

GTW – Acts of the Holy Spirit – Acts 9:1-43

“Saul’s Persecution of the Church; Saul’s Conversion Experience; Saul Blindness and Healing; Saul Preaching Christ as Lord; Peter’s Continued Ministry”

October 14, 2020 – Dr. C. Patrick Hartsock

Saul was the ringleader of the outset and continuation of the persecution of the Church.

- “Meanwhile, Saul was **still** breathing out murderous threats against the Lord’s disciples.” Acts 9:1
 - The Jews dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named **Saul**. Acts 7:58
 - “And **Saul** approved of his execution. And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem...” Acts 8:1
 - ³“But **Saul** began to **destroy** (*lymainomai* = destroying, devastating, ravaging) the church. Going **from house to house** (the strength and form of the early church, especially as it began in Jerusalem – “they met from house to house”) he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison.” Acts 8:3
 - **Saul** was determined to destroy the church in Jerusalem before it grew. Little did he know how sovereign the Lord was to build his church. The Lord uses *diaspora* to multiply his church (See Acts 8:4)
- “He went to the high priest ² and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.” Acts 9:1-2
 - Saul is so intent on destroying the church that he enlists Caiaphas (see 4:6) for letters to Synagogues in Damascus (140 miles northeast of Jerusalem) to get letters so that Hellenistic Jewish Christians who had turned to “the Way” might be returned to Jerusalem for trial.
 - Some of these trials resulted even in death (8:1; 26:10 – “when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them.”)
 - “Saul was **still** breathing out murderous threats (the Greek word for the panting and snorting of murderous animals) against the Lord’s disciples.” Saul did not just breath out threats he put them into murderous action (Again, 26:10 above)

Saul's encounter with the Lord and his conversion:

- ³ "As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven ("brighter than the midday sun" Acts 22:6) flashed around him (blinded him "Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes, he could see nothing")
- ⁴ He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"

Small group discussion, or personal reflection: How did the Lord reveal himself to you so that you could respond with faith and belief?

This was not a sudden or compulsive conversion that this seems to be:

○ Not a sudden conversion:

1. Probably not the first encounter Saul had with the Lord, conscience or unconscious. Paul says himself in Acts 26:1 – "It is hard for you to kick against the goads." This was likening Saul to a young bullock that had to be broken, using goads, in increasing numbers, multiple time, to break the bull. The implications, in **Paul's own words** are, **Jesus had been pursuing Saul, prodding him, pricking him, in increasing ways** and it was painful for him to resist. **The goads:**
 - a. Saul witnessing Stephen's "face shining like an angel" and Stephen's asking the Lord, "Lord do not hold this against them."
 - b. Saul's fanaticism, "is only found in individuals who are compensating secret doubts." (C. J. Jung – "Analytical Psychology")
 - c. Saul's claiming to be faultless: His fanaticism and hatred against converted Jews or Gentiles, and witnessing or voting for their death, is a violation of the sixth commandment, "thou shalt not murder." This must have weighed heavy on Saul's conscience.

○ Not compulsive conversion:

1. Christ did not crush him, did not demean him, did not label him. Christ simply asked a question of Saul, "Saul, why do you persecute me?"
2. The encounter did not deprive Saul of the ability to respond to the Lord, "Who are you Lord?"
3. Not unresponsive to Saul's condition: "He was blind..." (Acts 9:9) "The Lord told Ananias...lay hands on him to restore his sight." (Acts 9:12)

An illustration of God's sovereign grace:

- "Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save **sinners—of whom I am the worst.**" 1 Tim. 1:15
- 1. Saul did not, "decide for Christ" on the contrary, Christ decided for Saul.
- 2. Saul did not "choose Christ," but "Christ chose Saul." ("You did not choose me, but I chose you." John 15:16)
- 3. This is sovereign grace. "But sovereign grace is gradual grace and gentle grace. Gradually and without violence, Jesus picked Saul." John Stott – "The Message of Acts"
- 4. Jesus, "revealed himself to Saul by light and by voice, not in order to overwhelm him, but in such a way as to enable him to make a free response. Divine grace does not trample on human personality. Rather it is the reverse, for it enables human beings to be truly human." John Stott – "The Message of Acts"

Small group discussion or personal reflection: How gently and gradually did God's grace lead you to Jesus?

A Confirmation that we are "the body of Christ" on this earth:

- "I am **Jesus**, whom **you are persecuting**"

In imprisoning Christians, in torturing Christians, in stoning Christians, in killing Christians, Saul was persecuting the Lord Jesus himself.

- "For just as the physical body is one yet has many members, and **all the members of the body, though many, are one body**, so also is the **body of Christ.**" 1 Cor. 12:2
- "Now **you are the body of Christ**, and each one of you is a part of it." 1 Cor. 12:27

- ⁷"The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. ⁸Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes, he could see nothing. So, they led him by the hand into Damascus. ⁹For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything." Acts 9:7-9
 - Again, Jesus was not unresponsive to Saul's condition: "He was blind..." (Acts 9:9) "The Lord told Ananias...lay hands on him to restore his sight." (Acts 9:12)

God calls us to minister to and care for some dicey people:

- ¹⁰ "In Damascus there was a disciple named **Ananias** (From the Hebrew name, *hanania* which means **"the Lord is gracious"**). **The Lord called to him** (notice, not an angel, not the Spirit, but the Lord called) **in a vision, "Ananias!"** "Yes, Lord," he answered. ¹¹ The Lord told him, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and **ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul**, for he is praying. ¹² In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight."
 - The Lord's means of healing and helping Saul was to use a Christian when the Lord could have helped him and healed him Himself.
- **"Ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying..."**

"The same man who had been "breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples" is now praying and praising the God of Jesus Christ."

