
Lessons from the Life of Paul



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The Conversion of Saul

Introduction

1. Fundamental to the Christian faith is the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.
 - a. If Christ was not raised, our faith is in vain. (1 Cor. 15:14, 17)
 - b. If Christ was not raised, the apostles were liars (1 Cor. 15:15)
2. One evidence for the resurrection is the transformation that took place in the lives of those who knew Jesus.
 - a. Even a Orthodox Jewish scholar admitted as much: “If the disciples were totally disappointed and on the verge of desperate flight because of the very real reason of the crucifixion, it took another very real reason in order to transform them from a band of disheartened and dejected Jews into the most self-confident missionary society in world history.” (Pinchas Lapide, former Chairman of the Applied Linguistics Department at Israel's Bar-Iland University (*Time*, May 7, 1979)
 - c. He concluded that a bodily resurrection could possibly have been that reason.
3. An amazing transformation that took place was that in the conversion of Saul of Tarsus.
 - a. He was a devout Pharisee, a persecutor of Christians.
 - b. He became Paul the apostle, persecuted by his Jewish brethren.
4. In this lesson we shall consider why Saul's conversion serves as strong evidence for the resurrection of Jesus. (Gal. 1:13-14)

I. Background Information

- A. He was born and raised in Tarsus of Cilicia, one of the great learning centers of the eastern world. (Acts 22:3)
 1. His parents were Jews who possessed Roman citizenship, therefore, he was both a Roman and a Jew. (Phil. 3:5; Acts 22:25-29)
 2. Typical of Jewish males, he learned a manual trade—tent-making. (Acts 18:3)
 3. He was sent to study in Jerusalem under Gamaliel. (Acts 22:3)
 - a. He excelled in his studies. (Gal. 1:14)
 - b. He was found “blameless” by the Law. (Phil. 3:6)
- B. His conversion and ministry.
 1. He is first mentioned in Scripture as the young man who held the robes of those who stoned Stephen. (Acts 7:58)
 - a. He zealously persecuted Christians. (Acts 22:4; 26:10-11; Gal. 1:13)
 - b. Christians were deathly afraid of him. (Acts 9:13,26)

2. Jesus Christ manifested Himself to him on the road to Damascus. (Acts 9:1-16)
 - a. He obeyed the gospel. (Acts 22:16)
 - b. He became the apostle to the Gentiles. (Acts 9:15; Gal. 1:16; Rom. 11:13)

II. Saul's Former Manner of Life

- A. He persecuted the church.
 1. In Jerusalem. (Act 8:1-3)
 2. In Damascus. (Act 9:1-2)
 3. It was something he believed he ought to do. (Acts 26:9-11)
- B. He was advancing in Judaism.
 1. As a scholar having been trained at the feet of Gamaliel, the most respected rabbi of his time. (Acts 22:3)
 2. In social standing, advancing beyond many of his contemporaries.
 - a. Holding positions of religious power. (Acts 26:12)
 - b. This more than likely included access to financial power.
- C. He was zealous for his traditions.
 1. He as proud to be a Hebrew. (Phil. 3:4-5)
 2. He was proud to be a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee. (Acts 23:6)
 - a. The Pharisees were conservative sect of the Jews noted for their opposition to Jesus during His ministry. (Matt. 12:14)
 - b. With such a religious background, he was naturally prejudiced. (Acts 26:9)
- D. Yet this prejudiced, prominent Pharisee, fierce in his opposition to Jesus and His church, became one of the most influential Christians of all time.
 - How did this happen?

III. Explanations for Saul's Conversion

- A. Perhaps there were an ulterior motive.
 1. Could it have been wealth?
 - a. He had that with the Jews.
 - b. He left wealth for the poverty of following Christ. (1 Cor. 4:11-12; Acts 20:33-34)
 2. Could it have been fame?
 - a. He had that with the Jews.
 - b. Consider what he experienced as a Christian. (1 Cor. 4:10, 13)
 - 1) Regarded as foolish and weak, even by other Christians.
 - 2) Viewed as the filth of the world by those in the world.

