**Round Top Church Christian Fellowship**

Twenty-Eighth Week Since the Resurrection

 ***Paul’s Conversion, Part 2 - Acts 9:26 - 31***

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(Unless otherwise noted, NAS is quoted.)

Last week we looked at the fist part of the scriptural account of Saul’s conversion. This week we continue in Acts 9 to follow Saul as God led him to his new life. We pick up the account in verse 26.

**Acts 9**

 26 When he arrived in Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, since they did not believe he was a disciple.

 27 Barnabas, however, took him and brought him to the apostles and explained to them how Saul had seen the Lord on the road and that the Lord had talked to him, and how in Damascus he had spoken boldly in the name of Jesus.

 28 Saul was coming and going with them in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord.

 29 He conversed and debated with the Hellenistic Jews, but they tried to kill him.

 30 When the brothers found out,

they took him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.

 31 So the church throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and was strengthened.

Living in the fear of the Lord and

encouraged by the Holy Spirit,

it increased in numbers.

So, we continue in our journey in the Acts of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the Apostles. We see that God expands his apostle role by adding Saul. God does not go after every person the way He went after Saul, but he does reveal Himself to every person who has ever lived from the beginning of the creation (Romans 2:18ff). We note that not everyone got the memo concerning Saul being recruited by God. Those that were members of The Way still remembered the stoning of Stephen. God used Barnabas to introduce Saul to the Believer’s community. Personal testimony from others about our character is important. There was a ‘wait and see’ attitude about Saul. However, when Saul began speaking boldly in the name of Jesus in Damascus, his reputation changed.

 It is worthy of note that the distance between Jerusalem and Damascus is 150 miles. Due to the terrain, it would have taken Saul over a week to get to Damascus. Acts 9:3 reports that Saul was approaching Damascus when the Lord confronted him. Saul also spent three days in a blind state. Then Saul spent some time in Damascus preaching in Jesus’ name before he traveled back to Jerusalem. Once in Jerusalem, he talked to the Hellenistic Jews, meaning a Greek-speaking group, but was conservative about being a Jew and adhering to the Law of Moses as they interpreted. We can see that they viewed Saul as a person who was speaking treason against Judaism. Therefore, they attempted to enforce the code of Deuteronomy 13, killing those Jews who abandoned the faith for another belief system.

 Saul was then on the road again, but his time to Caesarea was only about 54 miles. From this coastal city, Saul could get on a boat or travel over land to his hometown of Tarsus which was about 300 miles. Galatians 1:17 tells us that Saul did not see any of the Apostles in Jerusalem and went to Arabia. From this chronology in Acts and Galatians, we can see that after Saul was taken to Tarsus he went to Arabia. Scholars believe that Arabia is the Sinai Peninsula. Saul stayed in Arabia three years before going back to Jerusalem. This is when he met Cephas (Peter).

 **Galatians 1:15-17** 15 But when God, who had set me apart even from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, was pleased 16 to reveal His Son in me so that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood, 17 nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went away to Arabia, and returned once more to Damascus.

 This account details Saul’s life as he transitioned to being the man God wanted him to be. Even though he preached in the name of Jesus in Damascus and Jerusalem, he needed to have a quiet time with God in Arabia. Saul went from being a persecutor of Believers in Jesus to a leading apostle. This did not take place overnight. I see this is a message to all of us. Whatever state the Lord finds us when we surrender to Him, it may take a few years to get things ironed-out in our lives. From persecutor of the Church to the Billy Graham of his day, Saul took a few years to prepare for a lifetime of ministry.

 **Let us look at Saul’s Salvation Account.**

**Starts with God’s Love**

Starting with God’s love reaching out to him, God is the first and primary mover in our salvation. Humanity is spiritually distant from God and blind to see Him.

**Pharisee to Apostle**

Speaking of being blind, Saul was a Pharisee. In Matthew 23, Jesus gives His most critical judgement of these religious leaders. Jesus uses the word “*blind*” (Greek: *tuphlos*) five times in Matthew 23 to describe their condition. An example is in verse 24. . . "You blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!

This is a view to what God thought about the Pharisees. With this, judgmental and condemning view of the Pharisee Saul, we can understand why God struck him so hard. The Pharisees were entrusted to minister to the people, but the Pharisees abused the people. Here are some verses highlighting the fallen condition of man and how distant we are without God. Theologians call this “total depravity.” I’m sure we all like to be referred to as “totally depraved” before we became saved.

9 "The heart is more deceitful than all else And is desperately sick; Who can understand it? Jeremiah 17:9

44 "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day. John 6:44

14 But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. 1 Corinthians. 2:14

**Sovereignty of God Makes the First Move - God Knocks On Our Door**

 God makes the first move to all of us. If it would not be for God reaching out to us, none of us would have the opportunity to restore our relationship with him. We all willingly ate from the forbidden tree the first time we decided to go against God’s plan for our lives. This is grace on full display. For it is by grace we are saved and not of our own works, Paul writes for God in Ephesians 2:8. It is God who extends His grace to us. We do not have to look for God.

To some extent, Saul was like the church in Laodicea (Rev. 3:14-22) in regard to him thinking he had everything he needed, but he was really wretched and miserable, poor, blind and naked.

17 'Because you say, "I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing," and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked,

 18 I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire so that you may become rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see.

 19 'Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore, be zealous and repent.

 20 'Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me.

 21 'He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.

 22 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'"

**God has already been working on a person before we witness to them.**

Remember that God’s creation is all around a person in everyday life. Prior to salvation, a person sees all the nature God created. It is innate in humanity to at least question how all that we see got here. Then there is the experience of good and evil at work in the world. From where do these forces come? There are many questions people develop during their young life. We, as Christians, can answer many of them. We can answer the most basic questions about God and His plan for humanity.

