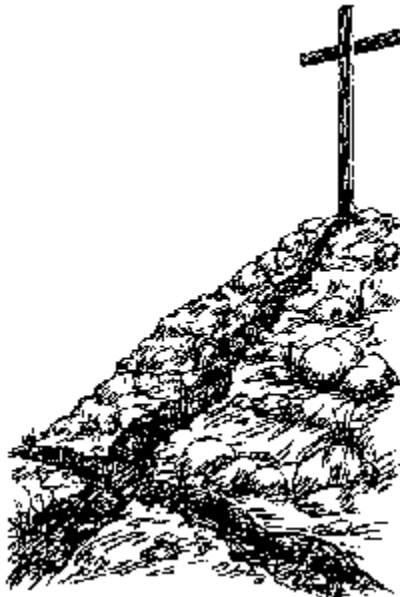


The Damascus Road Experience

Acts 9:1-8, 10-16

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(Acts 9:1-8 KJV) "And Saul, yet breathing out¹ threatenings² and slaughter³ against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, {2} 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 bound⁴ unto Jerusalem. {3} And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: {4} 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 persecutest⁵: *it is* hard for thee to kick against the pricks. {6} And he trembling⁶ and astonished⁷ said, Lord⁸, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord⁸ *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."

¹ Present Active Participle empneo {pronounced emp-neh'-o} = continually breathing in and out, puffing, emphasizes his eagerness to do for God.

² apeile {pronounced ap-i-lay'}, threatening.

³ phonos {fon'-os}, murder, slaughter.

⁴ Perfect Passive Participle, deo {pronounced deh'-o}, thrown into chains.

⁵ Present Active Indicative, dioko {pronounced dee-o'-ko}, to mistreat or

harass.

⁶ Present Active Participle, tremo {trem'-o}, to be in dread, in terror, in fear.

⁷ Present Active Participle, thambeo {pronounced tham-beh'-o}, astonishment, fearful amazement

⁸ kurios {pronounced koo'-ree-os}, Lord, Master, Divine, God. Also in many other places, of note in John 20:28 (KJV) "And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God."

(Acts 9:10-16 KJV) "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 inquire 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. {13} 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 show him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake."

The Damascus Road was a major trade road that ran from Jerusalem to Damascus. Damascus itself is one of the oldest cities in the world. Situated about 140

miles northeast of Jerusalem, Damascus has been around since Abraham's day (**Genesis 14:14-15**).

The Damascus Road is more than an ancient trade route, much more. We can study what happened at the Damascus Road in the early Church and see **restoration, repentance, and reward**. We can see how **God used the Damascus Road** - and the troubles that road brought - to **restore** the early Church to the Great Commission - to bring a **religious** unsaved man to **righteousness** - and to become an opportunity for **reward** for an obedient faithful believer.

1. Damascus Road - Restoration To Obedience

I have often been asked, "Why has this happened to me? Why did God allow this (be it death, illness, or loss of a job) to happen?" I can honestly say I do not know why trials and troubles happen to us all. Sometimes all I can say is, "That's life!". We all have our good times, and we all have our bad times. There is a natural rhythm to life, a cycle if you will, and we all move through both good and bad. There are times when all your pastor can say is, "That's life!".

There are other times, though, when troubles come because **God uses trouble to mold us, to weave us**, to move us into what He wants us to be. There are times when we through **disobedience bring Damascus Road on ourselves**. Though these bad times shock us,

we need to remember that God is in control. It is His hand that controls the trial, gentling caressing the fabric of our lives.

The early Church would grow, but it would not *initially* fulfill the Great Commission as our Lord required. What was our “Great Commission”? In Matthew 28:19 the Church was given this command:

(Matthew 28:19 KJV) "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:"

Look at the verbs in this sentence: “Go”, “teach”, “baptizing”. The Church was to reach outward, to come out of its shell, to - once it was established - reach out to *all nations*. The Church was, in fact, to help fulfill that portion of the promise God made to our Father Abraham when He said:

(Genesis 12:3 KJV) "... in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed."

We are even told in the Pauline writings that:

(Galatians 3:8 KJV) "And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed."

Listen Beloved - it was **God's intention from the very beginning to offer the Gospel message to all people**, both Jews and Gentiles. It was and has always been God's intention that *whosoever will call on the name of the Lord* shall be saved. The early Church was told to go outward, to witness to:

(Acts 1:8 KJV) "... Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."

Did the Church do this? No. It is a fact that **people like to be comfortable, and that we will often seek comfort above obedience**. The Church was told to go *into the world* and to preach the Gospel *to all nations*. Instead the Church grew and had their worship services in a very interesting place.

They held service on Solomon's Porch.

(Acts 5:11-12 KJV) "And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things. {12} And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; (and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch."

The Church was largely Jewish in its composition at this time, and the Gospel was preached in Jerusalem,
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the capital city of Israel. **Services** were held on **Solomon's Porch**, an area inside the Jewish Temple. How **many Gentiles** do you think went to the Temple on Sunday? **Absolutely none!** The Gospel that Jesus shed His blood for, the Gospel that was to be taught to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the earth - because its messengers stayed in Jerusalem, the message was preached to Jews only.

