

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Perth

Sunday, September 13th, 2026

Rev. Gerry Gallant

When We Reject the Living God

Proper 19

Acts 7:37-50

(Return To Church Sunday)

Welcome

Good morning, and welcome. We are so glad you are here today, especially if you are visiting with us or returning to church after some time away. On this Return to Church Sunday, we want you to know that you are warmly welcome among us.

Our hope is that you will encounter not just friendly faces, but the grace of Jesus Christ, who welcomes sinners, strengthens the weary, and calls us into the joy of knowing God. Please feel free to stay after the service for food and fellowship; we would love the chance to meet you and spend time together.

Announcements

Call to Worship

Come, let us worship the living God, who made heaven and earth and does not dwell in houses made by hands.

We come to worship the Lord Most High, whose throne is heaven and whose footstool is the earth.

The Lord looks with favor on the humble and contrite, on those who tremble at His Word.

Lord, give us humble hearts to receive Your living Word and worship You in spirit and truth.

Let us turn from the idols of our hands and lift our hearts to Jesus Christ, the Prophet greater than Moses and the Word made flesh.

We will worship the living God, trust in Christ our Saviour, and hear His Word with gladness.

Prayer of Adoration and Invocation

Almighty and everlasting God, heaven is Your throne and the earth is Your footstool. You are not contained by temples made with hands, nor limited by the places where we gather, for You are the living God who made all things and upholds all things by Your power.

We praise You because You are holy, faithful, merciful, and true. You spoke living words to Your people in the wilderness, and You have spoken fully and finally in Your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the Prophet greater than Moses, the Word made flesh, and the only Saviour of sinners.

Lord, we confess that our hearts are often restless and divided. We are tempted to trust what our hands have made, to cling to what we can manage, and to seek security apart from You. Yet You call us this morning to turn from every idol and to worship You in spirit and truth.

By Your Holy Spirit, draw near to us now. Humble our hearts, awaken our faith, quiet our distractions, and make us attentive to Your Word. Lift our eyes to Christ, who died and rose again, and lead us into the joy of Your presence.

Receive our worship, forgive our sins, strengthen Your church, and glorify the name of Jesus among us. We ask this in His holy and saving name. **Amen.**

Call to Confession

Friends, the living God calls us not only to worship Him, but to come before Him honestly. His Word exposes the idols of our hearts, the ways we resist His voice, and the things we trust more than Christ. Yet He reveals our sin not to drive us away, but to draw us back to Himself in mercy.

So with humble and contrite hearts, and trusting in the grace of God given to us in Jesus Christ, let us confess our sins together.

Prayer of Confession

Merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against You in thought, word, and deed. You have spoken to us by Your living Word, but we have not always listened. You have called us to trust You, but we have often trusted what our own hands have made.

Forgive us for the idols we protect, the comforts we cling to, and the excuses we make. Forgive us for treating Your gifts as if they were greater than the Giver, and for seeking security, approval, and control apart from You.

Lord Jesus Christ, You are the Prophet greater than Moses, the true Word made flesh, and the Saviour of sinners. Where we have resisted Your voice, soften our hearts. Where we have wandered from Your way, bring us back. Where we have rejoiced in the works of our hands, teach us to rejoice in Your grace.

Cleanse us by Your mercy, renew us by Your Spirit, and make us humble and contrite before You. Help us to tremble at Your Word, trust in Your Son, and walk in new obedience for Your glory.

We confess our sins in the name of Jesus Christ, who died and rose again for us. **Amen.**

Assurance of Pardon

Hear the good news: the God who exposes our idols is the God who gives His Son for sinners. Jesus Christ, the Prophet greater than Moses and the Word made flesh, has died for our sins and risen for our justification.

If you are in Christ, your sins are forgiven, your guilt is removed, and you are welcomed into the presence of the living God. In Jesus Christ, we are pardoned and made new.

