

462 Paul KNEW

Following Saul of Tarsus' dramatic conversion to Jesus Christ, his sudden, personal "palingenesia" or "starting afresh" that we dwelt on in last week's Reflection (Acts 9.1-8 / John 3.3,5 / Titus 3.4-5), the Lord quickly got to work. For Saul was now a "new creation" (II Corinthians 5.17) with a specific, wide-ranging, God-appointed ministry: "for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake" (from Acts 9.15-16, KJV). The Lord duly sent his servant Ananias to Saul, that he might see again, be filled with the Holy Spirit, and be baptized (9.17-18). Ananias was faithful, and Saul was now "all set".

Saul then spent "certain days" with Christ's disciples in Damascus, the very folk he had come to arrest and take back to Jerusalem, who were now his brothers and sisters in Christ (Acts 9.19, 2 / Galatians 3.26-28). We can imagine these disciples took some convincing, presumably by Ananias and Saul himself, that Saul's "new birth" and his sudden change of sides were both genuine (v.21).

Next we read of Saul – "And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God ... But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ" (vv.20, 22). Many of his listeners took strong exception to Saul's message – that Jesus of Nazareth was and is the Christ, the Messiah, whom the authorities had had put to death – so, "the Jews took counsel to kill him" (v.23).

After his dramatic escape from Damascus and initial rejection in Jerusalem (vv.24-27), sure enough, Saul got on with his Jesus-given tasks – he "spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians" (that is, Greek-speaking Jews); and sure enough once again, "but they went about to slay him" (v.29). Saul was duly whisked off to safety, via Caesarea to Tarsus (v.30), and the Church had a rare period of rest, blessing and growth (v.31).

After the narrative concentrating on the Lord's gracious work through Peter (9.32 – 12.19), our attention is brought back to Saul, soon to be Paul, in Chapter 13 and following. Paul and his companions undertook three main missionary journeys spread over many years and taking in what is now western Turkey, Greece, Cyprus, Malta and Rome. The contents of these chapters always amaze and encourage us! – as well

as giving us abundant guidance as to our Christian conduct and witnessing for the Risen Christ in a world that still for the most part “passes by on the other side”.

Let us now briefly pick out for our further prayerful attention just one lesson from the many such lessons in Paul’s life and ministry. It is just this: Paul KNEW. Paul knew from Scripture, (our Old Testament, which as a Pharisee he would have known in great detail), and he knew from experience that, despite all the knocks and setbacks, Jesus really was and is the Messiah, the “seed of the woman”, the suffering Servant, the Christ, the Lord, the Son of God and the Son of man; and he knew full well that Jesus’ death and resurrection lie at the very heart of God the Father’s gifts of forgiveness, salvation and peace to all accepters of His Son Jesus Christ. Hence, under the Holy Spirit’s inspiration Paul could write these extraordinary words - “I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them [but] dung, that I may win Christ” (Philippians 3.8, KJV). That word “dung”, occurring only this once in the New Testament, is fully intended to shock, and it still does!

Paul’s adventures, encounters, mishaps and sufferings remain jaw-dropping (egs., II Corinthians 1.8-10; 4.5-12; 6.1-10; 7.4-7; 11.23-33; 12.7-10), and not surprisingly there were times when he got very worn down, just as can happen to us too (eg., Acts 18.9-10; 23.11; 27.22-25). But by God’s grace, channelled to Paul both directly and through his companions, Paul just “kept at it” through thick and thin, because he KNEW. He wrote to Timothy concerning his sufferings, “out of [them] all the Lord delivered me”, and when “the time of (his) departure was at hand” – “I have fought a good fight, I have finished [my] course, I have kept the faith” (II Timothy 3.11b; 4.6-7).

The wonder is that we too are “chosen vessels” (egs., John 15.16,19 / I Corinthians 1.27-31 / James 2.5), called to serve on probably smaller stages than those of Paul but nonetheless still on stages that are real, important and urgent. In Christ, Paul KNEW, come what may, and we who follow on in Christ today also KNOW, come what may.

So Paul kept going for very good reasons - and so do we (Galatians 6.9-10 / II Timothy 3.12-17).

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