

What Are You Looking At?! (Part 2)

Introduction

Part 2

- A. You can turn to [Acts 7](#). We're going to read the entire chapter here in a minute.
1. But let me first remind you: This is now the second part of these sermons I've titled "What Are You Looking At?!"
 - a. You may recall, I opened last week's sermon by talking about how one of the ways you can know you've truly been walking with Jesus is you actually start to look more and more like him.
- B. That's what we see happening with this man named Stephen in the book of Acts. You can tell he's been with Jesus, because he looks like Jesus. There are these striking similarities.
1. We saw last time that he looks like Jesus in the way he serves and in the way he suffers.
 2. Now, this morning, we are going to see that he looks like him in the way that he speaks.
 - a. Just as Jesus, when punctured by persecution, "bled Bible," as Spurgeon would say . . .
 - b. . . so too, when Stephen is pressed by these religious leaders here, Scripture just comes tumbling out of his heart.
 - i. It's clear he's been living in the world of the Word. And that's why he's able to speak wisely and courageously and graciously.
 - (1) Don't you want to speak like that? I do!
- C. [Acts 7](#) is the longest recorded speech in the book Acts—longer than even the speeches and sermons of Peter and Paul.
1. And we're going to read it all.
 2. I'm going to try to cover it all and help us see the bigger picture of what's happening here.
- D. With that in mind, let me remind you of the context that stands behind what Stephen says here . . .
1. Stephen's been busy for Jesus, and some of the Jews aren't happy about it. So they seize him, and they drag him before the Sanhedrin (the Jewish Supreme Court, if you will), and they're drumming up these false charges against him—the essence of which really boils down to two things:

- a. Because of his association with and preaching of Jesus, we know: (1) He's against Moses and the Law; and (2) he's against God and the temple.
 - i. So Acts 6:11: "We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God."
 - ii. And, later, in vv. 13-14: " ¹³This man never ceases to speak words against this holy place and the law, ¹⁴for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and will change the customs that Moses delivered to us."
- 2. Then, having heard these charges, in Acts 7:1, the high priest turns to him and asks: "Are these things so?" And here comes Stephen's response . . . buckle up!

The Text

² And Stephen said: "Brothers and fathers, hear me. The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran, ³ and said to him, 'Go out from your land and from your kindred and go into the land that I will show you.'⁴ Then he went out from the land of the Chaldeans and lived in Haran. And after his father died, God removed him from there into this land in which you are now living. ⁵ Yet he gave him no inheritance in it, not even a foot's length, but promised to give it to him as a possession and to his offspring after him, though he had no child. ⁶ And God spoke to this effect—that his offspring would be sojourners in a land belonging to others, who would enslave them and afflict them four hundred years. ⁷ 'But I will judge the nation that they serve,' said God, 'and after that they shall come out and worship me in this place.'⁸ And he gave him the covenant of circumcision. And so Abraham became the father of Isaac, and circumcised him on the eighth day, and Isaac became the father of Jacob, and Jacob of the twelve patriarchs.

⁹ "And the patriarchs, jealous of Joseph, sold him into Egypt; but God was with him ¹⁰ and rescued him out of all his afflictions and gave him favor and wisdom before Pharaoh, king of Egypt, who made him ruler over Egypt and over all his household. ¹¹ Now there came a famine throughout all Egypt and Canaan, and great affliction, and our fathers could find no food. ¹² But when Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent out our fathers on their first visit. ¹³ And on the second visit Joseph made himself known to his brothers, and Joseph's family became known to Pharaoh. ¹⁴ And Joseph sent and summoned Jacob his father and all his kindred, seventy-five persons in all. ¹⁵ And Jacob went down into Egypt, and he died, he and our fathers, ¹⁶ and they were carried back to Shechem and laid in the tomb that Abraham had bought for a sum of silver from the sons of Hamor in Shechem.

