

Stephen: Be Filled With the Spirit

We're going to be looking at our hero today is Stephen.

And many of you know the story of Stephen.

How many of you know about Stephen in the New Testament?

How many of you know?

All right, most of you in here have heard the story of Stephen and you know what happened to Stephen.

I told the Wednesday night crowd that I almost named this message this morning, Stephen, how to get stoned.

but I thought maybe it wasn't in good taste.

But I do want to talk with you about something that was so characteristic of Stephen's life, and that is that he was full of the Holy Spirit.

I heard about a woman who was driving an actual incident that happened.

It was reported a woman was driving down the road when her car finally just died.

It died on her, and she coasted over to the shoulder of

and tried to restart it.

It would not restart.

She tried, tried.

It would not restart.

Finally, she called a local mechanic and asked where he was and asked could he come and see what the problem was with her vehicle.

He did.

He showed up, and he looked under the hood, and it didn't take him long.

He came back within about five minutes.

He says, ma'am, he said, I know what the problem is.

She said, what?

He said, ma'am, you're just out of gas.

And she looked back at him, and she said to him, well, will it hurt if I drive the car without gas?

Well, I think a lot of believers are like this woman.

They're trying to drive their life without the spiritual gas that God has provided for them.

You see, God has given you the fuel that you need for your soul and your life that He's designed for you and designed to operate your life, and that is the Holy Spirit.

Now, it doesn't take long in the Christian life, I think you would agree, it doesn't take long in the Christian life to realize that you can't live for God in your own strength, that you have to have a power beyond yourself.

I've been, as part of my personal study, I've been studying back through the life of Moses, and one of the incidents that I most recall is the incident where he goes up on the mountain, and he comes down from the mountain, and the glory of God is upon him so greatly that the Bible says that he had to wear a veil.

You perhaps have read that story, and the reason he had to wear a veil is because the

It is said that those who would have looked upon him without the veil, just the reflected glory of God and presence of God on him would have blinded them.

And so he wore that veil.

But do you know he also wore that veil long after the glory had faded?

And he wore it because he didn't want the people to think that the presence of God had abandoned any of them.

Well, I think there are a lot of Christians today, and they have encountered the Lord.

They have experienced the closeness and the proximity to Christ that enables and empowers them to live for Him.

But over the time, it's like a veil has still remained there, and behind the veil, there's no longer the glow.

There's no longer that presence.

There is the acknowledgement that Christ is important.

There is the outward statements of how precious Jesus is.

But behind the veil of many of our lives, I'm afraid there is a lack of that glory.

The fated presence of God is no longer there.

We believe it.

We've experienced it.

But it's just not there any longer.

And so we live with this veil.

We say the right thing.

We go through the right motions and that sort of, but we're missing the dynamic that makes our life in Christ so important.

Charles Spurgeon said it this way.

He said, without the Spirit of God, we can do nothing.

He said, we're like ships without the wind.

We're like branches without sap.

And we're like coals without fire.

He said, without the Spirit, we are nothing.

we are empty.

One of my favorite characters, evangelical characters, is D.L.

Moody, and I've read a number of biographies about him, and I urge you to do the same over the years.

Very inspiring, but he was an uneducated man.

He never had a formal education, and

And he didn't speak very well.

He wasn't eloquent in that, but God used him.

God used him mightily throughout the world, and God used him to reach thousands of men and women for Christ.

And there was a group of British pastors who were planning a crusade in that era, and the name of D.L.

Moody came up as a possible preacher for their crusade.

And one of the British pastors said with some skepticism, he said, now, why do we need Mr. Moody?

He's unordained, he's uneducated, and he's inexperienced.

Besides, who does Mr. Moody think that he is?

Does he think that he has a monopoly on the Holy Spirit?

But in that meeting, a much wiser pastor simply replied, he had heard Moody preach.

And he said, here's the deal.

Mr. Moody doesn't have a monopoly on the Holy Spirit, but the Holy Spirit has a monopoly on Mr. Moody.

Well, that's the secret.

