

Introduction: In September and October we showed the movie ‘The American Gospel’. It is an almost three hour documentary about cultural distortions of The Gospel in America that we accept because we think our values and way of life are right. We make the mistake of thinking God’s ways are our ways, when the truth is we must be seeking faith to make our ways line up with God’s Way. *** Typical American distortions of The Gospel of Christ Alone are that followers of Jesus should expect good health, miracles, and material wealth, IF they are doing the work God requires of them. The flaw in this is that no one can do the works that God requires. Furthermore, the only guarantee to followers of Jesus is that He will be present to them by The Holy Spirit in them. The result of this will be the experience of God’s overwhelming LOVE. His LOVE will change people to be more Christ-like and give them joy and peace in any and every circumstance. *** In our story in the book of Acts this morning, we are told how Saul of Tarsus, who always loved The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, as revealed in the Torah given through Moses, came to change his heart and mind about Jesus, The Savior. This happened when Saul was nearing the end of his one hundred forty mile journey to Damascus to find and bind disciples of The Lord. Light from heaven surrounded Saul, and Jesus spoke to him. Saul was left blind, but a Damascus disciple, Ananias, laid hands on him, he received sight and was baptized into Jesus. *** From then on, Saul chose to serve God IN Jesus. When we have examined the details of our passages, may we all commit to the same choice as Saul.

I. As Saul approaches Damascus intending to persecute disciples of The Lord, Jesus speaks to him out of light about persecuting Him, sends Saul for instruction, but he is blind. (Acts 9:1-9)

A. Saul, still intending to intimidate and kill disciples of The Lord, heads for Damascus with letters from the high priest. (Verses 1-2)

1. Saul, still breathing out threats and slaughter against the disciples of The Lord ... (Verses 1a-b)

Intimidation and death: Saul was convinced disciples of Jesus were blasphemers, so he was expelling from his lungs words to threaten, even kill, them.

2. ... having come to the high priest, he desired from him letters to Damascus synagogues that any he may find being of the ‘way’, both men and women, he might bring to Jerusalem bound. (Verses 1c-2)

High priest letters: Saul desired the authority of the highest religious official to be behind his plans.

The Way: Jesus called Himself The Way (John 14:6). His followers were called people of the ‘way’.

B. Suddenly, a light flashes around Saul and Jesus speaks to him about persecution, commands him to go to the city for instruction, but Saul cannot see for three days. (Verses 3-9)

1. But in the journey, as he happened to come near to Damascus, suddenly a light flashed around him from heaven. (Verse 3)

Light from heaven: Just before reaching his goal, Saul was suddenly startled by a light from heaven!

2. Having fallen upon the earth, he heard a voice having said to him, ‘Saul! Saul! Why me are thou persecuting?’ (Verse 4)

Having fallen, hears voice: Startled, Saul first fell to his knees. Then a voice called his name twice, asking Saul why he was persecuting it. This is a hard question for one persecuting Jesus’ disciples.

3. But he said, ‘Who thou are being, Lord?’ (Verse 5a)

Saul’s ignorance: Years later, now known as Paul, he wrote a letter to his protégé Timothy saying he was once a persecutor and violent man, but was shown mercy because he acted in ignorance and unbelief, so the grace of The Lord was poured out on him abundantly (1 Timothy 1:13-14).

4. But he, ‘I AM Jesus whom thou are persecuting. Thou must arise and thou must go into the city and it will be spoken to thee what it is necessary (for) thee to do’. (Verses 5b-6)

I AM Savior: Using The Divine Name, the voice identifies himself as The Savior. And He accuses Saul of persecuting Him – The Divine Savior!

Go to city: He is given two commands and a promise. First, he must rise from his knees. Second, he must go into Damascus. Then someone will tell him what he will need to do next.

5. But the men journeying with him had been standing speechless. (Verse 7)

Companions: Saul was not acting alone. To have success in any endeavor of life requires teamwork as Solomon wrote in his deep wisdom book (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12).

6. Saul, having been raised from the earth, when his eyes had been opened he was seeing no one, but leading him by the hand they brought him to Damascus; and he was being there three days not seeing. (Verses 8-9a)

Saul led to city: Saul’s traveling companions had to lead him to Damascus by holding his hand.

Blind for three days: The reason was because his encounter with the risen and glorified Lord Jesus left him blind.

In persecuting Jesus through His disciples Saul showed himself spiritually blind to who Jesus is.

As a result of his sin against Jesus and His people, Saul was left blind. This is not unusual.

Sinners may be blinded by The Light of Jesus

7. And, neither did he eat, nor did he drink. (Verse 9b)

Fully fasted: Saul engaged in a total fast for three days. Often, fasting is done in times of humble, seeking prayer.

The Jews in Susa in Esther’s day are an example of this (Esther 4:15-17).

II. The Lord appears to Ananias, sends him to find Saul and lay hands on him; after objecting, Ananias obeys, Saul sees and is baptized: he has chosen God IN Jesus. (Acts 9:10-19; Matthew 6:24)

A. The Lord appears to Ananias, a disciple in Damascus, directing him to find Saul on Straight Street and help him to receive sight, Ananias protests. (Acts 9:10-14)

1. But there was being in Damascus a certain disciple named Ananias and The Lord said to him in a vision, ‘Ananias’; and he said, ‘Behold! I (am here) Lord’. (Verse 10)

Ananias: The disciple of Jesus named Ananias (the Greek version of his Hebrew name meaning ‘favor of Yahweh’) was living in Damascus. He will be used to fulfill Jesus’ promise to Saul.