¹⁷ "But as the time of the promise drew near, which God had granted to Abraham, the people increased and multiplied in Egypt ¹⁸ until there arose over Egypt another king who did not know Joseph. ¹⁹ He dealt shrewdly with our race and forced our fathers to expose their infants, so that they would not be kept alive. ²⁰ At this time Moses was born; and he was beautiful in God's sight. And he was brought up for three months in his father's house, ²¹ and when he was exposed, Pharaoh's daughter adopted him and brought him up as her own son. ²² And Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and he was mighty in his words and deeds.

²³ "When he was forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brothers, the children of Israel. ²⁴ And seeing one of them being wronged, he defended the oppressed man and avenged him by striking down the Egyptian. ²⁵ He supposed that his brothers would understand that God was giving them salvation by his hand, but they did not understand. ²⁶ And on the following day he appeared to them as they were quarreling and tried to reconcile them, saying, 'Men, you are brothers. Why do you wrong each other?' ²⁷ But the man who was wronging his neighbor thrust him aside, saying, 'Who made you a

ruler and a judge over us?²⁸ Do you want to kill me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday?’²⁹ At this retort Moses fled and became an exile in the land of Midian, where he became the father of two sons.

³⁰ “Now when forty years had passed, an angel appeared to him in the wilderness of Mount Sinai, in a flame of fire in a bush.³¹ When Moses saw it, he was amazed at the sight, and as he drew near to look, there came the voice of the Lord:³² ‘I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob.’ And Moses trembled and did not dare to look.³³ Then the Lord said to him, ‘Take off the sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.³⁴ I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have heard their groaning, and I have come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send you to Egypt.’

³⁵ “This Moses, whom they rejected, saying, ‘Who made you a ruler and a judge?’—this man God sent as both ruler and redeemer by the hand of the angel who appeared to him in the bush.³⁶ This man led them out, performing wonders and signs in Egypt and at the Red Sea and in the wilderness for forty years.³⁷ This is the Moses who said to the Israelites, ‘God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers.’³⁸ This is the one who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the angel who spoke to him at Mount Sinai, and with our fathers. He received living oracles to give to us.³⁹ Our fathers refused to obey him, but thrust him aside, and in their hearts they turned to Egypt,⁴⁰ saying to Aaron, ‘Make for us gods who will go before us. As for this Moses who led us out from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.’⁴¹ And they made a calf in those days, and offered a sacrifice to the idol and were rejoicing in the works of their hands.⁴² But God turned away and gave them over to worship the host of heaven, as it is written in the book of the prophets: ‘Did you bring to me slain beasts and sacrifices, during the forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel?’⁴³ You took up the tent of Moloch and the star of your god Rephan, the images that you made to worship; and I will send you into exile beyond Babylon.’

⁴⁴ “Our fathers had the tent of witness in the wilderness, just as he who spoke to Moses directed him to make it, according to the pattern that he had seen.⁴⁵ Our fathers in turn brought it in with Joshua when they dispossessed the nations that God drove out before our fathers. So it was until the days of David,⁴⁶ who found favor in the sight of God and asked to find a dwelling place for the God of Jacob.⁴⁷ But it was Solomon who built a house for him.⁴⁸ Yet the Most High does not dwell in houses made by hands, as the prophet says,⁴⁹ ‘Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me, says the Lord, or what is the place of my rest?’⁵⁰ Did not my hand make all these things?’

⁵¹ “You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you.⁵² Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered,⁵³ you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it.”

⁵⁴ Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth at him.⁵⁵ But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.⁵⁶ And he said, “Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.”⁵⁷ But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together at him.⁵⁸ Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul.⁵⁹ And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.”⁶⁰ And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” And when he had said this, he fell asleep. (Acts 7:1–60)

Three Emphases

- A. Now, there is obviously a lot here. And you can see, it would be easy to get lost in the weeds. But from the bird’s eye, I see three primary emphases in this speech that I want to highlight for us.

