

Introduction	2
James, the Son of Thunder & James the Just.....	5
Thomas, the Architect.....	7
The Second Great Persecution of Christians: Domitian	8
John the Revelator, Timothy & Clement	9
Ignatius of Antioch.....	10
“I Will Glorify Your Name Forever!”	14

“I Will Glorify Your Name Forever!” (Psalm 86:12)

Pastor Gene Giguere, July 12, 2026

Reading: Acts 7:54-8:8

“Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth at him. ⁵⁵ But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. ⁵⁶ And he said, “Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.” ⁵⁷ But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together at him. ⁵⁸ Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul. ⁵⁹ And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” ⁶⁰ And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

And Saul approved of his execution.

And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. ² Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him. ³ But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison.

⁴ Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word. ⁵ Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ. ⁶ And the crowds with one accord paid attention to what was being said by Philip, when they heard him and saw the signs that he did. ⁷ For unclean spirits, crying out with a loud voice, came out of many who had them, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. ⁸ So there was much joy in that city.”

Introduction

- 1) Good morning, Church! As you know, we've been studying undeserved suffering and last time we looked to early Church history to see some of the ways the earliest believers glorified Jesus Christ in their death.

I had **Acts 7:54-8:8** read this morning to illustrate that even though the Church was being persecuted and believers were being scattered, they continued to preach Jesus boldly and they did so with apostolic miracles and with healings.

Last time we looked at Paul and Peter, both of whom died at Rome under the persecution of the Emperor Nero. We're drawing to a close of our study of undeserved suffering.

I promised that I'd share a few more stories from the early Church with you and so I'd like to begin by doing that this morning. Again, these are people, according to **Hebrews 11:38**, "of whom the world was not worthy." And they – this "great cloud of witnesses" – have been set before us as an encouragement to run the race God has set before us (our *Poterion*, our cup) with patient endurance.

- 2) I'll just mention again that these stories are drawn from a number of sources – everything from the testimony of Scripture to the earliest histories (such as Eusebius) or traditions of the Church. I'm not footnoting each statement as meticulously as I normally do, but I'll cite them broadly.¹
- 3) I'm doing this because I want each of us to receive a full reward. I want us to develop *a mind to suffer*, to glorify God, counting it all joy when God visits suffering upon us. Last time we ended with a study of the Crown of life, which the Lord promised to give to all who love Him. We talked about what that means.

¹ For this study I've leaned heavily on five resources:

Needham, Nick, *2000 Years of Christ's Power: The Age of the Early Church Fathers*, revised edition (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2016).

Schaff, Philip, and David Schley Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1910).

Bennett, William J., *Tried by Fire: The Story of Christianity's First Thousand Years* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2016).

Water, Mark, *The New Encyclopedia of Christian Martyrs* (Alresford, Hampshire: John Hunt Pub, 2001).

Shelley, Bruce L., *Church History in Plain Language*, Updated 2nd ed. (Dallas, TX: Word Pub., 1995), p. 212.

And, though this crown is often called the Martyrs' Crown, it's given to all believers who have a mind to suffer and even die for their faith, whether or not they are ever called to do so.

The Greek word **στέφανος** (stephanos), translated 'crown,' refers to "a wreath made of foliage (or designed to resemble foliage) and worn by one of high status or held in high regard."² It was given for victory in battle or in the athletic games. It is therefore signifying the greatest honor God can bestow upon a believer for his or her faithfulness in this life.

This crown, **τὸν στέφανον τῆς ζωῆς**, will be rewarded to all who persevere under trial in this life, thus manifesting their true love for the Lord.

✠ In **Revelation 2:10**, Jesus said to the persecuted Church at Sardis, "Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested ... Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life (**τὸν στέφανον τῆς ζωῆς**)."

✠ **James 1:12**: "Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life (**τὸν στέφανον τῆς ζωῆς**), which God has promised to those who love him."