William J. Larkin Jr. "Acts"

Whose conversion, yours included, was a monumental turn around or drastic change from pre-Christ, to believing in Christ? What were they like before and what were they like afterward?

Why do you think the Lord didn't just help and heal Saul Himself?

- ¹³ "Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem. ¹⁴ And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name."
 - Saul's reputation preceded him. Ananias was reticent. He knew the pre-Damascus road Saul, not the Saul who had encountered and changed by the Lord.
- ¹⁵ "But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. ¹⁶ I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."
 - Murderous Saul was "my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel."

- ¹⁷ “Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” ¹⁸ Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, ¹⁹ and after taking some food, he regained his strength.”
 - Ananias obeyed and God used him to heal Saul.
- “**Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus.** ²⁰ At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. ²¹ All those who heard him were astonished and asked, “Isn’t he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn’t he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?” ²² Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Messiah.”
 - **Politics aside, Chuck Colson** was led to Christ by “The Fellowship” in Washington D.C. and spent time with the brothers for a long time.” Colson was discipled. From reputable sources, **Donald Trump**, was led to Christ by “The Fellowship” but never submitted to their discipleship. Colson was a model of Christianity; Trump lacks much of the process of sanctification demonstrable in his external life.
- ²³ “**After many days** had gone by, there was **a conspiracy among the Jews to kill him,** ²⁴ **but Saul learned of their plan.** Day and night, they kept close watch on the city gates in order to kill him. ²⁵ But his followers took him by night and lowered him in a basket through an opening in the wall.” Luke is intentionally vague concerning the time Saul spent in Damascus.
 - But from Galatians 1:17-18 we know, “I did not go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went into Arabia. Later **I returned to Damascus.** ¹⁸ **Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem** to get acquainted with Cephas and stayed with him fifteen days.”
 - Why did Saul go to Arabia, very possibly during this “three years” in Galatians 1:18?
 1. He went on a preaching mission.
 2. He met with the risen Lord who called Saul to be “my chosen to carry my name to the Gentiles, kings and the people of Israel” and Jesus revealed to Saul the distinctive truths of Jewish-Gentile solidarity in the body of Christ.

3. Paul says it this way, “the mystery made known to me by revelation.” That revelation took place when Saul was in Arabia for a long period of time.

- ²⁶ “When he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple. ²⁷ But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how:
 - Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him,
 - and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus.”
 The disciples were fearful of Saul. Barnabas had to vouch for Saul.
- ²⁸ “So, Saul stayed with them and moved about freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord. ²⁹ He talked and debated with the Hellenistic Jews, but they tried to kill him. ³⁰ When the believers learned of this, they took him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.”
- ³¹ “Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed **a time of peace** and was **strengthened**. Living in the fear of the Lord and **encouraged by the Holy Spirit**, it increased in numbers.”

Personal reflection: When, in some circumstance or relationship, did you experience a move from discouragement, weakness, and trouble to encouragement, strength, and peace?

- ³² “As Peter traveled about the country, he went to visit the Lord’s people who lived in Lydda. ³³ There he found **a man named Aeneas**, who was **paralyzed** and had been **bedridden for eight years**. ³⁴ “Aeneas,” **Peter said** to him, “**Jesus Christ heals you**. Get up and roll up your mat.” Immediately Aeneas got up. ³⁵ All those who lived in Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord.”
 - Who healed Aeneas?
 - What did Aeneas need to do in order to experience and live out that healing?
 - Theological reflection: We have our part in the Lord’s healing. The Lord’s promises are mostly conditional, as are His healings.
- ³⁶ “In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (in Greek her name is Dorcas); she was always doing good and helping the poor. ³⁷ About that time she became sick and died, and her body was washed and placed in an upstairs room. ³⁸ Lydda was near Joppa; so, when the disciples heard that Peter was in Lydda, they sent two men to him and urged him, “Please come at once!”
 - These friends brought Peter to Tabitha (Dorcas) and Peter came into Dorcas’s presence.

Personal reflection: Who have you, or who might you, be called to bring to Jesus for healing?

- ³⁹ "Peter went with them, and when he arrived, he was taken upstairs to the room. All the widows stood around him, crying and showing him the robes and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was still with them. ⁴⁰ Peter sent them all out of the room; then he got down on his knees and prayed. Turning toward the dead woman, he said, "Tabitha, get up." She opened her eyes, and seeing Peter she sat up. ⁴¹ He took her by the hand and helped her to her feet. Then he called for the believers, especially the widows, and presented her to them alive. ⁴² This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord." Acts 9:39-42
- Dorcas was not only healed, she was brought back from the dead, just as Lazarus.
- ⁴³ "Peter stayed in Joppa for some time with a tanner named Simon."
 - This was a first hint that the Lord was leading to Peter to cross over to Gentiles, because a Jew would never stay with a man who slaughtered animals.

Homework:

1. Please read and re-read Acts 10 over and over again.
2. Please read the documents I send out to you next Monday or Tuesday before the class so we can have vital and lively discussions when asked.