

The Rise of Stephen

Acts 6:8-15

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Message Transcript

Acts chapter six. We finished down through the first seven verses last week, it was a fine place to break up the chapter because a period of time lapses between verses seven and eight. In verses one through seven, the early church finds itself not lacking at all in power as the results continue to flow in. People who are saved by Christ through the preaching of the Word and the moving of the Holy Spirit. But what they do find is that they are lacking in terms of organization, that shows up unmistakably so in their ministry to widows, which the Apostle Paul will tell us more about in First Timothy chapter five. Their widows ministry is a booming business at this point and it's not very organized, the loose oversight that the apostles have over this ministry just isn't cutting it anymore and there begins to be some infighting within the church between the Hebrews and the Hellenists. So the apostles, no doubt led by the Holy Spirit determined that it is time to select seven deacons to just sort of better organize that ministry and they select seven Hellenist believers from the group to take charge of the fairness of the distribution within the widows ministry. Among those seven that were selected, there are two standouts, that would be Steven and Phillip. They remind me a lot of myself from high school, I was a real standout in high school. It's true, I don't mean to brag or anything but my teachers used to say to me, Arlyn go stand out in the hall. I used to get that a lot. I was very proud of that, still am to this day. But two standouts, Stephen and Phillip, between verses seven and eight deacons are being deacons and doing Deacon sort of things. They're meeting the physical needs of the body. And we don't know much about that other than that, by the time we get to verse eight, the Lord has decided to move Steven on to bigger and better ministry things Phillip will follow next. They were both promoted by the Lord to elder positions from those positions of deacons handling physical aspects of ministry. Now, to these positions of elders where they're handling spiritual ministry and meeting the spiritual needs of the congregation. Beginning at verse eight, Luke, the the human author of this book, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, decides to briefly follow the ministry histories of both of those guys, Stephen and Philip. He begins with Stephen and we're with Stephen's story for about a chapter and a half beginning at verse eight. So we get to see the full scope of God's work in the life of Stephen. It is a powerful story. It is an inspiring story. And it begins to really pick up in tempo and tenseness here in verse eight, as we read Stephen, full of grace and power, was doing great wonders and signs among the people. Verses five through seven, Stephen was ordained by the apostles to serve as a deacon. He was a table waiter. That's all that he was doing for the church. I hate to say it that way, but it's to make a point. That's all that he was doing for the church was serving widows their meals. In verse eight, the Lord is manifesting miracles through Stephen in the verses that follow. We're going to read that Stephen will be preaching and he will become a Christian apologist. That is one who defends the Christian faith. And that does not happen overnight. That takes some time. So again, we know that a substantial time gap has transpired between verses seven and eight. Verse seven, he's just selected to be a deacon. Verse eight, he is doing the work of an elder and furthermore, he is very much doing the work of an apostle. Now need I tell you, Stephen is not an apostle, at least not officially. Yet that didn't seem to stop the Lord from using him in much the same way as he was using the apostles. Same with Phillip, same with Barnabas. Same with Silas, same with many other individuals from the book of Acts and the Epistles many other individuals throughout the whole of church history. Now they could never really serve in that official capacity or position of apostle that was very specifically reserved for just 12 men. The Bible is very clear about that. If you don't understand why that is, please talk to me later and I'll show that to you in the scriptures, those 12 apostles, those are official titles,

