed the Prince of Life, he said, but God, having raised him up, sent Jesus back to you, first, to bless you. Isn't that wonderful? So, though they had killed the Son of Life, the Prince of Life, he was sent back to bless those who had murdered him. Isn't that wonderful? And such is the heart of God.

And so for 3 years, 4 years, you find between Acts chapter 2 and onwards to chapter 8, you find for about 3, 4 years, God renewed again to the people of Israel, in Jerusalem particularly, his desire that they hear the gospel, repent and obey the gospel. It was great grace. And then in chapter 8, it's as if there's a hinge in the book.

There are several hinges in this book of Acts. One is here, this turning point in chapter 8, when suddenly now, all the believers leave Jerusalem. That is, of course, except the apostles.

I've just told you there, the apostles remain. But the believers left in droves. They were scattered.

They took the gospel out, first of all in chapter 8, it tells you in verse 5 that Philip went down to Samaria. Then in chapter 9, it tells us that Saul the Tarsus was converted. And at the end of chapter 8, an Ethiopian was converted.

And in chapter 10, a Roman soldier was converted. And as you look on, you find the gospel. In chapter 11, you find verse 19, that those who were scattered abroad upon the persecution that rose about Stephen, travelled as far as Phoenix, I don't know where that is, Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but to the Jews only.

And so the gospel was now going further. It was going to Ethiopia, it had gone to the Roman soldier in Caesarea, it had gone now to Cyprus, and then to Antioch, in the north there of this area, towards the north, towards Turkey, what is present-day Turkey. The gospel was spreading, and it began to spread upon the death of Stephen.

And this is the turning point. It was as if God was sending the gospel again to Jerusalem, and then Stephen arose, one of the great witnesses of the gospel in the history of the world, one of the great witnesses of the gospel. When he was stoned, it was as if they drew a line, the people of Jerusalem drew a line under it and said, no, we don't want it.

God said, well alright, then if you don't want it, let the gospel go out. And it went out. It's sobering to think that God could speak to us, and then at one day, he could say, well alright, I accept your rejection, we'll

turn then to others.

It's only fair, isn't it? If you were being given the chance to hear the gospel time after time after time, there should come a time when others should have the chance to hear it. Of course, it's fair, isn't it? If you reject the gospel, if a person should say, no thank you, it's only fair that God should say, well do you mind then if I turn and give a chance to somebody else, so that you won't have the chance to hear it anymore. At least in that action, God makes us understand that the time is limited.

Everybody's time is limited. None of us can pretend that we have unlimited time about the things we must do. We don't.

Our time is seriously limited. It's just enough. Praise God.

And so get on with it. Do what God is speaking to you to do. And don't assume that you might be better at responding next week.

Don't assume that. Respond now, with all your heart. There might not even be a next week, for any of us.

And by the way, Jack Kelly died this morning. I'm sure you all know this. But notice in verse 2 of chapter 8, that devout men carried Stephen to his burial and made great lamentation over him.

Now they were mourning mainly, I think, because of the way he died. This man hadn't died at a ripe old age. He died prematurely, if you see it like that.

A young man. But notice that devout men can make great lamentation. That's one of the things I noticed there.

You can mourn over the fact that Jack has died. You can mourn. We have hope, but it will also pass.

There's nothing wrong in mourning over the loss of someone. If one of my children emigrated to Australia, which I think they'd like to do, if they emigrated to Australia, and we all went to say goodbye in Tifo or something, and I had to say goodbye, I think I would be so, I'd be crying. I would be looking at them until they were gone.

I'd just be so torn up by the fact that they were going. And I'd think, where will I see them again? And all that life is shared now is coming to an end. And I was just, you know, just for a short time, perhaps a few years.

But it is a strange thing, isn't it, we lament. We have this sorrow in our hearts. But we don't sorrow as the world.

We sorrow as those who shall appear again. Amen. All right, well, here's the context then.

This great turning point in the history of the Church. And now the Gospel is going out to the nations. You know that God does this at different times in human history.

We think that God reaches the nations slowly, until now we're at the high peak of him reaching the nations. Well, I know we are in one way. But you must know that God has reached the whole world several times already.

Do you know that when they excavated in China, one of the strange things they found was a burial. I don't know what it was, a burial slab or something. They found a Christian inscription with a cross and a quotation from the Bible.