Notice it: "*When he has stood the test* he will receive the crown of life. The word "test" in **James 1:12** is **δοκιμος** (dokimos) which refers to something that is *proven to be genuine on the basis of testing* (i.e., it's been *approved*).³

The approval that earns this crown comes *only* through testing. This crown is given only to those who demonstrate *through testing* that they 'love' the Lord Jesus Christ. And, as we've seen, love for Jesus is shown by our obedience to Jesus in every circumstance. "If you love me," He said, "you will keep my commandments" (**John 14:15**).

4) Finally, in **Revelation 3:11**, we saw Jesus speaking to the remnant Church of the last days (the remnant of the Church of Philadelphia living in the age of the unsaved Laodicean Church).

² Arndt, William, Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 943.

³ Arndt, William, Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 256.

He wants to encourage them so He speaks about the soon-coming Rapture. He says, “Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth” (**Revelation 3:10**).

And then He said something we don’t want to miss! “I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown” (**Revelation 3:11**). Notice (1) He calls it “your crown” (τὸν στέφανόν σου) and (2) He wants you to see (2) that it can be seized. He’s speaking to this faithful remnant of the last days and He only has ONE command for them: “Hold fast what you have!”⁴

He’s saying, ‘Don’t give up! Tough times are ahead. But persevere. Keep loving Me! Don’t lose sight of the reward! The things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal!’

“Hold fast” is the present active *imperative* of κρατέω - *you MUST keep on producing the action of holding on to what you have!* We must not give a single opportunity to anything or anyone that would steal our crown! *We must hold fast to what we have!*

*And notice, this crown is not something we simply lose; it's something that's stolen from us, ripped from our hands: “Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize (aorist active subjunctive of λαμβάνω) your crown” (**Revelation 3:11**).*

Oh, how the Devil loves to steal, rob and destroy (**John 10:10; Luke 22:31; 1 Peter 5:8**). Let *Harvest* be a Church that holds fast to what we have! That remains faithful! That perseveres under trial! That receives the Crown of Life which Jesus has promised to all who love Him! Let’s be found faithful when He returns for us, busy about the work of the Kingdom. Let’s not be among those who will “shrink from Him in shame at His coming!”

Let’s be marked by a holy zeal – proclaiming the truth and waiting, faithfully, for the Rapture. May we receive every crown the Lord desires for us to have, only that we might cast it again at His feet! Amen?

⁴ Fanning, Buist M., *Revelation*, ed. by Clinton E. Arnold, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2020), p. 178.

James, the Son of Thunder & James the Just

- 1) Well, we looked at the martyrdoms of Paul and Peter. I shared Peter's *Quo Vadis* ("where are you going") story. But neither Peter nor Paul were the first of the Apostles to die for their faith in Jesus.

The first apostle to die for the faith was the Apostle James, John's brother.⁵ James was beheaded, the book of Acts tells us, as Herod Agrippa I, the grandson of King Herod, laid "violent hands" on members of the Church (**Acts 12:1**).

Perhaps James had been singled out because of his passion (he and John were nicknamed the "sons of thunder" by Jesus on account of their fiery personalities (**Mark 3:17**).

A story told by Clement of Alexandria relates that as James was being led to his execution, one of the soldiers guarding him was so moved by his courage in the face of death that he himself made a sudden profession of faith in Christ. But this sudden profession came with a price: both James *and* the soldier were executed that day.⁶

Clement writes: "They were thus both taken away together. On the way [the soldier] asked to receive forgiveness from James." James blessed him saying, "Peace be with you" and kissed him. And thus, they were both beheaded together.

⁵ He is said to have died in A.D. 44, approximately ten years after Stephen, the deacon and first recorded martyr of the young Christian Church.

⁶ Eusebius, *Church History* 2.8.2-9.3: "8. (2.) 'Now Luke, after describing in the Acts the famine under Claudius, after setting forth how, by the intercession of Paul and Barnabas, the brethren in Antioch succored those in Judea, each one according to his ability, adds the following: 9. (1.) 'Now about that that time Herod the King stretched forth his hands to harm some of the church, and killed James the brother of John with the sword'. (2.) On this James, Clement, in the seventh book of his Hypotyposes, relates a story worth mentioning: presumably from traditions of those who had lived before him, he says that the man that led him to the court was moved, as he saw him bearing his testimony, and confessed that he himself also was a Christian. (3.) 'They were thus both,' he says, 'taken away together; and on the way he asked to receive forgiveness from James. And he, after considering for a little, said, 'Peace be with you', and kissed him. And thus they were both beheaded together.'"