I really believe that is the secret to the effective Christian life, to being effective for God and working for God, not in our own strength, but in the fuel of the power of the Holy Spirit.

And in Scripture, we're commanded to be filled.

And in Christ, we're given the promise of His indwelling Spirit.

You understand the Bible says that if you are in Christ, the Spirit resides in you.

He is given to you, Paul said, as a seal.

The evidence that you are saved is that you are sealed by the Holy Spirit.

In fact, Paul said, if we have not the Spirit, we are not His.

We do not belong to Christ.

And so we have the Spirit, so the question is, are we accessing the indwelling power of the Spirit?

In other words, we can possess the Spirit of God, but not be possessed by the Spirit of God.

He can dwell in us, but not dwell or rule over us.

He can be resident, but not president of our lives.

And that's a distinction that makes a difference, how He rules, how He reigns, if we allow Him

to be the Lord of our life.

And so this is what characterized Stephen.

Now I want us to read our text in two ways this morning.

I want us to read from Acts 6 to begin with, and then we're going to move over to the next chapter and read just a few more verses.

If you are physically able to do so, I invite you to stand with me this morning.

If you're joining us by television or by live stream or radio, why don't you set your Krispy Kreme donut down and your coffee down?

And take a copy of God's Word and stand and follow along with us.

Beginning in verse 8 of chapter 6, the Scripture says, And Stephen, full of grace and power, was doing great wonders and signs among the people.

And then some of those who belonged to the synagogue of the freedmen, as it was called, and of the Cyrenians and the Alexandrians and those from Cilicia and Asia, rose up and disputed with Stephen."

Verse 2.

Verse 3.

And they set up false witnesses who said, This man never ceases to speak words against this holy place and the law.

For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and will change the customs of Moses delivered to us.

And gazing at him, all who sat in the council saw that his face was like the face of an angel.

That's called peace that passes all understanding.

And then it says, to begin chapter 7, it says, and the high priest said, are these things so?

And so Stephen answers, and for the next most of the passage of chapter 7, he preaches a message to them.

And then look at verse 51, if you will.

Chapter 7, he's bringing his message to a close.

And then he says this, you stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit as your fathers did.

so do you.

Now jump down to verse 54.

Now when they heard these things, they were enraged and they ground their teeth at him.

Can you get that picture in your mind?

But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God and

And he said, behold, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.

And they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together at him.

Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him.

And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul.

And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.

And falling to his knees, he cried out with a loud voice, Lord, do not hold this sin against them.

And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

Now, Father, we thank you for this hero of the faith, Stephen, who modeled so much for us of what it means to stand alone for you, but also to stand in the power and the

Lord, may it be so for us.

And I pray for any that are listening or watching or hearing my words this morning, that they will be your words and that you will use those words, Father, for so many who have lost the dynamic of living in the power of the Holy Spirit and the fullness of the Spirit.

And I pray that you will speak words of encouragement, but also, Father, conviction and challenge and transformation.

Father, use your word now.

We are listening.

You tell him that right now.

Say, Lord, I'm listening.

You say, Lord, I'm listening to you.

Father, we hear.

Speak in Jesus' name.

Amen.

Thank you.

You can be seated.

Now, we just this morning were involved in electing some deacons.

We'll do that in the second worship service a bit later on as well.

to select some deacons.

And you know, as I've said many times, the word deacon means servant.

That's the word.

It means to serve, to serve the church.

Our deacons are not administrators.

They don't administrate the church.

like some do, and that's up to, I guess, the individual church, but ours serve.

They understand that when they come on the deacon board, they have certain servant responsibilities, and they're phenomenal men.

But this ministry of the diaconate emerged from chapter 6 of the book of Acts.

That's where the first deacons were elected.

And as it would be, Stephen...

was one of the very first elected deacons.

You can see back in verse 6, it characterizes him among those who were elected.

In verse 5, it says he was a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit.

Now earlier it said, select for yourself men that are full of the Holy Spirit and full of faith.

But it distinctly separates Stephen out as a man

that is characterized by that very kind of existence and walk with God.

He was full of faith.

He was full of the Holy Spirit.

