

19a ACTS

Let's begin our study of the Word of God this evening in the customary manner by taking a moment at the outset to go to the Lord in prayer and remember that it is not our energy or our intelligence that enables us to understand and apply the things that are in God's Word, it is the presence of God's Spirit. And we're really wasting our time as Christians if we don't allow Him to do His work both at the point of taking in the Word of God and at the point of applying it. So let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Father, we thank you once again for the opportunity to spend time nourishing our souls through the truth that is contained in your Word. We thank you for preserving it for faithful men who literally gave their lives so that we could have a copy of your Word in our own hands and in our own language. We thank you that we live in a country where there is freedom and opportunity.

We don't have oppression. We don't have persecution. You have granted us blessings that kings of centuries past did not enjoy.

And we know you have given us all these things at the closing days of this age to enable us to prepare for the kingdom that is coming and the king that is coming. And we pray that our study tonight will further that goal. We ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen. We pick up our study tonight in the Book of Acts, Volume 2 of Luke's story. It's amazing how much we would not know if it wasn't for the Book of Acts.

You could lose one or another of the Gospels and it would be a tragedy, but we would still have some information about the Lord Jesus Christ. But if we did not have this book, if God had not inspired Luke to write it, we would have no earthly idea of the origins of the church except through cloudy traditions and things that have been distorted down through the ages. It's a wonderful thing to see the promises of God and the provisions of God as they unfold.

We're now right at the brink of chapter 7. We saw last time that the church in Jerusalem is growing and is made up of two different kinds of Christians. We have the Hebrews who are Aramaic-speaking Israelite natives, and we have those who are Jews by birth but have scattered in what they call the diaspora, the dispersion to Asia Minor and to other parts of the Greek and Roman Empire and have now come back to Jerusalem. Greek is their native tongue.

The Greek and Roman culture is the way they live. They are quite different in outlook and in emphasis. Their lifestyle is different, and yet they share a common heritage in Israel and in the law of Moses.

And I'm not sure I made something completely clear last time in talking about this group

in verse 9 of chapter 6 that arose from what is called the synagogue of the freed men, the Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and those from Cilicia and Asia who are disputing with Stephen. These are the foreigner Jews. These are the ones who are predominantly Greek culture, Greek-speaking.

These are not the native synagogues in Israel, but these are not in the Christian church. We talked about the dispute in the distribution to the widows. The Greeks said, our ladies are getting short shrift, and so the apostles said, well, let's appoint some guys to handle this so we can devote ourselves to prayer and the study of the Word.

By the way, when I addressed that particular passage last time, I was in a church where there had been a history of expecting the pastor to do all the work of ministry. Somebody new would come into town and people would assiduously write their name and address and phone number down and then hand it to the pastor and say, well, pastor, somebody new just came into town. You ought to visit them and invite them to church.

And if you look at the model in Acts and in Ephesians chapter four and elsewhere in the scriptures, keep in mind that the function of the pastor is to equip the saints for the work of the ministry by prayer and Bible study, Bible teaching. If you ever in some future time find yourself in a church that loses its focus, hopefully not ours, but this is a Catholic idea. This is how Catholicism organized itself hundreds of years ago.

Everybody chips in to the church and the church does the work of the ministry. The priests go out and do benevolences for the poor and the monks and the nuns go out and work acts of righteousness and you're supposed to chip in to the church and then the church does the work. Well, this kind of leaked over in the Protestant Reformation and churches ever since have this idea that, well, when you're giving to us, you're giving to God, so send us your tithe and we'll go out and do all these wonderful works of ministry.

And you become sort of the money man. You supply the money and then you say, well, I've done my part. Now the church should go off and do the ministry.

That's not the biblical model. And you see it here in Acts chapter 6 and I kind of glossed over it, but when the apostles get this complaint and they say, look, get some men who can be the diakonoi, the deacons, the ones who do the ministry of distribution. These are men from in the church.

The apostles who are the leadership of the church say, we have got to give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word. That is what spiritual leadership in a church is supposed to do. Whether it's the pastor or whatever model, the Bible does not dictate how churches are to organize.

Somebody should be in charge. Somebody should be teaching the word of God and

devoting themselves to prayer. It can be one.

It can be more than one. The Bible doesn't give any inkling as to the structure. It just says it needs to be done decently and in good order.