Soon after the death of James, Luke tells us that Herod was struck dead during a speech “because Herod did not give praise to God.” And that “he was eaten by worms and breathed his last” (**Acts 12:23**).^{7 8}

- 2) Many Romans were suspicious of Christians for their close-knit communities, and accused them of incest (Christians called one another “brother” and “sister”) and cannibalism (a gross misunderstanding of the Lord’s Supper).

The Romans also looked with scorn on the Christian practice of declining to acknowledge the Roman emperor as a god. In their minds, such atheism had the potential to disturb the social order and anger the traditional Roman gods, who would exact vengeance on Rome.

- 3) Another James, said to be the half-brother of Jesus and the author of the book of James, was the leader of the church at Jerusalem for nearly thirty years after the death and resurrection of Christ.

Jerome, quoting the first-century Christian chronicler Hegesippus, said he “drank neither wine, nor strong drink, [he] ate no flesh [meat], [he] never shaved or anointed himself with ointment or bathed.”⁹ Apparently, James practiced some form of asceticism.

⁷ “On the appointed day when Herod was delivering a speech, the people honored him as a god, and the Lord God judged him with death. This was in a.d. 44. This account parallels that given by Josephus in his *Antiquities of the Jews* (19. 8. 2). After Herod’s death, Felix and Festus, successively, were the governors of Judea” (Toussaint, Stanley D., “Acts,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. by J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985, II, 385).

⁸ Josephus: “A severe pain also arose in his belly, and began in a most violent manner. He therefore looked upon his friends, and said, “I whom you call a god, am commanded presently to depart this life; while Providence thus reproves the lying words you just now said to me; and I, who was by you called immortal, am immediately to be hurried away by death. But I am bound to accept of what Providence allots as it pleases God; for we have by no means lived ill, but in a splendid and happy manner.” When he said this, his pain was become violent. Accordingly, he was carried into the palace; and the rumor went abroad everywhere, that he would certainly die in a little time. But the multitude presently sat in sackcloth, with their wives and children, after the law of their country, and besought God for the king’s recovery. All places were also full of mourning and lamentation. Now the king rested in a high chamber, and as he saw them below lying prostrate on the ground, he could not himself forbear weeping. And when he had been quite worn out by the pain in his belly for five days, he departed this life, being in the fifty-fourth year of his age, and in the seventh year of his reign.”

⁹ James the Just, Jesus’s half-brother and leader of the Jerusalem church—appears to have practiced asceticism, though the extent warrants some nuance. Ancient tradition consistently portrays him as maintaining rigorous moral discipline, abstaining from wine and meat, and spending considerable time in the temple on his knees in prayer. His ascetical practices may have been shaped by Nazaritic vows—a practice involving dietary restrictions and other abstinences—which church historians like Hegesippus and possibly the Gospel of the Hebrews confirm he observed. However, the portrait shouldn’t be overstated. Paul’s reference in 1 Corinthians 9:5 strongly suggests that James, unlike Jesus Himself, was married, which distinguishes his asceticism from later, more extreme forms. While James embraced ascetical practices—notably fasting—these appear connected to his deep commitment to Jewish law and piety rather

Well, sometime probably in A.D. 62, James was arrested and brought before the Sanhedrin and stoned. Eusebius's account holds that James was thrown from the pinnacle of Solomon's temple and then given a deadly blow to the head from a fuller's club.¹⁰ A fuller's club was a heavy wooden mallet used by fullers—ancient laundry workers and textile processors. It was used to beat, scour, and agitate woven cloth in vats of water ... and soap to clean, thicken, and soften the fabric.¹¹

Thomas, the Architect

- 1) One of the most interesting apostolic stories is that of Thomas. Thomas is reputed to have traveled as far as India on his missionary journeys, a claim that has substantial evidence to its credit.