He was deeply devoted to Christ.

He was a deeply devoted deacon.

And he was the first recorded martyr in the New Testament.

This is the first martyr for their faith that is recorded in the New Testament.

In fact, he was overseen by a young religious zealot named Saul.

It says that, in other words, he was overseeing the process of the stoning.

And the witnesses, it says, laid their garments.

These who were those who were participating, but they were testifying by laying their garments at the feet of Paul that they agreed and that this man was blasphemous, that is Stephen.

And so they stoned him.

Saul witnessed this.

Ironically, Saul would later get saved and become Paul, the apostle.

He was there at this moment.

But what made Stephen such a remarkable man and a hero of the faith was that he was full of the Holy Spirit.

I said it a minute ago, all believers are commanded to be filled with the Spirit.

So Stephen is a model for us.

He's a model for deacons.

He's a model for pastors and staff.

Frankly, Stephen is a model for all believers, what it means to live in the power and the might of the Holy Spirit.

And from Stephen and from this passage, I think there are four things that we learn.

And I want to share them with you this morning.

The first is this.

The Spirit-filled miracles of Stephen are noted in verse 8 of chapter 6.

Look again there, if you will.

And Stephen, full of grace and power, by the way, that power is Holy Spirit power, full of grace and power, was doing great wonders and signs among the people.

Stephen was the first New Testament character, apart from Jesus and the apostles, that is described as a miracle worker.

Not only was he the first martyr, but he was the first, aside again from the apostles and from Jesus, he was the first layman that we see described as a worker of miracles.

And it's important to understand that Stephen wasn't doing signs and wonders in order to be filled with the Spirit.

Right?

Stephen was doing signs and wonders because he was filled with the Holy Spirit.

Several observations let me give you.

First is, I would say to you that the miracles of Stephen affirmed the operation of the church.

The miracles performed by Stephen helped...

helped give legitimacy to the new church.

It was young.

It was growing, massively growing.

And the miracles that were being performed were actually used by God to affirm the operation of the early church.

They had a purpose.

They helped substantiate what was going on.

Now, the enemy wanted to undermine the young church before it ever got on its feet.

And these wonders and signs that were being performed by the apostles and by Stephen were giving credibility to who Christ was and what the church was.

And the enemy knew that this was disaster for them, and so they mounted a campaign.

It says it was through the high priest and the councils and that sort of thing, but they were set on fire from hell.

And the whole battle was to undermine the work of God.

The miracles of Stephen, however, continue to affirm what God was doing, this new work called the church.

The second observation I would make is that the miracles of Stephen also attracted this consistent kind of opposition to the church.

And nothing has changed.

Here we are a little over 2,000 years later.

Nothing has changed about that, has it?

that where God is at work, opposition will spring forth.

The miracles that were performed by Stephen brought out the critics.

You could see them.

In fact, when they couldn't really identify anything to charge them with, they enlisted false witnesses.

We need you to say this.

We need you to say that.

That's literally what was going on.

We don't have a case.

against him, but we got to shut him up, and we got to shut him down, and the work that's going on.

And so they literally conspired.

There was a conspiracy against the work of the church and the work of God, and they brought in false witnesses to bear false testimony against the only way they thought they could possibly bring him down.

It attracted opposition.

So I would remind you that just as it was then, it is today.

Never be surprised.

at the amount of hostility that will manifest itself against the work of God, against the people of God.

If you live for God, all those who desire to live godly lives will suffer, the Scripture says.

If you serve God, you're going to find opposition.

It may come from family and friends.

One of the places that we think it would be most or least likely, sometimes this is the place of most opposition.

It might come from family and friends.

It may come from your employers.

It may come from some vain or empty philosophies that are being espoused in the culture.

Just don't be surprised when opposition arises.

When the work of God is being done, when miracles are occurring, and when lives are being snatched from hell, expect opposition.

A third observation I would make was not only that Stephen, the miracles affirmed the operation of the church and attracted opposition, but the miracles of Stephen were active and are active in the church today.

The miracles that they were doing then are not a thing that ceased or stopped.

