

# The Ideal Portrait of a Christian Martyr

Acts 7:51-60

*Halifax: 22 January 2012*

## **Introduction**

For several weeks now, we have been looking at Stephen's defence before those who falsely accused him.

- It is recorded for us in Acts 7.
- Stephen had been falsely accused of blasphemy against Moses and God.
  - His accusers said that he spoke against the law and the holy place.
  - We have seen that these charges were false because Stephen, far from speaking against law and the temple,
    - was proclaiming the glorious person to which both lead!

Indeed, he may very well have said that the customs delivered by Moses in the law would change, and that the temple would be destroyed.

- This is what Jesus had taught and Stephen was Jesus' follower, so it should not come as a surprise that He would say what his Master had said.
  - But Stephen is no more against the ceremonial law or against the temple than a doctor or an engineer is against high school.
    - You can be sure that neither wants to return to high school, but each verifies the importance of high school by practicing a calling that required such education.
    - Stephen sees that with the coming of the Messiah, all the shadows and ceremonies of the temple that taught about what He would do are to be phased out...
      - When the substance has come, the types and shadows must go because they have served their purpose!
- In giving his defence before the court,
  - Stephen recounts the history of the Jewish nation—the history of “our fathers” as he calls them,
    - And he shows how Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were blessed apart from the temple through trusting in the promises of God...
      - And how Joseph was blessed and made a deliverer in Egypt and how Moses was called in the wilderness—all before there even was a temple.
    - Stephen also shows how many of the fathers rejected those that God sent to deliver them—both Joseph and Moses were rejected.
      - He even goes so far as to ask which of the prophets were not rejected!
      - What an indictment that is!

- And then, having shown this history of rebellion,
  - He then charges his accusers of participating in the same rebellion as the betrayers and murders of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.
  - They are worse than their fathers because they have rejected not only those who told of the Messiah, but the Messiah Himself.

You can be sure that Stephen's accusers did not like this one bit!

- This week, we see their response to what Stephen has said...
  - It is familiar story and we have just read it again.
  - As soon as the crowd hears Stephen say that he sees Jesus at the right hand of God,
    - they come after him to give him the death prescribed by Moses for one who had committed blasphemy.
    - They close up their ears, which was spoken of in the Mishna as the duty of those who have heard blasphemy.
      - Then they take him out of the city and cast stones at him until he dies.
      - As prescribed in the law, the witnesses cast the first stones.
- So what we have here is the first martyrdom recorded after Jesus ascended to reign at the right hand of God the Father.
  - It is possible that were others before this, but this is the first one we have recorded for us.
  - And as with other first things in Acts,
    - we are given an ideal example of what a martyr ought to be like.
    - Remember how Luke presented the church to us in Acts 2:42-47 as a model that almost seemed idealistic?
      - The truth was, God so worked in the church in those very first days as to make them an example for future generations of what the church ought to be.
      - He gave us a faithful example to be an encouragement to us.
  - Well I would submit to you that the very same thing is the case with Stephen's martyrdom.
    - A period of persecution that will drive the believers out of Jerusalem is begun with Stephen's martyrdom...
    - There is actually a significant change that takes place here in the multitude.
      - Up until now, the leaders have been against the church, but they have been restrained because the people have held the church in favour.
      - But now, with Stephen, the whole multitude—both leaders and people—turn against the disciples of Jesus.
        - Many more martyrs will follow in the days to come and throughout the history of the church...

- But right here from outset, with Stephen as the very first martyr...
  - we are given this wonderful portrait of a martyr!
  - Stephen is for us the ideal portrait of a Christian martyr.
    - In him, the Lord gives the whole church an example to follow whenever we are called to lay down our lives for Jesus Christ.
    - And not only that, but he also gives us great encouragement about how to die well as a Christian—whether or not we die under persecution.
      - We need to learn from Stephen what it is to die well.
        - I want to look at four things about this today...

**I. First, if you die well, it will be because you have lived well.**

**II. Second, if you die well, you will be welcomed by Jesus at your death.**

**III. Third, if you die well, you will die filled with hope.**

**IV. Fourth, if you die well, you will die filled with love for others.**

Let's look at each of these with reference to Stephen's example as it is revealed to us in scripture by the Holy Spirit.