3. Could it have been power?
 - a. He had this with the Jews.
 - b. Compare this with what he suffered as a Christian. (2 Cor. 11:24-28)
 4. No ulterior motive can be found to explain Saul's conversion.
- B. Perhaps he was deceived.
1. Then who deceived him?
 - a. Friends would not, for he was their champion against the Christians.
 - b. Christians could not, because of his persecution against them.
 - 1) Putting them into prison, chasing them into other towns. (Acts 8:3; 9:1-2)
 - 2) Even after his conversion, many feared him. (Acts 9:26)
 2. His testimony does not allow for the possibility of deception.
 - a. He claimed to receive his gospel from Jesus, not man. (Gal. 1:11-12)
 - b. He claimed to see Jesus raised from the dead. (1 Cor. 15:8)
 - c. The empirical nature of his testimony precludes the possibility of deception.
- C. Perhaps he was mad.
1. Such was the conclusion of Festus, the governor. (Acts 26:24)
 2. Others have tried to explain his conversion in psychological terms.
 - a. That his intense persecution of Christians gave him a guilt-ridden conscience.
 - b. That combined with the heat on the road to Damascus, he became delirious and only thought he saw Jesus.
 3. Consider Paul's own testimony.
 - a. He had a clear conscience regarding persecuting the Christians. (Acts 23:1)
 - 1) It was something he thought he should do. (Acts 26:9)
 - 2) He did it out of ignorance, for which he knew he received mercy. (1 Tim. 1:13)
 - b. He said he saw Jesus more than once.
 - Not just on the road to Damascus but on other occasions as well. (Acts 18:9-10; 22:17-21; 23:11; 2 Co 12:8-9)
- D. The only plausible explanation: he saw Jesus.
1. This is the explanation given by Paul himself.
 - a. Before the Jerusalem mob. (Acts 22:1-16)
 - b. Before King Agrippa and Festus the governor. (Acts 26:12-23)
 2. It is the only explanation that truly explains his conversion.
 - a. Why he was willing to forego wealth, fame, and power.
 - b. Why he was willing to suffer poverty, shame, and persecution

Conclusion

1. The conversion of Saul is best explained by:
 - His testimony that it was the resurrected Jesus who appeared to him not once but continuously throughout the rest of his life serving as one of the greatest evidences for the resurrection of Jesus.
2. What is the significance of the resurrection of Jesus?
 - a. For the unbeliever, it verifies:
 - 1) The fact of His deity. (Rom. 1:4)
 - 2) The fact of final judgment. (Acts 17:30-31)
 - b. For the believer, it verifies:
 - The hope for our own resurrection. (1 Cor. 15:20-22)
3. Through such evidence as the conversion of Saul, God has born witness to the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.
 - Have you responded to this evidence with the obedience of faith?

Things Paul Saw While Blind

Introduction

1. The Bible tells of two types of blindness.
 - a. Physical blindness like the man Jesus healed in John 9.
 - b. Spiritual blindness as seen on many occasions and as prophesied by Isaiah. (Isa. 6:9-10; Acts 28:26-27)
2. The apostle Paul experienced both types.
 - a. As Saul of Tarsus he was blind to the truth concerning Jesus and as to what God really wanted him to do. (Acts 26:9; 1 Tim. 1:13)
 - b. While he was on the Damascus road, the Lord appeared to him and struck him with physical blindness so that he might learn to see with his heart. (Acts 9:1-20)
3. Have you ever what Paul saw while he was blind?
 - This is what we will see in this lesson.

I. His Ignorance

- A. Paul had been a blasphemer and an insolent man. (1 Tim. 1:12-15)
 - Later he would pray for the salvation of his nation. (Rom. 10:1-3)
- B. He saw the need for all to have the gospel. (Rom. 1:16-17)
 - The gospel must be taught and sinners must obey it. (Mark 16:15-16)

II. The True Identity of Jesus

- A. He saw that Jesus was truly the Son of God. (Acts 9:20)
- B. The apostle John wrote his gospel to testify of the deity of Jesus. (John 20:30-31)
- C. The deity of Jesus must be accepted and acknowledged. (Phil. 2:9-11)
 - Paul not only acknowledged and accepted it, he also preached it everywhere. (Acts 17:1-4)

III. He Was a Sinner

- A. He thought himself to be “a Hebrew of the Hebrews...concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.” (Phil. 3:5-6)
- B. After his blindness and conversion, he recalled his former days and realized he was a sinner. (1 Tim. 1:15)
- C. Every accountable person must come to this conclusion. (Rom. 3:10, 23)
 - Consider the example of the humble tax collector. (Luke 18:10-14)

IV. Sincerity Alone Was Not Enough

- A. Paul would later testify of his dedication. (Acts 26:9-11; Gal. 1:13-14)
- B. Even as a persecutor he had a “good conscience before God.” (Acts 23:1)

V. The Law of Moses Had Passed Away

- A. Paul had been tutored in the Law of Moses by Gamaliel. (Acts 22:3)
- B. Paul’s ancestors had followed the Law. (Col. 2:14; Gal. 1:14)
- C. As cited in the book of Hebrews, Jeremiah had prophesied that the Law of Moses would end. (Heb. 8:7-13; cf. Jer. 31:31-34)
- D. Those who would seek to be justified by the Old Law today fall from grace. (Gal. 5:4)

VI. One Cannot “Pray Through” to Salvation

- A. Paul was told that in the city of Damascus he would be told what he needed to do in order to be right with God. (Acts 22:10)
- B. While in Damascus, he was fervently praying. (Acts 9:10-11)
 - While he was praying, Ananias told him what he needed to do: “Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.” (Acts 22:16)