Generally, we have some form of pastor who is the buck stops here guy and he's the one that is accountable to God for how things operate in the church in terms of order and so on. But the pattern here is in verse four, we, those who are making policy, implementing policy, making sure people learn what they're supposed to learn in church, devote ourselves continually to prayer and the ministry of the word. They do not say, well, I'll do that for two hours in the morning and then spend the next 10 hours of the day visiting the sick and afflicted round about us or going off to meetings and conferences and getting on TV and making commercials and writing books and that kind of thing.

Prayer and the ministry of the word. This is the responsibility of whoever it is that does the teaching in the brethren church. They call them a teaching elder.

In most Bible churches, we call them a pastor and you might have a board of deacons or a board of elders or both or neither. But whoever's responsible for the teaching, this is what they do. Study and teach and pray.

This pleased the whole multitude. So they picked these men. Now, these guys all have Greek names.

They are from the community of Greek speaking Jews, but they are Christians and they're inside the church. This next group, as we move forward into verse nine and 10, Stephen, who is also from this community, he is a Greek speaking Jew, cultural Greek Jew, full of faith and power, does great wonders and signs among the people. So from the synagogue of the freedmen, these are also Greek speaking Jews who are not Christians, who are not going to church, not listening to the apostles.

They're still going to the synagogue. They rise up disputing with Stephen. They look at him as sort of a traitor.

They have been trying to establish a foothold for modernized Judaism. They are sort of the outsiders coming in. They are trying to get some legitimate standing and find some common ground with the native-born Hebrews.

They feel like they're making some ecumenical progress here, but now Stephen is giving them a bad name because he's gone off with the Christians and Nicanor and Philip and these other guys. This is undermining their political progress because to join in with the native Hebrews is to gain power in the Sanhedrin, to gain seats, to get some political power, to get some of the funding, to elbow your way in where everybody's feasting at the big banquet table of religion in Israel. And so just when they really start making progress, why a bunch of them defect in their view and go off to this new cult of

Christianity, and this makes them look bad.

So they're upset at Stephen and Philip and these others. So they're disputing with Stephen. They're trying to bring him back in the line.

They're trying to squash him down. So now you've got two different factions of Jews, the Hebrews and the Greeks, who both dislike the church for different reasons. So they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which Stephen spoke.

So they secretly plotted and induced men to say, we heard him speaking blasphemous words against Moses and God. This tells us what the nature of the message is that Stephen is putting out. What is Stephen saying that everybody finds so upsetting? Think about it.

Let's pretend like we're all in Jerusalem. And we go to church on Saturday. We go to the synagogue on Saturday.

And we hear noise about, well, there's this new thing that has come up. It's new. And right away, we're suspicious of something that's new.

My daddy didn't go to any kind of a ecclesia, to a church type of thing, and these apostles and these signs and wonders. My granddaddy didn't go. In the history that I can remember going back hundreds of years, we didn't have anything like this.

If this guy was the Messiah, then why did he get killed? Why isn't he still around giving us bread and healing us and so on? And so people are questioning and they're wondering what's going on. Some of them might even go down and listen to the apostles. And the apostles are saying, look, this is not new and this is not strange.

This is what was foretold in your Bible. The listen to what our scriptures say. This is in our Bible.

So now people are faced with, do I agree with what these men are saying about my Bible? We have this experience in our own church. We have a great weight of tradition that comes down to us over the last 1,500 to 2,000 years, telling us that certain things are so. Most churches that you go to, most Protestant evangelical churches by definition, are going to tell you that your main job, now that you're a Christian, is to go make everybody you know a Christian.

You need to give them the gospel. If they're lost and bound for hell, their blood is going to be on your hands if you don't get them saved. You need to live a holy life and you need to quit all your bad habits and be really, really good, mainly because these unbelieving, hell-bound sinners are watching you and you've got to have a good testimony for them.

And if you live like a rotten egg and they don't see Christ in you and they don't come to faith, well, it's kind of your fault that they're going to spend eternity in the hot place. And in a nutshell, this is what you get in a lot of traditional Christian teaching. Well, if somebody comes along and says, listen, what the Bible really tells you is you are supposed to be holy.

You're supposed to live in a way that pleases God because you are going to stand before God when the Lord Jesus returns and you're going to give an answer for the way you lived your life. And the way you lived your life is going to determine what happens to you for the next 1,000 years and on into the kingdom of the Father. And you may think, well, it's great to live it up right now.

