

CITY CHURCH-EASTSIDE WEEKLY WORSHIP GUIDE

January 5, 2009



Janus
Roman Art Piece

Janus: Looking Back & Looking Ahead

It's hard to believe that the Christmas holiday has passed and we are now looking squarely into the face of a new year. Our sermon series for the past two weeks, Janus, has actually encouraged us to look into two faces. Janus was a god of Roman mythology who served as the guardian of doorways and entryways. Janus is often pictured with two faces, one looking back and one looking ahead. The term Janus is now used in literature to describe a profound point of change in a character's story whereby the person leaves behind a former life in order to embrace a more promising future. We see this very plot play out in the character of Saul whose life would be forever changed on the road to Damascus.

In week one we "looked back" asking the question how would God have us evaluate the past for the sake of future change? In Acts 7:54-8:1-3; 9:1-9 we examined Saul's former life seeking to understand the character of this man who so violently opposed the church. Saul was a man consumed with preserving the religious traditions of his fathers not because of his worship of God, but because it meant everything to his identity. The point of change came on the road to Damascus. This whole experience has long been present within our cultural vocabulary, but if we get just beyond the bright lights we find that Saul's life was upended because he met with the person of Jesus Christ. For the

first time he would understand Jesus as Messiah, the Son of God. In week two we "looked forward" examining how Saul's new life charter in Acts 9:1-16 might impact our own pursuit of the American Dream. Saul was now the instrument of God, called to take this message to all nations, and summoned to suffer for the name of Christ. This text affords us the opportunity to consider the meaning of life, liberty, and happiness in light of the work of Christ. In the end we find that it isn't so much about our own pursuit of these ideals. Instead it's about following Christ's lead into the future, which as with Saul, is a journey of faith rooted in a new identity. What could God call us to in the new year?

Sermon Application

The questions and thoughts below can be used for further reflection this week. Seek to use a journal or discuss with a friend. Most of all use this to consider how the gospel of Christ can be transforming. Enjoy!

Application Questions

1. In his former life Saul was a man consumed by an inordinate desire. What was that desire and what impact did it have on his identity? What are some relevant examples of such desire in our society today?
2. Deconstructing inordinate loves can be hard but meaningful work. What are the promises of inordinate desires and why do they fail to make good on these promises?
3. Saul's life changed the moment he met with Christ. How does this serve as a template for real life change especially on a daily basis? The latest self-help methods can often change 'surface conditions', but not create lasting change. Why is this true compared to the change that Christ offers? How does this relate to the foundation of our identity?
4. Discuss why you believe 'life under God' is opposed in many corners of our society today. Discuss an example in your own life where you've felt that you've developed a 'personality of your own' because of Christ's personality. (Think of the wine & food example).
5. Share about a time, past or present, where you've found it hard to love someone. How could the elements of the gospel specifically help you overcome your opinion and set you free to love?
6. As Saul stepped into his new life he had to face his past and patiently wait for the future. Amidst it all we know from Phillippians 4 that he developed a unprecedented joy. Discuss an example in your own life of having to face the past or wait for the future. How did (or could) the gospel give you authentic joy during these times?

"I am not, in my natural state, nearly so much of a person as I like to believe: most of what I call "me" can be very easily explained. It is when I turn to Christ, when I give myself up to His Personality, that I first begin to have a real personality of my own."

C.S. Lewis
Mere Christianity

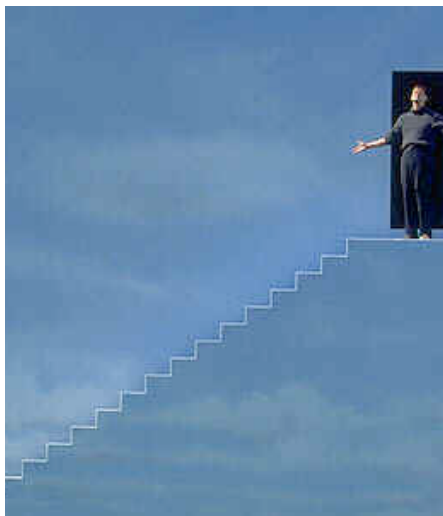
Intersect-Thoughts on Life & Faith

Forward-Looking Faith

What is faith? Hebrews chapter 11 would define faith as "the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." Often we think of faith as merely a description of our religious tradition or as the point at which we came to embrace a system of belief. Faith of course can be all of these things, but often we fail to see the power of faith for everyday living. If we miss this, then we perhaps miss out on the unique and elegant design of the gospel of Christ.

Spiritual formation is the process of obedience, repentance, and faith. Regarding obedience, believers in Christ consistently attempt to obey God's law. Often the results of obedience are not so clear cut, but sometimes we succeed and sometimes we fail. Obeying God's desire for our life always results in blessing and deep satisfaction. Sometimes obedience doesn't feel like the elysian bliss we would expect, but this is due in large part to our desire for instant gratification that is frequently promised by the world before us. It's when we place faith in the immediate things of this world over and against the desire of God that we sin against him and do injury to ourselves. Repentance, a misunderstood word in our contemporary society, is the process of discovering the inordinate loves in our heart for the things of this world. Our world is not bad but instead broken. Just as a car is not designed for an ocean voyage, in a like manner the things before us are not designed to adequately give us definition or satisfy our deepest longings.

Repentance leads us to this acknowledgment and as a result creates a sorrow in our heart because of the decision we made to act outside the covenant relationship we have with God. But we cannot simply stop there, we must move on to faith! Faith is the process of "continual conversion" whereby we embrace and trust the promises of God for our lives over and against the offerings of this world. Faith then is the process of vivification, or setting our affections on Christ. This was the whole key to the change witnessed in Saul. As he looked into the face of Christ he saw him more worthy than the broken love he experienced from his destructive pursuits. We come to treasure Christ through such means as the reading of His word, weekly worship, and communing with other followers of Christ. Faith then is the important step in moving forward.



Media Resource List

The following were used this week and recommended.

- C.S. Lewis *Mere Christianity*
- Timothy Keller *The Reason for God*
- Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. *I Have a Dream Speech*
- Henri Nouwen *In the Name of Jesus*