

Stephen the Plenteous

Acts 6:8-15

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Introduction

Our God is by very nature a very giving God.

- It is His great delight to give and give and give.
- Even before we were created, there was a ceaseless interplay of giving between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
 - Scripture tells us that the Father gives all things to the Son—all of His fullness...
 - And then the Holy Spirit is the out-flowing of that fullness as He proceeds from the Father and the Son.

And then there is creation—in which God, having purposed to create man,

- prepared the whole earth for us that He might give it to us in all its fullness.
 - He made us to be full of His goodness, made in His very own image...
 - a people who give to each other forever—
 - receiving the endless abundance of God's gifts and ceaselessly sharing these with each other through discovery and art and service.
- But we rebelled and in our rebellion we drew into our own selfishness.
 - Now in sin we are empty—the fullness of God is no longer in us...
 - And we have been cut off from many of the blessings of the earth which is now cursed on account of our sin...
 - And we yearn, but we do not fill each other—
 - We may get a taste of fullness here and there in our experience, but it is never complete and it is never lasting—not outside of Christ.
 - Many people are broken because of this—they are depressed and suicidal...
 - others have just come to accept it as the best that can be expected—
 - still others are looking for fullness in the wrong places.

But the good news is that there is redemption in Jesus Christ!

- He came to this earth in our flesh, and He was filled with all the fullness of God...
 - He was filled as full as a person could be, for He is the very Son of God incarnate.
 - Even as a man, He was given the Holy Spirit without measure—He is called the anointed one or the Christ because He is anointed with the Spirit above measure.
 - But not just for Himself—He came to restore fullness to all God's chosen people!
 - He is the beginning of the new heavens and the new earth that God has prepared for us.

- He is the first-fruits of that blessed eternal life that God gives to us when we come to Him and that we are promised in completeness at the last day.
 - As soon as we trust in Jesus, we enter into the life of fullness—the life of abundance—the life of giving—
 - And together the church brings this fullness back to earth—we restore love and giving in this broken empty world... by God’s grace in Jesus.
 - And we continue until the last day when Jesus at last restores all things to their fullness!

In our study of Acts, we have already seen how Jesus the anointed one, full of the Holy Spirit, poured out His Spirit upon His church—

- It was not an out-trickling, but an abundant outpouring!
 - The disciples were said to be *filled* with Holy Spirit.
 - This is what Jesus gives for His church as the beginning of the fullness that He has promised when all things are finished!

- How we ought to yearn for this fullness.
 - It is our inheritance in Jesus Christ!
 - The Scriptures command us to be filled with the Holy Spirit.
 - This filling begins as soon as we are brought to Jesus for salvation, and it continues throughout our life until the end when we receive all.
 - There are some believers who have a greater fullness than others—as is made clear in Acts 6:3 where instruction was given to choose men for deacon who were full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom.
 - As we saw when we studied that passage, this fullness set these men apart from other men—but it is a fullness we are all to seek.
 - Let me remind you what this involves...
 - a. When a man’s life is full of the Holy Spirit, he lives for Jesus Christ.
 - The Spirit is the one who joins us to Jesus Christ for new life.
 - Such a man loves Jesus and his life (not just his talk) shows it.
 - b. A Spirit-filled man will also have the fruits of the Spirit...
 - Where there Spirit is abundant, the fruit will be abundant.
 - The fruits of the Spirit are described in Galatians 5:22
 - **Gal 5:22-24: But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.**
 - He is no longer living as one who is controlled by his passions and desires, but as one who is controlled by Jesus His master.
 - He is not driven by his sinful passions and lusts, but by the word of God.

- c. In Ephesians, the filling of the Spirit is described in terms of its effect on a man's relationships...
 - Eph 5:18-21 says:
 - **Eph 5:18-21: And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another in the fear of God.**
 - His relationship with God is characterised by praising Him in the assembly of the saints and by giving thanks—
 - He is not full of grumbling and bitterness, but of true gratitude.
 - A Spirit filled man's relationship with his family is also described here in Eph 5—that he will be one who lives in submission relationships...
 - taking his place as a father and husband who manages his family well and lays down his life for them...
 - And in business, as one who does not abuse those who work for him or cheat those he works for.
 - Only such Spirit-filled men should be chosen as deacons.

