

Martyrdom

by Art Katz

The sermon emphasizes the importance of martyrdom in the life of the Church and how it defines the truest constituency and makeup of the Church, calling believers to live in a way that is pleasing to God and to see things in an eternal weight.

Duration: 1:05:15

Scripture: Acts 6:1

Topics: "Martyrdom"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of living in accordance with the truth of God's word, rather than being swayed by the visible circumstances of the world. He warns that if we do not fully commit ourselves to God's radical call, we will find ourselves in a dangerous position. The speaker shares a personal experience of a sudden and brutal attack, highlighting the importance of how we respond in moments of extreme adversity. He calls for a return to the apostolic faith and passion, urging believers to break through societal definitions and categories and to persuade others to turn to God, knowing the seriousness of the consequences.

Transcript

Well, bless the Lord. It's great to come unprepared, and I hope you'll not misunderstand me. Unprepared without a canned message, but utterly prepared in the Lord.

We ought always to be abiding in Him, and to be instant, in season, and out. And I feel especially abiding this morning, really percolating in the Spirit of God, which is probably more for your sake than for mine, considering the weight of the somber word that I have, which is at the same time both somber and joyous. Only the treat that the saint can enjoy is a paradox of the faith.

That something can be weighty, demanding, furious, solemn, and joyous at the same time. And the subject that's in my heart this morning by the Holy Spirit is just that. It's the subject of martyrdom, and that's not just an academic subject.

That's not something that ought to stir our curiosity as an historical phenomenon that has occasionally been the experience of a few saints here and there over the centuries, but as the normative and definitive experience of the Church in every generation, and especially ours at the end. And one not to be contemplated with a shudder like, why me? But one that needs to be embraced with joy for the great

privilege which is ours to obtain a crown, and not to come before the Lord on that day bareheaded. So, I want to just click in the text that I very rarely look at, but I think he wants us to consider together, Acts 6 and 7, which is the description of the first martyrdom of a New Testament saint.

Because the things that are at the first are also the things that are at the last. I guess you're familiar with that, aren't you? That if you want an insight into the definitive and enduring things of God, Church, faith, we look at them as they were given at the first, where we have the pristine, first, clear, authentic statement of that thing. And we'll have a better apprehension of what will be also at the end.

When all of the muddy things in between are taken away, and we come back again at the end of the things that were at the first. So what was at the first was not only original, but true. So this is an hour of restoration, and I have this sense, that we are on a collision course for such a climactic and glorious conclusion of the things that were signaled and indicated at the first.

And that the issue of martyrdom is the very definition of the Church in its truest constituency and makeup. And it's not how we perhaps will end our lives. It's not the issue of our final moment.

It's the issue of all our moments. That the Church that has made its peace with this kind of a conclusion, and anticipates it, and lives in the view of it as a forthcoming reality, is not the Church that knows how to die. It's the Church that knows how to live.

It's how we live as martyrs that settles the issue, not how we, in one final heroic moment, give up the ghost. You understand, Saints? The final moment is the statement of all our moments. And all our moments are to be called, to be lived, in a certain kind of apostolic and prophetic sense.

And that, indeed, is true living, indeed, and true witness. And the Lord said, He didn't mean distributing tracts. He didn't mean button-holding someone on a bus.

He meant, You shall be martyria, you shall be martyrs unto me. Because to be a martyr is the final and the true witness. Anything less than that is an incomplete and inadequate witness of him, who himself is the firstborn, and the first and the true martyr of God.

And everything that witnesses to him, witnesses to that. And the great Saints who have not loved their lives unto death, were in that tradition. And I'm of such a mind this morning to believe, that they're even around us invisibly, in this very service, who are not yet complete without us.

If we believe that and knew that and sensed that, how different would our services be? To know that we're moving toward something. And every teaching, every study, every proclamation of the Word, is a preparation for that end. Which is both glorious and eternal in its consequence.

So who's the first martyr in the New Testament? A Jewish fellow by the name of Stephen, who was a busboy. And that should not be lost to our considerations. Because we might romanticize and think that the great apostles and the great martyrs of the faith, were men of gigantic and heroic proportions, and that we somehow are eclipsed.

And that it does not mean us. We need to really understand and know, that they were flesh and blood, like as us in every way. Ordinary and yet extraordinary, in the great genius of what the faith is.

Stephen was a later on table. Let's read that in chapter 6. Can we turn off the fan or the air conditioning? I just suffer a little discomfort for this message. There's something contradictory about pondering martyrdom under the comfort of an air-conditioned room.

It would be far more appropriate to sweat a bit, not out of fear, but just somehow that's it. Hallelujah. Why does my spirit always breathe a sigh of relief when man's technology is silent? There's more in that sense than meets the eye.

We have paid such a price already for convenience that does not befit the noble theme of martyrdom and does not prepare us for it. We need to declare war. We need to willingly embrace the things that are inconvenient, so all the world subscribes to them and will give us every reason why we should not deny ourselves.