It's kind of like a car full of drunk teenagers. Everybody's having a good time veering down the road at a high rate of speed. And boy, aren't we having fun? But as soon as the car goes out of control and hits somebody in the oncoming lane and kills a family full of little kids, suddenly the fun is over and you've got a lifetime of misery and regret and possible maiming and death.

That little short period of exuberance has cost people their lives, cost people their health, and its effects go on much longer. And you say, well, was it really worth it to get happy and go veering down the road drunk? Well, it seemed fun at the time, but it sure didn't last. Well, think about that in terms of this life.

We can get happy and grab for the gusto and say, what will make me happiest today? Let me go grab for some gusto now. But if we do that, we are the drunk teenagers veering into the oncoming lane because there is a day of judgment coming and we are accountable to God. God says, look, you were born in sin.

You were born as a part of a fallen race. That wasn't necessarily your fault, so I'm going to give you a chance to be rescued. I'm going to send my son.

He's going to die on a cross, a cruel death. He's going to pay for all of your sins. All in the world you have to do to be rescued out of this lost condition, this sinful condition that you were born into, is just say yes.

Just accept the gift when I offer it to you. Once you accept that gift, you have been purchased. I have rescued you out of the kingdom of darkness.

I have made you a citizen of my kingdom of light. I expect you to live like a citizen of the kingdom of light. That means you need to put off this old stuff and start anticipating when this kingdom actually comes to earth and the Lord Jesus reigns for a thousand years.

You need to get free of all of the rest of the effects of being born in sin and being corrupted. You need rehabilitation. You were made in the image of God in the Garden of

Eden, but that's been corrupted and it needs to be restored.

So we have an opportunity. When we seize that, we are happier than any other way. Our life has purpose and meaning.

We redeem the time. There is a satisfaction and a peace and a future that is so satisfying you can hardly explain it. This is the choice that we face.

This is new and this is different than what a lot of churches say. A lot of churches don't tell you that you need to be living for the future, that you need to have an eye on the kingdom, that you need to plan ahead. They say you need to look around in the world and see all these lost, hellbound sinners and get them all saved.

God has already got that covered. God has got His Holy Spirit out there convicting every single one of them. We need to be ready if one of them comes in our periphery to speak the truth in love and give them the information that they need.

But they will ask if someone wants to be saved, if God the Holy Spirit comes to them and says, here is the truth about Jesus Christ, what are you going to do about it? They say, I need some information. I don't want to go to hell. I don't want to have to pay an eternity apart from God.

Then God will put one of us next to them and give us the opportunity to give them some information. But that is not the reason we are here. We don't exist just to stand around waiting for another hellbound sinner to ask us a question.

Our day-by-day life is preparation for eternity. And what a tragedy to be all busy looking at everybody else and forget to look at ourselves and forget to get ready for what is coming up. Well, this is an unusual message.

You don't hear that in just any church or any radio broadcast. There are only some places you hear it and there are people who resist that and dislike it. That is what is happening in this age.

So how do you know which is right? I've got all of the tradition and what everybody has said for all of these years and then I've got this other thing. Well, how does God communicate truth to us? It is in His Word and it is revealed by His Spirit. So go to the source.

Did you know that you are a priest? You represent yourself. You don't have to ask me. You don't have to ask anybody else.

You can go straight to God and say, Lord, I'd like to know the answer to this question because I don't want to get to the end of my life. I don't want to wake up on the day of the rapture and discover that I wasted my time and now I'm debilitated for the whole

length of the millennial kingdom. I want to be ready.

I want to do what you would have me to do. So show me the truth. Help me perceive it.

Help me understand it. And He will. God says, ask and it will be given.

Seek and you will find. Knock and the door will be opened to you. So what excuse do we have for not knowing the truth? Why is it we could go through life and not know the truth? It isn't that there wasn't any door or that there wasn't any opportunity.

It's that we didn't knock on the door and we didn't ask the question and we didn't look for the truth because it's there. God lays up sound wisdom for the righteous, it says in Proverbs chapter 2. All you have to do is ask and God will reveal it. Then once it's revealed, you say, well, now what am I going to do with it? Well, this is kind of a long introduction, but this is what's happening in these days in Acts.

There is kind of a new message. It's fresh and it doesn't sound like all of the tradition that they've been hearing in the synagogue and people have to make up their mind and they're accountable for what they choose. Well, a lot of these people, they like the status quo.

They say, I don't want to hear this new message. I don't care if it comes from the Bible or not. It bugs me because I like things the way they are.

