

Paul (*Part 2*)

Romans 1:1

Sermon-in-a-Sentence: Christ's calling on our lives is just as real as that of the Apostle Paul. How are you responding to that call?

I. Saul's Condition Prior to Salvation

- Before he met Jesus Christ, he was a vigorous persecutor and a hostile destroyer of Christianity.
- Our spiritual condition was really no different than Saul's (Ephesians 2:1-4, 11-12).
- How did he go from being a vigorous persecutor and a hostile destroyer to being a devoted advocate and zealous proponent of Christianity?
 - Note his description of himself in Romans 1:1 – "Paul, a servant (lit., a bond-servant, a slave) of Christ Jesus..." (Identity).
 - "...called to be an apostle and set apart for the [proclamation of the] gospel of God." (Identity & Purpose)
 - An apostle was a person who had been commissioned, given authority, and sent on a mission on behalf of another.
 - An apostle was a missionary, sent with a message; an ambassador who went to personally represent the One who sent him.
- How do you identify yourself? What would you say is your purpose in life?
- Does your sense of identity and purpose extend beyond this lifetime? Do they have any eternal impact? How do they relate to Jesus Christ?

II. Saul's Confrontation on the Road to Damascus

- Acts 8:1-3 – the martyrdom of Stephen and the participation of Saul.
- Acts 9:1-3 – this was not his "first rodeo"! (Cp. Acts 26:11).
- Acts 9:4-5 – Jesus identifies Himself so closely with His followers who are being persecuted for His namesake that it is as if Jesus Himself was being persecuted.
 - We are never closer to the Lord and He is never closer to us than when we are suffering for His sake (Matthew 25:40, 45).
 - "As he lay there in the dust, Saul must have been reeling from the realization that Jesus, the crucified founder of this detested sect, had been resurrected by God and exalted in divine glory. Saul was not serving God, as he had thought, but opposing him!" (LASB)
 - Saul didn't "get religion"; he got a relationship! His religion was taking him down the wrong path, away from God, not to God.
 - "True conversion comes from a personal encounter with Jesus Christ and leads to a new life in relationship with him." (LASB)
- Acts 9:6 – Why didn't the Lord just tell Saul what he was to do? He graciously uses willing and available people to accomplish His work.

III. Saul's Conversion in the City of Damascus

- Acts 9:7-9 – We do not always understand God's timing in our lives. We want God to deliver us NOW from our painful circumstances.
- "Saul probably would have begun to think about the many prophecies that he had studied in his training as a Pharisee, prophecies that spoke of the coming Messiah. He would have been forced to conclude that Jesus had indeed met the requirements and fulfilled the prophecies. These Christians, whom Saul had been chasing, believed that Jesus had risen from the dead — and Saul had just seen the risen Christ in his glory. Suddenly, all that Saul had believed was being torn down and replaced with a new truth — the very truth that he had been seeking to extinguish. As Saul was thinking about all this, he was also [fasting and] praying." (LASB)
- Recommended resources: *More Than a Carpenter* and *Evidence That Demands a Verdict* by Josh McDowell; *The Case For Christ* by Lee Strobel.
- Acts 9:10-16 – God's call on our lives is not risk-free!
 - What about the Health, Wealth and Prosperity Gospel?
 - The New Testament assumes that persecution and suffering will be part and parcel of the Christian life.
 - "Yes, Lord!" or "No way!" Which is it for you?

IV. Saul's Calling to the Gospel Ministry

- Acts 9:15-16; 26:12-20.
 - Saul / Paul never got over God's grace and mercy to him!
 - God uses willing and available people to accomplish His purposes.
- Acts 9:17-22 – Saul immediately responded to the Lord's call in faith and obedience.

THE SNOWFLAKE PRINCIPLE

Saul was perfect for the task given him by God: thoroughly versed in Jewish theology, language, and culture; a native of Tarsus and, thus, equally at home in Greek culture; a citizen of the Roman Empire; trained in the secular trade of tentmaking, thus able to support himself financially. This is a great example of the truth that **God has a tailor-made ministry for each Christian**. It's the snowflake principle. We're all different. No one else would have been suited to do what Paul did. And **no one else can do what you can do**. No one else has your circle of friends, your abilities, your situations. In a sense, **each believer has an apostolic call. God wants to send you out, to commission you to do something significant**. You may not play a prominent or highly visible role, but **God has a fulfilling plan for you that will bring him glory by building his church**. (LASB, *emphasis added*)