The Lord's Prayer

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name
Thy Kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven
Give us this day our daily bread
And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one
For Thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory,
Forever and ever, Amen.**

Opening Hymns (2)

He Knows My Name

I have a Maker,
He formed my heart.
Before even time began,
my life was in His hand.

He knows my name,
He knows my every thought.
He sees each tear that falls
and hears me when I call.

I have a Father,
He calls me his own
He'll never leave me
no matter where I go.

He knows my name,
He knows my every thought.
He sees each tear that falls
and hears me when I call,
and hears me when I call.

Precious Lord Take My Hand

Precious Lord, take my hand,
Lead me on, let me stand,
I am tired, I am weak, I am worn;
Through the storm, through the night,
Lead me on to the light:
Take my hand, precious Lord,
Lead me home.

When my way grows drear,
Precious Lord, linger near,
When my life is almost gone,
Hear my cry, hear my call,
Hold my hand lest I fall:
Take my hand, precious Lord,
Lead me home.

Precious Lord, take my hand,
Lead me on, let me stand,
I am tired, I am weak, I am worn;
Through the storm, through the night,
Lead me on to the light:
Take my hand, precious Lord,
Lead me home.

When the darkness appears
And the night draws near,
And the day is past and gone,
At the river, I stand,
Guide my feet, hold my hand:
Take my hand, precious Lord,
Lead me home.

Precious Lord, take my hand,
Lead me on, let me stand,
I am tired, I am weak, I am worn;
Through the storm, through the night,
Lead me on to the light:
Take my hand, precious Lord,
Lead me home.

Prayer for Illumination

Scripture

Acts 7:37-50

³⁷ This is the Moses who said to the Israelites, 'God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers.' ³⁸ This is the one who was 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. ³⁹ Our fathers refused to obey him, but thrust him aside, and in their hearts they turned to Egypt, ⁴⁰ saying to Aaron, 'Make for us gods who will go before us. As for this Moses who led us out from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.' ⁴¹ And they made a calf in those days, and offered a sacrifice to the idol and were rejoicing in the works of their hands. ⁴² But God turned away and gave them over to worship the host of heaven, as it is written in the book of the prophets:

" 'Did you bring to me slain beasts and sacrifices,
during the forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel?

⁴³ 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.'

⁴⁴ "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. ⁴⁵ Our fathers in turn brought it in with Joshua when they dispossessed the nations that God drove out before our fathers. So it was until the days of David, ⁴⁶ who found favor in the sight of God and asked to find a dwelling place for the God of Jacob. ⁴⁷ But it was Solomon who built a house for him. ⁴⁸ Yet the Most High does not dwell in houses made by hands, as the prophet says,

⁴⁹ " 'Heaven is my throne,
and the earth is my footstool.
What kind of house will you build for me, says the Lord,
or what is the place of my rest?

⁵⁰ Did not my hand make all these things?'

Sermon

Friends, Stephen's words invite us to see something deeply human in ourselves: the desire to make God manageable. It's true. We like what we can see, touch, organize, and understand. A place to gather, a tradition to hold onto, and a form of worship we recognize are good gifts when they serve faith. But they become dangerous when we treat them as though they can contain, secure, or control the God who made heaven and earth.

That is one of the themes running through Stephen's sermon in Acts 7, and it echoes into our lives this morning. Stephen stands before the Sanhedrin—men who know their Bibles, love the temple, defend their traditions, and believe they are standing firmly for God. Yet his message pierces deeply: it reminds us that it is possible to have Scripture and still resist the God who gave it, to have a temple and still worship false idols, and to have religious knowledge while the heart remains far from God.

That warning is not only for the people in Stephen's courtroom. It is for us. Stephen's accusers were serious, devout people who believed they were honoring God. Their danger was not open lack of religion, but a religious confidence in their standing with God without living a life of humble obedience to the living God. And that danger is still very real and can reach any of us, no matter our years of faith.

Stephen's warning is simple and searching: Simply put it reminds us that we can possess God's Word, honor God's servants, and protect God's house while still refusing to obey the God who is speaking.