What does it say that for a want of a nail, the shoe was lost on the horse, and for the want of the horse being hobbled, the battle was lost, and for the want of the battle, the war was lost, and it all went back to a nail. The very issue of how we will act in a final and ultimate moment of trial is not going to be decided then, it's going to be decided now. Over the issue of air conditioners, an extra hamburger or sundae, and a sensual indulgence that all the world sanctions as legitimate may well determine whether we will stand or fall before pressure and tension and demand.

All of our hours need to be seen in this context. All of our present living needs to be seen as pertaining to the end, or we are not properly living. We need to have an apostolic view that sees our present moment in the context of the whole, excuse the language, panoply of the face, the whole tremendous extension of the things that were from the beginning and are to the end, or we don't see a right.

If we don't see like that, we will have a very narrow and culturally and nationally determined view of the present. We will be locked in time, locked in culture, and we will lack a witness because we will be speaking to people from the very same vantage point of perspective by which they themselves see. In a word, we will not be coming to them from eternity.

We will not be speaking to them from their heavenly place. We'll be very much at their level, sharing their values, and the only difference is we have a peculiar vocabulary, that's religion. And you shall be witnesses unto me is more than doing witness for me.

It's a being thing. It's a quality of life. It's a condition.

And out of that flows everything. But we Americans, God bless us, are so doing oriented. The doing is the easy part.

The being is what is costly. And if our doing does not come out of our being, it's not apostolic, neither is it witness. So this is an invitation to being a witness, to being a martyr.

And it's a thing to which we need to give ourselves now. So in chapter 6, we read in the first verse that the number of disciples were multiplied, and there arose a murmuring of the Greeks against the Hebrews because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations. Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them and said, It's not reasonable that we should leave the word of God and serve Cain.

Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost, of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. For we will give ourselves continually

to prayer and to the ministry of the word. And when they came, pleased the whole multitude, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost.

That's our introduction. I tell you, it gives us such a stabbing insight into the character of the early church, the apostolic church and the glorious church. That even something as ordinary and as mundane as the waiting on tables required men full of the Holy Ghost and of wisdom.

I tell you, if we had such men in our midst today, we would exalt them to such a high place in the purposes of God and of the church rather than the waiting on tables. And I believe that nothing is small in the kingdom of God. Nothing is ordinary.

Nothing mundane. Do you see that? The word mundane actually means earthly, ordinary, dirt, grit. But it's in the ordinary places that apostolic character is formed.

How would you have liked to minister to the Greek and Hebrew widows who are murmuring with a sense of rivalry and competition that was already beginning to affect in the early church and had it continued, may well have enervated and destroyed that glorious body. That's all it takes is a little leaven to leaven them to lumps. And for the Gentile widows to feel that they were getting shortchanged and that the Jewish widows were being much more handsomely treated by the Jewish church.

And that's all we need in a situation explosive with racial and ethnic differences to have done in the church from its very inception. And you don't have to imagine that the enemy was right there at the elbow seeking at every opportunity to sow dissension and to bring down the church even at that level. And that's why the apostles themselves who were the wisdom of the Lord said, Seek ye out among you men of good report and full of the Holy Spirit and of wisdom.

Because this is more than just serving. Because the small things are the great things. And because in the kingdom of God there's no thing small.

Everything is fraught with consequence. Everything has an eternal weight if we but think. The only reason that we are lax and hemic and, what's the word, complacent, that's it.

Is because we don't see ourselves at that level. We don't see ourselves involved in the things that are eternal. We need to see things.

And if Stephen was anything, he's a man who saw. Because when we come to the end of the chapter 7 we're going to see that he saw a heaven and Jesus standing at the right hand of the Father. He really saw.

And I believe it was not a seeing of the final moment but a seeing of all his moments. I'm such a privileged man. You can come up after the service and think to me, you know how privileged I am? I have been in East Germany many times.

And I'll never forget the experience of meeting a saint there. Maybe just an ordinary wife of a pastor. One of the areas of Eastern Germany most known for its occultic and witchcraft history and tradition.

And this woman, in my every conversation with her, always had her hand upon her heart. Her conversation was continually studded with references to God, to the Lord. And as she would say these things, I don't know if you ever looked at me.

She was always looking up, always looking up. I wondered what she was seeing. When I looked up, all I could see was a cracked ceiling with peeling plaster.

But evidently, she saw something above and beyond and true. And she saw it continually and she saw it whole. I'll tell you, if you let this come into your spirit and seep your eyeballs from apostolic texts like this, you'll be ruined, charismatically speaking.

You have made such a cheap merchandise of the Holy Spirit. To improve the atmosphere at our meetings or our defunct denominations, the glory of the Holy Spirit, saints, is given for much more. And I'm wondering whether indeed we have received that spirit in fullness.

