

Post-Pentecost Realities II. Important considerations connected to the present and future status of the nation of Israel.

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- [0 : 00] Good morning. The title of the message this morning is Post-Pentecost Realities, Part 2. And I would like you to turn in the Scripture to the book of Ephesians, to chapter 3. And we'll be looking at verses 1-13 in Ephesians, chapter 3.
- For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus, for the sake of you Gentiles, if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace which was given to me for you, that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief.
- By referring to this, when you read, you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit.
- [1 : 41] To be specific that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel, of which I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given to me according to the working of His power.
- To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery, which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things, so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places.
- This was in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and confident access through faith in Him.
- Therefore, I ask you not to lose heart at my tribulations on your behalf, for they are your glory.
- I cannot tell you how many times, as a relatively new believer, I must have read that portion of Scripture that Gary just read to us in Ephesians chapter 3 and never saw it, never understood it, never really appreciated it.
- [3 : 51] I kind of admired it from a distance, but it wasn't until some years after I became a believer that this passage, as well as a number of other passages in the New Testament, started taking on a whole new meaning.
- It was like an epiphany to me. It was almost like, well, it did not equal my salvation experience, but it was the next best thing to it, let me put it that way, insofar as gaining an appreciation and an understanding of what God was really doing in this day and age, as opposed to what He had done previously.
- And slowly but surely, with the encouragement and help from others, like C.R. Stamm and David Weinbrenner and Paul Pontus and other men like that, some of whom you know, helped me to get a handle on this to the extent that it not only revolutionized my life, but it revolutionized my teaching ministry as well.

It has to do with seeing the plan and program of God unfold in a progressive way, as we have been mentioning. And that is, in part, why we are calling this brief series Post-Pentecost Realities.

It is, I think, a grievous mistake that is committed on the part of some to think that the events that took place on the day of Pentecost, very miraculous, very dramatic, are supposed to be the norm for the New Testament church.

[5 : 37] And if we have the faith that these people had, we will be able to do the same things that they did. Raise the dead, heal the sick, cause the lame to walk, and so on.

And never did it occur to me at the time, as an earlier believer, a younger believer, that these things were all part and parcel of a program that is now passed.

They all accompanied the events and activities of our Lord Jesus Christ in His earthly ministry. And they also accompanied the ministry of the twelve apostles after the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ.

But with the subsequent setting aside of the nation of Israel, those dramatic miracles came to a halt. And now, as members of the body of Christ, we are called upon to walk by faith, not by sight.

That is, we are to be willing to simply take God at His word on the basis of what He says without saying to Him, prove it. You want me to believe what you say, God?

[6 : 49] Okay. What sign showest thou that I may believe? Give me some visible, tangible evidence, something I can look at.

Then I'll be convinced. You remember the incident regarding Thomas when he was informed by the other apostles that they had seen the Lord and that He was alive?

Thomas' response was, I don't know what it was you guys saw, but it couldn't have been him. And I appreciate what you think you saw.

I don't believe that you're lying to me, but I just can't buy it. Unless I can put my hands in His side and feel the wound and the wounds in His hands, I'm not going to believe.

I can't believe just on your say-so. And when Jesus then shortly thereafter did appear to Him and invited Him to do that very thing, reach hither your hand, Thomas, and feel my side and look at my hands and be not faithless, but believing.

[8 : 11] And I am confident that Thomas felt about that high. And he fell on his knees and simply responded by saying, My Lord and my God.

And Jesus said to Thomas, Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed.

And that was the only reason that He did. He wasn't about to take it just on faith, on the say-so of somebody else. Because you have seen Me, you have believed.

Blessed are those who have not seen and yet shall believe. And you must understand when it comes to the verification of evidence, the establishment of fact, if it is historical fact that you are talking about, you are limited exclusively to the testimony of other reliable witnesses who have gone before.

You cannot replay the historical event and witness it for yourself. How do you know that Abraham Lincoln was shot to death in Ford Theater in Washington, D.C.

[9 : 27] in 1865? How do you know that? You weren't there. You haven't witnessed it. You didn't see it for yourself. But you believe it. Why do you believe it? Because the testimony of credible evidences is brought to bear upon the case and you would be a fool not to believe it.

