

SHINE Devotional

Week 41 – Lesson 1



A Legacy of Lunacy

Scripture reading Acts 12:1

“Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church.”

It has been said that “Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again but expecting different results.” Everyone knows someone who engages in the reckless behavior of continual foolish choices.

The New Testament shares the legacy of a family bent of repeating their war with God. They were the Herods. Upon hearing about the birth of a Jewish baby from wise travelers of the east, grandpappy Herod the Great ordered all babies in Bethlehem under two years of age to be killed. The mothers of Bethlehem wept over empty cribs, due to the vengeful violence of this maniacal despot who was seeking to secure his legacy. His legacy was secured, and he died one year later.

His son, Herod Antipas, continued the same failing war with God. This time he chose to start the hostility with the Master’s cousin, John the Baptist. John the Baptist condemned his adulterous behavior. Herod took umbrage with this correction, imprisoned, and executed John, then paraded his head around on a platter. Jesus called this devilish man “a fox” in Luke 13:52, and it was no compliment. Rather than alleviating his suffering in the precious hours before his crucifixion, the “fox” jeered at Jesus’ miracles. He desired a circus act over divine forgiveness. His death would come, shortly thereafter, and the tables turned as he stood before Jesus as the Judge of his eternal soul. A new Herod, Herod Agrippa, ascended to the place of power. He too mocked the sovereignty of God. Desirous of public praise and political prosperity, Herod Agrippa made war with the church of God. No person’s destiny is fixed. God uses people from every background, but our legacy often revolves around the heritage we receive from our family story. There is a lesson to consider in this legacy. Are there battles that need to die in my generation? Are there strongholds of pride, anger, or deceit that need to end in this generation, or will we continue to leave a legacy of lunacy for our descendants?

SHINE Devotional

Week 41 – Lesson 2



8 Days to Die

Scripture reading Acts 12:3-4

“And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also. (Then were the days of unleavened bread.) And when he had apprehended him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him; intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people.”

History books repeatedly record man’s desire for power. Adam wanted to be like God. The people of Babel attempted to bypass the Lord in getting to Heaven. Pharaoh made himself a God. The stories continue until contemporary times. Attaining power requires a few standards components, the least of which is securing a vocal, loyal group of followers to implement one’s will and coerce the masses into compliance. Herod found such a group in the Pharisees. These power-hungry, hypocritical zealots sensed their sway over their countrymen slipping away. Those who claimed to speak on God’s behalf, murdered His Son.

The followers of Jesus fell into the sights of the evil marksmen. Herod served as the deliverer of their malicious intent and their evil marriage spawned greater villainy. James, one of the closest to the Savior during His earthly ministry, was martyred. The evil glee of the Pharisees prompted Herod to increase his sadistic behavior. Seemingly, absent the opportunity to ascertain the developments of James execution, Peter was arrested, and his execution date set. Verse 4 shares that the kill date was set for after the Passover (Easter in the King James Version). Christ’s crucifixion illustrated the sanctimonious hypocrisy of the Pharisees when they sought to remove the body of the Savior prior to the holy day. Again, these criminals wanted to absolve their responsibility in innocents dying and keep the Passover pure. Peter understood he likely had less than a week to live. The days passed and the hours quickly approached for Peter’s appointment with Jesus.

Everyone lives in the shadow of the same appointment. That appointment may be within the next week or God may postpone it. How would your life be different with the specter of eternity staring you in the face? If there were less than seven days to invest in eternity, how would your calendar, priorities, and practices change. No man knows the hour of his death, but it is certain. Let that thought impact your routine today.

SHINE Devotional

Week 41 – Lesson 3



Top Secret Clearance

Scripture reading Acts 12:5-6

“Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him. 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.”

The first time a Federal Bureau of Investigation officer contacted me I was startled. I felt like Jack Bauer or some other fictitious hero would be repelling from the sound booth for an interrogation. Maybe, we would use the cone of silence to avoid KAOS from hearing our conversation or scurry away to an undisclosed location to discuss the greatest needs of our republic. To my dismay, none of those events happened. The FBI interviewer conducting a background check on an applicant wanted a character reference for an individual I knew several years prior. He presented his credentials (kinda cool and I did my best to act like I knew what they meant), asked a series of questions, and thanked me for my service to our country (not really, but I wish he had). Our government holds several classes of distinction for clearance. Those who interact with our most confidential information are given the classification of TOP SECRET clearance. This designation allows them to move freely through the intelligence world to make requests and find data in their career fields.

In our Scripture reading we see Herod securing unprecedented means to keep Peter imprisoned. On the eve of his would-be martyrdom, God intervened. Believers with TOP SECRET access to the very throne room of God persistently intervened on the former fisherman’s behalf. God answered their prayer. He commissioned an angel for the extraction of Peter. Two soldiers lied dormant. Two chains broke helplessly. Guards and gates opened like the automatic doors to Albertsons. Peter walked from his cell to freedom without struggle or resistance. Believers with clearance to the throne room engaged the mighty hand of God’s deliverance.