There are some who have taught that after the church was established, the miracles went away.

Here's the problem with that.

The Bible never says that.

But there are some who are so afraid that Jesus may do something spectacular and they may not know how to rationally explain it.

They just simply say, those stopped after the apostles.

Those stopped after the church was established.

But the Scripture doesn't say that.

We're not told the specific miracles or kinds of miracles that Stephen did in

in these wonders and signs, but God didn't turn off miracles after he established the church.

Now, I still believe in miracles.

Do you believe in miracles?

You still believe God does miracles?

God still does miracles today, just like he did through Stephen.

But they're a work of the Spirit.

By the way, always run a red flag up when a person, you hear a person out there who says, I did this miracle.

Or when they take credit for, listen, the credit goes to God Almighty.

The credit goes to the Spirit of God.

And if you ever hear somebody out there saying, well, I did this miracle, or I gave this sign, you run a red flag up.

Because miracles are the work of God.

We are the instruments, but to God be the glory.

In fact, Jesus said this in John 14, 12, Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do, and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father.

I hope you understand what Jesus was saying there.

He said, you know what you've seen me do?

He said, those who believe in me, not just limited.

He wasn't limiting that to his audience in the moment, which was the apostles.

He would say, they'll do even greater works than me.

Why will they do that?

He said, because I'm going to the Father.

Do you know why that statement's important?

Because Jesus also said this, unless I go to the Father, I cannot send to you the Spirit.

It's imperative that I go to the Father so that the Comforter, the Paraclete, the Spirit can come to you and He will be in you.

I have been with you, but He will be in you.

That's why He says, and He adds that at the end of that verse in John 14, I'm going, you'll do greater works.

Why?

Because the Spirit will be residing in you.

I still believe in miracles.

I've seen some miracles.

The Lord's allowed me to be a part of when he's done a miracle.

I've seen it happen.

But listen, listen, don't ever say that he stopped doing miracles.

Because there's going to come a time in your life you're going to need a miracle.

If you're not already, you may be there today and say, I need a miracle.

I need God to move in an unusual way.

And do you know sometimes miracles are not all that dramatic, but they're still from God.

I heard about an alcoholic.

He became a believer.

And he was asked how he could possibly believe all the nonsense in the Bible about miracles.

And this infidel skeptic asked him, said to him, he said, you don't believe that Jesus changed water into wine, do you?

To which this new believer said, I sure do.

Because he said, I saw Jesus change whiskey into furniture in my house.

Well, it's a miracle, isn't it?

Vance Habner said this, too many times we miss so much because we live on the low level of the natural and the ordinary and the explainable.

We live where we can explain things and we leave no room, he said, for God to do that which is exceeding, abundant, above all that we ask or think.

So you see, Stephen teaches us that miracles are a work of the Spirit of God.

They're not a work of man.

And so it is a reminder to be filled with the Spirit.

I told you, you know, you're commanded to be filled with the Spirit.

Paul commands you to be filled with the Spirit.

Now listen, that means that you've got to do something to be filled with the Spirit.

You know what you have to do?

You have to surrender.

You have to surrender.

Here I am, God, fill me up.

Fill me up.

I surrender.

I surrender.

And so he teaches us to be filled with the Spirit.

Next, I want you to notice, second, the Spirit-filled message of Stephen.

Now, I told you in chapter 7, most of chapter 7 is the message that Stephen delivered.

But look at verse 10 back in chapter 6.

So there arises this contention, this dispute with Stephen.

People trying to debate him and to shut him down and to argue against what he was saying.

And look at verse 10.

But they could not withstand the wisdom and the spirit with which he was speaking.

His message was full of the Spirit of God.

It was a Spirit-filled message.

And then we see, as we looked a moment ago in verses 51 and 52 of chapter 7, it was a pretty strong message.

I mean, these were the religious power brokers of his day.

And he looks at them and he says, you're stiff-necked.

Now, what was his sermon about?

You know what his sermon about, chapter 7?

It was about the history of God and Israel.

And Stephen just recants.

Listen, he said, you know this, how God did this, and God did this, and God did this.

