

The Demise of a Persecutor

Acts 9:1-9

Halifax: 4 March 2012

Introduction

Today, we come to one of the most important conversion accounts in all history!

- Luke presents it three times in Acts (Acts 9, 22- hostile Jews, 26- King Agrippa)
- It is important because:
 - It vindicates Paul as a true apostle (1 Cor 9:1, Gal 1:15-17)
 - It gives us a pattern of God's grace (1 Tim 1:12-17)
 - **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.**
 - It shows Christ's care for His church in limiting persecution (Ps. 57)
 - It shows us the power of Christ in subduing His enemies.
 - It is amazing that Saul, the ravenous beast, should be so quickly tamed!
 - This is the focus of verses 1-9 which we will consider today.

I. See here the bitter persecutor of Jesus

A. Saul was absolutely bent on stamping out Jesus' disciples.

1. We saw this back in 8:1, 3
 - "made havoc" (used of a ravenous beast)
 - brutal—
 - imprisoned both men and women
 - violence—39 lashes
 - wanted to destroy the church
2. He is *still* at it (v. 1)
 - *threats and murder*- the very air he breathes
 - Pursuing them to Damascus
 - Damascus was desert oasis 220 km north-north-west of Jerusalem
 - It had a large Jewish population (10,500 were killed by Rome in 66 AD)
 - Saul had letters from the high priest (who was happy to help)
 - bring them bound

- B. What fuelled his bitter opposition against the disciples of Jesus?
1. He hates Jesus (offence of the cross)
 - Cannot bear the doctrine of a suffering Messiah!
 - Considered it blasphemy
 - the cross is a direct contradiction to self-righteousness
 2. But he was sincere
- C. This hatred of Jesus is natural to all of us in our post-fallen condition.
1. same hatred—expressed in different way
 - (ignore him, play the hypocrite, false religion, excuses)
 2. We see this hatred written in bold lines with Paul.
 - It reveals our own...blind, hard, bitter...
 - We are offended by a crucified saviour
 3. We must all be confronted by the majesty of Jesus...
 - whether in the womb, in stages, in a crisis...
 - All must be tamed...

II. See how Jesus confronts Saul—and learn!

- A. Jesus reveals His glory to Saul— (glory as an angry judge)!
1. It was a great glory!
 - a light brighter than the desert sun!
 - It is the glory of God!
 2. Paul responds accordingly (he can do nothing else)
 - He falls on the ground (prostrate at the feet of the conqueror)
 - Here is the glory of God, and it is against him!
 3. See the nature of Jesus confrontation!
 - a. Not “I love you and have a wonderful plan for your life...”
 - But “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me!”
 - 1) The repetition of the name is significant...
 - It indicates intensity...
 - It is often used by God (as Paul knew)
 - **Gen 22:11: But the Angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, “Abraham, Abraham!” So he said, “Here I am.”**
 - **Ex 3:4-5: God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, “Moses, Moses!” And he said, “Here I am.” Then He said, "Do not draw near this place. Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand *is* holy ground.”**
 - **1 Sam 3:10: Now the LORD came and stood and called as at other times, “Samuel! Samuel!” And Samuel answered, “Speak, for Your servant hears.”**

2) The awful question hits... **“Why are you persecuting me?”**

- Followed by the awful reality...
 - “I am Jesus whom you are persecuting!”
 - The Lord of glory was speaking!
- How deeply this must have cut!
 - How wrong he had been!

3) Jesus tells him that he is being like a stupid ox to go on...

- (taken from chapter 26)

b. Everything is designed to humble this proud man...

- the light, the voice, the rebuke...
- no comfort is given at this time...
- blindness comes—
 - **Deuteronomy 28:28-29: The LORD will strike you with madness and blindness and confusion of heart. And you shall grope at noonday, as a blind man gropes in darkness;**
 - The brilliant scholar cannot see a thing!

TRANS> The ravenous persecutor has been put in his place—under the feet of Jesus!

- There is no candy-coated gospel, but a piercing sword!

