

"The Refining of Saul"

Part 2

Acts 9

Introduction: Last week in our study of Acts we were looking at the refining of Saul. He was saved and preached the Gospel in the synagogues and then he left Damascus and went to Arabia.

Notice Acts 9:23

The "many days" here are revealed in Galatians 1.

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 three years included his time in Arabia where he was alone with God, and it also included time in Damascus again after he returned. He came back to Damascus and continued to preach until the threats to his life caused him to leave and go to Jerusalem. The Jews watched the gates in order to catch him and put Saul to death, but this was all found out by Saul, and he was let down in a basket under the cover of darkness over the wall. When he arrived in Jerusalem, he attempted to join himself with the disciples, but they feared him because of his reputation. They did not trust him. So, Saul was like a man without a country. He did not seem to fit in anywhere. This was part of the refining process that God would use in his life. As I read this, I cannot help but think about how he must have felt. There was the memory of how he had persecuted and sentenced to death all those innocent people who were followers of Jesus Christ. The remorse from this would have been a heavy weight upon him. Then on top of that his life is threatened by the Jews and now even the disciples wanted nothing to do with him. But God had a man who would step in and provide the comfort that Saul needed.

Notice Acts 9:27

Barnabas whose name means "son of consolation" was used by God to testify on his behalf. God knew what he needed, and He would provide the encouragement and the comfort which Saul lacked at this time. Some could look at a man like Saul and say that he brought all of this on himself because of how he treated believers and for that reason they would not offer any comfort. But God's grace is greater than any sin.

"Jesus Christ knows the worst about you. Nonetheless, He is the one who loves you most." A. W. Tozer

Application:

Last week we talked about how God often desires to use us as a "Barnabas" because there is someone who is at the bottom, and they need a "Barnabas" in their life. Many times, in the church when someone falls into sin, and they repent, there is little compassion. They are sometimes treated as outcasts with no grace or forgiveness extended toward them. What often happens is that they leave the church, and no one follows up to see where they are or how they are doing. This should not be! When someone repents, they are to be restored back into fellowship. They are not to be constantly beat down so as to be overcome with sorrow.

Remember the man in 1 Corinthians 5 that was living in immorality and was to be put out of the church? He apparently repented Notice what Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians concerning this man.

2 Corinthians 2:6-11

⁶ *Sufficient to such a man is this punishment, which was inflicted of many.*

⁷ *So that contrariwise ye ought rather to forgive him, and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow.*

⁸ *Wherefore I beseech you that ye would confirm your love toward him.*

⁹ *For to this end also did I write, that I might know the proof of you, whether ye be obedient in all things.*

¹⁰ *To whom ye forgive any thing, I forgive also: for if I forgave any thing, to whom I forgave it, for your sakes forgave I it in the person of Christ;*

¹¹ *Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices.*

So, when we left Saul last week he was with the Apostles at Jerusalem.

Notice Acts 9:28

In Galatians we get some information concerning Saul's time in Jerusalem.

Galatians 1:18-19

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

¹⁹ But other of the apostles saw I none, save James the Lord's brother.

Saul spent two weeks with Peter. Peter had a lot to share concerning the life, the death, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. So, for two weeks we can just imagine how many questions Saul would have asked Peter. It is interesting that Saul also spent time with James. This was the Lord's half-brother. James had a remarkable experience. He had spent close to thirty years with the Son of God in the same home in Nazareth, but as an unbeliever.

John 7:3-5

³ His brethren therefore said unto him, Depart hence, and go into Judaea, that thy disciples also may see the works that thou doest.

⁴ For there is no man that doeth any thing in secret, and he himself seeketh to be known openly. If thou do these things, shew thyself to the world.

⁵ For neither did his brethren believe in him.

None of His half-brothers believed in Him before the resurrection. But when Saul met James in Jerusalem, he was now a believer. He would have had a great deal of information for Saul since he grew up in the same house with Jesus.