Today, we are going to take a good look at Stephen, one of the seven deacons.

- And the one thing that truly stands out about him is fullness!
 - The Holy Spirit emphasises this about Stephen in chapter 6.
 - He is an example of one who has the fullness of God—the fullness that God gives to His people.
 - In Acts 6:3, as we have seen, the men who are chosen for deacon were men that are filled with the Holy Spirit and wisdom—and Stephen was chosen.
 - But then in 6:5, when the deacons are named, we are told in particular that Stephen was **“full of faith and of the Holy Spirit.”**
 - This is something that was true of them all, but apparently it was especially true of him since this is said of him and not the others.
 - But in case that is not enough to make the point, fullness is again attributed to Stephen in Acts 6:8 where Stephen is described as
 - **Acts 6:8: “full of faith (or grace in many manuscripts) and power.”**
 - This is such an excellent thing—
 - When you are full of faith...
 - it means that you believe what God says—you are fully convinced of it so that you don't doubt His promises.
 - And when you are full of grace...
 - it means that you have God's constant help to meet whatever you encounter in ways that honour Him.

- And when you are full of power...
 - it means that sin does not have dominion over you and that you are able to do great things for God.
- Stephen is clearly a man of plenty—of fullness from God—of abundance!
 - What could be better than to have this fullness from God?
 - Today, I want to show you what an excellent thing it is to have God’s fullness!
 - I want to show you, not to berate you for not being as full as Stephen,
 - but to show you how marvellous it is to be a partaker of the Holy Spirit.
 - I want to make you rejoice in the fullness that God gives to His people,
 - and to yearn for that fullness—in a healthy way...
 - I want you to say,
 - “What a sweet and excellent thing it is that God gives us fullness!”
 - And then I want you to turn the Lord and say,
 - “Oh Lord, give me more of this fullness!”
 - Don’t worry about where you are in comparison to others—just look for more fullness which God is always ready to give.
 - Did Jesus not say so?
 - **Luke 11:13: If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!**
 - He is an out-giving God who makes us out-giving people.

And so this morning I want you to see five excellent things that characterise those who are filled with God’s fullness as believers. First,

I. Those filled with God’s fullness do good works.

- A. You see that we are told in verse 8, that Stephen, being full of grace and power,
- **“did great wonders and signs among the people.”**
 - Just like Jesus, He went about doing good.
1. This speaks of those miraculous works that were given to the Apostles and those on whom they laid hands.
 - a. They were called “signs of the Apostles” because they proved that Jesus had sent the Apostles to proclaim His Word.
 - Hebrews 2:3-4 explains how the signs and wonders were given for this purpose when it speaks of:
 - **Heb 2:3-4: the word...which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, God also bearing**

witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?

- These miracles bore witness to the fact that the LORD had sent these men even as Jesus' miracles proved that God had sent Him.
- b. But the Apostles were not the only ones who were able to do signs and wonders.
 - I Cor 12:7 tells us that **“the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all...”**
 - and verse 12 explains that He **“distributes to each one individually as He wills.”**
 - Here, Stephen, who was not an Apostle, is said to have had the ability not only to do wonders and signs, but to do *great* wonders and signs.
 - The Apostles were unique in that they were the ones, it would seem, who bestowed this ability on others by the laying on of hands.
 - But others were also enabled to do these signs.
- 2. And you see that the signs and wonders Stephen did were done before the people.
 - They were not done in secret.
 - These were real miracles—not questionable ones that could not be verified—but genuine miracles like the healing of the lame man.
 - Miracles, the purpose of which, was not only to heal, but also to prove that God was with the church as it emerged after Jesus' resurrection.
- 3. But consider that Stephen did these miracles because God had filled him with grace and power.
 - This ability did not come from himself, but from the filling of God.
 - He did great wonders and signs because he will full of the grace and power of God.
 - Like his Master, he went about doing good because He will filled with the Spirit.
- B. If you are filled with God's fullness, you will also be full of good works.
 1. I do not say that you will be full of signs and wonders, for that was unique to the church in the first century before the scriptures were complete...
 - As we have seen, the signs were given to verify the Scriptures...
 - But I say that those who are filled with God's fullness—with His Spirit—with His grace and power...
 - are always both disposed and empowered to do good works wherever they go.
 - They become givers, using whatever abilities they may have for others.