Going back centuries, maybe to about 400 AD. And they said, well, when did that, when did the Gospel get to China? Of course, people have to rewrite history when they make these discoveries, because they found that the Gospel had gone back there, right over there, years ago. The Gospel reached China probably in the 1st century AD.

It probably was preached there by one of the apostles. The Gospel reached India through Thomas in the 1st century. It probably reached the shores of Great Britain in the 1st century.

They found evidence of this. Romans told this to the believers and so on. And all kinds of things they found.

The Gospel spreads not by degrees. It suddenly spreads over the whole world. It happened in the 1st century.

It happened at this time. It happened in Zinzendorf's day, when missionaries went out of Germany and reached 130 nations in a generation. So don't assume that the Gospel is being slowly, increasingly preached.

It isn't. It's suddenly being spread abroad. And you'll find that when there are outpourings of the Holy Spirit, suddenly the whole world is reached by a group of people.

Small groups of people suddenly reach the whole world. And it's strange that if you look at this small group of churches that we know perhaps different ones, know little churches, but they've spread to how many countries? I don't know. But the Gospel has been preached throughout the whole world by a small group of churches.

And it's done again and again and again. And now I know through the ministry of people like Norman Meaton and various people I know and people I'm connected with, people converted in Bhutan. First time.

First time ever. New tribes in Nepal. The Marathi tribe in Nepal.

First time ever. Believers. Churches established.

This time. Towns in Canada are preaching. First time ever.

You know, it's wonderful. Places you can go. The whole world.

And you can hear and see testimonies of God reaching the whole world. Well, in these chapters, he went down just to Samaria. That's Samaria.

This area just north of Jerusalem. This area around what is now Nablus. Palestinian state.

Now Nablus. That is this area. That's where they went preaching.

Jacob's well was in Nablus. Or is in Nablus to this day. You can go there.

And right in that city you can find a church built around Jacob's well. You can go and see it. And sit on it.

And imagine what it was like. And you can drop a stone down it. I'm not saying you should.

If everybody dropped a stone down, they wouldn't be able to. Eventually. But you can drop a stone down it.

It's very, very deep, Jacob. It's all there. You can go and see it.

But modern day Nablus. And they went there and preached the gospel. Probably the woman of Samaria was also there.

And was filled with the spirit at this time. We guess that Jesus fulfilled his promise to her at this time. We guess these things.

But the gospel went to them. Then at the end of the chapter it went to Ethiopians. And this is the son of Ham.

Again as I mentioned yesterday in the evening, around the cross there were the three sons of Noah. Ham, Shem and Jacob. Now again, here in these chapters we have the three sons of Noah.

First the Ethiopians. Then, chapter 8, sorry, chapter 9, Saul of Tartus. He was from the tribe of Shem.

And then in chapter 10 we have Cornelius, a Roman from the tribe of Jacob. And there they all are. Being converted.

Individual conversions. And you can do a study of their individual conversions. And one of the ways, just look at one of the conversions.

Look at chapter 9 for a moment. Chapter 9. This is the conversion of Saul. And here in this chapter, we come to something that, this is wonderful in the Bible.

The way the Bible takes us out of the big picture and into the small picture. Here we find in Acts of the Apostles, chapter 9, we find this. Here's Saul of Tartus, religious, zealous, journeying, serving God, but disturbed, full of conflict, full of bewilderment, full of doubts for the first time.

And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus, and suddenly there, verse 3, there shone around about him a light from heaven. He fell to the earth, and he heard a voice saying to him, loved one, Saul, my beloved Saul, why are you persecuting me? And he had seen this mighty light, from the brightness of the sun he fell, he saw this mighty light, he fell to the ground, he heard the voice of Jesus, both travelling with him, saw the light, but didn't see any form or shape or who he was, they heard a noise, but they didn't hear any words, but there saw on the ground, and he said, this great word, he said, who are you? Who are you? And the way he said it, was to me, is always the key. Whenever you hear someone pray, it's not what they pray, it's the way they pray.

You know, if you said, why me Lord? The way you say it, is the most important thing. Why me? Because you could say, why me Lord? I must have told you, I went to a Snoopy cartoon, and he was lying on his kennel, looking up at the stars, and he said, why me? Next week he said, why me Lord? And the third thing he said, can't answer that. Charlie Schultz was a Christian though, had a Christian DNA anyway.