There was one problem with this. Well, two problems, really. **First**, it was **Jesus' command** that the Gospel go outward to the Gentiles. **Second**, the Church was meeting *in the Temple*. Now, the High Priest **Caiaphas** (John 18:24) was instrumental in getting Jesus crucified. **Do you think that he was happy when the Church “of this Jesus” started holding services in the Temple?** Are you kidding?! Caiaphas was more than likely livid over these Christians.

It is always best to obey Christ's commandments. In fact, if we love Him, we will keep His commandments. (John 14:15). When the Church began to meet in the Temple one young man, Saul, saw this as a *red flag*. “How dare these Christians, these Jesus worshipers, meet in our Temple?” The Church at Jerusalem, by not obeying Jesus, brought a Damascus Road experience on themselves. The Bible says:

(Acts 8:1-3 KJV) "And Saul was consenting unto

his {Stephen's} 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. {2} And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. {3} As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed *them* to prison."

The Bible says that Saul (his name means “death”) was vehemently moving down the Damascus Road,

(Acts 9:1-2 KJV) "And Saul^a, yet breathing out¹ threatenings² and slaughter³ against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, {2} 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 bound⁴ unto Jerusalem.

Saul was agitated. **What started his agitation was a Church holding services in the Temple.**

Application: As believers we need to ask ourselves, “Am I doing what Jesus has commanded me to do in my life?” You may not understand this, but I hope you do. We serve a BIG God! We serve a BIG Jesus! Jesus said:

(Revelation 21:6 KJV) "... I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. ..."

Jesus also said:

(Isaiah 48:12-13 KJV) "Hearken unto me, O Jacob and Israel, my called; I *am* he; I *am* the first, I also *am* the last. {13} Mine hand also hath laid the foundation of the earth, and my right hand hath spanned the heavens: *when* I call unto them, they stand up together."

Our God, our Creator, our **Jesus knows what is best for us**. I cannot say that, nor would I dare say that, of myself. I do not know what is always best for me, for you, or for anyone - for I am but a human. But Jesus Christ, our Savior, our God, knows the beginning from the end. It is always best to hear and obey His commandments.

Damascus Road gave the early Church a boot in its britches - a well needed boot, I might add. If God is booting you, if you are having a Damascus Road experience, then seek restoration with God. Confess your failure, and do as the Lord is leading you to do.

2. Damascus Road - Religious To Righteous

(Acts 9:2-4 KJV) "... desired of him [the High Priest] letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were

men or women, he might bring them bound⁴ unto Jerusalem. {3} And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: {4} And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?

Saul was like so many people "doing good" for God. He was angered because these "Christians" were blaspheming his God by worshiping Jesus in the Temple. So he decided he's **help God out by chasing down Christians**. Saul, a member of the ruling body of Israel, the **Sanhedrin**, knew that He was doing right. He went to the High Priest, and this religious leader gave him permission to do as he wanted to do. Saul then took his letters of arrest and headed back to Damascus. The Bible says:

he came near Damascus

Saul was just before executing more arrests, taking more Christians to their deaths, when Jesus came and knocked him down on Damascus Road.

I want you to notice how Jesus approached unbelieving Saul. Our Lord said:

Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?

The Bible tells me that Jesus Christ died for the sins of the world. The Bible tells me that Jesus *purchased the Church with His own blood*. We are told:

(Acts 20:28 KJV) "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood."

Did you read that. Read it again with me **God** purchased the Church *with His own blood*. The Church is Christ's precious possession. The Church is not just a *clubhouse*, nor a collection of people with like desires. The Church is the Body of Christ. The members of the Church are literally and spiritually joined to Christ:

(Ephesians 5:30 KJV) "For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones."

You **cannot hurt the Church and not hurt Jesus**. When you persecute the Church, you persecute Jesus. What saddens me more than anything is that people take the Church of Christ so lightly. We are His, He is ours. Praise God, this is His Church!

Saul thought he was serving God while he chased Christians to their death, but he was in reality serving Satan. You do not serve God if you hate God's Church. You do not serve Christ if you bring

confusion, dismay, and shame on the Body He died for. Saul was knocked down and blinded on Damascus Road for persecuting Christ by persecuting His Church.

I often wonder about those who pursue religion without Christ. **No good has ever come of religion**. During the Spanish Inquisition religious men totally ignorant of Jesus Christ persecuted all who did not fall in line with their beliefs. The Inquisition in Spain began in 1478 and officially ended in 1808. During that time, 323,362 people were burned at the stake. Religion apart from Christ creates madness and mayhem, and confusion of all sorts.

God often brings a Damascus Road experience on people who are unsaved but outwardly good. This was the case with Saul. He was unsaved, but looked good on the outside.

(Romans 3:10-12 KJV) "As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: {11} There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. {12} They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one."

The testimony of Scripture is that, as our Lord Jesus said, **"You must be born again"** (**John 3:3, 7**). If you have not been born again, but are only outwardly

washed, you are yet dead in your sins. You are like the Pharisees whom Jesus condemned:

(Matthew 23:27 KJV) "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchers, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead *men's* bones, and of all uncleanness."

