



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Acts 7:1–53

“Stephen’s Sermon”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] Well, I have a little bit of a problem today. We are usually at this point reading the Scripture and, ordinarily, when we are expounding the text, as you know, we have a relatively short section to read, but today our Scripture reading is verse 1 through verse 53 of chapter 7. So I confess that I, it passes through my mind, sometimes when I am irrational spiritually, is it worthwhile to read this entire chapter? Why not read a few selected portions from it and then I can spend an extra five or ten minutes on the message itself? But then when an unnatural wave of rationalism flows over me I realize, what is more important the Scriptures or the things that I say? Now, that’s a big decision.

[Laughter] So in one second, I make it. We’ll read the Scripture and we’ll cut the message a little short. So we’re going to read the entire 7th chapter, well, through the 53rd verse today. But this large section for our Scripture reading with the conviction that it is more important for you to listen to the Word of God than it is to my exposition of it.

Now, remember, that Stephen is before the Sanhedrin. He has been doing some mighty works. He has been disputing with the Hellenistic Jews and the Hellenistic synagogues. He, evidently, has been getting the best of them because they were not able to resist the wisdom and spirit by which he spoke, Luke says, in the 6th chapter in the 10th verse. So now, he’s going to give a defense and the defense, specifically, of the charges against him, which are that he has spoken blasphemous Words against Moses and against God. Now, we have to translate that a bit. Against Moses means

against the Law of Moses and against God means against the holy place or the temple of God. So, evidently, Stephen said some things that caused some of the Jewish people to say he’s against Moses and against the temple.

Now, we know that our Lord said, “Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up.” And then the Word went around, he said he was going to destroy the temple and he was going to raise it up again in three days. We know, also, that the early Church felt since the veil of the temple was rent in twain from top to bottom, on the day of Calvary, that the Law as a law code was a law code under which the believers in this age do not serve, though they are responsible to keep the righteousness, which is in the Law.

So one can see the background and what Stephen is going to do as he defends himself is to show that what he has been saying is in accord with the Old Testament. And, as a matter of fact, he’s not the one who is saying things against the temple and against Moses, but, actually, the Old Testament history is filled with Israel’s rejection of those who spoke before of the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. So bear that in mind as we go through and you will see that he’s defending himself against those specific charges and he does it admirably and courageously.

“Then said the high priest,” (in verse 1) “‘Are these things so?’ And he said, ‘Men, brethren, and fathers, hearken; the God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran, and said unto him, ‘Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I shall shew thee. Then came he out of the land of the Chaldaeans and dwelt in Charran. And from thence, when his father was dead, he removed him into this land, wherein ye now dwell. And he gave him none inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on, yet, he promised that he would give it to him for a possession, and to his seed after him, when as yet he had no child. And God spake on this wise that his seed should sojourn in a strange land; and that they should bring them into bondage, and entreat them evil four hundred years. ‘And the nation to whom they shall be in bondage will I judge,’ said God. And after that shall they come forth and serve

me in this place.” And he gave him the covenant of circumcision: And so Abraham begat Isaac, and circumcised him the eighth day; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat the twelve patriarchs. And the patriarchs, moved with envy, sold Joseph into Egypt, but God was with him, and delivered him out of all his afflictions, and gave him favor and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh King of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house.

