

**SUNDAY 22 September 2024 - St Paul's Cooma 9.30am**

### **Introduction**

#### **Hymn TIS 212 - Christ whose glory fills the skies**

**Christ whose glory fills the skies  
Christ the true the only Light  
Sun of righteousness arise  
Triumph o'er the shades of night  
Dayspring from on high be near  
Daystar in my heart appear**

**Dark and cheerless is the morn  
Unaccompanied by thee  
Joyless is the day's return  
Till thy mercy's beams I see  
Till they inward light impart  
Glad my eyes and warm my heart**

**Visit then this soul of mine  
Pierce the gloom of sin and grief  
Fill me radiancy divine  
Scatter all my unbelief  
More and more thyself display  
Shining to the perfect day**

### **Greeting**

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. **And also with you.**

### **Sentence of the day**

But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. Acts 7:55

### **Prayer of Preparation**

**Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hidden: cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy name, through Christ our Lord. Amen.**

Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.'

Jesus said: 'This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: you shall love your neighbour as yourself.'

### **Prayer of the Day**

O God, You are rich in love for your people: show us the treasure that endures and, when we are tempted by greed, call us back into your service and make us worthy to be entrusted with the wealth that never fails. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God for ever and ever. Amen

### **The Ministry of the Word**

#### **Daniel 7:13-14**

<sup>13</sup> "In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. <sup>14</sup> He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshipped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.

This is the word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God**

#### **Psalms 132: 1-9**

<sup>1</sup> LORD, remember David and all his self-denial.

<sup>2</sup> **He swore an oath to the LORD, he made a vow to the Mighty One of Jacob:**

<sup>3</sup> "I will not enter my house or go to my bed,

<sup>4</sup> **I will allow no sleep to my eyes or slumber to my eyelids,**

<sup>5</sup> till I find a place for the LORD, a dwelling for the Mighty One of Jacob."

<sup>6</sup> **We heard it in Bethlehem, we came upon it in the fields of the woods:**

<sup>7</sup> "Let us go to his dwelling place, let us worship at his footstool, saying,

<sup>8</sup> **'Arise, LORD, and come to your resting place, you and the ark of your might.**

<sup>9</sup> **May your priests be clothed with your righteousness; may your faithful people sing for joy.'**

#### **Acts 7:1-3,51-60**

<sup>7.1</sup> Then the high priest asked Stephen, "Are these charges true?" <sup>2</sup> To this he replied: "Brothers and fathers, listen to me! The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham

while he was still in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Harran. <sup>3</sup> ‘Leave your country and your people,’ God said, ‘and go to the land I will show you.’

<sup>51</sup> “You stiff-necked people! Your hearts and ears are still uncircumcised. You are just like your ancestors: You always resist the Holy Spirit! <sup>52</sup> Was there ever a prophet your ancestors did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him—<sup>53</sup> you who have received the law that was given through angels but have not obeyed it.” <sup>54</sup> When the members of the Sanhedrin heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. <sup>55</sup> But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. <sup>56</sup> “Look,” he said, “I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.” <sup>57</sup> At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, <sup>58</sup> dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul. <sup>59</sup> While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” <sup>60</sup> Then he fell on his knees and cried out, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” When he had said this, he fell asleep.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God

### Matthew 3:7-10

#### Glory to you, Lord Jesus Christ

<sup>7</sup> But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptising, he said to them: “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? <sup>8</sup> Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. <sup>9</sup> And do not think you can say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. <sup>10</sup> The axe is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

This is the gospel of the Lord: **Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ**

### Sermon - Ephesians 7 - A History Lesson

#### Question Time

#### Prayers

Let us pray for the world and the church.

Response: Gracious God, in your mercy. **Hear our prayer.**

#### The Lord's Prayer

Accept our prayers through Jesus Christ our Lord, who taught us to pray,

**Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us**

from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever.  
**Amen.**

### **The Confession**

God is steadfast in love and infinite in mercy, welcoming sinners and inviting them to the Lord's table. Let us confess our sins in penitence and faith, confident in God's forgiveness.

**Merciful God, our maker and our judge, we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, and in what we have failed to do: we have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbours as ourselves; we repent, and are sorry for all our sins. Father, forgive us. Strengthen us to love and obey you in newness of life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

Almighty God, who has promised forgiveness to all who turn to him in faith: pardon you and set you free from all your sins, strengthen you in all goodness and keep you in eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

### **Greeting of Peace**

We are the body of Christ. **His Spirit is with us.**

The peace of the Lord be always with you. **And also with you.**

### **Hymn TIS 690 - Beauty for brokenness**

**Beauty for brokenness, Hope for despair  
Lord in the suffering, This is our prayer  
Bread for the children, Justice Joy Peace  
Sunrise to sunset, Your Kingdom increase.**

**Shelter for fragile lives, Cures for their ills  
Work for the craftsman, Trade for their skills  
Land for the dispossessed, Rights for the weak  
Voices to plead the cause, Of those who can't speak.**

