

## A Great Multitude

**“After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb.”** (Revelation 7:9)

**Scripture:** Revelation 7:9–10, 13–17

**Song:** “Salvation Belongs to our God”

I had attended several small group events at Osaka International Church and had made friends with believers from all over the world, but it was the first time I was attending a worship service there. As I walked in, I noticed people I knew from several Asian nations, North and South America, Europe, and Africa. We were all so different—except for the same love we had for our Savior, Jesus Christ.

John saw a great crowd of believers who were worshipping around the throne in heaven. They spoke different languages and came from different cultures and countries around the world. But they were all united in praising the Lamb for the salvation that He brought to the world.

As I looked around at the group of people worshipping in the service. I was reminded of the picture John saw and thought to myself, “This is what heaven is going to be like!” It will be a place where our love for Christ will be the greatest thing that unites us.

**Father,** thank You for the gift of salvation and that this gift extends to all people. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

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 August 3–9. **PJ Kitchen, Th.M.**, has taught as an adjunct professor at Spring Arbor University for the past 15 years. He also teaches at Cornerstone University and is a graduate of Cornerstone Theological Seminary. He served as a youth minister for 20 years and led a network of youth pastors for 4 years.

## The Word of Their Testimony

**“They triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony.”** (Revelation 12:11)

**Scripture:** Revelation 12:7–11

**Song:** “10,000 Reasons”

We were each given a piece of string at summer camp and asked to use it to introduce ourselves. I looked over at a friend who was tangling her string into a chaotic bundle of knots. When it was her turn, she described her life of confusion and hopelessness. She felt like when one thing improved, other things became worse.

In John’s time, many Christians were told to deny Christ as their Lord or face severe punishments. Their testimony in those moments inspired others to put their trust in Christ. Today’s Scripture shows that the devil will be overcome both by Jesus’ blood and by the word of our testimony. We may not face the same things as the early Christians did, but we can still share what God has done for us and use it to defeat the enemy’s work.

That day at camp, I later shared with my friend about how I too had gone through a time of hopelessness and despair. I told her how God rescued me and brought me hope again. Each of us has a story of things God has done for us, and by sharing it, we can inspire others to follow Him.

**Father,** thank You for rescuing me. I ask that You give me an opportunity to share my testimony with someone today. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

## Stephen's Arrest

**“But they could not stand up against the wisdom the Spirit gave him as he spoke.”** (Acts 6:10)

**Scripture:** Acts 6:7–14

**Song:** “Spirit of the Living God”

Many countries in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East are experiencing amazing church growth today. Some estimates say that there could be over 100 million Christians in China, and that 2 million people are becoming Christians in Indonesia every year. Because of this, Christians are facing intense opposition. Christians lose their jobs, are unfairly put in prison, and are sometimes even killed.

The church in Stephen's day was growing rapidly and facing opposition as well. However, the Spirit gave Stephen wisdom to respond to the Jewish leaders in such a way that they could not stand up against what he said. So, they took him before the council and made false accusations.

Thank God that the Spirit who empowered Stephen and the early church is still empowering the church today. We can pray for our brothers and sisters who are facing hardships, asking the Spirit to give them strength and wisdom as they speak. We can also trust that He will enable us to speak with wisdom in any difficult situations we face.

**Father,** empower my brothers and sisters around the world and give me wisdom to speak Your words as well. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

## Delivered from Death

**Return to your rest, my soul, for the LORD has been good to you.** (Psalm 116:7)

**Scripture:** Psalm 116:1–9

**Song:** “His Love Endures Forever”

I had just received a notice of another bill I owed. I wasn't sure how I was going to pay for it and the many others that were piling up. As I spent the new few days thinking about this, my anxiety and worry increased. I cried out to God, and I sensed Him gently correcting me: “You're spending too much time looking at your circumstances and not enough time looking at the good things I've done!”

In many psalms, David expresses his anguish to God over trials that have brought him to the brink of death. In verse 3 he mourns, “I was overcome by distress and sorrow.” David cries out to God—but he doesn't stop there. He reminds himself of who God is and how God has delivered him in the past.

There is nothing wrong with talking to God about our problems. He wants us to be honest with Him no matter what we feel; but it can never just end there. When we spend time thinking about God and what He has done for us, it will bring us hope and rest. No matter what we are experiencing, we can face it with strength because we know God is faithful and hears our prayers.

**Father**, no matter what I am going through today, remind me of the many ways You have been gracious and loving to me in the past. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

## Precious Deaths

**I will sacrifice a thank offering to you and call on the name of the LORD.”** (Psalm 116:17)

**Scripture:** Psalm 116:10–19

**Song:** “Counting My Blessings”

Every day, I have my students look for five things for which they are grateful. Then they write those things in a daily journal throughout the semester. In my classes, and the countless others who have done this same assignment, students have found that this simple daily exercise improves their level of happiness and helps them cope with daily stress. For many, it improves their relationships, motivation, and overall health.

David remembers the blessings God has given throughout his life. He praises God for rescuing him from trouble and freeing him from bondage. He rejoices at the thought of being considered among the faithful servants whose death is precious in the eyes of the Lord. He then decides to offer up thanks to God and is not afraid to show deep gratitude “in the presence of all his people” (v. 18).

God is gracious and gives us immeasurably more than we deserve. How often do we miss His blessings because we overlook them or because we’ve grown to expect them? Spend time today looking for God’s gifts, no matter how large or small. Better yet, tell someone else about them. You’ll be grateful you did.

**Father,** thank You for Your countless gifts to me. May I show my gratitude by serving you faithfully, even unto death. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

## Stephen's Bold Message

**“Was there ever a prophet your ancestors did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him.”** (Acts 7:52)

**Scripture:** Acts 7:1, 44–53

**Song:** “It Is Well”

We were assigned to different downtown neighborhoods as part of our evangelism training. Our goal was to clean up trash and start casual conversations in hopes of sharing Jesus with those who were interested. Some had some great conversations with the residents, but Andrea didn't. She came back in tears, telling how one gentleman was angry with her and mocked her belief in Christ.

The Jewish leaders were angry with Stephen and accused him of going against the teachings of Moses. He explained to them his understanding of the Old Testament and how Jesus came to fulfill God's plans. *They* were the ones opposing Moses' teaching, not him.

Just like Jesus, Andrea, Stephen, and all the prophets from the Old Testament, our belief in God's plan will often be met with opposition. As hard as that can be, we can be comforted and even rejoice because we are in good company with God's messengers from the past.

**Father**, give me strength to endure hardships when I am rejected or ridiculed for my belief in You. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

## Stephen's Martyrdom

**[They] dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul. (Acts 7:58)**

**Scripture:** Acts 7:54–60

**Song:** “I Will Follow”

The first cheer competition was coming up, and Nikki was new to the squad. On the big day, some older girls got upset and screamed at the coach. When the school administrators found out, the girls denied it. They expected Nikki to lie to cover for them, but she told the truth. For the rest of the year, she was tormented. Many years later, Nikki got a job working with one of the tormentors, who apologized and told how she was impacted by Nikki's decision to do the right thing.

The Jewish leaders eventually murdered Stephen for standing up for the truth. One of those witnessing this tragedy was Saul. He would later believe in Jesus as the Messiah and change his name to Paul. Paul became one of the greatest missionaries of his time and would write many of the books of the New Testament.

When we stand up for God in spite of opposition, people will be watching. Whether we see the impact right away, years down the road, or never at all, we can be confident that God will use our witness for His purpose and plan.

**Father,** give me strength to stand up for the truth and use my testimony to impact those who are watching. May all the glory be Yours. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.