

***The Great Stories of the Early Church***  
***79-Paul in Roman Custody03***  
***The Call to the Ministry***  
***Acts 26:1-32***

1 Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Thou art permitted to speak for thyself. Then Paul stretched forth the hand, and answered for himself:

2 I think myself happy, king Agrippa, because I shall answer for myself this day before thee touching all the things whereof I am accused of the Jews:

3 Especially because I know thee to be expert in all customs and questions which are among the Jews: wherefore I beseech thee to hear me patiently.

4 My manner of life from my youth, which was at the first among mine own nation at Jerusalem, know all the Jews;

5 Which knew me from the beginning, if they would testify, that after the most straitest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee.

6 And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers:

7 Unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come. For which hope's sake, king Agrippa, I am accused of the Jews.

8 Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?

9 I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.

10 Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them.

11 And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities.

12 Whereupon as I went to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests,

13 At midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me.

14 And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.

15 And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest.

16 But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee;

17 Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee,

18 To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.

19 Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision:

20 But shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.

- 21 For these causes the Jews caught me in the temple, and went about to kill me.
- 22 Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come:
- 23 That Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should shew light unto the people, and to the Gentiles.
- 24 And as he thus spake for himself, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad.
- 25 But he said, I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness.
- 26 For the king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely: for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner.
- 27 King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest.
- 28 Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.
- 29 And Paul said, I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds.
- 30 And when he had thus spoken, the king rose up, and the governor, and Bernice, and they that sat with them:
- 31 And when they were gone aside, they talked between themselves, saying, This man doeth nothing worthy of death or of bonds.
- 32 Then said Agrippa unto Festus, This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Caesar. KJV

### **Introduction:**

In the previous message we focused on Paul's memories of his sins and the truths that must guide an honest mind to be able to deal with such memories and still be able to function as a faithful child of God. In this one we want to focus on the actual call that God laid upon the man Saul of Tarsus that turned him into Paul the Apostle, possibly the greatest of them all.

But our interest in this event is not merely a scholastic study or a pursuit of curiosity. In this communication to Paul that we find recorded here, the most complete account we have of the words spoken to him on the road to Damascus, we have in essence the design and intent of God for all Christian ministry.

We live in a day when all kinds of things are considered ministry. Many, if not most, of the activities which pass for 'ministry' in our day are actually businesses and many others are simply the self-conceived ideas of people who are seeking to have some kind of meaning for their lives. We could probably say that at least some of them are worthy endeavors on some level and there are a few that rise to the level of great and useful services but it is an enormous leap (one that most people do not understand) from there to an actual 'ministry' ordained and established by God Himself.

**The primary function of every call of God was stated by the Risen Lord to Saul as he lay there in the dust of the Damascus highway.**

- 16 But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee;
- 17 Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee,
- 18 To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.

What passes for 'Christianity' in our day has forgotten the primary mission of the Church. Paul was assigned the very same project that Jesus had taken upon Himself.

Luke 4:16-19

- 16 And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read.
- 17 And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written,
- 18 The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised,
- 19 To preach the acceptable year of the Lord. KJV

Jesus was quoting from Isaiah and although He phrased himself slightly differently to Paul than He had done to Isaiah the words mean and intend the same thing and they point to the great need of humanity.

They are blind

They are in spiritual darkness  
and under the power of Satan

They are unforgiven of their sins

They are separated from the inheritance that is promised in Abraham

And they are un sanctified, unholy, without faith

The problem we face is that 'Christianity' in our day has decided that its mission is to help people live better lives and has so minimized the work that Jesus came to do and that which He sent Paul to do that they think Jesus' Work is a small thing and that their work is the primary mission of the church.

Churches now think they can run people through a little formula and a little program, get them 'saved' and then get on to the important stuff that the church is *really* called to do.

**The primary duty and call of the Church is not doing charity work, campaigning for political causes, or rescuing derelicts.**

We are certainly called to have compassion on people but even there the scope is limited.

Gal 6:9-10

- 9 And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.
- 10 As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith. KJV

The churches of Asia, Macedonia, and Greece gave generously to the need of the saints in Judea during the famine but we see nothing of them building shelters for the pagan homeless in their own cities.

The mission of Jesus was to seek and save those who are lost.

Luke 19:8-10

- 8 And Zacchaeus stood, and said unto the Lord; Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold.
- 9 And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house, forsomuch as he also is a son of Abraham.
- 10 For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost. KJV

But seemingly everyone has forgotten that the 'lost' are the spiritually poor, the brokenhearted over sin, in captivity to the devil, spiritually blind and oppressed by all of the lies of invented religion.

