

The Gospel Scattered

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[0 : 0 0] Good. Well, we turn now to God's Word, and we're in the book of Acts this evening, and we are resuming a little series we began last summer in the book of Acts, and we'll be spending the next six or seven weeks working through the next little section.

And tonight we're in Acts chapter 6 and reading from verse 8. If you're using one of the Vista Bibles, that page 914. So Acts chapter 6, and I'll read from verse 7, which is really a summary of the previous six chapters.

So I'll read from chapter 6 and verse 7. And the Word of God continued to increase, and the number of disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.

And Stephen, full of grace and power, was doing great wonders and signs among the people. Then some of those who belonged to the synagogue of the freedmen, as it was called, and of the Cyrenians, and of the Alexandrians, and those from Cilicia and Asia, rose up and disputed with Stephen.

But they could not withstand the wisdom and the spirit with which he was speaking. Then they secretly instigated men who said, We've heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God.

[1 : 2 9] And they stirred up the people and the elders and the scribes. And they came upon him and seized him and brought him up before the council. And they set up false witnesses who said, This man never ceases to speak words against this holy place and the law.

For we've heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and will change the customs that Moses delivered to us. And gazing at him, all who sat in the council saw that his face was like the face of an angel.

And the high priest said, Are these things so? And Stephen said, Brothers and fathers, hear me. The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran, and said to him, Go out from your land and from your kindred, and go into the land that I will show you.

Then he went out from the land of the Chaldeans and lived in Haran. And after his father died, God removed him from there into this land in which you are now living. Yet he gave him no inheritance in it, not even a foot's length, but promised to give it to him as a possession and to his offspring after him, though he had no child.

And God spoke to this effect, that his offspring would be sojourners in the land belonging to others, who would enslave them and afflict them four hundred years. But I will judge the nation that they serve, said God, and after that they shall come out and worship me in this place.

[3 : 0 7] And he gave him the covenant of circumcision. And so Abraham became the father of Isaac and circumcised him on the eighth day. And Isaac became the father of Jacob and Jacob of the twelve patriarchs.

And the patriarchs, jealous of Joseph, sold him into Egypt. But God was with him and rescued him out of all his afflictions and gave him favor and wisdom before Pharaoh, king of Egypt, who made him ruler over Egypt and over all his household.

Now there came a famine throughout all Egypt and Canaan and great affliction, and our fathers could find no food. But when Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent out our fathers on their first visit.

And on the second visit, Joseph made himself known to his brothers. And Joseph's family became known to Pharaoh. And Joseph sent and summoned Jacob, his father and all his kindred, 75 persons in all.

And Jacob went down into Egypt and he died, he and our fathers. And they were carried back to Shechem and laid in the tomb that Abraham had bought for a sum of silver from the sons of Hamer and Shechem.

[4 : 22] But as the time of the promise drew near, which God had granted to Abraham, the people increased and multiplied in Egypt until there arose over Egypt another king who did not know Joseph.

He dealt shrewdly with our race and forced our fathers to expose their infants so that they would not be kept alive. At this time, Moses was born.

And he was beautiful in the sight of God. And he was brought up for three months in his father's house. And when he was exposed, Pharaoh's daughter adopted him and brought him up as her own son.

And Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians. And he was mighty in his words and deeds. When he was 40 years old, it came into his heart to visit his brothers, the children of Israel. And seeing one of them being wronged, he defended the oppressed man and avenged him by striking down the Egyptian. He supposed that his brothers would understand that God was giving them salvation by his hand.

[5 : 26] But they did not understand. And on the following day, he appeared to them as they were quarreling and tried to reconcile them, saying, Men, you are brothers.

Why do you wrong each other? But the man who was wronging his neighbor thrust him aside, saying, Who made you a ruler and judge over us? Do you want to kill me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday?

At this retort, Moses fled and became an exile in the land of Midian, where he became the father of two sons. Now, when 40 years had passed, an angel appeared to him in the wilderness of Mount Sinai in a flame of fire in a bush.