One of the legends associated with Thomas is that an Indian king, Gondophares, needed a palace built, and that Thomas, though not an architect, showed up and volunteered to do it. But, when the king discovered that Thomas was giving money earmarked for the palace to the poor, Gondophares had him thrown in prison.

A short time later though the king's brother Gad fell sick and was thought to have died. But Gad was revived! And when he came to, he told Gondophares that in his unconscious state, he'd seen a vision of *the marvelous heavenly palace that Thomas was building for him* with his money. Upon hearing this, both the king and his brother were converted and baptized.

Now, while this is a story from Church tradition, there *is* substantial evidence to suggest that Thomas really did visit India and that there *really was* a King

than a rejection of the material world. Later Gnostic groups found James appealing partly because traditions described him as an ascetic who disciplined his body for spiritual purposes, but they transformed his practices into something foreign to his actual concerns. James's reputation stemmed from his serious commitment to maintaining both the Jewish Law and traditional practices—a concern with continuity rather than world-renunciation. His asceticism functioned within his role as a devoted Jewish follower of Jesus, not as a philosophical stance against embodied existence. Culled from James Orr, ed., in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia: 1915 Edition* (Albany, OR: Ages, 1999) on James the Just; Hershel Shanks, Ben Witherington III, and André Lemaire, *The Brother of Jesus: The Dramatic Story and Meaning of the First Archaeological Link to Jesus and His Family* (HarperOne, 2009), pp.112–113; and Bryan Litfin, *After Acts: Exploring the Lives and Legends of the Apostles* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2015), p.115.

¹⁰ Eusebius, *Church History* 2.23.

¹¹ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fulling>.

Gondophares who had a brother named Gad. In the middle of the 19th century, an inscription dated c. A.D. 46 was found which mentions King Gondophares – and many coins bearing his name, minted no later than the end of the first century A.D., have also been found.

The most well-received tradition of Thomas' martyrdom states that the Apostle was speared to death by a group of soldiers. That's why Thomas is almost always depicted with a spear. Church historian Justo González concludes that "It is significant that from a relatively early date there was a church in India, and that this church has repeatedly claimed Thomas as its founder."¹²

The Second Great Persecution of Christians: Domitian

- 1) Well, the first great wave of persecution came under Nero, but the second took place under Domitian, the Roman emperor from A.D. 81 to 96.

Domitian had a number of bizarre personality traits; for instance, he'd retreat into extreme periods of isolation. Suetonius, the historian of the first Caesars, noted, "At the beginning of his reign he used to spend hours in seclusion every day, doing nothing but catching flies and stabbing them with a keenly sharpened stylus."¹³

Although Domitian's appetites for food, women, and revelry were tame compared to some of his predecessors, he, like them, was capable of terrible cruelty. He once put a historian to death for writing what he thought was 'inelegant prose.' Domitian believed himself to be a god, and, by the end of his reign, Suetonius wrote, "he had become an object of terror and hatred to all."¹⁴

A letter to the Corinthian Church, written around A.D. 96 by Clement, the leader of the Church at Rome, likely references Domitian's persecution when it speaks of "our recent series of unexpected misfortunes and set-backs."

¹² González, Justo L., *The Story of Christianity, Volume 1: The Early Church to the Reformation*, Revised and Updated Edition (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2010) p.38. In this chapter, chapter 4, "The Apostles' Mission," González discusses how the early teachings of Jesus spread outside of the Roman Empire and addresses the ancient traditions surrounding the disciples' travels.

¹³ Suetonius, *The Lives of the Caesars*, "Domitian," trans. J. C. Rolfe, Loeb Classical Library 38 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1913–1914), Book VIII.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, Suetonius, *The Lives of the Caesars*, Book VIII.

It was Domitian's fanaticism for the traditional Roman gods (which included himself) that drove him to oppress the Christians. This great anti-Christian campaign became known as the Second Persecution.

John the Revelator, Timothy & Clement

- 1) It is likely that the apostle John was one of Domitian's victims. One tradition holds that John was arrested and thrown into a pot of boiling oil in the middle of the Colosseum, only to escape unscathed by divine intervention.¹⁵ We know for certain that John was exiled to Patmos, a tiny and barren island off the coast of Turkey, where Jesus Christ appeared to him and gave him the Book of Revelation.

