

Sermon Title: Best Last Words, Ever  
Scripture Text: Acts 7:1-16 (Acts #15)

Speaker: Jim Harris  
Date: 5-21-23

---

Acts Chapter 7 is our venue for this morning; we are going to begin the chapter, anyway.

We pay special attention to the last words that someone speaks, and rightly so. When a person knows that death is on the doorstep, trivial things get ignored, and what matters most is what tends to come out of a person's mind at that moment: What and who the person loves gets their primary attention. Often a person's final words express forgiveness for wrongs done to them, and/or asking for forgiveness and seeking reconciliation of damaged relationships. For a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, last words often include a plea to family and friends to turn to Christ for eternal life. That formal document, a person's "Last Will and Testament," says what is most important to them; and we consider that so important, it's *legally binding*—you have to do what that document says.

We are not going to be reading a legal document from the apostolic associate named Stephen—he was also one of the first deacons—but we are going to see his *spectacularly-crafted* last words. And I submit to you that Acts Chapter 7 is arguably the "Best Last Words, Ever!" I don't think anybody is *ever* going to top this!

This chapter is 60 verses long, and it contains nothing less than a summary of the Old Testament; it just tumbled out over his lips on the last day he was on Earth. It's taking all the restraint that I can muster, as I keep looking at this chapter, to resist the temptation to take you to every passage that Stephen alluded to in this unprecedented spontaneous address on the final day of his earthly life, but resist I will—because we want to finish Acts before Jesus comes! But I don't want to minimize the fact that this all came out in one spontaneous statement of the work of God leading up to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ; so it is *meant* to be studied as a unit. We are not going to do the whole chapter today, though.

I was curious, just what that might take. I was remembering the year at the Shepherd's Conference when Pastor Mark Dever was assigned to preach on Psalm 119, and he read the entire text before he began preaching; it's only 176 verses. I'm not going to do that to you, and this is only 60 verses. I read it out loud to myself this week, and found out that it took me 7 minutes and 45 seconds just to *read* through it, let alone preach on it. It is 1,457 words in the New American Standard Bible. Even resisting all of those endless side-trips, we are going to take a couple or three bites to get through this, and we need to spend the time appropriately to get the most from it.

So for today, we are going to just ask: Who Is Stephen? Why Is He On Trial? And then we will look at the beginning of Chapter 7: The Answers Begin In Genesis.

I want you to keep this in perspective: Stephen was used by God in a unique way at a unique time. *You* are never going to be able to do what Stephen did. You cannot, as he did, perform "great wonders and signs" (Acts 6:8). You cannot get arrested by the Sanhedrin; we don't have one around here. And it is quite unlikely that you are going to be facing death by stoning at the hands of a bunch of zealous, self-righteous religious hypocrites.

Sermon Title: Best Last Words, Ever  
Scripture Text: Acts 7:1-16 (Acts #15)

Speaker: Jim Harris  
Date: 5-21-23

---

But, that said, understand *why* this is recorded in the Bible. Beyond the role of Stephen in the development of the early church, that I'll comment on a little bit today and more next time, this is here *for you*.

As we begin to look at this long chapter, don't forget the famous words of Second Timothy 3:16-17—"All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work." (NASB-1995—and throughout, unless otherwise noted)

So as we look at Stephen's words, make sure you receive this with an attitude that this is "profitable." It is *useful* for you; it *should* help you "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 3:18). When we get to the end of this chapter, I don't want you to just be saying, "Wow! Stephen was amazing!" You're right; he *was*. But I want us to be asking ourselves, "What can *I* learn from this?"

This is here for your "teaching." God provided it for us so that we might know the kinds of things that *we* should learn in order to be as useful to Him as possible, and to speak as accurately as possible *for* Him (cf. 2 Tim. 2:15). Stephen is a *tremendous* example to learn from (Rom. 15:4).

And this is also here for your "reproof." I make no apology: I *urge you* to be *humbled* by seeing what Stephen knew by heart (Prov. 22:18), and I urge you to be motivated to whittle away at steadily becoming *more like him* (cf. Acts 18:24).

