

The Stoning of Stephen

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Date: 20 July 2025

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[0 : 0 0] If you've got a Bible, you can go to Acts chapter 6 and verse 8. So this is an incredibly long passage and I thought if I read the entire thing, then I basically! I basically leave myself no time to preach an hour-long sermon, which I want to do.

So we're not going to read the entire thing. What I'm going to do is I'm going to read the first section, the first few verses, then we're going to jump right to the end.

I'll try and guide you along as we go there. And then hopefully, Lord willing, in the course of this sermon, we'll fill in all the blanks of the stuff we missed. So this is a famous story, the story of the stoning of Stephen, the first Christian martyr in the book of Acts.

Luke writes this for us, gives us this account, and we're going to look at it together. So let's start in Acts chapter 6 and verse 8. Now Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, performed great wonders and signs among the people.

Opposition arose, however, from members of the synagogue of the freedmen, as it was called, Jews from Cyrene and Alexandria, as well as the provinces of Cilicia and Asia, who began to argue with Stephen.

[1 : 2 7] But they could not stand up against the wisdom the Spirit gave him as he spoke. Then they secretly persuaded some men to say, we have heard Stephen speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God.

And so they stirred up the people and the elders and the teachers of the law. They seized Stephen and brought him before the Sanhedrin. They produced false witnesses who testified, this fellow never stopped speaking against this holy place and against the law.

For we have heard him say that Jesus, this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs Moses handed down to us. All who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen.

And they saw that his face was like the face of an angel. Then the high priest asked Stephen, are these charges true? True. Now what starts here at verse 2 is a long, long speech that Stephen makes.

And I want to take you right to the end of his speech, to sort of his final closing challenge, down in verse 51.

[2 : 3 9] Towards the very end of his speech, he says this. He says, And heard this, they were furious and they gnashed their teeth at him.

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.

At this they covered their ears and yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul.

While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. Then he fell on his knees and cried out, Lord, do not hold this sin against them.

When he had said this, he fell asleep. This is the word of the Lord. Let's pray. Let's ask for God's help as we study this together. Father, won't you teach us truth this morning?

[4 : 13] Won't you open our eyes to see your word, to understand it, and to have it go into us, that we might be changed and transformed by what we see?

Show us Jesus Christ, our Lord. Show us his glory and let us be changed by him. We ask for your help by your spirit for Christ's sake. Amen. Amen. So we continue in Acts.

We come to, this is the largest chunk we're probably going to cover in one section. We come to my namesake, actually, Stephen, the first Christian martyr. Do you ever find it weird when you say your own name?

Sounds funny when you say your own name. And so when you have to read through this passage and you're saying your own name, maybe it's because I'm used to people saying my name because they want something or I'm in trouble or something. And so when I read the passage, it's like, what have I done?

What have I done wrong? But we come to my namesake, Stephen. Besides having a name in common, the other thing that we have in common is the length of our sermons. There's actually so much in this passage that we could be going on here and I really don't feel like I'm going to do it all justice this morning.

[5 : 25] And so I would encourage you to keep reading. Go back this afternoon, read it. Hopefully some of the things I say will have made sense by then. But let's try and see what we can see in this lengthy speech that he gives, basically in defense of himself, as he then goes on and is stoned and put to death.

Two things I want you to see this morning. We're going to look at the big speech and then we're going to look at one big question that I think comes out. Not the only question, but one big question that I think comes out of this entire episode.

The big speech and then the big question. So let's dive into the speech that he makes first of all. If you look at the end of chapter 2, sorry, end of chapter 6, there are two accusations that are brought against Stephen as they grab him.

Verse 11, Then they secretly persuaded some men to say, We have heard Stephen speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God. And so they stirred up the people and the elders and the teachers of the law.

They seized Stephen and they brought him before the Sanhedrin. And they produced false witnesses who testified, This fellow never stops speaking against this holy place, that's the temple, and against the law.

[6 : 39] For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs Moses handed down to us. So you can see the two accusations there in what they're saying.

That Stephen is denigrating, maybe that's not a strong enough word, maybe vilifying or blaspheming Moses and the Old Testament law. And that he's denigrating and really wants to see the destruction of the temple.

