

# OPEN HEAVEN

Part 7 • August 11, 2024 • Pastor Jason Smotherman

## **Acts 7:56 (ESV), Ephesians 1:9-10 (ESV)**

Heaven is going to be a beautiful place. The audacity that Heaven could meet earth is mind boggling. Oil and water. Day and Night. Land and Sea. This convergence is where pressure is built. From what has been to what will be.

Uniting heaven and earth is the promise of the relationship with God through Jesus. When that born again experience happens, transformation happens. Like real, noticeable, life change.

In reality, it's the promise that eternal life doesn't start one day, but today. Even in the midst of this broken, fallen world. We have been studying the life of Stephen and his sacrifice to declare a responsibility to individuals that heaven is now open.

### **What house will you build?**

Nine verses later we are introduced to Simon the Sorcerer. People are being saved. People are being filled with the Holy Spirit. Simon the sorcerer, sees the power of Heaven on Earth living, and offers money to buy the power. There will always be the battle of earthly selfish ambition competing with open heaven selfless ambition.

## **Acts 8:23 (ESV)**

Note, it is possible for a man to continue under the power of sin, and yet to put on a form of godliness. Note, the disguises of hypocrites many times are soon seen through; the nature of the wolf shows itself notwithstanding the cover of the sheep's clothing. You can fool everybody, but not God.

Stephen, and his death, are the ultimate example of a life of sincerity. We can imagine Heaven.

Charles E. Fuller once announced that he would be speaking the following Sunday on "Heaven". During that week a beautiful letter was received from an old man who was very ill. The following is part of his letter:

*"Next Sunday you are to talk about Heaven. I am interested in that land, because I have held a clear title to a bit of property there for over fifty-five years. I did not buy it. It was given to me without money and without price. But the Donor purchased it for me at tremendous sacrifice. I am not holding it for speculation since the title is not transferable. It is not a vacant lot. For more than half a*

century I have been sending materials out of which the greatest Architect and Builder of the Universe has been building a home for me which will never need to be remodeled nor repaired because it will suit me perfectly, individually, and will never grow old. Termites can never undermine its foundations for they rest on the Rock of Ages. Fire cannot destroy it. Floods cannot wash it away. No locks or bolts will ever be placed upon its doors, for no vicious person can ever enter that land where my dwelling stands, now almost completed and almost ready for me to enter in and abide in peace eternally, without fear of being ejected. There is a valley of deep shadow between the place where I live in California and that to which I shall journey in a very short time. I cannot reach my home in that City of Gold without passing through this dark valley of shadows. But I am not afraid because the best Friend I ever had went through the same valley long, long ago and drove away all its gloom. He has stuck by me through thick and thin, since we first became acquainted fifty-five years ago, and I hold His promise in printed form, never to forsake me or leave me alone. He will be with me as I walk through the valley of shadows, and I shall not lose my way when He is with me. I hope to hear your sermon on Heaven next Sunday from my home in Los Angeles, California, but I have no assurance that I shall be able to do so. My ticket to Heaven has no date marked for the journey—no return coupon—and no permit for baggage. Yes, I am all ready to go and I may not be here while you are talking next Sunday evening, but I shall meet you there someday."

We all understand, those of us who are born again, that heaven is going to be a beautiful place. The audacious claim though through scripture is that Heaven can be seen on earth. Heaven is not just a future destination but a today occupation.

Jesus, when teaching us to pray, said the following: **Matthew 6:9-13 (KJV)**

Stephen did 3 important things that united Heaven and Earth.

## **1. DECLARED GOD IS GOOD, EVEN WHEN LIFE IS BAD.**

Life can't get any worse than being stoned to death while standing for good.

**Declaration** - a formal or explicit statement or announcement. The power of Declaration. Declare whose you are. Declare the promises of God. The words that we speak will influence our lives and connects us to the unseen spiritual world.

**Proverbs 18:21 (KJV), Proverbs 18:21 (TPT), 1 Peter 3:10 (NKJV)**

Our quality of life and the length thereof will depend on the words that we speak!  
**Hebrews 11:3 (NKJV)**

God created the world that we now see by taking that what already existed in the invisible spiritual world and transferring it into the world that we now see. He did so by speaking words! **Genesis 1:2-3 (NKJV)**

Stephen understood that the gateway of transformation was in declaration. Declaration in the face of opposition is so important. **Acts 7:54-57 (NKJV)**

In the early 1770s, more and more colonists became convinced that Parliament intended to take away their freedom. In fact, the Americans saw a pattern of increasing oppression and corruption happening all around the world. Parliament was determined to bring its unruly American subjects to heel. Britain began to prepare for war in early 1775. The first fighting broke out in April in Massachusetts. In August, the King declared the colonists "in a state of open and avowed rebellion." For the first time, many colonists began to seriously consider cutting ties with Britain. The publication of Thomas Paine's stirring pamphlet *Common Sense* in early 1776 lit a fire under this previously unthinkable idea. The movement for independence was now in full swing.

