

Acts 9:20-43

“Saul’s Separation, Peter’s Proceedings”

Last week we concentrated primarily on Saul’s salvation, how that in a single moment in time this man who was so passionate in his pursuit of uprooting and destroying disciples of the Lord was confronted, convicted, and converted. He was so sincere in his service to God as a Pharisee yet he was so sincerely wrong, and we discussed at some length how that sincerity will not save you, how that Jesus is the way, the truth and the Life and that no one comes to the Father, no one sees salvation but by Him and Him alone. Saul came to see and understand that in a very powerful, profound and personal way that day on the way to Damascus. But we also took heart in the fact that there’s no one so adamantly opposed to Jesus Christ and all that He stands for but that God *confront them, convict them, and convert them*. You aren’t going to find anyone more opposed to the person of Jesus Christ than Saul of Tarsus, yet Jesus saved Him (Paul himself said) as a pattern to those who would come to believe on Him for everlasting life.

Well then, what’s the pattern that we have in Saul’s salvation that the rest of us can take heart in? We realize in Saul’s salvation that before we’re converted we must be confronted with the person of Jesus Christ and with the fact that we have sinned against Him, even though at times that sin might be in ignorance, the sin remains. (If I’m doing 55 in a 35, even if I’m honestly ignorant of the speed limit I’ve still broke the law, the penalty remains). Saul’s salvation shows us that God is the One who finds us, that He goes looking for us; we don’t go looking for Him. We all like sheep have gone astray; we’ve all turned aside after our own ways, we don’t choose Him, but He chooses us. We see in his salvation (again that no one is beyond the redemptive reach of Jesus Christ) we see that at its core salvation is something that only God through Christ can do, that we have no part in it whatsoever, all we’re able to do is merely respond to the relationship that He initiates. (But lest you think that perhaps you’re just out of the loop and God must not want to save you because as far as you can tell He’s never initiated a relationship with you, God initiated a love relationship with you at the cross of His Son Jesus Christ, now it’s yours to respond to His initiative).

We also realize that once He’s saved us that we can only humbly wait upon Him to do the work with in us that only He can do, having lived so much of our lives in the dark, only He can bring us into the light and give us eyes to truly see. Finally (though there’s probably more) we realize that though brokenness is necessary it’s not enough, but that God breaks us only as a prelude to His filling us.

So we dealt with Saul’s *salvation*, the remainder of the ch here deals now with Saul’s *separation*, that is his being separated now *from* not only his former life as a Pharisee, but *unto* his calling to the Gentiles. and It seems to take him a bit to get dialed into that, his heart was for the nation of Israel, but God hadn’t separated him unto Himself for that reason (not primarily, remember vs 15) he was to bear the name of Jesus before *Gentiles* 1st, then kings, and *then* as last on the list of his priorities, the children of Israel.

But then we also turn the page here in ch 9 and begin to pursue Peter again in his ongoing proceedings in the ministry.

Now when we closed last week we just sort of brushed over vs 10-19, but I want to go ahead and take the time to develop one other thing out of this section that we really didn't draw any attention to in our last gathering. We spoke of how God uses ordinary people in extraordinary ways, we spoke of the acid test of Saul's salvation seemed to lie in his supplication.

How that though he'd recited prayers before, now he was *praying*, seeking after God personally, desiring to commune with Him intimately, asking direction of Him specifically, something you just don't do in truth if you don't know Jesus. We brushed up against the doctrine of election in that Saul was a *chosen* vessel, and pointed out the fact that election is always others oriented, Saul was chosen for a purpose that went beyond himself; God wanted to use him to reach others. The same is true for you and me, God has saved you for a reason that extends beyond yourself, He has a plan, and a purpose for your life, we spoke of laying hold of that for which God has laid hold of us. But look at vs 16, as the Lord is speaking to Ananias about His plan for Saul's life He says, (Read).

Vs 16

There's a couple of things I want you to see here #1 This word "show" literally means to "forewarn" or to "show in advance." It goes beyond being shown by day to day experience, its as though the Lord made it real clear to him what it was that he was going have to endure for His name's sake. Yet that didn't cause him to shrink back, or surrender God's call on his life. Now the exact detail with which he was forewarned I don't know, but I'm increasingly impressed with the depth of heart, and commitment that Paul had to Christ regardless of the cost, he counted the cost, and pressed on. When you read what he was subjected to throughout his life (look at 2nd Cor ch 11 Vs24-28). Now what would you do if you were in his shoes, and God told you about His desire to use you, but that it would involve your back being lashed some 195 times with a whip, beaten 3 times with a rod, shipwrecked 3 times, bobbing around in the pitch black sea with no certainty of survival, no land in sight with no telling what kind of shark infested waters you may or may not be in? That you would be in constant fear for your life from robbers, strangers, your own countrymen, you'd often be with out sleep, with out a bed, with out decent clothing or a meal in your stomach, and you have a constant worry in your heart for the welfare of the church like a nice cherry on top?