Most scholars think he died around A.D. 98 in Ephesus, the only Apostle who was *not* killed for his faith.

- 2) Another biblical figure who was martyred around this time was Timothy, the young companion of the Apostle Paul. In the New Testament, Timothy had proved his faithfulness as a Christian.

He was jailed at least once, and Paul. No stranger to suffering himself, Paul wrote to the Philippians about Timothy saying, "I have no one else like him" (**Philippians 2:20**).

The tradition of the Orthodox Church holds that Timothy was killed at Ephesus in A.D. 93 at the age of eighty. At the time of his death, Timothy was the leader of the Church of Ephesus. Well, one day he saw some of the Ephesians celebrating a pagan festival – carrying idols through the streets, singing hymns to them – and it was more than he could take. He interrupted their idolatrous worship and began preaching the gospel to them.

They responded by beating him with clubs, dragging him through the streets, and stoning him to death.

- 3) One of the most important church leaders of the first century was Clement of Rome.

¹⁵ Tertullian, *The Prescription Against Heretics* 36, trans. Peter Holmes, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 3, eds. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885).

The only surviving piece of writing by Clement is a fantastic epistle to the Church at Corinth, which was written to help them at a time when they were in a crisis of leadership.¹⁶

Well, Church tradition holds that Clement died as a martyr during the reign of the emperor Trajan. Sources are late, dating to the fourth century, but the story goes that Clement was arrested for being a Christian and was banished to a penitentiary on the Black Sea.

When he arrived at the prison, he saw that his fellow prisoners were suffering from terrible thirst and dehydration. Well, Clement is said to have knelt down to pray, and, when he looked up, he saw a Lamb standing on the spot where he might find water. When he struck that very spot, a geyser of water burst forth.

Seeing this, hundreds of the prisoners immediately converted to Christianity. The pagan overseer of the camp was furious over this and sentenced Clement to be put to death. And so, this great Church leader and disciple of both Peter and Paul, was martyred by being thrown into the sea with an anchor secured around his neck.

Early Church writers, such as Irenaeus, record that Clement conversed with the Apostles and was directly influenced by their teachings. To this day, the anchor is a symbol associated with Clement of Rome.

Many scholars believe that Clement is the same Clement mentioned by Paul in **Philippians 4:3**, called there one of his ‘fellow workers.’

Ignatius of Antioch

- 1) At roughly the same time, but at the other end of the Roman world in Syria, Ignatius, the bishop of Antioch, was ministering. Ignatius had been a disciple of John, and tradition in the Eastern Orthodox Church holds that he was personally appointed by Peter to be the leader of the Church at Antioch.¹⁷

¹⁶ Although it was written around A.D. 96, a complete manuscript was not discovered until 1628.

¹⁷ Ignatius taught that the Lord’s Table is the “medicine of immortality.” And, as a student of John, who was actually AT the Last Supper, his words carried great authority!

Ignatius is a very important early Church Father. He lived from approximately A.D. 35 to A.D. 107. This means he was born sometime around the year Jesus was crucified and was a contemporary of all the Apostles.

Ignatius was born into a pagan family and he also participated in the persecution of Christians before becoming saved. According to Church tradition, the Apostles recognized his spiritual maturity and appointed him to pastor the flock at Antioch. According to the great John Chrysostom, the Apostles personally ordained him by the laying on of hands.¹⁸

Ignatius became known as **θεοφόρος** (*Theophoros*, literally, “God-bearer”). The name derives from the Greek words for “God” and “carrier,” signifying one who carries God’s presence with him.¹⁹ He would later explain this title to the Emperor Trajan as meaning “one who has Christ in his heart.”²⁰

What is interesting is that *many Christians* at this time called themselves **θεοφόρος**! Why? Because it was their common understanding that “they carried the presence of God with them” where ever they went. So, the most straightforward understanding of the title **θεοφόρος** is Ignatius’s own: a was a self-designation emphasizing his intimate relationship with Christ and his conviction that Jesus dwelt within his heart.^{21 22}

Well, after persecution broke out against Christians under Domitian, it re-emerged during the reign of Trajan (who reigned from A.D. 98–117). Ignatius was involved in both of these afflictions. Christians faced persecution because they refused to worship the Roman gods.

