

“The Way”
Acts 9:1-31

Introduction:

1. Tonight - As We Continue On:
 - Our ***Journey Through Acts***:
 - We Will Leave Philip And His Ministry:
 - As Both A Deacon & An Evangelist:
 - Behind Us - As Luke Re-Introduces Us:
 - To A Man Named Saul - In Acts Chapter 9!
 - So Please Turn There With Me:
 - Acts 9 - Where We Begin By Reading About:

1. A Great Concern:

- For That Early Church!
 - In 9:1-2 - “And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, / And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem!”
- Now - We First Met This Man, Saul:
 - Back In Acts 7 & 8:
 - When Stephen, As One Of The First Deacons Of The Church At Jerusalem:
 - Was Tried And Killed:
 - For His Faith In & His Testimony About Jesus Christ!
 - And If You Look Briefly Back:
 - At 7:57 - 8:1 - After Stephen Was Done Sharing The Gospel Before The Great Jewish Sanhedrin Council - “Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, / And cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man’s feet, whose name was Saul. / And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. / And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep. / And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles!”
- Some Believe Saul Was One:
 - Of The 70 members Of The Sanhedrin Council:
 - And Was Personally Responsible:
 - For The Trial, Judgment, And Death:
 - Of Stephen!
 - In 8:1 - We Are Told That:
 - This Same Saul:
 - Was “Consenting Unto His Death!”
 - Which Means That He Gave His Personal & Even Professional Approval!
 - It Was His Responsibility To Carry Out The Wishes Of The Entire Council!
 - And That Is Why:
 - In 7:58 - The Witnesses Even “Laid Down Their Clothes” At The Feet:
 - Of This Man Saul!
 - This Meant That His “Whole Heart” Was Involved In The Death Of Stephen!
- And This Was Just The Beginning:
 - Of Saul’s Zealous Persecution:
 - Of The Church!
 - Because Now - In 9:1 - He Continues To Be A Thorn In The Side:
 - And A Dangerous & Deadly Threat To The Jewish Christians, Both Near & Far!
 - Because - For Saul:
 - It Didn’t Matter:
 - ***Where*** You Were:
 - Whether In Jerusalem Or In Damascus!

- It Didn't Matter:
 - **Who** You Were:
 - Whether A Man Or A Woman!
- If You Were A Member Of:
 - "This Way" - Which Was What The Christian Sect Was Initially Called:
 - His Desire Was That You Would Experience The Same End As Stephen:
 - If You Did Not Reject Jesus As The Messiah!
- So Saul Remained A Great & An Ongoing Concern!
 - But Then - Something Amazing Happened!
 - We Read About:

2. ***A Great Confrontation!***

- In 9:3-9 - "And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus!"
 - This Is A Picture Of The Area:
 - Through Which The Damascus Road Would Have Ran!
 - A Relatively Flat But Fertile Plain Known In Ancient Times As The "Great Trunk Road!"
 - But - As "He Came Near Damascus" - In This Same General Area:
 - 9:3 Continues - "And suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: / And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? / 5 And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks!"
 - The Bright Light From Heaven Was Nothing Less Than The Shining Glory Of The Risen, Exalted & Glorified Jesus!
 - And In That Moment:
 - As Jesus Revealed Himself:
 - To Saul - As The One Whom He Was Persecuting:
 - Not Just The Church - But Christ Himself!
 - Saul Stopped "Kicking Against Those Pricks" - Or The Prodding:
 - That God Had Planted In His Mind & Heart Ever Since He Witnessed The Death Of Stephen!
 - Instead Of Fighting Against:
 - All That He Had Heard & Learned:
 - About Those Christians:
 - He Submitted Himself - And - According To:
 - 9:6 - "And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do. / 7 And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man. / 8 And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man: but they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus. / 9 And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink!"
 - Here Is A Map Of The Old City Of Damascus:
 - Which Was A Walled City - And Is Laid Out:
 - Much The Same Way It Was:
 - During The Time Of Saul!
 - And It Was There That We Read About:

3. ***A Great Choice:***

- Made By The Lord - To Call & Then To Use:
 - Saul In His Own Service!
 - And The Lord Used A Faithful Jewish Disciple By The Name Of Ananias!
 - In 9:10-12 - "And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord. / 11 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, / 12 And hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight!"
 - Here Is A Picture Of The "Street Called Straight" That:
 - Still Exists In The Old-Town Of Damascus!
 - It Was Somewhere Along This Ancient Street Where Ananias Was To Meet With Saul!
 - This Is The Gate On The Far Eastern Side Of The Street Built By The Romans!

- But How Did Ananias Respond?

- 9:13-19 - "Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem: / 14 And here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name. / 15 But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: / 16 For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake. / 17 And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost. / 18 And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized. / 19 And when he had received meat, he was strengthened. Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus!"