B. This is the predominant way the gospel is introduced in the Bible!

1. Consider...

- a. John the Baptist
 - **Matt 3:1-2, 7: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!...flee from the wrath to come”**
 - b. Jesus’ normal message:
 - **Matt 4:17 From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”**
 - c. At Pentecost, Peter rebuked the Jews...
 - d. At Lystra and Athens—idolaters confronted.
2. Where did we ever get the “God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life” gospel?
- a. His great love is revealed in the gospel—but the message does not begin there.
 - b. It begins with a sword that cuts us down

C. Do you see?

- 1. We must be put in our proper place
 - Not the same experience as Paul—but the same result—beaten down.
- 2. And indeed, everyone **will** be brought to this place—
 - Day of judgement!—Jesus comes in full glory!
 - How meek and mild all will be in that day!

TRANS> But it behoves you to come to grips with His lordship before that great day!

III. See how Saul, our pattern, is subdued under Christ!

- **This is what you must be if you would be saved!**
- **Are you? Are you subdued?**

A. Like Paul, you must be broken...

1. He had been so sure, so proud, so insolent...
 - but now he was cut to the heart!
 - He saw that his whole life had been wrong.
2. Everything about us is wrong too—
 - We need forgiveness. We need mercy. We need to be changed.

B. Like Paul, you must be teachable

1. In v. 5 He says: “Who are you Lord?”
 - Some have said that “Lord” here is simply “sir”!
 - Not so—a dude with a flash light and big voice?
2. When you meet the Lord of glory, you are ready to be taught by Him!
 - You sit at His feet...
 - You hunger to learn of him... you know that you are wrong and he is right.
 - You receive His word to judge you, not you to judge it!

C. Like Paul, you must become meek and submissive!

1. What a wonderful, beautiful change!
 - from the independent raging persecutor to the trembling, astonished, submissive, “Lord, what do you want me to do?” servant.
 - (this question is inserted here from chapter 22)
 - He enters the city in a very different way than he had planned!
 - Not in pride and self-confidence; humbled, blinded and captive to Jesus.
2. Once you are apprehended by Jesus as the Lord of glory,
 - You become His ready follower...
 - No longer is your life your own—it is His—fully His...
 - The great issue for you now is, “What does the Lord want me to do?”
 - not pragmatism,
 - not my desires,
 - Everything is about Him—the Lord of glory.
3. And look, the LORD does not even tell Paul what to do Himself...
 - a. He tells him to go into Damascus and that he will be told what to do...
 - This is the test of Saul’s meekness...(like the Eunuch- faith to faith)
 - b. Many today want to hear directly from Jesus—
 - Rather apostles, teachers.

D. Like Paul, you must humbly seek the Lord...

1. Paul is forced to wait for the instruction he so desperately needs...
 - darkness for three days (Egyptians)
2. We are told here that he fasted...
 - desperate praying!
3. That is what happens to you when you are apprehended of the Lord...
 - From Jacob to Israel!
 - Nothing matters but obtaining Jesus' blessing!

Conclusion> This is how the Lord of Glory breaks sinners so that they will receive the gospel.

- What amazing power it is that breaks sinners like Saul!
 - This is the majesty that breaks every true child of God
 - Our testimony is that of Psalm 131.
 - **Psalm 131: LORD, my heart is not haughty, Nor my eyes lofty. Neither do I concern myself with great matters, Nor with things too profound for me. Surely I have calmed and quieted my soul, Like a weaned child with his mother; Like a weaned child is my soul within me. O Israel, hope in the LORD From this time forth and forever.**
- It is not about having the same experience as Paul as to the details...
 - It is about having:
 - the same brokenness over your sin,
 - the same teachableness,
 - the same meekness and submission,
 - and the same yearning for the blessing of Jesus.

So **have** you been confronted by the glory of the risen Christ?

- Are you broken?
- Are you teachable?
- Are you meek and submissive?
- Are you earnestly praying for blessing from Jesus?