

A Pattern of Mercy
Acts 9:10-19
Halifax: 11 March 2012

Introduction:

Last week began looking at 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 for a number of reasons...
 - 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.
 - If He can subdue Paul, He can subdue anyone!
 - Paul was broken before His glory! (broken, teachable, meek, and left desperate to have His blessing-- His mercy.)
 - We must be brought to this place...desperate for mercy!
- This week we come to see how that mercy was given to him.
 - not give right away...
 - Sure, it was mercy to stop Him--
 - but there was no immediate comfort or promise of forgiveness...
 - He was left in the mire for a time
 - It does not have to be this way, but often is this way.
- But though the details can be different, Paul is given as a pattern of mercy for us...
 - As Paul himself says in Timothy--
 - The way Christ dealt with him is a pattern of mercy to all who would believe after.
 - He is like a New Testament Abraham-- for the Gentiles (though a Jew).

I. First, see God's mercy in preparing the church to receive their (His and their) former enemies.

- A. First, see how the Lord gives His church a wonderful disposition to do His will.
1. It is a disposition that says, “Here I am” when He calls.
 - Verse 10: **Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and to him the Lord said in a vision, “Ananias.” And he said, “Here I am, Lord.”**
 - a. Isn’t that a great response?
 - a way of putting yourself at His disposal...
 - a way of saying what every believer ought to say to God... “Here I am”
 - as you start each day-- who are we living for
 - as you enter a marriage
 - as you begin as parents
 - every time read his word
 - as situations arrive in which we know His revealed will
 - b. These words have a very significant history...
 - *Abraham* in Gen 22 (called to offer Isaac)
 - And again when God said to refrain from offering him
 - *Jacob* (while labouring for Laban)
 - *Moses* (burning bush (Ex 3:4).
 - *Isaiah* (Isaiah 6:8)
 2. This is the disposition that God gives to every believer...
 - a. He promised (Jer 31)
 - b. our *default position* as believers: “Lord, here I am!”
 - c. Is this your disposition?
 3. The Lord is very specific about what He wants Ananias to do.
 - **Acts 9:11-12: So the Lord said to him, “Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he is praying. And in a vision he has seen a man named Ananias coming in and putting his hand on him, so that he might receive his sight.”**
 - Ananias certainly knows *what* to do.
 - a. God speaks very clearly to you as well...
 - not in a vision-- in His Word-- better
 - You know what to do when...
 - tempted to lie...
 - asked to do something not suited to the Lord’s Day...
 - your neighbour has wronged you...
 - you have wronged your brother...
 - your unbelieving neighbour is out of work...
 - You know **what** to do!
 - But sometimes it does not seem reasonable!

TRANS> Praise God that His instructions are clear!

B. We often struggle when instruction comes...

1. So it was with Ananias

- **Acts 9:13-14: Then Ananias answered, “Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem. And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name.”**

a. We can't be too hard on him.

- knew of Saul
- Osama Ben Laden!

b. Sometimes we just don't want to do what God says...

- doing good to our enemy!
 - Reaching out to a needy person
 - obeying our parents
- More specifically-- welcoming people into the church...
 - Some believers struggle with this!
 - Never let it be so! We must be a welcoming church.
 - I'm very thankful that I have not seen that to be a problem among you.

2. The Lord prepares Ananias to welcome Paul!

a. Jesus never does the welcoming Himself... it's our job.

- as with the Eunuch-- “from faith to faith”
 - Here it is a humble disciple chosen to welcome Paul.
- He mediates His mercy through us.
 - Rome goes to one extreme-- making the church the mediator...
 - But some modern evangelicals go to the opposite extreme and remove the church.
- Calvin speaks of God as our Father and the church as our mother.
 - Westminster Confession-- “no ordinary possibility of salvation”

b. See how the Lord gently prepares Ananias to welcome this arch enemy!

- tells him what His plans are for Saul:
 - **Acts 9:15-16: But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake.”**
 - No longer will Saul be the cause, but the recipient of the church's suffering.

- c. He also prepares us (as a congregation) to welcome sinners!
 - In the early days, we had to receive a man who stole thousands from us.

