

Scripture Reading: Daniel 4:30-37

Sermon: Jesus Converts Saul of Tarsus - Acts 9:1-7

Benediction: James 4:10

Acts 9:1-7 Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest (2) and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. (3) As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. (4) Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" (5) And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" Then the Lord said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. ~~It is hard for you to kick against the goads.~~" (6) ~~So he, trembling and astonished, said, "Lord, what do You want me to do?" Then the Lord said to him, "Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."~~ (7) And the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice but seeing no one.

1 Timothy 1:15-16 This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. (16) However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life.

INTRODUCTION

Look and see what Philip, full of the Holy Spirit, has been doing in the name of God---going from place to place preaching the good news of Jesus Christ.

In Samaria, he cries out, "You Samaritans, in Jesus Christ you will be forgiven a thousand years of idolatry." On the desert road, he explains from the scriptures to one Ethiopian, "It was Jesus of Nazareth who was cut off for our sake. Now even you, a eunuch, need not be cut off any longer from the people of God." In all the cities between that place and the Mediterranean coast, Philip preached the good news: forgiveness of sins in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ!

But look and see what Saul of Tarsus, full of threats and murder, has been doing in the name of God---going from place to place arresting all who believe in Jesus of Nazareth, both men and even women, tying them up, and tormenting them, even taking part in their death. Not content to persecute followers of The Way in the Judea, he is now on the road to Syria to do the same there.

In whom, then, is the great love of God for His people more clearly seen? In which of these men is the marvelous grace of our loving Lord more brightly manifested? In which of these men is the patience of God shown to be perfect? Which of these men will stand for all time as the brightest beacon, pointing hardened sinners to the forgiveness that there is in Jesus Christ?

If we will look together toward Damascus, on the road just outside the city, we will see the how in infinite mercy, in amazing grace, in limitless love, and in perfect patience, the Lord Jesus Christ converts even the chief of sinners, Saul of Tarsus.

Read the text: Acts 9:1-7

BODY

The Lord Jesus comes to Saul when he is the church's enemy v. 1-2

- the very name Saul evokes the image of King Saul, tormented by an evil spirit, persecuting God's anointed, David
- Saul has already been party to the murder of Stephen
- he has thrown both men and women in prison for being disciples of Jesus
- he is still breathing threats and slaughter
- he has applied to the chief priest for authority to persecute believers in other cities besides Jerusalem, and he is at this very moment about to arrive in Damascus to arrest both men and women, bind them, and take them back to Jerusalem for punishment
- APPLICATION: Understand that God is using Saul to show in actual deed what each of us is born with in his heart, and what each of us would do if the Lord did not restrain him
- Behold what manner of love the Father has given unto us---that we should be called the sons of God

-But as you look at Saul of Tarsus, the enemy of God, blinded by ignorance, driven by hatred,, see that in a way he is a mirror into your soul, also. What, me, reflected in the malice of the murderer? Yes, you!

-Don't you know that if you have hated someone, you have murdered him in your heart?

-Don't you know that if you have broken God's law at any point, you have broken all of it?

-Don't you know that love for the sinful world is hatred toward God?

Oh, yes, you and I are there on that road also.

And look, the Lord Jesus comes to Saul in this condition.

-He doesn't wait for Saul to reform

-He doesn't wait for Saul to change his mind on his own

-He doesn't cringe at Saul's sin and go on to someone more likely

No, the Lord Jesus Christ comes to this man, dead in transgressions and sins, hopelessly bound under the dominion of darkness. He comes to Saul, the chief of sinners.

-He comes to Saul, that the glory of God's grace may be the most clearly seen.

-He comes to Saul, that the worst kinds of sinners may see that even for them, there is mercy from the Lord.

-He comes to Saul to demonstrate His longsuffering, His patience; while Saul murdered God's saints, God was waiting, waiting, waiting. The time for grace in Saul's life was eternally appointed, and must not be rushed. The saints of Jerusalem cry out under the persecution by Saul, yet the time has not yet come. The perfect junction of God's grace and Saul's sin has not yet been reached. It seems a long time that the church has been waiting for relief from Saul's murders. They might cry out, "How long, Lord?" But they need not think that God is slow. He is not slow, but patient. For a thousand years the name Saul has meant persecution of God's anointed, and rejection because of sin. But what are a thousand years to the all-patient God? They are like one day to Him. It seems like ages ago that Stephen cried out, "Lord, do not charge them with this sin!" yet Saul adds every day to the charges against himself. But unknown to the saints, there is a sacred spot on the road, just outside the city gates of Damascus. Do you see it? No, the human eye can't see it, but the eye of God sees it. Ah, there, Saul has reached the place! And at the long-awaited moment,

The Lord Jesus comes to Saul, the church's enemy, and humbles Him

- The Lord appears to Saul, shining in glory with a light brighter than the noonday sun
 - Saul has been a rising star among the Pharisees; he has been a bright light among the students of the law
 - but this is as nothing compared with the light of the glory of the risen Lord Jesus Christ, the exalted Son of God
- Saul falls to the ground
 - as Isaiah did, when he saw the Lord
 - when Stephen was being stoned, Saul had proudly stood guard over the cloaks of the murderers, but now he does not stand proudly, but falls prostrate before the King of Kings and Lord of Lords
- Saul is blinded; the light is so bright that it has blinded his eyes; he cannot see
 - his large phylacteries
 - his long tassles
 - the letters granting him religious authority
 - his entourage
 - the city where he was going to persecute the disciples of Jesus Christ
 - he had thought he had need of nothing, but did not know that he was spiritually blind; now he is physically blinded, that he may see more clearly that he must have the eye salve only Jesus Christ can give
- Have you yet been humbled before the Lord Jesus Christ? Or do you still stand proudly, fists clenched, jaw set, confident in your own strength? Seeing how even Saul was humbled before Christ in a moment, bow your knee before him now. Humble yourself in the sight of the Lord.
- We have been looking---all the action has been for the eyes to see. But now the sound--the voice of Jesus Christ Himself! Listen, and hear