that God only hands out to those 12 men, and then that's it for the rest of history. But just because you don't have that official title of apostle, the Lord makes it very clear that doesn't stop you from performing the same ministry of an apostle, you can very much be an apostle in your ministry. Apostle just simply means an ambassador, a representative, one that is sent out on behalf of another. You know how this all started for Stephen? I'm gonna bring this all back to verse five and a simple statement that was made in verse five, that when they were, even verse three, when they were selecting deacons, when they were selecting men for these positions they were looking for number one, men of good repute, men of a good reputation, and how do you get a good reputation in anything? Any field of work in the area of life? How do you get a good reputation in that? Faithfulness. Whatever you're faithful in, you will develop a good reputation in that area of life, your reputation will precede you. That's never going to be a question. The question is always going to be what will your reputation be? If it's good, especially in this area that we're concerned with, if it's a good Christian reputation, that means that has been established in the hearts and minds of others through a faithful Christian walk with the Lord. So there is a reason why there's a verse eight, in the life of Stephen and that is because Stephen had established good Christian reputation through Christian faithfulness. When it came time to choose deacons, Stephen's name was on everyone's minds. We need deacons. Well, we gotta get Steve, and we got to have him do it. He's dependable. We know this guy. He shows up. He's faithful, definitely on the list. He was on the list of every person taking that vote because he had established himself through faithfulness in the fellowship. That really was the secret to Stephen's ministry success, faithfulness. Go figure, right. It was that same faithfulness that took Stephen from the church seats, and gave him that promotion of Deacon. It was his reputation, his faithfulness, it will be that same faithfulness that will take Stephen here from verses seven and eight, from a deacon, to an elder very much performing the work of an apostle, it was faithfulness, that took Stephen, from the Pew to the pantry to the pulpit. Now, there are a lot of people that want the pulpit. They want the ministry positions, but they aren't going to waste their faithfulness, while still just being in the church seats, just being a part of the congregation. So the way, the way that many people feel about this is that, well, once I get the position, then I'll be faithful. Once I get where I need to be, then I'll really get serious about what I'm doing for the Lord. They're going to wait for the position to then display their faithfulness. And they're going to be waiting for a very long time, in fact, forever, because that is not how this works. It just doesn't work that way, in the kingdom of God. If you can't be faithful as a Christian, you're not going to be faithful as a Christian minister. You're not going to be faithful as a Christian worker in any way. If you're not faithful, first and foremost, as a Christian. Listen to what Jesus said in Luke chapter 16, verse 10. This is black and white, in red letters, figure that one out. Jesus said, one who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much do you get that? Jesus just taught us in that verse, that faithfulness was a character trait that would remain consistent in a person's life. In other words, when it comes to spiritual faithfulness, you either have it or you don't. You either are or you aren't.

And it's more than just a spiritual character trait for the Christian. It is also the key to all Kingdom promotion. Jesus taught us in Matthew chapter 25 verse 21 Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little. Therefore what? I will set you over much. You've been faithful over a little, I will set you over much. That is always how it is going to work with the Lord. If you're expecting the church to put you on the ministry map by ordaining you and giving you a position in the church. Oh man. You're getting the cart before the horse there. The focus needs to be on your faithfulness to God, wherever you are right now. Whatever you're doing for the Lord, right now. And I know the argument always comes up but Arlyn I don't have anything to do. I'm just quote unquote, just a congregant. Well, that's where Stephen started. That's how it worked for Stephen. He started as a faithful congregant, the people knew him. He had established a reputation in that fellowship. That was the beginning point for the continual promotion in the life of Stephen. Who is it that put you in this congregation, or whatever congregation you're a part of? It's Christ, the head of