Application:

When I read all of this, I can see within Saul a great hunger to know more about Jesus. He spent time with anyone he could who had known the Lord while He walked the earth just to gain more knowledge about Him. Do you know how far he had to travel to meet with Peter, James and the other apostles at Jerusalem? It was a journey of 150 miles, and he would have WALKED! This is how hungry he was to learn. It would be good for us to ask ourselves how far are we willing to go to know the Lord in a deeper way?

I want to show you something from the book of Daniel when Daniel was given a vision of the Gentile world powers.

Daniel 8:15-17, 19

¹⁵ *And it came to pass, when I, even I Daniel, had seen the vision, and sought for the meaning, then, behold, there stood before me as the appearance of a man.*

¹⁶ *And I heard a man's voice between the banks of Ulai, which called, and said, Gabriel, make this man to understand the vision.*

¹⁷ *So he came near where I stood: and when he came, I was afraid, and fell upon my face: but he said unto me, Understand, O son of man: for at the time of the end shall be the vision.*

¹⁹ *And he said, Behold, I will make thee know what shall be in the last end of the indignation: for at the time appointed the end shall be.*

Daniel did not understand so he asked for the meaning and God gave him what he desired. When we want to know our Lord deeper, I can assure you that God will give us the deeper knowledge that we desire.

Psalm 37:3-4

³ *Trust in the LORD, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed.*

⁴ *Delight thyself also in the LORD: and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart.*

Our hunger for more of Jesus is a really good barometer as to where we are in our walk. If there is no hunger, there can be two causes:

1. No salvation.
2. Love has grown cold.

Revelation 2:4

⁴ *Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.*

John 14:21

²¹ *He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.*

Notice Acts 9:29

Paul spare time in Jerusalem was spent disputing with the Grecians. These were the very people who stoned Stephen. They however could not prove Saul wrong, so they made plans to kill him.

Notice Acts 9:30-31

Saul would go to Tarsus where he would stay for several years before we hear from him again. He will show up again in chapter 11 when Barnabas searches him out. I want to draw your attention to what is recorded concerning the churches in verse 31.

Notice Acts 9:31 again.

The word "rest" here is the word that is usually translated "peace". So let us consider this as peace in the churches. There are 4 points here to be seen concerning the churches or the church overall.

1. It is possible to experience God's peace in the midst of the trials of life.

The church had peace in the midst of all the persecution that was happening. We have been looking at Saul and the threats against him but let us remember there were others preaching the Gospel and they were being threatened and persecuted also. The persecution was not against Saul, but it was against the church. It started at the death of Stephen.

Acts 8:1

And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles.

So, how could they experience peace in all that they were facing?

Philippians 4:6-9

⁶ *Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.*

⁷ *And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.*

⁸ *Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever*

things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.

⁹ Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you.

2. Growth happens in the midst of the trials of life.

Notice Acts 9:31 again.

This verse tells us the church was edified. This means to be built up. How did this happen in the persecution. The church was driven to trust in the Lord for all they needed at this time. Self dependance was taken away and they could do nothing but depend upon the Lord and that was a good thing. They searched the Scriptures which they had, and they trusted God and the end result was spiritual growth. The next point also contributed to the growth.

3. Trials will change the walk of the believer.

Notice Acts 9:31 again.

In this time of persecution, the believers were walking in the fear of the Lord. This means they were living in a way that they were very careful not to do anything that would displease the Lord. They did not want to hinder the Lord's power and therefore they were very careful with how they lived and conducted their lives.

Application:

When we are facing the trials in our lives, we need God to work, and we need to be sure that we too are very careful not to displease Him. We certainly do not want to stand in the way of Him working in our lives or in the life of our family members.

4. The Holy Spirit will bring comfort in the trials when we are walking in obedience to the Lord.

Notice Acts 9:31 again.

The way they were living was not hindering the Spirit, so He was free to bring the comfort they needed.

Conclusion:

Let us learn from this the need to live in the fear of the Lord so that the Holy Spirit is not hindered.