He brought you here.

He delivered you here.

Solomon built a temple.

He goes through a brief history of how God had cared for and delivered Israel.

And then he comes to verse 51 and says, you stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart.

You know all the law, but you've missed the message.

You've missed what God has done for you.

And they couldn't handle it.

Now, I want you to get something here.

The message of Stephen was so powerful and persuasive because it was anointed by the Holy Spirit.

It was anointed by the Spirit of God.

It says that being full of faith and grace and power and the Spirit, His message had upon it the Spirit of God.

Why was He so wise?

Why could they not refute what He had to say?

It was because the Spirit of God rested upon His message.

And those who opposed Him, they didn't have a legitimate response.

They wanted to come up with something, so they had to create something, as I said a moment ago.

Stephen's message was powerful.

It was effective because it was supernatural.

He was filled with the Spirit.

Look, people will ask me, and I hope it's true.

I believe it is.

People will ask me.

I prayed it this morning early.

I pray it every morning.

People will ask me, Pastor, what can we pray for you about?

I always say this.

I think I've said this every time I've been asked a question.

Pray that the Spirit of God will anoint me.

Pray that the Spirit of God will rest on me.

I pray it in the morning.

I hope you pray, Lord, fill me up with the Spirit today so I can walk in the power of the Spirit.

Because I want to tell you something.

You only have one other alternative.

If you don't walk in the power of the Spirit, you're going to walk in the power of the flesh.

Those are the two options you have.

There's not a third.

There's not an in-between.

It's either life in the Spirit or life in the flesh.

And these war against each other, Paul said, in Galatians, that the flesh fights the Spirit, and the Spirit fights the flesh.

And that's why every morning we should say, here I am, I surrender.

Fill me up with your Holy Spirit.

And you know what?

We leak.

You notice that about yourself?

You leak.

I leak.

I leak.

And so I may have to ask him several times, Lord, I know the Spirit resides, but I'm not sure the Spirit is presiding.

So Lord, fill me up with the Spirit.

Control.

I surrender again.

I surrender today.

I surrender again this afternoon.

I surrender tonight.

I surrender.

I surrender.

His message was supernatural.

And that's why it was so powerful.

And so what did they do?

They tried to destroy him.

But they didn't silence him, did they?

You know how we know they didn't silence him?

Because we're talking about him today.

2,000 years later, we're talking about Stephen and we're talking about him for his faithful stand.

They didn't silence him.

They killed him, but they didn't silence him.

The Bible says, though dead, they still speak.

And who knows what impact this had on Saul eventually and his falling under the conviction of the Spirit of God and giving his life to Christ and turning to Christ.

He was there.

He saw this.

And even today, he still speaks to us.

Sounds like the age we're living in, isn't it?

If you don't like the message, just kill the messenger.

We've seen that recently, haven't we?

In the assassination of Charlie Kirk, we saw it.

We see it frequently in vicious attacks on Christians and churches and organizations that stand for and proclaim the truth.

And so what did they do?

And they brought Stephen before the council and high priest.

And they twisted his message to suit the agenda that they wanted.

And he doesn't have anyone with him.

Stephen is all alone.

He's standing alone.

They set him up.

They set him up in order to try and shut him up.

All alone, by himself.

He's there.

And did you... You heard that...

You heard that?

And they said when they looked at him, his face was like that of an angel.

He was all alone before the muckety-mucks of religion, the councils of government.

He was all alone, but he had the peace of God.

Why?

Because he had the Spirit of God.

He was full of the Spirit of God.

And when you're full of the Spirit of God, you'll have the peace of God.

You won't always have an easy path.

And he's there all by himself.

I thought about when I was studying, preparing this message, I thought about that statement with the Apostle Paul where Paul said, at my first defense, no one stood with me.

What a lonely statement.

But then he amends it and he says, but God was with me.

It's just like this for Stephen.

He's there and he's all alone.

He's all alone.

but God was with him.

And he had the peace and the presence of the Spirit of God in the midst of that, in the midst of the movers and the shakers.

And he wasn't ashamed.