Why me? Why? He could also say it, why me? Why me? And when Saul of Tarzan was on the ground, he fell to the earth, and he heard a voice saying to him, my beloved Saul, why are you persecuting me? And

he said, who are you? Who are you? And he called him Lord. Who are you Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus, whom you're persecuting. So hard for you to kick, to fight, against these sharp goads in your heart and mind.

You're fighting, aren't you? You're kicking against them. But it's hard for you, isn't it? It's hard. And I find this incredible, that Jesus had compassion on him, fighting the love of God.

It's hard for you, isn't it? You're fighting a losing battle, anyway. It's hard for you. And I think Jesus had this great chuckle, I often hear this chuckle in Jesus' song.

It's hard for you, isn't it? But there's something warm, some feeling about Jesus, in everything he does. And he said, it's hard for you to kick against these sharp goads in your soul. And Saul trembling and astonished said, Lord, this is the second prayer of Saul.

His first prayer was, who are you? His second, what should I do? And I think that those two prayers should be taken up by every person. They should never end with, Saul went on in his life, he still was praying that same prayer, that I may know him. That was his prayer, that I may know him.

I want to know him. And the great wonder of being a Christian is not that you get to some stage where you say, I've passed that, you know, I've passed my driving test, I've passed my religious test, I've put my hands up in a meeting, I've felt a bit better, and I've done this, I've done that, therefore I don't have to worry too much about Christian experience now, I can just tell others a bit, and just get on and attend church, and that's what Christianity is. It is not that.

Christianity, if you want a definition, is the discovery of God. It begins when you're saved, but remember that everything God does is to open a door of possibility. It's not the end, it's the beginning.

God gives us a door of possibility. Why are we saved? Why? So that we may know him. What is the wonder and excitement of being a Christian? Is it repeating again and again that I am saved, I am saved, I am saved? I'm not saying that that loses wonder, but the thing that will thrill your soul for all eternity is the answer to that prayer.

Who are you? Who are you? And then comes, as I said, the prayer. What would you have me to do? Now, notice this. Jesus said, hard for you to kick against the pricks.

This is the egos, these sharp things he felt, piercing his soul. And thereby Jesus is telling us all, and certainly Saul knew it, that what happened to Saul's chance on the Damascus Road began a long time before. It began a long time before.

When did it begin? Well, I don't know. I'll turn you back to chapter 7 and suggest a few things there to you. But I don't know when it began.

It may have begun when he was a boy and he promised God one day, I am going to be a good boy! And I bet he really tried. I can see the Apostle later and think of anything that he was like. He didn't like that as a boy.

You can see the way he was. I think he tried with all his heart. But I think one day he failed.

And I think he felt so bad. He felt so ashamed. And one of the things he promised God was I'll never do it again.

I'll be better. Until the next day. And the next, I'll be better God.

And I don't know when a man's conflict with God begins but something in the reading of the Word when he would have been reading the Word or maybe he was reading publicly dressed in his nice robes somehow or whether he was about to be like a good synagogue boy. He was there reading this Word of God and then he would have read it. And maybe if he read it himself it was a stab of shame because he knew he wasn't keeping it.

He tells you something of it in Romans chapter 7. Something happened in it. And he realised that he was a living contradiction of all that he believed. He wasn't living up to what he believed.

I don't know. I know different testimonies. I know one man who was a minister.

He was a Christian. An Australian man. He went to, he was a soldier in the Second World War.

He was taken to prison of war. He was taken to a Japanese prison of war camp. He was there with all the other prisoners.

He had his faith in Christ. And then the Japanese soldiers brought out food and it wasn't very good food. Some of the crusts of bread really.

Bits of cake and various things. Threw them down on this table or something. And here they were.

All these men had to now grab what food they could take. And this man couldn't stop himself pushing others aside and grabbing a good portion because he was dying. And he looked at his religious heart and he was broken to the core.

Goddamn! And he thought how real a Christian am I? How real am I? Now I know that Saul was trying to be a Jew not a Christian. But you understand it. God gave him the law to bring them to Christ.

And He gives us the law too to bring us to Christ. The law in our hearts. The law in different ways.

But here he is. He's under this tremendous burden. And now in chapter 7 I guess this all began before he met Stephen.

But in chapter 7 he's into Jerusalem now. He has just come in. He's perhaps come in about a few weeks or months before this point in the Revival.