On June 11, 1776, Jefferson holed up in his Philadelphia boarding house and began to write. He borrowed freely from existing documents like the Virginia Declaration of Rights and incorporated accepted ideals of the Enlightenment. Jefferson later explained that "he was not striving for originality of principal or sentiment."

On July 2, 1776, Congress voted to declare independence. Two days later, it ratified the text of the Declaration. John Dunlap, official printer to Congress, worked through the night to set the Declaration in type and print approximately 200 copies. These copies, known as the Dunlap Broad sides, were sent to various committees, assemblies, and commanders of the Continental troops.

The Dunlap Broad sides weren't signed, but John Hancock's name appears in large type at the bottom. One copy crossed the Atlantic, reaching King George III months later. The official British response scolded the "misguided Americans" and "their extravagant and inadmissible Claim of Independency".

The founding fathers knew the power of declaration. Stephen knew the power of declaration. Do you know the power of declaration?

**Declare the promises of God. Declare the unity of heaven and earth. Declare the victory you have in Jesus. Especially do it, when it seemingly is not present. Jesus was still standing when they were throwing.**

Triumph is just "umph" added to try.

It takes a Stephen to produce a Paul. It takes a declaration to produce a freedom.

## **2. HIS ETERNAL PERSPECTIVE, ALLOWED HIM TO FORGIVE THOSE WHO DID THE UNFORGIVABLE.**

### ***Matthew 6:9-13 (KJV)***

In a chapel service bulletin from Chaplain Wendell C. Hawley, comes a classic illustration of forgiveness. When the Moravian missionaries first went to the Eskimos, they could not find a word in their language for forgiveness, so they had to compound one.

This turned out to be: **Issumagijoungnainermik**. It is a formidable-looking

assembly of letters, but an expression that has a beautiful connotation for those who understand it. It means: **"Not-being-able-to-think-about-it-anymore."**

C. E. Macartney wrote the following:

*Leonardo da Vinci was one of the outstanding intellects of all history, for he was great as a draftsman, an engineer, and a thinker. Just before he commenced work on his "Last Supper" he had a violent quarrel with a fellow painter. So enraged and bitter was Leonardo that he determined to paint the face of his enemy, the other artist, into the face of Judas, and thus take his revenge and vent his spleen by handling the man down in infamy and scorn to succeeding generations. The face of Judas was therefore one of the first that he finished, and everyone could easily recognize it as the face of the painter with whom he had quarreled. But when he came to paint the face of Christ, he could make no progress. Something seemed to be baffling him, holding him back, frustrating his best efforts. At length he came to the conclusion that the thing which was checking and frustrating him was the fact that he had painted his enemy into the face of Judas. He therefore painted out the face of Judas and commenced anew on the face of Jesus, and this time with the success which the ages have acclaimed. You cannot at one and the same time be painting the features of Christ into your own life, and painting another face with the colors of enmity and hatred.*

The sign of a mature believer: the ability to not be offended. Especially in the face of something that should offend.

**Acts 7:59-60 (ESV)**

What a moment. Forgiveness in the moment. What a weapon. We often pray to receive God's Spirit. To pray, Lord receive my Spirit... Stephen built a house.

### **3. HIS ENEMIES BECAME HIS MISSION FIELD.**

**Acts 8:1 (ESV)**

Stephen recognized one of the greatest Open Heaven lessons. We do not have enemies, we have mission fields. The terrain of our mission field will require the proper vehicle. You will never win your mission field until you understand what it is going to take to reach it. Stephen understood.

It has been estimated that probably 95% of all church members have never led anyone to Christ

Dr. Kermit Long says, "With all our education, our fine buildings, our image of the church, we are doing less to win people to Christ than our unschooled forefathers did. We're no longer fishers of men, but keepers of the aquarium, and we spend most of our time swiping fish from each other's bowl."

**John 4:35 (NIV)**