Conclusion

1. Are you able to see the things Paul saw while he was blind?
 - a. You must not be ignorant but come to know and believe the truth of God. (John 8:32)
 - b. Jesus is the Christ. (John 8:24)
 - c. Your sinful condition. (1 John 1:9)
 - d. That sincerity alone is not enough. (Rom. 6:17-18)
 - e. Not to look to the Old Law for justification for it has passed away. (Heb. 8:7-13)
 - f. You cannot “pray through” to salvation but you must rather heed the command of the Lord to obey His gospel. (Rom. 1:16; Heb. 5:8-9)
2. Physical blindness is a challenge which people can learn to live with and be successful but spiritual blindness is far worse for it damns the soul.
3. Sinners must come to the Great Physician, Jesus Christ, to be healed. (Matt. 11:28-30)

Paul in Athens

Introduction

1. Athens was the most important city of ancient Attica and the capital of modern Greece since 1834.
 - a. The city was likely named for the patron goddess Athena.
 - b. E.M. Blaiklock called the Athens of New Testament times the “intellectual capital of the world.” (*Cities of the New Testament*, 50)
2. A brief history of Athens. ““No city in the Hellenic world could match Athens for those qualities which Greeks counted most glorious. Athens, the cradle of democracy, attained the foremost place among the city-states of Greece early in the fifth century B.C., because of the leading part she played in resisting the Persian invasions. For the next half-century she controlled a powerful and wealthy maritime empire, and after her defeat by the Spartans and their allies in the Peloponnesian War (431-404 B.C.) was not long in regaining much of her influence. In the fourth century she again took the lead in resisting Macedonian aggression, and even after Philip’s victory at Chaeronea (338 B.C.) was generously treated by him and allowed to retain much of her ancient liberty, which she enjoyed until the Roman conquest of Greece in 146 B.C. The Romans, too, in consideration of the city’s glorious past, permitted her to carry on her own institutions as a free and allied city within the empire. The sculpture, literature and oratory of Athens in the fifth and fourth centuries B.C. have never been surpassed; philosophy, too, she took the leading place, being the native city of Socrates and Plato and the adopted home of Aristotle, Epicurus and Zeno...The persistence of the cultural influence of Athens in the Hellenistic age is further to be seen in the fact that it was the Attic dialect of Greek, spoken first over a very restricted area as compared with Ionic and Doric, that formed the main basis of the Koine.” (F.F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of Acts*, 237-238)
3. The apostle visited the city of Athens on his second preaching trip to the Gentile world.

I. Paul’s Visit to Athens (Acts 17:13-34)

- A. While Paul was waiting for Timothy and Silas to join him, he had some time alone in the city and viewed its monuments. (vv. 22-23)
- B. Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus which was the most venerable of Athenian institutions.
 1. It derived its name from the original meeting place on the Areopagus, the hill of Mars, west of the Acropolis.

2. "Whether the 'areopagus' of Acts 17 referred to the hill or to the court which in Paul's day met in one of the colonades near the Agora cannot be determined exactly." (Merrill C. Tenney, *New Testament Times*, 265)
 3. In Roman times the court held most of its meetings in the Royal Portico (*stoa basileios*) in the agora, but we do not know whether Paul addressed the court in the Royal Portico or on the Areopagus.
 4. "The Court of the Areopagus seems to have exercised some supervision over itinerant preachers, and the invitation to Paul was by way of being a courteous command." (Blaiklock, 52)
- C. The unknown God.
1. The altar to the "unknown god" was typical of the religious climate of Athens because the city was completely given over to idolatry.
 - a. The Parthenon was dedicated to Athena Parthenos, the patron goddess of Athens.
 - b. The Erechtheion was dedicated to the worship of the two principle gods of Attica, Athena and Poseidon-Erechtheus.
 - c. The Temple of Athena Nike was dedicated to Athena Nike, the goddess of victory.
 2. The altar gave Paul the opportunity to tell of the True God.
 3. His sermon declared three fundamental facts about God that need to be known and understood today.

II. Paul's Sermon (Acts 17:22-34)

- A. The power of God is great.
1. His power created the world and "all things" in it. (vv. 24)
 - a. His creation declares His power universally. (Rom. 1:20; Psa. 19:1-3)
 - b. His power controls and sustains His creation. (vv. 25, 28)
 - c. The elements are subject to Him. (Matt. 5:45; 8:27; 2 Pet. 3:5-6)
 - d. The universe is preserved by His power. (2 Pet. 3:7; Col. 1:17; Heb. 1:3)
 2. His power is self-sustaining. (v. 25)
 - We need Him to survive but He does not need us to survive.
- B. The presence of God is unlimited.
1. He is not limited by space. (v. 24; cf. 1 Kings 8:27; 2 Chron. 2:6)
 2. His presence is not confined to any locality. (Isa. 66:1-2; Acts 7:48-49)
 3. We cannot escape His presence. (Psa. 139:7-10; Jonah 1:3-4)
 4. He is not limited by time. (Isa. 57:15; Psa. 90:2; 2 Pet. 3:8)
- C. The plan of God is for all mankind. (v. 30)
1. He has a present plan for all mankind. (Luke 24:46-47; Acts 2:38)
 2. All are accepted on the same basis. (Acts 10:34-35)
 3. All are reconciled to Him in the one body. (Eph. 2:16; Acts 2:47)
 4. He has a future plan for all—the judgment. (v. 31)

