



**Sermon Text:** Acts 6:8-7:60

*Sermon Date:* November 5, 2017

This Sunday, the storm clouds of persecution burst and suffering begins to rain down upon the church. Stephen, one of the church's Hellenistic leaders, is martyred for the gospel. The God who is able step in and stop Stephen's suffering chooses not to do so. We walked through our text in three stages.

### **A FAITHFUL LIFE**

Stephen is arrested for preaching Christ. He was teaching that Jesus was the fulfillment of the Mosaic Law and the Temple. When his opponents could not overcome his theological arguments, they resort to a smear campaign. They distort Stephen's teaching and stir the crowd into a frenzy. They then recruit false witnesses to lie and build an unbeatable case against Stephen.

### **A FAITHFUL WITNESS**

With the charges against Stephen filed, he offers his defense by retelling the story of Israel's history. Throughout his speech, he weaves together two themes to defend his teaching.

1. **God has never been bound to the Temple.** Pointing to Abraham, Joseph, and Moses, Stephen demonstrates that God's presence has never been bound to a specific location. Even Solomon, who built the Temple itself, grasped that the God of the Universe could not be confined to a man-made house.
2. **Israel's history is defined by Law-breaking.** Additionally, Stephen demonstrates that Israel has a long, abysmal history of breaking the Law they claim to honor. God's people have repeatedly rejected God's chosen leaders; whether it was Joseph, or Moses, or the prophets. And now, in rejecting the Messiah, the religious leaders have simply followed down this well-worn path.

### **A FAITHFUL DEATH**

The crowd explodes in response to Stephen's speech—dragging him out of the city and stoning him to death. Where is God? He could have easily saved Stephen's life, but He didn't. "But if not" (Daniel 3:18) comes true. Yet, in the darkest moment, Stephen enjoys the sweetest grace.

1. **Stephen dies filled with wonder.** He is graced to gaze into Heaven itself and see his Savior standing at the right hand of God. Jesus stands to welcome his servant home and plead his case in the heavenly courtroom.
2. **Stephen dies filled with faith.** In this moment of great trial, Stephen's faith remains strong. In faith, he cries out for Jesus to receive his spirit. While God did not save him from suffering, he graciously sustained his faith through it.
3. **Stephen dies filled with forgiveness.** With his final words, he cries out for God to forgive the sins of those who kill him. In his dying, he reflects the glory of His savior who prayed similarly.
4. **Stephen dies filled with peace.** Luke records, "And when he had said this, he fell asleep." It is such a peaceful description for such a brutal death. In Christ, our greatest enemy has been rendered our sweetest rest!

May we strive to live and speak and die like this. Confident that risk-taking obedience is always worth it. Since Christ is our sure and steady anchor we will never be moved.

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. What stood out to you from the sermon and the biblical text from this Sunday?
2. What causes you to question if faithful obedience to God is worth the risk?
3. How does Stephen's death encourage you to follow after Jesus?