This is also here for your "correction." As you see what poured out of Stephen's mouth as he faced martyrdom that very day, let it provoke you to new and better patterns in your own life.

You see, this is here for your "training in righteousness."

My friends, there is no excuse—*no excuse*—for any of us to know less than Stephen knew about God's Word. He didn't have his own copy of it! To study God's Word, he had to go to a synagogue or to the Temple, *where the scrolls were*—like, you can only study this in the library! He had to learn it at his own sacrifice. He did not have it on his I-phone! He didn't have it ever before him. But *he took the time to know it*; and all his study, all of his memorization, paid off—not only on the day of his death, but *now* it's in God's Word for every generation of believers since then to profit from it!

You put all that together, and understand: This is here to play a part in *our* lives, to make us "equipped for every good work."

Alright, the star of this chapter is Stephen. Who Is Stephen?

Well, he first appears in the previous chapter—Chapter 6, Verse 5—where he is first named on the list of the seven men that were chosen as what we believe were the first deacons of the first church anywhere in the world.

Sermon Title: Best Last Words, Ever  
Scripture Text: Acts 7:1-16 (Acts #15)

Speaker: Jim Harris  
Date: 5-21-23

---

What else do we know about him? Background-wise, we have no record of him, other than this appearance in the Book of Acts. But just from what is said in Acts 6 and Acts 7, we can put together Stephen's resumé; we know a number of things about him.

We know that Stephen had a "good reputation" (6:3). When the Apostles asked the congregation, "You select some people who can help us with this ministry to widows," his name immediately bubbled up; that's an indication of his reputation.

And as we noted last week: Elders and deacons are required to not only have a solid testimony of faith in Christ, but First Timothy Chapter 3, Verse 7, says an elder or deacon "must have a good reputation with those outside the church, so that he will not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil." So we know this guy had a good reputation—among the believers, and others as well.

Further, in Acts Chapter 6, Verse 5, "Stephen" is described as "a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit." That means that Stephen's actions were under the control of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 5:18)—and he hadn't even read Galatians Chapter 5, which describes the "fruit" of the Holy Spirit (vss. 22-23); it just oozed through him, and he consistently put his faith into practice: he *acted* on the basis of what he believed (cf. Gal. 5:6b; Jas. 2:26).

Three verses later—Chapter 6, Verse 8—he is described as "Stephen, full of grace and power, was performing great wonders and signs among the people." Two more factors that controlled how Stephen lived and spoke are "grace" and "power." He understood *he* had no power, but he knew the God who was the Creator of the Universe! He acted on the basis of God's "power" (Eph. 3:16), but also "grace." People who have received the grace of God become conduits of grace; they become *gracious* people (Matt. 5:7, 44-45). I always say, too: People who are *forgiven* become *forgiving* people (Eph. 4:32). You begin to mimic that which is of God in you, and what controls you (Lk. 6:35-36).

Add to that the fact that not only was Stephen recognized by fellow *believers* in his congregation, based upon his reputation, he was also approved by the Apostles. When you're in the First Church of Anywhere, you can't get any higher accreditation than that!

And that is a pattern to follow. You should be serving in a way, in harmony with the rest of the believers in the church, that you understand you have the approval of your elders; that's the right way for us to work together.

And *I* would add that another implication of what is here is that Stephen was obviously willing to go above and beyond what was asked of him. Remember, he was recruited and he was challenged and he was commissioned to help with a weakness that had been exposed in the delivery of the "daily food" service to "widows" (6:1); and before long, he's not only serving tables, God is using him to do miracles and to proclaim His Word, just as the Apostles did.

And as we work through Acts 7, I think you are going to see that it's pretty obvious: Stephen—who probably knew about this guy from his studies—also followed the example of Ezra.

Sermon Title: Best Last Words, Ever  
Scripture Text: Acts 7:1-16 (Acts #15)

Speaker: Jim Harris  
Date: 5-21-23

---

Look at Ezra Chapter 7, Verse 10. Ezra, a man that God used in a great revival when Israel came back from captivity. Ezra 7:10 says: "For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the Lord and to practice it, and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel." He had filled his heart with God's Word. He understood it, and he lived by it.

