



The Eyes of Stephen

But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God. – Acts 7:55
If you then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sits on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. – Colossians 3:1,2

In the book of Acts we are introduced to a disciple called Stephen. He is described as "full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people" (Acts 6:8). Because he was filled with the Holy Spirit, he spoke with great wisdom and those who opposed the gospel of Christ he proclaimed, "were not able to resist the wisdom and spirit by which he spoke" (Acts 6:10).

As a result he was falsely accused of perverting God's word. When he correctly used the word of God to refute his accusers and accurately assessed their own rebellion against God, his honesty exposed the evil in their own hearts which resulted in his martyrdom.

As they began to attack him, Stephen "looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God" (Acts 7:55). His declaration of this vision caused his accusers to rage. They led him out of the city and stoned him to death.

The vision of the truth of the gospel that lit up Stephen's eyes, was the reality that held him in its embrace as the rocks were being hurled against his body. Because his faith was so securely anchored in heaven, he could endure the pain and temporary suffering that preceded his death.

Like Stephen, there are multitudes of Christians all over the world who are enduring brutalities, atrocities and death at the hands of people who oppose the gospel of Christ that is proclaimed from the lips of these martyrs.

All true Christians will at some point in their walk with the Lord, experience some form of persecution for their faith; whether it is verbal abuse or physical attacks. These persecutions are made bearable by the reality of our faith. The Apostle Paul's exhortation for us to keep our eyes on "things above," is the spiritual

focus that will help us endure any persecution that comes against us because of our faith. A heavenly focus enables us to walk above the waters of this life with Jesus, as we carry our cross in service to Him.

When our eyes are like Stephen's, riveted upon our hope in heaven, no weapon formed against us can prosper or overcome us (Isaiah 54:17). May we all have eyes like Stephen, continually gazing upward with child-like trust and adoration.

God declares to the Messiah Jesus in Psalm 110:1, - "The LORD said to my Lord, You sit at My right hand, until I make Your enemies Your footstool." Stephen saw the Lord Jesus at God's right hand, which was God's further assurance to him and us, that one day all the enemies of Christ and the persecutors of His people will be subjugated beneath the feet of our Lord as we rejoice with Him in victory.

Children, keep your eyes focused upon Christ and our future with Him in heaven. The joy of the Lord that accompanies your sight will be your strength in times of trouble and adversity (Nehemiah 8:10).

The Martyrdom of Job

Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him –
Job 13:15

We don't usually think of the suffering Job as a martyr, yet I believe he was. He suffered the loss of loved ones, wealth and his health and through it all he never denied or turned against the Lord. "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him."

A true martyr suffers great losses and will remain faithful to God in all circumstances. We can suffer in our everyday living and bear it all for the Glory of God. So many of us are like spoiled children, and when we are suddenly tumbled out of our comfort zones, we shake an angry fist at God, or sulk away and pout, refusing to speak to Him again.

I know a pastor who suffered greatly when one of his children was born very ill and with a type of mental retardation. The Lord showed him in a dream his crown. It was white linen with a row of diamonds. The Lord told him that the diamonds represented salvations. There was one huge, glorious jewel in the

center of the crown and the pastor asked the Lord what it represented.

The Lord answered, "That jewel represents your sufferings."

The pastor noticed that the crown was only half-covered with jewels. "Why is the crown only half finished?" the pastor asked.

And the Lord responded, "It's not finished because you are not finished."

The crown Job now wears in heaven must be glorious. And you, my dear martyr, you are not finished either.

The Still Small Voice

Remember that when My blessings shower down upon you, that it is My delight to see you enjoy them, and I enjoy your response of praise and thanksgiving because you know that they are from Me. Remember also, that while you are rejoicing there are others who are suffering. Remember the persecuted, My martyrs, and let your prayer always be, "Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly." Keep this balance in your heart at all times, for it nurtures the compassion I require of all who claim to know Me.

Seeing God

*Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God. –
Matthew 5:8*

*Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which
no man shall see the Lord:
Hebrews 12:14*

Believers in the Messiah Jesus can be assured that while we are not saved by the degree of spiritual growth we are able to achieve in this life, Matthew 5:8 indicates that our spiritual progress in this life may determine our status in the heavenly realm. "Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God." Are the purest in heart granted a position that is the closest to God in His realm?

God says that He is a rewarder to those who diligently seek Him (Hebrews 11:6). And He tells us that our reward is Him (Genesis 15:1). It should be the goal of every believer to receive the greatest reward which is more of God. Our desire should be to bask in His presence and behold Him in all of His glory. The

pure in heart are promised this position of intimacy with the Highest. I can envision God's throne encircled with children and those who are like them, celebrating their God in guileless perfection.

We are deemed righteous and given the privilege to enter heaven solely through repentance and faith in Jesus' atonement and resurrection from the dead. Yet, we are consistently exhorted by the Apostles to "purify ourselves."

Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.- II Corinthians 7:1

But as He which has called you is holy, so you be holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, 'You be holy; for I am holy.' – I Peter 1:15,16 from Leviticus 11:44-45

This all leads us to one question: How do we purify ourselves?

We have to begin by determining within ourselves to be aware of any thought or attitude that emerges from us that is in opposition to godliness. We can develop a habit through discipline to immediately reject these ungodly things from remaining in us to influence our behavior. We need to be in continual communion with the Lord, - *Pray without ceasing (I Thessalonians 5:17)*. We also need to immerse ourselves in His word. When we read something corrective, humbly receive that correction.

One of the things I do is to read the lists in Galatians 5:22,23, and the characteristics of love in I Corinthians 13:4-7, and ask the Lord to increase the ones I have and give me the ones I don't have.

It is the work of Jesus' Holy Spirit to change us, "Without Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5); but God needs a cooperative vessel in which to work.

If we want to be among the pure hearted ones who desire to be as close to the Lord as possible, He will give us the desire of our hearts.

LORD, You have heard the desire of the humble: You will prepare their heart, You will cause Your ear to hear: - Psalm 10:17

You have given him his heart's desire, and have not withholden the request of his lips. Selah. Psalm 21:2

Copyright 2024 by H.D. Shively