It's the very spirit of martyrdom. It is the eternal spirit by which Jesus himself gave his life about Christ before God. What we have is something else and something other.

I'm dubious about it, whether in many times indeed it's even the spirit too glibly, too cheaply obtained and the evidence of the projection of it does not seem to transform people and bring them to the proportion of the kinds of men that the Church insisted upon for the mere serving of Christ. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost. And in verse 8, Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people.

You know, I just want to say this for the first time after being a believer for over a quarter of a century. The word full, are you underlining that in the text this morning? You'll see the frequency of the word full with references to Stephen. It's as if that is the thing to which we must come.

But not to be full and just to have the Spirit of God in part is to be somehow disqualified. It's full or nothing. It's all or nothing.

That is, when we are full, that somehow the resonance of God and the power of God and the reality of God issues. Something about full. What does that mean? Take that word like a wine onto your lips and into your tongue and don't be too quick to swallow it down.

Let it lay there and feel the prickly part of it and then let it slip into bring a quickening warmth. Full. How come we're not full? Because there's always a competition between spirits.

There's the spirit of the world and the spirit of... How many times have I enjoined young Christians to cut their hair and let go of the little thing at the nape of the neck or to take that cruddy thing off and around their lips that they call friendship bracelets or whatever they call it and the various other kinds of cultural adornments that somehow we have become so accustomed to that we don't even wince at the feeling. I even heard reports from a sister who took off a starved baby and I'm Jewish and felt an enormous exhilarating relief and a rush of the Holy Spirit in the being. I'm very careful what goes on my neck and my body.

Touch not the unclean thing. Be ye separate, sayeth the Lord and touch not the unclean thing and I will receive you and be a father unto you and you shall be my sons and my daughters sayeth the Lord God Almighty. Dear children, if we're not full of the Holy Spirit it's because it's to one degree or another that we have exceeded and yielded ourselves to the spirit of the world and it's displacing the space that should be occupied wholly and entirely by the spirit of God.

We need to periodically examine ourselves and see whether indeed we are in. These things are written for our admonition. God forbid that we should think that a man like Stephen was some extraordinary giant of a heroic mold whom we could never think to be.

He was a flesh and blood man like you and me. But he was a sanctified man. He was a set aside man.

He was a separated man. He was full of the spirit of God and of wisdom. And if he needed to be that merely to serve table at the commencement of the church's history what do we need at the end of that history? When the powers of darkness will clash with the powers of light in a final apocalyptic fury in which it says that the blood of the martyrs will swell the harlot of Babylon and that the beheaded of God will cry out and ask Lord how long before we are vindicated? This is the picture that the Scriptures give both in Revelation and in the apocalyptic Old Testament book of Daniel of what the end will be where the saints will be worn out and overcome.

And God gives the powers of darkness the right to overcome the saints. That's what it says. I'm not making that up.

What does that mean and why would God allow it? It's something that we ought to ask because the time is not far off when those realities will be taken. You know what I've been saying to the church for decades in the Western world? Shame on us. The scandal of the absence of persecution.

Shame on us that the quality of our Christian life is so timid, so predictable and so inoffensive that many of us can go through an entire Christian lifetime and never ever experience opposition, scandal, reproach, persecution. The very nature of the true apostolic faith guarantees a recoil against us from the world. And the fact that that has not been our experience is an indictment to our shame.

We are living beneath the apostolic standard. But we would have elicited and provoked that against us long before. So I'm privileged to see East German women who are continually looking up to heaven.

And I was privileged last year this time to be in Zimbabwe, Africa and to be a speaker at the memorial service of 16 saints who had been hacked to death two years before in that place. They would put you in the shade, every one of you, in terms of their beauty, their linguistic ability, their multiple skills and professions and qualifications of whom the world was not worthy. We're not talking about some ranchy ex-drug addict Jesus freak off the wall who has just come into the kingdom.

We're talking about people who could have made their mark in the world professionally and chose to forfeit all of that to live in a remote section of the former nation of southern Rhodesia where it was troubled and where after an eight-year civil war a black government has been formed and most of the whites fled for fear of what would come. But those whites that remained were essentially Christians and they remained because they were moved by the Holy Spirit to remain and to work out the destiny of this nation being willing to submit to a black government to take all the risks of loss of land and loss of life while the tribe that was out of power was yet infiltrating the countryside trying to bring down that administration regime and particularly attacking white farmers and they moved into that area to establish a community of reconciliation and to live unarmed and to trust God for their safety and for their security. And we're doing a remarkable job after several years in that area fish farms and chicken coops and lifting up the whole economic standard of an area that had been depressed economically for years.

