

Stephen Gets Stoned

Fairview Missionary Church | Angola, IN

Scripture: Acts 7

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So I grew up as a child of the 90s. It was a strange time, and so I want to share with you some pictures and ask you some questions to let you know whether you were a child of the 90s or maybe you had children in the 90s. Some of these things you may remember on every everybody's Christmas list in the early 90s was this thing called the discman, right? It was this thing that you'd carry around. It took the place of the tape player. It was a CD player.

And, you know, you had visions of holding on to this thing. And I had to mow the yard. That was one of my responsibilities growing up. And so I had these dreams of putting it in my back pocket and mowing the yard. Anybody that had a Discman knows that didn't work too well, did it? They would skip all the time from that laser. But if you got a disconnect for Christmas in the 90s, you thought you were something, right? Another way to know if you were a child of the 90s is every Friday evening, visiting this store was normal, right?

Going to Blockbuster and getting a movie for the family that night. Kids, I don't know if you know what this is, but you'd actually go to the store and get a movie. You couldn't stream it. You had to go get it. If you were a child of the 90s on Saturday mornings, this was your favorite science teacher growing up, Bill Nye, the science guy, right. You wanted to get your work done when you were in computer class. I remember having computer class in middle school, and we were working on these apple computers with the green screen, and you wanted to get your work done as fast as you could so that you could play this game, Oregon trail, right.

On your three-and-a-half-inch floppy disk that you would put in the computer if you were a child of the 90s. If you were a child of the 90s, you thought that beanie babies were your best investment option, right? A lot of people collected these, thinking they were going to be worth a lot of money. I did look some of them up on eBay, and they're trying to sell them for thousands of dollars, but I don't think anybody is bidding on beanie babies of the time. If you are a child of the 90s, you can finish this sentence in west Philadelphia, born and raised.

Nice job, first service. Nobody got it, so I appreciate you. Thank you. Yes, this was fresh Prince of Bel Air, one of the great sitcoms of the time, right? If you were a child of the 90s, you daydreamed about owning a piece of the Aggro Crag. Anybody remember this Nickelodeon show called guts? And they would compete against each other, and the winner got to take home a piece of the Aggro Crag. If you didn't, you're missing out. Go YouTube it and you can watch one of those videos.

Your bedroom ceiling was probably decorated with GLOWINTHEDARK stars and planets, right? You'd put them up with a little sticky putty stuff or whatever else, and they would glow in the dark. And we even took that to another level when I was growing up. We found that if you put Tide, the clothes detergent on your wall and then you shine black lights, you could see it. But when the lights were off, you couldn't see it anymore. Don't tell people what I wrote on my walls with Tide when I was growing up, all right?

If you were a child of the 90s, you learned about animals in the world from these books. Do you remember zoo books? Do you remember those? If you grew up in the 90s, you know what these are?

Anybody have these? It wasn't just me, was it? Pugs. They play this game. Okay, a few of us, we've got a few 90s children in here. All right, and one more. OK, one last one. A child of the 90s. If you were a child of the 90s, you spent hours trying to figure out how to see the images in these 3D posters, right?

I remember seeing one of these posters for the first time in the mine was at the Bay City Mall. I grew up in Bay City, Michigan, and it felt like every Friday night while my dad was working second shift, it just became tradition that my mom would take my sister, my older sister and I to the Bay City Mall to go shopping. What every junior high boy wants to do, right? The only thing that made it worth it, as if I didn't complain the whole night. She would take me to a store called The Stadium and I could buy a pack of basketball cards and open them.

And so that's what allowed me to get through all of those nights at the Bay City Mall. But I remember going one time and they had those little kiosks in the middle of the hallway on the indoor malls. And I remember seeing these pictures for the first time and I remember looking at it and thinking, that's kind of strange art, you know? And so I'm standing there trying to see what everybody is talking about and I can't see anything. All I see is the color and the weird shapes.