2. This is the very change that God works in us when Jesus saves us.
 - a. It is called love. He teaches us to love others as He has loved us.
 - And this love is demonstrated in good works.
 - Not just church stuff, but in being kind and helpful and giving of yourself to others in all of life.
 - b. This fullness of God in you makes you a different person at work, in your home, in the neighbourhood—and yes, at church.
 - As a child, your aim becomes to be a blessing to your parents and to your brothers and sisters...
 - As a father, you lay down our life for your wife and children.
 - As a wife, you serve your husband the way redeemed people serve Jesus.
 - As an employee, you aim to be a blessing to those for whom you work—both customers and managers.
 - You go about doing good like your Master.
 - You are out to bless the people around you because you have been so richly blessed—
 - God gives you both the desire and the ability to do this.
 - Ephesians 2:10 explains this change
 - **Eph 2:10: For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.**
 - c. And this is what you will be growing in for the rest of your life and then doing perfectly when Jesus returns...
 - If you have indeed been made alive through Jesus Christ.
 - Don't misunderstand—it is not that you are saved by doing good...
 - It is that you are saved to do good works—
 - God calls you out of bondage to serve Him—and you serve Him by serving your neighbour for the glory of God.

TRANS> Don't you want this fullness?

- Don't you want to be able to love?
 - God's fullness is truly a most excellent thing.
 - Let's look at a second characteristic of this fullness...

II. Those filled with God's fullness are given many opportunities to tell others about Jesus.

- When you are filled with His fullness, people will want to know where the fullness has come from...
 - And you will have many opportunities to explain that it comes from Jesus.

A. Look at how Stephen caught the attention of the Hellenistic Jews...

- Look at verse 9:
 - **Acts 6:9: Then there arose some from what is called the Synagogue of the Freedmen (Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and those from Cilicia and Asia), disputing with Stephen.**

1. These were Hellenistic Jews.

- If you were here a couple of weeks ago, you may remember that Stephen was one of them...
 - They were Greek-speaking Jews who had come to reside in Jerusalem.
 - They had their own synagogues at Jerusalem because they used Greek instead of Aramaic in their weekly assemblies.
- These who are called Freedmen or Libertines were probably those Jews who had been taken as prisoners of war by Pompey's forces in 63 BC and then set free.
 - There are probably at least two Synagogues referred to here—
 - one for the North Africans from Cyrene (the capital of what is now Libya) and Alexandria;
 - and the other for those from Asia Minor (the province of Asia and Cilicia which includes the city of Tarsus where Paul was from).
 - These four regions were all Greek speaking and had a high level of culture and education—especially Alexandria where the Greek translation of the OT called the Septuagint was done.
 - As was the case with Paul, many of these Jews or their parents had acquired Roman citizenship.
 - They were also very zealous for the Jewish religion which they had held on to through times of persecution.

2. Stephen was simply doing what every Spirit-filled believer does among his people...

- He was busy serving others—doing good works for the glory of God—with the abilities that God had given him...
 - And as he did, he told people about his hope in Jesus.
 - It came up a lot because it was the most important thing in his life.
 - There is no indication that Stephen was a preacher as such.
 - He was just talking about his faith wherever he went.
 - People wanted to know what made him tick.

- But when he told them, these fellow Hellenistic Jews began to dispute with him...
 - The word dispute does not imply hostility as such—they were simply reasoning with him about his faith in Jesus.
 - It is very likely that Paul of Tarsus was among those who were disputing with him.
 - How would you like to face him as an unbeliever?
 - Stephen’s fullness had gotten everyone’s attention.
- B. And I say that when you are filled with the fullness of God, you will have many opportunities to speak about the Lord Jesus.
1. A Spirit-filled life will get people’s attention.
 - And because part of being Spirit-filled has to do with deeply loving Christ,
 - You will be found speaking about Him.
 - We speak about the things that we love.
 - We speak about the things that we are trusting in and looking to.
 - Our love is for Jesus and we speak about Him when we are filled with God’s fullness.
 2. And whenever you speak about Jesus, people will dispute with you.
 - Even though they see the difference that He makes in you and in your family,
 - They will dispute as soon as you tell them about Him.
 - a. The natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they foolishness to him.
 - He does not accept the message that he needs a divine Saviour to save him from His sins by dying on the cross.
 - If he is religious, he wants to believe that God will accept him on the basis of his religious works or his goodness.
 - But the cross is offensive to him.
 - And if he is not religious—he will try to avoid the subject.
 - He will latch on to anything to deny the fact that he must answer to his creator.
 - Too him, the very idea of a God who would send His Son to die for sinners is foolish...
 - The cross is foolishness to him.
 - b. But this disputation should not discourage you!
 - It will not discourage you if you are Spirit-filled.
 - It is your opportunity to tell them about your Lord and what He has done!