And in that success one night abruptly and that's the way it comes in it comes abruptly it comes when we expect it to leave and how we respond and react in that moment that comes to us suddenly and without anticipation is what the whole faith it's not our amens and hallelujahs today that is the statement of our condition it's what we are in a final moment of extremity that will tell us and that moment is called how will we act when we're taken unaware and suddenly great threat of our very life is upon us was that situation and not even the dignity of being shot to death but being bludgeoned and cut to death by an axe one at a time taken with their wrists handcuffed and barbed wire and brought into a building and all through the night all you could hear was the thump of an axe with not one

howl or screech or scream in pleading for their earthly existence I'll tell you that the black militant Marxist oriented racist radicals who did them in were witness to ultimately and not one of them will stand before God with excuse that they had never seen the glory of God in the faces of the it was my privilege to be again at that place for the memorial service to see the burned out buildings where I had been years before when I first met these people with whom I was in correspondence and to know that the subject of my opinion was not academic that it had come this close to home that I was in actual correspondence with those who had died and in fact the report came to me when I was in New York City casing the joint for God feeling that I have a call in my life to my own Jewish kinsman

in the city of my own birth the great Babylon and I said to a brother who was with me when he heard the report of their death I said the next report will not be so distant it will not always be coming from behind the Iron Curtain or in Africa or in the so-called dark places you're going to have it right in the streets of Honolulu and Manhattan and San Francisco and all the places where the filthy, fierce powers of hell cannot abide the presence of the glorious and radiant sanctified I stayed in Johannesburg at the home of a wealthy Jewish pastor whose Christian wife was related to the family one family had seven members wiped out in one fell swoop and this man was unsaved and a leader of the Jewish community in fact the very personification of all that the Jewish community exalts as being

religious and ethical and moral and accomplished but unsaved and he said that you know these people used to bug me one of my best friends was among them who before he was converted was just a great fellow and great fun and we used to go to the bar and knock back a few drinks and he was a womanizer one of the boys but after he got saved he became intolerable he was always witnessing to me and poking a string in my chest and you need to be saved and I couldn't stand it and it irritated me and I was sorry for the loss of the friendship but he said toward the end these people were progressively changed and he said toward the end their faces had become radiant and they were no longer working on me the way they used to but even in their silence they were much more convicting than in the earlier

days when they used to needle me and when he said that their faces were radiant I thought of this text because it says in verse 15 and all that sat in the council looking steadfastly on him saw his face as it had been the face of an angel you want to avoid monitor them just keep on looking the way you're looking which is nice but it ain't radiant you allow God to move you toward the place of having an angelic face and you won't wait long to experience persecution there's a world that is still at enmity with God and the darkness hates the light and still wants to extinguish we really have a choice this morning about how far we want to go with God and how full of his spirit we really want to be and I'll tell you where the radiance of God is compounded and established in the faces of the

saints it's in the church but not a church of the casual sitting in pews not the church made up of individualists who come to send on Sunday to sit alongside one another it's the church of a people who

are together a church of a people who go from house to house daily baking bread a church of a people who receive the word of God the truth spoken in love who will exhort one another daily while it is yesterday who will reprimand and reproach and evict the word and exhort and rebuke if they have to because none of us in this filthy world where the daily appeal is coming forth from Potiphar's wife come lie with me you've got it coming none of us can resist that and stand before God single-eyed and pure and clean except by the strength the encouragement the exhortation the prayer the example

that comes to us in the body by a like-minded people who are moving in the same way what kind of church do we want to be? and I want to tell you something to move from New Sunday services and mid-week Bible study to the kind of apostolic thing that I'm describing cannot be obtained without a suffering it itself is a suffering it's a humiliation it's a being found out and though God does not explain how he even came to have a face like an angel and I want to tell you a victory Acts 6 and 7 is not the very next day after Pentecost though it's only three or four chapters after the falling of the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost we might be reading now of events that took place five, six or seven years after the falling of the Spirit of God and so the sanctifying work of God had been going

on in the church and in the body to bring forth men like this to such a degree so full of the Spirit of God and so full of heaven that they looked like angels not sitting in the Sunday field but when they were being faced by their detractors and their antagonists who were ready to kill the very life out of them there his face shone like an angel when this Reverend Johannesburg said their faces were radiant I said oh that's it now I know why they were murdered we want to keep ourselves from the martyrs course all we need to do is continue to be ordinary and to be satisfied with a Christianity that is a mere succession of children and enjoy a biblical word and some praise and worship and go home and live lackluster lives but if we want to glorify God and be a witness unto him who is going

to allow the antichrist forces at the end of the age to overcome the sin then we need to live quite differently now because it is in being overcome that we overcome it's what we exhibit in that final moment of extremity that is the whole issue of our faith and that all of the years and days that preceded are moving toward this one end remember Jesus on the cross and that dumb centurion who was a professional murderer and had executed numbers of people on the cross standing by and watching Jesus in the final agony and paroxysm and suffering of his death but he saw something in the ultimate extremity of that suffering that he had never seen in another that when Jesus yielded up his ghost when he prayed for those who had brought him to the place of death when he did not retaliate in kind to