I'm not sure that I would consent to the call, I'm not altogether excited about flying from one place to the other, or being in 3rd world Africa not wanting to get out of bed because I'm sick/tired, have literally no voice and it's a humid 110 in the shade kind of thing. I don't like the uncertainty of being laid off from my job, or having people make fun of me because of what I believe. But the things we consider rough aren't even worthy to be mentioned in the light of what Paul would have to endure, had God told me that when I went to Africa last time, I'd be sick, in bed and just wanting to go home most of the time, I probably wouldn't have went.

So I can say with some confidence that I wouldn't have enlisted into Paul's calling with any real sense of forewarning. But Paul would come to say, "*For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.*" 2 Cor 5:14-15 Or another way to understand that, "My life is not my own, it belongs to Him who loved me and gave Himself for me, I don't live for my will, it's not my will be done, but Thy will be done, the love of Christ constrains me, it presses me on, and if living for Him means perils, persecution, pain, and uncertainty in this life than so be it."

God help us to come to that place of absolute, whole hearted surrender, where we actually realize that our life is not our own and if in His will we're subjected to suffering, than so be it, because I know in whom I believe and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I've committed to Him until that day. That we would actually trust that God loves us so much, that whatever He allows into the equation of our lives will somehow with out a doubt work out for our eternal best interest. Saul was shown his sufferings, and yet subjected himself willingly and fully to God's plan for His life.

Which brings me to the 2nd thing. Can suffering actually be apart of God's will, God's way in your life? There are those who teach it emphatically cannot be. and That if you suffer in any way, physically, emotionally, financially, or spiritually, its due to a simple lack of faith in your life. But I don't see how you can read your bible in its context and at all come to that conclusion. You think of Joseph, or David, which of the prophets weren't subjected to some sort of suffering if not martyrdom? What about all the apostles? They all suffered in various ways, and 11 out of 12 of *them* were martyred. and The only reason John wasn't is because he was a tough ol' bird and refused to die when they tried to boil him with oil, so they banished him to Patmos where God gave him the book of Revelation, but that sounds like a peachy life doesn't it? From boiling to banishing, ooooh count me in! Jesus said, "*In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.*" John 16:33 Paul said, "*Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.*" 2 Tim 3:12 Peter said, "*Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you;*" 1 Peter 4:12 Which is to say that as believers, trials, or tough times should simply be an expected part of life, yet what happens when we enter in to some sort of season of suffering in our lives? We think it strange, we can't believe that here we are seeking to *serve* the Lord, be pleasing *to* the Lord, and now here we are in the midst of this radical trial. We have this strange misnomer that once we come to Christ all our problems in this life should be over, but Jesus never promised that. As a matter of fact He promised the opposite, that in several ways walking with Christ only invites further difficulty and complications into our lives.

That's why He said that we're to count the cost, because if they persecuted Him, they'll persecute you *in* Him as well. Jesus said, "*...narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it*" Matt 7:14

He said, “*Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to ‘set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law’; and ‘a man's enemies will be those of his own household.’*” Matt 10:34-36

You see the bible is clear that as a godly individual there will be times that you unjustifiably are subjected to suffering, or persecution. But that it has nothing to do with a lack of faith in your life, to the contrary its often times because of our faith that we suffer, and that suffering can be apart of the will of God for our lives. Peter went on to use Jesus Himself as the supreme example for us to look to as to what it means to suffer according to the will of God, had He not suffered according to God’s will none of us would be here today. So don’t be disheartened when you find yourself subjected to hard times, seasons of suffering, God will take those times and utilize them to form your life in such a way as to use you further for His glory, and to keep us mindful of the eternal perspective. I find that suffering has a tendency to cause us to loosen our grip on the things of this life and helps us to set our sites on Heaven. So God will at times use our suffering to keep us hungry for Heaven rather than allow us to attach ourselves to tightly to the things of this world.

Well, Saul has had a radical conversion experience, he’s seen the light in a literal kind of way, and though he was blind for a few days, he’d never seen more clearly in all his life. Ananias laid his hands on him, said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.”

Vs18-22

They were “dumbfounded” in Damascus at the radical transition and 180 that had taken place in this mans life regarding his position on Christ. The *persecutor* turned *preacher*, the *adversary* turned *advocate*, and we see this new believer type zeal (mingled with tons of scriptural knowledge) that welled up in him as he *immediately* began to preach who the Messiah is in the synagogues. Of course with Saul that zeal never waxed or waned, but rather his passion for proclaiming Jesus Christ and Him crucified only seemed to burn brighter with time. God help us that the flame of our 1st love relationship with Jesus Christ would never diminish, but only burn brighter with each passing day.

