

A Transition Statement.  
Acts 9:31-43.  
Sunday morning, April 18, 2010.

I. A veiled blessing.

The narrative transitions us in two ways:

- A. It is a transition from the work of the Lord in the conversion and early ministry of Saul. Now the narrative will switch back to the Lord's work done by Peter.
- B. It is also a transition statement from a time of great persecution to a time of peace. There may have been two reasons as to why this peace came about.
  1. Our text gives us a glimpse of the Church following the persecution. At the beginning of the persecution the Church was centered in and around Jerusalem. Here we are told that the churches throughout all Judea, Samaria and Galilee had peace and were edified.  
A tremendous multiplication had taken place as a result of the scattering of the Church in and around Jerusalem. See Acts 8:1 and 4. Such exponential growth in the Christian Church as a result of the persecution may have given the Sanhedrin cause to re-think their strategy.
  2. Josephus' Antiquities 18:8:1 and following gives an additional explanation. It was during these years that that the then emperor Caligula attempted to set his own image, in the form of a statue, in the temple of Jerusalem. This would have been an event so heinous and unthinkable to the Jewish mindset that it would have taken all the attention and the heat off the Christian Church.

Application:

Here is a good example of the wisdom and the sovereignty of God that is at work in the midst of the turmoil of the nations. How shall we view the rise and fall of kings and kingdoms? Or, in the language of the prophet Haggai, as quoted in Hebrews 12:26, "the shaking of the earth and her kingdoms"?

Is not the present world, and all the structures and organizations we have built in it among the nations, the scaffolding from which the Lord is building His kingdom which can not be shaken, nor removed? Hebrews 12:27-29

When the Jewish nation and leadership is shaken to its core by the plans of emperor Caligula, and the heat and attention of the Jewish leaders is taken off the Church, it is then that a Church emerges that has spread throughout "all Judea, Samaria, and Galilee." What is the best and the most important thing that can happen at any time in history, including our own time? Is it not that the Lord Jesus Christ should build His kingdom from the scaffolding of falling and rising nations?

Is this your desire? Is it your prayer for your own, and for the lives of others? Is it not this which we are taught to pray in the Lord's prayer when we pray: "Thy kingdom come..."? Are you there; is your heart there? If not, there is grace with the Lord to bring your heart to that place. Only go to Him and ask for it.

II. Inward blessing.

Besides the tremendous outward growth of the Church there was tremendous inward development as well. Following this time of great suffering and persecution the

Church is marked by two of the greatest graces we could ever possess as Christians:

A. "Walking in the fear of the Lord."

This means that their greatest concern would have been that they would lose their nearness and fellowship with the Lord, and that their love for Him and His people would grow cold and distant. That somehow their lives would not be useful to the Lord's service anymore. That somehow the work of His grace would grind to a halt in their lives. That they would be running the race in vain, merely going through the motions of religion. That they would lose their first love and lose sight of what truly is of value in life.

It means that in the midst of their suffering their greatest concern was that the Lord, in spite, or because of such persecution, would advance His kingdom. As long as they could have that, it would be worth it all, and they would gladly bear their burdens and if necessary lay down their lives.

All this and more is "the fear of the Lord." It is the wellspring of life. Proverbs 14:27. It is the concern that we have the Lord in truth, and that we're holding on to Him; that He has our attention. If we have anything in life it must be Him, and it must be Him in truth. That is the fear of the Lord in which these Christians were walking, and it represents Christian maturity at its finest.

Application:

Are you walking in the fear of the Lord? What is your greatest fear or concern in life? What is your greatest quest or pursuit in life? What would you like to have more than anything else? Here it is, or at least it ought to be; the fear of the Lord. And it is yours for the asking, for to this end the Lord Jesus Christ came into the world that He might purchase for us, and teach us, and impart to us, the fear of the Lord. Are you in the market for it? Without it you have nothing; your religion is in vain.

B. They walked in the comfort of the Holy Spirit.

In what does this comfort consist? Without mentioning the word "comfort" the apostle Paul mentions three of its main ingredients as things he desires for the Christians in Rome. Romans 15:13.

1. Joy. When the fear of the Lord rules our hearts; when He is our main concern and pursuit, then we find that in His presence there is fullness of joy, and that there are pleasures forevermore.
2. Peace. Greek Eirene from which we get the name Irene. Its Hebrew equivalent is "shalom," meaning "total wellness or well-being." Again, the fear of the Lord leads to total well-being; in the words of the hymn writer: "It is well with my soul."
3. Hope. Not hope in the sense of hoping for things that maybe will come. The sense of this word is the anticipation of things that surely will come for God has promised them.

Application:

Do you know this peace and joy in believing? Do you abound in hope by the power of the Holy spirit? These are the fruits of the fear of the Lord; and the comfort of the Holy Spirit, and you may go to Jesus and ask for them, for He has purchased them for you.