Conclusion

1. How much do you really respect the powers of God?
 - Enough to place complete confidence in Him?
2. How much do you really respect the presence of God?
 - a. Enough to never feel alone?
 - b. Enough to keep from secret sin?
3. How much do you really respect the plan of God?
 - Enough to humbly obey it?
4. You need to know this “unknown God.” (2 Thess. 1:7-9)

Paul's Prayer for the Ephesians

Text: Ephesians 3:14-21

Introduction

1. The apostle Paul understood the importance of prayer.
 - a. In 1 Thessalonians 5:17 he encouraged Christians to “pray without ceasing.”
 - b. In Romans 12:12 he encouraged the saints at Rome to be “continuing steadfastly in prayer.”
2. Paul, like the Savior, was a man of prayer
 - a. A good number of his prayers are found in Scripture.
 - b. His prayers which are found in Scripture:
 - 1) Are rich, full and beautiful.
 - 2) Show the fervency and spiritual maturity he possessed.
3. This lesson will examine Paul's prayer that is found in Ephesians 3:14-21.

I. “I Bow My Knees to the Father” (Eph. 3:14-15)

- A. “I bow my knees to the Father” is an expression that shows this is a prayer to the Father.
 - All prayer is directed to the Father.
 - a. Consider the model prayer in Matthew 6—it is directed to the Father. (v. 9)
 - b. The Father is the One who gives every good and perfect gift. (Jas. 1:17)
- B. In that he “bowed his knees” does not demand that we do the same.
 1. The physical posture one takes while praying is immaterial for, in the Bible, one can find people praying in nearly every physical position.
 - a. Standing. (Gen. 18:22)
 - b. Sitting. (1 Chron. 17:16)
 - c. Lying on one's face. (Matt. 26:39)
 2. To kneel in prayer seems to show special devotion and humility.
 - a. Consider Ezra's humble prayer in Ezra 9:5-6.
 - b. Paul knelt and prayed with the Ephesian elders upon his final departure from them. (Acts 20:36-38)
 - c. Consider David's plea in Psalm 96:6-7.

- C. "The whole family in heaven and on earth."
1. The whole family on earth is named after the Father.
 - a. Through God the Father, all human beings move and have their existence. (Acts 17:28)
 - b. As long as a person is alive, no matter how wicked, there is hope for him. (Eccl. 9:4)
 2. There is a special relationship with the Father for those who are children of God.
 - a. They have received the spirit of adoption. (Rom. 8:15)
 - b. They are sons of God—heirs of God. (Gal. 4:6-7)
 - c. The love of the Father has made them children of God. (1 John 3:1)

II. The Inner Man (Eph. 3:16-17a)

- A. The "inner man" is that part of man with which he should truly be concerned.
- B. The "inner man" is that part of man which lives forever.
1. Many place most of their emphasis and give most of their attention to the outward man.
 2. Think of all the money that is spent today on such things as cosmetics, dieting, exercise, etc. (1 Tim. 4:8)
 3. The hidden person of the heart should demand our utmost attention. (1 Pet. 3:3-4)
 - We should seek to renew our inward man day-by-day. (2 Cor. 4:16)
- C. "Strengthened with might."
1. Paul prayed that Christians might be strengthened with might through the Spirit.
 - a. But how does the Spirit strengthen? It is:
 - 1) Not by some mysterious working or irresistible grace.
 - 2) By and through His revealed word—one is strengthened as he studies this marvelous prayer of Paul.
 - b. The Spirit encourages one to make his stand for the Lord by putting on the whole armor of God. (Eph. 6:11-17; Prov. 28:1)
- D. "That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith."
1. Christ wants to take up permanent residence in the hearts of His saints.
 - The Lord is to be sanctified in the hearts of His people (1 Pet. 3:15)
 2. There is to be a complete surrender of self to Christ and to allow Him to rule in one's heart.