I'm having a good time. People look up to me because I'm a Pharisee or a Sadducee. People look up to me because I'm a modernized Greek speaking Jew and I'm in the synagogue of the freedmen and I'm kind of a monkey muck.

And I don't want people rocking the boat and changing my good time here. So don't bother me with this stuff. Don't try to tell me stuff from the Bible.

I like things the way they are. We have to watch for this attitude in our souls at the time that we decide we don't want to learn anything new and we don't want to know anymore. We're content with the status quo.

That is the time that we are standing looking up on the down escalator. You're standing there. You're looking, thinking, I want to be up there and you're just going backwards.

Next time you're in a store with a couple of three levels and an escalator, just get on the down escalator and turn around and face up and watch everything recede because that's exactly what's happening to these people. Everything that God has in the way of blessing and reward and opportunity, happiness, contentment, fulfillment is receding into the distance because they will not get off of that escalator. That's where they want to be.

So they set up false witnesses. They say, you're a threat. You're rocking the boat.

We don't like to hear what you have to say. We've heard him speak blasphemous words. They stirred up the people, the elders and the scribes, and they seized him and brought him to the council.

They also set up false witnesses who said this man does not cease to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the law. We've heard him say that Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs which Moses delivered to us. We like everything the way it is.

And this man says it needs to change. Well, this is important because we're going to look at the speech of Stephen tonight and what is it that is going on in Stephen's speech. He does not seem to answer the accusations.

The high priest asked him in chapter 7, are these things so? Are you guilty as charged? So Stephen says, and beginning in verse 2, we have a little sermon from Stephen, and it's a history lesson. It's kind of a review of history. He says, Brethren and fathers, listen, this is the classic way of addressing a Greek assembly or a Hebrew assembly, either one, but especially the Greeks.

He says, Brethren and fathers, listen, the God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia before he dwelt in Herod. And said to him, get out of your country and from your relatives and come to a land that I will show you. So he came out of the land of the Chaldeans.

It wasn't Chaldean at the time, but that's what it's known by now. And dwelt in Herod. And from there, when his father was dead, he moved him to this land in which you now dwell.

Why does Stephen go way back to the dark past when the priest says, are these things so? Why does he even say, these people are lying? I never said that Jesus was going to tear down the temple. I never said we had to get... You see, he doesn't go into a big self-defense, does he? He goes to the Bible. He goes to the Old Testament scriptures.

He says, you remember that Genesis scroll? What does it say in Genesis? And he takes them to the word of God. If you really want to have an effect, if you want to have any hope of changing someone's mind, give them the word of God. The word of God is alive and powerful.

It's sharper than a two-edged sword. It pierces and it divides right to the very center, the soul and the spirit and the joints and the marrow. It will judge the thoughts and intents of the heart.

If you have any desire to really do someone a benefit and do them a good and be a blessing to them, don't go off on a bunch of rationalizations. Don't go off on a bunch of scientific explanations. Don't go off on a bunch of self-justification.

Give them the word of God. God the Holy Spirit can't take your opinion and that's like a wet noodle. If you want to stab somebody, do you want a piece of wet spaghetti or do you want a sword? Our opinions and our rationalizations are just so much wet paper.

It is the sharp sword of the word of God that does people good. We should speak the truth in love. This is what Stephen does.

He doesn't try to justify himself. So he says, the God of glory appeared to our father Abraham. Why does he bring up Abraham? Abraham was living the happy-go-lucky life in Ur of the Chaldees, just like we live today.

Most of us live here in the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex. And one day, what would you think if all of a sudden God came down and spoke in the middle of the night, woke you up out of a sound sleep and said, fill in your name, Sam, I want you to pack up, pack your suitcase, throw it in the car and leave Dallas and I want you to go to Peru because I'm going to show you something there. Well, this is different than all of my expectations.

This is something new and strange and different. I don't have any precedent for this. But it is very much the will of God.

Would anyone argue that it was God who told Abraham to leave Ur of the Chaldees? It was. And all of these Jewish people, Greeks and Hebrews acknowledge that it was God who told Abraham to leave Ur of the Chaldees and do something totally new and different. Why does Stephen bring this up? Do you think? Because God has come and is telling Israel, I'm about to do something totally new and different.

I'm going to put an end to what you've been doing for the last 1500 years and we're going to do something new. Just like I told Abraham to do something new. It should not surprise us that God does something new.

So, get out of your country and from your relatives, come to a land that I will show you. He moved him to this land in which you now dwell. But God gave him no inheritance in it, not even enough to set his foot on.

