**PAUL'S TESTIMONY TO HIS FELLOW JEWS**

Acts 21:40-22:29

Key Verses: 22:14-15

“Then he said: ‘The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will and to see the Righteous One and to hear words from his mouth. You will be his witness to all people of what you have seen and heard.’”

 Today’s passage is the apostle Paul’s speech to his fellow Jews in Jerusalem while he was bound by chains. He testified how his life was changed through Jesus and how he received His high calling for mission. May we remember God’s marvelous grace upon us and strive to live for His divine calling purpose.

 Paul stood on the steps with two Roman soldiers chained to him. Upon getting the commander’s permission, he motioned to the crowd until they became silent. He began to speak in Aramaic, a Hebrew, the common language of the Palestinian Jews at that time. “**Brothers and fathers, listen now to my defense. I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city. I studied under Gamaliel and was thoroughly trained in the law of our ancestors**.” Paul spoke as a Jew to Jews. Paul began to share his life testimony part 1 about his birth and schooling. Tarsus of Cilicia was an university city. Although he was born outside Israel, he grew up in Jerusalem under an orthodox Jewish background and became a Pharisee. He received higher education under Gamaliel, one of the most prestigious rabbis of the day. He was a spiritual elite of that time.

 He said in verse 3b, “**I was just as zealous for God as any of you are today**.” But, he put all his zeal to eradicate Christianity. He said, “**I persecuted the followers of the Way to their death arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison**.” In short, he was a persecutor and a violent man.(1Ti 1:13) He was like the Terminator sent by the Sanhedrin. He even obtained letters from religious authorities and went to Damascus to bring Christians as prisoners.

 Look at verses 6,7. “**About noon as I came near Damascus, suddenly a bright light from heaven flashed around me. I fell to the ground and heard a voice say to me, ‘Saul! Saul! Why do you persecute me?**’” According to Acts 13:9a, “Then Saul, who was also called Paul…” Paul’s original name was Saul or he had dual names. The Risen Jesus revealed himself as a bright light flashing around Saul. The light from heaven was far brighter than noon day sun. The brightness of that light made Saul blind. The bright light radiates the glory and majesty of the Risen Jesus. The Lord Jesus called him by name, “Saul! Saul!” Saul asked, “**Who are you, Lord**?” Saul sensed that he was in the presence of the holy God. Then the words came, “**I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting**.” Paul persecuted the early Christians and the church of Jesus in Jerusalem and nearby cities. But in fact, he was persecuting the one in heaven because Jesus’ church represents his own body which He bought with his blood.

 Jesus was sufferings together with early Christians as they were persecuted. Jesus bore all of Saul’s mistreatment. Each time, Saul humiliated a Christian, Jesus bore the shame. Each time Saul beat a Christian, Jesus bore the pain. Jesus continues to suffer together with his servants who are persecuted for his name’s sake. When Saul heard Jesus’ voice from heaven, he realized that he had acted against God in utter ignorance and darkness. Through the personal encounter with Jesus, Saul came to know who Jesus is. Jesus is the Lord. Jesus is the Messiah. He was crucified but he rose from the dead. Now the Risen Christ came to visit him personally. At the same time, Saul realized the marvelous grace of God. Saul’s physical eyes were blind, but his spiritual eyes were opened because the Risen Jesus shone his light in his soul.

 Verse 9 says “**My companions saw the light, but they did not understand the voice of him who was speaking to me**.” They were in the same place, saw the same thing and heard the same voice, but they did not have any understanding of this. Encountering Jesus must be personal experience. Saul asked, **“What shall I do, Lord?”** At the shining of heavenly light and Jesus’ voice, Saul surrendered himself fully to Jesus. So far, Saul had lived his life in his own plan, direction and stubbornness. But after encountering Jesus, he recognized Jesus as the Lord and Master,

 The Lord said, **“’Get up,’ and go into Damascus. There you will be told all that you have been assigned to do. My companions led me by the hand into Damascus, because the brilliance of the light had blinded me.”** Jesus revealed Himself to Paul, but about his assigned task, the Lord prepared His answer through Ananias. The assigned task means God’s plan for his future life of mission. Paul would receive Jesus’ life long assignment for his life. Paul mentioned Ananias as a devout observer of the law and highly respected in the Damascus Jewish community. Ananias stood beside Paul and said, “**Brother Saul, receive your sight!**” Here calling Saul as a brother meant that Saul became a member of God’s redeemed family by God’s grace. Paul was blind for three days. His blindness must have reminded him of his past in darkness. Through Ananias, the Lord restored Paul’s sight.

 Look at verses 14-15. **“Then he said: ‘The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will and to see the Righteous One and to hear words from his mouth. You will be his witness to all people of what you have seen and heard.’”** God chose the Israel out of many nations to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. But the nation Israel was not able to bear this role of a priestly nation as she remained as narrow minded, disobedient, and self righteous. God’s salvation plan for using a nation Israel seemed to fail. But God’s redemptive work never fails. God began his ministry by choosing spiritual remnants. God continued his world redemption work by using scattered Jewish Christians and the apostles like Paul to spread the gospel to the world. God chose a new Israelites through His church.