Application: If you have little care for Jesus in your life, yet suffer - consider Damascus Road. If you only incidentally worship God, and when you do grace God with your presence - consider Damascus Road. I am amazed at the number of people who enter hospitals and long term care facilities who never examine their lives for purity. Oh Beloved, I am not called to be your judge nor jury, but God often uses Damascus Road to give the sinner an opportunity to repent. As the Bible says:

(1 Corinthians 11:31-32 KJV) "For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. {32} But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world."

Saul knew that Jesus was God, and knew whom he had offended. Saul said:

Acts 9:5-6 And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest⁵:

it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. {6} And he trembling⁶ and astonished⁷ said, Lord⁸, what wilt thou have me to do?

I want you to notice the **change from the *religious man* to the *righteous man***. Before Saul was saved by faith in Christ he went to the High Priest for instruction. Now Saul asks Jesus - JESUS - "What do you want me to do, Lord (kurios - God)?" Here is a changed, saved life. He no longer looks to others for validation, but to God. Now that he looks to God, he no longer persecutes the Church that Jesus died for.

This same Saul would soon have his name changed to "Paul". What an interesting change! At one time he was called "Saul", which means "death". **Saul was big, Saul was bad, Saul was one to be feared. But once he met Jesus he became "Paul", which means - not death - but "little"**. Saul was an unbeliever, pompous, full of himself, murderous. Paul was a believer, humble, full of Jesus, a builder rather than a destroyer. He who confidently stormed down Damascus Road now had to be led around blind by two strangers who took pity on him (Acts 9:8).

Have you met Jesus on the Damascus Road?

3. Damascus Road - Righteous To Reward

(Acts 9:10-16 KJV) "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 inquire 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. {13} 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 show him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake."

Damascus Road was also an opportunity for another Christian, Ananias, to be a blessing and to be blessed. There are times in your life, faithful Christian, when God is going to bring a Damascus Road experience to you. This experience will not come because you were disobedient, as the Church at Jerusalem foolishly disobeyed. This experience will not come because you are lost and undone, as Saul was. No, this experience will come because God wants to give you an opportunity to *excel in the faith*.

Consider Ananias. This is a faithful believer who has

tried to follow Jesus to the best of his ability. As he prayed one day Jesus touched his heart and told him to get up and do something very hard. You see, Ananias was *in Damascus*, and it's very possible that Saul was *coming for him* when Jesus knocked him down on the Damascus Road. Ananias knew about Saul - perhaps he was even hiding, dreading Saul's return with his death warrant. Now Jesus pops into his heart and tells him to go see Saul.

Saul, who would soon be Paul the Apostle, was a *chosen vessel* unto Jesus. Our Lord picked Paul to go to us, the Gentiles, to tell us about that great salvation that only comes by faith in Christ. **Ananias was also a chosen vessel, for his obedience was required to complete Saul's conversion.**

Faithful Christians are asked to do hard things. We were never saved to sit on the sidelines. The Church in America is in the condition it is in today because Christians have been lazy in serving Christ - let not that sin be named among us! Ananias was given a job to do. The hunted was to go find the hunter. The persecuted was to go find the persecutor. The rabbit was to go hunt the lion because *Jesus said so*. In our country and in our society we have come to believe that Christianity is all about comfort, ease, satisfaction, purpose driven malarkey! Christianity is about serving Christ. We stretch and grow, moving ever outward, ever higher because of Jesus.

I can imagine Ananias as Damascus Road came to him. I can imagine his heart beating wildly as he protested, knowing even as he spoke he protested to Almighty God. Nevertheless he knew what was commanded, and as God's chosen vessel he went.

Application: Many Christians today have the feeling that Christ's orders are only Christ's *suggestions*. It's sad, though. If you are a faithful follower of Jesus and God brings Damascus Road to you, you are a *chosen vessel*. If you do not do it, if you do not serve, then who will? God chose Ananias knowing that He could empower Ananias to do what He asked. Why Ananias? Who knows but God? The Bible says:

(1 Corinthians 1:27-29 KJV) "But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; {28} And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: {29} That no flesh should glory in his presence."

Ananias was not chosen based on ability, but on *pliability*. Ananias was not chosen because he was naturally equipped, but because God would *supernaturally equip him*. You see, once Ananias went and put his hand on Saul, Saul would regain his sight. It took Ananias' obedience to win Saul's

salvation.

I suspect there are **some of you whom God has touched you, putting someone on your heart to go and witness to**. If so, like Ananias you are the key! Not because you are better, but because God chose you - you are the key. Perhaps God has placed something on your heart - you feel Damascus Road looming, and your heart beats in your throat. Know this, what God hath required, God will empower.

You may be like the Church that failed to go out, and Damascus Road looms. You may be like Saul who followed religion rather than Christ; Damascus Road is before you. You may be like Ananias, faithful Ananias, who has been called to Damascus Road itself. Look now, judge within yourself, and respond to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

by His hand,
Pastor David Buffaloe, Rock Hill Baptist.