But Jerusalem is all a stir with stories of healings and tremendous power at work. And the Pharisees, his colleagues, are saying I'm speaking against this whole new thing. And Saul is stirred up.

And then there's this man, this young upstart who's done so little. He knows virtually nothing and he hasn't been to a Bible college like Saul had been. Saul had been to the Oxford University of Bible Colleges.

He'd been to the feet of Gamaliel. He'd done the best. And there he was coming to Jerusalem and now there's this young upstart who not only pretends to know the Bible better and to tell people about Moses and this new prophet Jesus and all this.

But to everybody in Angarina, especially Saul Stephen was doing great miracles. And Saul hadn't seen a miracle in a long time. He hadn't seen the supernatural.

And in chapter 6 I assume that Saul was one of those who were arguing with Stephen. And it tells you in verse 10 they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spoke. And I've no doubt they argued strongly with him.

But when Stephen spoke I guess the words of Stephen must have not come just with argument but with power and truth and conviction that Stephen knew what he was saying and he believed it and he was living it. And they couldn't resist the wisdom and the spirit by which they had argued the Bible with him. It made them mad.

And then verse 11 of chapter 6 they bribed people to say things that Stephen had said. They stirred up the people and the elders and the scribes and came upon him. And they brought him to the council.

And all this was taking place maybe Saul was among those who were who was called to talk against Stephen to bring arguments that would destroy all this that Stephen was saying. But when they sat and looked at Stephen in this room they saw his face, look at the end of verse chapter 6, they saw his face as if it had been the face of an angel. Serene, I don't know, you'd think the face of an angel.

Serenity. Real peace. He was at peace.

He wasn't laughing with some kind of foolish joy but he was. He had joy. He had a clear conscience.

You can read that on the face. He had a clear conscience. He was holy angel, because we're thinking here of an angel one of God's angels.

A holy angel. And look on this man with this Christian testimony an outstanding example of a Christian. A shining face.

Now I don't think he had a sort of fixed leer on his face you know, pretending to be happy because he thought he ought to be. I think he was simply shining, radiating a man right with God. And they looked at him and they asked him this question, well of course they asked him, are these things so Stephen they said.

And then of course Stephen launches into this great long, but long it's long in terms of chapters, but it isn't very long, it's only 60 verses or so. And he speaks for about half an hour, maybe 20 minutes, we don't know how long he spoke for, but he went into the history of Israel and I thought it shook them that he knew his Bible so well. Because he really did.

And then as he came down he spoke other things against the way the people of God have dealt with the Holy Spirit among them. Look at this, verse 51, this will not win you friends if you speak like this to them. But he called them, in verse 51, you wouldn't like me to call you this would you? This is the advantage of preaching, I can call anybody anything and just say, well I was just speaking generally.

But if I said you stiff-necked man I didn't say woman, I said you ladies of Israel you stiff-necked and here's the terrible thing, you uncircumcised now remember who he was saying this to, the Jews you are uncircumcised cut off from the covenant you're not part of the covenant. Translate that into our day, and of course I don't know if a Christian today if he says this to a Christian today whether they feel as shocked as they ought to feel but they ought to feel terribly insulted by this if I say you stubborn, proud and uncrucified in heart and the way you listen to God's word, you're uncrucified you're still strong and vigorous and powerful in the pursuit of your own agenda he said you always resist the Holy Spirit as your father did so

do you and one of the things in the New Testament that is revealed is that the reason the Holy Spirit is so invisible is because he is like oil and water to the human race.

In other words, he's all around us but we can't, we're incompatible we can't see him because we are so resisting the Holy Spirit the human race is so resistant to the Holy Spirit that most of the human race don't even know he exists the greatest tragedy is to go to a group of disciples and say have you received the Holy Spirit, were you baptized in the Holy Spirit when you were a young Christian and they say well we haven't even heard of it but that's what happened in Acts chapter 19 they said we haven't even heard of it we didn't even know there was a Holy Spirit how can there be such a thing as a Christian who doesn't know the Holy Spirit exists but that's what you find in Acts chapter 19, he said that and he said more he said you haven't checked the law but in verse 54 their reactions

were so, they were so angry they were so scurred they had no spirit, no peace they were cut to the heart, they gnashed on him with their teeth but he being full of the Holy Ghost this is a wonderful verse chapter 7, he being full of the Holy Ghost, and let me tell you something the Holy Ghost will enable you to do it will enable you to do what Stephen did he being full of the Holy Ghost looked up and one of the great gifts in the spiritual life the Holy Spirit imparts to all children of God is that he gives us the power to look up and he being full of the Holy Ghost looked up steadfastly into heaven, he wasn't wavering he looked up and he saw the glory of God and Jesus standing on the right hand of God and he said I see the heaven opened and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of