the church. We're told in the New Testament, He picks us individually and puts us into the body individually, where he wants us. So who puts you into the congregation? Christ. That means that is first and foremost, the beginning for you. That is your calling, and your assignment, at least for starters. And Zechariah chapter four, verse 10, do not despise the day of small things Be faithful right there as a congregant. How do you do that? Pray regularly. Read your Bible regularly. Attend church regularly. You think Stephen would have been picked if he was hardly ever in church? If he hardly ever showed up for the church meetings? There's no way. That right there is probably the most common reason why gifted Christians are not used in Christian ministry. It's because the pastor is scanning the congregation from week to week, and they're never there. How are you going to trust that person to be in a position where you're going to have to depend on their ministries? According to Jesus, it starts all the way back with being faithful in the little. And if you'll get that part down, if you'll be faithful in your Christian experience, that is prayer, and the reading of the word, if you're growing in him, if you're faithful in church, then what's going to happen is the Lord's going to see that. He's going to call you to ministry, the church is going to recognize it, or deign you and give you work to do in the ministry. And then once you're doing the work, it doesn't matter what it is sweeping the, well, you don't sweep carpets. Well, with the carpet sweeper, I guess you do, yes, I'll stand with that, sticking to my guns, whether it's sweeping the carpet, whether it's doing maintenance work on the building, that stuff that's sort of out of sight, out of mind to most people. Regardless of what it is, if you're faithful in that, guess what? He's going to come by again, he's going to see that again, he's going to see that he promoted you, in your walk with the Lord in your experience. He put you into work and you've been faithful at every step. And so as he's looking for people to elevate into those positions of spiritual ministry, your name is probably going to be on his list. I've experienced this, myself as a congregant. In Alaska, had a call to work for the Lord. I had pastored several churches, but I found myself in Alaska with no Pastorate and that did not stop me from being faithful to the Lord. I would show up every day. Well, not every day, every service, I would have been there every day if I could have been if they they held it every day, I showed up for every service, I was faithful. Before long, I started helping out in some of the physical things, hauling equipment in for the sound team. Before long, I was on the worship team as a backup bass guitarist. Before long I was the full time bass guitarist. Before long, I was teaching a midweek study to the church before long I was serving as the assistant to the senior pastor. And I even ended up running their radio ministry. I don't say those things to brag about me. I have nothing to brag about myself. I promise you. I'm saying those things to you to show you the a tried and true method of promotion within the kingdom of God. And that is to whatever you can get your hands on to do for the Lord. Do it with all your might be faithful in it, you do not get from A to Z, without faithfulness to God, all along the way. And if you don't ever get that, and you don't ever do that, wherever it is that you peter out, in your faithfulness to God, you're going to also peter out there in your position in the church and in your eligibility in God's eyes for future promotion. That's just the way that it's always going to work with the Lord. I will just add this, before I move on, just make sure that your faithfulness is for faithfulness, to God's sake. Don't be faithful so that you can get the position so that you can move up so that you can have more say in what the church is doing. So I would put it to you like this. Don't feign faithfulness to fake out the fellowship. For finer fitment into a better field. I'll give you more words that started with F if I could think of that's all I could come up with. Don't try to fake the church out with feigned faithfulness, just so you can get somewhere in the church, the church may or may not notice it. They may or may not catch your feigned faithfulness, but I'll tell you who won't miss it, and that's the Lord. And the Lord has a way of getting through even the thickest headed pastor and board of elders that you could ever be working with. I know this from experience. The Lord has a way of just shutting that down if it's fake, no, it's got to be genuine. Now about the translation of the word grace here. If you're following along in the King James Version, or a New King James Version, you've noticed that both of those versions use the word faith instead of grace. The King James and the New King James say that he

was filled with faith and power. But the ESV, which we're now using, as our text, doesn't say faith and power, it says grace and power as well as do all of the newer versions, or at least most of them, the ones that I have checked. So what's the deal with that? Well, going with the word grace, is purely based upon the conviction that in this instance, the older manuscripts are more dependable. And the older manuscripts use the word grace. It's kind of interesting, because this is one of those spots where you have to go with either the older translations or the newer translations. But here's the flip to that, the older translations are based on newer manuscripts, the Textus Receptus. The newer versions are based on older manuscripts does that like kind of confuse you maybe? So this is one of those instances where having a Strong's Concordance isn't going to help you to figure out if Grace is the right word, because this isn't based on the Textus Receptus, as is the King James version and the New King James Version translation. I think, from what I see this is a good translation. The newer translations go with the word grace, that that gives credence to the older manuscripts that date back closer to the times of the actual writings. And for the sake of this message, we're certainly going to stick with that, that Stephen was full of grace, that is God's intention for every single one of us. How is God's grace and God's power connected? Well, it's simple. God is not going to empower those that are full of, what's the opposite of grace, self righteousness. He's not going to empower through the Holy Spirit, those that are full of self righteousness, those that think, Well, I'm just sort of doing this on my own, through my own good works through my own accomplishments, through my own spiritual purity. God never will empower that. But if a person is full of grace, the Lord will empower that because then the Lord knows that person is never going to take credit for what I do through them. That's the problem with self righteousness. If you're full of self righteousness, when God does do something wonderful at the tips of your fingers, you're gonna say, wow, look what I did. Look what all my prayer time accomplished. Look what all my study has done. Look at the difference I have made, but the person that is full of grace is never even for a second trick by that. When God does something through you a person filled with grace, you know, you're only in the kingdom because he forgave you. Through His righteousness, you're righteous. Through His sacrifice, you're saved. And you go, wow, I cannot believe you would use a weirdo like me, Lord, a failure like me, I cannot believe you did that. What a testament to your power, and your grace.

