



# SERMON NOTES

US N<sup>o</sup>. 105

Date: June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2013

Title: Paul's Damascus Journey

#13 in the Series on the Acts of the Apostles

## 1. Review

a. The early church

b. Just who is this man Saul?

### i. Bio

1. Tarsus; capital of the Roman province, Cilicia (southern Turkey) and the seat of a famous university, higher in reputation even than the universities of Athens and Alexandria.
2. Tribe of Benjamin; Phil. 3 :4-7, *"If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ."*
3. Born with Roman Citizenship which was extremely rare; Acts 22:27-29, *"Then the commander came and said to him, 'Tell me, are you a Roman?' He said, 'Yes.' The commander answered, 'With a large sum I obtained this citizenship.' And Paul said, 'But I was born a citizen.' Then immediately those who were about to examine him withdrew from him; and the commander was also afraid after he found out that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him."*
4. Taught under Gamaliel; Gamaliel, as it appears, did most toward establishing the honor in which the house of Hillel was held, and which secured to it a preeminent position within Palestinian Judaism soon after the destruction of the Temple. The title "*Rabban*," which, in the learned hierarchy until post-Hadrianic times, was borne only by presidents of the highest religious council, was first prefixed to the name of Gamaliel.
5. Party to Cilicians who debated and lost with Stephen.

### ii. Devoted to YHWH; extremely disciplined.

c. The Church flourishes under difficult conditions.

2. The Story; Gal. 1:12-18, *"For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ. For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it. And I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers. But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I*

went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and remained with him fifteen days."

- a. Paul breathing out threats and murder
  - i. That a Pharisee would go to a Sadducee (the High Priest) reveals the intensity of his rage.
  - ii. He's seeking to chase down those that have escaped; this is classic tactics for quelling an insurgency.
  - iii. In 37 AD Damascus passed from Roman control to Hareth of Petra, who in order to keep the Jews quiet allowed a higher level of autonomy that permitted them to commit further religious violence.
  - iv. The shift from teacher to inquisitor probably created inward consternation (ex. *"It is hard for you to kick against the goads."*)
- b. Church known as the Way
  - i. *"The Way"* was the name the early Christians gave themselves, probably in memory of Christ's words, *"I am the way..."* (cf. Jn. 14:6)
  - ii. Also describes the way of truth, duty, life and salvation for those that embrace the Gospel.
- c. Great light shines upon Paul; revelation versus discipline.
  - i. The glory of the Risen Lord
    - 1. Acts 26:13, *"I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining around me and those who journeyed with me."*
    - 2. 1 Cor. 15:8, *"He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time."*
    - 3. Acts 9:27, *"But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. And he [Barnabas] declared to them how he [Paul] had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had spoken to him..."*
  - ii. Paul, exposed to the light and glory of God, falls.
- d. The Voice speaks to him alone. None of the others understand what is said.
  - i. According to F.F. Bruce, the rabbis of Saul's day mostly believed that God no longer spoke to man directly, as He did in the days of the prophets. However, they believed that one could hear the "echo" of God's voice, what they called "the daughter of the voice of God." Here, Saul learned that one can hear God directly.
    - 1. Jn. 1:1, 14, *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."*
    - 2. Job 33:14, *"For God may speak in one way, or in another, yet man does not perceive it."*
- e. The interview
  - i. *"...why are you persecuting Me?"* Persecution of His disciples is persecution of Him.
    - 1. Luke 10:16, *"He who hears you hears Me, he who rejects you rejects Me, and he who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me."*
  - ii. Saul asks two extremely important questions that everyone must have answered.

1. *"Who are you, Lord?"* We must ask this question with a humble heart, and ask it to God. Jesus showed us exactly who God is, and He can answer this question.
2. *"Lord, what do You want me to do?"* Few dare to really ask God this question, but when we ask it, we must ask it with submission and determined obedience.
- iii. Jesus answers the two most important questions.
  1. I am Jesus whom You are persecuting.
    - a. Acts 22:8, *"I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting."*
  2. Arise and go.
    - a. Acts 9:6, *"Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."*
    - b. Acts 22:10, *"Arise and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all things which are appointed for you to do."*
    - c. Acts 26:16-18, *"But rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you. I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me."*
    - d. Jer. 29:11, *"For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope."*
- iv. Notice that Paul is *"trembling and astonished"* once he hears that it is Jesus who is addressing him. Realization begins to hit him.
- v. What is conversion? 1 Tim. 1:12-16, *"And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry, although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life."*
  1. Deep contrition and sorrow.
  2. Spiritual illumination
  3. Self-surrender
  4. New creation
- f. Paul has been blinded.
  - i. The *"grand inquisitor"* now enters Damascus helpless, humbled and saddened.
  - ii. No soul is beyond the reach of converting grace; divine grace is sovereign in the selection of its objects.
  - iii. 3 days of fasting and praying.

- g. Ananias with Jesus; a disciple of Jesus in Damascus.
    - i. We can well imagine that Ananias and the other believers were terrified as they awaited Saul, they knew their lives might be lost for the sake of Christ. They must have awaited his arrival at the city with great dread and now here God asks Ananias to go and confront the ringleader of the persecutors. Ananias takes the opportunity to remind God of Saul's credentials. Ananias showed weakness here. He did not have unwavering trust in God, but he was obedient.
    - ii. Jesus explains Paul's future special calling. God considered Saul His chosen vessel long before there appeared anything worthy in Saul to choose. God knew what *He* could make of Saul, even when Saul or Ananias didn't know.
  - h. Ananias with Paul
    - i. Immediately shows sympathy for Paul, ministering much needed mercy and grace to him.
    - ii. Laid his hands upon Paul and states his purpose: healing and infilling.
    - iii. Scales fall from Paul's eyes and he sees.
    - iv. Immediately he gets baptized with water identifying with the rabbi from Nazareth.
    - v. Spends time with the disciples.
    - vi. At this point Ananias fades from the story and we hear of him no more. His role in the drama of Acts is small, yet significant. He was a man who wavered when he heard God's voice, yet despite his initial hesitation he was faithful and obedient. God used this man to further His purposes in launching the career of the most influential of the apostles.
  - i. Paul preaches Jesus
    - i. The Holy Spirit creates an internal necessity for missionary work, He reveals the need of men for the remission of sins. Throughout the book of Acts, Luke presents the presence of the Holy Spirit as of primary importance.
    - ii. Saul would leave a life of privilege to embrace a higher call, but a call with much suffering.
3. Take-aways
- a. Discipline and revelation.
    - i. Revelation in the light of God's glory should result in humility, grief, and surrender eventually producing a new creation.
  - b. Spiritual vs. Soulical; Spiritual vs. Intellectual
  - c. Brokenness required
  - d. Ananias' small act of obedience led to a great harvest for the kingdom. And this is the lesson of Ananias. Small acts of obedience that are premised on the Word of God, even when they seem contrary to reason, and even when they seem to challenge what seems so plain, can have great significance. Our perspective is so small, so limited while God's is wide, taking in all of history in a single glance. We need to rely on Him, on His Word, on His voice, trusting that He will not lead us astray.