Now there came a dearth over all the land of Egypt and Chanaan and great affliction and our fathers found no sustenance. But when Jacob heard that there was corn in Egypt, he sent out our fathers first. And at the second time Joseph was made known to his brethren; and Joseph’s kindred was made known unto Pharaoh. Then sent Joseph and called his father Jacob to him, and all his kindred, threescore and fifteen souls. So Jacob went down into Egypt, and died, he, and our fathers and were carried over into Sychem, or Shechem and laid in the sepulcher that Abraham bought for a sum of money of the sons of Emmor the father of Sychem. But when the time of the promise drew nigh, which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt, till another king arose, which knew not Joseph. The same dealt subtly with our kindred and evil entreated our fathers, so that they cast out their young children to the end they might not live. In which time Moses was born and was exceeding fair and nourished up in his father’s house three months. And when he was cast out, Pharaoh’s daughter took him up, and nourished him for her own son. And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was mighty in Words and in deeds. And when he was full forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren the children of Israel.” (To visit, there of course means of course to minister to them in a helpful way.) “And seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended him, and avenged him that was oppressed, and smote the Egyptian. (Other passages point out that he slew the Egyptian and buried him in sand.) For he supposed his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them: but they understood not. And the next day he shewed himself unto them as they strove. (Now, we know that this was a reference to two Hebrew men who were striving or fighting.) And would have set them at one again, saying, ‘Sirs, ye are brethren; why do ye wrong one to another?’ But he that did his neighbor wrong

thrust him away, saying, ‘Who made thee a ruler and a judge over us? Wilt thou kill me, as thou diddest the Egyptian yesterday?’ Then fled Moses at this saying, and was a stranger in the land of Madian, where he begat two sons. And when forty years were expired, (he’s now 80 years of age) there appeared to him in the wilderness of Mount Sinai an angel of the Lord in a flame of fire in a bush. When Moses saw it, he wondered at the sight: and as he drew near to behold it the voice of the Lord came unto him saying, ‘I am the God of thy fathers, the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’ Then Moses trembled, and durst not behold. And said the Lord to him, ‘Put off thy shoes from thy feet: For the place where thou standest is holy ground. I have seen the affliction of my people which is in Egypt, and I have heard their groaning, and am come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send thee into Egypt.’ This Moses whom they refused, saying, ‘Who made thee a ruler and a judge?’ The same did God send to be a ruler and a deliverer by the hand of the angel which appeared to him in the bush. (Now, you just notice here as we’re moving along, we don’t have time to talk about all of these things, but you’ll see that the pattern that Stephen is developing is simply this: that Israel has always resisted the working of God in their midst. Verse 36): “He brought them out, after that he had shewed wonders and signs in the land of Egypt, and in the Red sea, and in the wilderness forty years. This is that Moses, which said unto the children of Israel, ‘A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear. This is he, that was in the church in the wilderness with the angel which spake to him in the Mount Sinai, and with our fathers: who received the lively oracles to give unto us. To whom our fathers would not obey, but thrust him from them, and in their hearts turned back again into Egypt, saying unto Aaron, make us gods to go before us.’ For as for this Moses, which brought us out of the land of Egypt, we want not what is become of him. And they made a calf in those days, and offered sacrifice unto the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their own hands. Then God turned, and gave them up to worship the host of heaven; as it is written in the book of the prophets, O ye house of Israel, have ye offered to me slain beasts and sacrifices by the space of forty years in the wilderness? Yea, ye took up the tabernacle of Moloch, and the star of your god Remphan, figures which ye made

to worship them: and I will carry you away beyond Babylon. Our fathers had the tabernacle of witness in the wilderness, as he had appointed, speaking unto Moses, that he should make it according to the fashion that he had seen. (And that’s an important point to notice, that Stephen says that Moses was told to make the tabernacle. It was something given, or appointed, by God. Verse 45): Which also our fathers that came after brought in with Jesus into the possession of the Gentiles, whom God drove out before the face of our fathers, unto the days of David; who found favor before God, and desired to find a tabernacle for the God of Jacob. But Solomon built him a house. ‘Howbeit the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands,’ as saith the prophet, ‘Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool: what house will ye build me?’ saith the Lord, or what is the place of my rest? Hath not my hand made all these things?’ (Now Stephen, you see, wants to point out that it was obvious that the temple was a temporary thing; because no temple could contain God. Now is the charge.) ‘Ye stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers, who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it.’”