The apostle Peter later on tells us in Second Peter chapter three, verse 18 that this is one of the areas that we do need to mature in as Christians. Peter says, Grow in the grace of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Don't grow in the self righteousness that you think is maybe saving you or maintaining your salvation, Grow in the grace of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Well, Acts chapter six, verse nine, then some of those who belong to the synagogue of the freedmen, as it was called, and of the sirenians, and of the Alexandrians. And if those from silicea, and Asia rose up and disputed with Stephen. So verse nine tells us that Stephen adopted a practice that would also later on be adopted by the Apostle Paul. And that was that he would use the synagogue as a place for Christian evangelism. Jewish synagogues were just that, they weren't Christian. People in those synagogues, did not believe in Christ. But that does become a very popular location for these early Christians in the early church, to evangelize. And it only stands to reason that you go where people already have some kind of love for the Lord, and some kind of knowledge of the scriptures. And then all you have to do is take their scriptural knowledge, and use those scriptures to point them to Christ as the Promised Messiah from those scriptures. It's a major evangelistic Headstart. Now, you could evangelize in bars and brothels, too. But when you do that, usually you have to start at the beginning. You have to convince them, God exists. God is creator, God created mankind, mankind fell, God made a plan of salvation, Jesus becomes the Savior to the fallen, you got to go through the whole Bible, and you got to try to summarize it in enough time that they stick with you and don't get bored, and walk out on you. But when you're dealing with religious minded people who in this case, already hold up the Word of God as the authority on life, then all you have to do is be able to convince them that look, you got part of that, right, the word of God is the authority for our

lives as God's people, but you got to convince them that some of their interpretations are off, and you got to show them where they're wrong and where you're right. Is that easy to do? Was it easy for Stephen here in Acts chapter six and chapter seven? Is it easy for you, when you do it out there, among other Christians that maybe have some things wrong? Or Christian cults that you're dealing with? Is that ever going to be easy? No, it's not. And we're gonna find that out shortly. But back to the synagogues for a moment. Historians tell us that, at this time, there were over 400 Different synagogues. And the temple and the synagogue are very different. The temple would be the equivalent of the basically, the mega church where the mega church would meet, if we're putting this in modern terms. And synagogues would be like your small groups. Synagogues, and by the way, that is staggering when you think about it, isn't it? 400 synagogues in this little area of Jerusalem? It's almost staggering when you think about, if not, then just compare this, just ask yourself the question how many churches are in Uniontown? I don't know how many there are. But I guarantee you there aren't 400. And the population of Jerusalem at this time is off the charts. That's a lot. But you got to remember, they're like the small groups of the Old Testament religion. This all started as a practice in Babylon. They started erecting these synagogues where a handful of people would come together to further study the scriptures, but they maintain that, they retained it I should say, Up until the time of Jesus and for a while afterwards. And they're so similar to small groups because they work essentially the same way. Modern day small groups. I know we don't have any in this church right now, really. But as soon as you small group leaders stand up, and the Lord wants to promote you and reveals that to the church will give you those small groups to run. But small groups and synagogues essentially work the same way they would be formed by people of like heart, like mind, and like life situation. And they were usually themed. For example, in small groups, you know, a 70 year old man would not go and join a church small group that existed for young single mothers. No, that's a ministry for young single mothers. If a 70 year old man is in that ministry, I'm going to question his motives. I'm going to maybe point him to a dating app. And I'm going to maybe point him to a different small group that is better suited to him. Well, that's kind of the deal with synagogues. They work the same way. These groups are erected around like minded like hearted people in similar life circumstances. That is certainly the case with the synagogue that we just read about, the synagogue of the freedmen as mentioned in verse nine. This was a themed synagogue, it existed for those from the areas that were listed out to us there, Cyrene, which is modern day North Africa, Alexandria, which was the capital of Egypt at the time. So Lycia, whose capital city was Tarsus, ringing any bells, and Asia, Cilicia and Asia, both would be Asia Minor, or modern day Turkey. And this synagogue, from these different regions, so these are it's a Hellenist Synagogue. That's why Stephen is there, it's a Hellenist synagogue for Hellenist people from these regions, and it was for those who are freed men. That means that at some point, they were given Roman liberty, and granted Roman citizenship. Now with that all said, this is probably the synagogue that Saul of Tarsus would attend.

