



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Acts 9:10–31

“The Change That Christ Makes”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] The Scripture reading this morning is found in Acts chapter 9, verse 10 through verse 31, and we are continuing, as you know, Luke’s account of the conversion of Saul and of some of the events that happened at that time. He has just recorded how Saul met the risen Christ, on the road to Damascus, as he was going there with letters from the chief priests to take men and women who were giving testimony to Christ and bring them back, bound, to Jerusalem, that they might be punished for their new faith. Now we read in the 10th verse.

“And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias. And he said, ‘Behold, I am here, Lord.’ And the Lord said ‘Unto him, arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and enquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth, and hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight.’ Then Ananias answered, ‘Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem: And here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name.’ But the Lord said unto him, ‘Go thy way: 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.’ And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, ‘Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus,

that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost.’ And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized. And when he had received meat, he was strengthened. Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus. And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God.”

May I interrupt the reading here, to make one point? Later on, in writing the Epistle to the Galatians, the Apostle Paul gives us some information that Luke does not give us. He tells us that shortly after this conversion experience and shortly after he went into Damascus, he went off into Arabia. The verses are found in Galatians 1:15 through 17. And, if you’ll permit me, I’d like to read these verses now, because this visit to Arabia is probably to be placed either between verse 21 and 22, or between verse 22 and 23 of Acts chapter 9. Galatians 1:15 says, and Paul is going back over his past.

“But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother’s womb, and called me by his grace, to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood: Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus.”

So Luke does not tell us everything that happened. Now, coming back to verse 21 of Acts chapter 9, we read.

“But all that heard him were amazed, and said; is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests? But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews, which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ. And after that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill

him: But their laying await was known of Saul. And they watched the gates day and night to kill him. Then the disciples took him by night, and let him down by the wall in a basket.”

Isn't that startling? That here is a man, who came with the temple police and with an entourage, to slay the, ultimately, to slay the saints who were there to take them back to Jerusalem and to put them to death, if possible, and now he leaves Damascus, let down by those same saints, in a fish basket. God does produce remarkable changes in men. The 26th verse continues.

“And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. And he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem. And he spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians: [That's the Hellenistic Jews] but they went about to slay him. Which when the brethren knew, they brought him down to Caesarea, and sent him forth to Tarsus.”

In that same 1st chapter of Galatians, Paul said he did go back to Cilicia. Tarsus is in Cilicia. And the final verse, verse 31.

“Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied.”

May God bless this reading of his Word. Let's bow together in a moment of prayer.

[Prayer] Our Heavenly Father, we thank Thee for the accounts in the Word of God, concerning the experiences of the early church, for they so encourage us and strengthen us in our faith, and give us

insight into the historical origins of the faith that we acknowledge and proclaim in the twentieth century. We are grateful for Paul, for Luke, for Ananias, and for all that company of faithful men, whom Thou didst bring to faith and use in the glorification of Thy Name. Today, Lord, in our age, in our time, we pray that we may be as faithful as they; in proclaiming Christ. We ask, Lord, Thy blessing upon each one present in this auditorium, and we ask especially for those who are believers in our Lord Jesus Christ that their lives may be testimonies to the grace of God in Christ; and that Thou wilt strengthen them and encourage them and give them a true boldness in the proclamation of His Name. In business, in relationships with our friends, in our school, whatever our relationships may be, Lord, we pray that Thou wilt give us strength and boldness, and help us to realize the really important things in this life.

We pray for the whole church of Jesus Christ and we ask, Lord, Thy blessing upon it, and we also pray for Believers Chapel and its ministry, for its elders and for its deacons, and its members and its friends, and the visitors here today. We commit them all to Thee. We pray, O God, that Thy hand may be upon their lives for good. We pray for our country. We ask, also, Lord, Thy blessing upon our nation and we pray that Thou wilt be with our president, and those who are associated with him in government. May, Lord, we be enabled to preach the Gospel freely in our day. We give Thee thanks for the Lord Jesus Christ and all that He has accomplished through the shedding of His blood. And we, Lord, pray that Thou wilt enable us to grow through the ministry of the Word, in this hour. And if there are some here who have never believed, Lord, we pray that through the Holy Spirit Thou wilt take the Word, give them a sense of their own relationship before Thee, and Lord, bring regeneration and faith and salvation.

We pray, in Jesus' name. Amen.