### **Chorus**

**God of the poor, Friend of the weak  
Give us compassion we pray  
Melt our cold hearts, Let tears fall like rain  
Come, change our love, From a spark to a flame.**

**Refuge from cruel wars, Havens from fear  
Cities for sanctuary, Freedoms to share  
Peace to the killing-fields, Scorched earth to green**

**Christ for the bitterness, His cross for the pain.**

**Rest for the ravaged earth, Oceans and streams  
Plundered and poisoned, Our future, our dreams  
Lord, end our madness, Carelessness, greed  
Make us content with, The things that we need. *Chorus***

**Lighten our darkness, Breathe on this flame  
Until your justice burns, Brightly again  
Until the nations, Learn of Your ways  
Seek Your salvation, And bring You their praise. *Chorus***

### **The Thanksgiving**

The Lord be with you. **And also with you.**

Lift up your hearts. **We lift them to the Lord.**

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God. **It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

Loving God, we thank you for this world of wonder and delight. You have given it to us to care for, so that all your creatures may enjoy its bounty.

Lord our God, **we give you thanks and praise.**

We thank you that when we turned away from you, you sent Jesus to live and work as one of us, and bring us back to you. He showed us how to love you and set us free to love and serve one another.

Lord our God, **we give you thanks and praise.**

We thank you that on the cross Jesus took away our sin, all that keeps us from each other and from you. He frees us from hate and fear, from all that destroys love and trust.

Lord our God, **we give you thanks and praise.**

And so with everyone who believes in you, with all the saints and angels, we rejoice and praise you, saying:

**Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, Heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest.**

And now we thank you for these gifts of bread and wine; may we who receive them, as Jesus said, share his body and his blood.

On the night he was betrayed, he took bread and gave you thanks. He broke the bread and gave it to his friends, and said, 'Take and eat. This is my body given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.'

After supper he took the cup and gave you thanks. He shared the cup with them and said, 'This is my blood poured out so that sins may be forgiven. Do this in remembrance of me.'

**Christ has died.**

**Christ is risen.**

**Christ will come again.**

You have gathered us together to feed on Christ and to remember all he has done for us. Fill us with your Spirit that we may follow Jesus in all we do and say, working for justice and bringing your peace to this world that you have made. Accept our prayers through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Blessing and honour and glory and power are yours for ever and ever. Amen**

We who are many are one body, **for we all share in the one bread.**

**The gifts of God for the people of God.**

Come let us take this holy sacrament of the body and blood of Christ in remembrance that he died for us, and feed on him in our hearts with thanksgiving.

The Lord's Supper is open to all who love the Lord.

### **After Communion**

Father of all we give you thanks and praise that when we were still far off you met us in your Son and brought us home. Dying and living, he declared your love, gave us grace, and opened the gate of glory. May we who share Christ's body live his risen life; we who drink his cup bring life to others; we whom the Spirit lights give light to the world. **Keep us in this hope that we have grasped: so we and all your people will be free, and the whole earth live to praise your name.**

### **Hymn TIS 570 - Soldiers of Christ arise**

**Soldiers of Christ arise and put your armour on  
Strong in the strength which God supplies through His eternal Son  
Strong in the Lord of hosts and in His mighty power  
Who in the strength of Jesus trusts is more than conqueror.**

**Stand then in His great might with all His strength endued  
And take to arm you for the fight the panoply of God;  
That having all things done and all your conflicts past  
Ye may o'ercome through Christ alone and stand entire at last.**

**Stand then against your foes, in close and firm array;  
legions of wily fiends oppose throughout the evil day:  
but meet the sons of night, and mock their vain design**

armed in the arms of heavenly light of righteousness divine.

Leave no unguarded place, No weakness of the soul;  
Take every virtue, every grace, And fortify the whole:  
in him forever joined, to battle all proceed;  
but arm yourselves with all the mind that was in Christ, your Head.

### Notices

### Dismissal

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with you always. **Amen.**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord: **In the name of Christ. Amen.**

### **Sermon - Acts 7 - A History Lesson**

Who are you? Are you the product of your history? Your family? Your experiences? Your education and even your ancestry? Or are you your future: what you will become? The things you will do? The improvements you make in society? The inheritance you will leave to your children? Are you your future?

Please ponder that thought as we look at the 7th chapter of Acts.

Last week in Acts 6, we heard that Stephen, who was appointed the equivalent of a parish councillor in the early church, had been dragged before the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling council. False witnesses tried to get him condemned. They said, *"This man never ceases to speak words against this holy place and the law, 14 for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and will change the customs that Moses delivered to us." 15 And gazing at him, all who sat in the council saw that his face was like the face of an angel.*

How would you have responded if you were in Stephen's place?

Maybe you wouldn't have, but Stephen gave them a history lesson. He briefly summarised Old Testament history from the time of Abraham to King Solomon. In doing so, he really annoyed his Jewish listeners, because the Jewish people, like many other peoples, is a product of its history. Good Jews would trace their ancestry back to Abraham, and they saw their identity in that ancestry.

