

Observations of the Opening Moments of Christian Conversion

When Ananias was told to find Saul, the man who would become the great Lion for God, the Apostle Paul, these words were spoken, *"And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and enquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth"* (Acts 9:11). As we break this verse apart that tells us of the opening moments of Paul's Christian experience we discover some things about him that might well be said about us. Firstly, he would be found in...

I. The Street Called Straight

It is no coincidence that the name of the street that became Paul's first home after being saved is called "straight." The Greek word is: *euthus*, which means: straight, level, straight forward, upright, true, sincere. Paul was educated as fine as any man alive on earth at that time. He sat at the feet of the very celebrated Jewish doctor Gamaliel, grandson of Hillel, and who is referred to as authority in the Jewish Mishna (Acts 22:3). It is estimated that in today's terms he would have the equivalency of three PhD's. With all of this, he later said, *"Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ"* (Philippians 3:8).

After his conversion, Paul was dedicated to the "straight and narrow" (Matthew 7:13, 14). It was prophesied by John the Baptist when the Messiah would come and *"every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth"* (Luke 3:5).

We, too, at point of conversion and following should not only allow, but invite the Lord to straighten every crooked thing in our life.

In examining this verse again, we secondly find this new disciple in...

II. A House of Praise

The Bible says he will be found *"...in the house of Judas..."* (Acts 9:11). The name "Judas" means, "He shall be praised." We discover the way to enter into God's manifested presence is to praise Him! *"Serve the LORD with gladness: come before his presence with singing. Know ye that the LORD he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name"* (Psalm 100:2-4).

Have you ever been in a hurry when you are getting dressed and in your haste in buttoning up your shirt, you missed a button? The only remedy is to completely unbutton it and start again. In the same way, if there is something missing in our prayer life, it is good to start all over by opening up to God in praise. If we leave off praise, then the avenue of prayer will become a clogged and an unanswered exercise. Praise assures us that God will show up when we begin to dialogue with Him. In the early stages and continuum of Christian experience, it will do us well to remember that praise is the key that unlocks the mystery of answered prayer. We cannot have one without the other. Psalm 76:1 distinctly says, *"In Judah (Praise) is God known: his name is great in Israel."*

Thirdly, we discover from our text, Paul would be a man who is appointed for...

III. A Name Change

"...for one called Saul, of Tarsus..." (Acts 9:11). When you read that Paul was being referred to as Saul of Tarsus you might have thought I was referring to someone else. According to II Corinthians

5:17, you would be correct because Paul became, like you or me, a new creature in Christ at point of conversion.

Paul originally bore the name "Saul," the name of the first king of Israel. The name Saul means "desired." Since Israel demanded a king, God's desire and choice was Saul. Saul lost his throne because he forgot who and what he was when God found him. *"And Samuel said, When thou wast little in thine own sight, wast thou not made the head of the tribes of Israel, and the LORD anointed thee king over Israel?"* (I Samuel 15:17).

When God wanted to raise up a man to lead the early church, He chose a royal gem, also from the same genetic roots of the first Israeli king, *"...For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin"* (Romans 11:1). It is important to observe the name God gave Saul. The name Paul means "small" or "little." It is as though God is saying to Paul, "I want a lifetime of service from you, so the key to usability in my vineyard is to stay small in your own sight." God is on the look-out for those who will be small enough to use! God desires to be evermore the great and wonderful God in the eyes of all to whom we serve; it is difficult for Him to be displayed on the grand scale, if we become too big for Him to use. God will share His glory with no one!

Fourthly, we see from Acts 9:11, Paul was to begin an activity that would bring...

IV. Heaven and Earth Closer to Each Other

The Word says, *"...for, behold, he prayeth..."* (Acts 9:11). On 9/11/01, America found herself praying. In 9-11 of the Book of Acts, it would do us good to know that the leader of the early church began his Christian life by setting the precedent of prayer. We have had a wake-up call during the past almost three years. We need to stay by the stuff in prayer. Jesus said, *"...men ought always to pray, and not to faint"* (Luke 18:1).

Nothing we do will bring heaven closer to earth than prayer. S.D. Gordon said, "The greatest thing anyone can do for God and man is pray. It is not the only thing; but it is the chief thing. The great people of the earth today are the people who pray. I do not mean those who talk about prayer; nor those who say they believe in prayer; nor yet those who can explain about prayer; but I mean those who take time to pray." May God find us in the activity His young disciple was involved in when he told Ananias, *"...behold he prayeth."*

God was saying, "When you find my new disciple, you'll find him praying." The foremost activity in learning the ways of God is through the avenue of prayer. Before we walk or run for Jesus, we must know the value of waiting on the Lord in prayer.

- Pastor Pope -

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