



Gospel Lessons – Part 8

The Pushback Against the Messengers

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I know you're all accustomed now to hearing about every day it seems, viruses, their impact and their proposed remedies. We hear that all the time. But you need to remember that it wasn't long ago, before the acceptance of modern germ theory, that we didn't have a set germ theory. Of course, there are microscopically invisible to the naked eye viruses and bacteria that actually cause these things. Before that understanding, there were a lot of proposed therapies that were not remedies. Right? They just dealt with the symptoms and never really got to the problem. And therefore, you know, a lot of wacky and crazy suggestions to solve problems that we're not rightly understood.

Understanding the problem is critical, right? You can't propose a remedy, at least you're shooting in the dark with remedies, if you don't know what the problem is. And therefore, we need to be careful if you're going to go to the doctor that you get a proper diagnosis. And if that's true for your physical life, imagine how important it is for your spiritual life. You better know what the problem is. Now, some people think there is no problem. They'd like to go to a doctor with a sign out front that says, "We will never give you any bad news." Right? Well, that may make you feel good. Every appointment will be, you know, "You're looking great. You look like just a picture of health." That would be awesome. But what I really want the doctor to do is to be honest with me, because if I have a problem, if it's serious, at least I want to get that fixed. And if there's a fix for it, I'd like to have it.

We've been studying in Acts Chapter 7, Stephen, who's been preaching here, teaching, responding to the Sanhedrin, the council that had just imprisoned his pastor, had beaten his pastor, told him to stop preaching, Peter, and now they've got Steven there. And it's the same council that had previously, just months before, had put Jesus before them and turned him over to the Romans to be crucified. So this is an educated and experienced group of people who were in the know about Christ, about Christianity. They had clarity about all that, and yet they were really not responding well. Matter of fact, that's what Stephen's whole speech was about, is looking at the pattern of God sending the right person, the deliverer, the leader and having the people in their stubbornness just not respond well. They didn't recognize it. And he's basically setting them up for the diagnosis.

He's saying look at all the problems out there. Now, let's talk about you. Now, we finally turned the corner in the last two paragraphs of Acts 7. So I want you to turn there and quickly look at verses 51 through 60 as Stephen concludes his speech and it doesn't end well for him. It ends well in the sense that we get a clear diagnosis. But to a bunch of people who have rejected it in the past, they're certainly not interested in hearing it now, I was going to say a third time, but there were probably a multitude of people who had said to the Sanhedrin, this council that he was speaking to, of what they needed to do and their problem that they had with God.



So he responds this way. It sounds harsh, but remember that background. It may help you with the way that he's going to respond to them in saying, "You've got a problem." Well what's the problem? Verse 51. "You are stiff-necked people." Now, that's a phrase you probably didn't use this week on people, unless you're an old, crotchety, proper gentleman. I don't know who uses that phrase. "You're a stiff-necked person." But of course, that's the biblical terminology, even from the Old Testament about people who were stubborn. You're stubborn. And then he uses a phrase which I assume you haven't used this week, "uncircumcised in heart and ears." You didn't say that to anyone this week, right? Your ears are uncircumcised. No. What are you talking about? You're mixing metaphors. What are you saying?

Of course, circumcision, I don't want to talk about it too much or have you envision too much of that. But you know what it is. And it was the sign of the covenant between the people of God and God. And that excising of that flesh was the picture here of a heart that is calloused and insulated to God and ears that are like plugged up that are not interested in hearing from God. And of course, all of that is more accurately and clearly said in the last phrase of verse 51 where he says, "You always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you." You're resisting what God has to say.

You've heard it in the Scripture, which you are not listening to. You've heard it in Jesus himself in confessing to you who he is. You've heard it from Peter and John. You've heard what the truth is and you don't want to hear it. And that shows the problem that you have, just like the people in the Old Testament who he's been reviewing for the last fifty verses. And then he says, think about it. Which of the prophets did your fathers, the ancestors in the Old Testament, not persecute? Right? Why? Because they were saying things they didn't want to hear. I think about Micaiah in the Old Testament, not Micah, but Micaiah, notoriously evil King Ahab had a conference here with the King of the South. He's the King of the North. His wife was Jezebel. You remember them as notoriously evil in the Old Testament. And the King of the South says to the King of the North in this little powwow they were having, "Hey, don't you have a prophet that you can inquire of the Lord to find out what God thinks of all this?"

