

Introduction

Good morning. Two weeks ago. I preached on the last 10 verses of chapter 5. And I drew your eyes to the whole of the book of Acts preceding. That the way Luke has written this book up to this point is different than the way he wrote the Gospel account. Luke has this alternating style of describing the goings-on at a high level and then zooming in on a particular day or confrontation. And what we have seen is an escalating, upward trend in the violence of the confrontations between the young, fledgling Jewish convert Christian church and the Old Jewish Authority. Why did Luke the doctor write this book?

Remember that the Gospel according to Luke and the book of Acts are 2 pieces of a 2-part collection which Luke wrote. Luke is not an apostle or disciple of Jesus during his earthly ministry. However, Luke is a believer. Paul describes him as such as the dearly loved physician - as a coworker in the letter to Philemon.

In Luke 1, Luke gives his method and reason for writing: **[Luke 1:1-4] 1 Many have undertaken to compile a narrative about the events that have been fulfilled among us, 2 just as the original eyewitnesses and servants of the word handed them down to us. 3 It also seemed good to me, since I have carefully investigated everything from the very first, to write to you in an orderly sequence, most honorable Theophilus, 4 so that you may know the certainty of the things about which you have been instructed.**

Acts 1 contains no such lengthy introduction, but we can reasonably assume that Luke, led by the Holy Spirit, has continued this method and reason in writing to Theophilus again - that is to provide an orderly sequence of the narrative of events. Go ahead and open your bibles to Acts 6 verse 8. Page 622. My message today is an escalation of my message two weeks ago on the end of Chapter 5. I say this because I think that's what Luke is recording - we read about this increasing escalation of the persecution leading to the explosion of mission-oriented living of the church in Chapter 8 and onwards from Jerusalem to Antioch of Syria and finally to Rome at the end.

Stephen's Normal Life

[Acts 6:8-10 CSB] 8 Now Stephen, full of grace and power, was performing great wonders and signs among the people.

Stephen is one of the 7 proto-deacons. I don't recall where I heard that term - but I like it - it helps us separate the 7 proto-deacons of Acts 6 from the deacons later in the NT and certainly deacons today. And Stephen is a different breed. He is waiting tables for breakfast, lunch and dinner. Then he is going into Jewish synagogues all the rest of the day preaching about Jesus. And that is where the problem begins.

9 Opposition arose, however, from some members of the Freedmen's Synagogue, composed of both Cyrenians and Alexandrians, and some from Cilicia and Asia, and they began to argue with Stephen.

10 But they were unable to stand up against his wisdom and the Spirit by whom he was speaking.

Verse 9 - Opposition arises from the Freedmen's Synagogue in Jerusalem. In the 1st century, the Jews had their temple but around the city were various synagogues, and one of those was the Freedmen Synagogue. These were made up of Jews who had been enslaved and taken far away, indoctrinated in the culture of the time, then Greek and then Roman cultures. So when they returned to Jerusalem, they didn't speak Aramaic like the Jews, they had the Septuagint - a Greek OT - they formed their own synagogues - maybe they spoke Greek.

The 4 areas listed - Cyrene and Alexandria in northern Africa bordering the Mediterranean and - curiously - Asia and Cilicia. Put a pin in or draw a circle around Cilicia. And Write next to it if you are taking notes "Tarsus". That will become relevant later.

Charges/Allegations

So Stephen, who we can guess from the Greek-ness of his name is Hellenistic, possibly Greek-speaking, Greek-cultured. So Stephen goes to this synagogue - this is how cross-cultural boundaries in missions are eliminated - by sending someone of similar background and culture like Stephen to the Hellenistic Jews in the Freedmen's Synagogue.

Men in this one Jewish synagogue are arguing with Stephen, but they're unable to stand up against his wisdom and the Holy Spirit within. Stephen is not only a handyman who is willing to serve and give of his time. Stephen is theologically brilliant. He knows his Bible. He defeats them in debate with his mind and the Holy Spirit that fills him. These Jews can't deal with him. He has the Holy Spirit within him and Jesus Christ always with Him. He can't be defeated. So in Verse 11 - they persuade some men to accuse him.

[Acts 6:11-14 CSB] 11 Then they secretly persuaded some men to say, "We heard him speaking blasphemous words against Moses and God." 12 They stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes; so they came, seized him, and took him to the Sanhedrin.