Wants to see it destroyed. Now if you've read Stephen's long, long speech before and you're trying to make sense of what exactly is he doing with this speech, you need to understand these two charges.

Because it's essentially these two charges that he is addressing in his speech. So we're going to go over to chapter 7 where the bulk of the speech is. I'm going to skim over the speech and I'm going to try and point this out to you.

Now when you first read this passage, and really this is my view right up until this week of really studying this intently. I'd read this sermon many, many times that he preaches in defense of himself.

- [7 : 46] But when you first read it, it looks like he's just giving a walking commentary on the Old Testament. And it's like, well, thanks for that. I've grown in my knowledge of the Bible a little bit, but I don't really see how this connects to what's going on yet.
- So that's what it looks like. And you read it. It's like this walking commentary of some of the key events in the Old Testament storyline. So verses 2 to 8, he covers what we might call the patriarchal period from Abraham through to Joseph.
- Then in verse 9, he starts to talk about Israel's time in Egypt as slaves, stuff that's covered in the book of Exodus. And he starts to speak about Moses. You get the early years of Moses, verses 20 to 29.
- You get his calling with the burning bush, verse 30 to 34. You get his wilderness wanderings, verse 35 to 43. And then actually there, just before the end of that section, in verse 40, there's a transition.
- And the history lesson that he's giving sort of speeds up very quickly. So he's been going very slowly. And then it just starts going like really, really fast. He starts talking about the tabernacle in the wilderness, but then he very quickly moves to Joshua, and then to David, and then to Solomon, and the building of the temple.
- [8 : 58] And then after that, verse 51, that's when he goes on the offensive. And he sort of lays into his hearers.
- He did not read that book. I can't remember the title, How to Win Friends and Influence Them. That is not in this sermon. He says, you stiff-necked people with uncircumcised hearts.
- Now we'll get to that abrasive language later, but the bulk of his speech up to that point looks like some sort of sweeping survey of Old Testament history, Israelite history.
- And it doesn't seem to directly connect with the rebuke, the harsh rebuke that he has for the people at the very end. But if you look closely, I think you can see what he's actually doing. So notice that there are actually two main themes that stick out here.
- Number one, there's a disproportionate amount of time given to Moses in the speech. Verse 9, right up to verse 44, is basically all about Moses.
- [10 : 04] Centered on Moses. So that should make you go, okay, hang on. That's interesting. Number two, there's a big focus on the presence of God going with his people no matter where they are geographically.
- So whether they're in Mesopotamia or Haran, like Abraham was outside the boundaries of the promised land, God's there. That's verse 2 and 3.
- Whether they're in the promised land, but they don't actually own any land, like Abraham found himself, verse 4 and 5, God's there with him. Whether they're in Egypt, like Joseph and his brothers were, verse 9 to 15, God's with them.
- Whether they're in, there's a very little interesting hint here, whether they're in Samaritan territory, which is where Stephen says, Jacob and his sons were buried, verse 16, God seems to be with them.
- Whether they're following a tabernacle, a tent, around the wilderness, outside the land, verse 44, God seems to be with them. Or whether they're back in the promised land in Jerusalem, and Solomon is building a temple, verse 47, God seems to be with them.
- [11 : 12] It's a constant focus on God going with his people, wherever they are. Now I think you can step back then, and you can see that those two big themes there, Moses and God's presence, they basically map on to the two charges that are brought against Stephen, that he's blaspheming Moses and the law, and that he's denigrating the temple, the place that is associated with God's presence.

But here's the interesting thing. What he does in his speech is he actually flips it around, and he basically says, it's not me who's getting Moses and the temple wrong, it's you who's getting Moses and the temple wrong.

He accuses the people, he accuses his accusers, he accuses the listeners of rejecting Moses and the law, and of completely misunderstanding the point of the temple and the presence of God.

So he actually puts the charges back at them. Now how does he do this exactly? Well look at how he highlights particular aspects of Moses' life and ministry.

Like there's barely any focus on Moses confronting Pharaoh, like the plagues or anything like that. There's barely any focusing on him leading Israel across the Red Sea, all the sort of stuff you associate with the Exodus.