III. "Rooted and Grounded in Love" (Eph. 3:17b-19b)

- A. Paul prays that Christians, being rooted and grounded in love, might be able to comprehend the love of Christ and, above all things, put on love. (Col. 3:14)
- B. In this prayer, Paul states that the love of Christ passes knowledge.
 - 1. Instead of punishing man for his sins, God allowed His Son to be man's substitute even though man was still in sin. (Rom. 5:6-8)
 - 2. Because of His love for man, Jesus willingly died in man's place paying the debt of man's sins. (John 15:13)
- C. Though one will never know the true essence of Christ's love—it width, length, depth and height—one can know a few things about it.
 - 1. No outside force can remove it from him. (Rom. 8:35-39)
 - 2. It will never fail. (1 Cor. 13:8)
 - 3. It has mighty power. (2 Cor. 5:14)
- D. "That you may be filled with all the fullness of God."
 - 1. The fullness of God is found in Jesus Christ. (Col. 2:9-10; 1 Cor. 1:30)
 - 2. One only needs Christ and His New Testament which has been sealed by His blood. (Matt. 26:28)

IV. "God Is Able" (Eph. 3:20-21)

- A. God is fully capable of answering one's prayers.
- B. Consider the example of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego. (Dan 3:17-18)
 - 1. This is an example of how to approach God in prayer.
 - 2. Acknowledging His power while humbly asking for His help.
- C. "Glorified in the church."
 - 1. Saints need to be united as a congregation of God's people in bringing glory to Him.
 - 2. Christians must unite in holding to the truth, loving one another and leading lost souls to Christ.

Conclusion

- 1. What a beautiful and marvelous prayer.
- 2. All requests were for the spiritual good of the Ephesian brethren.
- 3. We need to learn to pray in the same fashion for we too are in need of these same great spiritual blessings.
- 4. In all things, may God be glorified through Jesus forever and ever.

Paul's Prayer for the Philippians

Text: Philippians 1:9-11

Introduction

1. On his second journey to the Gentiles while in the city of Troas, Paul was told to "Come over to Macedonia and help us." (Acts 16:9)
 - a. Paul sailed from Troas to Samothrace and then to Neapolis, a port city of Macedonia.
 - b. From there he went ten miles to Philippi, a Roman colony and the foremost city of that part of Macedonia.
2. While in Philippi:
 - a. He preached by the river near Philippi to the women who assembled there on the Sabbath for prayer.
 - b. He baptized Lydia and her household.
 - c. He was imprisoned after casting out a demon from a servant girl who brought her masters money by fortune-telling.
 - 1) While in prison, he and Silas are singing hymns and a great earthquake opens the prison doors.
 - 2) Thinking his prisoners had escaped the jailer is ready to take his life but Paul stays his hand and tells him no one had escaped.
 - 3) The jailer then kneels before Paul and asks what he needs to do to be saved so Paul tells him to believe and the jailer and his family are baptized that very night.
 - d. Paul visits Lydia and the brethren then, at the urging of the magistrates, he departs Philippi but he carries with him a great affection for the Philippian brethren.
3. There was a close spiritual bond between Paul and the Christians at Philippi.
 - a. He cherished them. (Phil. 1:8)
 - b. He not only cherished them but also prayed tenderly for them revealing his desire for them in the prayer he offered in Philippians 1:9-11.
4. It is important for us to consider this prayer for Paul's desire for them is the purpose of the religion of Christ for us.

I. The Beginning Place: Love

- A. "The greatest is love." (1 Cor. 13:13)
- B. The love of the Philippians was great but there is always room to grow. (Mark 12:30)
- C. As Paul linked love to knowledge, love is the beginning of knowledge.
 - 1. We can love deity only through knowledge.
 - 2. The same is true of loving God's word.
 - 3. The same is true of loving God's people. (John 17:3; Psa. 119:97, 1 John 3:14)
 - 4. Love and knowledge beget discernment.
 - Discernment is the good sense to correctly apply the knowledge gained. (Col. 1:9-10)

II. The Result: The Ability to Approve the Excellent (Phil. 1:10)

- A. The ability to approve the things that are excellent is based on the ability to distinguish between things that differ. (Rom. 2:17-18)
- B. Love for God brings about such sensitivity. (2 Thess. 2:9-10)
- C. God's truth shows us what to approve. (Micah 6:8; Heb. 5:14)
 - We must be impressed with the importance of the word of God. (1 Thess. 2:13)
- D. There is a need for careful watchfulness—for discrimination. (Col. 2:8)
 - 1. Some are very easily misled. (Eph. 4:14)
 - 2. We must learn precision in a world of confusion. (1 John 4:1)
 - Such is only possible if we prayerfully study the word of God. (Psa. 119:11)

III. The Result: More Settled and Steadfast (Phil. 1:9-11)

- A. "That you may be sincere" speaks of singleness of purpose. (1 John 1:7)
- B. "Be without offense."
 - Any stumbling blocks need to be cleared away so that neither you nor others trip over them. (Phil. 2:14-15)
- C. "Till the day of Christ."
 - 1. "Till" —with a view to, looking toward, contemplating.
 - 2. All things will be revealed and judged on that day.