What a magnificent display of courage. It’s obvious that’s not the way to speak to the jury; but that’s what he did. May God bless this reading of his Word. Let’s bow together in a moment of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee for these magnificent Words from Stephen, a true man of God. Lord, how wonderful it would be if Thou would give to us some of the spirit of this man Stephen, a man enlightened by the Holy Spirit and courageous in the proclamation of the message that had come home to him. We are grateful to him and we know that it is largely through his testimony that we have much of the truth of the New Testament through the Apostle Paul. We thank Thee and praise Thee for this day. We ask Thy blessing upon this congregation. We pray, particularly, for those who

are mentioned in our Calendar of Concern, and for others who have requested prayer. We pray for them and may their concerns find a ready ear in the ear of our Triune God. We thank Thee for the leaders of this assembly; we pray Thy blessing upon them and upon the members and friends and especially upon those who are in the auditorium now. And, now, Lord, be with us in this hour as we sing a hymn. Bless. May our hearts sing truly of the things that concern our Lord Jesus Christ, in sincerity.

We pray, in Jesus’ name. Amen.

[Message] I appreciate your listening with such attention as we read the Scriptures because that is so important. The subject this morning is “Stephen’s Sermon.” Stephen was a preaching deacon; an important New Testament character from three standpoints. Practically, he was the first Christian martyr. The first in a noble line of men beginning with himself, and then James and then on down through Polycarp and men like John Haas down into the twentieth century and the slaughter of the young men who went out to the Auca Indians in South America.

Theologically, he is very important, too, because he was the first great Christian apologist, the most enlightened teacher of his time perhaps, because it appears that in his understanding of the divine revelation, he had outstripped the pillars of the church, James and Peter and John. Paul, in one of his messages, latter on, comments upon the fact that he sat at the feet of Gamaliel, as if Gamaliel was his master in spiritual things. I really think that it was Stephen who was Paul’s master in spiritual things. Of course, he was not a willing person at the feet of Stephen at those debates in the Hellenistic synagogue. But, nevertheless, it was there that he learned his message. Augustine, noticing this many years ago, said, *Si Stephans non orossit ecclesia Paulus parum nun habis habitus*. And you, if you remember your Latin will remember that if Stephen had not prayed, the church would not have had Paul. Now, what lies back of that is Augustine’s conviction, and the conviction of others, that Stephen’s debates and Stephen’s ministry was the thing that really turned the Apostle Paul around. One of the great “ifs” of the Word of God is the “if Stephen had lived, what would have happened”?

Would we have thought of the Apostle Paul when we say, “The Great Apostle” or would we have thought of Stephen, though not an apostle, would we have thought of him as the great teacher of the Word of God? It’s interesting but, of course, it’s something we cannot do anything more than think about.

Now, Stephen illustrates the fact that many gifted young men are often cut-off, before they reach the prime of their contribution to our life. Stephen is one of those but he’s remembered; he’s a man of great promise, cut-off before he reached the fullness of what apparently he could have. But often in God’s ways, these things do happen. We cannot understand them. They are puzzles to us. But, nevertheless, they are part of the providence of God.

Historically, also, Stephen is important because he’s the link between Peter and Paul. As you read the book of the Acts, you notice the first part of this book has to do with the ministry of Peter. The last half of it has to do with the ministry of Paul. Stephen stands in between and, as the commission that the Lord Jesus gave the church, that the gospel should be preached in Jerusalem and in Judaea and in Samaria and to the uttermost part of the earth, Stephen is the connection between Jerusalem and Antioch, which became the headquarters of the Christian mission, from which the gospel went out to all of the known world. So he’s important historically, he’s important theologically and he’s important in a practical sense, as our great Christian martyr; first of all, in that noble line.

The first step on his way to martyrdom was his emergence as a leader of the Hellenistic Jewish Christians. He is said to have been a man who was full of the Holy Spirit. Notice the statement in chapter 6, when he was chosen. He was a man who was “full of faith” and of the Holy Spirit. And so this full man began to perform mighty signs and wonders, and powerfully defended the faith in the Hellenistic synagogues. I think that the Apostle Paul must have been present in those debates because, after all, he was the person, he says it latter in more than one place, he had advanced in Judaism beyond any of his contemporaries. He was an individual who was the champion of the Palestinian Jews; the champion of the knowledge of the truth as they understood it.