He wasn't afraid to stand for the truth.

I heard a story about a little boy who had a horse.

It was an old horse, a

kind of old swayback.

You've seen them, you know, you know what I'm talking about, an old swayback horse.

And he loved that horse.

He loved that horse.

And there was an older gentleman who saw him and saw him caring for his horse and saw how rickety that old horse was.

And he said, son, he said, he said, tell me about your horse.

And the little boy said, I love my horse.

And the man said, well, well, he said, son, can your horse run fast?

Kind of

making fun of it.

Can your horse run fast?

And the little boy straightened up and he said, no, sir, he can't run fast, but he can stand fast.

I want to tell you, Stephen stood fast even though he was alone.

Listen to me.

You and I are going to have to teach our children and our grandchildren to stand alone against the onslaught of paganism in this culture and the onslaught of immorality and the onslaught of relativism and postmodernism and any ism you want to put in there, and few of them are good.

And we're going to have to teach our kids to stand alone because one of the things that the devil does is he likes to try to divide people.

By the way, that's why it's so important that we unite as brothers and sisters, that we be strong.

The devil will always try to divide because that's how he can conquer.

You know, we're told that when a wolf wants to attack a flock of sheep, what it does is it tries to separate them.

Because if it can scatter them, it can attack individually, right?

It can take them apart by scattering them.

And that's what the devil loves to do.

We're going to have to do that.

I'm praying for my grandsons, Cooper and Bodie.

I pray for them.

I pray for them every day.

I pray for the Spirit of God to rest on them.

I pray that they will stand alone for God if they must.

I hope they never have to be put in that.

But if they are, I want them to stand alone.

And I pray for this church.

that God will keep us united, but that if we must stand alone, even as a congregation, that if we have to stand alone, we will stand alone.

Now look, it's easy to stand for God when you sit in a place like this that's

full of hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of believers.

And when you're a part of a church of thousands, we have thousands of members, and you're part of that.

And it's easy to stand strong when we are in places like this.

But Stephen didn't have hundreds and hundreds of believers that were like-minded people that were around him.

But I'll tell you, he had something that enabled him to stand alone.

He had the fullness of the Holy Spirit.

He had the supernatural power from God to stand alone in the hour when he most needed it.

And it's the same enabling power that you and I need to stand courageously without flinching and without compromise when those moments come in our life.

Now, he didn't get delivered from the trouble he was facing.

He was stoned to death.

He was full of the Holy Spirit.

He didn't get delivered.

He was stoned to death.

I think Stephen remembered the words of Jesus when Jesus said, do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul.

Rather, fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

He didn't get delivered.

Listen, being full of the Spirit doesn't mean you'll get out of every issue or problem or difficulty that you face.

It may get you into some.

When Paul got saved, do you know what Ananias, the message God gave to Ananias about Paul?

He said, I'm going to show him what great things he must suffer for my name's sake.

And before Paul died, you remember what he said?

He said, I'm already being poured out as a drink offering.

I'm already being poured out.

And he had a track record.

Look, he was a bad dude before he got saved.

But after he got saved, he got a dose of some of the things he had dished out.

Now you say, was God doing that on purpose?

No.

No.

But the point is, listen, because you're saved and if you're full of the Holy Spirit, it doesn't exempt you from difficulty.

Stephen, again, was stoned to death.

So here's what we have.

We have the Spirit-filled miracles and we have the Spirit-filled message of Stephen.

But here's the third thing that I want you to get.

We have the Spirit-filled manifestation of Stephen.

Verses 55 and 56 in our text say, Behold, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing.

Stephen suddenly looks up and he says, Look, I see the heavens have been opened and I see the Son of Man standing there.

This manifestation of God before him.

The setting changes from the difficulty of the world to the glorious entry into the kingdom of God.

And there's something interesting here in our text.

This is one of the few places in Scripture where we see Jesus standing by the side of the Father.

In almost all of the other passages or references to Jesus near the Father, it talks about Him being seated at the right hand of God the Father.

But this is one of the few places, Daniel 7 is also a place there, where we see Jesus standing by

At the right hand of God.