And he says, "Well, I do have a prophet Micaiah, but he says he always prophesies evil about me and never good." Well, because we've read the rest of Ahab's life. Your life is bad. Right? Of course, God is wanting you to deal with the moral and ethical issues of your life. And then he says this, "Therefore, I hate him." He didn't want to hear it. And this is the problem here with the people who Stephen is speaking to. And it's just like the prophets in the Old Testament, they didn't want to hear. They hated them. From Jeremiah, I mean, you can go all the way back to the beginning of the prophets emerging and Moses being the great mouthpiece of God, even in the desert, they didn't want to hear it. They didn't want to hear the truth.

"And they killed," they didn't just persecute them, but that many of them, they killed, "they killed those who announced beforehand," in their prophecies, "the Righteous One." Do you see that capitalized in your English text, "the Righteous One?" This is the first reference in 51 verses of Christ. He's finally talking about Jesus. This whole speech was a defense of his Christianity, but he finally gets around to talking about Jesus and he didn't even use his name



specifically. He uses this appellation, this title, the Righteous One, which again stands in contrast to them. They are unrighteous because they're resisting the Holy Spirit and they have their fingers in their ears, so to speak, and they are uncircumcised and callous in their heart and their neck is stiff, they're rebellious. They won't bow down to Christ.

"Whom," now he says about the Righteous One, look at the bottom of verse 52, "whom you betrayed and murdered." These very people did that, this very group of people, these 70 leaders of Israel, they did that. They said, "OK, we're handing him over to be crucified." "You received the law," it says in verse 53, "as delivered by angels," this was the picture on Mount Sinai of Moses receiving the tablets and the law, "and did not keep it." You didn't do what the law said. The law, as he said earlier, Moses speaks of the coming prophet, the Righteous One, Jesus, and you're not listening to that. You want to cherry-pick the Bible, you want to cherry-pick the things that Moses said, and you're choosing not to listen to the parts that you don't like.

And of course, particularly we don't like the parts that talk about our sin problem, which is what those first verses are about. In verse 54, it says, "Now they heard these things," look carefully in verse 54, and they were so thankful that they finally got an honest diagnosis about their stubbornness and their hard hearts. No. "When they heard these things," it happens too when you share the message of sin and judgment, this is what often happens, right? They get enraged. "When they heard these things they were enraged," that's a strong word, "and they ground their teeth at him." What a visual, right? You see someone who gets mad. You see the muscles on their jaws start to flex and, you know, maybe even physically grind their teeth they are so angry with a clenched jaw. They're angry at hearing that they're stiff-necked? That they are the ones that don't obey the law? I mean, they dragged him and said YOUR blasphemy against the law. He says, no, "I'm obeying what the law says and the law is pointing to Christ and Christ is the solution to our sin problem and you have a big sin problem. You're not even listening to the Spirit. You're not responding to the conscience that God has given you. You're not reading the Scripture and responding the way that it says you ought to, your hearts are callous, your ears are plugged, you refuse to listen." And they didn't want to hear it.

They were full of rage but in verse 55, "He is full of God's Spirit and gazing," up into the sky, "up into heaven, he saw the glory of God." So he has this vision here as he is being, you know, about to be rushed upon. He saw the glory of God, an interesting phrase, "Jesus standing at the right hand of God." You often hear about in the book of Hebrews that he's seated at the right hand of God because the priests would never sit down. There were no chairs in the temple or the holy place or the Holy of Holies because they were always working and always doing the work. And the book of Hebrews says that Jesus is finished with his work, his redemptive work, so "he sat down."

So we get Jesus here, the only reference to him standing at the right hand of the Father. And I think there are two implications for that. One in particular we'll see is that he's ready to receive into his presence the very first martyr, Steven, as we'll see. But he's standing there at the right hand of God. And he said, but the reason we know that is because he tells them that. "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man," which again, I try to emphasize this



every time we see this phrase, but it's like for the seminary educated elite, the scribes, the Pharisees, the people sitting on the Sanhedrin, they're like, "ding, ding, ding, ding, ding, ding." You're using very important biblical phraseology here. Son of Man. That's Daniel Chapter 7, the representation of the Ancient of Days, God, the Father. And he is going to execute judgment on the world. Everyone's going to be evaluated. But he calls one before him like the Son of Man it says, there's the phrase. and all dominion, all authority, all oversight of people who have ever been made has been given to the Son of Man. And he tells all people to obey him. He is the Son of Man, it's the number one phrase, most frequently used phrase, that Jesus uses about himself. When he talks about himself in light of prophetic Scripture, he loves the phrase Son of Man, and he references himself as this person.