Sometimes on the way to church on Sunday morning I catch a piece of a program that is produced by what passes for 'Mainstream Christianity' in our day. Every week they have a different speaker from one of the liberal churches around the country. They do not focus on any particular denomination in their choices that I can tell but all of the ones I have heard so far are from what I consider 'liberal' or 'progressive' churches.

And, of course, they always have nice things to say but I notice that when they are asked about their 'ministry' they always point to community projects that their churches sponsor: feeding the homeless, providing recreation for the youth, taking meals to the elderly, etc. In other words, all of the things that people expect that a church is supposed to do in our day.

I was reminded of them as I was putting this message together for today, realizing that they have completely misapplied the words of scripture.

The lost are blind but they do not need a church to sponsor eye clinics for poor neighborhoods. The lost need the scriptures clearly declared to them by people filled with the Spirit of God so that they might have an encounter with God by the Holy Spirit and have the eyes of their understanding opened to the wonders of Jesus Christ's Saving Work.

They are in spiritual darkness and under the power of Satan. Their need is not for a church to organize fund raising programs to help them pay their electric bills. They need a church in their community that is ablaze with spiritual power and radiating the light of God through their community.

They are unforgiven of their sins and miserable in their sins but they do not need for the church to provide free mental health clinics to help them feel good in the midst of their sins. They need a place where their spiritual ailment is correctly diagnosed and declared, a place where they can find freedom from the misery of their sins through an actual encounter with God.

They are separated from the inheritance that is promised in Abraham but they do not need community organizers provided by the church to lobby the government for more free programs so that they can live more comfortably here and still die without any hope in the Promise made to Abraham so long ago, the promise that there would be a Seed, Jesus Christ, and through faith they could inherit all that is in Him and, ultimately, all that God provides in eternity.

And they are unsanctified, unholy, without faith, and in danger of Hell fire. They don't need the false prophet to tell them, "peace, peace, all is well, God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life," which is the message of modern so-called Christianity. They need to be told, as Jesus told His world, "except ye repent, ye shall surely perish."

The gospel has been redefined as the instrument to seek to meet men's temporal and physical needs when it is, in reality, the device by which God rescues men from destruction.

So, if this is our understanding of what Jesus and Paul did, if Paul was correctly understanding and applying the words he heard there on the road to Damascus, and if this is the mission of the church and every child of God, let us explore some of these ideas in practical terms.

### **Preach the gospel to the poor**

Occasionally, in our Sunday Evening discussions I hear you bringing up silly and crazy things that people say to you concerning faith, your walk with God, and some of the decisions you have made about serving Him. Do you realize that they are telling you that they are poor? They lack spiritual understanding, godly insight, and the will by which to make proper determinations of how their lives are to be lived. **They are spiritually and morally poor!**

And, we are to preach the gospel to them. But we cannot tell them what we do not know. We all see the folks sitting by the side of the road asking for money. Some of them are making a pretty good living at it. I have heard that some make around \$1000 a week. But, suppose you pull up to an intersection and there is a guy who is actually in need and truly poor. What if you give him a handful of \$100 dollar bills in Monopoly money? Have you helped him? Of course not!

If your friend gives you a spiel of ideas that they have simply made up as principles by which they live their lives and you reply by beginning, "Well, I think...." You have simply handed them monopoly money. The only useful reply in such a situation is to tell them what the Word of God says about their situation.

Now, I realize that you may not necessarily have an instant answer for many things that are said to you. I confess that I have a difficulty at times knowing what to say to people. But, you have the opportunity to respond by saying, "That is interesting.... I will need to think about that... I

will get back to you.” And then, go home and do some research while you also pray and ask God to help you know how to help this person who is so poor in Biblical truth. Then, you can have the chance to go back later in another conversation and say, “You know what you said the other day and I said I would get back to you? Well, did you know that the Bible says.....” Here is some real gold that you can give to the poor, not Monopoly money.

Peter made a really interesting statement that applies often in such situations.

Acts 3:1-6

- 1 Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour.
- 2 And a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple;
- 3 Who seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple asked an alms.
- 4 And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him with John, said, Look on us.
- 5 And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them.
- 6 Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk. KJV

We are not called upon to give people anything except what we have to share from the Word of God. Opinions are just fake currency but the Word of God lives forever.

We are to feed the poor.