**I. First, if you die well, it will be because you have lived well.**

- How striking is the contrast between the life of Stephen and that of his accusers!
- A. Stephen has accused them of being stiff-necked, but we see that Stephen is more than willing to do whatever the Lord asks of him.
  1. To be stiff-necked is to be like a stubborn ox who refuses to bear the yoke.
    - He refuses to do what his owner asks him to do.
    - This is the word that was used to describe Israel in the wilderness when they made the golden calf instead of waiting for instruction about worship from God.
    - It is descriptive of their behaviour when they were unwilling to go into the Promised Land after Moses brought them there the first time...
      - You know how the spies went in and then, for most part, discouraged the people from doing the will of God so that they would not go.
  2. But Stephen is far different than that!
    - He is a man who continually served God.
      - He was a deacon in the church who laboured to distribute to the needs of widows and orphans.
    - He is also a man who spoke boldly for the Lord, as we have seen, because he loved the Lord—

- He was not ashamed of Him but testified of his hope in this one who had been crucified.
  - We see how bold he was in giving testimony to Him right here in our text.
  - We see how instead of drawing back when he was opposed, he made the most of the opportunity to speak of Jesus!
  - We see how willingly he bears his cross, ready to die for his Lord!
3. It is a great blessing to be fully prepared when the day of death comes.
- You will s glad in that day if you have a clear conscience as one who has sincerely served the Lord.
    - Not that you were perfect—we all sin and come short of the glory of God...
      - but that you have not been stiffnecked, refusing to follow the Lord.
    - And that whenever you have been stubborn, you have not continued in it, but have confessed your sin and sought the forgiveness of God.
      - Even if you are a believer, your assurance will be shaky if you come to your last day with unconfessed sin.
      - Indeed, it needs to be habit as it was with Paul that you strive always to maintain a conscience void of offence before God and man.
  - But I tell you, if you are among the many who have never set out to follow Jesus, but have refused His yoke as Stephen’s accusers,
    - you will not only be lacking assurance, but you will have no grounds for assurance!
    - You will die in your sins and there will be no mercy for you.
      - In Mark 8:34-38, we are told that Jesus said:
        - **Mk 8:34-38: "Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel’s will save it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels."**
      - How terrible it would be to die as one so stiff-necked that you never followed Jesus.
- B. Stephen has also accused his accusers of being uncircumcised in heart and ears, but Stephen, in contrast, trusts in the promises of God for salvation.

1. Circumcision has to do with the promises of God.

- When God gave Abraham the sign of circumcision,
  - it was in connection with the promise that He would be Abraham's God and would make Abraham and his seed to be His people and bring blessing to the nations through his seed.
    - The prophets accused many in Israel of being circumcised in the flesh but not in heart.
    - That meant that they had the outward sign, but they had never received the promise and the new life that comes when the promise is received.
  - Instead of rejoicing in God's promises, they were relying on their own righteousness—or were simply not concerned about righteousness at all.
    - That's the way so many are in our day who are baptised...
    - They have the symbol of God's promise of cleaning on their bodies, but their heart and ears have not received the promise.
      - They suppose that they are righteous enough without Jesus.

2. In Philippians 3:3, Paul makes it clear that true circumcision are those:

- **“who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and put no confidence in the flesh...”**
  - In other words, they do not rely on works of righteousness that they have done, but trust in the promise of God through Jesus Christ.
  - They trust the promise that whoever believes in Jesus will be pardoned on account of His suffering and death in the place of sinners.
    - They are circumcised in heart and ears because they have heard the promise of God and believed it in their heart.
- Stephen had done that!
  - Though he was a godly man who submitted to God's will, he did not look to that for his righteousness.
    - He looked to Jesus Christ as the only Saviour and put no confidence in the flesh.
    - That is what you must do if you wish to die well.
      - I can assure, if you come to the day of death with nothing but your own goodness, you will be totally unprepared!
      - God sent Jesus to die for our sins because it was totally necessary.
        - You are a fool if you do not trust in Him.