- You welcome the discussion and hope that the people you tell will come to see the truth as the dispute goes on.
- That will be your attitude if you are filled with God's fullness.
 - The subject will come up quite regularly and you will be glad that it does!

TRANS> But how will you get on in the dispute?

- I mean, what if you have to answer to someone like Paul of Tarsus?
- That brings us to the next characteristic of those who are filled with God's fullness...

III. Those filled with God's fullness are able to defend the truth.

A. Of course this does not mean that everyone who is Spirit-filled will be able to take on someone like Paul (before his conversion) in a public debate.

- You will not be able to refute every objection that is brought up by the PhD from history and science and philosophy...
 - You don't even know all the facts...
- 1. We are a part of the body of Christ, and we all have different gifts.
 - God will have some among his people who are able to go head to head with such persons.
 - But at the same time, if you are filled with the fullness of God, you have truth and you will not be ashamed of it—if you are filled with God's Spirit...
 - for He has not given us a Spirit of fear.
- 2. And I want you to know that even the simplest spirit-filled believer can unsettle the most learned unbeliever.
 - You can unsettle him by your simple faith in that which is true and that which is obvious and that which cannot be denied—
 - and you can unsettle him by a holy life that he cannot explain and by sacrificial love shown even to him.
 - I recently read an article by two atheists who acknowledged that the gospel was the only thing that transformed apathy in Africa
 - But even on an intellectual level, he is no match for the Spirit that is in you.
 - He may sneer at your ignorance, but he will have no power to resist when you testify that things cannot create themselves but were created by God.
 - It is true and he cannot deny it—even with all his high sounding arguments...
 - Or when you ask him what basis he has for saying that there is right and wrong if there is no God...
 - He will have no answer and he knows it.

- Or if he is a religious man, he will never be able to answer how sinners like us can stand before a holy God without a divine Saviour.

B. You see what the outcome is for those who disputed with Stephen...

1. Verse 10 tells us:

- **Acts 6:10: And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke.**
- It was not Stephen that they could not resist, but it was the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke...
 - The Holy Spirit was working in him so that he was able to confound them.
 - Sometimes, we do not experience this because we draw back from speaking to people about the LORD...
 - But when you go ahead and do it, you will often experience God giving you special grace to answer those who oppose you.
 - It will make you stronger.

2. Now you may say, “but I have done that and I have often failed.”

- “The enemies of the gospel were able to resist me—I got all muddled...”
- We have all experience that, but don’t let it stop you!
 - Go to the LORD in prayer and ask Him to give you wisdom and to give you His Spirit for next time.
 - Take some time to consider how you might have answered and then you will be prepared when the same arguments come up again.
 - You will find that the same old arguments will come up again and again, and as you talk to many people about the Lord,
 - you will become more and more able to defend the faith by God’s grace.
 - But must of all, you need to pray for God’s help.
 - Perhaps the Lord caused you to fail because wants to teach you to pray so that you will know that such grace comes from Him.
 - Again, you don’t have to have all the answers—you just have to hold on the basics—that is what cannot be resisted.
 - The Spirit will enable you do that.
 - Pray that you will be filled with His fullness!

TRANS> So these men who disputed with Stephen found that they could not resist his wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke...

