

**Acts 7: 1-5; “The God of Glory Appearing”, Sermon # 24 in the series –
“Laying the Foundations”, Delivered on January 25th, 2015,
in the Morning Worship Service.**

I want to begin this morning to preach to you about the history of the nation of Israel as Stephen presented it to the Council, the elders of Israel, at his trial. This will involve a number of sermons, in order for us to grasp what Stephen wanted to communicate to the Sanhedrim by the power of the Holy Spirit. But there are many good lessons for us to learn about God and His ways here; about faith and living our lives unto God, which are contained in this one sermon. By the grace of God, I will preach to you what Stephen preached to them; their need to understand that God is sovereign in His purposes of salvation, and merciful to those who receive and obey His Word. He was sovereign and merciful in the salvation of each of His elect people in the nation of Israel in that day; and He is sovereign and merciful today as well in the building of Christ's Church. His purpose in saving the elect among ancient Israel was to make them into a great nation; to give them a great everlasting inheritance in Christ and in relation to their helping to build His Church. But we will also come to see, as Stephen preaches this sermon to them, that a good many of them rejected God's purpose for themselves by not receiving the message that he had come to give them. Instead, they stoned the preacher so that they would not have to hear God's truth any more. Stephen, in telling them their history, would confront them with the details of their repeated national unbelief in relation to what God would have them to do; which was, that they would receive Christ as their Savior and believe in His Word to them. But the message only made them angry. It is my prayer that this sermon will do the very opposite; it will cause you to think about whether you understand the meaning of your life in relation to the holy God. This morning I would like us all to see the importance of learning from the history of how God called Abraham. I would like you to understand more about the doctrine of God's Effectual and Irresistible Call when He saves a person. I want to set this forth to you by asserting to you that there are 2 things which this Effectual Call of God involves. 1st – The Effectual Call of God involves an appearance of the God of glory to the soul of the person being saved. (Verse 2) And then 2nd – The Effectual Call of God involves your becoming a citizen of the heavenly country. (Verses 3-5) I want you to examine your own heart and life as you hear about these things, and confirm in your own mind that you have been effectually called of God.

1st of all – The Effectual Call of God involves an appearance of the God of glory to the soul of the person being saved.

Listen once again to verses 1 and 2: “Then the high priest said, ‘Are these things so?’ and he said, ‘Brethren and fathers, listen: The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Haran, and said to him, ‘Get out of your country and from your relatives, and come to a land that I will show you.’” When God calls a person to Himself in salvation, He also begins to show them His mighty purpose for their life. His mighty purpose is that you who believe in Him would be completely and totally taken up with following Him. This is what it means for you to love God with all of your heart and soul and mind and strength. God's purpose in the salvation of any sinner is that they would come to trust Him more and more; that having believed in Him for salvation, they would come to live out the truth of His Word by faith in their Savior Jesus Christ. As a Christian, God calls you to trust and obey; not in order to merit or work for your salvation, but in order that you might spiritually prosper in your soul. “If you love Me,” Jesus says in John 14: 15, “keep My commandments.” “And I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever; even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you.” God leads you by His Holy Spirit,

dear Christian, in such a way as to make you a useful and fruitful member in Christ's church if you will respond correctly. If you will respond correctly to His Word, walking with Him in faith and obedience, closely following Christ during the time of your stay here upon the earth, truly your reward will be very great, even as Abraham's was.

Now, today, we want to look at where all this began for Abraham, and where all this begins for you. The call of Abraham, which we read about in these verses, and his subsequent obedience, are given to us in order that we might know and understand more about the Christian life; how it begins and what it leads to. With Abraham it all began when the God of glory appeared to him. Let us learn from these words. We should think about God as He is; infinitely great, and wonderfully holy. We must always think of Him and reverence Him as "the God of glory". All glory resides in Him. Everything of excellence, everything of wisdom, everything that is good and pure and perfect is found in God Himself. All that He is, is good and righteous; and in everything that He does, His glory is seen in all His works. This God, the only true and living God, revealed Himself to Abram. This was the name of Abraham before God changed His name in relation to the sure fulfillment of His promises to him that he would be the father of a multitude of nations. "No longer shall your name be called Abram, (exalted father) but your name shall be Abraham;(father of a multitude) for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations." (Genesis 17: 5)