[Message] The subject for today is “The Change That Christ Makes.” I'm sure that most of you know the origin of the expression “Red Letter Day.” That expression comes from the habit of the Christian church in years past, in constructing a church calendar, of noting the days that were

called holy days in red letters. You can see it reflected in some of our calendars, also, with Easter and Christmas and other days set out in red. The emphasis is upon the significance of the day.

Acts chapter 9, and the conversion of the Apostle Paul is the record of one of the Red Letter Days in the history of the Christian church. And in a sense the activity of the risen Christ, set out in the book of Acts, reaches one of its climaxes in the conversion of Saul of Tarsus. Later on, the apostle in writing to Timothy will make the point that his conversion was a kind of example of conversions. He writes.

“This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. Albeit, for this cause I received mercy, that in me first, Jesus Christ might show forth all long suffering, for a pattern to them which hereafter should believe on Him, to life everlasting.”

And so the way in which the Lord interrupted the apostle on the Damascus road gave him the experience of regeneration and faith is a pattern of the expression of the mercy of God to all who belong to the Lord Jesus Christ. And while the circumstances of our encounter with the Lord will not be the same as Paul's, we may have the same kind of meeting that he had. And, in fact, this is characteristic of believers in the Lord Jesus, that they do have just such a meeting.

And now in Acts chapter 9, we follow this latest apostle in his earliest Christian experience. And it's really a fascinating study of the marks of the new creature in Christ, characteristic of him, first of all, is that he prays. That's marked out with special emphasis, as we shall see. He, also, is filled with the Holy Spirit, which does not refer to some esoteric experience, but simply to the fact that he came under the control of the Holy Spirit. He was baptized in water, one of those experiences that is a Red Letter Day in the experience of individual Christians. He began to fellowship with the Christians in Damascus. He read, “Then was Saul certain days with the disciples were at Damascus.” He begins to give witness and testimony to his faith. He goes into the synagogues and he preached

that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. And, while not stated in Acts chapter 9, it is stated in Galatians, that he went off into Arabia in order to commune with the Lord God, and have his spiritual thinking readjusted.

And, finally, no less important, the apostle is chosen by God to have certain experiences that may be described as suffering. He says, “I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my sake.” And then in this account, we read how his former compatriots in the work of Jehovah, are out now to kill him.

You’ll notice, there is no prosperity theology for the Apostle Paul. Anything but that, and the experience of the apostle is the pattern for those who are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. We should never, never think that if we become believers in the Lord Jesus that we are promised material prosperity in this life. That is simply not true and is contrary to the teaching of the Word of God. Paul was, as all Christians, called upon to suffer for the Lord Jesus Christ’s sake.

We might not have to suffer like the apostle in the United States of America. Our lives may not be at stake. But there are many places in this world where our lives would be at stake. We are called upon in the United States to suffer a more sophisticated kind of suffering. I do not suggest it is greater; it’s less, I presume. But we are mocked at. We are scorned. We are laughed at. We are regarded as obscurantists, and so we have to suffer. Every person who believes in the Lord Jesus Christ is going to have experiences that are not pleasant. But it’s part of being a Christian; it’s part of the manifestation of the courage that comes from a true faith in Christ that we speak up in occasions in which it may cost us a little something. So this chapter is remarkable and it’s very helpful.

We’re going to look at Paul and Ananias first, and then we’ll look at Paul in Arabia. And we’ll come back and take a look at Paul in Jerusalem, as well. And we’ll also refer to the testimony that he gave in Damascus after his conversion.

Now, two men in two different bedrooms in the city of Damascus, have complimentary visions. A man by the name of Ananias is given a vision; and at the same time, the Apostle Paul is given a vision. Ananias is given a vision and told that he must go see Paul and do certain things in the

name of the Lord for him. And Paul is also warned in the vision or instructed in his vision that Ananias will come to him.

I think, it’s interesting that Ananias appears on the scene now, because we know nothing about Ananias, a very obscure Christian, evidently, but useful to God. It’s remarkable in the history of the Christian church how obscure individuals have been used of God as instrumentalities in very significant things.

For example, in the conversion of Augustine, really Augustine as he describes his conversion traces it to some boys that were playing; and one of them was shouting out “Tolle lege, tolle lege,” which means “To take up and read,” and he recognized that as being an indication from the Lord that he was to take a book of the Word of God and read it. Now, Augustine speaks about his mother, Monica, as having a great influence upon him and so, all of these things finally came together. And two people, somewhat unknown to us, even his mother Monica, and the little boys playing in the yard nearby resulted in the conversion of one of the important figures in the history of the Christian church.

