

SERMONS ON THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES
SAUL OF TARSUS.
ACTS 9

The the scene opens in Jerusalem, and the appearance is that of a dark storm cloud with one portion, especially, unspent. But the heavens in general seem to indicate that the storm is shortly to break up. This glorious outcome is being developed by the the disciples of Jesus. They have been scattered every where and every where are preaching the Gospel of the Son of God. Even angels were in the land to lend their influence to the clearing up of the stormy condition brought about largely by one Saul of Tarsus. One of these angels had spoken to Philip, after he had preached to a city, to go now and preach to an individual, an Eunuch who has the Word of God but not a clue. Best of all Jesus Himself was soon to throw His presence across the pathway of Saul, if perchance this mighty enemy of the Cross might be checked in his powerful and hurtful attack on Christianity.

At present Saul is breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the Church—those of the WAY. The figure here is of one so angry that he is panting. St Luke who was master of the Greek tongue, chose such terms as best expressed, a heart desperately and incessantly bent on accomplishing the destruction of the objects of its resentment. Such at this time was the heart of Saul of Tarsus; and the thought had already given full proof of its malignity in the martyrdom of Stephen, making havoc of the church, and entering every house and dragging out every man, woman, and child and placing them in prison.

There were no Gentile converts at this time. The converts were Jews. The Sanhedrian had jurisdiction over all Jews every where. Saul conceived the idea of obtaining letters from the High priest to establish his authority to arrest Christians any where found and bring to prison. By gathering these converts "of this Way" he had hopes of crushing the infant church.

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The letters were granted and Saul began his journey to Damascus. Damascus lay north east of Jerusalem about one hundred and thirty miles. One authority says that it was one hundred thirty six miles. It was a very beautiful city and also the oldest city in the world. Fountains and gardens made it a wonderful retreat for those who had traveled long dust distances.

Just at that time in the history of the church this journey and the object of its promoter marked one of the most serious events connected with the establishment of the church of Jesus Christ. In the mind of Saul, to crush the Christian Jews meant the annihilation of the new movement. It must be remembered that Saul had almost unlimited power and influence. He was, no doubt, the strongest man that could have arisen against the Kingdom of Jesus at that time. All heaven must have turned its eyes to this small band of travelers. God Himself saw the danger if Saul entered Damascus and carried out his intentions of destruction. No human power seemed strong enough to stop him. No power that that could legally be brought to bear upon the situation.

It is astonishing, at times, to see the vigor that characterizes the onslaught of the wicked. Just think of the large armies that can be gathered for the cause of evil. Look at Behdad with that army that filled the mountains and plains as poor little Elijah was surrounded. Think also of the power they can accumulate in a city like Chicago, and the vote that they can poll in various instances. Evil has its horrible influences over people in that the public fears their night time prowlings and slughterings.

The seriousness of the situation of Saul entering the "Eye of the East" is evidenced by the fact that Jesus took His stand just outside the city walls. When Saul reached Jesus the spot light of heaven was turned on. Just as the sun burns out germs of earth and makes darkness to disappear even so this light from heaven began the extermination of sin in Saul's life and drove out the darkness of soul that was his. The experience made it possi-

ble for him to hear the voice of Jesus as it came through the light. The sinful goal of Saul came to an end right here. I say sinful goal advisedly. Many have said that he was not sinning but doing according to the light he had. I disagree with those of that view because if there was ever a man who was informed in the law of the Old Testament it was Saul. Then if he were familiar with those teachings he knew the teaching of the Ten Commandments in which we read, "Thou shalt not kill." Saul was angry, angry to the point where he was panting.

The people of "This Way", this new movement, this new church were in his mind enemies to his sect. He was just like you and me when we say "my party right or wrong." But he was stopped in this attitude in life by the voice that came with the light. All meanness, corruption, and vice will continue as long as the curtains of sin and superstition are kept drawn between the victims of such conditions and the Light. Light clears up the foul places, purifies the musty room, and kills the germs of disease. At the same time that it destroys the germs of disease it germinates germs of life which results in feeding and clothing the world. Strange ideas about God and religion are not cured by darkness and death but by light and life from the source of all light and life.