My older sister and my mom come up to the poster behind me and they look at it and they're talking about all these neat things that they're seeing in it. And I remember being so frustrated that I couldn't see what they could see. I remember going back week after week. It was months. And every time I would make my mom stop at this kiosk and I would say, I want to see what this image is. And I remember one Friday evening seeing it for the first time. How many of you guys can see the image in these? Not many of you can't see it right now.

Don't try right now. You've got to be looking straight on. And I'll give you some tips if you want to come up and look at the TV after service, you can do that. Okay? You've got to kind of look at it cross eyed. You got to kind of try to look through it, and then that 3D image will come out to you. Does anybody know what these are called? The name of these? Nobody got it first service. I think I heard it. They're called stereograms. Stereograms. They're actually pretty incredible when you think about it. But I remember trying to look at what that picture was. So here's how that applies to service.

This isn't a history lesson about the 90s, all right? Do you ever find it amazing that two people can look at the same situation and interpret it two completely opposite ways? You're both looking at the same thing, but you're both seeing something different. In the same way that I was staring at this picture for weeks on end, and all I could see was a weird colored pattern while my mom and sister saw amazing clouds.

So we are going to see in Acts chapter seven today how people that were believing one thing about their history. They both had the same history, the Israelite history, the Jewish history, but yet they were viewing it from completely different perspectives. If you weren't here last week, we left off in our series, in the Book of Acts, and we left off in Acts chapter six, where a man named Stephen has been seized by the religious authorities because he is teaching about a man named Jesus, whom he believes is the Messiah.

And the religious leaders are afraid of this new teaching. So they roused they got together some false witnesses that were claiming that Stephen was speaking one thing about this holy place, about the temple, that he was speaking against it. They were taking his words and twisting them. The fear was that Stephen was trying to get rid of all of the customs and traditions of the Jewish people, the practices that have been handed down by Moses.

And of course, the religious leaders were afraid because if that happened, they'd be without a job. They'd be without power. And so how would Steven respond? In Acts chapter seven, Stephen is going to stand before the Sanhedrin. And even though they're both staring at the same history of the Israelite

people, they're looking at the same facts. They're seeing a completely different image. So if you have your Bibles, open up with me to Acts chapter seven, verse one. Acts, chapter seven, verse one.

And if you were with us last week, you know that we only made it through eight verses as we wrapped up chapter six today. This is the last message before Christmas. And so I need to get in all of chapter seven today. It's 60 verses, but I promise you'll be out before dinner, all right? So just try to keep up with me. Buckle up, I'm gonna go fast. Alright, this is the history of Israel and Stephen's going to use this to point to Jesus. Let me pray. Heavenly Father, again, we thank you for your word.

Pray that you would open our eyes to your truths and apply them to our lives, because we will find that we're not much different from those we are going to read about today. We ask this in Jesus name, amen. Acts, chapter seven, verse one. Luke tells us. Then the high priest asks Stephen, are these charges true? The high priest is going to give Stephen an opportunity to respond to all of these accusations that are being made against him.

It's a chance to defend himself. Now, I'm sure that if you know the story of Jesus and him standing before the Sanhedrin, they were really just looking to catch him in something he said that they could blame as blasphemy so that they could kill him. It wasn't a real trial. They really didn't care about his defense. They just wanted him to say something that was going to get him in trouble. And so in these situations, if you ever find yourself in a situation like this, I hope you don't, but usually the less you say, the better. The less you say, the better.

But you'll see, Stephen is not concerned about defending himself. He is going to use this as an opportunity to share about Jesus. And he's going to use an interesting way to do that. He is going to use the history of Israel. What we're going to read this morning is going to be a Cliff Notes version of Genesis to Malachi, the whole Old Testament. He is going to give us a Cliff Notes version of the story of Israel and he is going to point to Jesus in the midst of this. So let's get started.

Verse two to this, Stephen replied, brothers and fathers, listen to me. The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham. He's going all the way back to the beginning while he was still in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran. Leave your country and your people, God said, and go to the land. I will show you. This is the beginning of the Israelite people. Abraham is their forefather. The Israelites come from the man Abraham.