It says that this great God of glory personally appeared to him. I do not believe that this was simply a bright and shining light that Abram saw but it was a Theophany, an instance where the 2nd Person of the Divine Trinity, God the Son, for a short time took the visible form of a man, and spoke with Abraham in this personal way. You see, God is a Spirit, and those who worship God must worship Him in spirit and in truth." No one can see God the Father or God the Holy Spirit. God dwells in unapproachable light, and no man has seen Him or can see Him except in Jesus Christ. But the Lord Jesus Christ is fully God and fully Man, two natures in one blessed Person. And if you see Him, what you are seeing when you see the form of a man, is His humanity. The deity of our Lord is right there with His humanity, but this great glory you only behold as He is pleased to reveal it to you. This same phrase which is used in Steven's sermon, "the God of glory appeared to him", is also used in Genesis 17: 1 – "Now when Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, 'I am God Almighty; walk before Me, and be blameless.'" "I will establish My covenant between me and you, and I will multiply you exceedingly."

I hope that you can see from these instances, something of the Effectual Call of God to those whom He intends to save. To be saved you must come to behold the God of glory, by faith. Abraham was one of God's Old Testament elect people. God chose him from before the foundation of the world, and at the time of His appointment, He, the God of glory, appeared to him and gave him precious and magnificent promises by which he would be saved, and by which he would become fruitful unto God in both a physical way in his descendants and in a spiritual way in that he would become the father of all who have faith unto salvation; both Jew and Gentile, in believing in the promises of God which all would have their focus in the future Incarnation. They all had for their focus the Person of Christ who would be the redeemer of all of God's elect. The first set of promises that were given to Abraham are found in Genesis Chapter 12, and they were given to him when he still lived as a pagan idolater in Ur of the Chaldees. Why don't you turn over there with me. Abraham was then 75 years old at this point. It says: "Now the Lord had said to Abram: 'Get out of your country, from your family and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you.'" "I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing." "I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." In Joshua 24: 2, we find this additional information. Joshua told the tribes of Israel this, in his farewell speech to them:

“Your fathers, including Terah, the father of Abraham and the father of Nahor, dwelt on the other side of the River in old times; and they served other gods.” “Then I took your father Abraham from the other side of the River, and led him throughout all the land of Canaan, and multiplied his descendants and gave him Isaac.”

You can see here from these verses that it was God who called Abram out of the land of idolatry and made him a worshipper of himself. The Effectual Call of God is the stretching forth of His power to reveal Himself to you; to bring you out of the kingdom of darkness and transfer you into the kingdom of light. He delivers you from the power of Satan, in terms of the false worship that you used to pursue, and He makes you a worshipper of Himself. He does this by revealing Himself to you through the declaration of His Word to you. Our God did this for Abram by revealing Himself personally in an appearance that He made to Abram in that day. And God does this in our own day through the preaching and sharing of His Word the Bible, working powerfully and effectually to reveal Himself by the power of the Spirit, to the person whose eyes He is opening to the truth concerning Himself. I want you to think about this truth and ask yourself this question: Has God called me with this powerful and effectual call? Has God revealed Himself to me savingly so that my heart has been forever changed in its direction? Am I now willing to live for the truth and if need be suffer for the truth, as it says in 2nd Timothy 1: 8-10? “Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me the suffering for the gospel according to the power of God, who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and glory in Christ Jesus before time began, but has now been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.”

Think also of the truth of Jesus’ words in Matthew 11: 26 – “Even so Father: for so it seemed good in Your sight.” “All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father.” “Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.” Please ask yourself once again; make very such of this, for the salvation of your everlasting soul depends upon it: Has the God of glory revealed Himself to me so that I love Him more than all earthly things and people who might turn me away from Him? The God of glory appeared to Abraham personally in Ur of the Chaldees, and he was from that moment on, a different man. He began the pursuit of holiness at that point when God first revealed Himself to him. Ask yourself now: Am I pursuing holiness? Am I pursuing the will of God for my life? If not, you should understand that The God of glory can, and He will, reveal Himself to you in these days now, by giving to you a revelation of His glory to your soul, as you begin to understand the gospel. 2nd Corinthians 4: 6 – “For it is the God who commands light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give us light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” Do not be afraid, only believe the gospel. It is through believing in the simple gospel that Christ comes into your heart and reveals to you His glory.

