

Acts #22  
Saul of Tarsus  
Acts 9:20-31

In our last study of the Acts we looked at the ministry of Ananias, and how an ordinary follower of Christ became an extra-ordinary disciple in the plan and program of God. Like Ananias, we too serve God in an extra-ordinary way, by simply having a godly character, a willing attitude, and faithfulness to God's will for our lives.

This week we are going to turn our attention back to the person of Saul, and the starting point of his ministry.

The conversion of Paul is the great turning point in God's dealing with Israel. His whole program for the evangelization of the world depended on this unusual man. If we are to rightly divide the Word of Truth, we must keep in mind that Peter and Paul, in the book of Acts, represent two different ministries.

Peter is associated with the twelve Apostles; Paul is associated with the One Body. Peter is associated with the Gospel of the Kingdom; Paul preaches the Gospel of the Grace of God. Peter is centered in Jerusalem; Paul is centered in Antioch. Peter ministered primarily to Israel; Paul ministered primarily to the Gentiles. Peter was called by Christ while on this earth; Paul was called by Christ from the heavenlies. Peter saw Christ's glory on earth, as a picture of the Kingdom; Paul saw Christ's glory in heaven, as a picture of the glorified Church.

And the conclusion is this: too many Christians are "robbing Paul to pay Peter." They confuse these two ministries and thus turn the local church into a hodgepodge of "kingdom truth" and "church truth." Paul is God's spokesman to the local church, as even Peter admits in 2 Peter 3:15-16, "And account that the long-suffering of our Lord is salvation, even as our beloved brother, Paul, also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to be understood, which they are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction." Peter is simply saying that it was hard for him to understand God's plans for the church, and we know that even he had to receive further instructions according to Galatians 2:11-14, "But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. For before certain men came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles; but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them who were of the circumcision. And the other Jews dissembled in like manner with him, insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their false pretense. But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel,

I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of the Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as the Jews?"

**In other words, the Jewish brethren were having trouble realizing the unity of the Body of Christ that involved both Jews and Gentiles.** And the result was that when Peter was with the Gentiles he treated them as friends and brothers, but when his Jewish friends came around he shunned the Gentiles as if they were not a part of the Church. **And Paul's confrontation was for him to be the same with all people.**

**Paul's conversion was all of grace; God suddenly interrupted him on his murderous path and by grace transformed him into a new man.** Just as the Church is one Body composed of Jews and Gentiles, so Paul was one man with both Jewish and Gentile relationships.

**He was a Jew by birth, but a Gentile by citizenship.** He was God's choice servant to announce the message of the Church. Being associated with both Jews and Gentiles, trained in the Old Testament scriptures as well as the Greek philosophies and the Roman laws, Paul was the ideal man to give the message, "There is no difference."

**Therefore, look with me at the starting point of Paul's ministry.**

**Verses 20-25 tell us,** "And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God. But all that heard him were amazed, and said; Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came here for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests? But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ. And after that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him: But their lying in wait was known of Saul. And they watched the gates day and night to kill him. Then the disciples took him by night, and let him down by the wall in a basket."

**Notice first of all the word,** "Straightway he preached Christ." **Paul started where he was and preached what he knew, and that is a good policy for any new Christian to follow.** It is a mistake for one to wait until he has mastered the Scriptures before he starts sharing Christ with others. **Because the more one learns the more he realizes that he knows nothing.**

**"Straightway he preached Christ."** **In other words, immediately after his conversion Paul proclaimed Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and this declaration gave a new and higher character to his preaching than is seen in the ministry of any other of the apostles.** They knew Christ was the Son of

God, but it is not recorded that they preached it openly. Peter confessed, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:16) but we are not told that Peter preached this message again after Christ told them to “tell no man that he was Jesus, the Christ.”

There is no doubt that Peter preached that the crucified, but risen Jesus was “both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36). We are aware that Peter preached repentance to Israel, and the remission of sin. He preached Jesus and preached Him fully – but only as Messiah. Peter preached on the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus. He also preached that in due time God would send Christ to restore Israel and fulfill every promise He had given to Abraham. But beyond that, Peter did not preach Christ in the book of Acts.

Therefore, Paul’s preaching gave a new and higher dimension to the preaching of the Gospel. He began preaching Jesus in His proper and divine glory, not only Messiah, but also very Christ, the Son of God!

“And after many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him.” One of the greatest ways to tell those that are religious but lost, is that they are always willing to destroy those that do not agree with them, and support them in their ideas. Therefore, the Jews were soon scheming and making plans to rid themselves of this man who had been their trusted leader in their efforts to destroy Christianity, “But their lying in wait was known by Saul...Then the disciples took him by night, and let him down by the wall in a basket.”

It is evident that Paul would have met with sure death if he had remained in this city, and God had much for him to do. So under the cover of darkness “the disciples” who were once afraid for their lives at the mere thought of this man, rallied about him and helped him to escape. Many times, after conversion, those that we thought were our friends become our enemies, and those whom we thought to be enemies become our brothers.

Look at verses 26-30, “And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he tried to join himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. And he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem. And he spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians: but they went about to slay him. Which when the brethren knew, they brought him down to Caesarea, and sent him forth to Tarsus.”

Having rescued from the plot of his enemies and under the cover of night, Paul now sets out for Jerusalem. However, Paul found that he was not to

be readily received by the assembly in Jerusalem, as seen in these words, “They were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple.”

**But there was a man in the group by the name of Barnabas, of who we have heard before, who was from Cyprus, which was not too far from Tarsus.** It is possible that Barnabas had been acquainted with Saul of Tarsus at some previous time, but it is most probable that Barnabas had heard about Saul through those from his hometown.

Nonetheless, Barnabas explained to Peter and James how Saul of Tarsus had met Jesus, of how he had been saved, and “how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus.”

On the testimony of Barnabas, Paul was received, admitted to fellowship, and recognized as a believer and an apostle, “and he spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus.”

But it wasn’t long before Paul was in trouble with those Grecian Jews in Jerusalem and had to be ushered out of town for his own safety, and the place that he went to was his own homeland.

**This was Paul’s first visit to his hometown since his conversion, and it is not known for certain that he was ever there again.** The scriptures are silent as to what happened to Saul when he got home, but in all probability that was his one and only visit to his hometown after he was saved.

And then verse 31 says, “Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, were multiplied.”

**From this passage of scripture we must note that the persecution of the believers had undoubtedly been promoted by Saul of Tarsus, and after his conversion the churches found a little rest from the bloodthirsty Jews.** The problem with the Jews is that they were just looking for someone to fight their battles for them. That way they could stand back and say, “We really were not involved.”

Notice this conclusion: When the church finds rest in the Lord, when Christians are edified and walking in the fear of the Lord, comforted by the Holy Spirit, then believers are “multiplied” and souls are added to the Church.

**The mark of a great Church is always the adding of souls!!**

If you are not saved, why not tonight?