God and then they cried out with a loud voice stop their ears, no, no, no they ran upon him with one accord Saul while he was with them they cast him out of the city out of a certain gate that is today called Stephen's gate, and they stoned him outside that gate and the witnesses laid down their clothes and the young man's feet whose name was Saul, Saul was there he said come on bring your coats here, you're going to get sweaty doing this job, take off your coats, bring them here stoning and they stoned Stephen and there's Saul looking on he watches Stephen calling on God, he watches him pray and he sees Stephen say this Lord Jesus, he says, receive my spirit, and he died dying with such assurance with such confidence and then I think the thing that absolutely stabbed the Apostle probably

wasn't Apostle at this point he stabbed this Pharisee to his heart was when he heard Stephen kneel down and cry with a loud clear voice without a trace of bitterness and he said Lord Jesus lay not this sin to their charge and he died in other words he said forgiven, and the way he prayed they knew Saul would have known this man had forgiven his murder now whatever else we can say whatever else had touched Saul's heart the most provocative thing he ever saw Saul heard was a man with a shining face filled with utter forgiveness a Christian should be in absolute shock to his family and his friends and his neighbours because he's full of a forgiving heart a Christian holds no grudge he's right with God he's forgiven everybody and I think one of the most shocking things to your neighbours will

be that you have a clear countenance and a shining testimony of forgiveness, you know I read the biographies of different people and I have different heroes in my when I think of different people one of the men I most admire was a man in, a German man, he was a great man of God he was such a powerful minister great miracles were done through him, he died just before World War II, he died about 1936 great miracles were done with him, through him he was a mighty man of God one of the greatest men of God who's ever lived one day he was preaching in a tent mission in in Prussia I think it was, or Pomerania somewhere right in the east and he was preaching down there and there was a man in the region who was a nobleman and he was a very violent man this nobleman and he was very rough,

apparently once told them that he was riding along this road and he knocked over a coffin in a funeral procession, didn't care anyway he was riding along this rough nobleman was riding along and he suddenly saw a man pushing a wheelchair empty and he said to him, where have you been? where's the sick man? where's the sick man? and he said, it's me I was a cripple and I went down to that tent meeting with that evangelist Jonathan Paul and I was healed today and this nobleman's jaw dropped and he said, what? and he went down there like a lamb to hear this evangelist and he was converted and he gave over his great estates for people to use them for for missions, for retreats and conferences very wonderful when I read that man's biography the thing that most hit me and I think it was a

wonderful biography it was, these great things of course wonderful, but the thing that really hit me was the little thing it was the little thing one day he'd been away preaching he came back to his house in Berlin and his neighbour had moved the fence over taking over about a metre of his property and he didn't say anything he'd moved the stones that indicated where the boundary was, he'd moved them and Jonathan Paul this man didn't say anything he greeted his neighbour as if nothing had happened he'd been kind to him before and he continued to be kind to him in exactly the same way one day his neighbour came to him broken-back I'm so sorry I'm so sorry gave him back his land broken, how was he broken? because he'd met his match in a man who didn't bear any grudge I could tell you more

stories about that man but the thing is, it's just so the thing about the man and I think he was such a great man is because he had a constant testimony of a man who he loved his friends his neighbours and his enemies he loved everybody and you know that if you want to be full of the Holy Ghost, if you want God to work in your life, one of the things you're going to have to agree to is that you're going to have to forgive everybody and I know as I've talked to people, that some people have got more to forgive than others it isn't actually in relationship to how much you've got to forgive you could tell me your story and I could hear something and I could say well yeah I know really I feel sorry for you would I then say at the end of hearing all your reasons to begrudge somebody would I

then say well you're really right to be bitter so I think you should continue go on be bitter prove it deeper go on, moan a bit stronger shout at God even about it complain to God write some stingy, horrible letters I told you that you know what I would do I would hasten your death I'm convinced that bitterness is the cause of death of many people unforgiving heart the cause of spiritual death when Saul saw this man die the way he died it would have shaken him to the core he forgave everybody he forgave everybody I know that the testimony of the cross which we're talking about the testimony of the cross how do I portray Jesus Christ in him crucified there's only one way to portray that cross if I'm unforgiving I am a contradiction I am denying everything about the Christian gospel if I