And now he's saying out loud as they're enraged and clenching their jaws, he says the Son of Man is standing at the right hand of God, which again has got to just even infuriate them even more. And it does. Verse 57, "They cried out with a loud voice," they stopped grinding their teeth and they start yelling and they, "stopped their ears." Talk about the uncircumcised ears. I mean, it's like they got their fingers in their ears, like a little kid, you know, going la la la la la la la la la la. I don't want to hear what you're saying. It was just so infantile. "and they rushed at him." Well, that's not infantile. I mean, they're going after him in violence now and they go to grab him. You can envision this.

And of course, they're not going to stone him to death, which they're about to do, on the Temple Mount in this court setting, in the Supreme Court of Israel. They're going to drag him out of town, which according to the laws of the Old Testament, that's what you did if you had a judicial sentence on killing someone. So you can see them dragging this grown man and see some of the people in the church even, you can imagine the chaos in all of this. They dragged him out of the city and they stoned him, two words, "stoned him." And you hear that because you know that's in the Bible and people get stoned in the Bible and you think, "Wow, yeah, that's too bad. They killed him."

Do you know what that is like? I need you to think about that. Right? They take him out of the city walls. They go out there in the valley and they look for rocks, which there are plenty of them if you ever been Israel, just like it was then, plenty of rocks laying around and they pick up rocks. Well, what kind of rocks do you have? We got rocks that are the size of golf balls. You got rocks that are the size of a racquetball, got rocks, maybe, big rocks the size of a baseball. I mean, that'll do some damage, but you get hit with that it's not going to kill you right off the bat.

Matter of fact, if I said take a bunch of rocks that we find out in some wilderness place and let's go take a Labrador retriever and throw rocks at that dog until that dog dies. That will be a horrific scene, right? Yelping, you know, you might break some bones. It would take some time to kill a dog. Think about a whole human, you know, a full-grown man. This is torturous. This is painful. This is someone they're getting pelted with rocks and a crowd around him, throwing rocks at this guy who's just for 50 verses has been talking about the fact that there are a lot of leaders who the people of Israel have rejected. Now, you, as the leaders of Israel, are rejecting the Righteous One, the one the Old Testament speaks of. And now they've

taken him out to the outskirts of the Old City and they said, "Time for you to pay for this." And they're yelling and they're enraged and they're throwing rocks at him and they're trying to kill him.

"And the witnesses," bottom of verse 58, "laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul." Now Sunday school graduates, you know this guy, Saul of Tarsus? Who does he become? Paul the Apostle. Right? So this is just an eerie little footnote that what you've got here and as Paul says later, "I was in full agreement holding their cloaks" like, go get him. So he's enraged as well and certainly in favor of these rocks. He didn't throw the rocks, but he's all about the rocks. Matter of fact, we're going to learn he's going to go out persecuting these Christians. But it says Paul's there, future Paul, Saul of Tarsus and "When they were stoning Steven," and that's a process, it's going to take several minutes, "he called out, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.'" So the Son of Man, the great judge of all the world, he's looking up and saying, "Hey, receive my spirit."

What a bold, confident assertion of his assurance that he's right with God. "And falling to his knees, he cried out with a loud voice," verse 60. Right? God, go and punish these people for stoning me to death. No. He says something reminiscent of Christ and that is, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." Well, the only way for sin not to be held against anyone is what? To look to the Righteous One as your redeemer and to trust in him. And how poetic that we just saw in verse 58, there is a man there who's in full agreement with killing Steven and that prayer comes true, right? Paul's sins have been blotted out, as he says in Colossians, "nailed to the cross," affixed to the cross to where he no longer bears his sin anymore. I mean, Stephen has a heart for these people. He's not saying "We're the good guys. We're better than you. You're the bad guys." No, he's saying, "Listen, we were saved by grace, by the fact that we have put our trust in Christ, you guys have rejected Christ, that's a bad thing. But in the end, I wish that you would be saved." As Paul said, I would love to see you as he looks at people who still reject Christ as he writes the book of Romans. I would do whatever. "I have unceasing anguish and tears" over the fact that you are not repentant, you have not put your trust in Christ. And in Stephen's last words, he says, God, I want to see them forgiven, "'Do not hold the sin against them.' And when he had said this, he fell asleep." This is the euphemism, of course, for death. After this pounding of rocks, he dies.

All this started at least the conclusion of his speech up in that paragraph in verse 51, where he's calling them out for being resistant to the truth of God. Stiff-neck, uncircumcised of heart and ears. You always resist the Spirit, just like your forefathers persecuted the prophets, you are persecuting me and you're persecuting my pastor and you put Christ to death. You murdered him are the words, "betrayed him and murdered him" in verse 52. That is the diagnosis that Peter brought in the first sermon that we saw on the day of Pentecost in Chapter 2. It's the message that has been brought by Jesus himself all throughout the gospels. You have a sin problem. You need to see it and recognize it. I think of John Chapter 9, "You are blind because of your sin, and unless you recognize your blindness, you'll remain in your sin. But it's those who see that they're blind." There's a purposeful oxymoron. They see that they're blind. They recognize their blindness, their spiritual sin problem. He says those are the ones who end up getting granted sight. I mean, this is the message.