C. Thirdly, Stephen accuses his accusers of resisting the Holy Spirit, but Stephen is said to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

1. They went to such extreme lengths in resisting the Holy Spirit that they killed those who spoke by Him.

- In particular, they had killed the Lord Jesus Himself of whom all the prophets spoke and who was the one who was anointed with the Spirit above measure.
    - You can see where Stephen speaks of this in verse 52.
      - **Acts 7:52: "Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers,**
  - You can tell that a person resists the Holy Spirit by looking at how they treat those who speak by the Holy Spirit in their own day.
    - There are many who claim allegiance to dead prophets, but who do not accept those who are sent in their own day.
    - They are self-deceived.
      - God sends His servants in every generation to speak by the Holy Spirit to their generation—
        - not a different message, but a message that is applied to them in their day and to their particular sins and evasions.
        - If they reject those prophets, they resist the Holy Spirit who speaks by them.
2. If you would die well, you ought to be in communion with the saints in your own day—not clinging to a rebellious apostate church,
- but identifying yourself with a church that preaches the Word and that applies it to us today—
    - a church that preaches Jesus Christ as the only way of salvation.
  - Where the Spirit of God is, the Jesus of the scriptures is always preached as He is revealed in the scriptures.
    - Stephen was in the position he was in because he had become a part of the saints who were following the twelve apostles.
      - And He died well because he died as one in walking in fellowship with the body of Jesus Christ in his day.
      - It is very sad to see how so many in our day who claim to follow Jesus refuse to identify themselves with any branch of His church...
        - Sometimes it is fear and sometimes it is pride—that no church is good enough for them...
          - but it is not wise to resist the Holy Spirit who always works through His people.

TRANS> My dear friends, the day will come when you breathe your last breath.

- That day comes for everyone and you slip away into eternity.
  - What a good thing it will be for you in that day to die as Stephen did—
    - submitting to the yoke of Jesus,

- circumcised in heart and ears as one trusting in Him as the promised Saviour,
  - and united to Him and His people through the Holy Spirit.
- What a dreadful thing it will be for any of you die in the state of Stephen's accusers...
- Going to meet the living God with your stiff-neck, with your uncircumcised heart and ears that have never received His promise, and with your resisting of the Holy Spirit and those in whom He works...
  - Nothing could be worse than to die in such a state—just think of it!
    - For eternity!
    - Let your prayer be like the prayer of Balaam—
      - “Let me die the death of the righteous!”
      - That will be unspeakably better than to die in your sin.

## II. Second, if you die well, you will be welcomed by Jesus at your death.

### A. Here is a word for our encouragement in a difficult time!

1. Stephen's accusers are cut to the heart—
  - They begin, it says in verse 54, to gnash with their teeth at him.
    - They are snarling at him like enraged animals.
    - They are coming against him like dogs as they did against Jesus.
    - Those filled with guilt cannot bear to be shown their sins.
      - They are preparing to bring violence upon Stephen!
      - Stephen was in the place of great danger and might well have been greatly distressed!
2. But look at what happens!
  - Look at verse 55-56:
    - **Acts 7:55-56: But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and said, “Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!”**
  - a. The curtain of heaven is drawn back and Stephen is enabled to peer into heaven!
    - He is able to see his risen, ascended, reigning Lord!
    - Even though his enemies are coming against him with violence, Stephen is totally enraptured and captivated by what he sees!
      - He calls upon everyone to look!
        - To see what he sees!