Let us also understand that the effectual call brought Abraham to place where he was justified by faith and he began to live by exercising his faith. “Those whom God predestined, these He also called, and those whom He called He also justified.” (Romans 8: 30) Let’s see how Abram came to a better understanding of faith. The second set of promises given to Abram by the God of glory came to him 10 years later. Look with me over at Genesis 15: 1 – “After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying, ‘Do not be afraid, Abram.’” “I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward.” “But Abram said, ‘Lord God, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?’” “Then Abram said, ‘Look You have given me no offspring; indeed one born in my house is my heir!’” “And behold, the word of the Lord came to him, saying, ‘This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir.’” “Then he brought him outside and said, ‘Look now

toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them.” “And he said to him, ‘So shall your descendants be.’” “And he believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.” I hope that you can see here that it was because the God of glory appeared to Abram some years before this, that he was first called by God. At that time he was regenerated by God’s Holy Spirit, and he began his obedience to God by repenting of false religion and by following the commands of the God of glory by faith.

But here we find that Abraham’s faith had grown very low. He had become very skeptical that God was going to do the great things that He had promised that He would do. He had become so frustrated over the promise not yet being fulfilled to him that he actually tells God about it in a very direct manner; revealing to God his disappointment and discouragement. And so God takes him outside and renews His promise to His child, His friend; that “one from his own body would become his heir, and that His descendants would be as the stars of the heavens in number. And Abraham believed God concerning what He would do for him, and this faith in exercise was reckoned to him for righteousness, it was accounted to him. Here he is formally justified by God Himself declaring it, and having it written down in the Scriptures. God could see that His faith, even though low, was real because Abram would not leave off following God and receiving His words even though he didn’t understand how God would fulfill the promise. How about you, my listeners here today. Will you continue to trust in Christ, will you continue to follow Him in accordance with His Word, even when perplexed, even when discouraged about how God will fulfill all of His promises to you? The person who has received the Effectual Call of God will do this very thing because God’s power and grace will make sure that it will be so. Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God; but dear Christian you must respond to that word by exercising that faith that He has given, and that He is building in your life. This will honor God, and it will be a safe-guard for you. And if you see yourself as an unbeliever, here this morning, remember that all of the opportunities that you have been given in common grace, in being here during the preaching of the Word, are given to you so that you might cry out to God for mercy; that He would come and show you His glory, and reveal Himself to you.

This great change for Abraham began years before in his receiving the Word of the Lord to him, in Ur of the Chaldees. But it was confirmed for him when he came into the land of Canaan, the land of Promise. All of these wonderful spiritual blessings came to him as a part of the Effectual call of God to him. As a part of that call, God decided to reveal the glory of His Person to Abram. This revelation of God’s glory to His mind and sight, accompanied by powerful working in his fallen heart, raised Him spiritually from his death in trespasses and sins. This Effectual Call convinced Abram that he should respond in faith and get out of Ur, just because God had told him to do so. It was because of further such revelations to him that Abraham came to be convinced that he could believe in what God would do for him, in giving him the child of promise. Even though the promise would not be fulfilled for many years, yet God would eventually give him Isaac, the one through whom the line would come, leading down to Christ the promised Savior. Let me ask you if you see the connection between Abram’s being effectually called to a life of faith and your being effectually called to a life of faith in being saved, and in following Jesus Christ?

2nd – The Effectual Call of God involves your becoming a citizen of the heavenly country.

Verse 3 of our text says, “The God of glory said to him, “Get out of your country and from your relatives, and come to a land that I will show you.” “Then he came out of the land of the Chaldeans and dwelt in Haran.” And from there, when his father was dead, He moved him to this land in which you now dwell.” “And God gave him no inheritance in it, not even enough to set his foot on.” “But even when Abraham had no child, He promised to give it to him for a possession, and to his descendants after him.” You can see here that Abram obeyed the words

which the God of glory spoke to him, to get out of his country and leave behind his relatives who didn't want to go with him. Let me assert to you this truth which is most definitely found in the Bible; that when you become a Christian you become a citizen of a heavenly country. It is a country which you have not seen, but which should become more precious to you than any piece of earthly property that you might now own. Let me further apply this truth to you in this way: When you are brought effectually into fellowship with the Father (the Father of glory), when you come into fellowship with the Son, the Lord of glory, when you come to perceive the Holy Spirit's working in your heart, you then come to love Christ and His Word more than all the preferences and opinions of your unbelieving relatives and friends regarding what you should be doing spiritually with your time.