When Moses saw it, he was amazed at the sight and he drew near to look. There came the voice of the Lord. I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and of Jacob. And Moses trembled and did not dare to look. Then the Lord said to him, Take off the sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.

[6 : 32] I have surely seen the affection of my people here in Egypt and have heard their groaning, and I have come down to deliver them. And now, come, I will send you to Egypt.

This Moses, whom they rejected, saying, Who made you a ruler and a judge? This man God sent both as a ruler and redeemer by the hand of the angel who appeared to him in the bush.

This man led them out, performing wonders and signs in Egypt and at the Red Sea and in the wilderness for 40 years. This is the Moses who said to Israelites, God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers.

This is the one who is in the congregation in the wilderness with the angel who spoke to him at Mount Sinai and with our fathers. He received living oracles to give to us.

Our fathers refused to obey him, but thrust him aside and in their hearts they turned to Egypt, saying to Aaron, Make for us gods who will go before us.

[7 : 36] As for this Moses who led us out from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him. And they made a calf in those days and offered a sacrifice to the idol and were rejoicing in the works of their hands.

But God turned away and gave them over to the worship to the host of heaven as it is written in the book of the prophets. Did you bring me to me slaying beasts and sacrifices during the 40 years in the wilderness of the house of Israel?

You took up the tent of Moloch and the star of your god Rephan, the images that you made to worship, and I will send you into exile beyond Babylon. Our fathers had the tent of witness in the wilderness, just as he who spoke to Moses directed him to make it according to the pattern that he had seen.

Our fathers in turn brought it in with Joshua when they dispossessed the nations that God drove out before our fathers. And so it was until the days of David who found favor in the sight of the Lord and asked to find a dwelling place for the God of Jacob.

But it was Solomon who made and built a house for him. Yet the Most High does not dwell in houses made by hands, as the prophet says.

[8 : 58] Heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me, says the Lord, or what place is the place of my rest?

Did not my hand make all these things? You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit.

As your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the righteous one, whom you have now betrayed and murdered.

You who received the law as delivered by the angels and did not keep it. Now when they heard these things, they were enraged.

And they ground their teeth at him. But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.

[10 : 06] And he said, Behold, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God. But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together at him.

Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul.

And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And falling to his knees, he cried out with a loud voice, Lord, do not hold this sin against them.

And when he had said this, he fell asleep. And Saul approved of his execution. And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem.

And they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria except the apostles. Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him.

[11 : 10] but Saul was ravaging the church and entering house after house. He dragged off men and women and committed them to prison. Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word.

Amen. This is the word of the Lord. Well done. That was a long reading. Good.

Well please do turn back to the passage we read earlier in Acts chapter 6 and chapter 7. We'll spend a few moments now thinking about this together. Acts chapter 6 and 7.

Let me begin with a question. What are you prepared to die for? What are you prepared to die for? I wonder if as you read this passage earlier that you thought to yourself what a waste what a waste of a talent to see Stephen such a key man in the early church to see him martyred.

[12 : 20] What a waste. Surely he didn't have to die. Well was it? Was his death a waste?

Well Luke the writer of this account he's included this section in his book to give us clarity and certainty about the gospel and how it goes forward in the world.

Stephen had clarity and certainty which is why he was willing to die. He was clear about the gospel. He was clear about the fact that it provokes.

He was clear about the content of the gospel but also that this gospel that he was willing to die for he was clear that it was going to the ends of the earth. Nothing was going to stop that.

And this passage and it's a long one it's here to give its readers to give you and I certainty and clarity. Remember that Acts is the second part of Dr. Luke's account of the words and works of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[13 : 30] It's an account with a clear purpose. A purpose that's set out in the very first pages of his gospel. His gospel account. Let me read you those words as he introduces his Luke Acts account.

Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word.

They've delivered them to us. It seemed good to me also having followed all things closely for some time past to write an orderly account for you most excellent Theophilus that you may have certainty concerning the things that you've been taught.