And so Stephen's going to use this story to make a point. He's going to say, Listen, we all know our history, but I see it through different eyes now. I see it through the eyes of Jesus. And so Stephen is going to reveal the hidden message of Jesus and of our God in their entire history. It's pretty neat. He's going to go back to their story. And a subtle message that I want you to look for as we're reading this.

The subtle message that he's given to the Sanhedrin that won't be so subtle later is this god isn't confined to buildings built by man. Remember, this trial is taking place at the temple. The temple was the central location of this religion, of Judaism. Everybody worshiped at the temple, and for a long time, god's presence was tied to the temple. But Stephen is going to share something with them that is new, something that they should understand, that God's presence is not tied to the temple.

It has existed from the very beginning, outside of a place, outside of a location. And that's why he's referring to Abraham. Abraham wasn't at the temple when God called him. There was no temple, and yet God was able to speak to him. God is not confined to a specific place. And so we begin to ask ourselves this question. This is the question we can ask ourselves. How many times do you and I put God in a box? How many times do we try to put god in a specific location?

Maybe we come on Sunday morning, and we even have phrases like, this is going to be our time of worship. And so we gather together, and we give our time of worship. But then we leave, and we go out

to our vehicles, and we fake like, or imagine, like, god is not with us there. So we say things like, or I hear people say things like, oh, I would never swear in church. What's different about here, right? What's different about this building? If you're not going to swear here, maybe you shouldn't swear out there.

Or I hear people say, and I grew up in a tradition this way, that there's this understanding that the sanctuary is a holy place, that somehow this room is more holy than the foyer. It's certainly more holy than the parking lot. It's more holy than my house. I am here to tell you, and Stephen is here to tell you that this building, this room is no more holy than your bedroom. It's this belief that we confine God to a place, to a location.

God exists here, but outside of here, God does not exist. So we go on. In verses four through eight, Stephen continues the story. So Abraham left the land of the Chaldeans, and he settled in Haran. After the death of his father, god sent him to this land where you are now living. He gave him no inheritance here, not even enough ground to set his foot on. But God promised Abraham that he and his descendants after him, the Israelites, would possess the land, the land of Canaan, even though at that time, Abraham had no child.

So God spoke to him in this way for 400 years, Abraham, your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own. And they will be enslaved and mistreated, but I will punish the nation. They serve as slaves, God said, and afterward they will come out of that country and they will worship me in this place. So then God gave Abraham the covenant of circumcision, and Abraham became the father of Isaac and circumcised him eight days after his birth.

Later, Isaac became the father of Jacob, and Jacob became the father of the twelve patriarchs. We're following the history of Israel. There's Abraham. Then there was Isaac. Then there was Jacob. And then after Jacob, we see the twelve tribes of Israel that are born again. Stephen is emphasizing that their relationship with God is to be based on faith, not outward practices. When God called Abraham, it wasn't because he was more righteous than anybody else. It wasn't because he was better than anybody else.

It was based on faith. It was not based on practice. It certainly wasn't based on the temple because that didn't even exist at that time. And it wasn't based on the law because Moses hadn't even entered the scene yet. It also was good to recognize that this faith was not always going to be easy. From the very beginning, God gave the news to Abraham that your descendants, your children, grandchildren, great grandchildren are going to be slaves in a land not their own for 400 years.

It's going to be hard. He goes on in verse nine, Stephen says, because the patriarchs, because the twelve brothers of Joseph were jealous of him, they sold him as a slave into Egypt. But God was with Joseph and he rescued him from all his troubles. He gave Joseph wisdom and enabled him to gain the goodwill of Pharaoh, king of Egypt. So Pharaoh made him ruler over Egypt and all his palace. Then a famine struck all of Egypt and all of Canaan, bringing great suffering.