You can see that if Stephen had gone into these Hellenistic synagogues, and he had defeated them in the debates, it wouldn’t be long before the Word got to Paul, even if he had not been there in the beginning. And they would have said to him, “Come over and help us defend ourselves against this Christian man, Stephen, because we are not able at this point to overcome the wisdom and the power by which he is speaking.” And I can imagine Paul going in, and I can imagine also that Paul, too, was defeated by this man, Stephen. They were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit, by which he spoke, so the Scriptures say.

Now, then, the debates were, of course, a reason for a great deal of turmoil in the midst of Jerusalem. And if Saul had been there, their champion, and if he had been defeated by this man who spoke about the new prophet, the new priest, the new covenant; it’s not astonishing to me, that these theologians should get together and say, “We’ve got to do something about Stephen.” And so, they got some men who made some false accusations against him and then they brought him in before the counsel and set him down there and they were on their way to getting rid of Stephen by stoning him to death. And so this is his defense before that crowd. The charge is very simple. You have blasphemed Moses and you have blasphemed God. He had, evidently, told them that the temple was no longer the place where God is worshiped. God is worshiped in spirit and in truth, and while the temple may have been the proper place for a time, now that Christ has come, we worship God not through the Levitical ceremonies of the Mosaic system; but we worship him in spirit and in truth.

He also, no doubt, told them that no longer are we under the Law of Moses as a code. We are responsible to follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit and in following the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we shall keep the righteousness that is in the law, but we are no longer under the dealings that God had put Israel under in the Old Testament. You might think that Stephen’s defense is a long, tiresome, irrelevant tirade; but it is not. It is very pointed. It’s very piercing. What he says essentially is this, if you read through and kind of catch the flavor of it. The chief dealings of the Lord God with Israel took place before there ever was a temple. Stephen, in effect, says, “Look back over your past history. Where did the important things take place?” Well, first of all, when Abraham was called, he

was called out of Ur of the Chaldees. God speaks in the language and in the place of the Chaldeans. Then, in addition, he spoke to and through Moses at Mount Sinai. That’s not in the land either. Then, he also prepared Moses for his work in the land of Midian. That’s not part of the land either. And, in addition, he appeared to Moses and he led the children of Israel down to Egypt and then out of Egypt. And that’s not part of the land either. And, furthermore, if you notice where the Patriarchs were buried, they were buried in *cismático* Samaria. So the great dealings of God, with some rare exception, were largely outside the Holy Land. That was one thing that he would point out.

The next thing he pointed out was this: the temple was never commanded by the Lord God; the tabernacle was. The tabernacle was appointed for the children of Israel. In fact, they were told that they were to construct it according to the pattern that was shown Moses, when he went up in the mountain; but no such thing pertains to the temple. In other Words, the tabernacle is more important for the history of Israel than the temple. Striking, but the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews constructs his epistle in a rather similar way with a similar evaluation of the tabernacle as supreme and not the temple.

And, finally, and an important point which Paul picks up later, the promise that God gave to Abraham was given before there was a law. And so, consequently, we are related to the unconditional promises made to Abraham. The law came in afterwards, to condemn Israel and to prepare them morally for the reception of the redeemer when he came.

Now, this great sermon, therefore, has a system of theology that lies under it that the Apostle Paul, later on, developed fully. It’s not surprising then that Paul, in one of his great sermons in chapter 13, in Antioch of Presidia, should near the climax of it say, “And by Him all that believe are justified from all things from which he could not be justified by the Law of Moses.”

Now, with that as a kind of background, let’s take a brief trip through this magnificent sermon. It begins, in the first verse, with the challenge of the high priest. And there, he uses the kind of trick that is used everyday when you want to incriminate someone. He asks a question, a question which has a buried assumption. And if you answer, yes, you’re defeated. If you answer, no, you are

defeated, as well. For you see, Stephen did talk about the temple and he did talk about Moses and the Law.