And scholars are mixed.

Some say that this represents Jesus standing in the role of judge.

He is standing there as he was in the book of Daniel chapter 7.

And he is looking at those who are committing this heinous act.

And it is an act of judgment.

I see what you're doing to my servant.

Some say that's what the standing meant.

Some believe that Jesus is standing because he's about to welcome the first martyr.
into heaven.

It may be.

But whatever the case, Stephen, being full of the Holy Spirit, was allowed to see this glorious manifestation of God before his very eyes as he left this world for the next.

And you know what?

Jesus was right there with him the whole time.

And I want to give you just one primary idea or central idea from this point.

And that is this.

Stephen saw what no one else could see.

No one around him could see this.

He saw what no one else could see because he was full of the Holy Spirit.

Listen, there is no indication that anyone could see any of this.

Anything that was going on in the heavenlies.

Because you see, it requires heavenly vision.

Paul prayed in Ephesians 1, 18, having the eyes of your hearts.

He prayed for the believers in Ephesus that their hearts would be enlightened and the eyes of their heart, their spiritual eyes would be opened so that they could see him who had called them and the riches of his glory and glorious inheritance.

Why did he pray that?

Why did Paul pray that?

He prayed that because only, listen, only with spiritual vision can you get a glimpse of heavenly glory.

Only with spiritual vision, with spiritual eyes, can you get a glimpse of heavenly glory.

You see, Stephen understood in that moment, he understood as he looked up, there's something bigger going on and it's not my stoning.

There's something more.

There's something more.

And he understood that.

If you want to see, listen, the supernatural be filled with the Holy Spirit.

But there's one final thing I give you this morning that I want you to get.

And that is, I want you to notice the Spirit-filled martyrdom of Stephen.

The Spirit-filled martyrdom of Stephen, verses 59 and 62.

as they were stoning Stephen, notice what he does.

He sounds like the Lord Jesus.

He said, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.

And then he fell down on his knees and he cried out in the midst of being stoned to death.

He cried out, Lord, don't lay this charge against them.

They don't understand what they're doing.

He had a good model.

He had learned from the right model.

The Holy Spirit in him helped testify just like Christ did in that moment.

Listen, I hope that you never have to die as a martyr.

We would have never even talked about this decades ago.

When I first got in the ministry, we would have never had to talk about it.

But I want to tell you, you could.

You might one day have to stand for your faith, and it may cost you.

I hope you never have to.

I hope you never have to die.

But if you do, do so like Stephen.

How?

Full of the Holy Spirit and full of faith.

Listen, Stephen didn't die for his faith.

Now hang on.

Stephen didn't die for his faith.

Stephen died with his faith.

Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.

There was not an ounce of doubt.

He didn't die for his faith.

Stephen died with his faith.

Now, you know, we sometimes get the idea that being full of the Holy Spirit just means, and full of faith, it means I won't have to face any kind of suffering like this.

It is a notion that great faith will get you out of suffering.

But friend, listen, faith doesn't get you out of suffering.

Faith doesn't get you out of difficulty.

Faith gets you through difficulty.

Faith gets you through suffering.

Think about Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

Faith did not get them out of the fiery furnace.

They said this, we know that our God can deliver us, but if He doesn't, we're not going to bow to any God but the God.

Faith didn't get them out of the furnace.

Faith got them through the furnace.

I like what Adrian Rogers said some years ago.

He said, some of us get the idea that if we take a stand for Christ, then somehow God is going to deliver us and we will not suffer.

No, I'm telling you that it costs to serve Jesus.

It costs every day.

It costs every step of the way.

It costs Stephen his life.

And if you're looking for a cheap way, an easy way, or a lazy way to serve God, then forget it.

And friends, I say to you this morning, spirit-filled living is not about having faith to escape.

Spirit-filled living is about having faith to endure.

Hebrews 11, you know the nickname of that chapter, the Hall of Fame of Faith.

It talks about all the heroes of the faith.

I thought about when I was working on this series, and though I've preached already about several of those characters, I thought about just taking that chapter and just preaching through each one of those.