C. God's preparing of the church is a great mercy to three parties...

1. to Saul himself
2. to the church-
 - Ananias had no idea!
 - The man who had done so much harm would do so much more good!
3. to the Gentiles
 - Saul was Jesus' chosen vessel
 - A vessel is an instrument (what an instrument he was!)
 - A vessel carries things (God's grace!)
 - What loss if Ananias had not received him!
 - He'd still be wallowing in the mire.
4. We do ourselves a great favour to welcome even our greatest enemies.
 - Even before they repent... try to win them!

II. Second, see God's mercy in preparing His former enemies to come to His church.

A. How wondrously Saul was prepared!

1. There must always be a double preparation-- (of the church, of the sinner)
 - Saul had to be prepared to receive the church.
 - just three days before-- not at all prepared!
 - now ready to be baptised immediately.
 - not all are ready right away.
 - when they are-- must not withhold baptism!
2. Consider-- Jesus had the church do the baptising.
 - He does not do it
 - Even the apostles did not generally do it-- local elders!
 - The Lord designed it this way
 - no disciple is to stand outside the body
 - this is why the Lord's Supper is forbidden...
 - can talk of submission to Jesus-- but must submit to the officers He has appointed.
 - reject a king's ambassadors-- reject the king.

B. Preparing this man to come into the church was God's work of mercy--

1. It was a mercy to all parties as we say...

- to the church-- he was coming to destroy
 - to Saul-- that he might be saved
 - to the Gentiles-- who would receive his ministry
2. God must do this work!
- Some are afraid of the church
 - Some despise the church
 - Some have no thought of it
 - Pray that God would prepare those who have not come.

C. How powerful was God's grace as we saw last week!

- Saul was transformed from a blood-thirsty hunter to a humble seeker!
- We saw that all whom Christ apprehends must become...
 - broken over their sin...
 - teachable-- ready to receive instruction from the Lord (all I knew was wrong)
 - meek and submissive-- ready to do the Lord's will-- even by a humble disciple like Ananias.
 - A humble seeker of the Lord-- earnestly fasting and praying... desperate for mercy and grace-- unable to live without them!
- How different Saul was when Ananias came to him than he would have been had God not prepared him!

TRANS> So you see the mercy of God that prepared the church (in this case, but one disciple) to receive Saul and Saul to come into the church.

- How marvellous that He does!
 - But it goes without saying that it is not enough for Saul to be prepared to come and the church to be prepared to receive him...
 - He must come and receive the blessed gospel!
 - He must come and receive the mercy that the Lord has for all who come to Him.

III. Third, see God's mercy in the blessing the Lord gives to His former enemies.

- As we look at this, remember that we were all enemies until God reconciled us!
 - O, this is a sweet text!

A. Ananias goes to this arch enemy and lays hands on him, calling him brother!

- **Acts 9:17: And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me..."**

1. Jesus had, to this point, only rebuked Saul...

- But now, in the person of His servant Ananias, He welcomes him!
 - The very one who tried to destroy Him-- Jesus.
 - The very one who tried to destroy His disciples.
 - The very one who had come with plans to destroy Ananias...
 - And now he is welcomed as a “brother!”
2. What this meant for all parties!
- The church was safe from this beast-- he was now their brother!
 - How sweet this was for Saul-- he had done so much against them and now he is called “brother!”
3. Reconciliation is what happens when people are saved!
- The spears are transformed into pruning hooks...
 - And the swords are turned into plough shares...
 - Now, instead of attacking, their mutual help and care...
 - Bonds of love have replaced prison shackles and chains.
 - See that Christ has such an impact on your relationships with your brothers and sisters.
 - Is the savour of brotherly love and kindness evident in your home?
 - Is there true care and fidelity?
 - Is there tenderness between husbands and wives?
 - Is there a laying down of your life for each other in the church?
 - What a marvellous mercy it is!

TRANS> Look at the next mercy that is mentioned...

B. The curse of blindness is removed

1. You see how this is described... v. 17 (again)
- **Acts 9:17-18: And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he 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.” Immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he received his sight at once;**
- a. I mentioned to you last week that Saul was struck with blindness as a curse...
- He certainly knew Dt. 28:
 - **Deut 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;**
- b. And now the scales fall!
- He is no longer under a curse!