Turn with me over to Hebrews Chapter 11, verse 8. "By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance." "And he went out, not knowing where he was going." "By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God." Now look down at verse 13 – "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth." "For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland." "And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return." "But now they desire a better, that is a heavenly country." "Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them." Let me ask you now if you, as a believer, realize that you are the citizen of a city in a heavenly country? Listen to John Calvin on this: "When God says to Abram, 'You will leave your country', it is not because God wants everyone to leave his country without some need to do so, but because he wants to show us that all of us are to be strangers in this world." "When our Lord gave that honor to the patriarchs to keep them as His heirs, it was because they walked in the world, not as those who considered it a permanent dwelling, but as those who were only passing through. (Heb. 11: 13-16) "Moreover, whenever it pleases God for us to leave father and mother, kinsmen and friends, lands and possessions for His name's sake, we must be prepared to do just that, as our Lord Jesus Christ Himself says, not to one or two, but to all, that anyone who does not leave father, mother, sister, brother, wife, and children for the sake of His gospel, is not worthy of belonging to Him." (Matthew 10: 37, Luke 14: 26, 33) (Sermon on Acts 7: 1-4 "Faith's Total Commitment, P. 370, 371)

Let me keep pressing upon your mind this question: Do you live as a stranger and a pilgrim upon the earth? Or are you living as a worldling, and yet all the while you are somehow still believing that you are a Christian? You do not have many spiritual thoughts of the meaning of your life at all, but you still think that somehow you will make it to heaven. You are going to have to re-think this mindset of yours. Because if you are true Christian, a faithful follower of the Lamb, the Bible says that you are "setting your mind on things above, not the things that are on earth, for you have died, (that is to the Old Man which you once were, and your old life of pursuing earthly pleasures to find lasting satisfaction) and now your life is hidden with Christ in God." "When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory." (Colossians 3: 2-4) As a true Christian, this is what you have your mind set upon; this is what you really like, and this is what you really prefer, in relation to all of the preferences and opinions of your old unbelieving friends, and also your unbelieving relatives.

Listen to Thomas Manton on this subject: "It does not become the members of a crucified Christ to be earthly-minded, nor the members of a glorified Christ to set their hearts on things so low." "A Christian should live in a perfect correspondence to all the acts of Christ's mediation." "The two solemn acts are His dying and rising again." "As He died and was

crucified, we must not mind earthly things; as He rose again our conversation must be in heaven.” “The one enforces mortification (that is; putting sin to death), and the other vivification, (that is; the seeking for spiritual life from Christ) or seeking things above.” “If we feel not the virtue of the one, or the other, or both, we have lost the benefit of our Christianity, and shall not be reckoned among the friends and disciples, but enemies of Jesus Christ.” (Vol. 20 of his works, P. 124) Listen also to Philippians 3: 17 and following which will confirm this for us – “Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern.” “For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame—who set their mind on earthly things.” “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which he is able even to subdue all things to Himself.”

Let me close with a couple of final applications. First to the Christians here: Seeing that our God is such a God of glory, will you not treat Him as such in the way that you respond to Him in obedience? When Abraham received the command to get out of His country, and from his relatives, he responded immediately. The God of glory, our Lord Jesus Christ, is not asking you to get up and out of your country, but He is commanding you to keep His Word and His commandments, to live by faith in Him, the One who has loved you and given Himself for you. The God of glory would have you to regularly read His word and pray over what you read. Will you make time to do this, so that He can reveal Himself to you through His word, and by His Spirit, more and more? It is when the God of glory appears in your heart by faith at such times, in your private devotions, that you are changed and transformed into the person that He would have you to be.

Second, to everyone here: You should know that you are only here for a few short years and then will come eternity. You ought to be preparing yourself to leave this world; preparing yourself so that you might attain to the resurrection of the righteous, and dwell in the house of the Lord forever. God gave no inheritance to Abraham, of the land of Canaan. He dwelt in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise. But he was looking for the city which God would build. He was seeking for a heavenly country where God would give him much better things than what he had upon this earth; not material things, but the spiritual joys of being in the presence of God. A person who has strong faith is looking to be satisfied with the spiritual joys of communion with Christ forever. Jesus says in Matthew 8: 11 – “And I say to you that many will come from the east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.” A person who does not have saving faith, but is only religious, is only really satisfied with the good things of this life. And so, Jesus says this to people who are like that: “But the sons of the kingdom,” those who thought that they knew God by the observance of the ceremonial religious works, ordinances, and sacraments, people who engaged in the works of an outward morality only; “These,” He says, “shall be cast out into outer darkness.” “There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” Let us all understand where the true and lasting joy and satisfaction in life are found; they are found in knowing and following Christ. I pray that each of us will examine our own heart now and ask – Have I been effectually called by God? Has the God of glory revealed Himself to me?