

Part 27 – Saul Increased

A sermon series by Pastor Byron Chesney Wednesday, March 23, 2016

† Acts 9:20-31

Last Wednesday we examined verses 9-19 which dealt with what Saul did for 3-days while he was blinded and the calling of Ananias to go and lay hands on Saul and baptize him into the New Testament Church. Tonight we pick up in verse 20 of our text which covers Saul's early preaching ministry:

20 And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God.

Saul of Tarsus wasted no time in beginning his preaching ministry. The Bible uses that word "straightway" that word means "immediately, forthwith." There was no downtime for Saul. It says that he "preached Christ in the synagogues." The very synagogues that he had originally intended to go to and find Christians and round them up and drag them to prison for their belief in Jesus. Now he is one of those Christians and instead of hiding in his new found faith he declares his new found faith and starts preaching about Jesus. His goal is to prove that Jesus is the Son of God.

The only way that Saul is going to be able to persuade the Jews that Jesus is the Son of God is by using his knowledge of the Old Testament and the teachings of the Prophets to connect the dots for them. He will prove to them that the promised Messiah is none other than Jesus of Nazareth, the man whom they themselves had put to death on a cross at Calvary.

You can rest assured that they would try to dispute against this teaching as they always did and, by the way, still do to this day. But that is not going to stop Saul from trying to prove it to them.

21 But all that heard him were amazed, and said; Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests?

Saul's reputation had preceded him. Everyone knew why he had come to Damascus. He had not tried to hide it from anyone. Both the believing and unbelieving Jews knew his purpose was to persecute Christians. So for him to now be preaching Christ is going to throw them all for a loop. The Bible said that "**all that heard him were amazed.**" In other words, they were astounded, stupefied, they could not believe their own ears.

His early preaching was very difficult and the average person would have given up or went somewhere else to preach until the fire had burnt out, but not Saul. He is determined to preach Jesus.

22 But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ.

When it says that "**Saul increased the more in strength,**" it doesn't mean physical strength, it means his spiritual strength. His belief that Jesus was the Christ and his conviction that living the Christian life increased more and more each day as he grew closer to Jesus and trusted in Him.

Along with an increase of his faith and spiritual walk, was an increase in his boldness of preaching. Despite their amazement, the Jews were **confounded** at his teaching. That means that it has thrown them into disorder. He had perplexed their minds. They could not dispute his teaching and they were greatly confused now concerning what they have always assumed. He was proving it to them and they could not deny the truth that he presented to them.

That phrase, "**proving that this is very Christ,**" means that he proved to them that that Jesus was the Christ. When you see the name "Christ" it comes from the Greek word, "**Christos**" which means, "**the Anointed One, the Messiah.**" Saul is proving to them that Jesus is their Messiah.

23 And after that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him:

My, how quickly the Jews turned upon him! He went from being the Jews poster boy to being their number one enemy. Just as when Jesus was living on earth and presented unto them the truth, instead of accepting the truth they fight against it and the only thing they know to do is to kill the messenger. They just want to shut him up even if it means killing him. And that was their plan.

24 But their laying await was known of Saul. And they watched the gates day and night to kill him.

Obviously the plot to kill Saul became widespread and Saul found out about it. It appears that they had men posted at the city gates night and day waiting for an opportunity to catch him going in or out so they could pounce on him and end his life.

Don't you find it ironic that these religious men who were so zealous of pleasing God that they have absolutely no qualms or second thoughts about murdering a man in cold blood? I mean, they are willing to commit pre-meditated first degree murder. What about the 6th Commandment? They just tossed that right out the window. Btw... the Commandment of "thou shalt not kill" can be rendered "thou shalt not murder." That is what the word "kill" means in that instance. We know this to be a fact because that's how Jesus interprets it in **Matthew 19:16-19: And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life? 17 And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments. 18 He saith unto him, Which? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, 19 Honour thy father and thy mother: and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.**

But these Jews could care less about the 6th Commandment because they hated Saul now because of his belief in Jesus.

25 Then the disciples took him by night, and let him down by the wall in a basket.

The Lord made a way for his newly anointed preacher to escape the evil clutches of the murderous Jews.