2. And though this was clearly physical blindness, it was full of symbolism!
 - a. He was one of the most learned men of his day-- yet totally blind!
 - It just shows how blind a brilliant, educated man can be!
 - God's wonderful symbolism.
 - If he was to see anything, Jesus would have to give him sight!
 - b. And now Jesus does!
 - With the opening of his physical eyes, the light of the gospel came flooding into his soul.
 - Not that it had to happen "at that very moment"
 - That is western thinking...
 - The symbolism is there-- it is associated with the spiritual blindness.
 - c. And now this man who had been in the darkness was delivered from the curse.
 - Just think what rich truths came flooding into his soul!
 - The cross that had been so offensive was now his glory!
 - All those rich OT prophecies he knew so well were now pulsing with life-- filled with Jesus!
 - Now this man of blindness would be a great source of light to the nations!
 - As the curse was removed from him,
 - so it would be removed from them...
 - "the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ" would "shine on them" through "the foolishness of preaching"
 - And they will see glorious forgiveness!
 - What a blessing it is when the LORD opens your eyes to see Jesus!
 - Has He opened your eyes?
 - Have you seen?

C. The Holy Spirit is poured out

1. Here is the great promised blessing of God under the New Covenant!
 - All who belong to Jesus Christ are given the Holy Spirit!
 - Jesus is the one who baptises with the Spirit, so no one who has the Spirit has Him but through Jesus-- and all who come to Jesus receive Him.
 - As Saul received him, just think of all the Gentiles that were going to receive Him through Paul's ministry!

- Here is God's mercy to Saul and to all those he would minister to-- and continues to minister to this day in his epistles which have so much to say about the Holy Spirit.
2. What a mercy this was for Saul... what a mercy for all of us!
 - a. He gives us comfort-- Spirit of sonship who bears witness that we are sons.
 - b. He empowers us for battle-- to fight against temptation and the devil.
 - c. He enables us to pray-- as the one who intercedes within us
 - d. He strengthens us for service-- so that our labour is in the Lord with His gifts
 - e. He is the Spirit of sanctification-- who transforms us by the renewing of our minds.
 - f. Most of all-- He reveals Christ to us who is filled with the Father's glory.

TRANS> This is what Saul had been waiting for those three days of fasting!

- I don't know why, but many commentators act as though he received everything on Damascus road!
 - It was then that Jesus knocked him down...
 - It was when Ananias came that the mercy of the gospel was received!

D. And there was yet one more New Covenant blessing that he received... baptism!

1. In this wonderful ceremony, the Lord declares to us the washing away of sin through faith in Him.
 - How Saul must have rejoiced when Ananias told him that he was to be baptised!
 - He was the chief of sinners!
 - How he must have yearned to be told, "your sins are forgiven!"
 - He now knew so well that Jesus had the power on earth to forgive sins!
 - Indeed, the Son of God crucified!
 - And now it was for him-- for Saul of Tarsus!
 - How this must have thrilled him beyond measure!
 - Do you know the joy of forgiveness?
 - I say again, this was not just for him, but for all those Gentiles that Jesus was sending Him to who would hear the gospel through him!
2. And not only did baptism represent total forgiveness--
 - It also testified to his inclusion into the body of Christ--
 - That he was a member of the one he had tried to destroy!
 - That he had full fellowship with the head and with all the members.
 - That he had a permanent inheritance in His house.
 - That he was given a new name and a new heart and a new life.

- And yes, that he was baptised into his death and would, in this world, bear many sorrows and afflictions for Him.
- How gladly he would-- yearning to be less like the sinful Saul of Tarsus and more and more like the holy Jesus of Nazareth!

3. Are you baptised into Jesus name?

- See that it is not in vain!
 - There is so much promised to you here, but you must believe or it is but an empty sign—no, worse than that--
 - a condemning sign because it shows you the promises that were held out to you and you would not take.
 - See that this is not the case with any of you!
 - All this mercy is there for you if you will have it through Jesus!
 - He prepares the church for you and you for the church...
 - And then He gives you all this marvellous mercy...
 - Mercy for even the chief of sinners!
 - Full acceptance as a brother!
 - The curse removed forever!
 - The gift of the Holy Spirit!
 - And baptism into the New Covenant!