

Saul's Early Ministry

Acts 9:26-31

In Acts 9, as Luke finishes up his introduction to the conversion and earliest ministries of Saul of Tarsus, the one who would become Paul, the Apostle; he shares with us one more incident of the very humbling beginnings of the Apostle.

Look with me if you would at Acts 9:23-25, as we begin where we left off last time - as Paul (or actually Saul at this point) slips out of Damascus in much the same way as a common criminal would to avoid the authorities.

Acts 9

²³ Now after many days were past, the Jews plotted to kill him. ²⁴ But their plot became known to Saul. And they watched the gates day and night, to kill him. ²⁵ Then the disciples took him by night and let him down through the wall in a large basket.

A couple of weeks ago we touched on the fact that later in his ministry, the then Apostle Paul told the Corinthians Church a little more detail, but in full agreement with the words of Luke in Acts –

2 Corinthians 11

³² In Damascus the governor, under Aretas the king, was guarding the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desiring to arrest me; ³³ but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and escaped from his hands.

In the midst of his earliest ministry efforts, Saul was able to **really tick people off**. Here, not only were the Jews after him, but the governor of the region had sent out a garrison of soldiers. And so Saul, with the help of several unknown brothers and possibly sisters was placed in a large basket and snuck out of the city under the cover of darkness.

At this point we go back to Luke record and we find that Saul was then headed up to Jerusalem. Jerusalem, the place where all of this started – yes

- The crucifixion, death, burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus,
- The Upper Room experience, with the coming of the Holy Spirit in power,
- The birth of the Church,
- The message of Peter and the conversion of thousands,

- The growth of the Church and subsequent problems,
- The stoning of Steven, a servant of the Church,
- The growing intensity of the persecution against all in the Church
- The influence, impact, and driving force of a young Pharisee by the name of Saul of Tarsus as he moved to destroy Christianity and all those who follow after the teachings of this man Jesus.

When Saul first left Jerusalem, a little over three years prior to this time, he was a man of **great power among the Jews and a great threat to all Christians**. He now returns as one who has become a **part of the Body of Believers and the Body of Christ**. He comes back to Jerusalem to make his conversion known to the disciples in Jerusalem.

And if you think they were waiting to welcome him with open arms, then you really don't understand the fear and the anxiety the disciples lived under as they were persecuted for their beliefs. Look at verse 26 –

²⁶ And when Saul had come to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, and did not believe that he was a disciple.

Some think that even after three years, the **word of Saul's conversion hadn't made it to Jerusalem**. However, whenever I read about this phase in Saul's life ***I think a bit of our own human nature and how we respond to things.***

A couple of weeks ago we spoke of the Apostles word to the Church at Galatia, how Paul told them that he **left for three years before coming back to Damascus and then at that time went up to Jerusalem**. I believe that the conversion of Saul of Tarsus was made known **very quickly to the whole area**. This was a man known for his vicious attacks on Christians. I believe his story was told to the Believers even in Jerusalem... **but then he vanished for three years**.

I wonder if the Church in Jerusalem was concerned about **1) the reality of his conversion and 2) did it really stick or was it simply a phase he was going through...** after all, **no one had heard from him in three years**. Now he's coming to Jerusalem...

...but they were all afraid of him, and did not believe that he was a disciple.

Then Luke tells us –

²⁷ But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. And he declared to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus.

You will remember this Barnabus from back in Acts 4.

Acts 4

³⁶ And Joses, who was also named Barnabas by the apostles (which is translated Son of Encouragement), a Levite of the country of Cyprus, ³⁷ having land, sold it, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.

His name was Joses, but the Apostles had given him the name of Barnabus, Son of Encouragement, or the Encouraging One. There was something about Barnabus that God was using in a powerful way – he had what is known as the *Gift of Encouragement*. And, he moved in that gift – when he knew the need of the moment:

- He was one who was willing to step out in faith and give...
- He was one who was willing to go outside of his comfort zone to assist someone who was being shunned by the others...
- He was even willing to put his well-being and even life on the line to bring someone together with the Household of Faith

He was **gifted by the Holy Spirit** and because of his trust in **the hand of God in his life**, he wasn't afraid to step out in his gift

So, Barnabus brings Saul of Tarsus, the former persecutor of Christians to the Apostle Peter and introduces him as not only a fellow Believer, but also an Evangelist and Apologist for the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

It is actually from the writings of Paul the Apostle that we come to know only a little more about the interaction he had with Peter.

Galatians 1

¹⁸ Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and remained with him fifteen days. ¹⁹ But I saw none of the other apostles except James, the Lord's brother.

At the beginning, there was still no great outpouring of love for this new convert. He tells us he only saw peter and James, the half-brother of Jesus. What about the rest of

them? Were they guarding their presence until he could be proved out, as far as his true conversion?