Saul was from Tarsus, Tarsus was the capital of silicea, which we just read about there, verse nine. And Saul of Tarsus, we know this from his writing, he was a freed man, he is a Jew. But at some point, he was freed from Roman bondage and granted his Roman citizenship. So it is very likely that this is Saul's synagogue, which means it's very likely that Saul could be one of the ones arguing with Stephen here, in this chapter. We know this, Stephen was definitely attending this synagogue, we just read it. That meant that he was qualified. So he too is a free men from one of these Hellenist regions. Synagogue meetings work like this, a rabbi would stand to read the passage for that day. And by the way, they did what we do here at Anchored Fellowship, they went chapter by chapter, verse by verse. Now, they didn't have chapter divisions, and numbers like we do, and verse numbers, that will come later. But they would do what we did, they would pick up where they left off, they would read a certain section this day. And the next time they met, they would pick up right there and read that next section, right where they left off just as we do. The rabbi would stand up and whatever text was open for that day, he would read that text, then he would sit down, he would always teach sitting down. And

he would give a little homily of sorts, he would give a little teaching, some kind of commentary on the section of verses that he just read. And then finally, at the end of that, it would be opened up for discussion, question, and even debate. The problem is that once you become a Christian, you realize that all of those Old Testament laws and practices serve as types and shadows for the substance that is found in Christ. And it is hard to resist not sharing that when you have more light on those topics than do the people that are studying them. So as Christless Jews are there, studying the Old Testament, and clinging to the types and shadows, there's Stephen biting his fingernails, and finally giving in and instead of allowing them to stay there and stuck in their types and shadows, and not really understanding them, Stephen tries to shed light on the source that's casting the shadows. And he tries to tell the synagogue that Christ is the fulfillment of all that Old Testament typology. But of course, that doesn't go over very well. And that's what happens when your eyes are adjusted to the shadows, the light hurts. And they begin arguing and fighting with Steven about it all. Verse 10, But when they could not withstand the wisdom and the spirit with which he was speaking, I read that wrong, but they could not withstand the wisdom and the spirit with which he was speaking. So as educated as these people were in the synagogue, they were no match for Stephen, they brought plastic knives to a gunfight. Stephen has something that they do not. Stephen has New Testament wisdom. They have Old Testament wisdom, and I won't take that away from them. Credit where credit is due, they do have Old Testament wisdom, but they do not know Christ as the one that all of those Old Testament passages are pointing to. Therefore, they have an incomplete biblical wisdom, whereas Stephen stands in there, in his arguments with full, biblical wisdom that comes from the Old Testament Scriptures, and is capped off by the knowledge of Christ as Messiah, and Savior and Stephen is filled with the Holy Spirit. That's how all this is happening. That's how Stephen knows what he knows. What we're seeing here is, Jesus coming through on a promise that he made to the apostles, in, among other passages, Luke chapter 12, verses 11 and 12, Jesus told them directly, when they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers, and the authorities, do not be anxious about how you should defend yourself, or what you should say for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour, in that very moment, what you ought to say. So look