- He is filled with wonder and amazement at the glory and majesty of Jesus at the right hand of the Father—
    - And like Joseph with his dreams, he simply declares the glory of what he sees!
    - They are coming against him with violence but Stephen is totally consumed with the glory of his Master!
      - What a way to die!
- b. You will notice here that Jesus is referred to as the Son of Man.
- 1) Jesus used this title to describe Himself almost all the time...
    - But it is hardly ever used by any one else—
    - Jesus said things like,
      - **Matthew 18:11: For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost.**
      - When the hour drew near for Jesus to be crucified, He said to His disciples:
        - **Matthew 20:18 "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and to the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death, and deliver Him to the Gentiles to mock and to scourge and to crucify. And the third day He will rise again."**
      - At His trial, Jesus told the high priest when he asked Him if He was the Christ...
        - **Matthew 26:64: "It is as you said. Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven."**
  - 2) *Son of man* is a glorious title.
    - It is used in Daniel in the place where Jesus comes up to heaven after His suffering and death to sit at the Father's right hand.
    - Daniel's vision is a vision of what happens on the other side of the cloud that Jesus entered when He ascended into heaven.
    - This is what Daniel saw in that vision:
      - **Daniel 7:13-14: I was watching in the night visions, And behold, One like the Son of Man, Coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, And they brought Him near before Him. Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, Which shall not pass away, And His kingdom the one Which shall not be destroyed.**

- Jesus is seen to be seated there as the one who has overcome the curse and overcome death and Satan and who has been given all authority in heaven and earth!
- This is how Jesus often presents Himself when He speaks of Himself as the Son of Man—
  - as the one who is at God’s right hand and to whom all judgement has been given.
  - There is no higher court to appeal to!

3) What a glorious vision this must have been!

- Stephen had been condemned by those who represented God on earth, but Jesus, the supreme judge, had overruled them!
- This vision seems to transport Stephen out of what was happening to him—not physically, but in his mind and spirit...
  - Almost in a child like way, he calls upon the entire assembly to look!
  - “Wow! Look at that!”

c. You will notice that Stephen says that he sees Jesus **standing** at the right hand—usually He is said to be seated there.

- But now He has stood up to receive His servant who has spoken for Him and is now being abused.
- He has stood to declare His own acceptance of the One who has faithfully confessed His name. He stands to vindicate him.
- He has stood as the supreme judge to overrule the verdict of Stephen’s enemies.
  - What a way to die!
  - Going to a welcoming Saviour!

B. Now I want you to know that this is written for your encouragement that Jesus will also greet you in the day of death!

1. It is not written to tell you that you will be granted the same vision at the time of death...

- But to show you what your Lord does on the other side of the clouds when His people die in Him.
  - It shows you how He arises to welcome you, to vindicate you, to confess you as His own, to silence the false accusations of your enemies!
- a. This is similar to what we saw when the Holy Spirit was poured out...
  - God made the outpouring conspicuous—

- He made it audible by giving it the sound of a mighty rushing wind.
  - He made it visible by giving it the appearance of tongues of fire coming down on the disciples who were receiving the Spirit.
  - And He made it evident by giving them the ability to praise God in languages that they had never before spoken.
- He did this, not to encourage those who trust in Jesus to expect these same signs and wonders whenever they come to Jesus,
    - But to be to us a standing testimony that the Spirit truly is given when we believe, even though we cannot see Him.
- b. This is also similar to what we saw when the disciples prayed for boldness after they were released from trial.
- To indicate that He hears such prayers, the Lord shook the place where they were assembled.
    - This is not to tell us to look for the earth to shake whenever we have a prayer meeting,
      - but to assure us that what was made visible on that day is still true for us...
      - When we pray for boldness in persecution, God answers!
2. So my brothers and sisters, when death comes knocking at your door,
- You do not need to be afraid of its ugly hateful face—for it is a curse...
    - But if you belong to Jesus, you can be sure that He takes pleasure in receiving you.
    - Even in the most painful, most humiliating, most hateful death, He Himself rises to greet you.
      - The curtains of heaven are drawn back here so that the whole church can see what happens when those who love Jesus die.
  - Now someone might say,
    - “But how do you know that it will be this way for all the saints? Perhaps this was only done for Stephen. How can be sure that Jesus will receive ordinary servants like us when we die?”
    - We can be sure because Paul told the Philippians and the Corinthians that when we die, our Spirit departs to be with the Lord.
      - And that it is better to depart to be with Christ than to remain here.
      - He does not present this as a thing only for specially privileged martyrs and apostles.
        - In 2 Corinthians 5, he presents it is as our common hope that we all share who belong to Jesus Christ.