Now, here's a spoiler alert: Stephen dies, right at the end of this chapter. It's sad; it should make you grieve. But that's not the whole story. When we see the end of *this* chapter—Chapter 7—and we start in to Chapter 8, you are going to see that in the plan of God, God used Stephen's martyrdom as the catalyst to propel many Christians out from Jerusalem (vss. 1, 4; cf. 8:4; 11:19). And that was a necessary step in the plan for spreading the Gospel *not only* in "Jerusalem" but also in "Judea," the surrounding area; and then to "Samaria," as we are going to see in Chapter 8; and then to "the remotest part of the earth" (Acts 1:8), which is what the last half of Acts is all dedicated to.

Stephen gets this much ink in Chapters 6 and 7 because his story is *pivotal* in the plan of God (cf. Acts 22:20). Quite a man! A worthy example.

Next, we want to look at: Why Is He On Trial?

We need to circle back one more time; I know I've read this passage both of the last two visits to the Book of Acts, but we need to see it set the scene for Chapter 7.

Stephen had been enabled to perform apostolic miracles (2 Cor. 12:12; cf. Heb. 2:4). Then the leaders of the Jews that hated Jesus began trying to discuss and debate and reason with them, and they were losing *all* the arguments.

So Acts Chapter 6, Verses 11 through 14, says this: "Then they secretly induced men to say, 'We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God.' And they stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes, and they came up to him and dragged him away and brought him before the Council. They put forward false witnesses who said, 'This man incessantly speaks against this holy place and the Law; for we have heard him say that this Nazarene, Jesus, will destroy this place and alter the customs which Moses handed down to us.' "

Did Stephen say anything wrong or bad about "Moses" or about "God"? No! You'll see exactly the opposite, when he speaks. Did he speak against the Temple? No! Did he disparage the "Law"? No! Did he "say" Jesus would "destroy" the Temple? No! Did he say that Jesus would "alter the customs" of the Temple? No!

So, what provoked all this? Well, in light of the miracles that they could not refute, and the inability of the Jewish leaders to "cope with the wisdom" and the grace and the winsomeness and the power of Stephen, they did everything they could to create a riot—stirred up the people, stirred up the rest of the Sanhedrin, and they put forth lying false witnesses to speak their party line and to fan the flames of hatred focused on Stephen.

So let's get into the chapter. We'll at least get started today. The final point is: The Answers Begin In Genesis.

Sermon Title: Best Last Words, Ever  
Scripture Text: Acts 7:1-16 (Acts #15)

Speaker: Jim Harris  
Date: 5-21-23

---

It wasn't just that nice guy from Australia, Ken Ham, who was the first to recognize that the answers to the most important questions begin with the Book of Genesis. You will marvel at what Stephen says right from the start.

Now, there's one of those completely irrational chapter divisions at the end of Chapter 6 and the beginning of Chapter 7—same scene, same people, same place, same subject, same day. Chapter 7, Verse 1, says: "The high priest said, 'Are these things so?' "

Remember, they dragged him before "the Council" (Acts 5:21; 6:15); that refers to the Sanhedrin, the group of "chief priests" that were kind of the governing entity, under Rome, of Israel (Matt. 21:23; 26:59; Acts 9:14, 21; 22:30). The Sanhedrin had a special place, adjunct to the Temple; they sat in a large circle, and anybody that was on trial was brought right into the middle of it so they were surrounded by their accusers, who could pepper them with questions.

And "the high priest" simply "said, 'Are these things so?' " Well, "these things" what? "Are you 'blaspheming Moses and God'? Do you demean the Temple? Do you disparage the Law of Moses? Do you say Jesus will destroy the Temple? Do you say that Jesus wants to 'alter the customs' of the Temple?"