1. Stephen emphasizes: (1) The Lord's Unfolding Plan of Redemption; (2) The People's Longstanding Pattern of Resistance; and (3) The Gospel's Stubborn Offer of Forgiveness.
 - a. Let's take these one at a time . . .

Emphasis #1: The Lord's Unfolding Plan of Redemption

- A. When we keep in mind those two charges against him, I think we are better equipped to see what exactly he's doing here with all these words, when he goes on to seemingly sum up the entirety of the OT.
 1. He covers serious ground, but what is he doing?
 - a. Well, he's actually trying to respond to those charges by showing how his commitment to Jesus and the gospel doesn't put him at odds with Moses and the law nor God and the temple as they claim.
 - b. No! In fact, Jesus is actually the fulfillment of such things. He's the realization of all this OT stuff was pointing towards.
 - i. The Lord's plan unfolds through Moses and the temple towards Jesus and the cross.

From Moses to Jesus

- A. So they say: "You are rejecting Moses."
 1. But Stephen says: "No I'm not, I'm simply going where Moses himself was trying to lead us: namely, to Jesus." Let me first show you how he develops his argument on this point . . .
- B. He begins by tracing things all the way back from Abraham, to Isaac, to Jacob, to Joseph . . . and then he comes to camp out, as we might expect, for a large portion of his message here on Moses.
 1. It's at this point that he tries to make the parallels between Moses and Jesus quite plain. And in every case, Jesus doesn't merely line up with Moses. He supersedes him.
 - a. Stephen says that Moses was "mighty in his words and deeds" (Acts 7:22).
 - b. Jesus, we know, was even more so (Luke 24:19).
 - c. Stephen says that God was "giving [the people of Israel] salvation through by [Moses'] hand" (Acts 7:25).
 - d. Jesus, we know, gives us a salvation that far exceeds that of the exodus—his death and resurrection become the catalyst for a new and greater exodus (Luke 9:31), one that releases us not just from the power of Egypt or Pharaoh, but from that of Satan, sin, and death itself.
 - e. Stephen says that Moses was "[sent]" by God to "deliver" his people (Acts 7:34).

- f. Surely, we know that Moses here is only thin foreshadow of Jesus who is sent by God to deliver us ([John 3:17](#): “God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”).
 - g. So Moses is called “ruler and redeemer” ([Acts 7:35](#)).
 - h. These are two titles that stick more appropriately in an eternal sense to Jesus, the King of all kings, “the ruler of kings on earth” ([Rev. 1:5](#)). And “[i]n him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace” ([Eph. 1:7](#)).
- C. This point is made particularly plain for us in [Acts 7:37](#) where Stephen says: “This is the Moses who said to the Israelites, ‘God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers.’”
- 1. Stephen here cites [Deut. 18:15](#), wherein Moses predicts a prophet like himself will one day come to whom all should listen.
 - a. And we know from Peter’s sermon in [Acts 3:22](#), this prediction is fulfilled, this prophet has arrived, in Jesus.
- D. Stephen doesn’t mince words here. He wants it come out loud and clear. “You say I am contradicting Moses and the law. I’m telling you I’m simply following the very trajectory Moses set in motion!”
- 1. Jesus does not stand against what Moses stood for. He’s the one who takes Moses’ baton and sprints across the finish line with it.
- E. That’s why, by the way, in the climax of this speech from Stephen, he refers to Jesus in [v. 52](#) as what?—“the Righteous One” What does he mean by this title?
- 1. He means: Jesus is not against the law of Moses. He’s the only one who ever truly kept it.
 - a. Jesus fulfills it—both by obeying its precepts, on the one hand; and by suffering its penalties, on the other hand . . . for us. I get his righteousness, he gets my sin.
- F. That’s why Jesus himself says in the Sermon on the Mount: “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them” ([Matt. 5:17](#)).
- 1. Or as he says to those antagonistic Jews in [John 5:46](#): “[I]f you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me.”