And that wasn't enough so they brought false witnesses. Jewish law requires 2-3 witnesses for a criminal to be tried.

13 They also presented false witnesses who said, "This man never stops speaking against this holy place and the law. 14 "For we heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs that Moses handed down to us."

There are 4 charges that the persuaded men and the false witnesses bring against Stephen.

Blasphemy - speaking in an irreligious way - a dishonoring/unglorifying way

- a. **Moses**
- b. **God**
- c. **Temple**
- d. **Law**

Starting in chapter 7 verse 1, The high priest asks "Are these things true?"

Stephens Jewish Defense (Acts 7:1-50)

Beginning in verse 2, Stephen defends himself and over the next 50 verses is the longest sermon in the book of Acts. It is a 4-part defense directly refuting these 4 charges. He is going to AT THE SAME TIME trace the history of the Jewish people from Genesis 11 all the way to 1 Kings 8 when the temple is finished AND answer these 4 charges along the way. Maybe that's why Luke preserved it for us.

This is how that looks:

a. God of Glory (7:2-8)

They say: "You were speaking blasphemous words against God." in ch. 6 v. 11. That's a serious allegation. What would you say if someone said that of you? Would you care - saying what does it matter? I hope you desire to know God and speak about him rightly. He begins his message with the worst charge - blasphemy against God. He begins his defense where the nation of Israel began back in Genesis chapter 12 when God called Abram.

[Acts 7:2-3 CSB] 2 "Brothers and fathers," he replied, "listen: **The God of glory** appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he settled in Haran, **3** "and said to him: Leave your country and relatives, and come to the land that I will show you.

The God of glory - a title coming from Psalm 29 - the God of Glory - a title of utmost respect and reverence. God of Glory...what is glory? God's glory is the display or the projection of God's holiness. And his holiness is the combination of all that He is - his attributes. His mercy is greater than we can comprehend. His love is greater than we can comprehend. His justice is greater than we can comprehend. His patience is greater. His joy is greater than we can comprehend. His faithfulness and gentleness are far greater. And when you take all those and a hundred more Biblical attributes of God and put them all together, you get God's **holiness**. It's his other-ness. His transcendent greatness above all his creation. So take that greatness- that holiness - and put it on display to the world, and that is the glory of God. And when you do that in your life and possibly your death, you are glorifying God.

Acts 7 Verses 2-8 show God's faithfulness to Abraham. Though Abraham doesn't receive the land in his life, the nation he fathers will. And God fulfills that promise in Isaac. And after Isaac, Jacob who fathers 12 sons making the 12 tribes of Israel.

Stephen did not blaspheme God. Stephens glorifies God by exulting in the faithfulness of God in the founding and history of the nation of Israel, the nation of his brothers and fathers. That brings us to verse 9.

b. Joseph and Moses Persecuted and rejected (7:9-36)

Acts 7 verse 9-36 are Stephen's defense against the 2nd charge that he had spoken blasphemous words against Moses. Moses was the first High Priest of the nation of Israel. He rescued them from the slavery of Egypt. But Stephen begins Moses' story where it should start. With Joseph. The 12th and youngest son of Jacob. Joseph who was sold into slavery by his very own brothers. Slavers that brought him to Egypt where he - through a long tale of God's plan and interference that we don't have time for today - rose to power as the 2nd in command of all of Egypt. So that when a famine drove the 11 brothers to Egypt in search of food, it is the rejected brother, the rejected son of Jacob who had risen from slavery to a position to save them all. The 12 brothers are now reunited in Egypt where they are safe from the famine and God's chosen nation is saved. The end of Joseph's story ends in genesis 50 and it ends with a confrontation between Joseph and his 11 brothers who feel so ashamed that the brother they sold into slavery has become their savior.

[Genesis 50:18-20 CSB] 18 His brothers also came to him, bowed down before him, and said, "We are your slaves!" **19** But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? **20** "You planned evil against me; God planned it for good to bring about the present result -- the survival of many people.

This is the power of our God - that He has the power to take man's evil intentions and conform them to his planned purposes - like the crucifixion of his Son to save a people from sin.

That brings us through verse 17 of Stephen's sermon.