[12 : 46] Instead what we have is a focus on Moses' rejection. So look at verse 23. When Moses was 40 years old, he decided to visit his own people, the Israelites.

He saw one of them being mistreated by an Egyptian, so he went to his defense and 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.

The next day, Moses came upon two Israelites who were fighting. 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. So he tells the story of Moses being rejected by his own people.

Then he goes on and he tells the story of Moses being called by God at the burning bush. Called by God to be the one who's going to lead Israel to freedom, to be the redeemer.

[14 : 03] But he ends that section with this reminder, verse 35. This is the same Moses they had rejected with the words, who made you ruler and judge?

He was sent to be their ruler and deliverer by God himself through the angel who appeared to him in the bush. He led them out of Egypt and performed wonders and signs in Egypt at the Red Sea and for 40 years in the wilderness.

This is the Moses who told the Israelites, God will raise up for you a prophet like me from 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. But our ancestors refused to obey him. Instead, they rejected him and in their hearts turned back to Egypt.

See, the focus is all on the Israelites' rejection of Moses. It's like Stephen is standing there having heard these charges, these accusations and he's saying to his accusers, you think I reject Moses in the law?

[15 : 15] Have you even read your own Bible? Have you read your own history? You guys have perfected the art of rejecting Moses. It's all there. And then the temple.

What about the temple? The presence of God. Well, there he's got an argument as well. And his argument goes like this. He says, well, was God with our forefather Abraham in Mesopotamia?

Was his presence there? Was he with him when he lived like a foreigner in his own land and he didn't own any land? Was his presence there? Was he with Joseph in Egypt?

Was he with his people when Jacob and his sons were buried in Samaritan graves? Was he with the nation in the wilderness when they followed the tabernacle around?

Was he with Joshua? Was he with David? Was he with Solomon when he built an actual physical temple? What does the Bible say, he says, to his own listeners?

[16 : 17] What does the Bible say about God's presence being contained in a temple made by human hands? And then he quotes the prophets to them. He quotes Isaiah 66.

Heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me, says the Lord, or where will my resting place be? Has not my hand made all these things?

You see what he's doing there? He's saying, you think I'm denigrating God's presence in this temple here? But have you guys not seen time and time and time again how God's presence transcends this earthly temple?

This earthly building made by human hands? have you not seen that in your own scriptures? And so all of that then leads up to what is really a stunning rebuke in verse 51.

You stiff necked people, your hearts and ears are still uncircumcised. You are just like your ancestors. You always resist the Holy Spirit. Was there ever a prophet your ancestors did not persecute?

[17 : 28] They even killed those who predicted the coming of the righteous one. And now you have betrayed and murdered him. That's Jesus. You who have received the law that was given through the angels but have not obeyed it.

So that's what's going on in this sermon. Stephen's lengthy sermon. He's addressing the charges that are leveled against him and he's putting those charges back on his accusers and saying you guys are guilty of this.

Now here's the one big question. Here's our second point. Here's the one big question this raises for me. Why do we instinctively want to contain God and violently reject his messengers?

Why do we want to do this? I mean we live 2,000 years later now so we're kind of used to stories about persecution. But if you didn't have a 2,000 year history of persecution and you're just reading the book of Acts for the first time and you're going wow that seems like a really over the top response to these early Christians to take one of their preachers outside and stone him to death.

Why do we do this as human beings? Stephen's whole point is that there's a pattern here. This is a pattern of human behavior. A pattern of rejection.

[18 : 56] A pattern of reducing God. God. And when he points that pattern out to his listeners which is what he's painstakingly doing in his speech, instead of repenting and going oh yes we actually see it, they just continue the pattern and they stone him to death.

Why do we do this? Why do we instinctively react this way to the revelation of God? Why do we welcome him? I mean think of all the amazing benefits and promises God is giving to us and saying to us why don't we just welcome him?

I think the answer to that question is towards the end of Stephen's speech and I think the answer is at least in part idolatry, false worship.

Look at verse 39. Stephen says but our ancestors refused to obey Moses. Instead they rejected him and in their hearts turned back to Egypt.

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. That was the time they made an idol in the form of a calf.