can't forgive somebody I am denying the whole gospel you see a Christian is shining, radiant a Christian is radiant a Christian has been made right with God, filled with the Holy Spirit filled with a life that's made him clean in spite from drugs and all the hurts and the things that make the human race such a sick bunch of people why is the human race so sick you know all these things but when Saul looked at Stephen he would have said he's whole I'm sick I'm sick but he wouldn't admit it he wouldn't admit it instead he redoubled his efforts to stamp out the things that were stirring his conscience if you look on we won't look at all these things but this man Stephen was filled with power, he was filled with faith he was filled with all these things but if you want to be full of the Holy

Ghost, if you want God to work in your life, one of the things you don't have to agree to is that you don't have to forgive everybody and I know that I've talked to people that some people have got more to forgive

than others it isn't actually in relationship to how much you've got to forgive, you could tell me your story and I could hear something and I could say well yeah I know, I feel sorry for you would I then say at the end of hearing all your reasons to be good to somebody, would I then say well you're really right to be bitter so I think you should continue go on be bitter pull a bit deeper, go on moan a bit stronger and shout at God even about it and complain to God and write some still horrible letters and I've told you that, you know what I would do, I would hasten your death

I'm convinced that bitterness is the cause of death for many people unforgiving heart is certainly the cause of spiritual death and when Saul saw this man die, the way he died it would have shaken him to the core he forgave everybody I know that the testimony of the cross which we're talking about, the testimony of the cross, how do I portray Jesus Christ and him crucified there's only one way to portray that cross if I'm unforgiving I am a contradiction, I am denying everything about the Christian gospel, if I can't forgive somebody I am denying the whole gospel you see a Christian is a shining radiant, a Christian is radiant, a Christian has been made right with God filled with the Holy Spirit filled with a life that's made him clean inside from drugs and all the hurts and the things

that make the human race such a sick bunch of people, why is the human race so sick look at all these things but when Saul looked at Stephen he would have said he's whole and I'm sick I'm sick, but he wouldn't admit it instead he redoubled his efforts to stamp out the things that were stirring his conscience if you look on we won't look at all these things but this man Stephen was filled with power, he was filled with faith he was filled with all these things but the thing that most would have shaken every person that looked at him was he was filled with love he was filled with the love of God and you know that this thing of forgiveness is something you will have to maintain there will be things that will happen you know I suppose the strange thing is that we expect the rules to be

different I suppose in all kinds of places, but we must learn the whole way of forgiveness, I said here that the Holy Spirit will cause you to look up into heaven the Holy Spirit will also cause you to forgive the Holy Spirit will cause you to believe, he will cause you to love, he will cause you to be kind he will cause you, but someday you will disagree with the Holy Spirit you will say I'm not doing that, you won't be able to feel it very strongly, but someday you will say no the Holy Spirit will persist and stir you, but then the Holy Spirit is greed and then when we turn away from the ways the Holy Spirit prompts us to we find that our life grows dull and dark and then to our greatest horror we get tempted to commit sins we never imagined we could even think about but once darkness

is unleashed on a soul the human heart is capable of the worst I think it's the most tragic thing that we assume so much, but remember this, that the walk of a life freed from sin is a life living in this spirit, walking in this spirit, walking in forgiveness walking in love, walking in faith walking in the things that the Holy Ghost prompts us to if it is the spirit, you'll be in the flesh and it won't be long before all the works of the flesh are being stirred in you so then we make a chapter 9 for a moment here is this apostle, well this man Charity, fighting all these things, and here he is and he's now seen Stephen, and he's about he's going to submit, we've seen already that he's on the ground, he's trembling he's astonished, we're not going to spend a long time here looking at the

conversion of souls but I just want you to notice this that when he saw Jesus and this sight of Jesus cut into the heart and he was on the ground he was dead, and this is what he said, who are you Lord, who are you, who are you and the Lord said, I am Jesus we don't realise this we assume things are all automatic because they're so familiar to us but you don't see this, but at this point Saul could have said, no go away