*Every one* of those accusations against Stephen was *patently false!* This was *not* an investigation seeking to find the truth; this was a lynching party. It was driven by religious hypocrites of the *highest* order. They claimed to speak for God (cf. Matt. 23:2), and yet they were willing to kill those who believe in the Son of God and preach His Gospel, *just* as they had killed the Son of God Himself (cf. Jn. 16:2).

So in Chapter 7, Verse 2, we get to the words of Stephen: "And he said, 'Hear me, brethren and fathers! The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran.' "

"Hear me"—that's an interesting way to begin it. It's a formal thing. It's another call to the enemies of Christ to come and listen. It was like when Peter said, in Chapter 2, "Men of Judea, listen to me! Here's what is going on!"; or when he said, in Chapter 3, "Men of Israel"; or when he said, in Chapter 4, "Rulers and elders of the people." The Christians *always* spoke respectfully, honoring the titles and the positions and the traditions around them, even when the audience was very hostile (2 Tim. 2:24-25).

Stephen's accusers didn't show him the *least* respect; they *forcibly dragged him* into this interrogation. But *he* addresses them with respect; he calls them "brethren and fathers." He calls them "brethren" to emphasize: "Guys, *I'm a Jew!* I'm with you! Let's go look at what the Word of God to us actually says." And he calls that group "fathers" because he is respecting the traditions of the Temple and the priesthood, as well as the Scriptures. He is being respectful.

His accusers have already brought up Jesus. The already made these ridiculous accusations against him. And so, what does he start out with? "The God of glory," "Abraham," "Mesopotamia," and "Haran."

Sermon Title: Best Last Words, Ever  
Scripture Text: Acts 7:1-16 (Acts #15)

Speaker: Jim Harris  
Date: 5-21-23

---

And they could have been saying, "*What?* We didn't bring you here to give us a history lesson!" But they had already brought up Jesus, and so what Stephen does is *absolutely brilliant*: He goes back to *Abraham*! He *knows* that the answers to the most important questions *begin* in Genesis.

Now, without looking at your Bible, do *you* know where to find Abraham going to Haran in your Bible? Okay, it's Genesis Chapter 11. I'll give you the answer so I don't lose you the rest of the morning. As we have been learning in our daily e-mail studies: From Genesis Chapter 12, Abraham becomes the central figure in Genesis for about, roughly ten chapters.

So, "The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran"—and then, Verse 3—"and said to him, 'Leave your country and your relatives, and come into the land that I will show you.' "

Now, you see that in the version I'm showing you, that's in all-caps; that's the New American Standard custom for showing that this is a direct quote from the Old Testament.

That quote is from Genesis 12:1. And again, I emphasize: It's *brilliant*! Stephen preached Christ. He did miracles in the name of Christ. The Gospel is all about Christ. But when he begins his defense, he backs up to *Abraham* because there is *context* that needs to be understood (cf. Gal. 3:16).

Jesus did not just appear from *nowhere*! He didn't come along and build up His resumé so that He could run for office. He came according to the plan of God, "in the fullness of time" (Gal. 4:4; Eph. 1:10), *exactly* when God wanted Him there! It is *one seamless plan of redemption*, and you *cannot possibly* understand Jesus if you don't understand *why* He came, and that this is part of an *eternal* plan of God (2 Tim. 1:9; cf. Lk. 24:27; Jn. 5:39; Acts 24:14; 26:22; Rev. 13:8; 17:8).

It was first announced right after the Fall, in Genesis Chapter 3, when God promised a Redeemer (vs. 15); and then *all* the promises of God fan out from the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen. 12:2-3; 15:12-20; cf. Gal. 3:29). That's the covenant that is the grandfather of all the covenants in the Bible (Gen. 17:1-8; Ps. 105:9-10; Acts 3:25).

Then, Acts Chapter 7, Verses 4 and 5—"Then he left the land of the Chaldeans and settled in Haran. From there, after his father died, God had him move to this country in which you are now living. But He gave him no inheritance in it, not even a foot of ground, and yet, even when he had no child, He promised that He would give it to him"—the land—"as a possession, and to his descendants after him."