And our ancestors could not find food. His brothers, his dad, they couldn't find any food. So when Jacob, his father, heard that there was grain in Egypt you guys know the story. In Genesis, he sent our forefathers on their first visit to Egypt to get food. On their second visit, Joseph told his brothers who he was and Pharaoh learned about Joseph's family for the first time. So after this, Joseph sent for his father Jacob and his whole family, 75 and all, and they moved them to Egypt.

Jacob went down to Egypt, where he and our ancestors died. Stephen tells us that their bodies were brought back to Shekhem and placed in the tomb that Abraham had bought from the sons of hammer at Shekhem for a certain sum of money. The story is emphasizing, as Stephen is sharing this to the

Sanhedrin. Of course, he's not giving them a history lesson they don't already know. They have most of the Old Testament memorized, if not all of it.

They know the story, but he's emphasizing the truth that even the patriarchs of Israel, that first generation, the twelve tribes, just like the leaders of today, just like the leaders of that time, they have a history of rejecting God. They have a history of rejecting God's chosen people. So the first example he gives is Joseph. They rejected Joseph, they were jealous of him, and later they would reject Jesus.

You see, Stephen is going to make the comparison. He's going to use people from Israelites history to make comparison of who Jesus is. The same thing that your forefathers did, that you know these stories and you read these stories and they probably even thought to themselves, how could our forefathers have been so dumb, right? How could they have ignored Joseph? We're going to read about Moses here in a little bit. How could they have missed the signs? And Stephen is saying, as we're going to see, you have missed the signs, you have missed the truth.

You've missed the truth about Jesus and about who he is because he doesn't fit in your story the way you think he should. Their forefathers had a history of repeatedly rejecting the prophets, Moses, even some of their own kings they would reject. So again, we apply this to our own lives as we think about where we live today. And you have to ask yourself the question have you ever rejected the truth of Jesus? Because it just doesn't fit in your story, it doesn't fit your expectations.

He's not the kind of God that you want him to be. Let's go on. In verses 17 to 22, as the time junior for God to fulfill his promise to Abraham, the number of our people in Egypt had greatly increased. Then a new king to whom Joseph meant nothing, came to power in Egypt. And this new king dealt treacherously with our people and he oppressed our ancestors by forcing them to throw out their newborn babies so that they would die. So now we're in the book of Exodus.

We're moving through the story of Israel. And at that time Stephen tells us Moses was born and he was no ordinary child. For three months he was cared for by his family. And when he was placed outside, of course we know placed in the Nile, we know the story of Exodus. Pharaoh's daughter took him and brought him up as her own son. Moses was educated in all of the wisdom of the Egyptians and he was powerful in speech and action. Israel's history would continue.

Stephen is sharing with you, if you don't know how the Israelites ended up in Egypt in the first place, it's because they went there, because Joseph was there and they needed food and they had food and so they began to live there. And as the years would go on and the population of Israelites would continue to grow, eventually the Egyptian Pharaoh would be afraid of the Israelites. And so he began to enslave them, force them to do labor Stephen is proving to the Israelite leaders of his time that the plight of the Jews has always been a difficult one.

It was prophesied about from the very beginning. It's going to be hard, it's going to be difficult. We shouldn't be surprised that we're captive to Rome, that they are our leaders right now. He goes on in verse 23 to tell us, when Moses was 40 years old, he decided to visit his own people, the Israelites. He saw one of them, one of his own people, being mistreated by an Egyptian. And so he went to his defense and he avenged him by killing the Egyptian.

Moses thought that his own people would realize that God was using him to rescue them, but they did not realize that. The next day, Moses came upon two Israelites who were fighting each other, and he tried to reconcile them by saying, men, you are brothers. Why do you want to hurt each other? But the man who was mistreating the other pushed Moses aside and said, who made you ruler and judge over us? Are you thinking of killing me as you killed the Egyptian?