Trajan, seeking to unify his recently-conquered lands, ordered that only religions which honored the Roman gods were legal (or ‘*religio licita*,’ Latin

¹⁸ Much of this biographical information is drawn from Lawson, Steven J., *Ignatius of Antioch, “God-Bearer,”* in *Pillars of Grace (AD 100–1564)*, A Long Line of Godly Men (Lake Mary, FL: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2011), 2:63–64.

¹⁹ Means, Joseph Calrow, “IGNATIUS (Ἰγνάτιος),” in *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Biography and Mythology*, ed. William Smith (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1870), 2:563–564.

²⁰ M’Clintock, John and James Strong, “Ignatius of Antioch,” in *Cyclopædia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature* (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1891), 4:490.

²¹ C.f., Jefford, Clayton N., *Reading the Apostolic Fathers: A Student’s Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), pp. 47–48.

²² He was a staunch defender of Christian doctrine. He particularly opposed Docetism, an early heresy which claimed that Jesus only appeared human. Ignatius brilliantly argued that if Christ wasn’t truly human, his crucifixion and resurrection would be mere illusions. He defended the truth that Jesus came in the flesh as both fully divine and fully human (Holman Reference, *The Church History Handbook*, Brentwood, TN: Holman Reference, 2024, p.19).

for ‘permitted’ or ‘licensed’ religion, a phrase coined by the early Christian apologist Tertullian in his *Apologeticum*, c. A.D. 197). Anyone who violated this law would be subject to arrest.

Ignatius, utterly disregarding the danger, kept right on openly professing Christ. In fact, Ignatius began to preach the gospel with more fervency than ever before! This led to his arrest and conviction.

Trajan just so happened to be visiting Antioch and ordered Ignatius to appear before him. Ignatius fearlessly proclaimed the truth of the risen Christ to his face; Trajan, was *not* convinced! And so, he ordered Ignatius to be bound in chains and taken to Rome, where he would become food for the wild beasts.

Around A.D. 107, Ignatius was transported to Rome by sea with a detachment of ten Roman soldiers²³ from Antioch to Rome.^{24 25} And this is where things get truly fascinating.

While on his journey to Rome to suffer in the Colosseum, Ignatius wrote seven letters.²⁶ He wrote to the saints at Ephesus, Magnesia, Tralles (TRAY-leez), Philadelphia and Smyrna – all of which were in Asia Minor. He also wrote to the Church at Rome (where he was headed), and a personal letter to Polycarp, the leader of the church in Smyrna²⁷ who would join him in martyrdom later.²⁸

His ship made many stops along the way, and Christians from various communities, aware of his impending execution, came out to support him. But while others grieved the old man’s impending execution, *Ignatius did not*.

²³ Andrews, Edward D., *Introduction to the Text of the New Testament: From the Authors and Scribe to the Modern Critical Text* (Cambridge, OH: Christian Publishing House, 2019).

²⁴ Holman Reference, *The Church History Handbook* (Brentwood, TN: Holman Reference, 2024), p.19.

²⁵ Bauckham, Richard, “For Whom Were Gospels Written?,” in *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences*, ed. Richard Bauckham (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), p.40.

²⁶ Nick Needham, *2000 Years of Christ’s Power: The Age of the Early Church Fathers* (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2016), p.64.

²⁷ González, Justo L., *A History of Early Christian Literature* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2019), p.16.

²⁸ The *Martyrdom of Polycarp* is a letter from the church at Philomelium to the church at Smyrna that records the death of Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna, and stands as one of the earliest known martyrologies. According to J. R. Michaels, “Apostolic Fathers,” in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Revised*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1979–1988), 1:210, *The Martyrdom of Polycarp* survives in six Greek manuscripts, extensive quotations by the church historian Eusebius, and Latin, Armenian, Syriac, and Coptic versions. See also Rick Brannan, “Apostolic Fathers,” in *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, ed. John D. Barry et al. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016) and Helmut Koester, *History and Literature of Early Christianity*, Introduction to the New Testament (New York; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2000), p.348.

