

Arrested In The Way.

Acts 9:1-9.

Sunday morning, March 7, 2010.

I. Saul's zeal and blindness.

- A. Saul, full of hatred against the followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, literally breathes out threats and murders against the community of disciples. He does so in much the same way that the Lord has breathed out His word of love and grace toward us in the inspiration of Scripture. All Scripture is "God breathed." 2 Timothy 3:16. What a contrast in "breathing" is here before us!
- B. Saul is not content to persecute the church in Jerusalem. He has heard that now even in Damascus there is a flourishing community of disciples of Jesus.
1. In Chapter 8 we saw how the scattering of believers away from Jerusalem bore fruit in Samaria, and how it found the Ethiopian Eunuch.
 2. Here we see how the scattering of believers away from Jerusalem bore fruit in Damascus as well. Damascus is one of the oldest inhabited cities in the world, and it is located in a very fertile and well watered valley in Syria. Historians have described the surroundings of Damascus as a virtual paradise. Damascus is located 130 miles Northeast of Jerusalem which would have been a week's journey. Damascus had a large Jewish community, and several flourishing synagogues.
 3. Here Saul wants to go, and he asks permission to bring, not just men, but also women who believe in Jesus, back to Jerusalem in chains, so they may be prosecuted there for their crimes.
- C. There is no zeal like carnal, religious zeal.
This is true for it is exceedingly pleasing to our fallen natures to contribute to the work of God by our own efforts, talents and strength. And the more successful we are in those efforts, the more pleased we are with ourselves, and the more we glory in our own accomplishments.
- D. There is no blindness like the blindness of religious zeal.
This blindness is the companion of the religious zeal of our fallen natures. It is caused by being so taken in and pleased with our own accomplishments that we neglect and forget to discern our true state before God.
1. The truth is that the work that any man can do, another man can undo. Only the work of God will stand forever.
 2. The truth is that in matters of the kingdom of God, God Himself has to come and visit us, and in matters of our salvation, do the work of His grace within us.
 3. The truth is that in matters pertaining to our service to the Lord, the Lord Himself has to come and visit us, and by His grace do the work through us.
- This is why we have to become like little children who instinctively know themselves dependant on the provisions and protection and guidance of those bigger than they. Instinctively they put themselves in the care of their parents, especially in the face of danger. Matthew 18:1-3.
- E. Do you see why the apostle became so resolute once he woke up to this truth. He casts all carnal confidence away. "Whatever things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ... I count them as rubbish." Phil 3:7,8.

Application:

Have you experienced this truth in your own life? It has been referred to sometimes as failure being the backdoor of success. There is but one way into the life of the kingdom of God: Via the failure of your own efforts, talents, zeal and efforts at the front door, and so being humbled by your own failures, arriving at the backdoor of God's grace. "Lord, if anything good is to come of me and my life, You will have to do the work."

II. A light and a voice.

- A. Acts 22:6 tells us that the light and the voice came about noon, when the sun was shining at its brightest. Acts 26:13 says that the light was far brighter than that of the sun shining at midday.
- B. This light falling from heaven was the Lord Jesus pulling back the curtain of heaven and revealing Himself in all His glory to Saul. Saul not only heard, but also saw the glorified Jesus at this time, see vs.17 "the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road has sent me..." Again in 22:14 God...who has chosen you that you... should see the Just One, and hear His voice." Also by the testimony of Barnabas in 9:27, and by his own testimony in 1 Cor. 9:1 and 15:8.
- C. The voice identifies Himself immediately as the persecuted One, and then again as "Jesus, whom you are persecuting."

Application:

Here we see the covenantal union of the Lord Jesus and His covenant people. Their sufferings are first and foremost His sufferings. The heavier end of the cross you are bearing rests on the Lord Jesus.

Later the apostle Paul would refer to this truth when he says that he is filling up in his body what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ for the sake of His body Col. 3:24.

Do you take comfort in the fact that Jesus is carrying the heavier end of your crosses?

- D. Hard to kick against the goads.
 - 1. Goads are there to guide us and to keep us in the right road. Kind of like the guardrails along the highway. It is hard to keep on hitting those guardrails.
 - 2. For the apostle they were the overwhelming evidences of the resurrection of the Lord; The transformation of the apostles lives; the many and varied supernatural works of the Holy Spirit among other things.

Application:

What are the goads the Lord has providentially placed in your life?

III. Three days of darkness in Damascus.

- A. All Saul is told in response to his question: "What would you have me to do," was to go to Damascus and wait.
- B. What were those three days like?
 - 1. They were days of a deafening silence on the part of heaven.
 - 2. They were days of soul searching and prayer on the part of Saul.
 - 3. They were days of losing all confidence in the flesh and casting it away.
 - 4. They were days of casting himself on the mercy of God in Christ alone.

Application:

Have you known days like these? Do you still go back to them. Right about now would be a good time.