at it again, with new eyes, this time, they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit, and that is a capital S. That's a proper translation. They could not withstand the wisdom of Stephen, and the Holy Spirit that was at work in the life of Stephen. So it is not just education versus education, to see who is the better scholar. This is God, the Holy Spirit, taking the knowledge scripturally that Stephen has stored up on his hard drive. And it's the Holy Spirit bringing that information out and leading Stephen on how to present it in order to put the exclamation point of Christ on all of their Old Testament understanding. Verse 11, then they secretly instigated men who said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and God. So notice they were bested in biblical debate. But that has not opened their hearts to faith in Christ. Don't be disillusioned when that happens to you to Christian, scriptural arguments won usually does not equate to hearts won. It usually doesn't. Usually, what happens is exactly what happens here to Stephen in this situation, their embarrassment, over being biblically bested, has led them further into their unbelief and has fueled anger against Stephen. Isn't that the way of the world? You can just absolutely whoop someone in a debate using facts and truth. But when it's all said and done, they don't believe you. They don't believe you anyway, they stick with what they believe, you know, the very thing that you just disproved with facts and truth, they won't budge from it. Usually all that it does is leave them embarrassed, and affronted, it drives a further wedge between you and that person. You share liberating truth with them. But they determined to stay bound to falsehoods. No, thank you. We've always believed this way. Have you heard that before? We've always believed, I've used that before. We've always believed this way because our founder or founders hundreds of years ago believed this way. So we've always been taught that way. And we've always just stuck with that. And that's what we're gonna do right now. We don't really care so much about being fundamentally sound, we just pretty much just care about going with our denominational line here. That is sad. That is

unfortunate. But to each his own, not all have appetites for truth, many would rather just stroke their egos and go on about their ways. So now begins the smear campaign against Stephen. You know, church good and well that Stephen has not blasphemed, Moses and God, you know that. He's merely contradicted their understandings of the writings of Moses, and the plan of God for their lives. They are, what they're doing is they're twisting, and misrepresenting what Stephen was teaching, so that they can have a case against Stephen, once they bring him before the Sanhedrin. That is exactly what they're doing. I get that sort of thing all the time. People can't best me in a biblical debate, so they decide to smear me to rub my name through the mud. That's a common approach. I'm sure you've probably experienced it as well. They're wrong. They know they're wrong. But instead of changing their belief system, which would take humility, instead, they just decide to smear the person that's truth has been established in the debate so that they can try to get other people to distrust that person and trust them. That's what this is all about. It's about numbers. It's exactly what they're doing to Stephen here. Verse 12, and they stirred up the people and the elders and the scribes. They stirred up the hornet's nest. And they came upon him and seized him and brought him before the council. This is a nice break for the apostle Peter. He's usually the one in the crosshairs. Public Enemy Number One, usually the apostle Peter. At least for right now, Simon Peter is public enemy number two, and Stephen is Public Enemy Number one. He's brought before the council, that would be the Sanhedrin.

