

Unlike Saul, we may not actually prosecute Christians as criminals, but how often has pride impaired relationships and reputations within the Church? Have you ever been in a community of believers where this was not so? As adversarial as Saul was to the Church, he was never guilty of treachery or betrayal. Can we say the same for ourselves? Can we truly say that we have not persecuted Jesus?

Job 2:1-13; Psalms 140, 142; John 6:27-40

### **Saturday, August 20**

Job 3:1-26 *“Why is light given to me in misery, and life to the bitter in soul, who long for death...and are glad when they find the grave?”* (vv.20-22)

This is not Job’s finest hour. That occurred earlier when, having lost everything that was dear to him in life through no fault of his own, Job refused to blame God: “The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.” Truly an example of faith that will endure forever.

But after Satan inflicted “loathsome sores” over Job’s body, Job forgot his place, cursed the day of his birth, and began a long series of laments, each essentially asking the question: “Why?” Job could handle the torments and not blame God, but he believed he was entitled to know why he was being afflicted.

Up until this point, I have a hard time identifying with Job’s patience and faith. But here’s a situation I understand well. When faced with the death of a child, a young parent stricken with cancer, senseless brutality, etc..., the question that lingers is always “Why?”. We, along with Job, apparently think this is information to which we are entitled.

But, as Job learns in the end, it is not our place to seek knowledge that is God’s alone— knowledge that, in truth, can only make sense to God. Despite not knowing why, there is peace in knowing, as Job acknowledged to God, “that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.”

Psalms 137; 144; Acts 9:10-19a; John 6:41-51

*by John Jacobs*

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## **Good News Daily**

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### **Sunday, August 14**

2 Corinthians 13:1-11 *Examine yourselves to see whether you are living in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not realize that Jesus Christ is in you?* (v.5 NRSV)

Paul, not in the habit of mincing words, makes a final plea for self-examination at the end of his second letter to the church in Corinth. Speaking to a community of believers beset by internal strife and idolatrous distractions, Paul urges the church to judge itself by no less a standard of measure than the Risen Lord himself.

Not much has changed in the past 2,000 years concerning temptations in the Church. Judging by Paul’s admonitions in his two letters, the Corinthian church encountered conflicts between the faith it professed and the pagan culture with which it sought to coexist. That is why Paul warns them against certain associations with unbelievers.

Some have taken this warning too far, urging minimal or even no contact with the secular world. But this would belie the Great Commission. We are called to be in the world as a reflection of Christ’s light in the darkness, while not becoming of the world by pursuing idolatrous distractions. Physically, we must and should show ourselves to unbelievers as living demonstrations of Christ’s transforming love and salvation. A picture, as they say, is worth a thousand words.

But spiritually, we must be separate from the tar babies of secularism that cling to the flesh and darken the soul. As parts of the Body of Christ, we must strive, as the Corinthians, to be holy in an unholy world. “For God’s temple is holy, and you are that temple.”

Judges 16:15-31; Psalm 118; Mark 5:25-34

### **Monday, August 15**

Acts 7:44—8:1a *“You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you are forever opposing the Holy Spirit, just as your ancestors used to do.”* (vv. 51-52a)

This terrible indictment is found at the end of Stephen’s courageous and eloquent speech to the council, detailing the history of the Old Covenant, the coming of the Messiah, and Jesus’ death at the hands of those who were awaiting his coming.

With the advantage of 2,000 years of hindsight, it’s easy perhaps to imagine that we wouldn’t have been among the crowd crying “Crucify him!” But it wasn’t the prostitutes and tax collectors who mocked and ridiculed Jesus on the cross; it was the fine, upstanding religious establishment who felt

threatened by the Genuine Article, the Messiah, and who therefore sought his death. It was the religious, not the pagan, who crucified Christ. Without pressure from the Sanhedrin, Pilate would have had no concern for Jesus, whose kingdom was not of this world.

