

"The Refining of Saul"

Acts 9

Introduction: Two weeks go when we left Saul he was growing in spiritual strength, and he was preaching the Gospel to the Jews who were in Damascus. His knowledge of the Old Testament and now his understanding that Jesus was the Christ equipped him to effectively communicate the Truth and therefore he confounded the Jews.

Notice Acts 9:22

The word "confounded" means that they were not able to resist the Truth that Saul preached.

Application:

This is what a knowledge of God's Word does in our lives. It equips us to stand against false doctrine. We see this in the Words of the Psalmist.

Psalm 119:98-100

⁹⁷ O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day.

⁹⁸ Thou through thy commandments hast made me wiser than mine enemies: for they are ever with me.

⁹⁹ I have more understanding than all my teachers: for thy testimonies are my meditation.

¹⁰⁰ I understand more than the ancients, because I keep thy precepts.

"The Opposition"

Notice Acts 9:23a

The phrase "after many days" covers a period of three years. How do we know this?

Galatians 1:15-18

¹⁵ But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace,

¹⁶ To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood:

¹⁷ Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus.

¹⁸ *Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days.*

The phrase "after many days" refers to the three years that Paul mentions in the letter to the Galatians when he went to Arabia. He left Damascus, went to Arabia and then returned to Damascus. It seems that most of the three years were spent in Arabia because of how intense the persecution was in Damascus. The time in Arabia was time which he spent with the Lord.

Application:

The Lord will often separate His servants for a time in order to prepare him or her for what He has for them to do.

Saul would spend the best part of 3 years in Arabia in the desert as he was being prepared and equipped for what was ahead. Moses would also spend time in the desert in preparation of what the Lord had for him.

Acts 7:22-30

²² *And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds.*

²³ *And when he was full forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren the children of Israel.*

²⁴ *And seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended him, and avenged him that was oppressed, and smote the Egyptian:*

²⁵ *For he supposed his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them: but they understood not.*

²⁶ *And the next day he shewed himself unto them as they strove, and would have set them at one again, saying, Sirs, ye are brethren; why do ye wrong one to another?*

²⁷ *But he that did his neighbour wrong thrust him away, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge over us?*

²⁸ *Wilt thou kill me, as thou diddest the Egyptian yesterday?*

²⁹ *Then fled Moses at this saying, and was a stranger in the land of Madian, where he begat two sons.*

³⁰ And when forty years were expired, there appeared to him in the wilderness of mount Sina an angel of the Lord in a flame of fire in a bush.

Moses was forty years in the desert, and he would not begin his ministry until he was eighty years old. The point we need to see is that the Lord can and often does take us through different life experiences in order to prepare us for what He has for us to do. Sometimes the situations He puts us in are very difficult to endure but we must keep in mind that His grace is always sufficient in those times.

Notice Acts 9:23b.

After he returned to Damascus, he continued to preach the Gospel and the Jews hated him and took counsel to kill him. This brings to mind what Paul wrote to Timothy.

2 Timothy 3:12

¹² *Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.*

He would learn this very early in his Christen life.

Notice Acts 9:24

Somehow Saul found out about the Jews plans to kill him. They expected him to exit the city through the one of the gates so every night they watched the gates in an attempt to capture him and kill him. But God had plans for Saul and the plans of these men would be foiled.

Notice the words of George Whitefield:

"Christ's servant is immortal until his work is done."

There are many verses that speak of God's protection for His children.

Isaiah 54:17

¹⁷ No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD, and their righteousness is of me, saith the LORD.

2 Thessalonians 3:1-3

Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified, even as it is with you:

² *And that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men: for all men have not faith.*

³ But the Lord is faithful, who shall stablish you, and keep you from evil.

Psalm 138:7

⁷ Though I walk in the midst of trouble, thou wilt revive me: **thou shalt stretch forth thine hand against the wrath of mine enemies, and thy right hand shall save me.**

There are times when God allows the enemy to get to us, but it is all for a purpose.

Notice the words of Allen Redpath:

"There is nothing--no circumstance, no trouble, no testing--that can ever touch me until, first of all, it has gone past God and past Christ right through to me. If it has come that far, it has come with a great purpose, which I may not understand at the moment. But as I refuse to become panicky, as I lift up my eyes to Him and accept it as coming from the throne of God for some great purpose of blessing to my own heart, no sorrow will ever disturb me, no circumstance will cause me to fret, for I shall rest in the joy of what my Lord is--that is the rest of victory!"

Notice Acts 9:25-26

In order to avoid the gates of the city of Damascus the disciples let Saul down over the wall of the city. We get a few more details in 2 Corinthians.

2 Corinthians 11:32-33

³² *In Damascus the governor under Aretas the king kept the city of the damascenes with a garrison, desirous to apprehend me:*

³³ *And through a window in a basket was I let down by the wall, and escaped his hands.*

Saul then made his way to Jerusalem. Now we would think that Jerusalem would be the most dangerous place for Saul to go. But let us keep in mind that he was in the will of God and there is no safer place for a believer to be than in the will of God.

Galatians 1:17-18

¹⁷ *Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus.*

¹⁸ **Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days.**

When he arrived in Jerusalem Saul wanted to join up with the disciples, but they wanted nothing to do with him.

Notice Acts 9:26 again.

The word "assayed" means that he tried time after time, but they did not believe he was saved. They were afraid of Saul because of his past reputation. They probably thought his attempt to join them was a plan to somehow destroy them.

Let us not miss that God is allowing Saul to experience some very difficult times. He has been chased from Damascus and now he is rejected by the disciples in Jerusalem. Saul is under excessive pressure at this time. Let me share with you another quote by Redpath.

"When GOD wants to do an impossible task, He takes an impossible man and crushes him."

God was working in his life through all of this, but he would not let him without comfort. God was in the process of refining Saul for the ministry.

Notice Acts 9:27

God now brings a man into his life that we had met earlier. His name is Barnabas.

Acts 4:34-37

³⁴ Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold,

³⁵ And laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need.

³⁶ And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus,

³⁷ Having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet.

Barnabas name was Joses but because of his ability to show compassion and comfort he was named Barnabas which means "son of comfort." He would stand before the Apostles, and he would testify on behalf of Saul.

Application:

There are two points to be made here with Barnabas stepping into the life of Saul when he was under pressure. First, I m reminded of how the Lord often brings people into our lives at just the right time. They may be there to bring comfort, encouragement, direction or even correction.

2 Corinthians 1:3-4

³ *Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort;*

⁴ *Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.*

The second part of verse 4 here introduces the second point I want to make. Sometimes we are the "channel of comfort" that God uses in someone's life. We must always be alert to those around us because they may possibly be someone like Saul who is at rock bottom, and they need someone to step into their life and provide the comfort or encouragement they need. I have found that sometimes people simply need someone to listen and say very little. Sometimes they need someone to pray with them because of the valley that they are in. Sometimes they need someone to weep with them. The point is we must NOT allow ourselves to get so focused upon our own lives that we then miss the opportunity to be a Barnabas to someone who needs us.

Conclusion:

Barnabas would play a significant role in Paul's ministry. We have no idea how much of a difference we can make in a person's life when we are willing to be Barnabas to them. I have seen the many faces of Barnabas in my own life through the years of ministry. Had it not been for those who stepped in to be Barnabas I may not be here. God has always provided what I needed. I certainly hope that I have been a Barnabas in the lives of people I have met on my journey as well. What about you?