You believe it on the basis of intelligent, credible testimony from those who were there. That's all you can do with any historical event that you did not personally witness.

when the disciples set about preaching this gospel and Paul began preaching this gospel, do you know what he appealed to?

Historical events that had already taken place that could not be repeated but were credible, were worthy of being believed.

how that Christ appeared to James and to John and the women at the tomb and then he appeared to the twelve.

[10 : 41] Then he appeared to above five hundred brethren at once. And Paul said, and they are, most of them are still alive.

You can go ask them. You can check with them. And last of all, he appeared unto me as one born out of due time. The evidence is overwhelming for anyone with an open mind to examine it.

There isn't any way that this could be construed as some kind of massive conspiracy designed to dupe millions of people into thinking that Jesus had been raised from the dead when in fact he had not.

Historical verification is always on the basis of eyewitness testimony. Now, we have some things today by way of technology.

The famous Magruder film clip caught in the very act the assassination of President John F. Kennedy in 1963 and anyone can get a copy of it and play it over.

[11 : 48] But years earlier, we didn't have that kind of capability. So, it is limited to eyewitness testimony. And when people tell you that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead and we get this from the Scriptures, we get this from God's Word, the Gospel simply is embraced on the basis of faith.

Faith comes by hearing. Hearing. And hearing by the Word of God. So, when the Word of God is preached, God expects it to be believed and taken at face value because He is a credible author and originator of the truth and information that He's setting forth.

You can believe it. That is walking by faith. You take what the Word of God says at face value. You believe it. You stand upon it.

You contend for it. You fight for it. You die for it. You live for it. Just because God said it, that's all the evidence you need. That is walking by faith.

The early Hebrews were not called upon to do that. Although there were many demonstrations of faith as elaborated in Hebrews chapter 11, yet in virtually every instance, God had given them some kind of visible, tangible, something or other to go on.

[13 : 20] He had manifested Himself to them through burning bushes, through quail falling from the sky, through manna from heaven, through the parting of the Red Sea, through water from a rock, all kinds of physical, visible manifestations.

But that is not the norm for today. I know many would prefer that it were. Many would say, well, if I could see those kinds of miracles, then I would believe.

Well, what about those who did see them when they were performed and didn't believe? What about them?

You see, belief is not a matter of a lack of evidence. Unbelief is a matter of a lack of will.

If you do not want to believe, it will be no problem at all finding reasons why you don't want to.

[14 : 29] If the heart is in a position of neutrality where you are open to truth, even though you admit you do not know it, you are open to it, you want to know the truth, then there is no question God will get that truth to you and you will be able to believe.

On the other hand, if someone's mind and heart is steeled against God's word, because, and here is the big item, because they want to maintain their own personal autonomy.

I don't want to surrender my will to anyone, not even to God. Well, then that's a different problem. Walking by faith simply means taking God at his word as opposed to requiring signs, miracles, healings, speaking in tongues, and everything else that goes along with it.

We believe it simply because God says so. And the difference that it makes is incredible. Now, that doesn't have anything to do with the message I want to bring you today. So, we left off last week.

Well, I take that back. It does have a lot to do with it, but it's not directly connected to it yet. I felt compelled to share that with you. I want you to come back, if you will, please, to Acts chapter 3 and let us pick up where we left off about the withdrawal of the kingdom opportunity to the nation of Israel.

[16 : 11] And we pointed out to you that in contrast to the typical position which says that the offer of the kingdom of heaven come to earth over which Jesus Christ would be the Messiah, that the opportunity for that being extended to the nation of Israel ended with the crucifixion of Christ.

That's the standard interpretation. I guess we would call that conventional wisdom or the majority point of view. And I don't have any difficulty understanding how people arrive at that.

And I must confess that for several years after I came to faith in Christ, that was the way I saw it too. And I didn't really see any reason to question it.

Because after all, when they say, when the people in the religious establishment, the leadership element of Israel, make it very clear, we will not have this man to rule over us, crucify him, crucify him, that sounds pretty final.

Especially when they go through with the act and crucify him. One would think, quite naturally, well, that's it for Israel. They had their chance, and they gave their final answer.