Paul’s love *for* Christ, and desire to be used *by* Christ only increased as time went on, he never took the cross for granted. God forgive us for taking the cross for granted, and growing lethargic in our service, dedication, and devotion to Him.

But notice that 1st he preached that the Christ is the Son of God, then He proved that *Jesus is the Christ*. In vs 11 he's praying, vs 20 he's preaching, vs 22 he's proving, great earmarks of any true believer, communicating about man with God, and about God with man. Learning of the heart and mind *of* God, by spending time in communion *with* God, studying the *Word* of God, and then sharing those things with those around us, the sacrifice of Jesus Christ upon the cross for the sin of the world out of His great love with which He loved us.

For Paul it was paramount that people recognize 1st of all the deity of the Messiah, that He was more than *just* a man like Moses, but that He was in fact God in the flesh. Because that was the big hang up of the Jews, they were looking for a man as their Messiah, but Jesus claimed deity, so they considered Him a blasphemer deserving of death. There in John Ch 10 you find the Jews preparing once again to stone Him, and Jesus says to them, *“Many good works I have shown you from My Father. For which of those works do you stone Me?” The Jews answered Him, saying, ‘For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy, and because You, being a Man, make Yourself God.’”* John 10:32-33

They had a real problem with the fact that He would claim to be God come in the flesh, and generally speaking that's understandable, we don't generally accept those types of claims either. But in Jesus' case the scriptures foretold of the deity of the Messiah, they foretold of the works, words, and ways of the Messiah, and Jesus fulfilled them all. For that matter it would be impossible that the Messiah should atone for our sins if He were anything *less* than God, because sinful man can't atone for sinful man, now therein lies a problem because all mankind everywhere throughout all time have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. I can't pay with my life the penalty of my own sins- much less anyone else's, I don't have any righteous credit on which to draw I have a sin debit, so how can I take from a debit of sin situation, and pay a credit of righteousness on my account or anyone else's? I can't and neither could any other man who came from Adam on the face of the earth, so the 1st thing that needs to be established is that the Messiah would not be a sinful man, but the Son of God. Perfect in Righteousness.

No doubt those scriptures like, *“I will declare the decree: The LORD has said to Me, ‘You are My Son, Today I have begotten You.’”* Ps 2:7 and Isa 9:6 *“For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”* These vs were coming together for him, beginning to be employed by him in his establishing the fact that the Messiah is the Son of God. Then he would take the time to point out to them by the fulfillment of the prophecies that pertained to the Messiah that Jesus was in fact the Messiah, the very Son of God come to the earth to suffer and die for the sin of the world.

Now somewhere in here, some say between vs 21-22, others between vs 22-23 (I don't think it much matters which you believe) Saul retreated to the desert in Arabia to take the time

to be with the Lord and receive from the Lord his understanding of the gospel and the word of God accordingly. and According to Gal 1:15-19 you find that he was there for 3years. and I think therein lies an application for us that we can glean regarding a preparation period for the ministry. The disciples were with Jesus for 3 yrs before they really began to launch out into the ministry, Paul (even though he'd been so radically schooled and instructed in the word), still took the time to get grounded in Christ before he launched out. and I'm not saying that there's anything magical about the 3 yrs necessarily, but that the principal there is that often times when someone comes to Christ they have this desire to immediately jump into the ministry.

They have zeal but not according to knowledge, often times when a celebrity comes to Christ, the church jumps all over them and sends them on a circuit tour to tell their testimony. But since all they hear is their own testimony, and they never have the opportunity to get grounded in the Word, often times you hear several months or a year or so later that so and so is back in the world. and It's because they never were able to get rooted in the Word of God, Jesus spoke of the need to dig deep and establish our foundations on the rock as opposed to hurrying the process by building on the sand. Because storms are going to come, we began our time today developing that reality, and the one who's found established on the rock solid foundation of Jesus Christ having heard His word and applied to their lives will stand. But to the one who builds on the sand, never taking the time to take God's Word to heart that it might root them and ground them, be a realistic working part of them, when the storm comes their going to fall, and great (Jesus said) will be that fall. Even the great apostle Paul took the time to get rooted in God's word and acclimated to the word as it relates to Jesus Christ Don't get in a hurry, be patient, build on the rock and God will use your life.