- He says that before the resurrection, during the time that our bodies lie in the grave before they are raised up...
  - we will be absent from the body but present with the Lord.
- That's right my brothers and sisters,
  - The spirits of all of you who trust in Jesus will depart to be with the Lord until the last day.
    - You will go to be with Him!
  - Stephen's vision is a vision for you to take comfort in.
    - It shows us what happens on the other side of the clouds when we die.
    - That means that as Paul says in 2 Cor 5:5:
      - **2 Cor 5:5-8: Now He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. For we walk by faith, not by sight. We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.**

TRANS> Yes my brothers and sisters...

- What a blessing it is to be welcomed by the Lord of glory!
  - Does that not almost make you want to die?
  - This brings us to next aspect of what it is to die well that we learn from Stephen...

### III. Third, if you die well, you will die filled with hope

- This, of course, is closely related to what we have just seen.
- A. You can see that Stephen takes great encouragement from his vision of Jesus.
  1. His enemies become all the more enraged when they hear him speak of this vision.
    - a. They treat him as one who has spoken blasphemy—
      - for the Mishna teaches that when a Jew hears blasphemy, he is to cover up his ears.
      - And the law says that the blasphemer is to be taken out of the city and stoned to death with the witnesses casting the first stone.
    - And that is just what Stephen's enemies do.
      - Look at verse 57-58:
        - **Acts 7:57-58: Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord; and they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul.**

- b. They were particularly enraged at him for saying that the one they had condemned and crucified was sitting at God's right hand—as God's equal!
  - This sent them into such a rage that they act immediately.
    - Then don't appear to even wait for a verdict.
    - There is no need for one—Stephen has claimed to see Jesus sitting at God's right and that is enough to condemn him for sure!
- c. And you will notice that Luke here mentions Saul...
  - We will say more about that in a minute...
    - but here see the rage of Stephen's enemies all around him dragging him off to the place of stoning!

TRANS> What an amazing contrast there was between what Stephen saw on earth—and what He saw in heaven!

- 2. See how Stephen dies in hope!
  - See how he takes great comfort in the heavenly vision even as the stones begin to fall upon him!
    - Verse 59 says:
      - **Acts 7:59: And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on God and saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."**
    - This is a prayer of hope!
      - Stephen asks Jesus, who has stood up to defend and welcome Him, to receive his spirit!
      - Stephen understands what we saw already...
        - That his body will be put in the grave until the resurrection, but that his spirit will immediately go to be with Christ.
        - Stephen asks this glorious Lord Jesus to receive his spirit!
          - This is the same thing that Jesus did when He died, only He addressed the Father and asked Him to receive His Spirit.

B. If you would die well, you will die claiming this hope!

- 1. You will die committing your spirit to the Lord.
  - Jesus gave this same assurance to the thief on the cross that repented.
  - Jesus said,
    - "This day you will be with me in paradise."
- 2. That is the hope that can animate you no matter what your circumstances may be.
  - a. It animated Stephen despite the horrendous circumstances he was in...

- Imagine it—stones flying through the air at him, and he, full of hope that he is going to the one whose vision he has seen!
  - What a way to die!
  - What a glorious way to die!
- b. But alas, what a dreadful thing it would be to die without this hope.
  - To suddenly realise in the hour of death that your spirit will not go to be with the Lord, but that you will be cut off from His glory and presence!
    - What terror to die in your sin!
    - It may not seem to matter much to you now, but I can assure you, it will matter more than anything when the hour of death comes!
      - O to die the death of the righteous!
      - O to die in hope that the Lord would receive your spirit... that you may abide with Him until the resurrection.

#### **IV. Fourth, if you die well, you will die filled with love for others**

##### A. What an example Stephen is of one who possesses this love at death!

1. Even as his enemies are pelting him with rocks, he prays for them.
  - In verse 60, it says:
    - **Acts 7:60: Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, “Lord, do not charge them with this sin.” And when he had said this, he fell asleep.**
  - In asking this, Stephen is not forgiving them, but asking the Lord to forgive them.
    - To do that, He must grant to them repentance so that they will repent of their sins and turn to Jesus for forgiveness.
    - Of course there were some among these men who could not be forgiven because they had already committed the sin against the Holy Spirit...
      - But there were many acted in ignorance and unbelief and so might become recipients of mercy and grace in Jesus.
2. But what great love this is in Stephen!
  - a. Stephen had this love because he knew that Jesus had so loved him.
    - Stephen had become an admirer of Jesus and His love and he had also received the Holy Spirit from Jesus.
      - And so now this love was in his heart.
        - He really wanted to see his enemies come to know Jesus too, even though they were stoning him!

