

460 Arise ...

In Acts Chapter 9 the Lord has given us through Luke an account of one of the most remarkable conversions of all time! – that of Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus. As the narrative unfolds we keep coming across one particular word in its various forms – “Arise”.

We first hear of Saul in Acts 7.58b and 8.1 – as he looked after the coats while consenting to Stephen being illegally stoned to death. Yet Saul and the others had just heard Stephen’s irrefutable justification of Jesus of Nazareth, “the Son of Man”, being “the Just One” (from 7.52b,56,59).

Then - “As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison ...” (8.3). Jesus and His followers have always aroused satanically-inspired hatred by determined opponents, but from Saul’s efforts - “Therefore they that were scattered went everywhere preaching the word” (8.3-4, KJV), a fine case of Romans 8.28 and John 16.33b.

We continue in Chapter 9 with Saul, who, “yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord”, asked the high priest for “letters to Damascus to the synagogues” (from 9.1-2). This young man duly set off with his team on their 130-mile journey to Damascus, full of anger, hate and intent, convinced that by his efforts to eradicate this new Christian sect he was truly serving the Lord God. How wrong he was.

As they approached Damascus, with Saul’s head full of plans – bang! – Jesus stepped in and took charge, leaving Saul as a broken man in the dust. By the grace of God this nasty, spiritually-blinkered man spluttered out two questions – “Who art thou, Lord?” (9.5a), and, having heard the Name of Jesus from the very voice of Jesus, “trembling and astonished” he then asked, “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” (v.6a). We can only marvel at the ways and mercies and power of Almighty God!

Jesus’ instruction was simple – “Arise, and go into the city”, where Saul would be told what to do next (v.6b). Now we come to a point where an “interlinear” translation is helpful. We read in the KJV in verse 8, “And Saul arose from the earth ...”, but the Greek word for this “arose” is different, and is passive: literally it reads, “And Saul was lifted up from the earth ...”. Now perhaps this subtle difference is not that vital, but there it is in the Greek text, explaining that Saul did not of himself “arise” in response to Jesus’ instruction – instead he “was lifted up”. Why?

Presumably he was so shattered by what was happening to him that he was in no state, in himself, to arise. And who did the lifting-up of Saul? Either those around him, or perhaps even the unseen Jesus Himself?

The next “Arise” is spoken in Damascus by Jesus to dear Ananias, surely one of Scripture’s unsung heroes – “Arise and go ...” - and find Saul (9.11). But, but, but - Ananias, just like Moses by that burning bush (Exodus Chapters 3-4), thought better not! But it was no good, there was no getting out of it – “Go thy way” (v.15a) – and he did (v.17a), and the extraordinary blessings duly flowed because of Ananias’ faith, obedience and courage (vv.17-22). We read that Saul, with his sight now restored, arose himself – no need for help this time – and was baptised (v.18b). And the rest is history, and truly too His Story.

We have a few further occurrences of “arise” in Chapter 9: Peter to Aeneas on his sick bed, “Jesus Christ maketh thee whole: arise ... and he arose immediately” (from 9.33-34); “Then Peter arose” and set off to Lydda (v.39); and then Peter’s words to the dead body of Tabitha, “Tabitha, arise he gave her [his] hand and lifted her up ...”.

What precious truths we learn from these “arise” occasions in Acts Chapter 9. That little word stands as an instruction to “get up and get on with it”, which applies to all of us in the Lord’s service day by day. It also applies to all of us sometimes, on a more specific God-appointed task, even perhaps, please God, when that instruction is to arise from our sickbed after His healing of us has occurred. As with Ananias we abide in the Lord Jesus, as branches in the Vine (John 15.1-8), that we may be ready to respond to that divine “tap on the shoulder”, to arise and get on with the Lord’s bidding whenever His specific instructions may come.

Praise God, of course the finest “arising” of all is that of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself on that Resurrection morning - an arising in which all “that are Christ’s” will share “at his coming” (from I Corinthians 15.20-23). What a prospect, as we arise afresh each day “to love and serve the Lord”.

© November 2021 Faithful Sheep Ministries – www.fsmins.org