In fact, he zealously desired the opportunity to testify for Jesus Christ in the Roman Arena! As the various churches learned that he was to be killed in the arena, they sought to intervene. There were ways to do this, most likely by bribing certain magistrates.²⁹ But, when Ignatius heard of their attempts to halt his martyrdom, he begged them to stop. He explicitly wrote asking the churches *not* to intervene. Ignatius believed his martyrdom was pleasing to God and preventing it would rob him of an irreplaceable opportunity to glorify Jesus Christ.³⁰ Did they hate him so much that they'd seize from him this opportunity to glorify his Lord by his manner of death?

In his epistle to the Romans, he wrote of the heavenly crown that awaits the martyr, and urges the Christians at Rome not to prevent him from receiving it!³¹

“For my part, I am writing to all the churches and assuring them that I am truly in earnest about dying for God—if only you yourself put no obstacles in the way. I must implore you to do me no such untimely kindness; pray leave me to be a meal for the beasts ... I am His wheat, ground fine by the lions’ teeth to be made purest bread for Christ ... When there is no trace of my body left for the world to see, then I shall truly be Jesus Christ’s disciple.”^{32 33}

In his *Epistle to the Ephesians*, he wrote:

“On hearing that I came bound from Syria for the sake of Christ ... [I am] trusting [that], through your prayers, [I may] be permitted to fight with beasts

²⁹ McGuckin, John Anthony, *The Path of Christianity: The First Thousand Years* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic: An Imprint of InterVarsity Press, 2017), p.58.

³⁰ Hughes, Amy Brown, George Kalantzis, and Kelly M. Kapic, “The Early Church Period (100–500),” in *Reading Christian Theology in the Protestant Tradition*, ed. Kelly M. Kapic and Hans Madueme (London; Oxford; New York; New Delhi; Sydney: Bloomsbury T&T Clark: An Imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2018), pp.30–31.

³¹ Newton, J., “Ignatius,” in *Who’s Who in Christian History*, ed. J.D. Douglas and Philip W. Comfort (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1992), p. 339.

³² Bennett, William J., *Tried by Fire: The Story of Christianity’s First Thousand Years* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2016), pp.25-26.

³³ In full: “I write to all the Churches, and impress on them all, that I shall willingly die for God, unless ye hinder me. I beseech of you not to show an unseasonable good-will towards me. Suffer me to become food for the wild beasts, through whose instrumentality it will be granted me to attain to God. I am the wheat of God, and am ground by the teeth of the wild beasts, that I may be found the pure bread of God. Rather entice the wild beasts, that they may become my tomb, and may leave nothing of my body; so that when I have fallen asleep [in death], I may not be found troublesome to anyone. Then shall I be a true disciple of Jesus Christ, when the world shall not see so much as my body. Entreat the Lord for me, that by these instruments I may be found a sacrifice to God.” Roberts, A., J. Donaldson, & A. C. Coxe. *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. I: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325* (Oak Harbor: Logos Research, 1997).

at Rome, that so, by martyrdom, I may indeed become the disciple of Him ‘who gave Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God.’³⁴

And so, Ignatius arrived at Rome and he faced his martyrdom with joy. He understood that suffering was a part of his calling as a Christian. You see, he’d learned from Paul, as we must, that it has been granted to all followers of Jesus that they should not only believe in Him but also suffer for His sake (**Philippians 1:29**). Jesus had suffered and died for him, and so Ignatius gladly suffered for His Name.

He was killed by wild beasts in the Flavian amphitheater in Rome sometime between A.D. 107 and 110.³⁵ Remarkably, he viewed this encounter with wild beasts as his chance to actually *be* a Christian rather than just *claim the title*.³⁶
37

And so, Ignatius understood his martyrdom *Christologically*—as a participation in Christ’s sufferings and on behalf of Christ’s body, the church—making it a spectacle that would affirm the full reality of all that Christian discipleship entailed: suffering, death, and – YES! – resurrection.³⁸ Remarkable!