[17 : 34] But as I hastened to point out in our last session, I do not believe that was Israel's final answer. Because the graciousness of our God continued to tender this offer to a disobedient and rebellious nation, even after they committed the heinous crime of orchestrating a kangaroo trial and a fixed verdict, if you will, that saw our Lord Jesus crucified.

One would think that God would have more than every right to say, all right, that's it for Israel, that's the end. But he did not do that. And I do think that part of the reason he didn't was because Israel's Messiah, the very one who was dying in Israel's stead, and in your stead and mine, offered a dying prayer to his father, that the opportunity be extended to Israel in spite of what they were doing to him.

and he prayed, Father, forgive them. They know not what they do. I think the father did forgive them and extended to them another opportunity.

And this is the crux of the day of Pentecost in Acts chapter 2 and Peter's stirring sermon. We saw it repeated in chapter 3 where he says, God promised a Messiah to come and suffer for the sins of the world, and God has delivered on his part, and now your part is to respond to that.

You, the nation of Israel, have to decide what are you going to do in response to what your Messiah did for you in fulfilling his father's will and giving himself for your sin.

[19 : 34] God has done. Now it's up to you to repent. You people need to do a 180. You need to completely reverse yourself because you have been completely wrong.

You need to repent. You need to change your mind. You change your position about Jesus Christ from who you thought he was to who you know him to be now.

And you change your mind regarding the fact that the idea that you didn't think that God the father sent him to reverse yourself to where you now are convinced that the father sent him and that he came to seek and to save that which was lost.

You've got to reverse yourself from thinking you aren't lost to that you are lost. And that's why he came. Are you willing to change your mind in those areas?

And we know on the day of Pentecost there were 3,000 who did. Oh one other thing. Remember John the baptizer? When he came baptizing, preaching repentance for the remission of sins?

[20 : 47] And you, religious establishment, you dismissed John. You rejected him. You said he wasn't from one of your rabbinical schools. You didn't have anything to do with it.

You didn't appoint him. He wasn't from God. He was just a voice out in the wilderness. He was just a weirdo with a weird message, dressed in weird clothes and ate weird food. You rejected him.

You've got to reverse yourself about John too. Who he was, who sent him, and why he came. And 3,000 of them. Think of it this way.

3,000 Jews ate crow. Humble pie on the day of Pentecost.

3,000 were man enough and woman enough to say, you know what? We had it completely wrong.

[21 : 47] We really messed up royally. We rejected the very one God sent to be our Messiah. God. And to demonstrate their reversal, they submitted to John's baptism, which they earlier rejected.

And 3,000 of them were baptized with John's baptism. And this is all Jewish. Non-Jews have nothing whatever to do with this.

This is all Jewish. And it is in fulfillment of a Jewish prophecy given through the Jewish prophet Joel. It's a marvelous thing to make these connections.

I tell you, I cannot express the degree of appreciation that I developed in connection with just these simple things that I am sharing with you. In Acts chapter 3, Peter preached that secondary message, very similar to the one he preached on Pentecost.

It was not accompanied with the miraculous manifestations that it was. But I want you to notice what Israel's ongoing answer was. And by the way, this is very, very important.

[23 : 06] I need to point this out. Before John the Baptist ever came on the scene, during the 400 period, 400 years of silence between the Old Testament and the opening of the New, before John the Baptizer ever arrived on the scene, the religious establishment of Israel, the Sanhedrin, the religious shakers and movers of the nation of Israel, were corrupt, were debauched, depraved, every other uncomplimentary thing you can say about them, the religious establishment of Judaism and Israel, prior to the coming of John the Baptist on the scene, was abhorrent.

I mean, it was just terrible. No way, shape, or form did it honor God. So when John the Baptist came on the scene, there was a man sent from God whose name was John.

And when he came on the scene, the religious establishment was already in a rejection negative mode toward God and his truth.

That's why it was very predictable that they would reject anyone and anyone's message who really was from God. And John was.

And they were already out of sync with God when John came on the scene. That's why they rejected John. Then when Jesus announced, when Jesus was announced by John as the Messiah, all they did was transfer the negativity that they had directed toward John to Jesus.

[24 : 51] They rejected him also. So prior to the coming of John and Christ, they were negative toward God, had already rejected the Father, which led Jesus to say things like, these people, they honor us with their lips.

but their heart is far from me. They have all of the outward trappings of religiosity, but inwardly they are so foul and so corrupt and so far from God, it's unimaginable.