He tells us that he was only with Peter for fifteen days, but Luke tells us in verse 28 –

²⁸ *So he was with them at Jerusalem, coming in and going out.*

We don't know for certain how long he was in Jerusalem during this trip – he did visit with Peter for 15 days. Those had to be some powerful days of exchange as Peter warmed up to the reality of the conversion and began sharing with Saul all early days he and the other Apostles had together with the Lord Jesus. The teachings, the miracles, the demonstration of love and grace, simply flowing out of the Lord's very presence.

I would imagine that Peter would have shared with him the time that Jesus allowed him to walk on water, and the time Peter himself declared that “*Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the Living God*”, oh those were the days!! But I wonder if he would have shared with Saul about the time that he tried to tell Jesus what to do and what He didn't have to do – the time when Jesus looked him square in the face and “*rebuked Peter, saying, "Get behind Me, Satan! For you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men."* (Mark 8:33)

Peter would have shared with him about the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord, but I wonder how much he would have shared with him about his brashness in the Upper Room declaring that “*even if all deny you, I'll stand with you*”, or the time in the Garden when he acted so rashly with a sword, or how during the trial, Peter himself denied the Lord three different times. I wonder how much Peter shared with Saul. How much of your journey would you share?

We don't know how long he was at Jerusalem, but we do know he met with Peter for 15 days, then *them at Jerusalem, coming in and going out*. And Saul didn't spend all of his time simply with the brethren. Luke tells us he was busily about sharing the Gospel and debating or disputing with those who were the enemy of the Gospel.

²⁹ *And he (Saul) spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus and disputed against the Hellenists, but they attempted to kill him.* ³⁰ *When the brethren found out, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him out to Tarsus.*

Did you catch which group he was disputing with? The Hellenist Jews. These were the ones he was with as they stoned Stephen. Luke tells us very clearly –

Acts 7

⁵⁸ *(As the Hellenist Jews cast Stephen out of the city and began to stone him to death,) the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul.*

^{8:1} *Now Saul was consenting to his death.*

Saul had been with this group before his conversion, now he finds himself disputing with them. Probably actually saying the same things Stephen had said to them. And although they had been friends or at least comrades in the past, these Hellenist Jews were not listening to the truth being presented to them and – *they attempted to kill him.*

Saul is going to find that everywhere he goes, as he shares the Gospel message of eternal life and forgiveness of sin through faith in Jesus Christ, there will be those who will receive the message and come to a saving faith in Christ, those who will ignore the message, and those who will stand against it with every fiber of their being.

It is later in his ministry that Paul the Apostle declares –

1 Corinthians 1

¹⁸ *For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.*

It is the preaching of the cross that brings an offense to those who willingly reject the message of the Gospel. Saul is only just now learning this and he will learn many more lessons in his journey of faith and ministry. Here, those who had been comrades, now seek to take his life because he is now preaching the message of the cross –

³⁰ *When the brethren found out, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him out to Tarsus.*

It was years later that the Apostle Paul gives testimony of this time to a crowd there in Jerusalem after a conflict in the Temple. Paul gets to share with them about his conversion experience and his time in those days while he was at Jerusalem –

Acts 22

¹⁷ "Now it happened, when I returned to Jerusalem (from Damascus) and was praying in the temple, that I was in a trance ¹⁸ and saw (the Lord Jesus) saying to me, 'Make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly, for they will not receive your testimony concerning Me.'¹⁹ So I said, 'Lord, they know that in every synagogue I imprisoned and beat those who believe on You. ²⁰ And when the blood of Your martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by consenting to his death, and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him.'

²¹ "Then He said to me, 'Depart, for I will send you far from here to the Gentiles.'"

Undoubtedly, as Saul relayed this vision to the Brethren there in Jerusalem, that were we find in Acts 9 –

³⁰ *When the brethren found out, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him out to Tarsus.*

And, it would seem that once Saul was out of the region, we find here in Acts 9, verse 31 –

³¹ *Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied.*

It is at this point that within Luke's report here in Acts, Saul literally disappears from the scene once more – at least for a season. The disciples in Jerusalem sent him back to Tarsus, his home city. For his safety no doubt, but perhaps also for a time of continued growth and preparation.

He's now returning for the first time since his conversion to the place of his childhood. Perhaps aged parents and brothers or sisters are there to greet him, but also to find there has been a dynamic change in this one they knew to be moving up the ladder of Jewish leadership. Now he has not only turned to the teachings of this Rabbi from Nazareth, but he is becoming an enemy of his former peers.

He is now a fugitive of two great cities: Damascus and Jerusalem; and he has turned his back on the sect of Judaism he had worked toward his entire adult life.

Would his family and hometown accept the message of the Gospel or would they reject it. Once again we go to the Apostle Paul's writings in Galatians –

Galatians 1

²¹ Afterward I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. ²² And I was unknown by face to the churches of Judea which were in Christ. ²³ But they were hearing only, "He who formerly persecuted us now preaches the faith which he once tried to destroy." ²⁴ And they glorified God in me.