Vs23-25

Talk about being "let down" in ministry, I doubt that this is the response Saul was looking for to the message of the gospel from the Jews here in Damascus. It's like "Let the sufferings begin I guess." But eventually there in 2nd Cor ch 11 Paul would come to glory in this event, being "let down" as it were because it caused him to *look up*. God hadn't called him to the Jews, he's still not altogether convinced of that, believes that he's tailor made to minister to them (and from the natural stand point he was) but God was going to use him outside of his comfort zone, why? Because that's when you know it's all God and none you, yeah this was a let down, in more than one way, but God will use this as a profound point of humbling in his life, whereby he'll look up having been let down that he might get a grip on God's plan for his life. Oh he doesn't see it now, but he will later, so often its that way with you and me, we feel a certain pull to a way of ministry, or a style of outreach and sometimes it doesn't seem to reap anything but turmoil/trouble. and We're let down, but God would have us look up, that we might grab hold of His plan, His way, for our lives. Sometimes we don't get that immediately, Saul didn't, notice. Did he go, "Man, that was close, I better head off to the Gentiles." No, he headed for Jerusalem!

Vs26-30

"Look Saul, why don't you just go home for awhile." and Guess what, he drops into obscurity for another 6-10 yrs while no doubt being reworked and rewired for his calling. The

great apostle Paul, who would turn the world upside down for Christ was sent home, because things just weren't going good for him, closed door, after closed door. So far he's endeavored in 2 outreaches, and in both places they just wanted to kill him. It seems like everywhere he went there was one of 2 end results, either *revival*, or a *riot*, he knew how to stir a crowd, but so far they were just stirred to kill him.

But again we notice how he dumbfounded the people of Damascus, and here he had their *jaws dropping* in *Jerusalem*, they couldn't believe he was really saved. They thought he was just trying to get on the inside so that he might continue his havoc. But Barnabas, "The son of Encouragement" from ch 4 took him in. Barnabas was just an incredible fella, always giving, be it in finances, or the benefit of the doubt, he just had a real gift (not only of giving) but of mercy, love believes all things. and When Saul sought to explain to them his story, no one else would give him the time of day, but Barnabas took a chance, showed him mercy.

Got him on the inside, and notice he began preaching again, this time against the Hellenists, I have a feeling that it was the same bunch that Stephen was debating when Saul consented to his death. Saul seeks to carry on his torch, but God hadn't called him to the Jews, so it just didn't work out. They were going to kill him to, so the disciples sent him home.

Vs31

When did they experience peace, and edification? When Saul was gone. He wasn't where he was supposed to be, almost a "Jonah" type of a situation, it was just getting more and more stormy around him, but when he headed back to Gentile country... what do you know, immediately the seas were calmed. The churches were multiplied, and we have this note regarding the fear of the Lord and the comfort of the Holy Spirit that they walked in, meaning that they led lives of holiness, and the Holy Spirit gave them peace.

Vs32-35

So now that Saul has been separated from the situation whereby God is no doubt dealing with him and he's still no doubt serving the Lord in Tarsus, the narrative picks back up with the proceedings of Peter. and We see how God is still using his life in powerful and profound ways as he came down to Lydda, and he finds a man who had been paralyzed for 8 yrs. and The Lord gives to him a word of faith, he speaks it, and the man is made whole. Of course this is a picture of who we are before Christ makes us whole, paralyzed by sin, unable to in any way help or heal our own condition, unable to walk uprightly before God. But by grace through faith Jesus Christ heals us, makes us whole, and just like with this man God wants the testimony of what He's done in our lives to draw men unto Him.

Vs36-42

Super quick, notice this woman was a doer of good works, she didn't just think of nice things that would be neat to do, she did them. She was a blessing to the body of Christ, sorely

missed when she was gone. We're to be doers, we're to be here not to be served, but to serve and give of ourselves to others.

Then lastly, we see that Peter imitated Jesus in the healing of Jairus' daughter almost exactly in every detail. and You can read of it there in Mark Ch 5, but Peter was there when Jesus put the people out, turned to her and said, "Talitha Cumi" or "Little girl, arise" and now Peter puts the people out, turns around knelt down to pray and when he was finished he looked at her and said, "Tabitha Cumi" or arise, just like Jesus did, then he gave her his hand and presented her alive. and Let me tell you that you're never going to go wrong when it comes to ministry if you just mimic the master, we're called to imitate Christ, He's given us an example that we're to do as He has done.

Vs43

Prayer points.

Take heart in suffering, to be those who commune with You about man, and with man about You, that when we're let down we'd learn to look up and that we'd learn what it means to imitate You in all that we do.

If you're here and you don't know Jesus, you know in your own heart you're not walking uprightly before Jesus, perhaps paralyzed in sin, Jesus Christ wants to heal you, forgive you, make you whole today. He wants to give you the grace to walk uprightly before Him, He wants to forgive your sin, and set you apart unto Him.