**God brings others around us to follow-up with our repenting state.**

God chose Ananias to assist Saul when he was at his weakest point. We need to keep this in mind when we witness to someone and they surrender to God. They are not to be left on their own. God desires for us to stay with a new Believer and minister to them. They are most vulnerable at that point. Saul had to be led around by others. The disciples fed Saul and took care of him.

**After Surrendering to God - a time of preparation.**

A person may want to go and start proclaiming God to others immediately after their salvation experience. This is a natural desire. However, there is a difference in telling others what happened to you and attempting to become an evangelist. This got Saul in trouble right away with the Hellenistic Jews. We all need to mature in the faith before becoming a spokesperson for God. We need to have the discernment when to witness God.

Some of us went to Seminary and earned a formal education. Others trained within the local church. We all need preparation. We need to keep in mind that we are all not going to become the next Saul/Paul. My view, is that I am hopeful parents can witness to their children.

**Saul/Paul’s Transition**

Saul had a corrupted view of the world. He had to change his lifelong religious worldview. Saul had to empty his heart and mind of being a “blind” Pharisee to become the man, Paul, to be used by God. The Jews in the 1st century had perverted God’s plan for salvation regarding who and what the Messiah was going to be and do. They had placed themselves as a *mediator* between the people and God. We know that the Jews were looking for a Messiah that would be a political and military leader. He would defeat the enemies of Israel and create a world capital in Jerusalem. The whole world would bow down to him. This is in sharp contrast to the Messiah of Isaiah 9:6; 53, Daniel 7:9,13,14; 9:24 and Psalm 22; Micah 5:2; Zachariah 9:9. 12:10, to list a few. This Messiah came to die for the sins of the world. Jesus proclaimed that his Kingdom was not of this world. The Jews denied the resurrection and made-up lies to account for the empty tomb (Matthew 28:13). Thus, to the Jews, there is not a resurrection ministry or ascension to heaven.

**The Big Question Saul Could Not Answer**

My question for anyone is this: Why would God go to the trouble to incarnate himself as one of us, live a persecuted ministry life, be illegally arrested, tried, convicted and crucified to become the king of this temporal fallen world? Satan offered Jesus this very position in Matthew 4 during the test in the wilderness. God, in the flesh as Jesus, turned-down the appointment. So, God did not come to be king of the world. He came to pay the price for our sins by dying on the cross. This begs the next question that Saul did not understand. Why did God incarnate himself and go through all the above mentioned to leave the challenge that His earthly ministry was not enough to close the chasm between fallen man and Himself? The teaching in much of the non-biblical Church is that we must add something to His work. In some churches, leaders and their traditions have made themselves a mediator between people and God. This is a basic observation. But this is the difference between Biblical Christianity and any other faith positions on earth.

The catalyst for God’s action is His unwavering love for every person. To be clear – God’s unconditional love and His Messianic mission to the Cross is exclusive in the world. This is why Biblical Christianity is not compatible with any other monotheistic faith and all the world of paganism/polytheism. Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism and all the eastern mystic religions require you to earn your good standing with a deity. In addition, there are numerous groups who call themselves Christian but require additional works be added to the Cross of Christ. This is in opposition to the Cross. No wonder people go to some religious groups for guidance but reject Christianity due to all the things being added to the Cross.

 **The Cross Is in Contrast All Other Faiths**

**Looking at Islam and Jesus.**

The Quran has passages that acknowledge Jesus was born of a virgin, performed miracles, was sinless, was a prophet of God, ascended to be with God, and will return again one day. All that sounds good and compatible with Christianity. But wait. Islam denies that Jesus died on the Cross for the sins of the world. They teach that a substitute, look-alike person was crucified in his place. Islam denies the Trinity ability of God, thus the Divinity of Jesus and the Holy Spirit. They deny God can indwell a person with His Spirit. They deny ‘right standing’ with God can be achieved by faith alone. They do not understand that it is the Spirit of God within us that produces good works. They attempt to do good works on their own which produces murderous and barbaric outcomes. We can use many verses in the Bible to correct the teachings of Islam. Romans 8:9 9 clearly states. . . *However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.*

This one verse (of hundreds to which we could point) separates Islam from Biblical Christianity. No Muslim person will claim to have the Spirit of God in them. You be the judge. We pray for all Muslim people to see the truth in God’s Word.

**We can rightfully proclaim that Christ is in us, though our bodies are dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness. So, if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in us, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to our mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in us. Romans 8:10-11 AMEN**

**The Remaining verses in Acts 9**

 32 As Peter was traveling from place to place,

he also came down to the saints who lived in Lydda.

 33 There he found a man named Aeneas,

who was paralyzed and had been bedridden for eight years.

 34 Peter said to him, "Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you.

Get up and make your bed," and immediately he got up.

 35 So all who lived in Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord.

 36 In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (which is translated Dorcas). She was always doing good works and acts of charity.

 37 About that time she became sick and died.

 After washing her, they placed her in a room upstairs.

 38 Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples heard that Peter was there and sent two men to him who urged him,

 "Don't delay in coming with us."

 39 Peter got up and went with them. When he arrived, they led him to the room upstairs. And all the widows approached him, weeping and showing him the robes and clothes that Dorcas had made while she was with them.

 40 Peter sent them all out of the room.

He knelt down, prayed, and turning toward the body said,

 "Tabitha, get up."

She opened her eyes, saw Peter, and sat up.

 41 He gave her his hand and helped her stand up.

 He called the saints and widows and presented her alive.

 42 This became known throughout Joppa, and many believed in the Lord.

 43 Peter stayed for some time in Joppa with Simon, a leather tanner. (CSB17)