Verse 17-18: Years pass and a Pharaoh that despises the Israelites comes to power. He takes all the nation of Israel and convert them into a slave force to build temples and pyramids and whatnot. During this time, Moses is born. Because the Pharaoh had ordered male infants to be killed, Moses' mother sends him down the river in a little basket. He is found by the Pharaoh's daughter and raised as a son of the Pharaoh for 40 years. 40 years old - he's walking around one day, sees an Egyptian slave master beating an Israelite slave. Moses tries to stop it and accidentally kills the Egyptian, buries the body, and the next day Moses is told by the very Israelite men he protected:

[Acts 7:27-29 CSB] 27 Who appointed you a ruler and a judge over us? **28** "Do you want to kill me, the same way you killed the Egyptian yesterday? **29** "When he heard this, Moses fled and became an exile in the land of Midian, where he became the father of two sons.

After this, God reveals himself to Moses in the form of the burning bush, the 10 plagues to show God's power to the Egyptians, the exodus from Egyptian through the desert, through the parting of the Red Sea, the journey to Mt. Sinai. And at Mt. Sinai makes his 3rd defense in verse 37.

c. Law rejected (7:37-43)

[Acts 7:37-38 CSB] 37 "This is the Moses who said to the Israelites: **God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your brothers and sisters.** (Deut 18:15) **38** "He is the one who was in the assembly in the wilderness, with the angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and with our ancestors. He received living oracles to give to us.

Moses was the chosen High Priest to receive the old covenant law and read it to the people who from the beginning have rejected it and turned to the worship of idols. Stephen's defense is this: I have not blasphemed against the customs of or the law of Moses. Moses warned you of another prophet to come and he has come - Jesus is the prophet in Deut 18 which Stephen quotes in verse 37.

Stephen's defense against this charge is this: from the moment this Nation received the law of God, you have rejected it. Through Moses, the law was given. Through Jesus, the greater Moses, the law was fulfilled. Stephen is not downplaying or blaspheming the law. Jesus never said he was destroying the law. In fact, he said not one dot iota or or title would end - not until the final day when Jesus returns. That is defense #3.

d. Temple redesigned (7:44-50)

In verse 44, Stephen makes his 4th and final defense. And Stephen's conclusion is the point of his sermon and the point of mine. The story of the whole Bible is this: from the moment that Adam and Eve sinned, God has been pursuing his own glory by creating a fitting dwelling place for himself. He moves his chosen people here, moves them there, has them craft him a tabernacle, a tent, has them craft a temple,

[Acts 7:48-50 CSB] 48 "but the Most High does not dwell in sanctuaries made with hands, as the prophet says: **49** "Heaven is my throne, and the earth my footstool. What sort of house will you build for me? says the Lord, or what will be my resting place? **50** "Did not my hand make all these things?

God does not require anything to dwell with us any more. He does not need any special, purified place. He has no need for buildings or altars or sanctuaries. There is an idolatrous danger in thinking that God can only be experienced in holy places. Buildings are great, they make gathering consistent and convenient, but Jesus is the mediator of our worship and the only true source of our satisfaction in God.

Verse 49 comes from (2nd Samuel 7) God's response to King David's plea. David is in his palace on his throne and looks outside at the old tabernacle that he has moved near to Jerusalem and set up inside the tabernacle tent again. And David seeing the disparity that his God lives in an old dirty tent while David dwells in royalty in his palace, he is troubled. He wants to make God a beautiful temple to dwell in. He tells this to the Prophet Nathan. Nathan goes to bed that night and God speaks to him, giving him a message for David. This is a long chunk of text on top of an already long passage but this is necessary to understand what Jesus did to the Jewish temple when he died and that curtain that hung from floor to ceiling was torn in two and no longer needed. In John 2, Jesus said, I'm going to destroy this temple and rebuild it in 3 days.

Here is what God, through the prophet, told David:

[2 Samuel 7:7-9, 12-14 CSB] 7 "In all my journeys with all the Israelites, have I ever spoken a word to one of the tribes of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, asking: Why haven't you built me a house of cedar?' 8 "So now this is what you are to say to my servant David: 'This is what the LORD of Armies says: I took you from the pasture, from tending the flock, to be ruler over my people Israel. 9 "I have been with you wherever you have gone, and I have destroyed all your enemies before you. I will make a great name for you like that of the greatest on the earth.

12 "When your time comes and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up after you your descendant, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. 13 "He is the one who will build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. 14 "I will be his father, and he will be my son. When he does wrong, I will discipline him with a rod of men and blows from mortals.