So, at the beginning of something new, you're in the sojourning mode. You don't have any possession. You don't have any inheritance.

Your inheritance is future. Isn't that the way it is for the church? Isn't that the way it is for us? Our citizenship, our inheritance is in the future. When Abraham had no child, he promised to give it to him for a possession and to his descendants after him.

God spoke in this way. His descendants would dwell in a foreign land. They would bring them into bondage and oppress them 400 years.

The people of God, starting out in Abraham, are going to be oppressed and resisted and

attacked by the existing status quo people as they try to bring this new thing into existence. Isn't that what's happening with the church in this first generation? They're getting resisted and oppressed and they're not given any foothold in Jerusalem. And he says they will oppress them 400 years.

I'll come back to the 400 a little bit later. The nation to whom they will be in bondage, I will judge, says God. And after that, they shall come out and serve me in this place.

So, God says, be patient. Those who are resisting you are going to be judged. What is the implication? Who is analogous here? Or as Tommy Smothers would say, who's analogous? It's the church, Stephen and the apostles and the early first generation church.

They are the Abraham and the family of Abraham and the seed of Abraham coming to a foreign land and being resisted and oppressed and attacked. And God says, be patient. You're going to be attacked, but the people who attack you are going to be judged.

So, who are the attackers? The synagogue of the freedmen, Pharisees, Sadducees, the council, the status quo, right? So, people are not slow and they're not dumb in this age. And when Stephen starts saying these things, they say, wait a minute. I think I'm getting an analogy here.

I think I can see who you think you are and who you think we are and we don't really like this. So, he goes on. He says, look, God gave Abraham the covenant of circumcision.

Abraham begot Isaac, circumcised him on the eighth day. Isaac begot Jacob and Jacob begot the twelve patriarchs. The patriarchs sold Joseph into Egypt.

There was division even in the people of God. They had a schism. Haven't they just recently had a schism in the church? None of this is going to be done in the dark.

People are going to know it. They're going to be quick to pick up on it. Sort of a mini scandal.

They say, well, I heard somebody died at your church the other day. Your new assembly heard a couple of people drop dead. That can't be good.

And I heard you starving some of the people's family there and not giving the widows something to eat. So, you all have got some problems. Well, it's no different than looking at the family of Jacob and saying, well, I hear you sold your brother into slavery and all is not well and happy in your brotherhood there.

But God delivered him out of all his troubles, gave him favor and wisdom in the presence of Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, made him governor over Egypt and all his house. A famine and great trouble came over all the land of Egypt and Canaan. Our fathers found no

sustenance.

When Jacob heard there was grain in Egypt, he sent our fathers out first. And the second time, Joseph was made known to his brothers and Joseph's family became known to the Pharaoh. Then Joseph sent and called his father Jacob and all his relatives to him, seventy-five people.

I'll come back to the seventy-five in a minute also. Every time we hit some of these numbers, it seems to be a difference with what the Old Testament says, but it's not a problem. Jacob went down to Egypt and he died, he and our fathers.

And they were carried back to Shechem and laid in the tomb that Abraham bought for a sum of money from the sons of Hamor, the father of Shechem. It's another little discrepancy. But here's the thing.

In this paragraph, verses 9-16, what's the main idea? What's the big idea here? Well, there are a couple. One, this is Stephen's answer to these accusations that he is disrupting tradition and that he's going against the Bible as it exists in those days. And what is his answer? This is not the first time God has done something new.

Okay? God cooks up new things from time to time in history. It's not like this has never happened before. Secondly, oftentimes when God starts to do something new, there is just the kind of resistance and oppression that you all are giving the church.

And you need to figure out which side of God's plan you want to be on. Because God ultimately vindicated and delivered Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and their descendants. And he is, by implication, he's ultimately going to vindicate the twelve apostles and the church here.

And people who oppose them are going to be rolled over by the steamroller of God's plan. So you might want to learn from history so that you're not doomed to repeat it. Thirdly, and this is what I find most interesting, did you notice that little phrase at the beginning of verse 13? Everybody look at verse 13.

Jacob heard there was grain in Egypt, he sent our fathers out first, and the second time Joseph was made known to his brothers. What was the first time he was made known? Remember back when Joseph was out there and he said, hey Judah, Simeon, Reuben, I had a dream. And Joseph gave his little I had a dream speech.

And it didn't go over. Because he said, I had a dream that we were out in the field and all of a sudden the sheaves that you all bound started bowing down to my sheaf. And then later he had another dream.

