

PAUL SHARES HIS TESTIMONY ABOUT JESUS WITH THE JEWS

Acts 21:40-22:29 (Key verse: 6-7)

“About noon as I came near Damascus, suddenly a bright light from heaven flashed around me. I fell to the ground and heard a voice say to me, ‘Saul! Saul! Why do you persecute me?’

Generally in a court of law, there is always the need of witnesses to support evidence or what is claimed to have happened. What the witness brings is a sworn testimony or affidavit. The testimony needs to be consistent with its flow or sequence of events. The times, the places with what was seen and heard all needs to make sense. A witness then is very important in giving direction to a particular case. In this passage apostle Paul is serving as a witness of Christ Jesus. He brings with him a testimony of how he met the risen Jesus, that Jesus is indeed the Messiah, the only person who can save mankind from the power of sin and death. Paul was a hard core Jew in the Pharisee sect of the Jewish religion. He used to persecute the followers of Jesus Christ. However, today because of the love and grace of God he has become a witness of the risen Jesus. However, as much as he presented his testimony to the Jews they chose not to believe or become convinced. Instead Paul had to be rescued by the roman commanders as the Jews wanted to kill him. Its as though Paul’s testimony in Jerusalem was not so effective to convince the Jews of the Lordship of Jesus as Messiah. However, through Paul’s testimony we can learn of the amazing grace and love of Jesus for sinners. Because of the grace of God Paul could be used greatly in the lives of many people. I pray that God may convict us of his word and grant each one of us real life experiences of His grace. Amen!

Paul went into Jerusalem aware of persecution from the Jews. We learned from last week Sunday that he was also ready to lay down his life for Jesus. Paul was dragged out of the Synagogue so that he may be killed however was taken by the commander and the soldiers. Paul was convinced that he could persuade the people of Jesus and so requested to speak to the people. Look at verse 1, “Brothers and fathers, listen now to my defense before you.” Paul spoke in Hebrew and began to reveal a number of things about himself. First, that he was a Jew, born in tarsus of Cilicia [3]. Secondly, that he was educated at the feet of Gamaliel who was strict in the laws of their fathers. In this way Paul could reveal that he was no stranger by birth and origin. Moreover, Paul revealed that he had same ambitions as they had for God. Look at verse 4-5, “I persecuted this Way even to the death, detaining both men and women and throwing them into prison, 5as the high priest and the whole Council can testify about me. I even obtained letters from them to their brothers in Damascus, and I was on my way to apprehend these people and bring them to Jerusalem to be punished.” This was Paul’s zealous heart for God. Making sure that the way of God is not contaminated by false teachings. They as Jews saw the teachings of Jesus false and blasphemous. Paul was so convinced that Jesus was not the Messiah but a false teacher leading his people astray.

However, something happened, look at verse 6-7 “6About noon as I was approaching Damascus, suddenly a bright light from heaven flashed around me. 7I fell to the ground and heard a voice say to me, ‘Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me?’” Paul was on his way for another expedition to capture followers of Jesus and bring them to prison. However, Jesus appeared to Paul on the way. We are told that there was such a bright light that Paul even fell to the ground. At the time Paul was still called by his old name Saul. And so Jesus called Saul’s name twice, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me?” By persecuting the followers of Jesus, Saul was persecuting Jesus because the followers of Jesus were simply doing what Jesus had commanded them to do. So to persecute them is to go against Jesus. When we look at verse 6-7 again, we see that, Jesus is not telling Saul that he is persecuting him. But rather he question Saul, why are you persecuting me? And of course Jesus knew why Saul was persecuting him. However, it was a question intended to help Saul see his sin and rebellious heart. In other words, how could you be zealous for God and yet you persecute the same God. The Jews had the Torah, the scriptures, they new the law in and out and yet they persecuted Jesus the very person who inspired the scriptures through the Holy Spirit. But because they rejected Jesus, they became

enemies of God. It did not matter how much scriptural knowledge they had. In fact their objective to study the scriptures was misplaced as we read John 5:39, we reads, "You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me." Knowing the scriptures very well should result in knowing about Jesus because the scriptures testify about Jesus. The knowledge of scripture should draw us all the more to love Jesus and strive to know him more. However if we study the scripture without the intention to surrender to Jesus and accept his leading in our lives, the result will be head knowledge and pride that we know the Bible. It will only result in making us enemies of God and of the Church of Jesus. We end up persecuting Jesus rather than glorifying him and serving Him. So Saul realized how far off he was from God and even called Jesus Lord.

His heart was softened by Jesus and His revelation that he was actually persecuting Him. Let us see how Saul responded, Look at verse 10, "Then I asked, 'What should I do, Lord?' 'Get up and go into Damascus,' He told me. 'There you will be told all that you have been appointed to do.'" Saul could drop every plan of his own that he had, his ambitions to persecute Jesus and follow the leading of the high priests. He even called Jesus Lord. Jesus became his king. He now met the person the scriptures had been talking about. He could then repent and let go of his own life direction. For he asked Jesus, "what should I do, Lord?" Saul became empty of his human ambitions so that Jesus may plant new life direction in his heart. Saul was now going into Damascus because of Jesus, a different reason than the one he initially had. Jesus did not even reveal to him the details but rather, "get up and go into Damascus, there you will be told all that you have been appointed to do". This was such a great blessing for Saul, a man who used to terrorize the church of Jesus was now going to receive a new life direction from Jesus. Jesus was indeed the grace of God over Saul. Because Jesus could have ended Saul's life since he was causing huge frustration for the believers, however, he spared his life. Jesus loved Saul and showed him much grace. Saul could receive forgiveness of his sins and repent immediately as we shall see later on. Saul could finally in his life receive a clear life direction from Jesus, what a blessing and honor.