And then, John Wesley, who knows the name of the Moravian who was reading the introduction to Luther’s commentary on the Romans, which was the means of Wesley’s conversion and of the evangelical revival in which Wesley and Whitfield participated? Well, no one does. He’s an anonymous Moravian. But, nevertheless, a useful instrument in the hand of the Lord, in his day. Or who was the man who preached for Charles Haddon Spurgeon’s conversion? As a matter of fact, Mr. Spurgeon only went into that church because of the weather that night. It was very bad. He went into this little chapel. He heard a man concerning whom he says, later on, “He was not a very learned man and he gave a relatively poor sermon. In fact,” he said, “He didn’t know a whole lot about theology or Christianity, and so he had to, because he didn’t know too much, he had to keep repeating the text.” And, he said that a repetition of the text is the things that brought him to the Lord.

No one knows his name, but the instrumentality in the conversion of Charles Haddon Spurgeon would be something that someone would call a whole life's work. “Look unto me and be saved all the ends of the earth, for I am the Lord and beside me, there is no one else.” So he preached, and having nothing much to say, he kept repeating it, over and over again. I can see how God had his hand upon that relatively unlettered man and used him remarkably in the conversion of one of the great preachers of the nineteenth century. That's not to mention people like Moody, who was an outstanding evangelist, and who was converted because one of his Sunday school teachers happened to put his hand upon his shoulder and asked him if he had really believed in the Lord Jesus Christ.

So Ananias is the man who is the one who is to come to Paul and to speak to him through whose ministry he's to receive his sight and to be baptized and strengthened in the things of the Lord. I like this for another reason too, because Ananias, so far as we know, he was not, so far as we know, an elder. He was not, so far as we know, a deacon. He certainly was not one of the apostles. And, therefore, he didn't have the human ordination that some people would think is absolutely essential to have a legitimate baptism. So he has an illegitimate baptism in the eyes of some people. It certainly is an irregular baptism. But the Lord is not dependant upon human ordination. Saul, the apostle, was not ordained to preach the gospel. John Calvin was never ordained to preach the gospel. John Bunyan was never ordained to preach the Gospel. Moody was never ordained to preach the Gospel. And we have many people in our present day, who have not been ordained but who, nevertheless, have the hand of God upon them and the preaching of the Word. So often the Christian church has built up unbiblical traditions around the ministry of the Word.

Now, Ananias is told that he is to go into the street called Straight and he's to go to the house of Judas and he's to ask there for one whose name is Saul, of Tarsus, and the Lord said to Ananias, “For behold, he prayeth.” That's the hallmark of a genuine conversion. The first thing that expresses a genuine conversion is prayer that comes genuinely from the heart.

No man calls upon the Lord, except through the Holy Spirit, we read. No man can call Jesus Lord, except through the Holy Spirit. So when an individual gets down upon his knees, and it's not necessary to get down upon your knees, but if when he gets down upon his knees and he says, “Lord, I thank Thee,” that man has already received the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit; and the expression of it, in faith, is prayer. “For, behold, he prayeth.”

Now, this is a rather interesting thing because, you see, Paul had been a Pharisee of the Pharisees. He had spent most of his days praying, if he was a regular Pharisee, because they prayed three times a day. And those who were truly into this, being a Pharisee, were also meditating for one hour before they prayed for one hour and then they meditated for another hour after they prayed. So nine hours a day they spent, supposedly, in prayer. But, evidently, according to this, the Lord regards Paul as praying for the first time. He is really praying, and for the first time in Paul's life, now, after he has met the Lord, he does truly pray.

Incidentally, it doesn't say behold he sings, behold he sings in the choir, or behold he says masses or all of the other things that we think are very significant. Behold he's playing the organ or, well, you could name all of the religious exercises that we think are associated with faith. The one thing that is singled out is, “Behold, he prays.”

I would like to ask you a question at this point. Have you prayed your first prayer? I'm not asking you, have you got down on your knees and said a few rote things, directed, so-called toward some being in heaven. But have you truly prayed out of an experience of conversion, wrought by the Holy Spirit in your heart? Have you come to the sense of your lost condition before the Lord God? Have you, also, come to understand that Jesus Christ has borne your burden of guilt and condemnation and have you come to the Lord God and received, as a free gift, the eternal life that he offers? And have you offered your prayer of thanksgiving? Is that your experience?