They were in a rejection mode with the Father before the Son ever came on the scene. And when the Son did come on the scene, they rejected, they transferred their rejection mode from the Father, from John to Jesus.

Now they are in a rejection mode of the Lord Jesus, the Messiah. And when you move into the book of Acts, after Jesus Christ is off the scene through the ascension, and Peter preaches his message in Acts 2, chapter 3, and Stephen, as we shall see, preaches his message in Acts chapter 7, they transfer their rejection mode from the Father to John, from Jesus to the Spirit.

And now they have rejected all free. Remember when Jesus made the statement, all manner of blasphemy shall be forgiven, but blasphemy against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, neither in this age nor in the age to come.

[26 : 35] That is significant. The nation of Israel rejected in order every member of the triune Godhead, the Father before Jesus came, Jesus when he came, the Spirit after Jesus ascended.

Their rejection is complete across the board. They've rejected the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. What's left? Nothing.

Nothing. That's the ultimate rejection. You can't go any further than that. And it sealed Israel's doom until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in.

And then God will take up unfinished business with the nation of Israel. We must hasten on. I want to go please to Acts chapter 3. And I want you to just look at verse 26, the last verse in the chapter.

You first, God raised up his servant and sent him to bless you by turning every one of you from your wicked ways. Now, look at their response.

[27 : 50] Forget the chapter division here. There wasn't one when Dr. Luke wrote this book, the book of Acts. There was no chapter division, and we ought not to have one there, but it's that way in our Bible, so we just have to live with it.

And as they were speaking to the people, that is, Peter and the apostles, the priests and the captain of the temple guard, and the Sadducees, who are these people?

Same religious establishment, same ones responsible for the crucifixion, same crowd, same 70 people. Now, we don't know that all 70 of them were there, but there was a good representation of them there.

They came upon them being greatly disturbed, because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead, and they laid hands on them and put them in jail until the next day.

Now, this is what you call a negative response. It is not too difficult to say they were not pleased with the message. They are still in a rejection mode.

[28 : 57] these are the people of whom the Lord said, all day long have I stretched out my arm to a disobedient and gainsaying people.

Boy, you guys are stubborn. You are really dug in to your stubbornness and your rejection. And I'll tell you what this is all about.

Don't think that it's just these Jewish people of this generation. This is an epidemic, endemic, systemic problem of humanity.

We are all like this. We don't want to surrender our autonomy. economy. We want to run the show. We want to be in charge.

We want to, it's my life and I want to live it as I please and I don't want anybody telling me what to do. We've all got that in us. Every one of us. And the one who thinks he doesn't has a problem that's compounded by deception.

[30 : 07] So, they're worse off than anybody. But this is rejection that just won't quit. Now, come over to chapter 6.

Acts chapter 6. And we read in verse... Oh, I just wish I had about four hours for this.

I just have to be selective. Let's just take a look at verse 7. We've got the ministry of Stephen here that's just incredible. Verse 7, the word of God kept on spreading.

The number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem. Now, notice where they are. They're still in Jerusalem. And a great...

Oh, look at this. A great many of the priests. These are Levitical priests. These are Jewish priests. We're becoming obedient to the faith.

[31 : 17] That simply means they were reversing themselves. It means that they were adding their number to the 3,000 who were saved on the day of Pentecost. They have come to see the light.

No doubt some of these people talking with them. Some of these priests are family members and their cousins and their relatives and their neighbors and they're talking and they're discussing all of this event. It's the topic of the day.

And Stephen, verse 8, full of grace and power, was performing great wonders and signs among the people. This is another evidence, in my thinking, why it seems to me that the opportunity for Israel remained open.

The door had not yet closed. It is evidenced, I think, by the continuing signs and miracles, because they were given for the benefit of who? Israel.

The Jews require a sign. God's giving them signs. God's giving them all kinds of reasons to believe. Stephen is working miracles and it's just incredible and nobody is denying it, but, you know, when you see these miracles, you've got to ask yourself the question, how do you do that?

[32 : 33] how was he able to do that? I know this man. I know this man. I've known him for years.