those of his own people to whom he had come who were taunting him and saying come down from the cross and we'll believe you you've saved others, yourself you cannot save that was more true than they knew to himself he would not that when he died in this remarkable way something was revealed that this dumb Gentile centurion who had never been to Hebrew school never knew anything about the scriptures or the Messiah or God's plan of God or his salvation or his redemption cried out even in his ignorance at that glorious demonstration truly this was the son of God now listen saints we're very close to coming full circle there's going to be one end of the age of demonstration of exactly this same phenomenon but this time it's the church on the cross this time it's the body of Christ following

its master with us or he goeth that leads us to the same place of final confrontation and suffering and death as well what we shall demonstrate in that extremity of the final moment is the whole issue if we screech, if we howl, if we say why me and how come and if we wring our fingers it's lost what did Stephen exhibit in his final moment let's turn the page to chapter 7 when he had reviewed the entire history of the

Jewish people with the doctors of the law and his detractors he was giving them a summary of the whole meaning of the faith and finally came in 1st Luke 47 and 48 about the house of God and that God does not dwell in temples made with hands of prophets men whose whole religious life is staked in a temple made with hands they are religious functionaries thinking they're serving

God and actually upbraiding him because they think he speaks against the holy temple he was challenging and threatening their whole religious life their place of preference their prestige their gratification so will it be again at the end of the age when the religious and political forces symbolized by Jezebel and Ahab come together in one final powerful configuration and will be challenged by us, not only by our speaking but by our very presence because we represent another kind of temple in which the Holy Ghost dwells heaven is my throne and earth is my footstool what house will you build me sayeth the Lord verse 49 what is the place of my rest hath not my hand made all these things and then something breaks out of him terribly impolite confrontational, not at all politic he should have

been wiser and not agitated these people to such a place that he almost guarantees that they're going to rise up against him in a bitterness and fury would you want to know a thing? he did not deliberate one word of what he said, very much in the same way that I'm not deliberating any words that I'm saying I'm trusting the Holy Ghost to bring forth his own burden without my deliberation and I've already been warned, you know where I'm going from here? what is the warning? there's only but a six day interval in Minnesota Israel, fearfully beset upon nations for ten days he can pray November 15th to 25th I don't know that I'm going to come out alive and I'm not just speaking about the possibility of a gas and nuclear war I may not come out alive from just confronting the saints I've already

been warned prophetically in Australia on this trip it's going to be an exceeding and I'll be standing before rulers and leaders but not to take sources that God will be with me as he was with Stephen listen to these words saints and understand it's not a man speaking but very God use stiff necks and uncircumcised and hardened ears the proudest loftiest men of the religious establishment who think that they have it all together coming to a moment of truth and confrontation to hear something about their condition as God himself sees it use stiff necks and uncircumcised and hardened ears you do always resist the Holy Ghost as your fathers did so do you which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted may have slain them which so before the coming of the just one of whom you have been

now the betrayers and murderers this guy's pulling out all the stops were they actually there in the hour of the crucifixion of Jesus were they actually there in the hour of the crucifixion of Jesus whether they were or whether they weren't physically he's indicting them that there's an unbroken continuum of sins with their fathers which they shield and for which they have never repented that implicates them both to the death of the prophets and Jesus and you know how come his statement is true because now they're going to be responsible also for his we need to see as God sees and men need to see as God sees that they're going to repent before his appearance we need to persuade men knowing the terror of God but I'll tell you what, unless our mouths are yielded to the Holy Ghost to speak

the things that he once spoken they're not going to be confronted looking forward to it for a while is a lot easier than this are you saved brother? do you know God has a plan for your life? the benefits that you'll receive by accepting Jesus is a lot easier to hear than you stiff necked and uncircumcised of ears and of hearts how long do you continue to oppose and to grieve the Holy Spirit I'm not saying that this is for us it's a necessary word, here's what I'm saying whatever the word is the one before whom we stand or the people before whom we stand it needs to be God does he have the full perception of our vessels that he

can speak without compromise whatever is in his heart no matter what the consequence is for ourselves and I'll tell you what, that as pastors and ministers if

now we are afraid of the people of God, if we're cowardly in the church if we're afraid to say something lest it offends and we lose the favor of people in the congregation who might walk out and leave us and go to another congregation and take their tithes and offerings with them, how shall we stand before the enemies of God?