Yesterday, when Moses heard this, he fled to Midian, where he settled as a foreigner and had two sons. This was again another not so subtle way for Stephen to show the religious leaders that they were following in the exact footsteps of their forefathers. The Israelites initially rejected Moses as their leader. They didn't believe that he had the authority to rule. What did he know about their life? He grew up in the palace of Egypt.

He didn't know about the suffering of the Israelites. He was not going to be their leader. And so now Stephen is pointing to the present time. The Israelites have rejected Jesus, just as they rejected Moses, because Jesus doesn't fit the mold of their redeemer that they thought was going to come. They were awaiting a messianic military leader that was going to deliver the land of Israel from the Romans. And so Jesus didn't fit that.

He didn't fit what they wanted. So again we ask the question, have you ever rejected Jesus because he doesn't fit your mold? You have an idea of what Jesus should look like, what this God should act like, and he doesn't act the way that you think he should. And so he must not be real. Maybe he hasn't answered your prayers. This has been going on for generations, since the creation, people have been rejecting God because he doesn't fit their mold.

Stephen goes on in verse 30, after 40 years had passed, so Moses is now 80 years old, an angel appeared to Moses in the flames of a burning bush in the desert near Mount Sinai. When Moses saw this, he was amazed at the site. And as he went over to get a closer look, he heard the Lord say, I am the God of your Father's, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Moses trembled with fear and did not dare to look, and we would be the same. Don't think otherwise.

Then the Lord said to him, take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground. I have indeed seen the oppression of my people, the Israelites in Egypt. I have heard their groaning and have come to set them free. Now come, I will send you back to Egypt, to which you and I, who know the story, recognize that Moses was not very pleased with God's plan. They've already rejected me, but God says, I'm going to send you aback, send you back again.

As Stephen is sharing this story, he is once again proving that God is not confined to a temple or a place. Here was Moses in the wilderness of Midian, and God calls to Moses there because God is a personal God. He wants a relationship. He continues his defense. In verse 35, he said, this is the same Moses that they had rejected with the words the Israelites had rejected him who made you ruler and judge?

But Moses was sent back to be their ruler and to deliver by God himself, the Israelites, though the angel who had appeared to him through the angel who had appeared to him in the bush. So Moses led them out of Egypt, and he performed wonders and signs in Egypt, at the Red Sea, and for 40 years in the wilderness, as we know, they wandered the wilderness. Listen, Stephen is saying to these religious leaders, it doesn't matter that our forefathers rejected Moses. He was their deliverer, whether they recognized it or not.

And God would prove it through signs and wonders, just like today. He speaks to the leaders, it doesn't matter if you reject Jesus. He is still your deliverer. And this is proven by signs and wonders. It doesn't matter if you reject Jesus or receive him. He has proven himself to us, and this is your choice, just like it was theirs. It's your choice. Do you believe it to be true or not? He was proven by signs and wonders and miracles.

Stephen says. He goes on in verse 37, this is the Moses who told the Israelites, god will raise up for you a prophet like me from your own people. This is a message that Moses gives. It's a prophetic message. He says, God is going to raise somebody up like me from among your own people. He was in the assembly in

the wilderness with the angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai and with our ancestors. And he received living words to pass on to us.

Of course, he is referencing the giving of the law at Mount Sinai when the Israelites are in the wilderness. But Stephen says our ancestors once again refused to obey him. They refused to obey him, and instead they rejected Moses. And in their hearts they turned back to Jesus. Remember, the Israelites after they got out of Egypt, they were concerned, they were afraid. What do they want to do? Let us just go back to Egypt? Let us just go back to that. And so they told Aaron, make us gods, who will go before us?

As for this fellow Moses who led us out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him. Basically, what have you done for me lately? Right? He just led them out of Egypt and now they're instantly ready to just throw him away. That was the time. Stephen tells us that they made an idol in the form of a calf, a golden calf, and they brought sacrifices to it, and they reveled in what their own hands have made. Stephen refers to this prophecy of Moses.

