Apostle Persecution July 7

Worthy of Disgrace

The apostles were brought before the council again, jailed and an angel was sent to set them free, as the jailers were discovering the prisoners were gone but yet the gates were locked – Then a man came in and said to them, “Listen! The men you put in prison are in the Temple teaching the people!” Acts 5:25.

When questioned about spreading the Word – Peter and the other apostles replied, “We must obey God, not men. The God of our ancestors raised Jesus from death, after you killed him by nailing him to a cross. God raised him to his right hand side as Leader and Savior, to give the people of Israel the opportunity to repent and have their sins forgiven. We are witnesses to these things – we and the Holy Spirit, who is God’s gift to those who obey him.” Acts 5:29-32.

Upon hearing this the council became so angry they wanted to kill the Apostles but Gamaliel, a law teacher, gave this advice - … “Leave them alone! If what they have planned and done is of human origin, it will disappear, but if it comes from God, you cannot possibly defeat them. You could find yourselves fighting against God!”

The Council followed Gamaliel’s advice. Acts 5:38b, 39. When the Apostles returned to the room they were warned to keep quiet, were whipped and released! They were happy about the beating because they felt worthy of disgrace for the sake of Jesus!

May we think of disgrace and humiliation for Jesus’ sake as worthiness in God’s eyes and to keep right on spreading the Word!

VERSE FOR TODAY: They continued to teach and preach the Good News about Jesus the Messiah. Acts 5:42b.

PRAYER THOUGHT: Help me, O Lord, to be worthy of disgrace for you.

Christian Martyr July 8

Stephen

-Stephen, a man richly blessed by God and full of power, performed great miracles and wonders among the people. Acts 6:8.

Members of the Synagogue of Freedmen, its members were Jews from many parts of the country, argued with Stephen but the Holy Spirit was with him and he always won out!

Stephen was brought before the council accused of talking against the Temple and the Laws of Moses. When asked if guilty as charged, Stephen went back in history pointing out the times where the Israelites refused to obey God and leaders chosen by God and he concluded with -

“How stubborn you are! Stephen went on to say. “How heathen your hearts, how deaf you are to God’s message! You are just like your ancestors: you too have always resisted the Holy Spirit! Was there any prophet that your ancestors did not persecute? You are the one who received God’s law that was handed down by angels –yet you have not obeyed it!” Acts 7:51, 52a, 53.

This telling of the truth really threw the Council into a rage then a vision by Stephen of Jesus on the right hand of God was the last straw! They threw Stephen out of Jerusalem and stoned him! As they stoned him, Stephen cried out – “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!” Acts 7:59b.

Stephen died for what he believed, and many others have too, whether Christian or otherwise like the Jews in WWII. Do we have faith strong enough to keep it while being killed?

VERSE FOR TODAY: He knelt down and cried out in a loud voice, “Lord! Do not remember this sin against them!” He said this and died. Acts 7:60.

PRAYER THOUGHT: If your will, O Lord, demands it may I have the strength of faith to die for what I believe.

Philip July 9

Spreading the Word

The believers scattered around the area, Philip went to Samaria proclaiming the message.

Simon was a man from the area, a magician who when he say Philip’s miracles, just tagged along.

Peter and John heard of Philip’s work so they went to Samaria and gave the believers the Holy Spirit – For the Holy Spirit had not yet come down on any of them; they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. Acts 8:16, 17. Simon saw this and wanted to pay money so he could receive the Holy Spirit – But Peter answered him, “May you and your money go to hell, for thinking that you can buy God’s gift with money!...” Acts 8:20. We give money to the Lord because we want to further His Kingdom here on earth, but the money we give has nothing to do with buying the Holy Spirit or salvation because that is impossible!

Philip was called to minister to an Ethiopian Eunuch, an official to the queen of Ethiopia, who was reading the book of Isaiah as he rode along the road between Jerusalem and Gaza. Philip shared the Good News of Jesus and the Eunuch was baptized a short way down the road!

Our conversion too may be as quickly as the Eunuch’s but it also may take years and we don’t necessarily have to be able to pin point the day of the change to the Lord, we’re just as saved as those who can name the day of their conversion.

VERSE FOR TODAY: The official ordered the carriage to stop, and both Philip and the official went down into the water, and Philip baptized him. Acts 8:38.

PRAYER THOUGHT: Praise to you O God, for your Son that died making eternal life possible for all who repent!

Saul July 10

Persecutor Called

Saul was one of the reasons the believers scattered out around the region, Soul not only persecuted the believers relentlessly, - But Saul tried to destroy the church; going from house to house, he dragged out the believers, both men and women, and threw them in to jail. Acts 8:3.

Saul even went one step further; he went to the High Priest and got a letter of introduction so he could go into the synagogue and arrest believers there! Saul was on his way to Damascus to use the introductory letter, when suddenly a blinding light shown on him – He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul! Why do you persecute me?”

“Who are you Lord?” he asked.

“I am Jesus, whom you persecute,” the voice said. Acts 9:4, 5.

Saul remained blind, the men with him took him into Damascus, and for three days he was blind and ate no food.

Here we see a man blinded by God, we so many times we are blinded by greed, hate, jealousy or pride so we can’t see what God has for us, if we only could repent, and then we could be free from the burden of sin and live in the light of the Lord.

VERSE FOR TODAY: The men who were traveling with Saul had stopped, not saying a word; they heard the voice but could not see anyone. Acts 9:7.