Luke writes an orderly account to give certainty. So taking gospel Acts as Luke's single work we can say to quote one preacher that he is writing so that we will have certainty about what Jesus has done and is doing and also that we'll have certainty about the way in which Jesus is working now through his church.

That's what this is here for. And in the opening chapter of Acts which we looked at last summer chapters 1-6 we read about the beginning of the continuation of the works of the risen Lord Jesus

as his apostles witness to his death and resurrection.

[14:56] And chapter 6 verse 7 which I read at the start that gives us a summary of this first section that the word of God continued to increase the numbers of disciples increased greatly in Jerusalem and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.

That's what's been happening so far and our passage that we read earlier it marks the beginning of the next stage of the gospel advance and this chapter is a real turning point.

Up until this point the focus has been entirely on Jerusalem but by the end of our passage this evening things have moved on.

Look on to chapter 8 verse 1 there was great persecution against the church in Jerusalem and they were scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria and look on to verse 4 what were they doing those who were scattered went about preaching the word so the events of our passage they lead directly to the further spreading of the gospel that is what is so significant about these words we've read so we'll look at this passage under three headings three things we learn about the great unstoppable gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ so first at the end of chapter 6 verses 8 to 15 God's great gospel mission provokes God's great gospel mission provokes we're given certainty about the impact of the gospel already in the opening pages of

Luke's accounts we've seen the steady opposition to the progress of the gospel from those outside the church and also attempts from within the church to undermine that progress and so far it's been the apostles that are born the brunt of that opposition think about Peter and John in chapter 4 being dragged before the council but here in chapter 6 it's not an apostle who's in the firing line but rather it's Stephen he was one of the men appointed by the apostles in the first half of chapter 6 he's a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit and he was doing great wonders and signs among the people and he drew out opposition end of verse 9 because they could not withstand the wisdom and the spirit with which he was speaking and by including this episode Luke is demonstrating clearly that opposition to the gospel is not just directed at the apostles no the gospel in its very essence brings opposition regardless of whose lips it comes from

[17:47] God's great gospel mission provokes just look at how the members of the synagogue of the freedman react to the words and works of Stephen they did not like one bit what they heard and they took him to task but they couldn't withstand the wisdom with which he spoke they weren't able to counter the truth that he uttered and so they have to resort to underhand tactics look at verse 11 they secretly instigated men who said we've heard him speak blasphemous words about Moses and God they stirred up trouble and eventually he's dragged before the council false witnesses testify against him it's pretty grim isn't it but this is a reality that Luke is really clear on the gospel provokes opposition it's the reality but it's not in any way surprising in fact it's entirely to be expected back in the first half of his account

Luke records these words spoken by the Lord Jesus Christ he says that they will lay hands on you and persecute you delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name's sake this will be your opportunity to bear witness so those are words recorded by Luke spoken by Jesus and his words are proving to be exactly true here aren't they in chapter six of Acts it's exactly like Jesus said it would be and so Luke is giving us he's giving you and I certainty about the reality of what the gospel provokes and sometimes sometimes the gospel provokes real stern opposition opposition that leads those who declare the truth about Jesus being dragged before councils but that's just how Jesus said it would be and so we're not to be surprised or scared by that he's in absolute control and he gives his words his servants the exact words to say in such moments back in

Luke just after the bit I quoted a minute ago Jesus goes on to say this settle it therefore in your minds not to meditate beforehand how to answer for I will give you a mouth and wisdom which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict and don't we see a wonderful fulfillment of those very promises here with Stephen he's given just the words the Lord was with him and this helps us this little section here end of chapter six it gives you and I real realism helps you and I to be realistic about the impact that the gospel has yes of course some will gladly accept just look back two verses to chapter six verse seven we read there about some in Jerusalem some of the priests are becoming obedient to the faith so from some there's great and glad acceptance but here in the same city there are other