Acts 7 asks each of us to consider if our religion has become a substitute for repentance, whether God's gifts have become our idols, and whether we are truly listening to Christ.

Let me read where we begin, in verse 37:

Acts 7:37-38

³⁷ This is the Moses who said to the Israelites, 'God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers.' ³⁸ This is the one who was 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.

Stephen opens by pointing his audience back to Moses, the man they most revered, the lawgiver they defended, the mediator through whom they believed God had spoken most clearly.

But notice what Stephen is reminding them about. He doesn't merely quote Moses's authority. He quotes Moses's own testimony about the future. Moses himself said that God would raise up another prophet, one like him but from among the people. And that prophet, Moses insisted, must be heard.

This is crucial. Stephen is not asking them to abandon Moses. He is asking them to listen to Moses more carefully. Moses was not the final destination; he was a faithful signpost. His ministry pointed beyond itself to the greater Prophet God would raise up, the One

whose Word must be heard because He is not merely another servant in God's house, but the Son over God's house.

The early church saw this same connection clearly.

Moses was human and limited by time and space. Christ came truly in the flesh, yet with divine majesty. As the early church recognized and Stephen understood, that Prophet was Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God.

That means the issue before Stephen's hearers was not whether they respected Moses, but whether they would receive the One to whom Moses pointed.

Think about that for a moment. The religious leaders of Stephen's time believed they honored Moses. They devoted their lives to studying his words, following his law, and preserving his traditions. But in doing so, they had missed what Moses himself was most eager to communicate: there is Someone coming who is greater than I am. If you truly believed me, you would believe Him.

Stephen also reminds them where Moses received the Word: among the congregation in the wilderness. Israel gathered at Sinai as God's covenant people, foreshadowing the church gathered around Christ.

Moses received what Stephen calls 'living oracles,' These were not dead religious relics or ancient information. They were living words from the living God.

John Calvin wrote that these were not Moses's opinions or human wisdom, but God's own declarations delivered to His people. To reject Moses was to reject God; Which is a reminder all of us could use, to treat Scripture as merely an old religious book is to forget that it is the living Word of the living God.

Which brings us to the heart of the matter: Israel had everything they needed to know God. They had God's Word. They had centuries of revelation. They had the living oracles delivered by Moses. They had access to the God who had rescued them, led them, and promised to be with them.

But having God's Word in your possession is not the same as obeying God's Word with your heart.

And that is where the tragedy begins.

Acts 7:39-41

³⁹ Our fathers refused to obey him, but thrust him aside, and in their hearts they turned to Egypt, ⁴⁰ saying to Aaron, 'Make for us gods who will go before us. As for this Moses who led us out from the land of Egypt, we do not know

what has become of him.’⁴¹ And they made a calf in those days, and offered a sacrifice to the idol and were rejoicing in the works of their hands

Do you feel the weight of that? These people had personally witnessed God's power. They had seen the plagues, walked through the Red Sea on dry ground, eaten bread from heaven, drunk water from the rock, and followed the presence of God in cloud and fire.

Yet even with all of that experience of God, ‘in their hearts they turned back to Egypt.’ Their bodies had been delivered, but Egypt still lived in their hearts. The place God had rescued them from still felt safer than the God who was leading them forward.

This is a crucial Biblical warning. You can leave something physically and remain enslaved to it spiritually. Sin can still be your idol, if you do not give yourself fully to God. The heart is always vulnerable to looking backward when trust in God begins to feel costly.

Then comes what appears to be an outburst of impatience. Moses is on Mount Sinai receiving God's living Word, God's covenant, God's law—everything necessary for life and godliness. But the people cannot wait. They grow restless. And they turn to Aaron and ask to make them a new God.

There is contempt in their words that they used ‘This Moses’, almost as if to dismiss him, as if to say we are done with him. And what happens next? They fashioned a golden calf. And Stephen says something devastating: they ‘rejoiced in the works of their hands.’