But even this report isn't sufficient to tell us all that the Apostle went through during this second time of exile. Some believe that much of what he tells us of his suffering took place during this time frame, since once he returns to the pages of Acts, there are some things which we read in his testimony in 2 Corinthians that can't be equated with the events of Acts, such as five differing times being beaten by the Jews; we know of one ship wreck, but Paul speaks of three. Since Luke gives a pretty accurate account of the Apostles life and ministry once we get to the end of chapter 11 and then on through the rest of the book, we have to believe that much of this suffering took place while he was separate from the leadership in Jerusalem and while he was, in essence, ministering alone in the areas of Syria and Cilicia.

Before we move on into the missionary journeys of the Apostle Peter, beginning here in Acts 9:32; before we move away from this portion of the life, conversion and early ministry of Saul of Tarsus; I want to bring your mind back to some individuals who had impacted his life – both before his conversion, as well as after.

We spoke of the impact of Ananias last week. A man we have no history on, either before the conversion of Saul or after – other than how God used this "unknown Believer" to get Saul back on his feet and get him moving in the right direction.

We've already looked at Stephen, and although the scripture is silent on this case, in his later ministry Paul brings up Stephen a couple of times. I personally wonder how much Stephen's message and his faithfulness to Christ, even while being stoned to death impacted the angry Jewish Pharisee of the Pharisees. He no doubt saw in Stephen something that he did not have in his own life.

Today we returned to the man Barnabus. We will see that Barnabus has a big influence on Saul's life once we get into chapter 11, but then we see they also have a falling out of sorts once we come to chapter 15.

These three men, not to mention the unnamed Believers in Damascus and Jerusalem, each of them having some influence on this new convert, yet gifted messenger of God.

When you pause to reflect on these men, particularly the three – Stephen, Ananias, and Barnabus – you see God using three different individuals with three differing callings and giftings. God uses each one in specific ways and at specific times in the life of Saul (soon to be the Apostle Paul). And once again I am reminded of both the diversity and necessity of each and every member of the Body of Christ.

In these closing minutes I want to segue into the words of Paul the Apostle. He saw it fulfilled in his own early Christian life, he saw it fulfilled in the life of the Church in a variety of locations and culture, but in all of it he continues to speak of the Believers united together as the Body of Christ, each having gifts differing and purposes differing, but united all for Christ, for the glory of the Kingdom of God, and for the building up of His Bride – the Church.

He tells us in Romans –

Romans 12

⁴ For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, ⁵ so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. ⁶ Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them:

Then again in 1 Corinthians –

1 Corinthians 12

¹² For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ.

²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.

My guess would be that the Apostle himself would have seen the importance of each of these individuals, and countless others throughout his ministry as an important part of

the plan of God... not only for his life personally, but for the growth of the Church and God's Kingdom.

There is not a single one of us here today, but that through God's providence He has brought into our lives parents or other family members, friends, a co-worker, or neighbor who demonstrated the truth of God's promises by word or actions;

For some it was the faithfulness of a Sunday School teacher who was devoted to teach the Word of God, week in and week out to students who didn't seem to hear, yet those were the very words which had great impact on your life;

For some of us, we saw the power of the Holy Spirit of God in an individual's life in a way that we never knew existed, and we were jealous for more – more of God and more of a surrender of our own life to Him;

For others of us, even after we had blown it big time – again, and were rejected by many, there that one who was the very ***touch of Jesus*** compelling us and encouraging us to not give up, but to forget *“those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, (to) press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”* (Philippians 3:13-14)

We've all had those people in our lives and therefore we all need to be those kinds of people in the lives of those who God places before us:

For some, you'll will be like a Stephen – the very testimony and strength of witness and character will stir the hearts of someone you may not thing is watching.

For others, you'll be like Ananias, the Lord will bring someone into your life for just a moment of time – what will you do with that moment? Will they see Jesus in you? Will they hear words of truth and blessing? Then they pass out of your life, and you never hear the outcome of your time with them – you can only trust the faithfulness of God.

And for others, God has called you to be an intentional Barnabus – an encourager who goes beyond comfort zone, who goes beyond to touch the life of someone who others

may reject, ignore, or not trust. Yet the lord has called you to be the one who connects them fully with the Body of Christ. Connecting them in order that they would be blessed, but also in order for them to be a blessing through the gifts God has given to them.

Beloved, the blood of Christ was shed for such as these. His mercy extends to those who downhearted, His grace extends to those who are lost in this dark and dying world. His Holy Spirit desires to overwhelm those who have grown weary in doing well.

Who will be a Stephen, an Ananias, or a Barnabus among us? Thus allowing God to use us as His channel of blessing to another.