Lord in vision: The Lord Jesus came to him in a vision. And he answered as Isaiah had over seven centuries before this (Isaiah 6:8).

2. The Lord said to him, ‘Having risen, thou must go to the street being called Straight, and thou must seek in the house of Judah one named Saul, of Tarsus; for, behold he is praying and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias having come and having put hand on him that he might be able to see’. (*Verses 11-12*)

Seek out Saul: Jesus clearly commands Ananias to seek out Saul and be His agent for Saul to see.

Saul’s vision: God gave Saul a vision of a man named Ananias coming so he would regain his sight. This is the grace of God. Even though He may discipline sinners with a blinding light, He may also give them back their sight.

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3. Then Ananias answered. ‘Lord! I have heard from many concerning this man, how much evil he has done to the saints in Jerusalem; and here, he is having authority from the chief priests to bind those who are calling on Thy Name’. (*Verses 13-14*)

Protest: Ananias has not yet fully understood the power and grace of His Savior. He questions why he would be asked to help a great persecutor of The Lord’s people.

- B. The Lord sends Ananias, telling him Saul is His chosen instrument to bear His Name everywhere; Ananias obeys, touches Saul to see; Saul sees and is baptized. (*Acts 9:15-19*)

1. But The Lord said to him, ‘Thou must go because a chosen vessel he is being, this one to Me, to carry My Name before the nations and kings, also the children of Israel’. (*Verse 15*)

Chosen vessel: Jesus now tells Ananias that He has chosen Saul for an amazing task: Saul will take His Name to nations, kings and even his own people who are in error as he was.

2. ‘For I, even I will show to him how great things it is necessary him for the sake of My Name to suffer’. (*Verse 16*)

Suffering: In the Gospels Jesus often spoke of His disciples taking up their cross (suffering, even to death) to follow Him (Luke 9:23-24); and, in his last letter to Timothy, Saul-Paul wrote that all desiring to live godly in Christ will be persecuted (2 Timothy 3:12). So these words proved true.

3. But Ananias went his way and entered into the house, and having put hands on him, he said, ‘Saul! Brother! The Lord had sent me – Jesus, having appeared to thee in the way on which thou were coming that thou might receive sight, and thou might be filled with The Holy Spirit’. (*Verse 17*)

Ananias obeys: So, Jesus convinced Ananias to obey and he goes to Saul.

Speaks to Saul: He says Jesus, who appeared to Saul, sent him so Saul might see again and be filled with The Holy Spirit. Saul is an example of a disciplined sinner (having been blinded by the light of Jesus for persecuting Him in His church of disciples) receiving both healing and God’s Spirit.

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4. Immediately they fell from his eyes as scales; both he received his sight, and having risen he was baptized. (*Verse 18*)

Sees: Whatever was blocking Saul’s vision was as scales on a fish, but these fell away and Saul was able to see. His disciplinary blindness only lasted three days.

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Baptized: After receiving The Holy Spirit, Saul was baptized for repentance into forgiveness and life.

Whenever we are in a crisis, as Saul was, let us remember that God does His best work in us in our times of crisis.

5. Having received food, he regained strength, and was with Damascus disciples some days. (*Verse 19*)

Strengthened: After being healed and receiving The Holy Spirit, Saul broke his fast.

- C. All people must choose between idols and God, to become children of light with treasure in heaven. (*Matthew 6:19-24*)

Context: Jesus sets up the choice between God and idols by contrasting two types of people living two kinds of lives.

1. He commands people not to store up treasures on earth that can be lost, but treasures in heaven which will be eternal, because the heart of people is with what they treasure. (*Verses 19-21*)

Earth or heaven: So, will we choose to live by the ways of earth or God’s Way coming from heaven?

2. The lamp of the body is the eye, therefore if the eye is sound the whole body bright will be; but if the eye may be evil the whole body full of darkness will be. (*Verses 22-23*)

Light or darkness: People who choose to look at God’s goodness, beauty and truth will show God’s light to the world. But those looking upon evil are in darkness. This leads to Jesus saying ...

3. No one is being able two masters to serve; for either the one he will hate and the other he will love; or one he will hold firmly and the other he will despise; not y’all are being able God to serve and money (mammon). (*Verse 24*)

Choose: The choice could not be clearer. Those who serve the idol of money – as an end in itself and not just a tool – are estranged from God. But those who choose to serve God with all they have will experience His grace, mercy and LOVE. It is impossible to do both. So, we must, in the words of the first Joshua, ‘Choose this day whom you will serve’ (Joshua 24:15).

It is impossible to be a sinner and a saint

Conclusion: Culture bound ideas of God and Jesus are flawed until God graciously reveals Himself in a crisis.

Then, He calls people to Himself and sends them out to serve Him, taking up their cross, knowing He is their treasure.

Sinners may be blinded by The Light of Jesus