From the Temple to Jesus

- A. In a like manner, they say: “You are rejecting the temple.”
- 1. But Stephen says: “No I’m not, I’m simply going where God with the temple was trying to lead us: namely, to Jesus.” Let me now show you how he develops his argument on this point . . .

- B. It seems to me that, throughout this entire discourse here, Stephen is trying to make it plain that God has always been able to move in the lives of his people with or without the temple. His presence has never been confined to a spot on the map or a building. He used the temple, but he was never contained by it. This comes out in various ways . . .
1. For one thing, notice how he begins there in v. 2: “The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia”
 - a. After the Israelites the temple, if you recall, the glory of the Lord came in like a shining cloud and filled it. And so, naturally, it came to be assumed: here’s where his glory resides . . . and only here.
 - b. But Stephen reminds them, his glory, his presence, can be manifested anywhere. So the “God of glory” is here with Abraham in Mesopotamia.
 2. Then, in v. 9, we see that he shows up to help Joseph in Egypt: “God was with him” there. No temple needed. No temple even yet existed.
 3. Then in v. 30 we see that he appeared to Moses “in the wilderness of . . . Sinai”
 - a. He’s not manifested above the mercy seat in the Most Holy Place. He shows up in a burning bush, on a mountain.
 - b. And because he is there, he tells Moses in v. 33: “Take off the sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.”
 - i. Remember their charge against Stephen in Acts 6:13? “This man never ceases to speak words against this holy place . . .”—by which they meant, of course, the temple.
 - ii. Now Stephen says, that holy place, it’s not confined to this little space here in Jerusalem. It never has been. It’s wherever God is.
- C. This point is made particularly plain for us in Acts 7:47-50 when he says: “⁴⁷ [I]t was Solomon who built a house for [the God of Jacob]. ⁴⁸ Yet the Most High does not dwell in houses made by hands, as the prophet says [and here he quotes Isa. 66:1-2 . . .], ⁴⁹ ‘Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me, says the Lord, or what is the place of my rest? ⁵⁰ Did not my hand make all these things?’”
1. God has been with his people all along and can work with or without the temple. It was never about the brick and the mortar, the building itself.
 2. God used the temple to try to convey things about himself and the way we get access to him, but this was always a mere earthly picture of a more heavenly reality—something which is ultimately realized in Jesus.
 - a. He’s the glory-presence of God come down to dwell with us.
 - b. He’s the high priest living to make intercession for us.
 - c. He’s the spotless sacrifice whose blood atones for our sin.
 - d. He’s the one who tears the curtain from top to bottom (literally when he’s on that cross [Matt. 27:51]) giving sinners like us access to a holy God.

- i. He's the realization and fulfillment of all that the temple stood for.
- D. This is why Jesus himself says, in [John 2:19](#): "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." Or as his opponents put it in [Mark 14:58](#): "We heard him say, 'I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands.'" What does he mean by this?
 - 1. He means: "In my death and resurrection, I'm going to inaugurate a new era for the people of God with a new temple, if you will. I've come to fulfill all that original temple stood for, with its physical, earthly types and shadows and I'm going to rebuild it, as it were, now in its more spiritual, eschatological, eternal, heavenly form."
- E. This is what the author of Hebrews is referring to when, speaking of Jesus, he writes in [Heb. 8](#): "¹ [W]e have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven,² a minister in the holy places, in the true tent that the Lord set up, not man. . . .⁵ They [the priests of the first temple] serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things. For when Moses was about to erect the tent, he was instructed by God, saying, 'See that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain.'⁶ But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is . . . much more excellent . . ." (vv. 1-2, 5-6). And so later, in [Heb. 9](#), he continues and concludes: "¹¹ [W]hen Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation)¹² he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption" (vv. 11–12) . . . for us!
 - 1. Earthly copy is giving way to the heavenly original. Shadow is giving way to substance. Because of Jesus and the cross, things are leveling up, if you will.
- F. This is why, by the way, again, at the climax of Stephen's encounter here with the council, what does he see? [Acts 7:55](#): "But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God."
 - 1. In Jesus, Stephen has access now, not to some little room behind the curtain, but to the very throne room of God in heaven.
 - a. And, in Jesus, you and I do as well!