PRAYER THOUGHT: O Lord, let the light of your word shine through me so brightly that others will know that you are not only in my heart but my very being lives in your love.

Saul July 11

Receives Sight

Ananias, a believer, in Damascus was called in a vision to go to Saul, lay his hands on him and give Saul back his sight. Ananias was reluctant to go because of Saul’s reputation as a persecutor of Christians had preceded him to Damascus – The Lord said to him (Ananias), “Go because I have chosen him to serve men, to make my name known to Gentiles and kings and to the people of Israel…” Acts 9:15.

Ananias did as Jesus commanded; he went, found Saul -…and placed his hands on him. “Brother Saul,” he said, “the Lord has sent me-Jesus himself, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here. He sent me so that you might see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” Acts 9:17b. As quickly as he was blinded Saul could see, he was baptized and ate.

Saul came from darkness into the light both through his eyes and his heart. As God told Ananias that he had chosen Saul, so also he chooses us to be his followers, but we must accept his calling, we do have the free will to accept or reject Him. If we reject him all we can hope for is eternal damnation but if we accept Jesus, repenting of our sins and changing our lives to follow Christ’s example we can look forward to eternal life with Him. Our life as a Christian will not be smooth but God is there to comfort and guide.

VERSE FOR TODAY: At once something like fish scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he was able to see again. He stood up and was baptized. Acts 9:18.

PRAYER THOUGHT: Thank-you for being my strength and my guide!

Saul July 12

Preparation for Preaching

If we read only in Acts, it seems Saul goes immediately into the ministry but in the Letter to the Galatians it is revealed –Instead, I went at once to Arabia, and then I returned to Damascus. It was three years later that I went to Jerusalem to obtain information from Peter, and I stayed with him for two weeks. Galatians 1:17b, 18. From this we gather that Saul perhaps went through quite extensive time of study, prayer and meditation before revealing himself to the apostles in Jerusalem as one of them.

When Soul did start to preach in Damascus, they hadn’t forgotten him – All who heard him were amazed and asked, “Isn’t he the one who in Jerusalem was killing those who worshipped that man Jesus? And didn’t he come here for the very purpose of arresting those people and taking them back to the chief priests?” Acts 9:21. The Jews made plans to kill Saul but some of his followers lowered him over the city wall in a basket.

Those who undergo a radical conversion, like Saul, may find it hard to shake the old reputation once converted. Fellow Christians will have to search their hearts and minds and give the new convert a chance to grow, unfortunately new Christians are often discouraged instead of encouraged by a lack of acceptance from established Christians.

VERSE FOR TODAY: And so it was that the church throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had a time of peace. Acts 9:31a.

PRAYER THOUGHT: Help me to give new converts encouragement and help, not let a poor attitude of disbelief in their sincerity make them once again fall by the wayside.

Peter July 13

On the Road

Peter did not stay just in Jerusalem but traveled throughout Judea teaching and healing.

In Lydda, Peter healed a crippled man – “Aeneas,” Peter said to him, “Jesus Christ makes you well. Get up and take your bed.” At once Aeneas got up. Acts 9:34. Peter was then summonsed to Joppa from Lydda to the deathbed of Dorcas, whom he raised from the dead – Peter put them all out of the room, and knelt down and prayed; then he turned to the body and said, “Tabitha, get up!” She opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter, she sat up. Acts 9:40.

We may not be miracle workers but we can help make miracles happen through prayer and faith. Sometimes a simple smile can show someone they are cared about and can cause a miracle in their lives.

While Peter was in Joppa, a man in Caesarea name Cornelius, received a message from God to have Peter brought to Caesarea so he sent some men to fetch Peter.

Peter in the meantime had a vision of a sheet, lowered from heaven filled with “unclean” animals – a voice said to him, “Get up, Peter; kill and eat!”

But Peter said, “Certainly not, Lord! I have never eaten anything ritually unclean or defiled.”

The voice spoke to him again, “Do not consider anything unclean that God has declared clean.” Acts 10:13-15.

While Peter was pondering what the Lord was trying to tell him, Cornelius’ men arrived and Peter went with them to Caesarea as the Lord instructed.

VERSE FOR TODAY: This happened three times, and then the thing was taken back up into heaven. Acts 10:16.

PRAYER THOUGHT: Thank-you, O Lord, for the miracles in my life.

Peter July 14

The Meaning Revealed

Peter pondered the meaning of his vision of the unclean animals in the sheet. When Peter arrived at the house of Cornelius, a gentile, who was considered unfit for Jews to associate with – “…But God has shown me that I must not consider any person ritually unclean or defiled…” Acts 10:28b.

Cornelius answered that he had a visitor from God telling him to send for Peter so that they could hear what Peter had to say.

-Peter began to speak: “I now realize that it is true that God treats everyone on the same basis. Whoever worships him and does what is right and acceptable to him, no matter what race he belongs to…” Acts 10:34b-35.

Most of Peter’s and the Apostles time was spent in Christianizing the Jews, now a whole new ministry was opened up to them bringing the Good News to the Gentiles too. For us today this passage means that all races of people, Jews and Gentles alike must hear the Word of God and must be given the opportunity to receive eternal life.

VERSE FOR TODAY: When they heard this, they stopped their criticism and praised God, saying, “Then God has given to the Gentiles also the opportunity to repent and live!” Acts 11:18.

PRAYER THOUGHT: Help me, O Lord, to extend your love and grace to all I come in contact with not just those of my race.