Stephen didn't indict the Romans, the secular culture of his age—rather, he accused people like us. And we are the ones who stand convicted today for wounding the Body of Christ for our failure to unite and agree on those things essential to our faith; to be tolerant and understanding in matters not essential to our faith; and to unconditionally love each other as Christ loves us. As Stephen convicted the council, it is we who have convicted ourselves. Christ have mercy.

Judges 17:1-13; Psalm 106:1-18; John 5:19-29

## **Tuesday, August 16**

John 5:30-47 *“You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that testify on my behalf.”* (v.39)

Two lessons are immediately evident in this passage. While a passion for studying God's word is essential in developing spiritual maturity, the temptation for many of us is to become prideful about our biblical knowledge, as if God were holding a competition. When my focus is on Christ and not myself, I am reminded, no matter how much I study the Bible, just how much I don't know. It is indeed the most humbling book to read the world has ever known.

Another temptation for the biblical intelligentsia is to make the Bible itself, and not Christ, the focus of our faith. This is easier to do than one might think, because the Bible seems to be so holy and perfect, like God. But just as some mistook John the Baptist for the Messiah (“he was not the light but pointed to the light”), God's word is not God, but rather it points us to God. It is not perfect as God is perfect, but as a map to the kingdom of God it is perfect. Inerrantly performing its purpose, “it contains all things necessary to salvation.”

Judges 18:1-15; Psalms 120, 121, 122, 123; Acts 8:1-13

## **Wednesday, August 17**

John 6:1-15 *Jesus said to Philip, “Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?”* (v.5)

In a small group Bible study recently, the question was asked: What is the first question you will ask Jesus in heaven? As historical and theological questions were offered, I wondered, considering biblical precedent, whether asking Jesus a question would be advisable. No less vexing is the prospect that he might initiate the questioning. Why?

Jesus never asked a question without already knowing the answer. Here we see the Bread of Heaven questioning the availability of bread to his

most reticent disciple, Philip. Earlier, Philip had answered appropriately when Nathaniel cynically asked, “Can anything good come from Nazareth?” by responding: “Come and see.” Now in the presence of his Lord, he is questioned—not about his knowledge, but about his faith. His answer: “Six month's wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little,” proves that he still had not recognized the “bread which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” And what about us, who work for the food that perishes, but not for the food that endures for eternal life?

Judges 18:16-31; Psalm 119:145-176; Acts 8:14-25

## **Thursday, August 18**

Acts 8:26-40 *The eunuch asked Philip: “About whom does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?”* (v.34)

Did an apostle ever have a better opening to share the gospel than this? Led by the Holy Spirit but not told why, Philip encounters an Ethiopian reading Isaiah in his chariot. And it's not just any passage from Isaiah, but one of the more obvious prophecies of the Messiah as the “suffering servant.” What a perfect opening to share the gospel, and Philip doesn't let the opportunity pass, resulting in the Ethiopian's baptism (at his own insistence) that very day.

This incident (and there are many more like it in Acts) confirms my belief that, while some are called to conspicuous and public evangelism, most of us are given opportunities to witness on a one-to-one basis. And we don't necessarily have to go out of our way to find these opportunities. It's really a matter of watching and listening to the prompting of the Holy Spirit, and being ready, as Peter advised, to give a reason for the hope that is within us. As with Philip and the Ethiopian, the Holy Spirit will take care of the rest.

Job 1:1-22; Psalms 131, 132, 133; John 6:16-27

## **Friday, August 19**

Acts 9:1-9 *“Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?”* (v.4)

Ask yourself: do I persecute Jesus, or does he persecute me? I suspect that many of us, in times of weakness or self-pity, imagine that God is punishing us for simply being the creatures He created, e.g., if God hates lust, then why did he give me that inclination and drive? Aside from the truth that lust is a perversion of a divinely bestowed gift, isn't it also true that most, if not all, of the predicaments we get into are self-inflicted, the natural and logical consequences of our own sinful behavior?

With whom do you more closely identify? Job—the righteous and godly victim of undeserved torment—or Saul, an open and notorious enemy of the church? If you say neither (which in the case of Job is understandable), then consider whether the sum of your time is spent more in building up or tearing down the Body of Christ.