The death of Jesus on the cross accomplished what the temple and its constant sacrifices could not. Jesus's death as a substitute for us in the payment of the debt for our sin abolished the need for any temple. You and I are not made holy and clean either by the blood of animals or the following of the law. We do not want to become like those Pharisees who Jesus calls white-washed tombs - on the outside they're clean and pure, but on the inside, they are dead, rotting, and corrupt. Jesus' death was the acting out and the purchase of His new tabernacle. He purchased sinners out of their debt!

Before your conversion, you were like an old rundown abandoned home, decaying and rotting, falling apart, condemned, unsuitable for living. And the God of universe paid an enormous amount in the death of his Son on the cross. In that moment you were justified, declared a suitable dwelling place, and God moved in! And from that moment, God has been working in your mind and heart to wage war. War against the sinfulness of your old ways to sanctify his purchase. He doesn't look at how dilapidated or rundown you've made your life and go, "wow shucks that's gonna take a lot of work. Nevermind" No. He is the God of Glory. He is in the business of adopting into his family the hardest, most difficult children so that no one will deny that this conversion is from God. Look at the OT history: Abram, Jacob/Israel, Moses, David, Solomon. And if you're a Christian and you're honest with yourself, you're a difficult child. You are a difficult renovation project. But that's who God loves to rescue. He is most glorified in our enjoyment of his work - that's why we worship! God is most glorified - His beauty and greatness are most honored in our enjoyment and worship of Him and what he has done.

This is the motivation of God throughout the Bible - From Gen 1 to Revelation 22 That's how the book begins and that's how it ends. God is making a fitting dwelling place for both Creator and Creation to dwell together. He is remodeling, renovating, house-flipping this new temple - your body - his new dwelling place - from the inside out. That is Stephen's defense. That is his conclusion.

With his defense complete, Stephen turns to accuse the Sanhedrin:

Stephen's Rebuke is the same 4-parts of his defense turned into the conviction of white-washed tombs whose hearts are dead and unfit for dwelling. He has defended himself. And now he offers his Spirit-filled assessment of them. Look at 51-53.

51 - Hard-hearted, deaf-eared, blind, blasphemous resistant of God's Spirit

52 - You have betrayed and rejected the latest and most Righteous Prophet of God.

53 - You received the law with its temple instructions within and have rejected them as well.

That is the message of Stephen's sermon. You cannot be saved by a remodeling of your exterior. No fresh coat of paint can save you when you don't have any electricity or heating. God begins the remodel from the inside out.

I once asked a friend "Did yall go to church this past Sunday?" He responded, "Yeah..had to get right with the big man this week." Friends, no one is made right with God on a Sunday by keeping a schedule or keeping the law. To be a Christian is not to have the best answer to the question: "Are you a good person? Do you stay out of trouble?" That's not the question for the Christian life. That's now how you know you are a child of God.

To be a Christian is to live your life aimed towards what is described in **[Philippians 1:20 CSB] 20 My eager expectation and hope is that I will not be ashamed about anything, but that now as always, with all courage, Christ will be highly honored in my body, whether by life or by death.**

That desire ought to be the primary desire of every person claiming to be a Christian - that Christ would be honored or magnified in your body by life or by death. But God is merciful. He adopted you as his children, and since this church is made up of mostly parents of little ones, this illustration should be quickly understood. For the rest of you, this was your life a long time ago, you just don't remember it.

When it came time to teach my kids to walk - around a year old or whatever - The first few times my son tried to walk, I didn't get angry every time he fell down. Each step was this giant celebration. He couldn't walk on his own yet - far from it, but the little baby steps (literally) were amazing. It signified this transition from one way of living to another - from crawling to walking. And I believe, because God is relationally to us our Father, he views us the same way. As we walk through life trying to glorify Him, we stumble and fall, repeatedly, again and again, and God is rejoicing that even in our getting back up, he is glorified. His mercy, his power, his worth is made visible to those around us. God is glorified in the stumbling, in the falling, and the standing back up again. That is our call as believers, to persevere in growing into the likeness of Jesus. Or As the Puritan John Owen refers to it, Mortifying the sin in our bodies. It is a lifelong, everyday task of failing, repenting, and returning to the worship of God in our bodies.