The Lord Jesus preaches the law and the gospel to Saul

- Hear how He preaches the Law to Saul (4): Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?
 - What, persecuting the One in heaven? Saul had deluded Himself into thinking that he was serving the One in heaven. But now the Lord Jesus preaches to Saul that his actions have not been in keeping with God's will, but against it. All of this he could have known before. The truth was well known all around Saul. he had doubtless heard it many times, including the great debates and sermon of Stephen. But by God's will, it was this short sermon by the mouth of Jesus Himself that Paul's conscience was convinced; he was convicted by the law of God, shown to be a sinner before the righteous Judge.
 - And hear how that same sermon preaches to you and to me. "You think you are good with God, that God is pleased with you, that your good works and your good human nature have put you in good standing with God. but that is not the case! If you are not a disciple of Jesus Christ, a follower of The Way, your good works are like filthy rags before God. Your religious exercises are detestable to Him. You were a guilty sinner in Adam when you were born, and you are twice-condemned now because of the sin committed during your life up until now. Yes, in the preaching of the law to Saul, hear it preached to you, also!
- But wait--we hear more. It is not the Law only that we hear the Lord preach. He proclaims also the Gospel, the Good News: that Jesus is risen from the dead (v. 5) "I am Jesus"
- Is this good news? Yes, a thousand times yes! This is the quintessential good news, the best of all good news.
 - If Jesus Christ is still dead, then there is nothing for me but death. This body will die, and that will be bad enough. But then I will die a million

deaths in hell, ever being burned by the flames of God's wrath, but never being consumed, never ceasing to suffer.

-But if Jesus Christ is risen from the dead, then there is life also for me!
If Jesus Christ has risen from the dead, then everything He said must be true, and He said that whoever believes in Him will never die!

-Saul has heard this good news before---that Jesus is risen from the dead; but he has never believed it before. But now he believes! Why does he believe it now? Does he believe it because the One risen from the dead has appeared to him? No. Think, remember, that Jesus already has said that if a man did not believe Moses and the prophets, then he still would not believe even if someone came back from the dead. Saul believes now because while the Son of God was appearing to him in this glorious light, the Spirit of God was moving in Saul's heart, reviving the part of Saul that was dead in sin, giving him faith as a gift, granting him repentance unto life!

-Does this good news apply to us also, or only to Saul? To us also! The fact that the good news of Jesus Christ's resurrection is preached even to Saul, the chief of sinners, means that no one is too bad a sinner to be saved from sin by Jesus Christ. If even Saul, persecutor of Christ's church, can believe the gospel and be saved, then certainly you and I can be forgiven our sins also as we trust in Jesus Christ.

-Listen, there's more. Jesus continues to speak---

The Lord Jesus gives Saul his orders

-The Lord Jesus Christ, who has graciously come to Saul while he was still an enemy, and who has humbled Saul before His glory, and who has preached the law and the gospel to Saul for His salvation, now commands His new servant to do His will.

-This sounds familiar, doesn't it? The Lord had said to His church, make disciples, baptize them, and teach them to observe all things I have commanded you. This is how it is with Jesus Christ. We are set free from our slavery to sin, but not so we can serve ourselves. We are set free to become the bondservants of our Lord Jesus Christ. And what willing slaves we are! We gladly place the earlobe against the beam, and as for the awl. Pierce me with your mark. You have redeemed me from slavery to sin, but I don't want to be on my own---I am your slave, by right and full willingly. Do not ask me to leave you---I will go where you go. Saul is now the willing, obedient servant of the Lord who has redeemed him, and so is everyone who has been set free from sin by Christ.

The Lord leaves Saul's companions as they were

-Curious, isn't it? Look there, and see the men who travel with Saul. They have seen the light, but not the person of Jesus Christ. They have heard a sound, but not the voice of Christ preaching. They accompany Saul on the road still, but now they are as strangers to him, and he to them.

-Now look and see Saul and his companions walking through the gates of the city. But the story doesn't say anything about them believing. Maybe on the next page? No, there is no record that any of them ever will believe.

-If these men continue as they are, they surely will be condemned in the great day of judgment, where all must give an account for their deeds

-Is this unjust of God, to be merciful to only one among many? Is God unjust? Heaven forbid the very thought of that! God is not unjust! Which of these men has been condemned by God when he really is innocent? None! No one is righteous, no, not one! All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.

-Before Esau and Jacob were even born, before they had opportunity to do anything good or bad, God declares, "Jacob have I loved, and Esau have I hated." How can this be? Esau and Jacob both were guilty of sin in Adam, the head of our race. God left Esau to his well-deserved destruction, but showed mercy to Jacob in love.

-Does this seem wrong to you? If so, then take a lesson from the potter and the clay. When the potter is working with a lump of clay, doesn't he have the right to make whatever he wants out of the clay? If so, then God has the right to make one man on the Damascus road a servant of his, destined for eternal life, and one man on that same road a servant of sin, destined for eternal destruction. And when he the potter has made the clay into pots, does a pot have the right to argue that the potter has done wrong to him? If not, then neither do we, as mere creatures, have enough wisdom, or any right, to question God's sovereign dealings with His creatures. Instead, let each of us bow before our great God and Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, in praise of His perfect patience in bringing even Saul, the chief of sinners, to faith and repentance.