Now, those of you who are genuine Christians, you know what I am talking about. And deep down within there is a sense of, “I do understand.” It didn't happen to me exactly as it happened with Paul, but it has happened with me. And, I have truly prayed. I trust. I hope. I do pray to God

that everyone of you in this audience have had that experience. But if you haven't, so far as the Scriptures are concerned, if you have never truly prayed, in the light of your condition and in the light of what Christ has done, there is no assurance that you have the life that is called the Christian Life.

I think the way this thing is written is an implication that it is remarkable for such a fellow as Saul to pray. “Behold, he prays.” It's a miracle of grace for a proud Pharisee, to plead, like a penitent publican. After all, Saul was a man who was characterized by all of the self-righteousness of a Pharisee. I can just imagine him say, “Be a Christian or be a believer in Yahweh? I've always been that. I was raised in a believing family and I've had all of the experiences that you're supposed to have.” Just like some of you are saying, “I don't think Dr. Johnson is really talking for me, because I've been raised in a Christian family. We've had the Bible read in our house. I've attended Sunday school. I've gone through the experience of baptism. And I have sat at the Lord's Table, and I've taken of the bread and the wine. I have parents who are Christians. My friends are Christians. And I must be a Christian, therefore.” But you never really have had the experience that is described in this chapter.

The apostle's praying, this praying of a self-righteous man, this praying of an individual who was brought up in religion is so astonishing that God describes it as something astonishing. He says, “Behold, he prays.” It's astonishing. In fact, it's almost as if he's saying, “It's astonishing to me, that Paul is praying.”

Incidentally, it implies that his pray is answered, too. He's praying. God's recognized that he is praying. And, I think, that is a good indication that he's answering the prayers that he is offering. I wonder, what kind of prayers Paul was offering. Well, someone has suggested that what he was doing was pleading things like David pled in the Old Testament. “Deliver me from blood guiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation and my tongue shall sing aloud of Thy righteousness.” “O God, be my scapegoat, and bear my sins.” “Be my sin offering.” “Be my morning and evening sacrifice.” And there is, crowding in upon the apostle, the conviction that all of the things that he had believed in

before are wrong; and now the things that had been practicing are assuming their intended spiritual meaning. They are pointing forward to the Messiah, the Son of God, now, the Lord Jesus Christ. And so I say to you, try it! Try it! Try praying in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, acknowledging your lost condition and asking for the forgiveness of sins that comes through him.

Now, Ananias is told some other things about the Apostle Paul. Ananias said, “Lord, I have heard many things of this man. I’ve heard how much evil he’s done to Thy saints at Jerusalem. He has authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on Thy name.” He’s not too anxious to go into the presence of the Apostle Paul, you can see. But God answered him and said, “You go your way, he is a vessel of election for me, to bear my name before the Gentiles and kings, and the children of Israel.” And so, the apostle is given the special apostolic calling of preaching the Gospel, not simply to Israel, not simply to the poor, but to the kings and, especially, to the Gentiles. In fact, later on, he will call himself an apostle to the Gentiles. By the way, over in the 22nd chapter, when Paul describes his conversion, he explains further what these words means. Because there, he says, that God has called him to go to all men, and we learn from that the meaning of all. So often in these early days in the Christian church, “all” meant not everybody without exception, but everybody without distinction. Whether a king or a poor man, whether a Jew or a Gentile, the message of the Apostle is to go to all men only without distinction, not all men without exception. That comes from thinking about the next thing that you’re going to say, and then hearing words come out of your mouth that with which you do not agree. [Laughter]

So anyway, verse 17, we read, “And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul.” Isn’t it striking, here is a man who hasn’t been baptized yet, and Ananias calls him “Brother.” Well, the reason that he calls him brother, and he has not been baptized yet is because water baptism is not the means by which we enter into Christian life. But it should, of course, accompany our entrance into Christian life. And it does in the apostle’s case.

In Paul’s description of what happened to him in Acts chapter 22, it has sometimes been said from that account that the apostle suggests that it is by being baptized that he received the

forgiveness of sins. In the Authorized Version of verse 16 of Acts chapter 22, we read, “And now why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.”