To stand before God and not before men is the posture of a martyr not in a final moment but in all of our moments I like to tell you stories of what God has had to say through his mouth over the course of these years of which I'm not invited back and often if men could they would stone me for it I'm not celebrating myself I'm as ordinary as season I'm a high school dropout but I'm saying that the church of the end of the age must have this character or else it will find itself another kind of church in opposition to this one and it will be called apostate you don't remember a single thing else that I'm saying this morning, do you remember this? that cats predicted that at the end of the age there's only going to be two kinds of Christian entities the apostates which is the greater number

of those calling themselves Christians who are content with mere predictable Christian services and a much smaller remnant people called the people of God and the one will hurt, hate, oppose and persecute the other and kill us and claim they are doing God a service dear children, hear me I don't give a rat what it's like outside today and how beautiful Hawaii is and how idyllic and how romantic and does not lend itself to these apostolic verities this is the truth of the matter, no matter what we see with our natural eyes and we will be wise to live in accordance with this rather than with the things that are I'm predicting that if we will not give ourselves to the radical prep of God to bring us daily, every bit more to becoming the students of our generation we'll find ourselves with

those who will stone them and there'll be no place in between no middle or neutral ground except the one radical place that our every day is determining which toward which of these polarities are we moving every day and in every way and in every decision we're moving toward the one or toward the other there'll be two classes of people at the end one with the name of the Lord of God in their forehead and others with the mark and I don't think it's something embossed in the last moment but day by day and action by action we're submitting to one or the other and the day of the Lord will reveal which final identification don't think that we're incapable of perception of moving from the faith even while we continue to pronounce the truth of the faith we meet each other desperately if we are to

be the people of truth, full of the Holy Spirit and of wisdom and of power and knowing that if we elect that it puts us on a collision course with opposition persecution, suffering and when he said those things and when they heard those things in verse 54 they were cut to the heart what an eternal moment came to those men they were pierced through and they had one of two choices to fall at the feet of Stephen and say, men and brethren what must we do to be saved or to pick up stones to kill them how'd you like to be that kind of preacher that your preaching is of such a kind that it leaves men with only one of two alternatives is it a cry out, what must I do to be saved because they are pierced to the heart or because they cannot abide what you're saying to put their fingers in the ears

and to run on you with one accord and to crush the very life out of you how'd you like to be a preacher we all like to see men fall before God repentantly we all like to see the powerful work of the Spirit to bring people to a place of truth but I want to tell you something if we're not prepared for the other response God

will never give us for the one or the other if we're not prepared for those who will rush upon us with one accord will not be used for those who will fall at our feet and cry out what must we do, it's the nature of the faith they were cut to the heart but they didn't repent but they gnashed on him with their teeth vexed unbearably by all this man represented if only he were not there if only we did not have to contend with him if only we were not indicted by his angelic

face, by the conviction of his speaking, by the anointing of what he speaks, the penetration if only we could go on with the sham of the kind of Judaism that we want to perform, which we enjoy and people are willing to pay for everything would be okay but his very existence blows the whistle on us and makes the thing that we celebrate to be a lie that's the way it shall be at the end the very presence of God's people will condemn and reveal what is false and I'm sharing in these days how as a young believer after being saved in Jerusalem on a year's leave of absence from the teaching profession to come back to California where I was one of the leading faculty radicals with a Bible under my arm and say Jesus is the answer have you ever had the experience of losing all your friends in one

night as I have had when they had a homecoming party for me and I shared my testimony and I never saw such anger and bitterness and vexation as erupted that night by a man whom everybody loved when I was a filthy adulterer like themselves the next day in the car with a Jewish woman at whose home I was staying, a colleague at the school that she broke out into such a vile and filthy bitter vocabulary that I opened the door and got out of a moving car how come people love me as a Marxist as a communist as a humanist as a pragmatist, as an existentialist and hated me as a believer I'll tell you that the evidence of their bitter violent hate was the greatest and first evidence I have had that I had entered another kingdom in fact and so I was one day in the cafeteria with one of these Jewish

colleagues, a woman and she was so bugged by me I'm always witnessing, you know how clumsy we are when we're young in the Lord and always wanting to say something for God and by the way, the entire church that I attended was filled with converts out of my classes, the whole youth section many adults, I had an adult night class student evening stay like that, because I was too dumb to know that there's a difference between the sacred and the secular to me, life and death was always at stake, even in the history classroom and that the Holy Ghost is not to be reserved for Sunday services, but right into the secular place, the power and the penetration of God, where I asked students in a discussion about life after death, what is the remedy and none knew, and someone remembered that when we

studied the history of Israel there's something about sacrifice and blood and I took my Bible right above the desk and read Isaiah 53 under the anointing of the Holy Spirit in a high school classroom in Oakland, California and said to the students by the same anointing if you will not come to church, God has brought his church to you and gave an invitation, and guess what happened, 17 trembling hands went up to receive the anointing but I didn't last too long I was a teacher in that system I got promoted by God Oh dear saints the world needs again to see the apostolic faith the apostolic passion the apostolic integrity that will not be satisfied with the world's definitions and categories of sacred and secular and break right through because eternity is at stake and men are perishing and