Saul relates this story to the Church in Corinth where he says: **2 Corinthians 11:32-33: In Damascus the governor under Aretas the king kept the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desirous to apprehend me: 33 And through a window in a basket was I let down by the wall, and escaped his hands.**

This is the same method the Lord used to help other men that we read about in the Old Testament. Remember the men during Joshua's time when the King of Jericho found out that that Joshua had sent spies into the city that Rahab the Harlot hid them and then let them escape through a windows in her house and they were let down by a cord down the wall: **Joshua 2:14-15: And the men answered her, Our life for yours, if ye utter not this our business. And it shall be, when the LORD hath given us the land, that we will deal kindly and truly with thee. 15 Then she let them down by a cord through the window: for her house was upon the town wall, and she dwelt upon the wall.**

It is also the method that David's wife, Michal, used to help him escape when her father, King Saul, was trying to kill him: **1 Samuel 19:11-12: Saul also sent messengers unto David's house, to watch him, and to slay him in the morning: and Michal David's wife told him, saying, If thou save not thy life to night, to morrow thou shalt be slain. 12 So Michal let David down through a window: and he went, and fled, and escaped.**

26 And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple.

I want you to be aware that there is at least 3-years that have passed between verses 25 and 26. The writer of the Book of Acts, Luke, does not inform us of Saul's 3-year stay in the desert of Arabia, he picks up his story after that. We know this to be the case because we read from Paul's own testimony in **Galatians 1:15-18: But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, 16 To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood: 17 Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus. 18 Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days.**

So, Saul did not go up to Jerusalem immediately after escaping Damascus, he first went to Arabia and the back to Damascus, all of which he said was after three years, then he went to Jerusalem to see Peter. -- The interesting thing here is that the disciples were afraid of him and didn't believe that he was a disciple, or a follower of Christ. I've often wondered why the Lord didn't come to the Apostles and reveal to them the same as he did Ananias that Saul was now a saved man? I don't know the answer to that, Luke doesn't explain it, however, it is obvious that they were not aware that Saul was no longer the zealous persecutor of the Church but was now on their side. It is only natural for them to be cautious because they knew what kind of man that he once was.

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

I've always been thankful for Barnabas. I don't think he gets near the credit he deserves for being so instrumental in Paul's ministry. Yes, we know he was a great missionary partner with him but not much is ever said about how he was the one that stepped in and helped him get started and recognized by the other Apostles as a fellow laborer in Christ. He explains to them all about Saul's miraculous conversion on the way to Damascus. Barnabas is obviously a very trusted man to the Apostles.

28 And he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem.

So, after Barnabas' explanation about Saul, the Apostles accept him and he spends some time with them in the ministry. This had to be a huge relief to him and a great help to get him introduced into the proper places to be able to preach.

29 And he spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians: but they went about to slay him.

Saul grows bolder in his preaching and spent time disputing with the Grecians. The Grecians are a hard crowd to please. You may remember that they were the ones that caused the uproar over their widows being neglected in the early stages of the Church. **Acts 6:1: And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations.**

As we explained when we went through that study, the Grecians were from outside of Palestine, most living in areas of Alexandria, Egypt and Northern Syria, they are called "**Hellenistic Jews**," and they were often looked down upon by the Hebrews.

Of course these particular Grecians Saul was disputing with were not the saved Grecians, they were the ones that were still every bit Jewish in their beliefs, the same as those that were there during the stoning of Stephen. They were a hard headed group of folks and just like the Jews in Damascus, their intention is to just kill Saul.

30 Which when the brethren knew, they brought him down to Caesarea, and sent him forth to Tarsus.

Again, the murderous plot is found out and to protect Saul he is moved to Caesarea and then sent home to Tarsus.

Some may think that Saul is running in the face of adversity but that's not the case. There comes a time in the sharing of the Gospel when you know those listening are not accepting of the Gospel. The Holy Spirit reveals that to you. It would have served no purpose for Saul to continue arguing and then getting killed by these Grecians. The Lord had big plans for him. Let's not forget what the Lord Jesus told the disciples when he commissioned them to go out and preach the Gospel. He said this: **Matthew 10:13-16: And if the house be worthy, let your peace come upon it: but if it be not worthy, let your peace return to you. 14 And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet. 15 Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, than for that city. 16 Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves. --**

Saul and the brethren were being "**wise as serpents**" in dealing with the Grecians.

31 Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied.

And, so, the Church has some relief from persecution for a time and the Gospel increased and the Church continued to multiply.

† All Scripture from the Authorized King James Version