He has sat at the same spot in the temple begging for the last 30 years. Everybody knows him. And everybody knows he was born lame from his mother's womb, never stood on his two feet in his whole life, and now he's up walking, running, jumping up and down.

How did that happen? Who did this? What power? That's why the miracles were given. They were given to provoke people to answers, to examine, and to come to the conclusion.

Nicodemus came to. No man can do these miracles that thou doest except God be with him.

There is no other explanation. And that being the only logical conclusion, I just have to embrace him as my own.

[33 : 45] Can't reach any other conclusion. That's what miracles and signs were designed to do. And for some, it didn't work.

Not because the miracle wasn't genuine, but because the posture of the heart remained recalcitrant in a rejection mode.

I will not believe. And there were plenty of those. There were a lot of those. Had the evidence right in front of them.

Rejected it. And you know, one of the reasons, one of the reasons, and this gets back to this autonomy thing again. Once you recognize who is behind this, and you are confronted with the dilemma of what are you going to do?

Are you going to just lay aside your objections and lay aside your own ideas and your own so-called dreams and fantasies and embrace this truth?

[35 : 01] Or are you going to dig your heels in and say, I don't believe in you. You can't make me. And the reason people do that, listen to me now, this is really important.

The reason people do that is because they know where that is going to take them and they don't want to go there. They know that is going to mean for them a whole new life, a whole new value system.

A whole new agenda. A whole new everything. Any man be in Christ, he's a new creation. And they are too much in love with the old one.

Like the young fellow came to my office probably 20 years ago. He was sitting there telling me his tale of woe. I cannot believe that a young man in his early 20s was able to work so much misery into one human life in such a short period of time.

But I'm telling you it was one calamity, one disaster after another, one bad mistake, one bad judgment. I really screwed that up. I messed this up, joined that, that didn't work out. My life is a complete mess and on and on and on he went.

[36 : 16] And I said, well you know what? I said, I only have one answer for you. There's only one thing I can tell you. And that is, for starters, you need to make the most important decision you'll ever make in your life.

you need to put your faith and trust in Jesus Christ. Give yourself to him. He said, oh, I don't think I can do that.

I said, what do you mean you don't think you can do that? He said, well, I can't say this without laughing. He said, that messed up my whole life.

What do you say to somebody like that? That messed up my whole life. You've made such a wonderful thing of it up to this point, haven't you?

I don't know what he ever decided to do. I never saw him again. But this is where some people are when it comes to this issue of belief and unbelief. I want you to look at how they're handling Stephen.

[37 : 33] They don't know how to handle him. Same way with our Lord. They didn't know how to handle him. And do you know what their methodology becomes? Look, when you cannot answer a man's arguments, kill him.

You've got to get rid of him. Why? Because he represents a threat. He represents a threat to your security and your position. Like the Jews said when they conspired together, we have got to get rid of this man.

He's causing an uproar everywhere he goes. And if we allow this to go on, the Romans will come in and take away our place.

They will come in and to the chief priests and the Sanhedrin the Romans will say, you, you Jews, you chief priests, you Sanhedrin, you elders of the people, you're fired.

You're all fired. Clean out your desk and get out of here. You're not allowed in the temple anymore. You're not allowed in the palace anymore. Your pay is cut, all the rest of it. They had cushy jobs.

[38 : 45] They had a lot of prestige, a lot of influence, a lot of power, a lot of authority. That's all going to go down the tubes. And that's exactly what they were concerned about. So when you see yourself threatened like that and you cannot intelligently rebut a man's arguments, you have no good answers.

You can't think of any comebacks that are adequate and sufficient. So what are you going to do? Kill him. Simple as that.

Eliminate him. And that's exactly what they did with Jesus Christ. And that's exactly why they did it. But history repeats itself.

Look at this. Acts chapter 6. Stephen, full of grace, verse 8, and power was performing great wonders and signs among the people.

But, but, some men from what was called the synagogue of the freedmen, including both Cyrenians and Alexandrians and some from Cilicia and Asia, rose up and argued with Stephen.

[39 : 57] Is there anything wrong with that? No. No. There's nothing wrong with arguing. When you argue, all you do is muster your best case, you set forth your premises, you set forth your logic and your reasoning and your evidence, and you try to make a case for your position.