As I said before, this is *brilliant*. Stephen tells the story of the plan of God. It is sprinkled with Old Testament quotes, but a lot of it is Stephen summarizing the narrative *from memory*. And I urge you to follow Stephen's example: Make it your long-range plan, and your regular habit, to *continually* fill in your understanding of the mighty works of God, as revealed in the Bible (Ps. 111:2). And you won't find that on television or on Twitter, or any of the other things that would distract us. He filled his mind with the right things.

Sermon Title: Best Last Words, Ever  
Scripture Text: Acts 7:1-16 (Acts #15)

Speaker: Jim Harris  
Date: 5-21-23

---

Stephen could both *quote* the Scripture, and—in a sense, more remarkably, because you can learn to memorize something by rote, and kind of have a "play" button, and you can recite a verse, but it is something else to be able to *summarize* the whole thing, to understand the "big picture."

This is a good time for me to invite you to get in on the next session of our Sunday School class devoted to the Survey of the Bible. I think it's coming again in July. We do it for a month, and then take a few months off, and do it for a month. You will get a survey—an overview—of every single book of the Bible, *and* some really cool ways to *remember* those things. If you have never done that, mark the month of July! Come to the first service, because I think this will be in the second service; it'll be during *this* service hour that you need to be there. *Get in that class!* Take that! It's okay if you want to read through your Bible a few times, in the meantime. But *learn it* (1 Pet. 2:2; cf. Deut. 32:47a; Jos. 1:8; Ps. 1:2; 19:7-11; 119:11; Matt. 4:4; Acts 20:32; 1 Thess. 2:13; 1 Tim. 4:6).

Stephen is going to show that what he says about Jesus is *not* in a vacuum; it is *directly connected* to the plan that God worked out in the *two thousand years* before Jesus came!

Acts Chapter 7, Verses 6 and 7—"But God spoke to this effect, that his descendants would be aliens in a foreign land, and that they would be enslaved and mistreated for four hundred years. 'And whatever nation to which they will be in bondage I Myself will judge,' said God, 'and after that they will come out and serve Me in this place.' "

There's *context!* There's a *whole lot* to this! In that two verses, Stephen summarizes about *ten chapter* of the Book of Genesis—again, *from memory!* You don't have to *know* every word, but can you talk your way through the story of Genesis...and Exodus, and Leviticus, and Numbers—every book of the Bible? He *knew* them! That wove together the reiteration of part of the Abrahamic Covenant from Genesis 15, and he stuck in one line from Exodus Chapter 3, Verse 12.

Now look at Verse 8—"And He gave him the covenant of circumcision; and so Abraham became the father of Isaac, and circumcised him on the eighth day; and Isaac became the father of Jacob, and Jacob of the twelve patriarchs."

And again, this is *absolutely brilliant!* They didn't ask him about Abraham; they didn't ask him about the Abrahamic Covenant; they didn't ask him about circumcision, Jacob, Isaac—*any* of those things. But the Jewish leaders of that day made a *huge deal*—and you see this many times in the life of Jesus—about their identification with Moses and circumcision. It is *brilliant* that Stephen subtly points out that circumcision predates Moses! That was probably lost on most of those guys.

Verses 9 and 10—"The patriarchs became jealous of Joseph and sold him into Egypt. Yet God was with him, and rescued him from all his afflictions, and granted him favor and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and he made him governor over Egypt and all his household"—that is, all of Pharaoh's household. In this case, the word "patriarchs" refers not to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; but it refers to the *sons* of Jacob, who became the heads of the twelve tribes of Israel.

Sermon Title: Best Last Words, Ever  
Scripture Text: Acts 7:1-16 (Acts #15)

Speaker: Jim Harris  
Date: 5-21-23

---

Now, the oldest ten sons of "Jacob"—whose name was changed to "Israel" (Gen. 32:28)—turned on Joseph. You see, Jacob got into the marriage and baby derby with his two wives and their two handmaids; and we will never know what God might have done if he had not willingly gone along with all of that. But he had his favorite: Rachel. And she finished last in the baby derby, but finally gave him Joseph and Benjamin, and they were unabashedly Jacob's favorites.

