

The Cheers of Heaven

Day 8

Scripture Reading

Read Acts Chapter 7

Power Quote

We must be ever thankful for small miracles, and ever hopeful for receiving greater ones.

Chapter Glossary

Gnashed

To gnash is to bite with grinding teeth, especially while in pain or rage.

Stoning

Stoning, the world's oldest form of execution, is the most common death penalty recorded in the Bible. It is distinct from other forms of capital punishments in that the entire community participates in the killing, in pain or rage.

Fell Asleep

The Bible often times speaks of death or dying as fallen asleep. It does so in light of the fact that the dead in Christ will rise again.

Prayer

Lord, Thank you for keeping an eye on us and our situation. Continue to motivate us with the applauses of heaven. In Jesus Name we pray. Amen.

Scripture Concentration

Acts 7:54-58

Observation

When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth. But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God. And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God. They cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord. And cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul.

Observation

Stephen was arrested on triumphed up charges. The false accusations and imprisonment was followed by a guilty verdict of capital treason. Stephen was sentenced to death by stoning. The spotlight of the text quickly moves from the barbaric act of his accusers gnawing and biting on him, to the Kodak moment when Jesus is standing in heaven, eyeing what was happening to His servant Stephen. Jesus standing?

After Jesus's resurrection and ascension into heaven, Jesus is recorded in Scripture as sitting at the right hand of God, but the stoning of Stephen catches Jesus' attention. In response, Jesus stands. He stands in support and honor of Stephen. He stands to let Stephen know he is not alone. He stands to cheer Stephen on to victory.

We often face challenging circumstances and situations that leave us feeling alone. But Stephen helps us to understand that we are never alone. Our situations are caught by the all-seeing eyes of Jesus. Amidst our situations, Jesus and the hosts of heaven take notice. They stand to honor us, acknowledge our situation, and cheer us on to victory. As we begin this renovation project, I am encouraged by the cheers and the applause and those who are out of their seats in heaven's grandstand – standing for us.

Questions to Ponder?

1. Name a time when your situation caught the eye of God. How did it make you feel that God was watching over you and your situation? How did it turn out?

2. Name a time that you felt the cheers and applause of heaven cheering you on to victory.

They Changed

Day 9

Scripture Reading

Read Acts Chapter 8

Power Quote

The Great Commission is not an option to be considered; it is a command to be obeyed.

Hudson Taylor

Chapter Glossary

Eunuch

Eunuchs were castrated males or those born incapable of reproduction due to a birth defect.

Scripture

Scriptures are the sacred writings of the Old and New Testaments.

Baptize

Baptism is an ordinance established by Christ as a sign to the world that the believer has died to self and the world and has arisen from a liquid grave to a new life in Christ.

Prayer

Lord, help us to live so that others will want to follow. In Jesus Name. Amen.

Scripture Concentration

Acts 8:26-31, 35

Observation

And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert. And he arose and went: and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship, Was returning, and sitting in his chariot read Esaias the prophet. Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot. And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest? And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him. Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus.

Observation

The ministry of Philip, one of the original deacons of the New Testament Church, progressed swiftly. Philip transitioned from a member, to a deacon, to a street ministering evangelist. Supernaturally, Philip was catapulted to a desert to witness and preach to a eunuch from Ethiopia. Philip's evangelistic techniques were unique. Before he asked the eunuch about a profession to faith, or recited the four spiritual laws, Philip simply listened. After listening, at the right time, Philip introduced the eunuch to Jesus.

Often we are quick to acknowledge that Philip interjected Jesus into the life situation of the eunuch. Not fast enough do we acknowledge that he was able to do so because he took time to listen. One of the mistakes that we often make in sharing the good news about Christ, is we often fail to listen.

We come prepared with our message and method, but seldom prepared to listen. Jesus was successful reaching the woman at the well, blind Bartimaeus, the woman caught in adultery, and even the children who came to him. How? The answer is by listening, and ministering to the needs of the people. As a church, we are called to minister to the needs, of those seeking Jesus, but the only way to do this is to begin by listening.

Questions to Ponder?

1. Who was the first person to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with you? How did you respond? How difficult is it for you to listen without giving your advice? Who, most recently, has God placed before you for the sole purpose of listening?

2. How have you been able to bless others simply by listening? Name a time when someone has blessed you by listening.

A Date with Destiny

Day 10

Scripture Reading

Read Acts Chapter 9

Power Quote

Chance can allow you to accomplish a goal every once in a while, but consistent achievement happens only if you love what you are doing.

Bart Conner

Glossary

Pricks

Pricks were pointed spikes on a wooden shaft used to exert influence and control over an ox. If the ox refused the command indicated, the ox would be jabbed with the prick. If the ox rebelled by kicking the prick, the prick would be driven deeper into the flesh.

Slaughter

Slaughter is the mass killing of a large amount of people or animals in a cruel way.

Persecute

Persecution is a campaign to drive away, subjugate, or exterminate a people because of their religion, beliefs or race.