There is another element to this as well. The scripture is clear that the primary impact of the gospel has been and always will be on those who are not wealthy.

1 Cor 1:26-29

- 26 For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called:
- 27 But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty;
- 28 And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are:
- 29 That no flesh should glory in his presence. KJV

I have seen obviously poor people come into a church and people who call themselves Christian get that look on their face that says, “what are they doing here?” Well, the reality is that for some reason or other, they got up on a Sunday morning and drove past a lot of churches to get to yours. Remember that the gospel is preached to the poor and received by the poor far more than the wealthy. Thank God for poor folk coming to church.

We are called upon to be humble, to stoop to serve others and this is a totally appropriate part of gospel work.

The church is not designed nor built for the culturally elite, nor for those who think they are.

### **The gospel is for the broken-hearted**

But, as I said earlier, it is not the mission of the church to build free counseling clinics to help people be comfortable in their rebellion against God.

Isaiah and then Jesus were referring to those who broken heart comes from the awareness that they are not right with God.

You see, when things are going as they ought to go, when the people of God are being led by the Spirit of God, He goes ahead of them and brings into their paths people who are miserable in their sins.

When Awakenings occur this is just what happens, God visits communities and stirs up the misery in souls without God, shows them their sins by His Law and holds before their eyes the realities of Judgment.

We are absolutely not commissioned to tell people, “God loves you just as your are,” but “God is angry with the wicked every day.” The one whose mind/heart is being stirred and provoked by the Spirit of God will seek remedy in the gospel.

Our job is not to find people who are doing perfectly well in their own minds and convince them that they are miserable. Our task is to find the broken hearted, the ones made broken hearted by God, and speak the hope of the gospel to them.

We are not called to try to heal them in any other way.

Rom 10:14-17

- 14 How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?
- 15 And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!
- 16 But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report?
- 17 So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. KJV

Not Monopoly money but real gold.

I think a part of praying for Awakening is praying that God would break hearts. All Revivals flow out of broken hearts and produce broken hearts. Is your heart broken for the lost?

**“to preach deliverance to the captives” and “to set at liberty them that are bruised (oppressed)”**

As independent as they try to seem and pretend to be, the lost are literal captives of Satan and he is not treating them well. Oh, their lives may seem easy and they may have plenty of money, but their souls are troubled. Satan charges far more than he pays.

But, always, the full recognition of captivity and oppression comes through the working of the Holy Spirit in ones heart/mind.

But we need wisdom to not get side-tracked when an oppressed captive comes into our life. We dare not try to repair that which only God can fix and we need wisdom. If a person is in a miserable place because he/she has made sinful choices, our best help for them is to help them think through their sin and repent of it. It is not our job, and often we should not try, to undo the consequences of sin or even help modify the impact of them. The Prodigal had to face head on the consequences of his decisions and do all of the work to get himself to a place where he could repent.

Many people confound the issues by attempting to help in wrong ways.

**“recovering of sight to the blind”**

We must remember that healing for spiritual blindness is much more difficult than healing for physical blindness.

We surely are to share the Word of God with them when they cross our paths (make sure we have some light to share) but we must also diligently pray for them that God might grant enlightenment by the Spirit.

Now, I want you to notice something from the words of Paul that give a connectivity to all of this.

- 13 At midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me.
- 14 And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.
- 15 And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest.
- 16 But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee;
- 17 Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee,
- 18 To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.



- 19 Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision:  
20 But shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.

He was tasked with opening the eyes of the blind, turning them from darkness to light, and delivering them from the power of Satan so that they might receive forgiveness of sins, so how did he address the task? Look again at vs. 19,20. He taught them that they should repent of their sins and turn to God, being careful to take the issue of Repentance seriously and actually begin obeying God's Word.

The way we help the poor, the blind, the captive and the oppressed is to speak to them clearly, honestly and consistently about Repentance. The bottom line is that if Repentance does not occur in their lives we have not helped them at all.

Let me take an aside here. Sinners are not going to like this approach. Most who call themselves Christian are not going to like it. They are going to attempt to persuade you and may even demand that you choose another approach. ***No other approach will help them!*** Unless they find their way to Repentance, and that includes everyone in this audience, unless you find your way to Repentance, you will never be free of the misery that sin brings upon you.

The sinner must do a complete job, no half-way measures. Whatever elements are left out of Repentance will be their undoing. God demands Repentance.... Only He can give it..... Any 'Faith' which does not include it is bogus. **Repentance is the Cod Liver Oil of the Gospel.**