[20 : 08] They brought sacrifices to it and reveled in what their own hands had made. But God turned away from them and gave them over to the worship of the sun, moon and stars. This agrees with what is written in the book of the prophets.

Did you bring me sacrifices and offerings forty years in the wilderness people of Israel? You have taken up the tabernacle of Molech and the star of your God Rephan, the idols you made to worship.

Therefore I will send you into exile beyond Babylon. Notice actually how idolatry is described there in that passage.

Their idolatry is described as them in their hearts turning back to Egypt. Verse 39 and as reveling verse 41 in what their own hands had made.

It's quite a striking explanation of what idolatry really is. It's giving your deepest heart allegiance and worship to something created rather than to the creator who transcends everything that is created.

[21 : 18] See because their hearts are inherently prone to love the created over the creator because we have that problem we constantly find ourselves rejecting God or trying to reduce him into something more manageable.

This was the case with the temple there or their conception at least of the temple. So I'll give you two examples of this in the speech itself. The first one comes from the Israelites rejecting Moses.

Think about those Israelites rejecting Moses as God's appointed leader. Why wouldn't you want somebody to come and save you from slavery in Egypt? I mean that seems like a good thing. That's what I want.

Why did they reject Moses when he kills the Egyptian foreman who is clearly one of their oppressors? Later after he leads them out of Egypt why they so quickly turn their back on him in the wilderness when he goes up Sinai?

Well I would put it to you that's the idol. It's the idol of comfort. It's the idol of security. It's the idol of control. You see even in their very oppressive situation they still felt like they had some measure of control.

[22 : 29] But now this Moses figure turns up. He kills an Egyptian foreman. Well that's going to cause grief for us. That's going to make Pharaoh hate us even more and make our lives more miserable than they currently are.

We might be miserable now they're thinking. We might be terribly miserable now but at least we feel like we have a measure of control, a measure of stability, of security. To step out in faith and follow Moses means letting go of that control.

It means risking that perceived security. And that's why you find them out in the plains of the wilderness later on in that unstable environment with their hearts hankering back after the misery in Egypt.

Here's another example. Think of Stephen's actual listeners and their obsession with the temple. So they are a tiny oppressed nation under the thumb of the mighty Roman Empire.

But at least they've got the temple. They've got the one place on earth where God has specifically chosen to place his presence in some special way. And so what?

[23 : 42] That's a source of identity then for them. It's a source of national pride, a comfort, a security in the face of this brutal occupation of the Roman Empire. In fact it was probably more than that for them.

Several commentators have pointed out that the location of the temple in Jerusalem was big business for the city. So the temple and all the businesses that sort of grew up around the life and the activity of the temple drove a large section of the city's economy.

It provided financial security. See they're looking at that temple and they're subconsciously saying to their own hearts this thing that we built with our own hands this is what sustains us.

This is what secures us. This is what gives us our identity. security. And so if you are going to threaten this thing well of course we're going to react violently towards that.

Now it's pretty easy for us to sit here and to criticize them from our vantage point. Their violent rage this mob coming together to throw stones at Stephen.

[24 : 58] We're repulsed by that. By their actions. But I say this to you. Do you realize that that propensity towards idolatry lives inside of you?

One of the ways that helps me think about this is to think about those men who were throwing the stones. I once very briefly thankfully very briefly saw a segment of a video that captured a stoning that took place in Afghanistan under the Taliban.

And the little bit that I did see before I turn it off made me sick. I wanted to vomit after watching that. Seeing an actual live stoning take place.

And that's what happened to Stephen here. That's how violent their rejection of him and his message was. And yet if you think about these men throwing those stones several of them were probably ordinary upstanding respectable citizens of the town.

Men who worked hard. Men who appeared to have something of a moral compass. Men who probably that morning loved the lovingly and tenderly kissed their wives and their children as they went off to work.

[26 : 25] And when you think about it like that it makes you shudder. It makes me shudder at the horrifying power of idolatry. That it can move people to this level of evil.

And so I ask again then do you realize that the propensity towards idolatry lives in each one of us. Who of us are not tempted to have our highest heart allegiance wrapped up in our comfort, in our security, in our sense of control in life.