Moses knew that a prophet was going to come speaking of Jesus after him, and he urged the Jews, do not miss it, don't miss it. Don't miss our messiah. Listen to him. But Stephen is saying to those religious leaders, these are the people that are in charge of this faith. They're in charge of this people group. And he's saying, you missed it. You missed him. His name was Jesus, and you have killed him.

Just as the Israelites rejected Moses and they had Aaron make a cap so that they could worship him, so you religious leaders have created an idol to worship. You have rejected the true Messiah and you have instead created a manmade religion that was all about rules, all about regulations, all about authority and power and tradition. In the temple, Stephen is accusing them of worshipping a golden calf. It just looks a little different than what it did for their forefathers.

I think at this point, they're starting to get what Stephen is saying and they're getting mad. I can imagine their faces just turning red with anger. How dare you tell us what we have done is wrong? And so I asked the question, what about you? Have you missed the Messiah and worshipped man-made idols instead? I don't think you're worshipping golden calves or a temple or a building, but there's plenty of other things we can worship.

Wealth, pleasure, religion, power. These are things that maybe you and I struggle with and we put in the place of God. Stephen goes on in verse 42 to tell us that God turned away from these people and he gave them over to the worship of the sun and the moon and the stars. And this agrees with what is written in the book of the prophets. Did you bring these sacrifices and offerings 40 years in the wilderness?

People of Israel, you have taken up the tabernacle of Molec and the star of your god, Raphael, the idols you made to worship. Therefore I will send you into exile beyond Babylon. They received the penalty for what they had done. God gave them over to the evil desires of their worship. And so they. Would go into exile. They would be kicked out of the land that God had given them. He let them fade away and get what they thought they wanted.

If you reject Jesus, what will you be given over to? You ever thought about that? What types of suffering will enter your life because of your disobedience to obey God's best? All of us have done this to some degree or another. We disobey God's commands, and because of that, we endure some type of suffering due to our disobedience.

Stephen goes on in verse 44, our ancestors had the tabernacle of the Covenant Law with them in the wilderness. It had been made as God directed Moses according to the pattern that Moses had seen. And after receiving that tabernacle, our ancestors, under Joshua, as they're beginning to conquer the

Promised Land, brought it with them. When they took the land from the nations that God drove out before them, it remained in the land until the time of David. Now we get through the time of the judges.

We get into King Saul and then King David, who enjoyed God's favor and ask that he might provide a dwelling place for the God of Jacob. David wanted to build a house for his God, a temple. But Stephen says in fact, it was Solomon who built a house for him. However, now he's going to make his point very clear. The Most High does not live in houses made by human hands. As the prophet says, heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house could you possibly build from?

He says, the Lord. Or where will my resting place be? Has not my hand made all of these things at the Sanhedrin? Didn't understand what Stephen was saying up to this point. It now became painfully clear. Stephen is saying God does not live in temples built by human hands. Nor is our faith about a religion, but it's about a relationship with our Heavenly Father. We cannot confine God to certain buildings or places.

Faith in Jesus is not about empty practices or continuing to do the traditional things that our forefathers have done. In verse 51, Stephen gets bold. The story ends. That's the history of Israel. He takes it all the way up to the time of David. And then he says to them, you stiff necked people. This is like maybe a cuss word to them, right? You stiff neck people. Your hearts and ears are still uncircumcised. That's the worst thing that he could say to the religious leaders.

You are just like your ancestors. You're just like our forefathers. You always resist the Holy Spirit. Was there ever a prophet that your ancestors did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered Him. You who have received the law that was given through angels but yet have not obeyed it, things are now getting a little intense.

Stephen comes right out and he confronts the leaders that they're no different from their forefathers who rejected God's leaders, and now they have rejected the Messiah. Can you imagine a man whose job it was to distribute bread to widows now telling the religious elite what they're doing wrong? Can you imagine what was going through their mind? They would have been furious, thinking things like, how dare you tell us what to do? We make the law. This was their greatest pride.