Well, the stock question in logic books, if you want to illustrate a question that will incriminate the person that you want to defeat in an argument, the stock question is have you stopped beating your wife? And, of course, if you answer that, yes, you’ve stopped, you have in a sense admitted that you have been beating your wife. If you say, no, well, you’re still beating your wife. So if you in an argument can ask a question that has a buried assumption and get your opponent to answer it, that’s the way to win arguments. You may not, necessarily, be right; but you will win the argument.

Well, Stephen doesn’t fall for that. He gives a rather lengthy answer to the question, “Are these things so?” And he seeks to explain what he has been talking about. The defense begins at chapter 2, and goes through chapter 50. And if you’ll just let me summarize it for you, it has to do first with the patriarchal period that is inclusive of his dealings with Abraham and the patriarchs. And he specializes in Joseph. And then, it has to do with the Mosaic and legal period; and, particularly, Moses is singled out for attention. And, finally, concludes with a brief section on the tabernacle, temple controversy and the period of the temple.

So let’s try to do it rather quickly and rapidly. What it is is an historical retrospect. You know, it’s interesting how the apostles and others preached. They really didn’t preach expository sermons as we know them. In evangelical seminaries, we are told well, you should preach expositively and you should take books and expound them through. Well, we don’t have any instance of people doing that. As a matter of fact, the kind of preaching they did was more like an historical summary of God’s dealings in salvation. And there’s probably a reason for that. The local situation probably is the reason for it. But that’s what Stephen gives. He gives a look out over history to show that grace supercedes and surpasses the ceremonies under which Israel served the Lord in Old Testament times.

Campbell Morgan, in his book, says, “It is an interpretation of history from the heights,” and he reminds us that A. T. Pierson, a well-known Presbyterian expositor of two generations ago, speaking before the ecumenical conference on foreign missions, in New York, once said, “History is his story, if a man can climb high enough to read it.” That’s true. History is God’s story, if we can get to the vantage point that is high enough, and look at it from the divine standpoint. Comedians today say, “History is his-story; a whole lot different from her-story.” [Laughter]

Well, Stephen looks out over history and he gives an interpretation of it. And, in the patriarchal period, what he seeks to show is simply this: God worked before there was a temple. And, furthermore, he said, those people had opposition. But the opposition that they had came from the opposition from some of the patriarchs to Joseph, so that the history of Israel is the history of opposition to the divine working of the Lord God. That’s important.

He begins, as anyone should begin, he begins with the working of God. It’s a good Calvinistic beginning, I would say. Notice what he says in the first verse, it’s really chapter, it’s really verse 2, but his first statement. He says, “Men, brethren and fathers, hearken; the God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran.” Abraham, so far as we know, was just like a Gentile in rejection of the Lord God, an unbeliever. God came to him, gave him a magnificent vision, filled his life with the promises that we know as the Abrahamic unconditional promises.

Now, what happened in the history of Israel after that? Well, it reaches its climax in the fact that the patriarchs, Abraham begat Isaac, Isaac begat Jacob. Jacob is the father of the patriarchs. And what did the patriarchs do to Joseph? They sold him into slavery. In other words, the attitude of the patriarchs to Joseph is an illustration of the resistance of the nation Israel to the Word of God, down through the centuries of the Old Testament. I can imagine that those people in the Sanhedrin, listening to Stephen begin like this are beginning to get a little uncomfortable because it’s obvious that he’s looking at history as it was and not as they have glorified it.

Now, it’s very evident too that Stephen sees in Joseph’s experience a parallel to the ministry of the Lord Jesus. He doesn’t say it directly yet, because he wants them to get the full force of it. But, think of Joseph’s life. He was a person who was in the certain of the affection of Jacob, his father. In fact, Jacob doted upon Joseph, because Joseph was the son of his beloved Rachel. And being the son of Rachel and the young son, he naturally doted upon him.

