

My Utmost for His Highest

Lesson 2

Acts 7:54-60, 9:16, 12:1-4; 1 Peter 4:1-2

August 2, 2020

Passionate Witness

Introduction

When Christ was convicted, flogged and executed on the cross, He went through the most painful and humiliating experience imaginable. He suffered not only the physical pain of being whipped and crucified, but he also suffered the emotional catastrophe of being separated from His heavenly Father.

Likewise, Jesus promised His disciples that their lives as His followers would be difficult (Matthew 16:24), and indeed they were. All of the church leaders were persecuted and each of the twelve apostles except for John suffered violent deaths because of their devotion to the gospel. This commitment to Christ was seen by both the Jews and Gentiles and the church grew by leaps and bounds in the years following Christ's death and resurrection.

Our commitment to Jesus is likewise seen by those around us. When we are obedient to Jesus, we will make choices that are not easy or popular, but our co-workers, neighbors and family members notice it. They'll wonder why we make the choices that we do, and they'll sense our authenticity. The effect of our witness is directly proportional to our willingness to make the right choices, even when suffering is part of these decisions.

Memory verse: "Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because whoever suffers in the body is done with sin. As a result, they do not live the rest of their earthly lives for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God."—1 Peter 4:1-2

Pray and read Acts 7:54-60, 9:16, 12:1-4 and 1 Peter 4:1-2.
What questions or observations do you have about these passages?

What do the passages say?

1. What did Stephen say that made the Sanhedrin so angry? How did the Sanhedrin react to what Stephen said? (Acts 7:51-53, 54, 57-58)
2. What did Stephen do as he was being stoned? (Acts 7:59-60)
3. What did God say that He would show Paul? (Acts 9:16)
4. What did Herod do to James? (Acts 12:2)
5. What did Herod do to Peter? (Acts 12:4)
6. With what should we arm ourselves? (1 Peter 4:1)
7. What is the main purpose in life for those who are willing to suffer as Christ did? (1 Peter 4:2)

What do the passages mean?

1. Read 1 Peter 3:8-22, then read 1 Peter 4:1-2 again. What do you think the “Therefore” in 1 Peter 4:1 is there for? What is the connection between our behavior, Christ’s death and resurrection, and our suffering?
2. In each of the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke), Peter declares Jesus to be the Messiah. Immediately after this declaration, Jesus tells the disciples that He will suffer, and because of His suffering and the disciples would also suffer. What was the connection between Peter declaring Jesus as Messiah and the suffering that Jesus described? (Matthew 16:13-28)
3. Paul was a powerful and privileged man before his experience on the road to Damascus. How was this different from his life after his conversion? What are the ways that Paul suffered after his conversion? (Acts 20:23, 21:30-31, 21:27-28, 21:33)

4. Why do you think Stephen talked about Israel's historical relationship with God and His prophets, calling them to repentance, rather than defending himself? What do you imagine Stephen's passion for Christ was like? (Acts 7:1-53)

5. Most of the early church leaders suffered persecution, beatings and imprisonment because of their witness and role in the early church. What was the effect of the sacrifice and devotion on the early church leaders on the growth of the early church? (Acts 4:1-4, 9:31)

Applying the passages

1. Chances are, we won't ever be stoned to death like Stephen or imprisoned for our faith like Paul, but there are times that believers in our day and age will suffer for our faith in Christ. What are some ways that you have personally seen believers suffer in your life? (Acts 7:51-60)