Prayer

Lord, Thank you for the dates with destiny that you place in our lives. Help us always to desire to know and follow what you will have us to do. In Jesus Name we pray. Amen.

Scripture Concentration

Acts 9:3-6

Observation

And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him. Saul, Saul, why persecutes thou me? And he said Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.

Observation

The name of Saul of Tarsus is briefly sprinkled throughout the book of Acts prior to his conversion in chapter 9. At the stoning of Stephen, the executioners laid garments at his feet, as they went to do their dastardly deed. In chapter 8, Saul unleashes terror upon the church. In chapter 9, he has a date with destiny. Saul is summonsed to meet with God. Others are around, but he is alone in his meeting with God. God calls Saul's actions into question.

The Hebrew writer reminds us that each of us have an appointment with God. From time to time, God calls all of our actions into question. Our date with destiny sometimes knocks us off our feet, and brings us face to face; or ear to ear with God. Sometimes it blinds us, or deafens us, to capture our undivided attention with the master.

On December 20, 2007, when the catastrophic fire consumed our worship and family life centers, we had a date with destiny. On April 13, 2011 when we marched into present worship and ministry center, we had a date with destiny. A few weeks ago, when we broke ground on the renovation of our present facility, we were summonsed to a meeting with God.

On Saul's date with destiny, he was bombarded with probing questions from God, but before he completed his meeting, Saul asked God a question, that we would do well to ask today – "Lord, what will thou have us to do?"

Questions to Ponder?

1. Name a time when you had an encounter with God that became a date with destiny. How has your life changed since that encounter?

2. Have you ever asked God what He would have you to do? What was His answer? Are you doing it?

How well do you know God?

Day 11

Scripture Reading

Read Acts Chapter 10

Power Quote

We must be ever thankful for small miracles, and ever hopeful for receiving greater ones.

Glossary **Common**

Animals that God did not intend to be eaten, or items that were unclean ceremonially.

Unclean

Unclean refers to physical, moral, or spiritual blemish especially relating to dietary and ceremonial laws.

Tanner

A tanner is a person who earns their living by making leather from animal hides.

Prayer

Lord, give us the courage to accept the things I cannot change, to change the things that I should, and the wisdom to know the difference. In Jesus Name we pray. Amen.

Scripture Concentration

Acts 10:9-16

On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh into the city, Peter went up upon the house top to pray about the sixth hour: And he became very hungry, and would have eaten: but while they made ready, he fell into a trance. And saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth: Wherein were all manner of four-footed beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat. But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean. And the voice spake unto him again the second time, "What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common." This was done thrice: and the vessel was received up again into heaven.

Observation

Peter knew God, or at least he thought he did. One day while on a roof top, Peter found out that he didn't know God like he thought he did. Peter was under the impression that only the Jews, God's chosen people, could be saved. This prejudicial way of thinking hindered the growth of the church, and God was ready to do a new thing in the church, but it required a change in Peter.

While Peter was hungry and waiting for his meal to be prepared, Peter fell into a trance, and God through a vision showed him various kinds of wild and exotic animals to eat. Peter refused. Peter told God no! Peter told God that the animals were common and unclean. Peter told God no! Not once, or twice, but three times.

Peter needed to know God, but to do so, Peter had to change. Peter changed and made it possible to advance the gospel to the entire non-Jew community. Peter changed, and because he changed, he was able to watch the world around him change.

Questions to Ponder?

1. Name a time when God was stretching you, but you were reluctant. How long did it take you to understand what God was doing? How have you changed because of it?

2. In what ways is God stretching you now? How does it feel? How are other things affected by your changing?

What's in a Name?

Day 12

Scripture Reading

Read Acts Chapter 11

Power Quote

The spirit of Christ is the spirit of mission. The nearer we get to Him, the more intensely missionary we become.

Henry Martyn

Glossary

Contended

To compete or fight against.

Uncircumcised

Uncircumcised refers to those who are outside of a covenant relationship with God, elsewhere in Scripture they are also referred to as heathens.

Trance

A trance is a state of half-consciousness, or hypnotic condition in which the ability to function voluntarily is suspended.

Prayer

Lord, we thank you for the opportunity to carry your name. Help us to not to be associated with you in name only. Help us to be associated with you in name and deeds. In Jesus Name we pray. Amen.

Scripture Concentration

And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.

Acts 11:26

Observation

It has been said, there's no pain without gain, and such is a proven truism within the body of Christ. The book of Acts records the phenomenal growth of the church that was made possible, only because of persecution. As the early church fled Jerusalem to Judea, Samaria and throughout the uttermost parts of the earth, so did the gospel.

The gospel ended up in some of the unlikeliest places, even the great and notable city of Antioch. It was there that the believers were first called Christians. Interesting? Not in Jerusalem, but in Antioch. After a year of being taught by Barnabas and Paul, their lives began to reflect the life and teachings of the Christ they were taught about. They did not receive the name Christian in order to be associated with Christ, but because their life, lifestyle, and teachings reflected Christ, they were referred to as "Christians" or Christ-like.