The Lesson for Us

- A. So what's the lesson for us under this first emphasis in Stephen's speech?
 - 1. These Jews, they couldn't move on from what God had done in the past. They had him in a box, literally. They got stuck on Moses and the temple to such a degree that they couldn't see where Moses and the temple were actually leading.
- B. And, you know, we can be prone to the same thing. We can get stuck in the "glory days." Beware of standing in the way of God's plan for you.

1. Let him have his way in your life. Let his plan unfold, whether it seems favorable to you at first or not.
- C. I thought of Peter on the mount of transfiguration when Jesus manifests his glory to him: “This is good! Let’s get some tents and stay here in this, in the glory, I like it. I don’t want to go down. I don’t want to pass through the cross.”
1. But then you risk missing the greater thing that God is after in your life.
- D. For some of us, we, like these Jews here, get attached to stuff God has done in the past, or stuff he’s doing right now—a season of glory and blessing—and we don’t want him to move us on. We certainly don’t want him to move us through hardship, move us towards things that currently seem unfavorable to us.
1. We want to pitch our tents on the mount of transfiguration.
 2. We want to stay with Moses and the temple, with the things we’re comfortable with instead of following God out into the great unknown.
 3. But we must fight this temptation. For, while the future, in one sense, may be unknown to us, at least in some of its particulars, the one who holds the future is well known.
 - a. We know the God who took Peter from the mount of transfiguration on through the cross to the mount of ascension. He came to a brighter day on the other side of Calvary’s shadow.
 - i. And that’s what he’ll do with us if we’ll let him.
- E. So I don’t know what you’ve been going through lately. I don’t know where Jesus is leading you. But I do know the one who is leading you—and he’s good, and he can be trusted. Let go. Let him lead you on.
1. He may destroy the temple, so to speak, but he only does so if he’s planning to rebuild something even better!

Emphasis #2: The People’s Longstanding Pattern of Resistance

A Poisoned Pedigree

- A. In response to these charges against him, Stephen doesn’t just make it a point to emphasize the Lord’s unfolding plan of redemption, he also, quite courageously, emphasizes the fact that the Jewish people have, from the very beginning, always stood in opposition to that plan.
- B. What he wants to do here, really, is expose the irony, the hypocrisy in all of this.
 1. “You are accusing me of standing against Moses and the temple and God. But I am here saying, it is not I who is standing against such things, but you.