I'm going to assume that you know what the Sanhedrin is by now. And I'll just add this. We know for certain that Saul of Tarsus was here at this council trial. We know that. We can't say for sure that Saul of Tarsus was there in the synagogue arguing with Stephen biblically, but we can say this with all authority, Saul of Tarsus is sitting on this council meeting in this trial as a council member. And we know that because by the time we get to Acts chapter eight, verse one, we will read that Saul of Tarsus was consenting to the death of Stephen. That means that Saul was a part of this Sanhedrin he was one of the 70 passing a judgment on Stephen. And Saul of Tarsus' vote was this: execute him. That's what Acts chapter eight, verse one tells us. By the way, sorry if I spoil that for you. Now, we all know who Saul of Tarsus is, don't we? He will become by all accounts, according to human estimation, the greatest apostle to ever apostle. I mean, hands down. The apostle Paul was a phenomenal apostle. But before that, he's going to vote for the death of Stephen. And he's going to be responsible for the martyrdom of many other Christians. Acts chapter nine, verse 21, tells us that Paul made havoc of the church, he wreaked havoc on the church, putting Christians to death, dragging them out of their homes, sentencing them, and putting them to death. And somehow, in all of that, the Lord looks down on this guy Saul of Tarsus, wreaking havoc on the church, persecuting and killing Christians, and somehow God says, You know what, I like this guy's fervor. Let's repurpose that fervor. Let's convert him and use him as that 12th official apostle in the church. His ministry resume is going to be really weird. But he's going to be really effective because this guy's got Moxie, this guy's got guts, he will stand up for the truth, once he knows the full truth. Verse 13, And they set up false witnesses who said, This man never ceases to speak words against this holy place, that is the temple, and the law, that is the law of God and the Law of Moses. Verse 14, for we have heard him say, now remember, these are false witnesses, this didn't really happen. For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place, the temple, and will change the customs that Moses delivered to us. Now they have a checkmark in all the right categories if they're looking for a conviction. There are four things that Jewish life revolved around God, Moses, the temple, and the law. And they've got a checkmark in every category. They've got someone that can stand up as a false witness,, witness number one, yes, I heard him blaspheme, blaspheme means to speak evil against, Yes, I heard him blaspheme Moses. And sometimes I think they revered Moses more than they did God. Moses was like their idol. And there was a witness for that. Witness number two, yep, I heard him blaspheme God, witness number three, I heard him blaspheme, what was number three there? The temple, Thank you. I heard him blaspheme the temple. And then finally, I heard him blaspheme the law of God from which our entire life is based upon. These are all false

witnesses, but they nonetheless, have witnesses that are going to come forward, make him appear guilty of blaspheming, all four of these major categories of Jewish life, and it's going to make the conviction seem like a pretty sure thing. Now, Stephen will get a chance to give a defense, he knows that there was at least one good thing about these Sanhedrin Council trials, and that was, the accused would always get the chance to speak last, they always got the chance to give their defense. And Stephen is gonna do that. That's what chapter seven is, that's Stephen's sermon, or defense against the charges that were brought before him. And he is going to address every one of these charges. But for right now, we can pretty much I think, accurately guess, the kind of stuff that Stephen was teaching in the synagogue that created such a stir, because if you compare Stephen with Jesus, you'll notice these same accusations that are leveled against Stephen. They're the same accusations that were leveled against Christ. So it's real easy to figure out what Stephen was teaching, what was Stephen teaching? What Christ commanded him to, the teachings of Christ. So we go back and we start to look at this and figure it out. Here's what was happening: Stephen was teaching that Jesus is greater than Moses. Stephen was teaching that Moses handed down the law. But Jesus brought grace and truth. Stephen was teaching that Jesus fulfills the law of Moses and that that system of Judaism is no longer needed. Under the new covenant, for the purpose of forgiveness of sins, Stephen was teaching that the temple that they love so much was going to be destroyed by the Romans in 70 ad, either that, or he was teaching the temple, using it as a metaphor just as Jesus did, in order to reveal the truth about His resurrection. John chapter two, verses 19 through 21, Jesus answered them, Destroy this temple, and in three days, I will raise it up. The Jews then said, it has taken 46 years to build this temple and you will raise it up in three days? Verse 21, but he was speaking about the Temple of his body. They're doing the same thing to Stephen that they did with Jesus over the exact same arguments and false accusations that they brought against Jesus, most of it all based on a misrepresentation of what Jesus and Stephen were actually saying. Matthew chapter 26, verse 59, Jesus said, or pardon me, now the chief priests and the whole council were seeking false testimony against Jesus that they might put him to death. Stephen is literally in the same situation in the same place before the same people who brought up the same accusations as what took place in the life and story of the ministry of Jesus. Jesus really knew what he was talking about when Jesus said in John chapter 15, verse 20, a servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you. Does not matter to them if the accusations are true, it just matters if the accusations are good, that they'll stick, that the Sanhedrin the council will buy it. Because those are surefire, I mean, surefire in the bag reasons for conviction of death.