Nothing wrong with arguing. Christians ought to learn to argue. Christians ought not to quarrel, but we ought to argue. Husbands and wives ought to learn to argue.

And this doesn't mean tempers flare and you call one another names. It means that you make your case. You set forth your best reasons for taking the position that you take.

Arguing is an honorable thing. Everybody ought to learn to do it. But they were unable to cope. With the wisdom and the spirit with which he was speaking.

And I'm sure they got together and said, what are we going to do? You know what? This guy, this guy is really making us look bad.

[41 : 04] I mean, he's got all of these claims that he is making on behalf of Jesus of Nazareth and we don't have any comeback and we can't, we can't, our arguments won't hold up and when we try to debate this guy, it is so lopsided and so one-sided, it's almost as if he has all the truth and we don't have any.

Well, la-dee-da, that was precisely the case. And when you don't have any arguments and you don't have any comeback, you do look bad.

You look foolish. you look like if there's an audience looking on, their only conclusion is, hey, you guys, you don't have a case.

You know what you ought to do? You ought to join them. You ought to come over to their side. You don't have a case. Well, they didn't want to do that. That'd mess up their whole life.

So, we've got to be careful how we set this thing up. And verse 11 says, they secretly induced men to say, isn't it amazing how some people can be bought off with anything, you know?

[42 : 24] Throw a couple of shekels in their direction and they'll do anything you want. Incredible. Some people can be bought so cheaply. Hmm.

Wow. So sad. Secretly induced men to say, we have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God.

Hey, if we can pay somebody to say that and get at least two or three to do it because the law requires in the mouth of two or three witnesses shall the thing be established.

So, we'll just take up a little collection among ourselves and we'll find a couple of these ne'er-do-will these real bum type hangouts that have never worked a day in their life and they're always looking for a way to make a dishonest dollar.

We'll slip them a few shekels, get two or three of them to say, yeah, yeah, that's Stephen guy. Yeah, we heard him say that. We heard him blaspheme God and blaspheme Moses. What's the penalty for blasphemy?

[43 : 30] Death. If you're convicted of blasphemy in a Jewish court, they stone you to death. That's it. You're dead. So, they cook up this scheme, conspiracy against Stephen.

They stirred up the people, elders, scribes, they came upon him, dragged him away and brought him before the council. That's the Sanhedrin.

This is the official Jewish court. 70 people comprise it. The high priest presides over it. These are shakers and movers throughout Israel.

These are the most intelligent. These are the most wealthy. These are the most influential Jews in all of the area. No doubt Nicodemus was among them. No doubt. Joseph of Arimathea and several others made up this august body.

They put forward false witnesses in verse 13 who said, this man incessantly speaks against this holy place and the law. We have heard him say that this Nazarene Jesus will destroy this place and alter the customs which Moses handed down to it.

[44 : 45] Yeah, we heard him say it. We heard him say it in his own words. Didn't we, Mike? Didn't we, Joe? Didn't we? Yeah, yeah, yeah, that's what he said. That's what he said. Hmm.

Hmm. Hmm. Hmm. Hmm. Hmm. Hmm. If ever there was a kangaroo court, boy, this was it. So, they've got Stephen there before them.

And they asked a question in verse 1 of chapter 7. The high priest said, I didn't say so.

This is what you said. And Stephen would have made a great politician question.

Because you cannot get a politician to answer a question with yes or no. Can you, Jim? Can't be done. So, so Stephen says, well, and you know what he does?

[45 : 55] It's just a beautiful thing. He answers their question, but he isn't going to answer their question without making his point. And does he ever make a point?

He recounts the whole history of the nation of Israel and goes back almost 2,000 years to the call of Abraham and Moses up out of the land of Egypt, and he recounts the whole history of Israel, and what he does is he shows demonstration after demonstration after illustration of Israel's stubbornness and disobedience and rejection of God and his truth all throughout their history.

Stephen is recounting the history of Israel and saying to this present audience, and let me tell you something, fellows, it isn't pretty. It is sown with unbelief, rejection, rebellion against God and then he comes right down to the punchline to the end of his answer and he says, and let me tell you something, you, you men who are seated here before me, you are just like them.