from me if he had, he would have been led to Damascus, a broken land there would be no zeal now for being a pharisee he would have lived out his days a broken man he would have stirred his heart sometimes to this or that, but he would have been not only disappointed, he would have been absolutely miserable he had the moment of choice you know you can see it in different

ones if you look at the rich young ruler what should I do Eden, Eden, what should I do how should I live my life Jesus told him, he went away sorrowful, and I am certain that man never enjoyed his money again deep down in his heart every time he looked he remembered the word of Jesus, give it away give it away and he'd sit with his friends eating expensive food, drinking expensive wine planning expensive buildings and in his heart he'd hear the word give it away, give it away and he wouldn't enjoy it because once the word of Jesus has come to you you are a ruined person you're dead and you need to know the resurrection life but you only know it if you'll agree to die with him on that cross because if you die you're going to lose your life you know the most blessed thing about this gospel

is that I can lose my horrible self-centered life I can let go of it and be made completely new forgiveness is only possible by letting go you can't forgive unless you let go of things that have happened of events of maybe money owed you or something that somebody took because you let it go, let it go I want it back, no let it go forever because people won't talk to others because there's something they've got that they, you know this terrible thing of envy, of lust all connected and all things ready to go, let go from your life, I wanted that so much let it go, you can't have it, but he's got it and he doesn't deserve it more than me and I deserve it more than him and I want it, let it go one of the most dirty things you can ever do is compare yourself with another you know I've heard

people say this, I hate you because, why? because of something you've got that they want let it go let it go and when Saul let go his life, do you remember, I think for three days he must have thought about this three days he was blind he was working it through the Holy Spirit was poured over him on the third day, for three days he sat there and as he he'd said, he'd abandoned himself to this on the first day Tejet I guess, that's what he's been saying all his life, he went like a lamb into the town, led by those who, he was led there led by his companions, they went in, they didn't know what had happened, he didn't eat or drink for three days and I think as he was there praying, and the Bible because he was praying, as he was praying, suddenly it would come to him what about all that

career you could be the high priest if you follow this man, you're going to have to let go all your hopes for a future career and suddenly he would say can I do it, can I do it can I do it, and then he would say yes, I'll do it, so as you can have it and from him went away the ambition to be high priest you could be like Emmanuel, the most respected Bible teacher, but if you do this you'll lose it let it go, let it go, and he let it go you could have been rich, and let it go famous, let it go if you do this maybe Satan reminded him of all that he could lose but on that journey there, three days he was there in the tomb, and I think Saul said yes I let go my life one of the things you've got to do is let go your life you've got to let go you've got to let go the past you've got to let go

ambitions you've got to let go everything hurts injustices let them go before God people you know so well it might be a husband, it might be a wife it might be a parent, it might be a child it hurts you so deeply let it go let it go and Saul let everything go before Jesus I think he saw that face there today you don't remember him now, but he saw it and he said I want to know and all the time that he was there, the church was there either or, either or you can't have both you can't have both you want this, then let that go you want this, let it go let this go, let that go and he let it go he let it go and on the third day he was there

praying, he'd released his hold on everything he was dead and Ananias came into him and said this by faith Ananias came and said by faith, he said I think

he must have taken a deep breath when he went in because he knew that Saul was an enemy of Christianity, he took a deep breath and he said brother Saul brother Saul you're my brother Saul brother with a lack of faith he had only got the word of Jesus to God and he called him brother you're my brother the Lord Jesus who appeared to you in the way has sent me to you that you might receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Ghost and he laid his hands on him and they fell from his eyes and he sailed, his sight was restored to him and he arose and was baptized first baptized in the Spirit and secondly in water, I don't know where they rushed him to do it, but they baptized him in water he was baptized in the Holy Spirit and I think that Saul rose and he began to witness immediately this

man, I think he was one of the most stubborn witnesses of the Lord Jesus Christ that ever existed he never stopped witnessing, he never stopped witnessing it's wonderful isn't it and Saul, you see he saw, as I said, when later on when he was filled with the Holy Spirit he was baptized he was baptized, united with Christ in his death he felt this whole life was being transformed, he was losing this whole self-centered striving life, he was released from the law he was released from everything, he was dead and he was alive in Christ he was a new man in Christ it's wonderful isn't it and he became a witness of the Lord Jesus Christ a witness of the cross, and he became one who told the whole world about the glories of the cross and most of what we know about the cross is from the pen of the