- b. Stephen was prepared to forgive much because he realised that he had been forgiven much.
    - He knew that his debt to the Lord was greater than any debt that his enemies might incur toward him.
    - Perhaps Stephen had even been in the crowds at Jerusalem when the Lord Jesus was crucified...
      - But whether or not he was,
        - he knew that Jesus had loved him even while he was a sinner and that Jesus had interceded for him.
        - And now he was prepared to do this for others.
  - c. Yet, at the same time, you must know that Stephen would not have been adverse about joining the other martyrs portrayed in Revelation who asked God to avenge them.
    - In Revelation 6:9-11, it says:
      - **Rev 6:9-11 When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held. And they cried with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" Then a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed.**
    - I need to say that because there are so many in our day who say that Stephen's prayer is the only sort that can be prayed.
      - But this is not so according to New Testament teaching—even Revelation which is one of the later books.
        - As I have explained before, when we pray against our enemies, it is not because of personal animosity toward them...
          - It is because they are enemies of the kingdom of God and of our Lord Jesus that we pray against them.
          - But we ought always to have a heart that yearns to see them repent and be reconciled to God.
3. Isn't it splendid to consider how the Lord answered Stephen's prayer?
- Luke puts the man right there in front of us in verse 58—
    - He says that those who witnessed against Stephen laid their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul.
    - This, of course, is the man who was also called Paul and who becomes known to us as the great apostle to the Gentiles.

- He was there, consenting to Stephen's death and likely instigating it.
- He was a young intellectual who may have even debated with Stephen, for he was from Tarsus and may have attended one of the Hellenistic Synagogues with Stephen.
- Whatever the case, Stephen's prayer for forgiveness is answered concerning him.
  - Saul will indeed be marvellously converted!

B. If you would die well, you need to die with love in your heart for others.

1. If you are full of bitterness and strife and malice, you will have a hard go of things when it comes time to die.
  - If you do not love your brother, John tells you that you don't love God, regardless of what you might say!
    - **1 John 4:20 If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?**
  - It is not that we are saved because we love our brothers,
    - but it is rather that those who are saved will love their brothers—
      - because Christ has transformed their hearts...
      - And because they realise how much they have been loved.
2. Do not wait until you are on your death bed to start loving.
  - Be sure now, this very day, that Christ has saved you and that your salvation can be seen in a heart filled with love, even for your enemies.
  - The more you cultivate this love now, the greater your assurance will be when your time comes to depart and be with the Lord.
  - And how sweet it will be to die with love like Stephen had, even for your enemies who are attacking you.
    - That is a sure indication of a heart renewed by Christ and His Spirit.
      - It is yours if you come to Jesus to save you.

**Conclusion:**

So my brothers and sisters, are you prepared to meet your God?

- Death may always seem far away, but it is where we are all headed!
  - If you are wise, like Stephen, you will prepare yourself for that day.

Look at the conclusion—

- It says:
  - **“And when he said that, he fell asleep.”**

Who is in the better place,

- The one whose body is bloody and bruised and who lays under a pile of stones with a great crowd that is filled with malice toward him...
  - or the ones who are in the seats of power in the Jewish courts and who have just exercised their God-given authority to execute a man...
    - and who will return to their fine homes to enjoy food and drink?
- Who is in the better place?
  - These men, or Stephen?
- Stephen, of course, for he has just gone from this world of hate to the Lord Jesus who is love and who is surrounded by loving servants.
  - Get it in perspective!
    - Prepare to meet your God.
  - When that day comes, it won't matter at all what else you may have done.
    - All that will matter is that you are prepared to die well—to die the death of the righteous—to die according to the pattern that Stephen has left for us.