You haven't changed from their modus operandi one bit. You're repeating the same attitude and the same murderous intent that they had.

Look at his conclusion. Come over to chapter seven and look, if you will, at verse 51.

[47 : 44] You men, you men who are stiff-necked. Do you know what a stiff neck means?

It means the head will not turn. The neck is stiff and the head will not be reoriented to any other position. It is locked in.

Stiff-necked. Uncircumcised in heart. Oh, they were circumcised. They were Jews. They were circumcised. They were all circumcised physically.

And he is saying as much as you know what, you can have the outward sign, physical circumcision, that you are a child of the covenant, doesn't mean a thing. Doesn't mean a thing.

You can be circumcised on the outside, but the condition of your heart inwardly is anything but. You are all, oh, look at this, uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit you are doing just as your fathers did.

[49 : 02] Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who had previously announced the coming of the righteous one whose betrayers and murderers you have now become.

And you who received the law as ordained by angels and yet did not keep it. Now when they heard this, I can see them looking at one another and nodding their heads and saying, that's it, that's it, kill him, take him.

That's exactly what they did. They began gnashing their teeth at him. This is anger that is fueled by demons themselves. They began gnashing their teeth at him and being full of the Holy Spirit, gazing intently into heaven, saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.

And he said, Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God. They cried out with a loud voice, covered their ears, they rushed upon him with one impulse.

When they had driven him out of the city, oh, you have to drive him out of the city. You know why? Because it would be against the law of Moses to execute within the city.

[50 : 29] Oh, we don't want to violate the law of Moses. Moses. So they drove him, dragged him, pushed him, shoved him outside the city.

When they got him out there, they began stoning him. The witnesses laid aside their robes at the feet of a young man named Saul. They went on stoning Stephen as he called upon the Lord and said, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.

Falling on his knees, he cried out with a loud voice. This is so touching and tremendous.

It is reminiscent of Father forgive them, they know not what they do. And Stephen said, Lord, do not hold this sin against them.

And having said this, he fell asleep. That's a biblical euphemism. He died. His spirit exited his body.

[51 : 43] He died from being stoned to death. Unbelief, hatred, are such ugly, virulent things.

The level of hatred here was just almost demonic, if not demonic. This is an irrational hatred. And there's a lot of irrational hatred going on in our world today.

It just, there's just no, it makes no sense, but it's going on anyway. And these ought to be really occasions of enlightenment for all of us.

This is the tragedy of the human heart. And do you realize, do you realize that these evil people who are, who have contrived this conspiracy and trumped up these charges against Stephen, manufactured all of these lies, and are hurling these stones to silence this man.

These are people for whom Christ died. Isn't that something? Isn't that something? To me, that just takes the grace of God and puts it so far above and out of reach.

[53 : 16] It's just marvelous. Father, we cannot begin to really understand what we've been talking about. And as weak as our grasp of it is, we know that yours is full and complete because you read every heart and every mind that was involved in this.

And we only see them from afar as your word gives us the information. Yet we know that this is part and parcel of humanity. We know that this kind of unbelief and this kind of potential for hatred exists in every human heart.

The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, incurable. and yet you have a care of love and devotion for the likes of people like us that we cannot begin to imagine.

We cannot deny it, but we are so grateful for it. Thank you for that inexpressible demonstration of love that you poured out on behalf of us on your own dear son.

And father, we pray if there is anyone here, man or woman, boy or girl, who has never come to the truth of embracing Jesus Christ as their savior, may they right now be willing to come to the end of themselves and see themselves as needy, lost, and undone, the one for whom Christ died.

[54 : 58] And may they even now in the quietness of their heart, right where they are, say, Lord Jesus, there is much about this that I don't understand, but I do understand that you love me and you gave yourself for me and the very least I can do is embrace you for having done so.

Lord Jesus, I want to give myself to you. I want to trust you and take you as my personal savior and I want you to do with me whatever you deem wise.

I want to be putty in your hands. This is my prayer. Dear friend, if you made that your prayer, tell somebody. Tell me.

I have some literature that would be very helpful to you and I'd love to spend some time with you in the scriptures and show you what God has provided for you in Christ. Thank you, Father, for this occasion.

Thank you for this truth and for that which will follow in Christ's name. Amen. You are dismissed.