- And so they do what many other unbelievers have done when they cannot resist the truth...
 - They attack the messenger who speaks the truth and begin to oppress him.
 - Of course there are some who also come to believe after a time—but our text does not mention that here...
 - It shows the opposition to Stephen.
 - This brings us to the fourth characteristic of those who are filled with God's fullness:

IV. Those filled with God's fullness get to enter into the fellowship of Christ's sufferings.

- As Paul says to Timothy,
 - **2 Tim 3:12: All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.**
- A. You can see in our text that Stephen is very much in the same place that Jesus was in with his enemies...
 1. First they tried to dispute with Him and were frustrated—
 - Remember how the Herodians and the Pharisees and the Sadducees all took their turn in disputing with Jesus?
 - And when they could not win by argumentation,
 - they came against Him with false accusations, arrested Him, and brought Him to trial.
 2. This is exactly what they did with Stephen...
 - Look at verse 11-14:
 - **Acts 6:11-14: Then they secretly induced men to say, "We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God." And they stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes; and they came upon him, 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; for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs which Moses delivered to us."**
 - a. Stephen actually did say something like what they accuse him of saying.
 - The falseness of the charge was not in that Stephen said that Jesus of Nazareth would destroy the temple and change the customs which Moses delivered...
 - This is probably pretty much what Stephen said!
 - The falseness is in the charge that these are blasphemous words spoken against the temple and the law.

- b. Jesus had indeed declared at His own trial that they would see Him coming in the clouds—
- 1) This greatly offended the Jews because the chariot in the clouds was a picture of God coming in judgement!
 - Jesus told them He would come in judgement in that generation.
 - Some of them would be alive to see it.
 - He had said that not one stone of the temple would be left upon another
 - And that, of course, is exactly what happened. By 70 AD the temple was flattened by the armies of Rome.
 - They were just as much the agents of Jesus as the Babylonians had been when they came to bring judgement upon Jerusalem and to reduce the city to dust and rubble over 600 years before.
 - 2) And it was also true that Jesus had spoken against many of the customs of the Jews which they claimed originated with Moses, but which Jesus exposed as contrary to Moses...
 - But even more than that,
 - Jesus had declared that all the ceremonies and shadows of the law would pass away because the fullness had come...
 - He Himself had come to fulfill all those types and shadows.
 - The New wine of the gospel would be put in new wine skins.
 - Now worship would be in spirit and truth rather than in type and shadow as a temple made by men's hands.
- c. When you look at the charges that were brought against Stephen, it appears that he was saying the same things that Jesus had said...
- 1) Now that Jesus had come, the temple and all of its ceremonies would pass away.
 - The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world would replace the lambs that were offered up on the altar at Jerusalem.
 - The temple made with man's hands that could not possibly contain God would be replaced by a temple of living stones built by the Lord, with Jesus as the cornerstone.
 - 2) We see how far Stephen went with these arguments in the defence he presents in chapter 7.
 - He obviously had excellent theological understanding—perhaps even surpassing that of Peter at this time.

TRANS> And so you see that Stephen become a target of persecution, just as Jesus had before Him.

- He had fellowship with Christ in suffering!

B. This is one of the greatest privileges of a believer.

1. The Scripture testifies of this quite frequently...

a. Jesus declared it in the sermon on the mount when He said:

- **Matthew 5:10-12: Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.**
- You see that He describes it as a blessing!
 - The Spirit-filled believer will find it to be so.

TRANS> Jesus had not suffered yet, so He speaks of their fellowship with the faithful prophets who had come before.

b. But later in His ministry, Jesus told His disciples that He was going to suffer and that they would be privileged to suffer with Him...

- In John 15:18-21, He said:

- **John 15:18-21: If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also. But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake, because they do not know Him who sent Me.**
- The suffering comes because they are identified with Jesus Himself!
 - They are strangers to the world because the world does not know God and they are now set apart to God.

c. And then we have the testimony of Paul who uses the phrase—"the fellowship of His sufferings"

- which sufferings come about because he is trusting in and preaching righteousness through faith rather than through the works of the law.
- It is because Paul is resting in Christ as his righteousness that he is persecuted, but he says that through those sufferings he knows Christ.
 - **Phil 3:10-11: that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed**

to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

- That simple truth that righteousness is through Christ is the truth that brings persecution.
 - But when it does, it simply brings you into closer fellowship with Jesus who gave Himself to make sinners righteous and caused such great offence by doing so.