So like the Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the Father said, “This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.” Just as our Lord received a commission to come into this earth and carry out the will of the Father, so Joseph had a commission to his brethren, who were serving out on the fields as shepherds of the flock of the family. He was rejected, just as Joseph was rejected by his brethren. He suffered humiliation, the humiliation of the death and burial, just as Joseph suffered humiliation by being thrown into the pit and put there as if dead. Just as Joseph was taken out of the pit and taken to Egypt and, ultimately, was exalted to become governor or prime minister of the land, so the Lord Jesus came from the grave and has ascended to the right hand of the Father, exalted at the right hand of the Father. Just as Joseph took a bride in Egypt, so the Lord Jesus has taken a bride as well; the bride of Christ being the body known today as the Church of Jesus Christ. And, ultimately, Joseph restored to the place in the family of God that he should have had all along, so the Lord Jesus Christ, ultimately, restored to the place, King of kings and Lord of lords. Well, you can see how that would have made a great impression, if the people had been listening to him.

Now, having said that, he moves into the Mosaic and legal period; and the point that he makes here is that Moses’ life parallels Christ’s life, too. And also, in addition, Moses pointed forward to a new prophet, who would come, who would be like him, but Israel would respond to him. When the time of the promise drew neigh, we read, in verse 17. That’s almost like Galatians 4:4 and 5, when Paul is speaking about the Lord Jesus and said, “When the fullness of time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the Law.” So Moses’ life parallels our Lord. It came at a specific time.

Moses is born, and we read that he was exceeding fair. That’s an interesting thing. He was exceeding fair means, literally, something like he was fair to God. He may have been the only baby in the Bible who could be called beautiful. As a matter of fact, he may be the only baby that could ever have been called beautiful, really. The Germans have a proverb, *Jeder mütter kind ist schön*. Every mother’s child is beautiful. And even though the child looks like a beet that’s been left in the refrigerator for three weeks [Laughter] the mother thinks the baby is beautiful. And anyone who comes in has to say, “My, that is a baby!” [More laughter]

Well, we know Moses was a beautiful child and as a matter of fact, Josephus has some tradition, and you can be sure this is tradition, Josephus said, “Moses was so beautiful as a child that when he was carried down the street in his nurse’s arm, people stopped to look and admire this child.” He was a man who had great opportunities. Evidently, when Stephen describes him as a man who was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was mighty in Word and deeds, he was not speaking glamorously of Moses at all, because other traditions, not Christian traditions, say that Moses was a person who had unusual abilities.

He was the inventor, it is said, of alphabetic writing. He was a person who, according to Philo, the Alexandrian Jew, was proficient in arithmetic, geometry, poetry, music, philosophy, astrology and most of the branches of learning. He was described as a person unique in wisdom, stature, and beauty. And then we know from other tradition that he was responsible for some of the greatest military victories that Egypt ever won. Remember, he grew up in Pharaoh’s house; and he had all of the advantages of that kind of education.

Just like Prince Charles, today, has had all of the advantages of so many years of the kind of education that a prince would have in a royal family; everything that you could think of is supplied for them. Moses had all of that. As a matter of fact, it’s something that you would think about and wonder about, but whenever you go into an ancient museum and you see there an Egyptian mummy. Or, if for example, you’ve had the chance to see the mummy of Tutankhamun, then you could think that, if Moses had not been chosen by God for his work, it might have been said, “There but for the

grace of God lies Moses,” because he had all of the right to be just like the mummies of the ancient Egyptian kings to be mummified and to have his burial in a pyramid. So God, of course, overrules in the affairs of men, and Moses becomes a man who is trained with a view to leading out Israel out of the land of Egypt. His abilities were magnificent and prepared by God for his work.

There is one thing, of course, the Bible doesn’t tell us, but Hollywood has told it. And we get the complete picture now with Hollywood, and we know now that Moses was in addition to being intelligent and wise and gifted in all of these ways; he was also a great lover. [Laughter] Charlton Heston has made that very plain for us. He has documented it. That Moses was also a great lover.