2. You say I'm denying God's ways, when truly I'm defending them. You think you're defending God's ways, when you're truly you're denying them.
 - a. And such is to be expected, for it has always been this way with you and your fathers.
 - i. You have a poisoned pedigree. You are sour fruit from a sour stalk. Like father, like son."
- C. So, while he's recounting the history of Israel and all this, he makes sure to point out their resistance to God's true leaders and redemptive purposes all along the way . . .
- D. This comes out first with Joseph, the one whom God would use to help Israel, granting them favor with Egypt, delivering them from famine and things. By God's appointment, he would be a leader among his brothers, but, as you might imagine, his brothers aren't feeling it.
 1. So in [Acts 7:9](#), Stephen accents the fact that "[the patriarchs \[were\] jealous of Joseph \[and they\] sold him into Egypt . . .](#)" (Actually, when you look at the story, you realize they betrayed him for few pieces of silver [[Gen. 37:28](#)]. Sound familiar [[Matt. 26:15](#)]?)
 - a. These are the headwaters of the twelve tribes of Israel, and there's jealousy and backbiting and resistance to God's good will and work from the start.
- E. And it carries on into the way the Israelites would treat Moses. And Stephen is going to spend a little extra time on this, as we would expect given the charges that have been leveled against him.
 1. So when God is raising up Moses to deliver them from Egypt, Stephen tells us in [v. 25](#) that "[\[Moses\] supposed that his brothers would understand that God was giving them salvation by his hand, but they did not understand.](#)" They didn't get it. They weren't for it.
 2. As Stephen puts it in [v. 35](#): "[This Moses, whom they rejected, saying, 'Who made you a ruler and a judge?'—this man God sent as both ruler and redeemer . . .](#)" He's here to rescue, they did nothing but resist.
 3. In fact, even after he'd rescued, still they resisted. So Stephen, speaking of the time after the Exodus, says of Moses in [vv. 38-41](#): "[38 This is the one who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the angel who spoke to him at Mount Sinai, and with our fathers. He received living oracles to give to us. 39 Our fathers refused to obey him, but thrust him aside, and in their hearts they turned to Egypt, 40 saying to Aaron, 'Make for us gods who will go before us. As for this Moses who led us out from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.' 41 And they made a calf in those days, and offered a sacrifice to the idol and were rejoicing in the works of their hands.](#)"
- F. That last phrase there is critical: "[the works of their hands](#)" ([v. 41](#)).
 1. Because it corresponds later with something Stephen says about the temple. I read it to you already. He says: "[\[T\]he Most High does not dwell in houses made by hands . . .](#)" ([v. 48](#)).

- a. In fact, every time the Greek word translated “made by hands” here is used in the LXX it’s always in reference to idols.
- 2. So, therefore, even when it seems they are appreciating the temple, truly they are resisting it, rejecting the very point of it.
 - a. They are idolizing it; taking false confidence in it; getting superstitious and externally religious and missing the heart of it; they take pride in it and use it to prop up their egos over and against the Gentiles and other nations.
 - i. They’ve turned even the temple into a golden calf.
- G. Stephen again gets as clear as he can by the end of this speech of his. Look at what he comes out and says in vv. 51-53: “⁵¹You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you.⁵² Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered,⁵³ you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it.”
 - 1. “Let’s stop pretending you’re for Moses, you’re for the temple, you’re standing on the side of God. You’ve always been against such things, however good a show you might put on on the outside.
 - 2. So it’s no wonder, that even though God has come to rescue and redeem in Jesus, you are resisting him, stiffening your neck up against him. It’s what you’ve always done.”
- H. Jesus himself, when contemplating his own impending death, says in Luke 13:33-34: “³³ [I]t cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem.³⁴ O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!”

The Lesson for Us

- A. So, again, we must ask: what’s the lesson for us here with this second emphasis?
- B. I would put it like this: Beware of your propensity to self-deception. Sometimes we can think we are walking hand-in-hand with God, when truly we are stiff-arming him.
 - 1. You realize, we’re not just tempted to lie to others about this, sometimes we lie even to ourselves. We close our eyes to the truth of God and his Word because it doesn’t suit us. We don’t want to know it. It’s uncomfortable. It’s inconvenient. So we spin a web of deception, and it’s not just others that get caught up in it, we get caught up in it as well.
- C. That’s what we see here. They think they are defending Moses and the Temple, when truly they are contradicting them. They think they are standing for God, when truly they are standing against him.
 - 1. It’s a devastating window into our fallen human condition. We are often most distant from God at the times we think we are on the best of terms with him.

- D. This is what Jesus is trying to get at with the smug, self-assured, Pharisees, when he says: “If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, ‘We see,’ your guilt remains” (John 9:41).
1. “So long as you think you are great, you’re far from it.
 2. But when once you’re willing to own up to your sin, and face the hard truths of the gospel, hallelujah, you’re starting to see!”