Any attack on their history, or any implication that they were unworthy products of their ancestry would really hit a raw nerve, and boy, did Stephen hit a raw nerve.

I won't go into detail about the history lesson Stephen gave the Sanhedrin, but I hope you remember the third sermon I gave in my series on the gospel. It was about God's plan for restoration, and I said that the Old Testament was part one of the plan, set up the framework for part two, which was sending Jesus into the world. For this reason, Stephen's Jewish history lesson is very important to Christians.

When I spoke about part one on God's salvation plan, I emphasised how the Old Testament law and the sacrificial system were fundamental for us to understand sin and forgiveness. The law convicts us of our sin, shows us that none of us live up to God's standard, and the sacrificial system shows how we can be forgiven by something else taking the punishment we deserve, specifically the animal's sacrifice substituting for the judgement we deserve for our sin.

Stephen's history lesson however emphasises God's promise of a Messiah, and the forerunners of that Messiah that he sent throughout Israel's history. Stephen started with Abraham, but I prefer to go all the way back to Adam and Eve. You will recall that back in Genesis 3 verse 15, God tells the snake through whom sin entered the world: I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."

As soon as sin entered the world, the Bible tells us to expect one of the woman's offspring to crush the head of the serpent and overcome sin. Throughout the Old Testament we are left waiting for this offspring, but no one successfully defeats sin. Stephen mentions Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph and his 11 brothers, Moses, Joshua, King David and King Solomon, all likely candidates to crush the serpent's head but all failed. Each of them were called by God, and try to lead God's people away from sin. Even Moses, who was no ordinary child, led the Israelites out of Egypt and performed wonders and signs in Egypt, at the Red Sea and for forty years in the wilderness; but he didn't make the cut. God chose him to give Israel God's law and the ark of the covenant, and to remind Israel that Eve's offspring was still to come, by



foretelling a prophet like him would come. Joshua brought Israel into the promised land, but even Joshua wasn't the one. David was called by God to be king of Israel, and his son Solomon built the temple, but they weren't the one.

Stephen goes on to say that prophets were also sent by God to foretell the coming of the righteous one, the offspring of Eve, but the Sanhedrin's ancestors would not even listen to them, and they persecuted and even killed them, showing how much they resisted God's holy spirit.

Stephen says now the Sanhedrin have even betrayed and murdered Jesus, the righteous one finally sent by God to save them from their sin.

This history really hurts the Sanhedrin. They see themselves in their ancestors who have received the law, but they don't like to be reminded that they have not obeyed that law.

In reality, the Jews in the Sanhedrin were just like their ancestors. They didn't like the message, but rather than learning it and changing to become the people they should be, they shoot the messenger, or at least they stone him. It wasn't enough for them to have Jesus crucified, they stoned to death his messenger Stephen, even as he reminded them of their history.

As he stood before the Sanhedrin, Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. <sup>56</sup> "Look," he said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."

This might not sound particularly inflammatory to you and me, but the Sanhedrin knew their Bibles. They knew Stephen was quoting the prophet Daniel. They wanted to ignore him, but they knew he said:

*Daniel 7:13 (NIV) 13 "In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. 14 He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshipped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.*

Stephen was telling them that Jesus was standing at the right hand of God, who had given him authority, glory and sovereign power. Stephen was telling them that Jesus was being worshipped by all nations and peoples of every language. They would have known, if they had listened to the prophets, that His dominion is everlasting and will not pass away; his kingdom will never be destroyed. But they also know they hadn't listened to the prophets, and they will not listen to the prophets because they are too much like their ancestors. They would not recognise Jesus, the king of Kings, ruler of the kingdom of God, and they would miss out on the salvation he offered.

I don't know how many of us here grew up in believing families, or how many of us have ancestors who put their faith in Jesus as saviour and Lord. What I do know is that you are not your ancestors, no matter how much the Sanhedrin saw their identity in their ancestors.

Many of us have a great legacy from Christian forebears - knowledge of the gospel, their example of faith, and in Australia, a Christian heritage and a legal system based on Christians principles.

But you are not your forebears, you are not your ancestors, whether they were Christian or not. Your future, your eternal destination, does not depend on whether your parents, or your grandparents, or any of your ancestors trusted in Jesus's death and resurrection. Your eternal salvation depends on your faith in Jesus's death and resurrection on your behalf.

The Sanhedrin in Stephen's day had everything going for them - they had all the ancestors, the history, the law and the prophets pointing them to faith in Jesus, but they wasted it all by rejecting him - just as their ancestors had rejected the prophets. No matter what your ancestors were, you are not your history. Even if we can't remember it, we all have a history of rejecting God, but we are not even that history.

The history that really matters for you is that God's son, Jesus Christ, died on the cross for your salvation some 2000 years ago. Your response, your faith in this, or rejection of it today is your future. It is the future of salvation to an eternal life in the perfectly restored world that Jesus died to bring about, or eternal judgement.

Is that your future?