Well, notice how Israel treats Moses? What do they do with Moses? Stephen says, “Take a look at your history.” How did they treat Moses? Why, they thrust him away. This is the one that showed wonders and signs in the land of Egypt and in the Red Sea and in the wilderness for forty years; this is the Moses that the children of Israel thrust from themselves and said, “Who made thee a ruler and a judge over us?” And, furthermore, even if you should say, “We did follow him for awhile.” Then, remember that it was Moses who said that “We should look for someone else.” Moses is the one who said a prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you, of your brethren, like unto me. And so Stephen develops that and says, in effect, that Moses himself said the revelation that I’m giving you is not final. But they oppose Moses.

Now, when he comes to the tabernacle-temple period in verse 44 through verse 50, Stephen points out something that they may have overlooked. They have the magnificent temple before them, and they are inclined to think this is so of God, that any kind of thing said against it surely is wrong. But Stephen points out that it was the tabernacle that God appointed. verse 44, “Our fathers had the tabernacle of witness in the wilderness, as he had appointed, speaking unto Moses, that he should make it according to the fashion that he had seen.” As far as the temple was concerned, why, the temple was a royal whim, tolerated by God. It was the tabernacle that he had commanded. And so the Solomon and the prophets had the right view of the temple, and I am only saying to you that the temple and its worship is now done away with in the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Stephen, then, at this point, seeing flashes of anger in his audience, and realizing “I’m getting through to them finally” draws the parallel between the Jews of the past and the present, and speaks directly to them in the language of Moses. “Ye stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do you.” Just as they sinned against the Lord God and the representatives of the Lord God, so are you. You sinned against the types, Joseph and Moses, in your ancestors; now, you are sinning against the anti-type, the Messiah, the Just One, the Lord Jesus, himself. You sinned in your sin against the patriarchs against those who were given the law; and it was a law with, as he says, “living oracles.” But now, you have sinned against the one who has kept the law perfectly. And you can imagine that they were not happy by the things that he was saying.

Stephen, in one sense, like Moses and the prophets, was anti-Semitic in his accusation of Jewish sin. Sin. That’s really the problem of human nature, isn’t it? Sin, the scholars call ignorance, that scientists often call the opposition to the lower tendencies of mankind to the gradually developing evolutionary moral consciousness. Society calls it indisgression or, now, it’s popular to call it sickness. Christian Science, like Spinoza, long before called it an illusion. But God calls it the transgression of his Law and he traces it back to unbelief. And he colors it black, very black.

What do you think the world would be like if the devil had control of it? Many people think that if the devil had control of human life, immorality would be rampant. No. That’s not what the world would be like. If Satan was in control of one of our cities, do you know what we would say about it? That’s the cleanest city in the United States. It’s the nicest place to be. It’s the most beautiful of our cities. There is no crime there. There is no drug. There is no alcohol. Everything is nice and sweet. And furthermore, on Sunday morning, everybody is in church. But Christ is not preached there. Everybody is in church and the ministers would be talking about the infinite goodness of man and the way in which we have developed through the years and what great dignity God has conferred upon us and how we ought to seek more and more to have a magnified self-esteem. And you can just imagine the minister saying, “We believe in the unlimited potential of.”

And Dr. Barnhouse, my old man who led me to the Lord liked to say, “We believe in the unlimited potentiality of man, uh.” And when the audience laughed, he would say, “You’ve heard that sermon, too, I see.” That’s the kind of thing that we would have. Christ eliminated. Everything nice and sweet. That’s what Satan would like to have. Remember, he is an angelic being and an angelic being, an imitator of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, total depravity. It’s amazing that people cannot believe in total depravity. I find that so startling. But it only reveals the depths of our depravity. Now, remember, when we talk about total depravity, we’re not talking about the total corruption of our nature. We’re talking about the corruption of our “total” nature. That is, all of our nature is touched by sin; but we are not as bad as we can be. It’s possible to be very bad.