IV. The Result: The Kind of Character Which Is Pure and Complete (Phil. 1:11a)

- A. "Filled with the fruits of righteousness."
 - 1. Love works. (1 Cor. 13:1-13; Titus 2:14)
 - 2. Such is gained by fellowship with God. (1 John 4:7-8)

- B. This quality is based on continued growth in love for God and His word. (Psa. 119:34)
- C. This quality causes on to live his life:
 - 1. In such a manner as to adorn the doctrine of God in all things. (Titus 2:10)
 - 2. With a view to heaven. (Phil. 3:13-14)

V. The Result: Jesus Living in Us (Phil. 1:11b)

- A. The growth of character comes by, through, Jesus Christ. (Phil. 3:8-9)
- B. It is from Jesus we receive instruction. (Heb. 1:1-2)
 - 1. His word believed and obeyed makes us spiritually alive. (Rom. 6:4, 17)
 - 2. His word makes our conscience sensitive to truth. (Phil. 4:8)
 - 3. By Him our hearts are lifted to great hope. (1 Pet. 1:3-4)

VI. The Result: The Glory and Praise of God (Phil. 1:11c)

- A. We are to live lives which glorify God. (Matt. 5:16)
- B. Such praise and glory increases as we become conformed to the image of God's Son. (Rom. 8:29)
- C. Such praise and glory finds its completeness in the final day. (1 John 3:2-3)
- D. If all of us were what we should be, God's glory would shine more and others would praise our King.

Conclusion

- 1. We must not only admire Paul's tender prayer for the Philippians, we must also seek to accomplish it in our lives.
- 2. There is no higher ambition in life than to live in accordance with the will of God.
- 3. May our love abound unto more knowledge and discernment so that we can approve the things that are excellent so that God will receive praise and glory, so that we will be void of offense and so that we will have an eternal reward.

Learning from Paul

Text: Acts 14:21-23

Introduction

1. In the fourteenth chapter of the book of Acts, the apostle Paul is on his first journey to the Gentiles.
 - a. He left Antioch of Syria and traveled to Seleucia. Cyprus, Perga of Pamphylia, Antioch of Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe.
 - b. After preaching the gospel in Derbe, he and Barnabas retrace their steps in order to strengthen the Christians in the cities they had previously visited. (Acts 14:21-23)
2. As he journeyed to different cities not only did he teach in word but also by example. (2 Thess. 3:4-9)
 - Paul encouraged people to imitate him. (1 Cor. 11:1)
3. This lesson will examine Paul's actions as he journeyed among the churches of Asia so that we might learn some things involved in the religion of Christ and living the Christian life.

I. Paul Preached the Gospel

- A. "And when they had preached the gospel in that city..." (Acts 14:21)
- B. Paul preached the same simple message in every city. (1 Cor. 2:1-2)
- C. The gospel is:
 1. God's power to save. (Rom. 1:16)
 2. The living and active message that cuts to the very heart of the soul. (Heb. 4:12)
- D. The preachers of the gospel in New Testament days did not preach themselves but the Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Cor. 4:5)
 - "Two guest speakers were asked to speak to a student body on Abraham Lincoln. After the first speech, the unanimous consent of the student body was, 'Our speaker was a great speaker.' After the second speech, the consensus was, 'Abraham Lincoln was a great man.' We ask, 'Which speaker did his job?'"

II. Paul Made Disciples for the Lord

- A. "And made many disciples..." (Acts 14:21)
- B. Jesus commanded His apostles to "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations." (Matt. 28:18-20)
 - The Greek word translated "make disciples" in this passage is not the common word for "teach."
 - a. It means "to disciple, teach, instruct."
 - b. It is the same word used in Acts 14:21.
- C. Baptism is a part of the discipleship process but it is only the beginning.
 - 1. Jesus added, "Teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you..."
 - 2. One must grow and develop into a true disciple of the Lord. (Luke 6:40)
- D. Thus, not only does the true disciple learn his master's teaching but he follows and obeys him. (John 8:31-32)

III. Paul Strengthened the Souls of the Disciples

- A. "Strengthening the souls of the disciples..." (Acts 14:22)
- B. Worldly people are concerned with outward, fleshly things.
 - 1. They do not distinguish between their bodies and the person on the inside.
 - 2. The Lord develops and strengthens the inner person—not the outward. (Rom. 12:1-2)
- C. Once someone becomes a Christian he must be strengthened or he will not last. (Luke 8:13)
 - 1. After becoming a Christian, one must immediately replace the bad with the good.
 - 2. One must not merely stop sinning but he must become a servant of righteousness. (Rom. 6:11-13)
- D. In strengthening the disciples, Paul exhorted them to continue in the faith. (Acts 14:22)
 - It is not enough to start, we must finish the race, keep the faith—never give up. (2 Tim. 4:7-8)
- E. Much of our work and effort as God's servants today is to encourage one another to keep going in the right direction. (Heb. 10:24)
 - 1. We must be reminded that we must endure many tribulations to enter the kingdom of God. (Acts 14:22)
 - 2. This should help all of us understand that being a Christian is not always easy or pleasant—there will be many tribulations both inside and outside the church.