- Here Is A Picture Of What Is The Traditional Site:

- Of Ananias' Home - Or At Least A Part Of His Home! There Is A Small Christian Chapel In This Room, With A Church Built On Top! It Is Likely That Ananias Took Saul His Own Home In Order To Introduce Him To The Rest Of The Church!

- Now - Luke Does Not Give Us A Comprehensive History Of Saul's Time In Damascus! Instead, We Have To Read Some Of Paul's Own Letters In Order To Discover That Not Long After He Was Saved, He Spent Several Years Away From Damascus In The Arabian Desert - Which He Briefly Describes In Galatians 1:15-17:

- "But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, / To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood: / Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus!"

- But When Saul Returned - Luke Then Records For Us:

4. A Great Change!

- Instead Of Being A Fervent Persecutor Of Christians:

- He Became A Fervent Preacher For Christ!

- 9:20-22 - "And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God. / 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? / But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ!"

- What A Change!

- In Fact - His Change Was So Dramatic:

- That Luke Tells Us About:

5. A Great Contrast!

- Instead Of The Church On The Run:

- It Was Now Saul On The Run!

- 9:23-30 - "And after that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him: / But their laying await was known of Saul. And they watched the gates day and night to kill him. / Then the disciples took him by night, and let him down by the wall in a basket!"

- Here Is A Picture Of One Of The Remaining Gates Of The Ancient City Of Damascus! This One Is Now The Facade For A Christian Church, Because It Is Believed To Be The Place Where Saul Was Let Down In The Basket!

- But When Saul Arrived In Jerusalem - About 3 Years After His Conversion - He Was Still A Man On The Run!

- 9:26-30 - "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. / 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. / And he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem. / And he spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians: but they went about to slay him. / Which when the brethren knew, they brought him down to Caesarea, and sent him forth to Tarsus!"

- Here Are Some Of The Ruins Of Tarsus In South-Eastern Turkey - Tarsus Was Saul's Boyhood Home - And For The Time - A Place Of Safety & Growth - Until We Meet Him Again In Acts 11!

- But - In The Meantime:

- We Read In 9:31 - "Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were

- Isaiah! "Here Am I!"
 - Ananias Was Willing To Do Anything The Lord Wanted Him To Do!
 - And God Was Able To Use The Faithfulness & Obedience Of This Follower & Disciple:
 - To Take Saul Under His Wing And Help Him Take The First Steps As A Disciple As Well!
 - This Shows Us That:
 - God Can Use Anyone:
 - To Further His Work!
 - Perhaps God Has Used You At Some Point In Your Life:
 - To Help Another "Saul" Take The First Steps In Their Walk With Christ!
 - You May Never Know This Side Of Heaven How God Has Used You In The Lives Of Others! **IE:** My Cousin Ronel!
5. And That Leads Us To Another Description Of The Church:
- In 9:17 - When - After Being Reassured By The Lord:
 - "And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost!"
 - In This Verse - Ananias Calls Saul:
 - "Brother!"
 - First Of All, This Shows That Saul Was Already Saved By The Time Ananias Got There!
 - But It Also Shows Us That:
 - There Was Already An Unbreakable Bond:
 - Between Those Two Men:
 - As Christian Brothers!
 - As Part Of A New A Christian Family!
 - And As Part Of That Christian Family:
 - He Was Now One Of Them!
 - And It Became A Term Of Tender & Loving Endearment!
 - And The Rest Of The Disciples There In Damascus Took Care Of Saul & Sought To Preserve His Life - Even Though He Had Initially Come To Take Theirs!
 - Isn't This Also How Barnabas:
 - Treated Saul - When He Arrived In Jerusalem?
 - Even Though At First The Disciples "Were All Afraid Of Him!" (9:26)
 - Yet - God Used Barnabas To Shower Saul With The Love And Grace As A Christian Brother!
 - And Eventually - The Rest Of The Church Came Around - Until In 9:30 - All The "Brethren" Are Mentioned Taking Care Of Saul As They "Sent Him Forth To Tarsus!"
6. And So - Even Though It Was Jesus:
- Who Personally Met & Saved Saul:
 - On That Road To Damascus:
 - Jesus Also Used His Church:
 - To Encourage & Equip Saul:
 - To Become The Apostle Paul:
 - Who We Are So Familiar With:
 - In Our New Testaments!
7. And What The Lord Did For Saul:
- Back Then - He Can Still Do Today!
 - As Members Of:
 - "The Way" - God Can Use:
 - Our Clear Faith & Testimony For Him:
 - To Point Others To Jesus!
 - As The Disciples:
 - Of Jesus - God Can Use:
 - Our Faithfulness & Willingness:

- To Reach The People In The Most Unexpected Places & Ways!
- And As Brethren:
 - God Can Use:
 - Our Family Love:
 - To Encourage & Equip Others In Their Own Walk With The Lord!
- Never Underestimate:
 - How God Might Use You:
 - To Make A Spiritual Difference In Someone Else's Life!

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