Talk about words we misunderstand. It's not just words like baptism. It's words like this. It's words that we see in the Scripture, the "gospel." We say, "Well, there's a word and you're talking about stuff that seems negative and the gospel, I know that word. It means good news," and it does mean good news. Right? "Euaggelion" is the Greek word that translates gospel. Gospel. Good news, means it's a good message. It is a good message, just like your doctor might have a good message that he's got a remedy for you, that if you take it, you will be saved. Right? That's all great. That physical analogy, that medical analogy works. But you're never going to take the remedy unless you agree with the diagnosis and that's the problem.

Churches that are like this imaginary foolish doctor's office that say I'm only going to tell you the good stuff. Here in Orange County, it was like guys like Schuller, Robert Schuller, who were followers of Norman Vincent Peale and others that said, Og Mandino, all the rest. Hey, I'm just going to give you the good news. I don't want to talk about the bad news. We've got plenty of those out there today in big stadiums across the country saying I'm here to talk about God and Christ, but I'm only going to give you the good news. Just going to say good news, "God loves you." "God has a wonderful plan for your life." "Everything's going to work out." "Just add Christ your life." And they'll say it in interviews. I don't want to talk about sin, OK? That's like a doctor who's trying to get people to take some kind of remedy but there's no motivation. There's no sense of a diagnosis.

But you and I need to understand the gospel includes, even though that's a big banner, "good news," the good news is good news that there's a solution to the bad news. And the bad news is you have hard hearts against God and they need to be replaced. God would love to replace your heart. God would love to get you right with him. God would love to append all of your sins judicially to the cross so that you don't bear your sins anymore, that you would die and be acceptable before God in the next life without any reference to your sins. He would love to do that. But you've got to admit you have a sin problem and that's a problem because most people want to hear it. Right? You need to understand, if you're taking notes, number one, "Know the Gospel Diagnosis Hurts." There is a diagnosis. Before the remedy there's a diagnosis and the remedy is great if you recognize the diagnosis. And that's painful.

Now, if you're a real Christian here, you've accepted that. We've heard it in the baptismal tank this morning. People talking about their coming to a realization of their sin. That's so helpful and so necessary. But you need to know how hard it is as you share that message of salvation with others, they don't want to hear that. They will get angry. They will be enraged. They don't like to hear that your message of Christianity involves the fact that they have a sin problem and you should be able to sympathize with that because you don't like it either. Even as a Christian, if you've come to recognize your sin, you may sit there in your own home this week with an open Bible and you read the Bible, you get convicted and you say things to yourself, "Yeah, man, I am an undisciplined person. I see that I am..." I don't know whatever your sin might be. Maybe, "I have a bad temper and God I'm sorry for that." "I'm a person with just a bad set of habits that I'm enslaved to."



You can have all that going on in your life. But if someone comes up to you in a small group and says, you know what, you are an angry, undisciplined, stubborn person, you won't go, "Oh, I was just thinking the same thing this week." Right? I mean, you're not going to be cool with that because your flesh is going to go I don't like being called those things and I don't want someone telling me that. But that's the reality of the gospel. It has to expose those things. Now, I can't get around and tell you exactly what the sins are in the non-Christian that I care about, that I want to see saved. But I got to get them to start looking internally as the Spirit of God starts to reveal those things to them and not resist the Spirit of God to say you have a problem. And I want them to see that problem. And that's what Jesus said people struggle with.

Matter of fact, in the most famous verse in all of the Bible, John 3:16, you remember Jesus talking about that "God so loved the world that he sent his only Son." Well, that's the solution. That's the remedy. But he goes on to talk in that same discussion about the problem of people not seeing the need for that remedy, because he says, "This is the judgment that's come unto the world that men love darkness rather than light." That's an analogy now, right? Because what? The light is going to expose their sin. Men love darkness because their deeds are evil and they refuse to come into the light because their sins are going to be exposed. And they don't like that.

Just like if I said, "OK, hey, take off your clothes. I've got a little skimpy bathing suit for you to put on and come on up here on the stage." And let's say to the techs, "Turn these lights way up. Everybody spin around. Look at this person." OK? I mean, there's only like three of you that would be like up for that, right? The rest of us are going to go, "I'm not interested in that." Right? Matter of fact, I see someone from church when I'm at the beach and I want to hide, put the towel around me. I don't want people seeing that. I certainly don't want the light shined all over my body on the platform. We don't like that.