If you know Christ as your Savior, you too have that TOP SECRET clearance. The opportunity to occupy the very throne of God comes not through longevity or special merit, but through Jesus. This is the beauty of corporate, church prayer. We enter God’s dwelling for the needs of our present condition. The same God who honored the beckoning call of distraught believers nineteen centuries ago grants you access to His power today. Take advantage of the clearance. Share your needs with a friend. Hoist your hand at prayer time in your small group. Pray and expect God to show himself strong.

SHINE Devotional

Week 41 – Lesson 4



Pajama Party

Scripture reading Acts 12:7-9

“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. And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals. And so he did. And he saith unto him, Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me. And he went out, and followed him; and wist not that it was true which was done by the angel; but thought he saw a vision.”

Peter lay in his pajamas, resting peacefully with his shoes off. In the last moments of his life, we find no worry or panic. There were no lawyers appealing to a higher magistrate. Peter modeled the rest of Jesus in a boat surrounded by tempestuous seas. He slept. The Lord wanted more from Peter. His earthly ministry must continue. The saints prayed and God sent an angel, but the peace of a volatile fisherman must not be lost. Peter rested so well that the angel had to jostle him to awaken his slumber. His groggy condition prompted the angel to instruct the apostle to put on his shoes and clothes and follow him. Peter, even in his incoherent condition, trusted the angel and followed him to deliverance.

Peter developed a pattern of trusting God. This was a discipline previously unknown to the rogue fisherman. Peter was ambitious and crass. Trust was an unnatural reaction, but obedience to the Holy Spirit brought many changes to his life, and on this night the discipline of trust and obedience spared his life.

There is a natural tension in the life of the believer to default to their natural inclinations especially in times of crisis. Peter exhibited supernatural change. It started on a seashore when he met Jesus. Though he experienced many setbacks and failures, on this night his Savior’s might was on full display as he wistfully heeded his instructions. We too experience the same conflict. We tend to lean on the default of our flesh, but dependence on the Savior provides avenues of escape and freedom that human understanding cannot comprehend. Allow the circumstances of Peter to challenge your natural response today. Listen to the prompting of the Master and let him provide a way of deliverance.

SHINE Devotional

Week 41 – Lesson 5



The Mad Damsel

Scripture reading Acts 12:13-16

“And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a damsel came to hearken, named Rhoda. And when she knew Peter's voice, she opened not the gate for gladness, but ran in, and told how Peter stood before the gate. And they said unto her, Thou art mad. But she constantly affirmed that it was even so. Then said they, It is his angel. But Peter continued knocking: and when they had opened the door, and saw him, they were astonished.”

“You’d have to be crazy to believe a thing like that,” says the cynic to a believer who is trusting God for a miracle. Faith baffles the lost, but faith marvels the believer. When was the last time you allowed God to rapture your attention and you stood in marvel of His wonder? It is so easy to transfer our attention from the wonder of God’s majesty to the mechanical technology of a cell phone, computer, or tablet. We are challenged with completing religious exercises and continuing in the monotonous wonder of process and calendar reminders. Nothing is new.

First century Christians faced the same challenge. The church lost one of the big three. (see verse 2) The prospect of losing another pillar of their faith motivated the believers to pray all night. Their prayers were sincere. Their prayers were specific. Their prayers were answered. Peter stood outside their meeting seeking entrance. Rhoda answered the door and could not believe her eyes. Leaving the paroled preacher waiting at the door, she informed the congregation of his presence. They called her crazy! She brought the answer to their prayers and they scoffed at the notion of her claim.

We find a model for prayer here. Pray! Expect God to answer the prayer! Look for the answer to prayer! Accept the answer to the prayer! I wonder if the answer to our prayers may not be looking us in the face. When we pray for our country, could we be seeing the answer in the eyes of our children? When we pray for financial help, could we be looking at an expense that needs to go away? When we need more time, could our answer be in front of our faces? Rhoda found the answered prayer, and no one wanted to hear. The church viewed her as crazy. Pray! Expect God to answer! Accept the answer when it is in front of your face.

SHINE Devotional

Week 41 – Lesson 6



The Appeal of Shiny Things

Scripture reading Acts 12:19-24

“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.”

Herod would have been a great American. He sought the approval of those with influence. He pursued unreasoned fads (Ice bucket challenge anyone?) like murdering apostles. He used his influence to promote himself all while knowing better. On the contrary, there is a certain level of understanding for the misdeeds of Pilate. The Roman provincial leader grew up in Pagan theology unaware of the saving knowledge of the LORD. But Herod was a Hebrew. His Jewish upbringing had introduced him to the laws of God and expectation of the Savior. However, the pursuit of shiny things had captured his attention. His last recorded act reveals the folly of pursuing transient measures of success. His attempts to reconcile skirmishes had been successful as his diplomacy resolved the conflict of the day. His new allies flattered the king by comparing him to a god. The Israelite governor knew full well the blasphemy of that statement, but allowed the error to persist. God took his life. Of all the gruesome deaths in the Bible, this one takes the prize. Herod was eaten by worms. GROSS! The very next verse records the importance of the eternal. The word of God grew. The lure of shining things traps every generation, but they pass. Herod's life focused on this allurements and ended tragically, with nothing but an uncomfortable eulogy remaining. For this reason, Christians must pursue the timeless truths of God's word. It never fails. It never disappoints. It remains long after our eulogies are read.