the Lord is at the door and we need to persuade men knowing the terror of God, it will cost us everything, when they heard these things they were cut to the heart, they gnashed on him with their teeth but he completely opposite, what a contrast the religious and the ultimately spiritual, but he being full of the Holy Ghost again looked up steadfastly into heaven and saw the glory of God and of Jesus standing at the right hand of God that was more than just a little ceremonial picture Jesus at the right hand of God is a

statement of the government of God from heaven that determines all things that on earth, including our death you know why those saints in Zimbabwe could be hacked to death without one shriek and one howl and one plea for their lives, they came in the middle of the night and

they were taken by astonishment without preparation and never thought to arm themselves because they believed that God was their defense because if this was happening then God himself had a part for purposes for which they did not need explanation that some mystery was being worked by the sacrifice of their death that did not have to be explained to them, though they were doing good, it was abruptly terminated in the most vicious and cruel way, how would you like to be the elder of that fellowship and come into that building and see the dismembered remains of your congregation how would you like to be a husband and see your wife in pieces and come in there and receive from the hands of men something that God has ordained, or do you believe that what comes from the hands of men is ordained

as well come on, confess up you saints even now are you victims of circumstance or is God sovereign king in heaven and at the right hand of the father even now if you could look steadfastly being full of the spirit and see an open heaven and know it, because you will not believe it now, if we don't get the right income tax return, or the promotion at work, or getting snubbed by a boyfriend or girlfriend or this goes on to that, and we think it's men and we think it's circumstance and not God, how should we be prepared for the final and ultimate expression of the sovereignty in the world Pontius Pilate had Jesus in the palm of his hand and the Lord was silent aren't you going to defend yourself don't you know I have the power to release you or to execute you and Jesus said in that

wonderful piece you could do nothing against me, except it was given you from above come on saints, we need to walk through this world that is going to become increasingly vile and vicious and violent particularly against the saints of God whose faces are angelic, with a complete equanimity and peace and security you could do nothing, except it was given you from above, and if it's given you from above I can bear it, because the one who allows you gives me also the grace to bear it.

Well if you know the history of the martyrs, and when they talked with one another in their cells and said when you're brought to the stake and they ignite that fire if there's a grace of God that enables you to endure the suffering and the pain raise your hand to us you know what happened when those saints were put were bound at the stake and they licked that vile thing beneath them and the flames crackled and the smoke went up and the enormous heat and their flesh began to sink while they were yet alive and the fire lent their cords from their arms, they raised their hands and they praised God in the midst of their suffering, and when the powers of the air, the principalities and the powers of darkness and the world rulers of this darkness see that they're finished what more can they do to intimidate and to threaten when people in the midst of the suffering that is the consequence of the faith praise God in the heart they're not at all intimidated or threatened today because to praise God in comfort and security and being well fed and the beauty of this environment is one thing but to praise God in the midst of our sufferings and our afflictions that's the final testimony, that's the final witness not only to men but to the powers of the air that they cannot abide nor entertain it destroys them. Will we perform it on that day? It will depend on how we're living on this day.

He being full of the Holy Ghost looked up dead sadly not just in that moment, all of his moments he looked up all of his moments he saw the sovereignty of God. He was never a victim it didn't have to be explained to him why that he being full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom and doing so much good for the church and performing signs and wonders should be abruptly taken while he was yet a youth isn't that wasteful?

Couldn't God have used him? Why did he have to be taken like that? He never asked. But there was one man before whose feet the garments were laid of those who stoned Stephen to death.

A bitter, vexed Jew a Hebrew of the Hebrews a prized student of the Rabbi Gamaliel a persecutor who was breathing out murderings and threatenings to the church himself who saw something that day beyond religion that was such a prick and such a goad he could not swallow it down it haunted him, he couldn't sleep at night seeing the angelic face of Stephen saying, lay not this into their charge. What would we have liked to say in the last moment when the stones are thumping into our face and breaking our noses and the blood rolling into our eyes and we can taste our own blood?

Are we going to be that magnanimous to say, lay not this into their charge or let those filthy brack-a-bracks have it you dirty so-and-so isn't everything in us, rising up in a flesh that is normal and human and soulless want to get back to retaliate, let them have it but the last thing he said was, Lord lay not this into their charge and having said that that's the way God describes his death he wasn't killed, St.

Scott took him he had fulfilled the purpose for which God had given him in the earth and then when I was living in New York and I was a missionary to the Jews some Jewish brothers came and said we've encountered the JBL on the streets today in New York City Jewish Defense League terrorists doing God good by killing us and they said that you're under Hitler's thought, that you and Moshe Rosen are ticketed for assassination and I don't know when I said to my wife you know that I'm ticketed for assassination and she said don't worry about it God's not finished with you yet I'm not worrying about it they can do nothing against me except it be given from above and it will not be given until I have finished the purpose until I'm sent which includes speaking to you this morning these words how