IV. Paul Appointed Elders in Every Church

- A. "So when they had appointed elders in every church..." (Acts 14:23)

- B. God, in His wisdom, wants mature men to oversee the flock.
 - 1. Someone needs to make final decisions.
 - 2. A typical business meeting will spend hours, even weeks, to discuss things sometimes with no decision ever being made.
- C. Every congregation should be striving to reach the goal of having elders.
 - 1. Men need to be appointed, in accordance with the Scriptural qualifications, who can be trusted and who can lead.
 - 2. When elders make decisions which are in accord with the Lord's will, we need to abide by their decisions.

V. Paul Acted with Prayer and Fasting

- A. "...prayed with fasting..." (Acts 14:23)
- B. This indicates that he was serious about what he was doing.
- C. While prayer is commanded in Scripture, fasting is not.
 - 1. It is neither condemned nor commended but we have New Testament examples of it being done.
 - 2. The neglect or severe treatment of the body has no value against the indulgence of the flesh. (Col. 2:23; Heb. 13:9)
 - 3. Because of a lack of instructions on it, let each individual decide for himself whether or not he wants to fast.
- D. Here the disciples, through prayer and fasting, are invoking God's help in the appointing of elders and in commending others to the Lord.
 - 1. We also need to seek God's aid.
 - 2. We need to solicit the Lord's help in everything we do.

VI. Paul Commended Them to the Lord

- A. "...they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed." (Acts 14:23)
- B. Emphasis should always be placed on the Lord Himself.
 - 1. In the church, Jesus needs to be the center, the focus, of everything.
 - 2. It is possible for one to be converted to the "Church of Christ" and never to the Lord.

Conclusion

- 1. There are many marvelous things about New Testament Christianity in Acts 14:21-23.
 - a. We need to preach and teach the gospel of Christ.
 - b. We need to encourage one another to continue in the faith.
 - c. Elders are to be appointed in every church.
 - d. Tribulations are a part of Christianity.
- 2. We need to keep our eyes, our focus, on the Lord: Our Lord, our Master and Teacher.

The Last Words of Paul

Text: 2 Timothy 4:7-8

Introduction

1. Some famous last words.
 - a. Elizabeth I, Queen of England. Died 1603. "All my possessions for a moment of time.
 - b. Louis B. Mayer, movie studio head. Died October 29, 1957. "Nothing matters. Nothing matters."
 - c. John Barrymore, actor. Died May 29, 1942. "Die? I should say not, dear fellow. No Barrymore would allow such a conventional thing to happen to him."
 - d. Karl Marx, revolutionary. Died 1883. To his housekeeper, who urged him to tell her his last words so she could write them down for posterity. "Go on, get out—last words are for fools who haven't said enough."
 - e. Ethan Allen, American revolutionary general. Died 1789. "In response to an attending doctor who attempted to comfort him by saying, "General, I fear the angels are waiting for you." "Waiting are they? Waiting are they? Well—let 'em wait."
 - f. General John Sedgwick, Union Commander. Died 1864. Killed in battle during U.S. Civil War. "They couldn't hit an elephant at this dist. . . ."
 - g. Edgar Allan Poe, writer. Died October 7, 1849. "Lord, help my poor soul."
2. As the apostle Paul knew that his execution was imminent, he looked back over his life to offer words of encouragement that we should take to heart and follow. (2 Tim. 4:7-8)
3. Paul was a Jew (Acts 22:3); a Roman citizen (Acts 22:26-29); and was born in a Greek city, Tarsus of Cilicia (Acts 22:3). In his final words, he actually makes reference to each of these facts.
 - a. "Fought the good fight." This was a very "Roman" thing to say because the Romans possessed a mighty army and fought constantly to increase their empire.
 - b. "Finished the race." The Greeks were involved in track and field—Olympics and marathons—so they knew what finishing the race meant.
 - c. "Kept the faith." Paul was of the strictest sect of the Jews, the Pharisees, who were very religious and always looked to the Law and its keeping.
4. This lesson will look at each of the above statements which comprise the last words of the apostle Paul.