The Hall of Fame of Faith and just preach through.

But I thought, God, there's so many others.

And the passage actually says that.

It says in verse 32 of chapter 11, And what more shall I say?

For time would fail me of it.

This is what the writer of chapter 11 of Hebrews says.

He says there's so many.

He's talked about the patriarchs.

He's talked about all the victories and the successes they have.

And then he says, and there's so much more I could say.

He said there's so many more stories.

The writer's coming to the end of his message.

He's not finished yet.

Does that sound familiar?

He's already talked about all these heroes of the faith, and he says there's just many more.

I haven't even scratched the surface, he says.

But time won't permit it.

They're victories.

They're conquests.

But then he wraps the chapter up with the most intriguing part of that chapter to me.

Listen to what he says in verses 36 and 38.

And then there were others.

who suffered mocking and flogging and even chains and imprisonment.

They were stoned.

They were sawn in two.

They were killed with a sword.

They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated,

Of whom the world was not worthy.

Wandering about in deserts and mountains and in dens and caves of the earth.

These are the others.

We think of the patriarchs and those who had such great stories of their faith.

But did you just get that?

And he said, then there were these others.

I don't have time to tell you about all of them.

There are so many of them.

And they suffered.

And you heard the kind of suffering they went through.

This is our legacy.

These people all died the same way the other ones who had all the victories.

By faith, they endured all of these things.

They wandered about.

They lived in caves.

He said they were sawn in two, killed by the wild.

All of these things.

And he says they are just as much

a part of the Hall of Fame of faith, is all the ones we like to point to.

We don't even know all their names, but they're heroes of the faith.

They weren't characterized by all the great successes and victories.

They were characterized by their suffering.

But it was their faith that carried them through.

They didn't, their faith didn't give them escape.

It gave them endurance.

And, you know, he says they were stoned.

I think one of those that the writer is talking about is Stephen.

The man that was full of faith and full of the Spirit of God.

Listen, the big question is not do you have faith enough to be delivered and then praise God.

The big question is, do you have faith enough to not be delivered and still praise God?

That is spirit-filled faith.

Listen, it's rough out there, isn't it?

And if like Stephen, you're going to stand up, you're going to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

If, like Stephen, you're going to take your stand out there, you're going to stand up for truth, you're going to have to be filled up with the Spirit of God.

You're going to have to stand up.

There is a story.

As I was working on this message, I came across about years ago, decades ago, at a big Coliseum meeting.

there was a gathering to hear a world-renowned atheist, infidel.

And he was attacking Christianity.

His whole speech was about Christianity and why it couldn't be trusted or couldn't be believed.

And he went through that and he was a very eloquent speaker and he made his case and he went on for, I don't know, a long time.

And finally, toward the close of the evening, he said, Now, is there anybody here in this audience...

that wants to strike a blow for Christ after that.

There was silence in this audience, silence.

And then suddenly in the balcony, a 13-year-old girl stood up.

And she began to sing.

Stand up.

Stand up for Jesus.

You soldiers of the cross.

Lift high his royal banner.

It must not suffer loss.

From victory unto victory.

His army shall He lead, Till every foe is vanquished, And Christ is Lord indeed.

Stand up, stand up for Jesus, Stand in His strength alone,

The arm of flesh will fail you.

You dare not trust your own.

Put on the gospel armor.

Each piece put on with prayer.

Where duty calls or danger, be never wanting there.

Stand up, stand up for Jesus, the strife will not be long.

This day the noise of battle, the next the victor's song.

To those who vanquish evil, a crown of life shall be.

They with the King of glory shall reign eternally.

May it be so.

Father, let us stand.

in the power and the might of your Holy Spirit.

Father, let us learn from Stephen that without the Spirit, we have no power.

I pray for those this morning that have never trusted you, that they'll understand that they must begin right there and give their heart, give their life to you.

For those, Father, who have been wearing a veil that no longer covered the glory because the glory is faded, I pray that today, afresh, they'll tap into the power of the Spirit that already rests inside them.

We pray in Jesus' name.

Amen.