The Brave New World

For the remaining 10 -15 minutes, I want to look at the reactions to Stephen's sermon. It's not often that you get 3 different reactions to your sermon in the very passage. All three groups respond in ways that change the course of the early church forever. Let's turn to chapter 7 verse 54 now and see the connection between God's new dwelling place in the body of the Christian and the response of three peoples.

1. 1st group: The Jews

[Acts 7:54-60 CSB] 54 When they heard these things, they were enraged and gnashed their teeth at him. 55 Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven. He saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. 56 He said, "Look, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!" 57 They yelled at the top of their voices, covered their ears, and together rushed against him. 58 They dragged him out of the city and began to stone him.

The Jews, enraged at these allegations perhaps self-righteously most enraged at the final one about keeping the law, rush on him. While Stephen is gazing into the heavens opened, they are covering their ears and yelling. They drag him out of the city. In accordance with the law and customs, death by stoning would begin by throwing him down a large hill or off the roof of a building to see if that kills him. If it doesn't, the witnesses whose testimony condemned him would throw the first stones and when that doesn't work, the entire group picks up stones to kill Stephen.

I don't think anyone in his room can relate to this group - the one murdering Stephen. However, one word of warning: be careful and be aware of sin's ability to dodge accusations. We have a natural sinful - biological - tendency to fight back, or dodge, or avoid when we are accused or convicted of something. That's not the example or command Jesus left for us. Don't bristle up. Someone hits you, turn the other cheek. Someone takes your jacket, give them your hat too. Heap coals on their head with gentleness and kindness.

Stephen is given one final ounce of grace from God in this view of heaven. I mean - just minutes before he was able to see Jesus on his throne face-to-face - he sees the throne. And he prays! Stephen prays! What Luke records next for us is so important. He prays 2 prayers.

2. 2nd Group: Saul

And the witnesses laid their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul. (I'm just going to call him Saul for the rest of this message, but he later takes his Greek name, Paul) **59 While they were stoning Stephen, he called out: "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit! "** (That's his first prayer. He makes one final plea for salvation. Do you pray like that - with that urgency? God, keep me! Keep me faithful. To you, to my wife, to my church. Do you pray that?) **60 He knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them! "** (His second prayer, the last use of the air in his lungs. He prays like his savior on the cross. "Father. Forgive them, because they do not know what they are doing." **And after saying this, he died.**

Apart from Jesus's prayers, Stephen's prayer might be the greatest prayer in the Bible. What did Joseph, the rejected savior of the entire Israelite nation say when his brothers came back to him begging for forgiveness? **20 "You planned evil against me; God planned it for good to bring about the present result -- the survival of many people.** Stephen's murder was carried out by evil, wicked men - Saul included. Although they planned such evil against Stephen, our God works through that evil for something greater - the conversion of Saul and the spread of the message of salvation of the Gentiles

Charles Spurgeon writes in an 1875 sermon: **"Stephen's prayer, 'Lord, [do not hold this sin against them],' was such a comprehensive plea for his murderers that I can well conceive of his fixing his tearful gaze upon that young man named Saul, and in his thoughts including him, in that petition, and beseeching the Lord not to [hold this sin against him]; and the Lord did [not hold it against him]"**

I have been thinking about the method and structure of Luke's writing over the last few weeks. And what I can't shake is why we have this story about Stephen. We don't need it necessarily to follow the narrative. Just jump from the end of chapter 5 to 8:3. My theory is that Saul (Paul) later when traveling with Luke. Luke asks about the persecution in Jerusalem and why the Jewish Christians left the city. And Saul says, "Let me tell you about a man named Stephen." So Luke begins Chapter 6 introducing us to Stephen and Phillip who we will meet next Sunday. Take a quick moment to turn to Acts 22. This is near the end. Paul has been arrested by the Jews. Next the Romans take him to Rome where he dies a couple years later.

[Acts 22:1-4 CSB] 1 "Brothers and fathers, listen now to my defense before you." 2 When they heard that he was addressing them in Aramaic, they became even quieter. 3 He continued, "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia but brought up in this city (Remember Cilicia from the Freedmen's Synagogue. It's plausible that Saul was attending the very synagogue where Stephen was evangelizing) , educated at the feet of Gamaliel according to the law of our ancestors. I was zealous for God, just as all of you are today. 4 "I persecuted this Way to the death, arresting and putting both men and women in jail,

Then Saul recounts his entire conversion on the Damascus rode. Skip to verse 19. He objects to the Lord's plan because why would God send his greatest enemy back to his people? Look who Saul still hasn't forgotten about this many years later.