I. "Fought the Good Fight"

- A. As Paul, in his life, had "fought the good fight," he had also urged Timothy to do the same. (1 Tim. 6:12)
- B. "Fight the good fight" is *agonizou ton kalon agona*, 'agonize the good agony.' The related verb and noun come from the verb *ago*, which means 'lead' or 'bring.' From this was derived the noun that we have here, *agon*. It meant first 'a gathering,' especially for 'games' (the sports events in the various Greek cities). Similarly, the verb *agonizo* meant 'to enter a contest; contend in the gymnastic games'; and then more universally, 'to contend with adversaries, fight' (Thayer). In the NT both words are used to describe the struggles of the Christian life. The background of the words suggests exerting every ounce of energy to win." (*Expositors Bible Commentary*, Vol. 11, 386)
- C. "'Agonize the good agony.' Thou hast a contest to sustain in which thy honour, thy life, thy soul, are at stake. Live the Gospel, and defend the cause of God. Unmask hypocrites, expel the profligate, purge and build up the Church, live in the spirit of thy religion, and give thyself wholly to this work." (*Adam Clarke Commentary*, Vol. VI, 616)
- D. "Faith in God calls man to a vigorous fight with evil in his own soul that he against the influences of the flesh may keep the faith, and then it summons him to maintain the faith in the world." (David Lipscomb, *Gospel Advocate Commentary on the NT Epistles*, Vol. V, 183)
- E. The Christian is to fight. He is to:
 1. "Contend earnestly for the faith." (Jude 3)
 2. Stand firm and not falter. (Heb. 10:38-39)
 3. Don the whole armor of God. (Eph. 6:10-18)
 4. Wield the "sword of the Spirit," the word of God. (Eph. 6:17)
 5. Fight against the wiles of Satan and be constantly on guard against that which would rob him of his soul. (1 Pet. 5:8)

II. "Finished the Race"

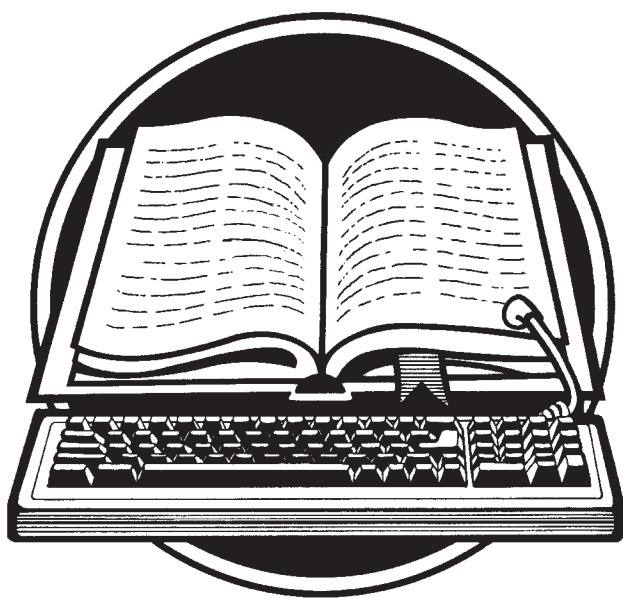
- A. All need to keep their eyes on the finish line—heaven.
 1. All need to follow the example of Christ. (1 Pet. 2:21-22)
 2. All need to look ahead to the goal. (Phil. 3:12-16)
- B. All must run the course as Paul did. (1 Cor. 9:24-27)
 1. Paul ran the race:
 - a. Lawfully. (2 Tim. 2:5)
 - b. Exercising self-control. (1 Cor. 9:27)
 - c. Purposefully to win. (1 Cor. 9:26)
 2. All must run with patience and endurance. (Heb. 12:1-3)

III. "Kept the Faith"

- A. "Faith" in this passage is the word of God, the same as in Jude 3.
 - 1. "Contend earnestly for the faith." (Jude 3)
 - 2. The system of religious, gospel, truth itself.
- B. Paul followed the teachings of Jesus Christ without wavering and encouraged others to do the same. (Eph. 4:11-15)
- C. As Paul had "kept the faith," he had exhorted Timothy to do the same.
 - 1. "Hold fast the pattern of sound words." (2 Tim. 1:13)
 - 2. "Preach the word." (2 Tim 4:1-4)
- D. To not "keep the faith" is to be condemned. (Gal. 1:6-9)
- E. Nothing else but "the faith" is needed because the word of God:
 - 1. "Thoroughly furnishes." (2 Tim. 3:16-17)
 - 2. Provides all that pertains to life and godliness. (2 Pet. 1:3)
 - 3. Contains the grace of God. (Titus 2:11-12)
 - 4. Contains the righteousness of God. (Rom. 1:17)
 - 5. Is the power of God unto salvation. (Rom. 1:16)

Conclusion

- 1. The apostle Paul was fully assured that if he had done these three things he would receive a crown of life.
- 2. Those who do the same as Paul will receive that same victory crown. It will be given to those who:
 - a. Fight the good fight of faith.
 - b. Finish the race.
 - c. Keep the faith.
- 3. The last words of the apostle Paul should be taken to heart and he should be followed as an example that will lead them to life.



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