Think about how absurd that is. A craftsman makes a beautiful chair, sets it in the room, then kneels before it the next morning and asks it to protect him, provide for him, and guide him. We would call that madness. Yet that is so many people in this world do when they take God's good gifts and trust them more than God Himself.

God's gifts become idols when we trust them more than God Himself. Money becomes a golden calf when we trust it for security. Productivity becomes golden achievement when it matters more than prayer, rest, and obedience. Family becomes a golden family when we demand from spouse, children, or home the ultimate meaning only God can give.

The great reformer Martin Luther taught something memorable in his explanation of the First Commandment: whatever we look to for all good and refuge in distress is truly our god. Meaning where you turn to in times of trouble, whether it is yourself and your abilities, your family, your friends, or some other thing, person, place or idea. That is your God.

That makes Stephen's words cut right to the heart of our idolatry.

Where do you run to for refuge? What do you fear losing most? What do you believe that you absolutely must have in order to be secure?

And that is what makes the consequence so serious. Verse 42 says something that should make us pause:

Acts 7:42-43

⁴² But God turned away and gave them over to worship the host of heaven, as it is written in the book of the prophets:

**“ ‘Did you bring to me slain beasts and sacrifices,
during the forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel?**

**⁴³ 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.’**

Paul uses this same judicial language in Romans 1: God's judgment often appears not as immediate thunder from heaven, but as the fearful act of handing people over to the desires they insisted on keeping.

Think about that for a moment and then look at the world today. People have been handed over to their false idols and create whole cultures, actually they are more like religions around them. They have gravened images, special words and they fight against anyone who speak ill of their god.

Stephen then goes on and quotes the prophet Amos to show that Israel's idolatry did not end with the golden calf in the wilderness. It became a pattern that deepened throughout their history as they turned from the living God to false gods that demanded more and more from those who served them.

Notice the trajectory.

First they rejected God's Word.

Then they made an idol.

Then God gave them over to darker forms of worship.

Idolatry never stays static. It descends, our current culture is proof. Money can demand our time and integrity. Success can demand our convictions. Approval can demand our obedience. Comfort can demand our service. Sin can claim our souls. Any god we substitute for the true God becomes a crueller master than God ever is.

Yet there is something else happening in Stephen's speech that we must not miss. Stephen is not pronouncing condemnation to destroy his people. He is laying out their history to call them back. He is saying, 'Can you see the pattern? Can you see where this leads? And can you see that the only way forward is to stop rejecting God and start hearing Him?'

Stephen is not trying to humiliate his hearers. He is trying to help them see what they have done with one of God's good gifts. Now he turns from Israel's repeated rejection to the charge standing over his own head. The Sanhedrin has accused him of speaking against the temple. But instead of defending the temple, or attacking it, Stephen reorients their understanding of what the temple is and what God is.

Acts 7:44

⁴⁴ **"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.**

⁴⁵ **Our fathers in turn brought it in with Joshua when they dispossessed the nations that God drove out before our fathers. So it was until the days of David,**

⁴⁶ **who found favor in the sight of God and asked to find a dwelling place for the God of Jacob. ⁴⁷ But it was Solomon who built a house for him. ⁴⁸ Yet the Most High does not dwell in houses made by hands, as the prophet says,**

⁴⁹ **" 'Heaven is my throne,
and the earth is my footstool.**

**What kind of house will you build for me, says the Lord,
or what is the place of my rest?**

⁵⁰ **Did not my hand make all these things?'**

For over four hundred years, Israel's place of worship was a tent. It was mobile, traveling with the people, and in that portable tent God displayed His holiness, kept His covenant, and met with His people.

Then David desired to build a dwelling for God. That desire was not wrong. Solomon built the temple, and it was magnificent, gold-overlaid, and impressive to behold.

Yet Solomon himself prayed, 'Heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you; how much less this house that I have built!' The one who had just finished the temple understood that you cannot contain the infinite God in a finite structure.