- 2. Both religious people and non-religious people are offended by the cross...
 - They cannot bear to admit that they as sinners who need righteousness from the suffering of God's Son.
 - Think about this today—
 - Go to a religious person—even one who is Christian in name...
 - and tell them that all their rituals and all their morals will not pass muster with the LORD.
 - They will become angry with you!
 - They will accuse you of speaking against their religious and against God.
 - Then go to a non-religious person—
 - Tell them that there is a God who calls them to repent and who has made provision for the forgiveness of sins through the cross.
 - They too will become angry with you! They don't want to hear it.

 - 3. But do not let their anger and their threats and their accusations stop you.
 - Rejoice that you are identified with your Saviour.
 - He is the one that they hate, and they hate you because you belong to Him and bear witness of Him.
 - Don't draw back and miss out on the opportunity of suffering with Him that you may be glorified with Him.
 - If you are filled with God's fullness, you will be brought to suffer with Him for the very reason that you are filled with His fullness.

 - So if your family or your friends and neighbours become angry with you and accuse you when you are living and speaking for Jesus,
 - Do not suppose that you have done something wrong.
 - Do not change your message to make them happy as if their judgement is right.
 - No, rather rejoice in the fellowship of Christ's sufferings.

TRANS> Now you will say,

- But what if it is not in me to rejoice?
 - Let me tell you—God will be with you in such times if only you look to Him to fill you...
 - And the result will be that you will flourish under persecution.
 - That is the fifth characteristic of being filled with God’s fullness that we learn from Stephen, the plenteous:

V. Those filled with God’s fullness shine under persecution.

A. You can see the shocking thing that happened with Stephen when he stood before the court and was accused of blasphemy.

- Verse 15 says:
 - **Acts 6:15: And all who sat in the council, looking steadfastly at him, saw his face as the face of an angel.**

1. This could simply mean that Stephen was so composed and serene as he stood trial that his face was like that of an angel.

- Most people who were before the Jewish supreme court, having just been charged with blasphemy, would be pale and full of trepidation.
 - But Stephen was at peace and this would certainly have shown on his face.
 - That may be all that is intended here.

2. But more than likely, this speaks of a miracle—

- It was something that was apparently very striking because everyone in the council was gazing at him.
 - They were all taken up with what they saw!
 - Perhaps this was like the face of Moses when the skin of his face shone after he was speaking to the Lord.

3. But it is really no good to speculate—the Lord has not revealed the details.

- What is clear is that the council saw something extraordinary in Stephen’s face that demonstrated that the Lord was with him.
 - He was being accused of blasphemy, yet the glory of God was seen upon his face!
 - As we have seen before in Acts, it was a very visible way of God showing that He is with His people and working among them...
 - It is a sign for us so that we can know that He will be with us in such times.

B. The Lord delights in pouring out special grace upon those who suffer for Him.

1. Many martyrs have been extraordinary in the time of their trial such that they were given marvellous peace and joy for all to see...

- Sometimes, even as the flames consume their body, they are full of rejoicing before the Lord and found singing praise.
 - This is only possible by the grace of God.
2. I want you to know that if you are filled with the fullness of God, you can count on His grace to sustain you in suffering.
- His grace will always be sufficient for you.
 - You do not need to be afraid because the Lord will be with you in your time of need if you are looking to Him.
 - And He can make you more comfortable in the worst of circumstances than you have even been in the best of circumstances.
 - This brings glory to Him!
 - There are so many who are converted as a result of watching a martyr suffer for our Lord.
 - If the LORD is with you, nothing that man can do can really harm you.

Conclusion

And so you see what a desirable thing it is to be full of God's abundance!

- Jesus Christ has begun the New Heavens and the New Earth.
 - He is already risen as the first fruits because He has conquered sin and death as our head, representing the whole church.
 - And now that He has risen into that life, we are able to die to self and rise into the new life that He had begun, with full remission of our sins.
- And when we are filled with God's Spirit who begins this new life in us,
 - We will be full of good works—works of love—to the glory of Jesus...
 - And then we will be given many opportunities to speak of our Saviour...
 - And we will be given grace to defend what we believe...
 - And then it will be given to us to enter into the fellowship of Christ's sufferings...
 - And then we will be given more grace to shine for Him in persecution.

Oh my brothers and sisters!

- Our God is a powerful God and a gracious God!
 - He delights in giving us an abundance of good things.
 - Will you not seek Him that you might be filled with His fullness?