Emphasis #3: The Gospel’s Stubborn Offer of Forgiveness

God Is Not Done

- A. Now, here’s what’s so amazing about all this. When we look at what Stephen’s saying at the close of his speech, you think it’s over for these guys. It seems like he’s just yelling at them, rebuking them—like God’s done with them. That’s what you’d think.
1. But it’s not true. He’s not done. In fact, he’s ready to receive and forgive them.
 - a. If God’s people have a stiff neck, I suppose you could rightly say, in one sense, that God’s neck is stiffer still.
 - b. If they are stubborn in their resistance and rebellion. He is even more stubborn, it would seem, in his mercy and grace.
- B. This comes out in at least three ways here . . .
1. First, simply note that, in Stephen’s recounting of all this history, God doesn’t stop with Moses or the temple, in view of their resistance, and just say: “I’m done with you.”
 - a. He keeps coming. That’s the history of redemption. He doesn’t stop. He sends Jesus anyways. He’s relentless in his love.
 2. Second, why does Stephen spend so much on Joseph’s story there in the beginning? It seems a little bit out of place, until you get what he’s doing.
 - a. Did his brothers reject Joseph? Yes.
 - b. But did Joseph then turn around and reject them? No. He forgave them. He received them. He saved them.
 3. But then, third, and most clearly, even after the not-so-subtle rebuke of [vv. 51-53](#), when this religious mob is circling to stone him, what does Stephen cry out, do you remember? Look at [v. 60](#): “And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, ‘Lord, do not hold this sin against them.’ And when he had said this, he fell asleep.”
 - a. Those are the last words left ringing out in the air after his passing. And they’re not words of condemnation but of grace!
- C. And, you know, I suppose there really is a fourth way this stubborn mercy of God comes out here in the story if you know where to look for it.

1. Who does Luke tell is there in some way overseeing this whole affair? Saul, whom we later come to know as Paul, the apostle. [Acts 7:58](#): “Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul.” And, later, in [Acts 8:1](#), Luke leaves no doubt as to where Saul stood on all this: “And Saul approved of his execution.”
 - a. But was God done with Paul because of this—because of his resistance, because of his hardness, because of his self-righteousness, because of his sin?
 - i. Oh no, God was just getting started.
 - ii. Later in [Acts 9](#) we will see, God is going to open his eyes by blinding him, just as we’ve said—humbling him to the dirt, so he can lift him to the sky!

The Lesson for Us

- A. The lesson for us on this third point here is quite obvious, isn’t it?
- B. If God could extend mercy to people like this, to people like Saul, he can extend and is extending mercy to you here today, I don’t care what you were doing yesterday. Come to him through Jesus and he will receive you!
 1. As Paul himself would later write in [1 Tim. 1:15-16](#): “¹⁵ The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.¹⁶ But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life.” Jesus saved him to make it abundantly plain: he can, therefore, also save you!

But How?!

- A. So, as I said at the beginning, Stephen looks like Jesus in the way he speaks here . . . but how? How was he able to speak with such wisdom, with such courage, with such grace? How was he able to speak in a manner like Jesus? How did he look like Jesus in these moments?
 1. Well, as I mentioned last week, it’s because he was looking at him. We look like what we look at. And, for Stephen, as we saw there in [v. 55](#), he was looking right at Jesus.
- B. And, as such . . .
 1. It made him wise: “I see the one who is the fulfillment of the Law and the temple.”
 2. It made him courageous: “Why would I be afraid of this angry mob here? I see the one who stands in my defense. Even if they kill me, I live.”
 3. It made him gracious: “How do I know that Jesus will receive my spirit? Is it because I am better than these other Jews here? Not at all. It’s by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Which means this salvation isn’t mine alone. It’s for anyone. Father, forgive them like you’ve forgiven me!”

C. If you look at Jesus, you'll look like Jesus—in the way you serve, in the way you suffer, and in the way you speak.

1. So what are you looking at?!