That is what Stephen is trying to drive home to these men, 'the Most High does not dwell in houses made by hands'

The phrase 'made by hands' matters because Scripture often uses that language for idols: things people make and then foolishly trust.

Do you see what Stephen is doing? He is using language that echoes through centuries of warnings about idolatry. He is saying to his accusers, 'You claim I have blasphemed the temple. But you have given the temple a place God never gave it. You have treated a building made by human hands as though God Himself could be secured, defended, and possessed through it.'

Then Stephen quotes Isaiah 66:1: 'Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me, says the Lord, or what is the place of my rest? Did not my hand make all these things?'

The imagery is vast and overwhelming. God's throne is heaven. God's footstool is the entire earth. If you could stand on the highest mountain and see as far as your eyes could see, and then imagine that view expanding to encompass the entire planet, you would still only be looking at God's footstool.

Calvin warned his own generation against what he called creating a 'carnal and worldly God', a God we can see, touch, manage, and predict. A God confined to the spaces where we think He belongs.

Here is where Isaiah's prophecy becomes beautiful and transforming. It continues with these words in verse 2:

Isaiah 66:2

**²All these things my hand has made,
and so all these things came to be,
declares the Lord.
But this is the one to whom I will look:
he who is humble and contrite in spirit
and trembles at my word.**

God's true dwelling is not stone and mortar. He looks with favor on the humble and contrite, on those who tremble at His Word, all those who come empty-handed, ready to listen and obey.

Jesus taught the same thing to the woman at the well in John 4:23-24. The Father seeks those who worship Him 'in spirit and truth'. not because one building can contain Him, but because true worship must come from the heart and be shaped by the truth He has revealed.

So let me ask each of you directly, as Stephen asked his people:

Where are your treasures today? Wherever your treasure is, there your heart will be also. What do you trust more than God, the culture, the media, your own reasoning or

feelings? What idol have you built that you are protecting more fiercely than your soul? What part of your life do you fear giving up to God?

That is the idolatry of our time. It looks respectable. It wears the clothes of success and accomplishment and responsibility. It is culturally accepted and it might sound loving and wise. But it is the same ancient pattern that Amos spoke of, just with modern clothing.

Remember this, that God does not seek what we have. Calvin said 'God seeketh us and not ours.' God is not looking for buildings or money or religious activity. God is looking for you. He wants your heart. He wants your trust. He wants your obedience flowing from love.

Maybe this morning the Lord is showing you a place where your heart has been trusting what your hands have made. If so, do not run from Him. Run to Him.

The God who names our idols is the God who gives His Son. The Prophet greater than Moses has come, and He calls weary, wandering hearts back to Himself.

He did not merely speak God's Word. He is God's Word. John 1:14 says, 'The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.' That word 'dwelt' echoes the imagery of the tabernacle. The presence of God is no longer something we approach through a building or a religious system. God has come to us in Christ.

Jesus does what no building can do, what no ritual can accomplish, and what no amount of religious precision can provide. Jesus takes away sin. Jesus opens the way into God's presence. Jesus brings us into the family of God.

And the Christ whom men rejected God raised from the dead. He is alive. He is reigning. He is interceding for us. And He is calling us right now, not to defend traditions, protect buildings, or perfect our theology as ends in themselves, but to hear Him. To trust Him. To surrender to Him.

So where do we end this morning? Right where Stephen began: 'This is the Moses who said to the Israelites, 'God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers.'"

Moses pointed forward. The tabernacle pointed forward. The temple pointed forward. Everything in the Old Testament covenant pointed toward Christ. And Christ has come. He is present with His people by His Spirit, calling to those who have ears to hear.

The question, then, is not whether God has spoken. God has spoken, and His Word still speaks to each of us today.

The question is not whether God has revealed Himself. God has revealed Himself in Christ.

The question is not whether God is near. In Christ, God has drawn near with a fullness and clarity greater than the temple could ever provide.

The question is: Will you listen?