And to the extent that you think, "Well, my body is not presentable to be on the stage with all these lights in a skimpy bathing suit," think about your moral life, how ugly and unacceptable that is to a holy God. Talk about lights, man. And we're talking about the brightest light of all, the holy standard of God upon your life. And you're saying I can't give the good news of forgiveness until you see the grossness of your sin. I'm supposed to tell people at work, I'm supposed to tell my friends, my neighbors, my coworkers, "You got a sin problem. It's bad. You should really think about how bad it is?" That's why people don't want to hear the real gospel. They want to hear, "Hey, God loves you. Add a little Jesus to your life. Things will get better." But the real gospel exposes sin. Just know that sympathetically. Not that you ever curtail it. Not that you ever edit it. Not that you ever excise it from the message, but at least know, I get why sharing the gospel is hard. It's hard because the diagnosis hurts. It's hard for people to embrace it.

In the next section, I don't have a lot of time for this, but in the next section Steven brings up the Son of Man. Let me just summarize this. In this section, 55 through 58, he talks about seeing the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God. Now, that picture of the Son of Man, as I said, is a reference to Daniel 7. It's about judgment. They were seminary grads. They

knew the Bible. This would be a painful reminder to them of everything, not only that Daniel 7 said, but that Jesus kept saying. He kept saying things like this: "When the Son of Man," he talked about himself in the third person because this is how Scripture presents the Son of Man, "when the Son of Man comes in his glory with the angels, he will sit upon his glorious throne." "He will separate the peoples into two groups like a shepherd separates sheep from the goats." He would say things like this in John Chapter 5, "The Son of Man has been given all authority to judge." Right? These pictures of judgment, they know that Stephen is saying, that Jesus had said, that Peter has said to them that you were wrong and because you're wrong, there's a penalty for that. And now Stephen is saying, "Son of Man, I see him now standing at the right hand of the Father." They hated that because it was a picture, an indictment of where they were headed to stand before the judge one day. The Son of Man reference was a reminder to them of the prognosis, not just the diagnosis, that the prognosis was terminal.

I mean, the reason you were taught as a little kid, if you went to church, the verses that started with the diagnosis, "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God," was because that's the message that people need to understand. And then once they do we move to the prognosis, the wages of sin, here's the next verse you learned in Romans, "The wages of sin is death." This is a terminal prognosis. And like going to your doctor, if today you went to the doctor, tomorrow you went to the doctor and they said, "Yes, you have a problem and it's bad and it's going to kill you. And who knows, it could kill you tomorrow, next week, next month." That would mess your day up because you're thinking, "Wow, I got a serious problem brewing inside of me. It's invisible. Can't see it. But, man, now all of a sudden, I'm just bummed out because I feel like I could die in a month. Terminal. OK?"

Spiritually, that's the thing. It involves obviously physical death because physical death came as a result, Romans 5, of the spiritual death that was exacted at the moment of the sin in the Garden in Genesis 3, that God says now we're relationally separated and one day there's going to be death, physical death that comes to your biological body. But the reality of that prognosis of you now dying without fixing this problem, it ramps everything up. You've got a serious problem.

Number two, we need to "Realize the Prognosis is Dreadful." And we talked about this. We won't turn you back there. But when Hebrews talks about the reality of facing God without Christ, it says it's a dreadful thing. A dreadful thing. A fearful thing, I think, is how the English Standard Version translates it. "A fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." You don't want to meet God, your creator, without Christ encasing you, being clothed in Christ. And that, again, is the stuff people... "Don't talk to me about sin and don't talk to me about hell. All of that, I don't like that. That's old-time religion. I don't want it." See, but that's what the gospel begins with.

Speaking of physical ailments, I did get diagnosed with something. I guess I should tell the church. Androgenetic alopecia. I got diagnosed with that and they said it's an incurable case. And I hate to tell you that, but I am going to tell you today that I don't care. And matter of fact, my response is a shrug of the shoulders and no one's perfect. And I hope you agree with me,



if you know what androgenetic alopecia is, because all that means is that I have an incurable baldness in the back of my head. Those are the fancy Greek words for male pattern baldness and so I have it. I do shrug my shoulders and say, no one's perfect. There are remedies, but I don't really care about it. Right? I'm not going to spend money on, you know, trying to move follicles around on my head, whatever. OK, so I need a cap before you do and my head gets colder faster than yours. So the pictures from behind are like, you know, that head is not going to win any awards from the backside. OK, whatever. I don't care.