Jews who fiercely oppose the gospel and so you and I need to be realistic about that but we're not fatalistic it's just as Jesus said it would be he's in control and so you and I we may very well face

stern opposition like Stephen we may be dragged before councils facing the same opposition that he faced and that before him Jesus faced we're to be realistic but also we're to be reassured we see with Stephen's example and with the promise of the Lord Jesus that if we do face opposition we have everything we need to stand firm and to witness faithfully to the end the very same Holy Spirit that equipped and enabled Stephen indwells every Christian and so we are to walk with him obediently day after day and as

Kevin de Young puts it you can't plan for persecution but if you walk with Jesus now you can speak for Jesus then we can be greatly reassured as we walk with him now he'll equip us he'll be with us he'll give us the words to say then so God's great gospel mission it provokes we're given certainty about the impact of the gospel so you and I to be realistic but also let's look on now to our second point and it's chapter 7 verses 1 to 53 God's great gospel mission his great gospel message is proclaimed God's great gospel message proclaimed we're given certainty about the content of the gospel Stephen's accusers they make two false accusations against him there in chapter 6 verse 13 and 14 the two accusations of this one that Stephen has been speaking against the temple and second that he has spoken against the law as delivered by

[23 : 22] Moses and Stephen's response is extraordinary it's long it's the longest speech recorded in the book of Acts and he rehearses much of the history of God's people starting with Abraham and then Joseph and then Moses briefly mentioning Joshua then David Solomon and then ultimately the righteous one the Lord Jesus Christ himself and through the course of his speech Stephen flips their accusation right back on them the accusation against Stephen was that he spoke against Moses that he was against the scriptures but the truth however was that he spoke against the Jews interpretation of Moses his contention was that they consistently misunderstood the meaning of their own scriptures particularly with regards to the messianic prophecies and so Stephen sets about demonstrating to them what the scriptures are really all about and that they've understood it all wrong and that their scriptures have now been fulfilled by the

Lord Jesus Christ he's basically saying to them your God the God that you worship he's too small you stop listening to him and just look at his conclusion there in verse 51 it's extraordinary isn't it no punches are pulled verse 51 you stiff necked people uncircumcised in hearts you always resist the Holy Spirit as your fathers did so do you which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute and they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the righteous one whom you have now murdered no punches pulled Stephen's speech it's all about the great and majestic God it's all about how he works and how he has brought his plans and purposes to fulfillment and fruition in the Lord Jesus Christ

Stephen proclaims God's great gospel message so let's consider his speech under two points he says to his accusers you've limited God and therefore you haven't listened to him so first you've limited God Stephen sets out a massive vision of God and his majestic glory and it's in total contrast to the small God of his opponents you see those Jews he was speaking to they had limited God to a particular place to the temple that's what they get so angry about they say you're speaking against this place about the temple but Stephen look at verse 49 he knows that God is far far bigger than that heaven is my throne the earth that's my footstool so Stephen really takes on his listeners and he declared to them that God cannot be localized in some building

God is not limited to a temple now Stephen covers an awful lot of geography in his speech I wonder if you noticed that as we read just look at all the places that he mentions look at verse 2 he talks about Mesopotamia and Haran in verse 4 he talks about the land of the Chaldeans in verse 9 he talks about Egypt verse 10 Egypt verse 11 Egypt and Canaan verse 16 Shechem verse 17 Egypt and so on and so on lots and lots of geography and so for somebody who likes maps as I do this is great stuff you can get really lost in all the geographical detail but Stephen isn't interested in geography for the sake of geography why mention all these places well Stephen is demonstrating that God is not limited to a particular place to a particular piece of land or to a particular building so many of the places he mentions here are not in the promised land

Abraham Moses Joseph they never lived in the promised land so this is not to say that the promised land is insignificant far from it but God isn't limited by it he's not limited to one place he's not limited to a tent or a temple the most high does not dwell in houses made by man he's the God of the universe not just Israel how could the God of the universe be restricted to some temple in Jerusalem his plans and purposes were never limited to a small part of land in the Middle East it was always the plan of God for his kingdom and presence to be extended to the ends of the earth

even back in the garden of Eden that was the instruction given to Adam and Eve go to the ends of the earth subdue it the world was always in view and with the coming of the [28 : 41] Lord Jesus all that was anticipated in the scriptures comes to its glorious fruition Jesus has now come the temple is fulfilled in the Lord Jesus it's no longer constricted to a place it's a person and it's one who rules over the entire universe now do we see just how devastating Stephen's line of argument is the Jews literally had God boxed in contained limited it seems silly doesn't it to think that the sovereign God the creator of the universe to think that he could be contained and limited the promised land was his yes but so was every square inch of the entire earth it always belonged to him you can't contain him now I wonder if your view of God is a bit like that of the