much more precious will these words be when you will one day and perhaps in the not too distant future hear the report of my death at the hands of men vexed by the same spirits of darkness as did in Stephen and every saint of God in every generation merely to punctuate the importance of this word for you when my earthly course is finished when I have run the course that it set before me then I'll fall asleep and not before you know what my privilege is? with them who have fallen asleep in the faith where Paul says in 1st 1st Timothy where he said I'm not happy to be ignorant brethren concerning them which are asleep that means to have died in Christ and not of old age or from ulcers or cancer or tumors or the various other consequences of sinful living those that have fallen asleep in

obedience to God in suffering and in death concerning them which are asleep that you shall not even as others which have no hope for we believe that Jesus died and rose again even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him for this we say unto you by the word of the Lord that we which are alive and remain just barely survive is what those words actually mean those of us that are barely alive who survive the intense persecution of the church at the end times unto the coming of the Lord shall not come before or precede them which are asleep for the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout with the voice of the archangel with the trump of God and the dead in Christ shall rise first we have such a privilege, such a crown such a reward so heavenly a thing and we'll be

the first to rise and greet the Lord in the air and forever to be with him and to rule and to reign with him while others sleep for a thousand years who are content with mere Sunday Christians oh bless the Lord's name what's your choice this morning and how far do you want to go you want to be full of the Holy Ghost and the wisdom and of power you want to have a face that shines like an angel and will guarantee a reaction against darkness you want to be sent by God to such places of confrontation to speak such

fearful things that men will either fall before you in repentance or gnash upon you with their teeth and there will be no in between you want to be among the persecuted or the persecutors such decisions are needing to be made now how far do we want to go to be full of the Holy

Spirit and be separated from the spirit of this world and touch not the unclean things and he will receive us hallelujah let's bow before Stephen Scott let's decide something today and transact something today I didn't make up this message was it my choice I thought to speak something else entirely about Israel but I want to tell you dear saints that the issue of martyrdom is the issue of Israel for only a martyr witness will move my people to jealousy nothing less and indeed to expend mercy to them at the end of the age will require your life precious Jesus thank you Lord great martyr witness that you yourself are to call us with the high calling of Christ Jesus and Lord I think it's in your heart this morning to do something with certain individuals in this room once and for all not

with regard to their final moments but all their moments that they can stand before men without fear because they fear you only will speak the words that your spirit puts in their mouth without regard to how it is heard how is it understood, how is it received whether it's appreciated, liked or not liked settle something today my God with sons and daughters who choose this course who welcome your disciplines who need their air conditioning need their fix need their sensual provision which is legitimate to have that is compromising and want today to pull out the plug willing for inconvenience and will not hold their lives as dealing to themselves will love it unto the death thanks transact something now settle it what this faith is and what it's called is because we're only hours removed

from the taking away of a veil that has disguised the naked enmity and hatred of the powers that crucified Jesus who have but a short time and will ventilate their full fury on the church and upon the Jew in the last days where will you be?

Settle it welcome the discipline and the dealings and the trials of God to shape his character in you live by the spirit be full of the spirit the eternal spirit by the power of which Jesus gave himself without stop hallelujah call on him let him know what your decision is whatever it takes whatever it takes my God may I look steadfastly up to heaven may I be full of the spirit may I always see that heaven is open may I always see Jesus at the right hand of the father may I always recognize that everything is from the government of God from the throne of God in heaven that nothing is circumstantial, nothing is haphazard, nothing is accidental every suffering, every trial is from you for your eternal good, for your glory for the praise of your name fill me with that spirit in full abandonment I remove from my body from my mind, from my apartment from my dwelling anything that is of the world that makes your spirit to be quenched I don't want to be a groovy believer who is all this and heaven too I want to be radically separate hallelujah give up that death gask even now and whatever comes comes by the sovereignty of God who loves us with an everlasting love and whose grace is sufficient for all oh that he might have such witnesses on Halloween in Honolulu a people without fear whose life has already been given up and it hardly matters by what form and at what time the body shall be required hallelujah thank you Jesus hallelujah hallelujah let the cloud of witnesses about us my God rejoice for this morning rejoice for the work of your spirit in your world rejoice that a transaction was made this morning that brings us closer to the fulfillment of the end for which they wait may the powers of darkness that brood over Honolulu shudder who have had an undisputed sway over this city and over this land to distort, to pervert to tempt to intimidate, to threaten to have a cruel day because there has not been in the midst a church of an apostolic kind whom they are required to fear who do not hold their lives as dear unto death Lord settle something today for this congregation put something into their foundation that shall never dissipate away let people who have been coming not come again

because it has gotten just a little too radical for their taste but let those people remain and abide and add to them such as shall please you to have my God in this city and in this midst a people for your men a witness people let's pray out from your seats make a statement before the witness of men, the witness of angels, the witness of God the witness of the invisible witnesses and the witness of the principalities and powers who have threatened you, intimidated you jerked and manipulated you, tempted you break their filthy power by a word out of your mouth that says I will yes Lord this call is for me

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