And you know what, my response to androgenetic alopecia is the way some people respond, when we start talking about sin and hell and judgment, they think, "What does it matter? I don't care." And they'll say what I just said, "Nobody's perfect." Nobody's perfect. But the problem is, it's not that. It's like someone saying you have, you know, stage five cancer. You have, you know, a malignancy in your brain. This is a bigger deal than, hey, no one's perfect. Right? You need to do something about this. There is a remedy. It's like a doctor saying you have a terrible situation, but there is a remedy. Well, there's a remedy for my baldness, some kind of remedy. I'm not interested in having it or paying for it, but I recognize this. If it were some other kind, I'm going to say, "Dude, I don't care about the insurance. I got to figure out the money." I have to do that because I don't want to be killed by this thing, this diagnosis.

When Stephen talks about the Son of Man, he's ramping this up, right? Of course, God in his providence as he shows him Christ standing at the right hand, but he chose the words, the Son of Man, and that reminds them of the judgment that was delivered to Christ to judge the world. And that's the problem. They don't see the gravity of where they're headed without Christ, when he will say to those who have rejected him, "Into the outer darkness, where there's weeping, wailing and gnashing of teeth." And the gnashing of teeth, the grinding of teeth is not because you're angry, it's because you're in pain.

I mean, it's like us hearing about criminals and believing that, you know, jail or punishment or fines are just a big myth. Well, it's not a myth. It's real. If you get caught, and here's the thing about God, he will always have your sins catch up to you, there will be a day of reckoning. You can sit there and hold up, you know, 7-Eleven's and think, well, there's no penalty for this. Well, there is a penalty and that penalty is coming. People may say, "Well, I don't like the sandwich board Christianity 'turn or burn,' you know, you're a sinner. You're going to go to hell. I don't want to hear that." Well, you may not want to hear that. Of course you don't want to hear that. It's a dreadful prognosis. But the thing that we share is the euaggelion, the good news, the gospel of a remedy, Christ is the remedy.

And the passage, I mean, should remind us of that. Look back at it here in Acts Chapter 7, Steven calls out, verse 59, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." I'm dying and I know this. The one who is the judge of the whole earth is not only my judge now he's now my savior. I know I'm going to have, as Peter said in his letter, I'm going to receive a rich welcome into the kingdom. I think this God who formerly would be my judge and condemner, he would condemn me for my sins, is now going to say, "Hey, Steven, welcome." They didn't have that. Matter of fact, references to the Son of Man made them enraged. But as Stephen saw the Son of Man, he said, "Lord," my king, "Jesus, receive my spirit."



That's the difference, that's the joyful remedy. And it's the thing that you should be willing to share in hope that some people are going to take it, they're going to reach out by faith and grab it. Number three, "In Hope Share the Joyful Remedy." The joyful remedy is there is a payment that has been paid for every last sin you've ever committed. If you would trust in Christ and embrace him, whatever the cost with this world might be, however weird you might be thought of because you're a follower of Christ, it solves your guilt problem and your sin problem, and you will die on a day, not be going to some kind of, you know, fire car wash, some celestial purgatory to kind of get cleaned up. You are right now 100%, as Paul said to the Colossians, you are "fully qualified to share in the inheritance and the light." And that is joyful news and you should say, even if I make my neighbor mad or my extended family member mad, I need to talk about sin and judgment because there's no other way for you to be saved but to acknowledge that so that you can have eternal life. And that's what we want. That's what we need.

There's a story. Let me end with this. Matter of fact, turn there with me, would you? Luke, 15. Jesus tells three stories in this chapter. And the sermon so far, you might say, "Well, I don't like this church. It's just negative and it's the bad stuff and it's, you know, I want to go to church where you don't hear about sin and judgment and all that stuff. Where's the love, where's the compassion?" Here's where the love and compassion are. For someone who finally comes to their senses about their problem, then Jesus says you need to understand it. There's a great passage, by the way in the Second Chronicles 30. Matter of fact, I put it on your discussion questions on the worksheet this week, which if you don't have a physical copy of it, which we're now again providing when you come each week. You'll have that in the back by the doors if you want them. We also have it downloadable, but those are your cues for your small group to read those questions and think them through. I always have you look up five passages, at least five, and I give you a great passage that reminds us of, as Paul put it, the severity and the kindness of God.