 There were 3 purposes that God chose Paul. The first one is to know God’s will. It refers to God’s world salvation plan to send the Messiah through the Jews and then spread the gospel to all nations. God also chose Paul to see the Righteous One. “The Righteous One” was a Jewish expression for the Messiah based on the Old Testament. The Righteous One would fulfill God’s will and atone for the sin of his people. Saul’s spiritual blindness was opened up by the light from heaven, he could see the Righteous One. He found in Jesus, the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets. God chose Paul to hear words from his mouth. John 1:1 says, **“In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”** Jesus is the Word. Jesus is God in the flesh who speaks God’s word. Hebrews 1:1 says**, “In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things.”**

 But many people had a hearing problem of Jesus’ words. Jesus quoted the prophecy of Isaiah, “**You will be ever hearing but never understanding**.” So Jesus said in Mark 4:9, **“Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear.”** But Jesus opened Paul’s ears to hear words from Jesus’ mouth. Look at verse 15. **“You will be his witness to all people of what you have seen and heard.”** It was Paul’s assignment given by Jesus. Acts 9:15b says, **“Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles…”** God set apart Paul for his assigned task which was to witness to all people.

 Ananias said to Saul**, “And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.”** No one is deserved to be Jesus’ witness due to their sins. Even an angel touched the prophet Isaiah’s mouth with a live coal from the altar and said, **“See, this has touched your lips, your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.”** Jesus died on the cross offering his holy blood as the Lamb of God for the forgiveness of sins. By calling Jesus’ name, one can accept all the atoning work that Jesus had finished and be forgiven.

 Yes! Jesus’ blood can make us clean by washing away our sins. The sin of the past bind us like a shackle. However, Jesus’ blood can make the vilest sinner clean. He saved wretches like us. Paul would be a witness of the Righteous One to all men of what he had seen and heard. Ananias was like a 1:1 shepherd who leaded a sinner to Jesus for a certain period by his prayer and bible studies. God also put human shepherds in our lives to lead us until we become independent. Then we need to get up in our places as new persons standing on our own feet.

 Many people are wasting their time not knowing how to use their precious life. Jesus, the light of the world gives us clear life direction and eternal life assignment. We are also called to be his witnesses to the world. Not many of us have such a dramatic conversion experience like Paul except a few. But God calls each person in his own way by opening spiritual eyes to know Jesus and hear his words. Some might continue to remain in their sinful life and stubbornness. Will you wait until Jesus knock you down to the ground and become blind? No! we need to encounter Jesus personally. May we humble ourselves before Jesus and submit to his will when He intervenes in our lives.

 I attended a Christian high school where there were weekly bible class, worship services in Auditorium and morning QT like short sermon from the principal. Although I was there for 3 years, none of God’s word touched my heart not to mention knowing God. I was just busy with my own study. But when I was invited to UBF Genesis Bible academy in the first year in my university days, a message on Genesis 1:31, “God saw all that he had made and it was very good” and 2 naïve testimonies touched my soul and made a crack in my closed heart. Then God’s light began to shine through God’s word. That encounter with God began to shape my life to take a different path than others that God had prepared in advance. I was desperately searching for a meaningful life. When God led me to know his assignment, a blessed life of mission, my aimless wandering ended. I am grateful to God for his intervention in my life to know Jesus and holy mission.

 Look at verses 17,18 **“When I returned to Jerusalem and was praying at the temple, I fell into a trance and saw the Lord speaking to me. ‘Quick!’ he said. ‘Leave Jerusalem immediately, because the people here will not accept your testimony about me.’”**

Paul told them about something that had happened about 20 years before. Paul was sure that his own conversion story would be an indisputable testimony that would make the Jews believe in Jesus. Paul really wanted to share the good news with the Jews in Jerusalem. He knew them very well and vice versa. They knew him as the passionate persecutor of the church.

 But the Lord said to Paul, **“Go; I will send you far away to the Gentiles.’”** Paul had a deep affection and a broken shepherd’s heart toward his fellow Jews. He really wished that they might see the Righteous One, the Messiah they had been longing for to come for centuries. But God’s plan for Paul was different. It was to send Paul far away to the Gentiles. The crowd listened to Paul until he said this. Then they raised their voices and shouted, **“Rid the earth of him! He’s not fit to live!”** They shouted and threw off their cloaks and flinging dust into the air. They could not accept the fact that God might save Jews and Gentiles alike and in the same way. The one word, “Gentiles” made the crowd outraged. Their response to the last gospel message through Paul foreshadowed the fall of Jerusalem and the nation in a few years.

 The commander ordered Paul to be brought into the barracks and ordered him to be flogged and interrogated to find out why the people were shouting like this. As they stretched him out to flog him, Paul said to the centurion standing there, **“Is it legal for you to flog a Roman citizen who hasn’t even been found guilty?”** As the centurion reported this to the commander, He was greatly alarmed at hearing Paul’s Roman citizenship. They stopped interrogation immediately. Through the Roman citizenship, Paul was protected from the Romans as well as the Jews and later would go to Rome to preach the gospel. Paul was an educated, bilingual, intelligent, devout Jew who was also a Roman citizen. God had prepared Paul in every way to make him his witness to the Gentiles.

 God calls his people in every generation for His divine purpose. God also uses our unique background to serve His work in a special way. We do not know every detail how God would use us. We need to prepare ourselves useful to God for his divine purposes. God endowed us with His new life. We may have our own plans about how God should work and use us. But God who knows every man’s heart carries out his work according to his way and plan. May we humbly submit ourselves to God’s will and find out his assigned task in our life and fully dedicate for this aim.