Saul even became blind, look at verse 11-13, "Because the brilliance of the light had blinded me, my companions led me by the hand into Damascus. 12There a man named Ananias, a devout observer of the law who was highly regarded by all the Jews living there, 13came and stood beside me. 'Brother Saul,' he said, 'receive your sight.' And at that moment I could see him." Paul's blindness also reveals a lot, that he has been walking as a blind spiritual man. That though he had so much knowledge of scripture and all these expeditions to persecute the Church, he was actually blind. Ananias on the other hand who also knew the scriptures well and was even a teacher of the law, because scriptures were about Jesus for him he could be in the light and even be used to help Saul come from darkness into the light.

Look at verse 14, "Then he said, 'The God of our fathers has appointed you to know His will, and to see the Righteous One, and to hear His voice.'" The God of our fathers refers to the same God the Jews claim to believe in, the God of History, the God Moses, the God of Joshua, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. This God is the very person Jesus Christ who Saul met on his way to Damascus. Saul was not been told of a new God who had no history, but the same God taught in scriptures.

This God had appointed Saul for three things: first, to know His will, secondly, to see the Righteous one and thirdly to hear His voice. This means that all along Saul did not know the will of God. Even though he had been zealous for God and believing that he was living for God. It was only when he met Jesus personally in his life that the will of God could be revealed to him. The "righteous one" was known by Jews to mean the Messiah, and Saul had already started to hear his voice. To hear the voice of Jesus means that Paul also had same authority as the old testament prophets. Who spoke what they heard from God. It is for this reason that the new testament has a large portion of it written by

Paul (who was previously known as Saul). Paul did not teach his mind and what he wished for. Paul taught directly what he heard from Jesus through the Holy Spirit. He could teach about the grace of God, the law of God, faith and righteousness because of the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Look at verse 15, "You will be His witness to everyone of what you have seen and heard." In this way Paul is testifying that, he was chosen by the grace of God to be a witness of Jesus to everyone and did not make all these things up. Even Ananias a devout observer of the law who was highly regarded by all the Jews living there could attest to Paul's testimony. Paul was testifying that he did not appoint himself to serve in the ministry of Jesus or to know the will of God. But rather it was God who appointed him, to know His will, to see the righteous one and to hear His voice. All these were but by the grace of God. Let us look at verse 16 for the directive from Ananias, it reads, "And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized, and wash your sins away, calling on His name." Paul was to be baptized calling on the name of Jesus for the forgiveness of his sins. Because Jesus is our savior from the power of sin and death for we read in Acts 4:12 "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved." [Acts 4:12]. Thus Paul is baptized through the name of Jesus.

Look at verse 17-18, "Later, when I had returned to Jerusalem and was praying at the temple, I fell into a trance and saw the Lord saying to me, 'Hurry! Leave Jerusalem quickly, because the people here will not accept your testimony about Me.'" Paul was even commanded by Jesus to leave Jerusalem, Jesus had made it clear to him that Jerusalem would not accept his testimony. However Paul reasoned that, the Jews know him very well, on how he used to persecute the church, that he was the one who led the killing of God's servant, Stephen. However still Jesus knew their hearts that they would not listen and believe. Look at verse 21-22, "Then He said to me, 'Go! I will send you far away to the Gentiles.'" 22The crowd listened to Paul until he made this statement. Then they lifted up their voices and shouted, "Rid the earth of him! He is not fit to live!" The Jews not only refused to accept Paul's testimony, they wanted to kill Paul and said he was not even fit to live. The Jews refused to see and hear the heart of God for world salvation. They read the scriptures with eye glasses the blinded their sight to see and accept Jesus as their Messiah. It was God's will from the time of Abraham, that he will be a father of many nations not only the nation of Israel. And so when in Paul's testimony Jesus directed him far away to the Gentiles they found it very blasphemous. They were blind to God's heart and grace for the salvation of all peoples.

Verses 23-29 shows that the situation got out of hand for Paul. He was chained and about to be flogged. However Paul used his Roman citizenship to avoid being flogged. Because as a citizen he is supposed to firstly go on trial even before they could chain him. This is how Paul could escape flogging.

In conclusion, through this passage God's amazing grace is revealed. Jesus was patient with a man who had brutally persecuted His servants. He was even on his way to persecute the followers of Jesus in Damascus when Jesus met with him. Paul was persecuting Jesus yet because of the grace of God that was demonstrated through Jesus dying for us on the cross, Saul could be given a new life direction. Because of the grace of God, this man who seemed eager and untouchable to destroy the Church of Jesus was greatly humbled. He could repent of his sin, be baptized in the name of Jesus and accept Jesus new life direction. May God Paul's testimony convict of the Lordship of Jesus as our only savior in this broken world. Today we have been blessed by the word of God from the Bible because of the grace of God that worked mightily in the life of Paul. May we study the word of God and so we may place our hopes on Jesus as we journey through this life. Amen!