

Third Sunday of Easter
May 5th, 2019
Pastor Matthew Ude

Acts 9:1-22 NKJ 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. ⁸ Then Saul arose from the ground, and when his eyes were opened he saw no one. But they led him by the hand and brought *him* into Damascus. ⁹ And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank. ¹⁰ Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and to him the Lord said in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Here I am, Lord." ¹¹ So the Lord *said* to him, "Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for *one* called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he is praying. ¹² "And in a vision he has seen a man named Ananias coming in and putting *his* hand on him, so that he might receive his sight." ¹³ Then Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem. ¹⁴ "And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name." ¹⁵ But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. ¹⁶ "For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake." ¹⁷ And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." ¹⁸ Immediately there fell from his eyes *something* like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized. ¹⁹ So when he had received food, he was strengthened. Then Saul spent some days with the disciples at Damascus. ²⁰ Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God. ²¹ Then all who heard were amazed, and said, "Is this not he who destroyed those who called on this name in Jerusalem, and has come here for that purpose, so that he might bring them bound to the chief priests?" ²² But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this *Jesus* is the Christ.

Lord what must I do?

Last week we saw the incredible growth of the church at Jerusalem. How the Lord blessed the preaching of the word there and "multitudes of men and women" were added daily. And so we asked ourselves the question, "how can our church be more like that church?"

Today we see the beginnings of Paul, the great and mighty missionary. And again each of us might wonder how can I be more like him?

Maybe not all of us want to be great missionaries traveling all over the world. But if we were able to imitate him even a little. If we were able to argue convincingly that Jesus is Christ and Lord. As Moses said, "Oh, that all the LORD'S people were prophets *and* that the LORD would put His Spirit upon them!" **Numbers 11:29 NKJ**. Wouldn't that be great.

We would like the Lord's guidance. We would like to do His will. We want His blessing but we just aren't sure how. So we consider with Paul, "Lord, what must I do?"

Repentance

Of course it begins with repentance. Paul's words, "What must I do, Lord?" are a complete repudiation of everything that has gone before.

Up to this point, Paul is one of those people who thought he had it all figured out. He was born into a wealthy family. He was educated in the best schools in the empire. He dedicates his life to the Lord. He studied under Gamaliel. He was a rising star in the Jewish world. I'm sure his parents were very proud. I'm sure they told all the neighbors what a great son they had. Saul thought he had it all figured out.

But now the Lord opens the eyes of Saul to see the truth. To see that it is all a pile of worthless sticking rot. All his hard work, all his accomplishments, they are all nothing and worse than nothing they are the greatest sins.

The Lord opens Saul's eyes for the first time he sees himself for what he truly is. "**what must I do, Lord?**" These are the words of one who is a sinner and who knows it. I've tried everything myself and it is a failure. Lord you teach me your way.

Something very similar happened to Joshua at the battle of Ai, right after the destruction of Jericho. The children of Israel destroyed the city of Jericho and next on the list was the city of Ai. Joshua sent spies up to look at the city of Ai. The spies came back and said, "that is a small city, no big deal, just only send two or three thousand." So that is what they did, but no one bothered to ask the Lord. They thought they had it covered. They thought they knew what they were doing. The men lost and came running back. Joshua tore his clothes and hair, and fell on his face before the Lord, "What happened? Why did you abandon us Lord?" The answer came back, "Israel has sinned."

Usually exactly when we think we have it covered is when we have the greatest need to start with repentance. Lest we waste our lives doing useless and or pointless things, or even worse sinful things, thinking we are doing something great.

This repentance is of course not something we can do ourselves. It takes the power of Christ to open our hearts and eyes so that we see ourselves for what we truly are, "terrible sinners."

In our text it takes a light greater than the Sun, three days of blindness and fasting, but most importantly it takes the voice of Christ. Repentance is necessary if we are going to accomplish anything for the Lord. Repentance is a gift from Christ which he gives us in His word.

Listening

Another important aspect of a life that actually accomplishes something is learning to listen when God speaks to us. Here we have the example of Saul for sure. He has to be taught to listen. Here we also have the example of Ananias.

Our text shows us that Ananias knew Saul was coming and why Saul was coming. Do you think that Ananias was praying for help from Saul? Do you think that when Ananias heard that Saul was coming to persecute the Christians in Damascus that he prayed to the Lord that he would save them from the hand of Saul? I think it likely, but even if he wasn't, surely some in the church were. And God answered their prayer, yet in a way entirely different from what they were expecting.

The Christians in Damascus probably thought: Stop Saul from reaching Damascus. Help us to hide when he gets here. Cause the governor to protect us.

But God says, "no I got a better plan. I am going to convert Saul and cause him to work on our side."

Ananias isn't too sure about this, yet at the word of the Lord he goes.

there are many times in our lives too when we don't really think the Lord knows what he is talking about. We doubt God and his word. Is that really the best way God?

Yet we need to learn with Ananias to go at his word. When once we know what God's will is we need to stop raising excuses and go.

This also is not something in ourselves. This also is a gift from the Lord through His word. Through that word we not only hear His voice but learn to trust it.

Go and Do

Finally we want to get to work doing those tasks the Lord has given to us to do.

Jesus with His power brought Saul to repentance. Jesus gave him a new life in the waters of baptism. Jesus filled him with the Holy Spirit. And being filled with the Holy Spirit, Saul got up and went out and immediately preached that Jesus was the Christ.

God having given us, His word, his forgiveness, his power and to each of gifts and tasks to do, expects that we will get up and do them.

Perhaps you have heard sayings such as, "do what you can and God will take care of the rest." Or "God helps those who help themselves." This is not the same as what we see in our text. These sayings would imply that if we do our best God will fill in the rest for us. God will reward those who work hard. This is not what we see in our text.

It is all Jesus. Jesus calls Saul when he was still a sinner. Jesus opens his eyes and heart to recognize his sin. Jesus sends him to Damascus and baptizes him, and gives him a part and a mission in the early church. Jesus takes this sinner and makes of him a true soldier of the cross. May Jesus fill us with his grace and Holy Spirit that we also may be great soldiers of the cross.

Yet having been filled with His grace Jesus expects that we get out there and do those tasks he has sent us to do.

Ephesians 2:10 NKJ ¹⁰ For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

The Grace of God is not an excuse for our laziness, yes it is all Him but that doesn't mean we sitting around with popcorn watching the show.

Filled with his grace we go out to do His will.

Amen