“I Will Glorify Your Name Forever!”

- 1) Church, the greatest thing we can do with the new life Jesus has given to us is to glorify Him with it. The more we come to know Him and understand all that he’s done for us the more this desire grows.

The first question in the *Westminster Catechism* is rightly famous:

Q. What is the chief end of man?

A. Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.

³⁴Roberts, A., J. Donaldson, & A. C. Coxe. *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. I: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325*. Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, 1997.

³⁵Holman Reference, *The Church History Handbook* (Brentwood, TN: Holman Reference, 2024), p.19.

³⁶*Ibid.*, Hughes, et. al., “The Early Church” in *Reading Christian Theology in the Protestant Tradition*, pp.30–31.

³⁷He believed he was following Christ’s example, who “in making himself an offering for others” acted in perfect freedom and laid down his life down of His own accord. Ignatius actually feared that interference from the Roman Church would strip him of the opportunity to complete his discipleship through sacrifice.

³⁸*Op. cit.*, Hughes, et. al., “The Early Church” in *Reading Christian Theology in the Protestant Tradition*, pp.30–31.

I believe that's precisely correct. David had been through a lot with the Lord. He'd seen amazing victories – defeating that uncircumcised slob of a Philistine Goliath with a sling and a few smooth stones. He understood that the battle was not his own victory, but the Lord's. But he'd also committed horrendous sins and even murdered an innocent man to cover them up! And through it all He'd come to know both the severity and the mercy of God.

And when he returned, all of these things made him appreciate the way the Lord had been his companion in the good times and in the bad. He had come to love the Lord and desired, above all other things, to glorify Him. We read his thoughts in **Psalm 86**:

- ¹ Incline your ear, O Lord, and answer me,
for I am poor and needy.
- ² Preserve my life, for I am godly;
save your servant, who trusts in you—you are my God.
- ³ Be gracious to me, O Lord,
for to you do I cry all the day.
- ⁴ Gladden the soul of your servant,
for to you, O Lord, do I lift up my soul.
- ⁵ For you, O Lord, are good and forgiving,
abounding in steadfast love to all who call upon you.
- ⁶ Give ear, O Lord, to my prayer;
listen to my plea for grace.
- ⁷ In the day of my trouble I call upon you,
for you answer me.
- ⁸ There is none like you among the gods, O Lord,
nor are there any works like yours.
- ⁹ All the nations you have made shall come
and worship before you, O Lord,
and shall glorify your name.
- ¹⁰ For you are great and do wondrous things;
you alone are God.
- ¹¹ Teach me your way, O Lord,
that I may walk in your truth;
unite my heart to fear your name.

¹² I give thanks to you, O Lord my God,
with my whole heart,
and I will glorify your name forever.”

And so, David wanted to “glorify God’s name forever” because He’d shown him goodness and mercy all throughout his life.

- 2) Paul reminds us that we are not our own; we’ve been bought with a price – the precious blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, he said, “glorify God in your body” (**1 Corinthians 6:19-20**). So, “whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do,” he says, “do all to the glory of God” (**1 Corinthians 10:31**).

In the scene John witnessed in Heaven, the Father was seated upon a throne and everyone there was giving “glory and honor and thanks to him” (**Revelation 4:9**). They “worship him who lives forever and ever” and “cast their crowns before the throne, saying,

“Worthy are you, our Lord and God,
to receive glory and honor and power,
for you created all things,
and by your will they existed and were created”
(**Revelation 4:10-11**).

And so, Paul wrote, “from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen” (**Romans 11:36**).

Q. What is the chief end of man? A. Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.

And it’s because of that ‘enjoy Him forever’ part that we read: “Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I say, rejoice” (**Philippians 4:4**). Joy itself will characterize our eternal future together with the Lord Jesus Christ! And so, we say with the Apostle Paul that “from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen” (**Romans 11:36**).

But we don’t want to glorify the Lord *theoretically*; we want to glorify Him *practically*. And, next time, we’ll learn how.

Let’s pray.