[Acts 22:19-20 CSB] 19 "But I said, 'Lord, they know that in synagogue after synagogue I had those who believed in you imprisoned and beaten. 20 "And when the blood of your witness Stephen was being shed, I stood there giving approval and guarding the clothes of those who killed him.'" Saul never forgot the man who plead for him. The man whose prayer changed the world. Stephen didn't change God's mind. But He was given the enormous privilege of being the means by which Saul was forgiven.

3. 3rd group: The Church

[Act 8:1-3 CSB] 1 Saul agreed with putting him to death. On that day a severe persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout the land of Judea and Samaria. **2** Devout men buried Stephen and mourned deeply over him. **3** Saul, however, was ravaging the church. He would enter house after house, drag out men and women, and put them in prison.

The death of the first Christian martyr propelled the early church out of the city of Jerusalem, just the apostles remained. Christianity is a "Go and Tell" religion. Why do we do that? Why do we lift up global missions as the ultimate aim of the church? 2 answers:

1. Because Jesus commanded it.

[Matthew 28:19-20 CSB] 19 "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 "teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you." Let me be honest for a moment. We know the command. I know the command. You know the command. What we need is confidence, encouragement, courage, training. I need God to work in me to remodel this sinful, introverted coward of a dwelling place. How do you do that? You become a student of the Word of God! We live in the best technological age for this. You can while you drive to work, get 20-30 mins of Bible fed into your brain aloud. There are millions of hours of sermons and conferences and podcasts out there to help you understand the Bible. There are ____ books back here in Chase's office which I'm sure he's vetted and if each of you grabbed a book, brought it back in 2-3-6 months, it might be more useful than just collecting dust. Grab a book, find a sermon, a podcast, share it with somebody. You wanna send me something or give me something, I'd really love that.

2. Because Jesus modeled it.

We are sent. We say that every Sunday. Why are we a Go and Tell religion? Because God was the first to send. **John 3:** God sent his Son into this world to save it. **John 20:** "Peace to you. As the Father has sent me, I also send you." That is the Christmas message. The God who created everything, sustains every heartbeat, breath, and molecule by the power of his voice became flesh to dwell among his Creation and to suffer, and to die not just to save us from hell, but that we might be saved to something. To a dwelling place with Him for eternity. Emmanuel means "God is with us" This is the glorious meaning of the incarnation. It is good news to escape eternal separation from God, it is better news to receive Him.

The Christian church was designed by the Creator of the universe to persevere any kind of persecution, revolution, or virus lockdown in pursuit of that end. She is designed to function in the desert, in the jungle, and in the biggest of cities. Because God doesn't dwell in sanctuaries made with human hands, but rather in human hearts made anew/born again by God. To be a Christian is to be a walking, living, breathing image-bearing temple of God. And God is in the business of flipping houses for the praise of his name.

Prayer and Worship

So what are you to do? We do what temples are meant to do. We Pray and We Worship and We Serve. So for a few minutes, I want to just prompt you to pray. I don't know what your capacity is for God's freedom. Meaning - when you pray, how big are your requests? Not in the length of our words or in total, but in power. When Stephen prayed, do not hold this sin against them. He prayed the greatest, biggest prayer he could with his last breath. So what should you pray?

1. If you are not a Christian and want to pray. Pray that God would help you. God, help me see and understand who you are. God, reveal to me who you truly are and who I truly am.
2. If you are a Christian, Pray that God would keep you. The biggest miracle in my life and in your life is that you wake up each day still a child of God.
3. Parents - pray that God would draw your children to the saving knowledge of his Son's death for their sin. God can answer that prayer. We just read it. Pray that God would forgive their sins and minimize yours.
4. Village Church - Pray that whatever happens in the next year, that God may be glorified. Pray that we hold fast to our vision and commitments to one another is that "We glorify God by making, growing and sending disciples of Jesus Christ." Pray that God would raise up people from this congregation to go, go to their neighbor, go to plant another church, go to the ends of the earth so you can say with Saul - yes the same Saul **[Philippians 1:20 CSB] 20 My eager expectation and hope is that I will not be ashamed about anything, but that now as always, with all courage, Christ will be highly honored in my body, whether by life or by death.**