See friends, Stephen's martyrdom story is not just here to sort of have us intellectually dissect and scoff at these Jews for not realizing that the true Messiah had come to them in Jesus and that they'd rejected him like they'd rejected every other prophet before that.

The story of Stephen's gruesome death is there at least in part I think to warn us. To warn us that the seeds that produce that horror are in each of us and we best know how to look for them and how to root them out.

I mean comfort and security and control those are such incredibly powerful idols. Incredibly powerful idols. They speak directly to what we perceive are our deepest needs.

[28 : 03] Our deepest desires. How do you root them out then? If they're that deep if they're going to go that deep down into you how do you root them out?

I think you look at Stephen and not this Stephen that Stephen look at Stephen in front of the Sanhedrin after the charges are brought against him and just before he begins his very lengthy speech.

This is chapter 6 verse 15. All who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel. Imagine how tense that environment was.

How pressurized that moment was. The members of the Sanhedrin are spewing vile hateful false accusations in his face. He is completely at that point in the mercy of this court.

He has no control over what's going to happen next. He's calm. He's collected. Almost caught up in some sort of divine angelic peace.

[29 : 13] And then look at him at the very end after he concludes his speech. Chapter 7 verse 54. When the members of the Sanhedrin heard this, heard his speech, they were furious and they gnashed their teeth at him.

That's anger. But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and 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.

At this they covered their ears and yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul.

And while they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, Lord Jesus receive my spirit. Then he fell on his knees and he cried out, Lord, do not hold the sin against them.

When he had said this, he fell asleep. Friends, idolatry has monstrous power. Monstrous power. But the sort of power that must be at work in a man who is at that level of discomfort, covered in blood, bruised, broken, about to die, and yet he cries out, Lord, do not hold their sin against them.

[30 : 38] Well, friends, that's a power that can overcome any monster, any other power. power. This is not a guy with sort of just deep resolve or mental toughness.

This is a supernatural power that's coming from outside of him. That that angelic serenity in the face of accusations, that comes from somewhere else. That crazy plea for mercy to be shown to his murderers, that comes from somewhere else.

it can only come from him seeing Christ, seeing the Son of Man, standing at the right hand of the glory of God in heaven.

That's what he sees as he's about to face his death. It's a very powerful image. If you go back to the Old Testament where this phrase, the Son of Man, comes from, the book of Daniel, it's a very powerful vision, a vision of one who has all majesty and authority and might, strength.

That's the vision that Stephen is granted as he dies. He gets to catch a glimpse of that. He gets to catch a glimpse of the sheer glory and the wonder of Jesus, the power of Jesus, his Lord.

[31 : 56] And when he sees that power, when he sees that glory, it's in that moment that he then instinctively knows that to find your ultimate comfort in anything short of the comfort that comes from salvation in Jesus Christ is to find a false comfort, a nothing comfort, one that's never going to put you at ease, one that's never going to put you truly at rest.

When he sees that, he sees reality, when he sees the Son of Man, the power of the Son of Man in that moment, it's in that moment that he instinctively knows that any form of control that he seeks to gain for himself, that he seeks to put the hope of his life in, is nothing more than hopeless self-delusion compared with the authority that Christ has, and his supreme control over this entire universe.

And when he looks up and he really sees his majestic Lord standing at the right hand of his Father in heaven, ready to welcome him in, that he instinctively knows that there can be no greater comfort, no greater security than that, and that it is the height of vain glory to spend your earthly life lusting after material security, that it's incredibly fragile in this world.

See, in that moment, with that vision, Stephen is stripped of his idols. Every single idol just falls down. He sees them for what they are, dumb, mute, hunks of metal or wood.

because he sees Jesus. And that's how you can root out your idols. It's how you can stop your heart from hankering after Egypt, to gaze upon Christ.

[33 : 53] Now, you might say, with Stephen, this Stephen, how exactly do you do that? It's not like I get this powerful heavenly vision every single day to keep me on the straight and narrow.

It's like I wake up every single morning seeing the Son of Man standing next to the glory of God in heaven. How do I keep going in my day-to-day struggle to root out my idols?