The severity is sin is a problem to this God, and he is not going to tolerate it. The only way to tolerate you is to take your sin, excise it from your life and to throw it on the cross so that you can, under the shadow of the cross, be counted as righteous. So in that passage, you see the great juxtaposition and contrast of the severity of God who will judge sinners, and him saying, if you would just turn from that. He uses all these words, there will be compassion, there will be mercy, there will be grace. What a great picture of the gospel in the Old Testament. That's what we're looking for, is for us to have the experience of the good, good, good, good, good, good, good news of forgiveness, but it only comes to those like in this passage, we won't take time to read the whole story. You already know it. It's called The Prodigal Son. That's what people normally call it.

Dropped down to verse 17 at that moment. Look at these words, "But when he came to himself." You know the story. He takes his father's inheritance. He goes out with prostitutes and he just through a flagrant lifestyle he goes out and squanders it all in sin and debauchery. And now he finds himself wanting to eat the pods in the pig farm. And he finally goes, "What in the world am I doing? What a sinner I am," when he came to himself. And that's the



problem. We're trying to share the solution without people coming to themselves and seeing their sins for what it is. He says, "I'm thinking about people in my father's house, the hired servants," middle of verse 17. "They have more than enough bread, but I'm here perishing with hunger. I will arise," here's the resolve, verse 18, "I will go to my father. I will say to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants. I just know that people even in my father's house," he says, even in the back row, "they got all the stuff I do not have. I just want to be accepted back into my father's family. That's what I want."

Well, that's hard to have people really recognize they're unworthy of eternal life, that they're sinners, that they've sinned against heaven. I know that's hard, but that's the diagnosis. And it's really hard because he says in verse 17, "I'm going to perish." And that's the problem. The prognosis is "the wages of sin is death." There's going to be not just physical death, but spiritual relational exclusion after you die from anything that's good because you'll be excluded from the giver of all good things. But where's the gospel? Where's the grace? Where's the mercy? Where's the compassion? Here it is, verse 20. People that recognize that, that see the diagnosis and are motivated by the prognosis, they embrace the remedy. "He arose and he came to his father and while he," the prodigal son "was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him."

If you would turn to the Lord today, I don't care what your sinful background is like, even if you were there with hearty approval holding the cloaks of those who had stoned Stephen, if you have been a persecutor of the Church, God can take all that in his mercy and embrace you and accept you as his own son.

Verse 21, "And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'" The father, he's embracing him and kissing him. And he says, "I'm just a sinner." But the father didn't say, "Yeah, you're going to have to go to Purgatory now" or "you're going to have to go work this off." "The father says to his servants, 'Hey, bring quickly the best robe, put it on him, put a ring on his hand, put shoes on his feet, bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead, and is alive again; he was lost and is found,'" and they began to celebrate. What did he have to do? Go get a job, work his way out of the pig farm? No. Turn to the father who is full of compassion and full of grace and full of mercy to solve the problem of sin. That's the problem. It's not loneliness. It's not you're having a hard time. It's not that you'd be healthier if you just turned to Christ and things would clear up for you financially. Just get a little God in your life. It's not about that. You and I get to the place where this son was. I've sinned against heaven and sinned against you. I'm going to perish in this state of exile from a relationship with God. I need a relationship with the God who made me.

By the way, all three of these parables in Luke 15 were about the Pharisees and the scribes who were grumbling that Jesus was spending time with a receptive crowd, these penitent sinners, as they saw them, scribes and Pharisees saw them. And they could not rejoice in the fact that Jesus was having people come to faith in him and be right with their God, that they said that they served. They refused, they were like the older son, which it goes on to talk



about this, he says, "I'm not going to rejoice in that." They couldn't see extending forgiveness. They thought, "I can't believe you would forgive those people." You can see why Stephen could be tempted to say, I can't believe you would ever forgive these people standing by throwing rocks at me. And yet, what were his last words? His last words were words of forgiveness. That's the sign of real Christianity. First John talks about that. You don't even know that you're really a Christian unless you can be a forgiving person. If you can't forgive, the Father doesn't forgive you. I mean, that's what the Bible says repeatedly. And here is Steven willing to say, "Those people are on equal ground with me. I pray that you wouldn't hold this against them. I pray that they'll come to faith in Christ." I mean, this is a great example of what they needed and what they didn't have. Stephen had it all, he knew what it was to be accepted by the Father. He knew what it was to die and say, "I know where I'm going." And he also knew what it was to look at other people and say, "Hey, if they were to come to faith, I would rejoice in that."