They looked down on everyone else. But yet the Holy Spirit, through Stephen, was showing Israel that the old traditions of Judaism could not lead to the new faith of Christianity. The old traditions of Judaism could not lead to the new faith of Christianity. Something new was happening. In verse 40 54, Luke tells us, when the members of the Sanhedrin heard this, they were furious and they gnashed their teeth at him.

This was enough. Stephen had to be silenced and could not be allowed to go on. But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and he saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. Look, he said, I see heaven open and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God. Maybe you don't think about this when you read this, but I asked the question, why is Jesus standing at the right hand of God? He's usually sitting at the right hand of God.

Maybe there's two reasons for this. I don't have any idea. Maybe Jesus is standing up and applauding Stephen. Way to go. Way to point to the truth of who I am and how much I love them. Maybe he was standing up to let Stephen and those of us that would read about this know that we don't serve a God that sits idly by while things are happening to us, but he is engaged in what is taking place in our lives.

Luke goes on in verse 57. At this, the Sanhedrin covered their ears and yelling at the top of their voices. They all rushed at him. They dragged him out of the city and they began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul. As Luke will introduce us to the next

person in the story, Stephen would become the first Christian murderer. These leaders have lost their mind.

They cover their ears and they scream and they run out at him, blasphemy again, hoping that this would stop the spread of the name of Jesus. That was their goal. But instead, this persecution would only cause exponential growth, as now these believers who are living in Jerusalem, fearing for their own lives, would leave Jerusalem and spread around to the known world. And do you know what they took with them? The story of Jesus. And it would now spread to everyone in the known world.

The very thing that the leaders were trying to stop. They only exasperated. Luke finishes the chapter this way. He tells us that while these religious leaders were stoning him, Stephen prayed lord, Jesus received my spirit. Then he fell on his knees and he cried out, lord, do not hold this sin against them. And when he had said this, he fell asleep. Steven's life would end the same way it had been lived in complete trust to God. Let me just ask the closing question.

What character are you in the story? Are you like the spiritual leaders who fear what submitting to Jesus would mean for your life? Listen, I know it's easy to look back at the story and to see the foolishness of the spiritual leaders. How could they not believe that Jesus was the Messiah? He was raised from the dead. He did miracles. He did wonders. And you say to yourself, I would never be like them. I would never not believe if I saw those things.

But yet Stephen proves the point. They were the same people that were looking back at their ancestors going, you know, they were kind of stupid. They missed it, but yet they themselves were missing it. You see, if Stephen was correct and these spiritual leaders were actually to submit to Jesus, then their lives would be completely changed. They would lose their job as priests at the temple. They would lose their power and authority because nobody needs a high priest anymore when Jesus is the high priest.

They would have given up their comfortable lifestyle. They were revered. They were looked up to. They were financially well to do. They would have to repent. They would have to say, I'm sorry. They would have to say, I was wrong. They would have to begin a whole new life. It wasn't just an easy decision for them. And maybe following Jesus means the same for you. Maybe it means giving up some of those things.

Maybe it means admitting you're wrong, repenting, recognizing that you can't do it on your own, that you need a savior. And maybe for some of you, you just can't do it. It's too much. It cost too much. But let me just give you a warning. It is very dangerous to be religious apart from a real relationship with Jesus Christ. It is very dangerous to be religious apart from a real relationship with Jesus Christ.

Maybe today you're here, you're watching or you're listening on the radio, and maybe you more relate with Stephen in the story. You've already surrendered everything to God. You've gotten to that point where you've given it all, and now your life is lived for Him. So today you can leave with the comfort that no matter what happens to you, even if you're martyred, even if it means your life, you know that Jesus will be with you.

And so we're all left with the decision to make. Will we serve Jesus and submit to him? Or will we continue to serve our own agenda, believing that we know what is best? Let me close in prayer. Heavenly Father, I pray that you would call us to you.

We allow your spirit to move amongst us. We have all been foolish many times we've been deceived. I pray that you would open our eyes to see your truth. We asked us in Jesus name. Amen.