Jews that Stephen was speaking to I wonder if you think you can compartmentalize God limit him but he cannot be limited he cannot he doesn't dwell in houses made by man and you see if you limit God if you restrict him to a temple or a building if you limit him then you don't really need to listen to him and that's the second key point in Stephen's speech he says to them you haven't listened to God in his survey of Israel's history Stephen highlights not just geography not just where God is located or where he blesses but he also highlights that the Jews have constantly refused to listen to God's words and to God's messengers that was always the way it was with Joseph with Moses constant rejection and opposition from the people of God against God's appointed rescuers and mouthpieces God's people have always limited God and so by limiting there's no real requirement to listen to him and that is what God's people have done in the past says Stephen it's what those who are speaking to have done it's what so many do today if you limit God you don't have to listen to him but Stephen blows that thinking clear out of the water you cannot limit God you must listen to him listen to his messengers and supremely you must listen to Jesus who is the final messenger the great deliverer the supreme rescuer and as Stephen says the Jews had at all times rejected their God appointed deliverers and had simply summed up all their previous history in rejecting the one whom God had long promised the one whom all these deliverers had foreshadowed they rejected him ultimately that is what he says there in verse 52 they murdered him they betrayed him let's quickly trace the examples that

Stephen gives in his speech of their rejection time and time again of God's deliverers and rescuers look at Joseph verse 9 the patriarchs jealous of Joseph they sold him into slavery and Joseph would prove in the end to be their redeemer wouldn't he and then on to verse 25 Moses he supposed that his brothers would understand that God was giving them salvation by his hand but they did not understand and on the following day he appeared to them as they were crawling he tried to reconcile them saying men you are brothers why do you wrong each other but the men who were wronging his brother said who made you the ruler and judge over us and Moses again end of verse 38 he received living oracles to give to us our fathers refused to obey him they thrust him aside and in their hearts they turned to

Egypt and then there's the clincher in verse 51 you always resist the Holy Spirit as your fathers did so do you which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute and they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the righteous one whom you have betrayed and murdered Stephen turns the whole thing around on his accusers they are the ones who are in the dark because they as their forefathers did they refused to listen to God's messengers in fact they've done more than that they've done more than refused to listen they have in fact killed Jesus Christ they murdered him and a refusal to listen to God's messengers and in particular for us who live this side of the cross a refusal to listen to

[34 : 01] God's final messenger his own son Jesus Christ that is culpable it's serious eternal destinies hang in the balance that is why Stephen was prepared to die recognition of God's appointed savior bowing thee to him recognizing him listening to him well that leads to deliverance and life a failure to acknowledge Jesus can only lead to judgment and death that's Stephen's assessment of those he's speaking to you and so that assessment well it's deeply offensive isn't it for these accusers to be told you're opposing God to be told that they are totally wrong to be told that as it stands they are no better than unbelieving Gentiles it cuts them to the heart and they hate him for it and that's no different today the gospel of the

Lord Jesus Christ it calls all people in all places at all times to listen to him because he is God's final messenger he's God's final deliverer and salvation can only be found in him so if you haven't repented if you don't turn to him for forgiveness then you must and that is not a comfortable truth to

be told it wasn't then and it isn't today Stephen's message is the eternal gospel message it turned his accuser's assumptions and understandings totally upside down they had it all wrong and they hated him for it which leads to our final point despite that opposition despite that murderous opposition the gospel progresses so we see from chapter 7 verse 54 to the beginning of chapter 8 see