And he says, I dreamed that there was the sun and the moon and twelve stars and they all started bowing down to me. And they say, boy, you are really full of yourself there,

young man. You think we're going to bow down to you? Joseph was revealed that he was going to be a ruler and a prince over his older brothers and even his father.

And nobody got into that idea. Nobody liked it. They thought he was uppity.

They thought he was thinking much of himself. And so they got so mad at him, they sold him as a slave and said, well, see how you rule over us down in Egypt as a slave. And Joseph went through a lot of tribulation.

The second time Joseph was made known to his brothers and Joseph's family became known to Pharaoh, you're going to see this same pattern when he comes down and starts talking about Moses. Look at verse 17. When the time of the promise drew near that God had sworn to Abraham, people grew and multiplied in Egypt.

Now the king arose that did not know Joseph. You go all the way down through this. Verse 20.

At this time, Moses was born. He was well pleasing to God, brought up in his father's house for three months. Pharaoh's daughter took him, brought him up as her own son.

Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, mighty in words and deeds. Now, look at verse 23. When he was 40 years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren, the children of Israel.

He supposed that his brothers would have understood that God would deliver them by his hand. Sounds kind of like Joseph, doesn't it? But they did not understand. So he appears to two of them as they're fighting.

He tried to reconcile them. They push him away. Verse 28.

At this saying, Moses fled and became a dweller in the land of Midian where he had two sons. Both Joseph and Moses are revealed to the people as a deliverer. In both cases, the people aren't ready for him to be the deliverer.

And in both cases, Joseph and Moses have to leave the country for an extended period of time. Then, verse 31. Forty years had passed.

Angel of the Lord, Mount Sinai, marvel at the sight. Voice of the Lord, I am God. They made a calf, etc.

I'm sorry, I skipped a whole page there. Take your sandals off. I've surely seen the oppression of my people.

Verse 35. This Moses whom they rejected saying, who made you a ruler and a judge is the one God sent to be a ruler and a deliverer. So, a lot of verbiage here.

We could spend a lot of time on it, but here's the big idea. And this is what we're going to close our first lesson with. Two different times, the deliverer was made manifest, Joseph and Moses.

The first time the people saw them, they rejected them. Cast them away. Had to leave the country.

Appeared to be dead. Come back, as it were, from the dead. And the second time, they are the big hero.

They actually do accomplish God's deliverance for the people. What's Stephen getting at here? You're asking me if I'm telling you that the law of Moses and this temple and a lot of the things that we have taken as tradition are about to change? We have yet another deliverer whom God has sent. And when he appeared the first time, he was rejected by the people.

And he has gone away. But when he appears the second time, he is going to accomplish all of the promises that God has made for his people. Does this make sense? Do you see where Stephen is going with his argument? Now, so what? What does that mean to us? We oftentimes resist what God has in store for us.

We are just like Newton's laws. We have inertia. We have a body at rest wants to remain at rest.

A body in motion wants to remain in motion. And as the Holy Spirit and the Word of God try to work in our souls, we resist. We say, well, I'm not really sure I need to change or that I want to change or that I should go this way.

We have a natural, ingrained, inborn, sinful, corrupt desire to maintain the status quo. God's Word, God's Spirit, God's plan for us will be revealed and will show us the way of deliverance. And we want to learn from history and not repeat it.

When God shows us the path of deliverance, shows us the path to life and to peace and to a bright future, we don't want to push it away and send it off into slavery or send it off to Midian for 40 years. Or crucify it on a cross and say, you don't match my expectations. We want to be asking for God's will.

We want to be seeking God's will. We want to be knocking on the door saying, Lord, just show it to me and I'll accept it. I will do it.

It is the receptive heart, it is the one who asks, the one who seeks, the one who knocks. These are the ones who are going to find God's deliverance and God's salvation. Look at the sad record of these people.

It's a third time that they're going to miss what God has in store. Does God want to

discipline these people? Does He want to send them out into the sin unto death? He does not. He is holding His hands out even though they are disobedient and stiff-necked because He wants to deliver them.

He says, how many different ways do I need to tell you this truth? Well, let's be smarter than they were. Let's wake up and see the deliverance of God when it comes the first time. We're going to pause here and take our break.

When we come back, we're going to see the remainder of Stephen's sermon here and see if it also holds some clues as to how we can make the most of our time here on earth. But let's pause here and take our break.