So in that one verse, Stephen summarizes about ten chapters of the Book of Genesis, and mentions that those ten [brothers] turned on Joseph.

Verse 11 now: "Now a famine came over all Egypt and Canaan, and great affliction with it, and our fathers could find no food"—referring, again, to the "patriarchs." "But when Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent our fathers there the first time. On the second visit Joseph made himself known to his brothers, and Joseph's family was disclosed to Pharaoh. Then Joseph sent word and invited Jacob his father and all his relatives to come to him, seventy-five persons in all" (vss. 11-14).

Now, I want to urge you: Watch your inbox for our daily e-mails. We happen to be in this portion of the Book of Genesis. I promise, I am *not* smart enough to have figured out, "When do you need to start Genesis, in light of when you're going to start Acts on Sunday Morning, to make them coalesce at Acts Chapter 7?" I didn't figure that out! And by the way, if you're not receiving our daily e-mails, for goodness sake, write your e-mail address and your name on one of the registration slips, put in in the box, and say, "Send me the daily e-mails." Every day, we have a little study in God's Word; I can share prayer requests with you; we usually share some music in that time. Scott is going to cover me while I'm in Israel. But right now, we are *right in this portion* of the Book of Genesis.

Stephen summarized how God arranged, in His glorious sovereign providence, for Jacob and his sons and their families—"seventy-five persons in all"—to move to Egypt for what would turn out to be over "four hundred years," just exactly as God had promised. God used a famine. God used the treachery of Joseph's older brothers. God used Jacob's sinful favoritism toward Joseph—who, by the way, he thought was dead when this was going on. And He used his youngest son, and his favoritism toward his youngest son also; Joseph's brother Benjamin plays an interesting role in all of that.

God used *all of that* to get the man He brought from "the land of the Chaldeans." Remember where Abraham was from? He had a hard time with geography, and they said, "Where are you from?" and he said, "Ur, um..."—and that got recorded in the Bible. Go read Genesis 11; you'll know why everybody is chuckling (vs. 28). And He brought him from the land of the Chaldeans—brought him by way of Haran, shows him the Promised Land, promises it to him; and then, by the time of his great-grandsons, they're out of there; Abraham never had a possession in that land.

But notice Verse 15; Stephen stays on task: "And Jacob went down to Egypt and there he and our fathers died." And again, notice the respect and the demeanor and the connections that Stephen shows. He repeated: "our fathers." This is all God's plan for us,



Sermon Title: Best Last Words, Ever  
Scripture Text: Acts 7:1-16 (Acts #15)

Speaker: Jim Harris  
Date: 5-21-23

---

His people. He did everything he could to identify with the heritage and the legacy of being Jewish. This is a Jewish man, trying to show Jewish men that God has kept His promise to send a Redeemer!

He doesn't even *bother* commenting on the ridiculous false accusations, but he turns the subject to Jesus. He starts out with, "The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham"—and by the way, all of this has been in motion ever since then. He lays out everything that God did to bring the Savior. Just like Peter did in his sermons in earlier chapters, whatever the challenge is, he says the subject is Jesus (cf. 1 Cor. 2:2), and he connects it to the plan of God (cf. Acts 26:22).

Now here is as far as we are going to get today: Verse 16—"From there they were removed to Shechem..." The "they" antecedent of that is "our fathers," the sons of Jacob; all died there in Egypt. "They were removed to Shechem and laid in the tomb which Abraham had purchased for a sum of money from the sons of Hamor in Shechem."

Oh, and by the way, you'll find that in the Book of Genesis. Go look for it. That is the last reference to events recorded in the Book of Genesis. When we get back to Acts next time, we will pick it up with things that Stephen says that happened in Exodus, and we will give a sweeping overview, up through the time when the Temple was built.

They accused Stephen of badmouthing the Temple; but he is going to turn the argument around on them, and show that *they*, right there *in* the Temple—*they* were continuing in the long and tragic history of rejecting God's "prophets" (Matt. 23:31). They had carried it on to rejecting Jesus (Acts 13:27), and *now* they are about to murder *one more person* who told them the truth.