Ananias had told him this, so Paul said. But I’d just like to remind you of this; that in the New Testament, the manuscripts upon which our translations are based are largely in their earliest, in the oldest cases, manuscripts without very much and some without any punctuation marks. So the editors of the texts supply the punctuation marks. The punctuation is not inspired. The text is inspired. And, therefore, we are justified, if the sense demands it, of re-punctuating texts.

Now, this one in verse 16, “And now why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord,” might suggest that one washed away one’s sins by being baptized. But I’d like to ask you to do just two things: Eliminate the comma after the word sins, and then since the word “calling” is a participle in the Greek text and, therefore, is a circumstantial or adverbial participle of manner, that we should add the little word “by” in English in front of calling in order to give the sense of manner. And, therefore, the verse will then be rendered, “And now why tarriest thou? Arise and be baptized, and wash away thy sins by calling on the name of the Lord.” In other words, the washing away of sins is not from the baptism; the washing away of sins is brought about by calling on the name of the Lord.

And then, in Romans 10, the apostle later on writing to the church at Rome, makes that very plain because he cites the passage in the Old Testament to which this is related and says, “Whosoever calls on the Name of the Lord, shall be saved.” Romans, chapter 10 in verse 13. So Brother Saul, I can imagine that Ananias said this with something of a gulp. “Brother Saul,” this was the enemy of the Christian church. And now, he calls him a brother. And he was baptized. I can just imagine that Ananias in the house of Judas, in the city of Damascus, an ordinary house, would be a house with four walls and in the center it would have an atrium. And I can just see them going out through the atrium on out to the river, Abanah, and there in the River Abanah, the Apostle Paul, one who is now an apostle to the Gentiles, baptized by this rather obscure Christian, Ananias. He was baptized.

And we read in 19th verse, “And when he had received meat, he was strengthened. Then was Paul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus.” He met regularly with them, he attended their meetings, he attended the Lord’s Supper with them; for that’s what the early church did, when they met in their meetings. They listened to the teaching of the gifted men and they observed the Lord’s Supper. They remembered the Lord in the bread and the wine and that was characteristic of the meetings of the early church. You’ll find that all expressed in the writings of the early church fathers. We’re not doing in Believers Chapel anything different from the early church. That’s what they did. That’s why we make a great deal over the Lord’s Supper in the ministry of Believers Chapel because we think we are following in the tradition of the early church in doing the things that the apostles have called upon us to do when they said, “Be imitators of us as we are of the Lord.”

Well, at this point, the apostle, having now been brought by the Lord to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, begins to give testimony to his faith. We read in the 20th verse.

“And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues that He is the Son of God. And, all who heard him were amazed and they said, ‘Isn’t this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests?’ But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ.”

That word is an interesting word—the word translated “proving”—because it’s a word that means, literally, “put together” or “bring together,” that is its ultimate significance so far as the root of the word is concerned. Word meanings, however, are ultimately determined by usage, not root; but the sense in this case of the root is very close to the sense of the usage, which was that it meant to prove or teach or instruct or unite, some of these meanings we have in the New Testament, also.

But the interesting thing about it is that one might ask, well, how did he teach? Well, Mr. Prier, if you're still here, the apostle did not teach consecutively, as we do. What he did, evidently, was to go back in the Old Testament, go through the Old Testament, and through the preaching prove that the prophecies of the Old Testament were fulfilled in the Lord Jesus. Now, I don't want you to misunderstand me. I'm not trying to tell Mr. Prier, he's an elder, I'm not. He may say, "I'm going to give you the final word, Lewis." But, [Laughter] I'm just suggesting this. That I like the way we do preaching. I think it's the proper way to do it today, to teach the Word of God. But in Paul's case, he was in a situation in which individuals did not have, yet, the comprehension that the Lord Jesus was the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies. And so the early preachers in their politic preaching, for that's what they did ordinarily; that we have record of in the New Testament. They went back in the Old Testament and they looked at the history of salvation in the Old Testament as Old Testament prophecies, and then they looked at the experiences of the Lord Jesus and the events in his life, and they showed that these events in our Lord's life were the fulfillment of the prophecies of the Old Testament. In other words, they brought together or they put together the prophecies of the Old Testament with the events described in the New Testament life and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. That's perfectly all right in Paul's day. That's what he was trying to do.