Verse 15, And gazing at him, all who sat in the council saw that his face was like the face of an angel. Excuse me, sir, your Halo is showing, might want to cover that up. This is not the place for that. He's just been, I mean, this is an incredible guy. He has just been falsely accused. They're lying about everything that he said. He knows they are gunning for his execution, his neck is on the line. But there is not fear on his face. There is not hurt on his face. And there is not anger on his face. He sits there with the face of an angel. And that is not just an expression, it was not makeup or face cream. This is not just an expression. His countenance was supernaturally altered, so that he appeared to the council to have the face of an angel. I believe there was a reason behind this because the power of God altered the face of another servant of God in the history of the nation of Israel, who would that be, Pray tell? Moses himself the idol of the nation. Moses would come down from the mountaintop, having been in the presence of God, and His face would glow before the people. It was a parting gift from God to Moses, once they would split up those mountaintop meetings and Moses would come down his face a-glow with the presence of God, His countenance changed, if nothing else, to serve as a seal of approval, a sign for the entire nation, that God was speaking to that man, and that God was using that man. I think for the very same reason, the Lord is doing that here with the face of Stephen. The same people that revere Moses, would they get the point when the face of Stephen turns angelic, as he's presenting truth from the Scriptures. And maybe, just maybe, as the whole counsel here, sits there watching him with the face

of an angel, if he just left it at that, and didn't open up his mouth, they would have probably been shocked and confused and let Stephen walk. But chapter seven, Stephen opened his mouth, didn't he? And he was gonna say some hard things to them, but I want to point out, he's going to do so with the face of an angel. And I'm gonna give you that same recommendation in closing here. Instead of avoiding the hard truths, and leaving people to their damnation, we should say the hard truths. But we should do so with the face of an angel. With a soft face, with a kind face with a loving face. A lot of times, it's not what we're saying, that offends people and drives them further into their shell. A lot of times it's how we say it. It's how we present it. Sometimes it's even the expression on our faces. We studied this, haven't we? Communication is verbal and nonverbal. You can turn someone off to the truth of what you're saying, just based on the look on your face. Is your face arrogant and know it all? Is it harsh and judgmental? Or is it hard truth that is said with a soft face? Spurgeon, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, you know who he is. He had a similar approach and similar advice to to his pupils, those that he was training in the ministry, he said to his students, and I quote, When speaking about heaven, let your face light up, and your eyes shine with reflected glory. And when speaking about hell, well, then your usual face will do. Now, of course he was joking. I know as humor isn't quite as sophisticated and developed his mind, but he was doing his best and in his humor, he made a good point. And a point that stands and agrees with what I'm saying in this message. This might be a hard truth, for unbelieving Jews, but it is gospel. Gospel means good news. This is good news for them. It's not like that he's called to share hell with them. No, they already believe in hell. He's sharing good news with them that all of that sacrificial system stuff the slaying of animals day to day and week to week just to cover sins temporarily that's all done, because Christ has once for all died for sin. And now once and for all time, you can come to Christ and be forever pardoned of your sin, and granted eternal salvation. eternal heaven with Him. That's good news. And most of the time, what we're sharing with others is good news as well. May your face reflect that. Good news from the face of an angel seems pretty irresistible to me. Was it to them? Well, I guess already let that cat out of the bag. Nope. They're still gonna kill him. On that note, we're set up for chapter seven. Stephens defense, would you stand with me?