Saul had no more use for his letters. Those instruments of cruelty, those letters obtained as the desire of a corrupt heart were no longer needed. How wonderful when the man has no use for his flask, no more use for his weapons of burglary, no more use for words of profanity and no more use for any of the instruments of sin and cruelty which have hindered the cause of righteousness. Those things become useless when we have met Jesus and given ourselves to His ways and will. The one taking people captive now becomes the captive of the Lord Jesus. Abraham traveled over this same road likely when called of God but in opposite direction, both from physical and spiritual standpoint. But now he will be similar to

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the great father of the Jewish race.

The question arises in the reader's mind, likely, "If the Lord could save Saul in this marvelous way why is it that He does not halt every sinner and save him and thereby save at once the whole race?" That is a good question, one that every one ought to settle in his life. I am going to answer that Saul did not have to yield. The revelation was before him that there was a power greater than he was. It was just upto him to him to say "Lord what wilt Thou have me to do?" or of Cursing God like some men do when a rain destroys a field of corn.

We might say that if the hindrance thrown across your path is not of such great demonstration as that which met Saul it may be that you are just not as important in the plan of things as was he. Nevertheless it is true that in every sinner's life when ever there is a sin committed, the Holy Spirit throws into that heart arrows of conviction. Across our paths God has thrown our mothers prayers, the schools, the homes, the churches, and various other institutions. The Blessed word of God stands out before us ever as a guide to our conduct. Now insted of coming clean like Saul did when he was face to face with God's Son and saying "Lord what wilt Thou have me to do?" we are going around whining and complaining and declaring what we are not going to do.

People will stand around and talk about how bad Saul was, what the church had to face in his day. Yet here in this advanced age, basking in the accumulated light of twenty centuries, we are found spewing out of our mouths vulgarity, criticising the church, the preacher, the Sunday school teachers, the stewards, other faithful members, and the program of the church. So far as I am concerned I am glad there is a hell. If there should not have been one then I guess such a place would not have been established. It is a place where these breakers of law, the wreckers of homes, the blotchers of good names, beings of ingratitude to man and God and the general corrupters of society may receive their just settlement.

Saul was man enough to say, "Lord what do you want ME to do?" Jesus told him in words so often used by Him and angels, "Arise and go." "Go into the city (where you intended to kill) and you will be told what you must do." Saul entered the city of flowers and fountains. Just as travelers entered from long, hard, dusty pilgrimages and found refreshment even so this man entered from a long difficult journey of bitterness and hatred and found spiritual refreshment in nothing less than the new birth.

Why did Jesus send him into the city for some one else to tell him what to do? It must have been that Jesus wanted him to come face to face with those whom he would destroy and let them "Return good for evil" and not kill him but instruct ~~him~~ him in the way of life. Tehn too Jesus seems partial to giving His Gospel to the world through men. It is good for us to impart blessings to those who have desired to harm us. This gave Ananias the chance of receiving Saul into the visiable church. One of the greatest rewards for our work as Christians is to see the scales from from sinners eyes and see them look for the first time through converted vision. Ananias had this priviledge of seeing the greatest sinner (which Saul said of himself in the words, "Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am chief") open his converted eyes on the world wherein he was to be the greatest messenger of the Gospel.

Saul received Jesus and the Holy Ghost and was baptised. No Methodist need worry over not being immersed for we read here that Saul arose and was baptised. There was not likely a river running through that house. He did not likely walk to a river for it was after his baptism that he ate and received strength.

The same Christ who worked for the change of view point in Sauls relig~~ion~~ ion, and who helped to give him new eyes to look on the world, and who gave him a new heart, is here to day in this twentieth century world and church to convict of sin through the Holy Spirit and to edify the church to the point where it can say to the sinner, "Brother Saul receive thy

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sight. All of us should learn and love to sing:

"Amazing grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me.
I once was lost but now I am found, was blind but now I see."