I gather, later on, when the Apostle taught the Word of God and spoke about it, that they would then, more systematically, expound the Word of God, like we try to do Sunday morning here. But in those days when Paul proved that this was the Messiah, he went back and took the Old Testament prophecies and showed that they were fulfilled in the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, here is a man who came to Damascus with hate for his enemies, in a royal fashion, but now he has had the great conversion experience. Oh, what a change Christ does make! And he has to leave Damascus, we read, "Let down by the wall in a basket." What a change Christ does make! He's no longer the head of a group of men with the temple police, entering the city as a great authority in Judaism, but he's let down by the disciples of the Lord Jesus in a fish basket. What a change!

Now, at this point, I want to say just a word about what happened in Arabia because the experience in Galatians chapter 1, is not described here, but, nevertheless, it is part of Paul’s experience. He had come to Damascus with horses, with servants, like a prince. But he left alone, like Jacob, with a staff in his hand, but we don’t judge by the outward. It’s true, he had to be let down from Damascus in a basket. And I don’t know how he was let down or how he escaped out to Arabia from Damascus. But one thing I do know, this man now carried in his heart the faith of Augustine, the faith of Luther, the faith of Calvin, the faith of Knox, the faith of Owen, the faith of Whitfield. He left with Moses and the Psalms and the Prophets in his little knapsack, but when he returned from communing with the Lord in Arabia, he had the contents of Romans, the contents of 1 Corinthians, and 2 Corinthians, and of Galatians and the other things that God taught him, in his heart.

I love the expression in Galatians 1, where it says that he “conferred not with flesh and blood.” He conferred with God; he didn’t confer with culture. He didn’t confer with college or university. He didn’t read books about the Bible. He had communion with the Lord God.

We, so often, think that a person cannot really preach the Word of God with authority if he’s not an individual who has attended school, gone to university, gone on to theological seminary, and maybe even taken advanced degrees. Then you’re qualified to preach the Word of God. Well, that’s a very, very serious mistake.

The apostle was an individual who went out and conferred with the Lord God; that’s the fundamental experience, communion with the Lord God. We don’t denigrate other things such as education or learning, but the one fundamental thing is the communion with the Lord God, conversion and communion with him.

Someone has pointed out the analogy in the life of Moses. Moses lived to be one hundred and twenty years. Three forty-year periods characterize his life. The first forty he spent in Egypt as an important man in the government in Egypt. And someone has said, ‘That’s an illustration of how helpless God is with a man who is trying to be somebody.’ And then he had the experience with the

Egyptian and he was forced to flee and he fled to Median and was on the backside of the desert for forty years. And someone has said, “That’s an illustration of how God is helpless with a man who is trying to be nobody.” And then the last forty years of his life and the great deliverance and redemption that was given to Israel, illustrate how God can do something with a man who has learned those two lessons; that it’s wrong to try and be somebody, it’s wrong to try to be nobody, the important thing is to be God’s man, which was what Moses became and God used him with great glory to his name.

He went out and in Arabia he says God spoke to him in a particular way and revealed his Son in him. I gather that that came from personal intimate study of the Scriptures with which he was very familiar but which were, so far as he was concerned, had been twisted in his understanding. By the Holy Spirit, now, things were straightened out. And, as he read through the Scriptures, he came to understand truly what they were teaching.

You know, if we had time, we could go back and show how the apostle reinterpreted the Old Testament; reinterpreted it, not in the sense that he gave it a meaning it did not have, but reinterpreted it in the sense that he found a different meaning in it from that which he had thought was there from his Jewish training. He began at Genesis chapter 1 in verse 1, “Let there be light,” and a reflecting upon his own experience, he realized that this was an illustration of what had happened to him on the Damascus road. And as he writes later on in 2 Corinthians, chapter 4, he says, “We preach not ourselves; we preach Christ Jesus, the Lord, and ourselves, your servants, for Jesus’ sake. For God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” And, he saw that the way God spoke in creation, “Let there be light,” was the way that he spoke in his own conversion.

And then, in the 2nd chapter of Genesis, speaking about the creation of woman and the relationship of Eve to Adam, he saw all of the teaching that he, ultimately, expresses in 1 Corinthians chapter 11, and other places. And then, when he comes to Genesis chapter 3, he sees that God has dealt with two men in the world; he has dealt with Adam the first, and all men have fallen in him, the

representative man. But the principle of representation is the foundation of Christianity and he sees because he dealt with representative with Adam the first, he may deal representatively with Adam the last.