Many today claim the name Christian without reflecting the life, lifestyle and teachings of the Christ whose name we claim. The true honor in being Christian is not in giving ourselves that title, but rather others seeing Christ in us, and giving that title to us.

As we move forward in our mission, our goal is not to call ourselves the church, but for the community to see us as the church; not to call ourselves Christians, but for others to see Christ in us; not to call ourselves blessed, but to live a blessed life.

Questions to Ponder?

1. If being Christian was a crime, would you be convicted? What would be the evidence against you?

2. Who is the most Christian person you know? What gives you that impression? Who would say that about you? What would it take for someone to say that about you?

The Cheers of Heaven

Day 13

Scripture Reading

Read Acts Chapter 12

Power Quote

The invariable mark of wisdom is to see the miraculous in the common. The meaning of life is to give meaning to life.

**Ralph Waldo
Emerson**

Glossary Keepers

The keepers of the prison served the king like modern day prison guards.

Damsel

A damsel is a young unmarried woman or girl.

Sword

Dying by the sword was a form of capital punishment in which the victim was either beheaded or thrust through his or her body.

Prayer

Lord, Thank you for giving us peace in the midst of our storms. Help us to inspire others with your peace. In Jesus Name we pray. Amen.

Scripture Concentration

Acts 12:6-7

And when Herod would have brought him forth, the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains: and the keepers before the door kept the prison. And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison: and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from his hands.

Observation

Miracles with high visibility and profile are highly cherished while those without the glitter and glamour often go unnoticed. One such miracle is the ability to experience peace in the midst of storms.

At the height of persecution on the New Testament Church, King Herod beheaded James. Once he found out that this pleased the Jews, he set an execution date to kill Peter also. The day before the scheduled execution, Peter was sleeping while chained between two guards. It doesn't sound like the mightiest of miracle, but Peter was sleeping soundly on the night in the midst of a life ending storm. The recent death of James did not shake his faith; neither did his impending date with destiny. It was from this posture and position that God brought deliverance.

Before praying for deliverance, we must also know how to appreciate the miracle of peace. Before stressing out, worrying, or falling into a deep den of depression, ask God to allow you to experience the miraculous peace that only He can give.

Questions to Ponder

1. Name a time when you were able to experience peace amidst a high stressful situation. What gave you peace? How were others impacted by your peace?

2. What is your prescription for peace? How do you dispense it to others?

The Cheers of Heaven

Day 14

Scripture Reading

Read Acts Chapter 7

Power Quote

We must be ever thankful for small miracles, and ever hopeful for receiving greater ones.

Glossary

Chamberlain

A chamberlain is an officer in charge of managing a household.

Oration

A formal speech, usually one given as a part of a ceremonial event.

Glory

The recognition and honor due a person because of their position, power, or personhood.

Prayer

Lord, Thank you for keeping an eye on us and our situation. Continue to motivate us with the applauses of heaven. In Jesus Name we pray. Amen.

Scripture Concentration - Acts 12:18-24

Now as soon as it was day, there was no small stir among the soldiers, what was become of Peter. And when Herod had sought for him, and found him not, he examined the keepers, and commanded that they should be put to death. And he went down from Judaea to Caesarea, and there abode. And Herod was highly displeased with them of Tyre and Sidon: but they came with one accord to him, and, having made Blastus the king's chamberlain their friend, desired peace; because their country was nourished by the king's country. And upon a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne, and made an oration unto them. And the people gave a shout, saying, It is the voice of a god, and not of a man. And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost. But the word of God grew and multiplied.

Observation

King Herod was a people pleaser. He killed James, one of Jesus' original disciples - just to please the Jews. To please them further, he decided to set an execution date to kill Peter also. But God intervened with a miraculous deliverance from prison. Upon Peter's miraculous escape from prison, Herod ordered the guards who were watching Peter to be executed. He then left to give the keynote address for a political rally.

Herod wore a robe that sparkled, and became even more luminous upon contact with sunlight. His dazzling wardrobe coupled with his oratory excellence was enough for some people to catapult Herod to the status of a god. Herod loved it! It pleased him, but infuriated God. And the Bible says that God smote him, and he was eaten of worms.

It has often been said, "what goes around, comes around." The Bible says it a little different, "what a man soweth, that shall he also reap." And for what Herod did to James and the soldiers, and tried to do to Peter, Herod deserved to die. But according to the coroner's report, vengeance was not the cause of death. The cause of death was stealing God's glory. Herod should have acknowledged God; for all that God gave him in life. Like Herod, we must be reminded that all that we have and who we are is because of God. And for the favor and influence that we are blessed to experience, we need to forever give Him all the glory, honor, and praise.

Questions to Ponder

1. Name a time when you were proud of an accomplishment. How did you feel? Who did you give credit to? Who did you forget to acknowledge?

2. Name a time when you accomplished a task, but someone else received the credit. How did that make you feel? How did the other person respond? How do you think God feels when you take credit that He rightfully deserves?