Apostle Paul he writes about how we die to self we die to the world, we die to all the things I've mentioned we die, and he spoke of it as the greatest joy, why, because then we live we die, we also live, and he became a witness a stubborn witness who would not take no for an answer, and I think this is what he saw in Stephen an outstanding witness a shining clear witness you know that wherever there is witness there is conflict did you know that wherever there is witness there is conflict Stephen gave witness and he gave his life when Paul witnessed, he witnessed let him go out of the war I remember a story I heard in Germany again about this man, he was a Jew he was a he was a Jew, he was taken to the camps and he was on his way to be gassed they were leading him down with all the

others and he at some point he didn't know where he was going exactly, and I didn't know always what was happening, and I didn't know he didn't know he stumbled over his shoelace something small like that in his suit to tie his shoelace and whether the guard knew what was happening or not the guard pushed him aside and ordered him back to the barracks get back and he lasted a second he didn't die with all the others and he came out of this prison of war, this concentration camp in Germany he went back to his town third man was all the loathe on him, all these things and he got married and one of his neighbours was a Christian this man I'm talking about this Jewish man lived on the first floor flat well like John Shaw if you haven't seen him, you must visit Villa Shaw Castle Shaw go and

visit the mansion and if you go there, it was a flat just like that, it was up some stairs and there was a door, and this Christian went to him and said excuse me sir, would you come to a Christian meeting the man said, what?

Christian meeting? Never! Get out of my house the next day the man came back and he said our meetings are continuing, would you like to come to our Christian meeting he said, what?

I told you never to come back here he said, if you come here again then invite me, I'll throw you down those stairs go and see them, go and see them, not the very first stairs but they're just like that so the next

day he went back again stood on the bottom of the stairs laughing and he said would you come to our meeting he said, no he said, you're too big a coward to come to our meeting what? and he went to the meeting so he said, and he was converted became a great preacher eventually in German he was converted, he sat in the meeting he realised what Christ had done for him on that cross and he gave in let go of all his life all his hurts he was made new apparently his wife wasn't with him when he was converted she was away she came back and he didn't know how to say it to her so they

were living together there quietly, he wasn't saying anything and one day his wife said to him, you know I've been away for a few days she said, I've got something I'd like to tell you while I was travelling I met a Christian and I'd given my life to Christ laughing we both became Christians the same week wonderful story you know I love such stories I love the way God's grace worked to a very dark age it never stops I know men who were converted on the battlefield hard German men who broke down and wept Nazis waiting the death penalty who broke down and wept being led to the Lord by a people who had been who had lost sons by the Germans but you see, forgiveness the power of forgiveness God wants to make you a witness of the cross, later on when Saul, now Paul wrote his letters and he

wrote things, don't you know that many of us were baptised into Jesus Christ who was baptised into his death you can almost hear the leap of joy you know when you read Romans don't read it like that don't read it like that read it how it was written many of us were baptised into Jesus Christ who was baptised into his death you might die to sin live to righteousness live for Jesus it's Paul who wrote you're dead, you're dead and he expects everybody to say yee I'm dead yee I'm dead he expects all the crowd to say mmm mmm mmm you're dead you're alive to see the Christ in God it's the best news ever not that he'll patch you up he'll just change you entirely from the inside out what a baptism in the spirit this is what a power there is in the cross but what do we experience misery? no

release, joy what do we do? let's pray all I know is that you'll pray and ask Jesus to fill you with this life if you'll let go your own he'll do it the choice is yours let go, let go, let go let it go from you and let the Holy Ghost come to you it's a choice let the bitterness go, let the hurt go let your ambitions go, let your possessions go, let things that happen go from you, let it go and let the Holy Ghost come he's seeking entrance the whole point of what we are here tonight for the Holy Ghost is seeking entrance the church may be weak, the preacher may be weak but the Holy Ghost is strong and he's knocking on your heart, he wants entrance, he wants to take over your life, fill you flood you, give you real life real joy, real peace he wants that, he wants it with all his being he

wants to fill you change you, he wants to release you let it happen let it happen let it happen to you, and you can say why me, Lord, it's so wonderful he's pointing at you hallelujah receive from the Lord our power the Holy Ghost is being poured out from heaven's height like a flying fountain, he's never stopped flowing since Jesus opened those floodgates on the human race they've been poured out and now on you and you, and you hallelujah receive

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