And Adam the Last, through the redemptive work, acts not only for himself, but for all who are in him, so that the Lord Jesus through his saving work acts representatively for those who are in him. For, as in Adam, all die, Paul will say. So also in Christ shall all be made alive. So he read through the Old Testament under the light of the Holy Spirit and saw the significance that God had put in those ancient Scriptures.

Wouldn't it be nice to go through the Old Testament like that? You can find almost all of Paul's theology in the Old Testament, under the illumination of the Holy Spirit. Now, there are one or two mysteries that he talks about; but most of it is all there in the Old Testament.

Well, he went up to Jerusalem and it's not surprising that as he went in to join himself with the believers in Jerusalem that some of them turned pale when Paul came into the meetings, because they remembered him as the one who had put to death, perhaps, some of their own family and friends.

Dr. Ironside in his commentary on the book of Acts, speaks about something that happened in his day. A young man from New Guinea, coming from a Christian family, as a young man was sent away for school, and went away for school and university. Came back to New Guinea, on Sunday morning he went in to meet with the saints around the Lord's Table, as was their custom. And he was sitting by an elderly brother and in the midst of the meeting, a man came in just a few minutes late and this young university graduate from New Guinea, just straightened up and became very, very tense. And the man sitting by him noticed that something was tremendously disturbing to him. And after a minute or so, he relaxed. And, when the meeting was over, the older Christian turned to the younger one and said, “What was it that upset you so?”

He said, “Well, that man who came was the man who killed my father and ate him.” But he said, “As I was sitting at the table, I finally realized of course that he evidently had come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. And now I am to receive him as a brother.”

So I can understand how we read, “He assayed to join himself to the disciples, but they were all afraid of him.” But Barnabas said a good word for him. They had gone to the University of Tarsus, together and both were members of the Alpha Tau Omega Fraternity there, [Laughter] and both had been Jewish men, participated in the riots that they caused on the campus. And so he said a word for Paul with the apostles. And the apostle was given an entrée among them. That, incidentally, so far as I can tell, is unscientific. It’s not found in the New Testament; I’ve added it, so as to awake three people in the audience who were sleeping and hoping that twelve o’clock was already here. [More Laughter]

Now, Paul disputed against the Hellenists. He follows Stephen’s path. I can just imagine those people in Jerusalem saying things like, “You know, we got rid of Stephen by stoning him to death, but here is somebody that’s worse than Stephen.” And it was Paul. He follows in his path; he escapes the fate of Stephen by the grace of God. And then goes off to Tarsus and there he gains experience in the life of a local church. He spent a number of years in Tarsus before he began his ministry. Because, after all, if we are going to serve the Lord God, we need to know him. And Paul needs time to have all of his thinking straightened out and all of his experiences as a Christian in the affairs of the assemblies straightened out, as well.

Luke concludes the section with a report, in verse 31, “Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and they were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied.” No bars to fellowship, if born again, walking in the light. No name to divide them. No Baptists. No Presbyterians. No Methodists. No others. It was one church; and they met in the Name of our Lord, Jesus Christ. The church was open to all who had had experience of conversion. No one was separated from others for various non-scriptural reasons. And, further, he says, “There was inward growth and outward growth

because we must strengthen stakes before we lengthen cords, the forward movement must always be God-ward movement,” two great ideas close the section. “We advance unto the Lordship of Christ, and we advance in the strength of the Holy Spirit.” He softens. He complements. And when both are true then the church is multiplied.

If you are here this morning, and you have never believed in our Lord Jesus Christ, as an ambassador of him, we call upon you to believe in him who has offered the atoning sacrifice; the same one with whom the Apostle Paul dealt and to whom he prayed.

May God help you, by his grace, to truly pray, if you never have, thanking him for what he has done for sinners. If you are here this morning, and you have never believed in Christ; Christ died for sinners. Come to him! Believe in him! Trust in him! Pray to him! Receive the forgiveness of your sins.

Let's stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Father, what a change Jesus Christ does make. And, O God, may each individual soul or spirit in this auditorium have the experience of the great apostle, the same experience that Ananias and others had, O God. So minister to us that we truly pray, regenerated by the Holy Spirit, given faith to look to Thee. We are grateful for what Christ has done, what would we be without Him. And we give Thee thanks for the future, we know it's bright for all who have come to Christ. And, Lord, if there should be someone in this audience who has never believed, O, give them no rest, no peace, no satisfaction in this life until they rest in Him.

For Jesus' sake. Amen.