Speaking of physical health, when you go to your doctor the next time you go, I want you to look for, maybe out on the sign, maybe on the business card of your doctor, maybe in the elevator. Look for that logo, that image, you'll see it on ambulances, the pole and the snake wrapped around it. And I want you to remember that it was a really bad problem being bitten by a snake. In the Old Testament, a bunch of snakes came to all those people wandering in the wilderness. They got bitten. You get dizzy, your blood pressure drops, you have a rapid pulse rate. You vomit, you have nausea. It's a horrible thing to be bitten by a poisonous snake. And so all these people were bitten by poisonous snakes in the wilderness and they happened all at once and God says I'm bringing that on the people because of their sin. They were rebellious, they were angry, they were criticizing Moses. And God goes, I'm going to judge them for their sin.

And instead of letting them all die with that terrible feeling of dying of a snake bite in the middle of the wilderness, they said to Moses, "OK, we see our problem, we get this is judgment." And God said to Moses, here's what I want you to do. I want you to take a bronze snake, wrap it around a pole and erect it here in the middle of the camp, and these people who are wasting away while you're building this bronze snake who are saying we need remedies, we need remedies, you stick that pole up in the middle of the camp and you have people come and look at it. Numbers 21. You can read about it when you get home. Numbers 21. Just look at it. Here's the simple phrase, "Look at it and live." I mean, you want to get it fixed? Right here. Look at it and live.

In John 3 when Jesus was talking to Nicodemus, he said, "I know men hate the light because they don't want their sins exposed, but those people who will admit it, they'll see it for what it is, they need to look to me." He said, "Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, the bronze snake on the pole, so the Son of Man must be lifted up." And if anyone looks at him and trusts in him, he says that's my spiritual remedy. I can get right with a living God, knowing that I'm sick in my sins and knowing that the prognosis is terminal. Just look in faith to Christ. I mean, it's a simple, reductionistic way to put it. But look to Christ and live. I mean, there's the great remedy. It's as simple as that.



It's not like, "Hey, do all these things and you'll get the venom to get out of your system, just look to the bronze snake. I mean, God could have told Moses to construct a lot of things to be more pleasant to look at than a snake. They just got bitten by snakes. Maybe, "Construct a silver dove and put it up on a pole." Right? No, no, no. Construct a bronze snake and have the people because of their sin bitten by snakes, look at the snake. Think about that even. Look at your sin. Look at it. Look at the problem. Look at the prognosis. Look at it. And you put that faith in God's promise that he will forgive you, look at it and live. And Jesus said, "I'm going to be lifted up," and I'm going to draw people to myself.

And guess what? Even Saul, who was in that crowd, was going to be drawn to Christ. We're going to read about it in a couple of chapters in Acts, we're going to study that. Just because Christ has provided a gracious, merciful remedy, I hope you've appropriated that by faith and if you have then here's what Christ said, "Come follow me, I'll make you fishers of men." Your job is to go out and share that message. Ambassadors of the message. Remember the diagnosis hurts. Remember your job is to remind them that the prognosis is terminal. But keep sharing in hope, even though most people will push you back on it, that there's a joyful remedy and there will be people who refuse it, but there will be people who embrace it. And like you, they'll sit here, I trust, one day next to you worshiping Christ, listening to the word, hearts being change, like the testimonies we heard this morning, new life, because they've seen the problem, they feared the consequence and they turned to Christ for eternal life. That's good news.

Let's pray. God, help us, please, to be more faithful in representing the word. In our fear of being socially rejected, being relationally snubbed, we sometimes hold back. Forgive us for holding back about the truth. I don't know what the specific sins are of the people I'm sharing with, but I do know I need to talk about sin and I need to talk about judgment because those are the things that expose the problem and the Spirit of God is trying to convict them of that. I've got to be clear about it. I can't edit the message. But then I can get to the good news. There is a solution. It's a complete solution, not a partial solution. It's a solution that has been provided for where all the work has been done.

Thank you God so much for the crucified Christ. As awful as that is to think about, the death was on display on a Roman execution rack, just like the snake, the reminder of the sin and the penalty. We look to Christ and while people can see in the first century, a horrific picture of an execution, that execution is the means of our salvation so we cherish the cross. We cherish what took place there. And we're thankful that our king did not die on the cross eternally. It was temporary, that in three days he was raised and will return one day. As he is accepting every day a saint, every day a Christian dies, accepting and receiving the spirits of those who have trusted in him.

We're grateful, God, if our lives end whenever it might be on this life, we can look with faith, knowing Christ will embrace us because of our trust in him. And if our life doesn't end that way, the Bible's very clear that this epic will end by Christ coming back and breaking the skies open and receiving his Church and meeting us in the air. And God, maybe that'll be how it ends, maybe today, maybe this week, maybe next week. If so, God, we want to spend time



between now and then, sharing the good message of salvation, salvation from sin and judgment. Let us be faithful to share the whole message of the gospel.

In Jesus name. Amen.