Friends, I want to remind you of this. This is really interesting to think about. Stephen seemed to possess that serene, angelic peace at the beginning of his trial, prior to that spectacular vision.

You realize that? He somehow took hold of that glorious vision before he actually saw the glorious vision. I didn't mention this last week when we were looking at chapter 6, but an interesting feature about those seven deacons that get commissioned in Acts chapter 6, of which Stephen was the first named one, is that they all have Greek names.

All of them have Greek names. And so most New Testament scholars think that they were most likely all Hellenistic Jews, which would make sense given that the whole point was to balance out the distribution of food to make sure that the Hellenistic widows were also getting looked after in the distribution of the food.

[35 : 20] But do you know what else that probably tells us? And there are several distinguished New Testament scholars who make this exact point. It tells us that it is highly probable that Stephen was not an original eyewitness of the life and ministry of Jesus.

He wasn't one of the original disciples following him around Galilee and wherever else he was going. He was probably only converted after Pentecost, which means he didn't see Jesus' miracles.

He didn't see the crucifixion. He didn't witness the resurrection. He didn't see the ascension. His faith was based not on sight but on the gospel message of the apostles.

He believed the word of God is what he did. Just like you and I have to do today. The very thing that he actually accuses his accusers of failing to do over and over again.

Believe the word of God. He believed the word of God. When he stands with that quiet resolve in front of his accusers it's not because he saw Jesus exercise that same resolve in front of Pontius Pilate but it's because he believed the words of the prophet Isaiah when Isaiah said this of Jesus he was oppressed and afflicted yet he did not open his mouth.

[36 : 40] He was led like a lamb to the slaughter and as a sheep before its shearers is silent so he did not open his mouth. When Stephen called for mercy for those who were murdering him it's not because he was there at the foot of the cross to hear his bleeding savior say father forgive them for they know not what they do.

It's because the apostles who were there told him about the cross and he believed it. And that simple simple very unspectacularly faith produced supernatural power in him.

The supernatural power that crushes idols breaks them down roots them out. And so friends as you through the gospel word repeatedly gaze at the crucified Lord Jesus you too will find that supernatural power.

You will find it to root out even the deepest idols of your heart. That is why we study the Bible. It's why we gather Lord's day after Lord's day to remind ourselves of these biblical gospel promises.

It's why we go to the table over and over again because that is where the vision is. That's where we see the Son of Man standing at the right hand of the glory of heaven.

[38 : 08] And it's as we see that vision like our Lord. Just as Stephen was clearly made like his Lord here.

Let me close with these words from famous Charles Spurgeon. He says, Stephen we see Jesus imitated for the death of Stephen is a reproduction of the death of Jesus.

Jesus died outside the gate so did Stephen. Jesus died praying so did Stephen. Jesus died saying Father into thy hands I commit my spirit. Stephen says Lord Jesus receive my spirit.

Christ dies pleading for his murderers so does Stephen. Lord lay not their sin to their charge. Thus you see dear brethren that Stephen's death was radiant with the glow of his Lord's brightness.

Christ was glorified and reflected in him. None could question whose image and superscription he bore. Let your life be looking unto Jesus pleading with Jesus trusting in Jesus copying Jesus and then your departing moments will be attended by visions of Jesus and reproductions of his dying behavior.

[39 : 32] Let's pray together. Father won't you teach us to gaze upon Christ this morning.

We know our own hearts and we know that they do hanker off to Egypt that they look to find their ultimate love in comfort and security and control and other idols and we want to be free from those idols we want to be free from the slavery of those idols and so we ask that you teach us how to look at Jesus how to gaze intently upon him so that we are changed and we are stripped of our idols and we are freed up to trust in him to walk in faith help us with this Lord it's not easy our vision of Christ gets clouded out by all sorts of!

things we fail to come to your word and to study it we fail to come to worship and to be reminded of your gospel promises help us in this moment to recommit to those things to recommit to going to the places where we get to see that glorious vision of Christ and then change us by what we see Lord I pray for any person who's!

He suffered for them that forgiveness and life is offered in His death and His resurrection won't you bring that person to a place of repentance and faith this morning that they might come into your kingdom of light we ask these things for Christ's sake and His glory Amen