This appeared I think last week in one of our papers. “Four-year-old found dead in an oven; couple charged.” Can you imagine taking your child, and putting your four-year-old child and cooking them to death? That occurred in the United States. That occurred in the state of Maine. That’s, almost, the total corruption of human nature. But if you look at the history of the United States; and if you look at the history of the nations of the world today, you will find so many evidences of total depravity. If you think, for example, that man is good. Reflect for a moment about the Nazis; the Russians under Stalin; about the things that are happening today in the East, the things that are happening to the south of us, the things that have happened in the Far East. To call the instigators and perpetrators of the crimes that are taking place today bestial, is to insult the animals. If we should see a lion bound upon its prey and tear it to bits, it would be only proper to say, he eats almost in a human fashion, because men are more like animals than they are men. And if you find it difficult to understand the total inability and total depravity of man that’s only more evidence of our total depravity.

The Bible teaches that there is no good in man that can satisfy God. We’d be willing to accept, perhaps, for the sake of argument that the monsters of Buchenwald, may have been loving fathers. I imagine they were. I imagine, like all good Germans on Sunday afternoon they took their children out and walked them up and down the streets of the continent, as is their custom today.

And I can just imagine them weeping in their beer when they listened to Brahms and Beethoven. But all of that goes along with total depravity of men. “The heart is deceitful above all things and incurably wicked,” Jeremiah the prophet said, total depravity.

Look at the history of this great nation, Israel, that have the benefits of the revelation of God, had the prophets, had Moses, had the great men of the Old Testament giving them the Word of God; the most elaborate, the most beautiful system of theological thinking anywhere in the world then. And then, look at how they responded to it.

Well, I said I was going to about the time I was supposed to stop, and I’m going to do that. Let me close by just saying this. At first, you might think this sermon is very disappointing, even baffling, Stephen doesn’t say much about Christ. As a matter of fact, he only mentions him once. He says, in verse 52, “Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? And they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom you have now been the betrayers and murders.” But Stephen has preached Christ in his types or in his illustrations. He preached him in Joseph’s life. He preached him in Moses’ life. And he shows that the tendencies that were manifested there are the same tendencies that one sees today in the way they are responding to the great prophet that Moses pointed them to, the Lord Jesus Christ.

The first martyr’s secret? What was Stephen’s secret? Well, William Charles Robinson once said, “The Church which conquered the ancient Roman Empire and ascended the throne of the Caesars was not a Church that gave forth an uncertain sound, concerning her redeemer.” Stephen was a man who preached; and the power of the Spirit with complete courage. There was no cowardice in Stephen. And standing before this group, he did not hesitate to accuse them of being stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, and being guilty of the death of our Lord Jesus Christ.

What does Stephen’s name mean? Remember? *stephanus*, it means, crown. In the New Testament, the Lord Jesus said to one of the churches, “Be though faithful unto death and I will give thee the crown of life.” That’s what Stephen received; the kind of crown that really counts. And, you

know, I began by saying that Stephen was a preaching deacon. Paul has some Words to say about a deacon. I don’t know that he had Stephen in mind. But he said about the deacons that “They that have used the office of deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.” That, surely, characterizes Stephen; a man who had a good degree and great boldness, in the proclamation of our Lord Jesus Christ; oh to have some of the spirit of Stephen. May God give it to us. May God deliver us from the cowardice of saying, “We are believers in Christ,” but never defending the faith that means so much to us.

If you are here this morning and you have never believed in Christ, we invite you to come to him, the Just One, who has offered the atoning sacrifice for sinners. Believe in Christ. Possess the life that he offers, in grace. And then go out and faithfully and boldly and courageously represent him.

May we stand for the benediction?

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for this magnificent sermon that Stephen preached. We admire the way in which this first Christian martyr defended the truth. O God, give us something of his disposition and spirit in our day? We need it. We need it in Believers Chapel. O God, if it should please Thee, give us some followers of Stephen. If there are some here, Lord, who have never believed in Christ, we ask that Thou wilt through the Holy Spirit bring conviction and conversion.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.