If you want to personalize this—and *you should*—I urge you to work on being able to talk your way through the Bible, like Stephen did. And by the way, if you want to get started on that, Stephen gave you a *great shortcut*! Just keep reading and rereading Acts Chapter 7 until you get the theme of it all, the flow of it all, into *your* memory.

You see, our world is turning more and more hostile to the things of God, more and more hostile to the Church of God and His people who comprise His Church. We may not have a Sanhedrin after us; but more and more, we have various government entities turning hostile toward us. More and more, we have major corporations choosing to demand that employees give *full approval* to immoral and blasphemous things (cf. Rom. 1:32).

So, I have to ask if you are ready to handle what may be headed our way *sooner* than you might think. And can you do it in a manner that gives you the reputation of being "full of grace," "full of wisdom," and "full of the Spirit"? We need to be able to use the Bible to declare what we believe, and to stand resolutely upon it (1 Pet. 3:15); and to do it graciously, and also to do it tenaciously. Now, you're not going to be challenged about blaspheming God or the Temple, but you could stick around after church and follow Wade Salvorsen outside, and go greet our friends who come for the Food Pantry, and share a Gospel tract with them, and just say, "Here's what we're all about. Come and get fed, and come back *next* Sunday and get your *soul* fed"—and introduce them to the Savior.

Sermon Title: Best Last Words, Ever  
Scripture Text: Acts 7:1-16 (Acts #15)

Speaker: Jim Harris  
Date: 5-21-23

---

Here's a summary of what Stephen did on the final day of his life. And I'm going to quote something else that Stephen never read, because he never met Paul—because Paul wasn't Paul yet; he was still Saul there on the day that Stephen died (Acts 13:9). But here's a summary; Paul wrote this, but listen carefully with this emphasis on what Stephen is saying in his own defense:

First Corinthians 15:1-4—"Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you..." That is, in essence, what Stephen did: "You are accusing me of all these things. Oh, by the way, I just want to tell you about the Gospel that I've been preaching!" "I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins *according to the Scriptures...*" (e.g., Is. 53:5-8; cf. 1 Pet. 1:18-19; 2:24; 3:18) You *don't really understand Jesus* without that *first* three-fourths of your Bible! The "good news" of the Gospel is the answer to the "bad news" of our sin—which traces all the way back to Genesis, Chapter 3. He says, "and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day *according to the Scriptures.*" (e.g., Ps. 16:10; Is. 53:11-12; cf. Rom. 4:25).

Stephen was *so brilliant!* This is what it's all about. Let's start with "the God of glory," and what He said to "Abraham" in "the land of the Chaldeans," and how He brought "Abraham" out, and "Abraham...became the father of Isaac," who "became the father of Jacob," who became the father of the "twelve" sons, [ten of whom] turned on Joseph, who sent him to Egypt—all of that stuff.

And by the way, he didn't even toss in why "there was grain in Egypt": It was because of the wisdom that God gave to Joseph, who Jacob thought was dead. Oh, *it's a great story!*

My friends, this is what we *know!* This is what we *believe!* This is what we *preach!* So, let's take a cue from Stephen, and keep working to improve our skill at stating it with grace and passion, and let's *stand* upon it as we "stand" in His "grace" (Rom. 5:2)!

Let's pray:

*Father, thank You for this dear brother in Christ, Stephen. It will be a joy someday to be in Your presence and to meet him, to be able to thank him for these words and for his steadfastness in You. Father, we admit: We are so thankful that we live in the best country in the world, that we have such freedom, that we have such earthly blessings. We are not yearning to be persecuted, by any means; but Father, we know that the world hates Your Son, and it hates those who follow Him. So make us strong in Your Word, we pray, that we would forever be able to—even in the face of opposition, even under threat of death—winsomely, graciously, lovingly, forcefully, tenaciously, and accurately proclaim Your truth. Have Your way with each of us to that end, we pray, in Jesus' name. Amen.*