Will you stop trying to make God manageable and submit to the God who made you? Will you stop rejoicing in the works of your hands, reject your idols, and build your hope on treasure in heaven?

God is calling each of you this morning, not away from joy, but into joy. Not into poverty of soul, but into the riches of grace. Not into slavery, but into freedom. And the call comes through the living God who cannot be contained, who cannot be managed, who cannot be reduced to our categories, but who bends down in love to meet us where we are.

Let us receive the Father's care, renounce the idols we have built, and walk out as people shaped by His Word—salt in places of decay, light in places of darkness, and witnesses to Christ in a broken world.

Let Us Pray

Lord God, our Maker and Redeemer, Augustine once confessed that You have made us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You. We confess that our hearts still wander, our desires divide, and our hands make idols that cannot save.

Forgive us for seeking rest in comfort, control, success, and religion without surrender. Turn us from every false refuge, and teach us again that You alone are our true home, treasure, and joy.

Thank You for Jesus Christ, the Prophet greater than Moses and the Word made flesh. In Him, restless hearts find peace, sinners find mercy, and Your people are brought into Your presence.

By Your Holy Spirit, make us humble before Your Word. Give us grace to hear Christ, trust Christ, obey Christ, and rejoice no longer in the idols we have built, but in the grace we have received.

Rest our hearts in You, living God, and make our lives a witness to Jesus Christ, in whose holy name we pray. **Amen.**

Invitation to Offering

Offering Prayer

Closing Hymn

O Church Arise

O church, arise and put your armour on;
 Hear the call of Christ our captain.
 For now the weak can say that they are strong,
 In the strength that God has given.
 With shield of faith and belt of truth,
 We'll stand against the devil's lies.
 An army bold, whose battle cry is, love,
 Reaching out to those in darkness.

Come, see the cross where love and mercy meet,
 As the Son of God is stricken.
 Then see His foes lie crushed beneath His feet,
 For the Conqueror has risen.
 And as the stone is rolled away
 And Christ emerges from the grave.
 This victory march continues till the day
 Every eye and heart shall see Him.

So Spirit come, put strength in every stride,
 Give grace for every hurdle.
 That we may run with faith to win the prize,
 Of a servant good and faithful.
 As saints of old still line the way
 Retelling triumphs of His grace.
 We hear the calls and hunger for the day
 When with Christ we stand in glory.

Pastoral Prayer

Father in heaven, we thank You that You have gathered us today under the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. You know each name, each story, each burden, and each need represented here, and You invite us to cast our cares upon You because You care for us. We pray for those who come weary from the week, those carrying grief, those facing decisions, those quietly battling fear, temptation, illness, or discouragement. Meet them with the nearness of Christ. Give strength for today, mercy for yesterday, and hope for tomorrow.

Lord, make this church a place where sinners hear good news, where tired souls are pointed to the Saviour, and where Your Word is received with humble faith. Keep us from cold religion and from confidence in ourselves. Teach us to depend on Christ, speak of Christ, and show the kindness of Christ to one another.

As we look ahead to the meal and fellowship after the service, we thank You for ordinary gifts that become holy when received with gratitude: food on the table, friends to sit beside, family to embrace, and conversations that remind us we are not alone.

Bless those who prepared and provided the food. Bless everyone present with peace, laughter, welcome, and thoughtful conversation. Let visitors feel at home, let longtime friends be renewed in affection, and let family bonds be strengthened in the warmth of Christian love.

May our time together bear witness to the gospel we have heard: that in Jesus Christ strangers are welcomed, sinners are forgiven, and the weary are invited to rest. Send us from this day nourished in body, encouraged in heart, and renewed in faith. We ask this in Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Benediction

May the God who made heaven His throne and earth His footstool turn your hearts from every idol and fix your eyes on Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh and the Saviour of sinners.

May He make you humble and contrite before His Word, joyful in His grace, steadfast in faith, and rich in love for one another.

And may the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, rest upon you and remain with you now and forever. **Amen.**