God's great gospel movements progresses we're given certainty about the spread of the gospel you see gospel expansion and gospel persecution they ironically work together and this is what Luke demonstrates again and again we see it so vividly here those who Stephen was speaking to they are absolutely enraged they drag him out of the city and they stone him to death you see their sin had been exposed their savior had been revealed but they wanted none of it they didn't want to hear it they literally put their fingers in their ears verse 57 they run at Stephen and it's a terrible and grotesque scene isn't it but look at what happens next chapter 8 verse 1 Saul he approves of his execution and there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in

Jerusalem and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria now up until this point as we've seen the activity has been all in Jerusalem but there was still more to be done remember Jesus words from Acts chapter 1 he charged his apostles with the task of being his witnesses not only in Jerusalem but to Judea and to Samaria and then to the end of the earth that was Jesus mission plan for his apostles this great expansion of the gospel is unstoppable that's the big picture of the book of Acts and the severe persecution the martyrdom we read about here it didn't stop the spread of the gospel in fact it was the very means to the spread of the gospel wasn't it it's just how it was for the Lord Jesus Christ and Luke is careful here to draw a close comparison between the

Lord Jesus and Stephen the sufferings and death of Stephen are so like the sufferings and death of Jesus and that is the pattern that is the pattern of all who follow Christ and witness to him those who follow Christ you and I if you follow Christ we are called to take up our cross we're called if it comes to it to die for our faith now without doubt as James Philip put it the persecution was the work of Satan but it became the means of God in God's hands it became the new outreach of his grace and he goes on to say that this ought to help us see Satan's attacks and pressure on our lives in proper perspective Stephen had that perspective and it was a perspective that saw beyond the temporal it saw beyond what he was experiencing to eternity it's remarkable isn't look at verse 56 he saw the risen

[39 : 45] Lord Jesus standing in heaven and as he dies in verse 59 he calls out to Jesus and having this amazing perspective seeing the Lord Jesus there the risen Lord Jesus in heaven that enabled him to suffer with such dignity and to even ask for the forgiveness of those who are stoning him that is the only way you and I can endure suffering in this world isn't it knowing there's an eternity knowing that there's a Lord Jesus Christ waiting for us to say well done good and faithful servant without that eternal perspective we couldn't stand but that is the perspective knowing that there's something beyond this world but notice small detail at the end of verse one there's a great persecution many are scattered except the apostles it seems that the apostles remain at least initially in

Jerusalem they were the leaders of the Jerusalem church and they stayed and so it is the ordinary Christians the non-apostles who are scattered it's the non-apostles who go about preaching the word those other people read about there in chapter 8 verse 4 they are the ones who go about preaching and the task of gospel spread that is the responsibility not of the few but of the many it's not the task of the preacher alone it wasn't the task of the apostles alone it's not the task of the elders alone or the small group leaders or whoever it's the task of every Christian wherever you go wherever I go whether it's at home in the workplace the classroom over the garden fence wherever there are Christians witnessing to the truth about Jesus that is our task we are to go with the words of

Christ on our lips proclaiming Christ but it is a task that may well mean for us for you for me real costliness and opposition and suffering but that is the pattern that we see here it was Stephen's own experience but it was so it was his experience because it was first Jesus experience and that is the pattern for all who will follow him and speak for him but that is the pattern of gospel growth gospel expansion and gospel persecution they work together so if we meet hard times as a church as individuals don't panic that is how God grows his church and it is going to the ends of the earth just as

Jesus said it would nothing is going to stop that we have certainty that God's great gospel message provokes we have certainty about God's great gospel message that we are to proclaim but we also have certainty that God's great gospel movement progresses nothing will stop that so let's be encouraged let's pray our father you know how weak and how feeble and how faint hearted we so often are encourage our hearts with these words to see that you are in control that you are taking your great gospel to the ends of the earth and so would you help us to see things through the eyes of an eternal perspective seeing beyond the sufferings and persecutions of this world to the eternity beyond so comfort us encourage us and strengthen us for we ask it in Jesus name Amen Amen