**Pastor Tim’s Message Notes from 6-20-2021
Blinded by the Light, but Enabled to See**

Back in the day, one of the things I enjoyed a lot and played a lot of was baseball. It is still one of my favorite games today.

As a lefty, I played positions that lefties typically play --- 1st base, pitcher, and outfield.

And I remember that sometime, especially when I was playing outfield, I would put eye black on.

Now if you are not familiar with eye black, its purpose was to help block the bright sunlight and help me to see the ball as it flies through the sky more easily. It is not a very good feeling to be looking up and trying to follow the ball with your eyes, and then suddenly, the sunlight blinds you to the baseball. It is a helpless feeling. You basically just have to wait until the ball hits the ground and then run to get it.

Well, as bright and blinding as the sun can be, it pales in comparison to the radiant presence of our awesome Triune God.

1 Timothy 6:16 tell us this about our Lord **that it is the Lord alone who is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light.**

We are told that when Christ eventually established the new heavens and new earth, **there will be no need for the sun, because of the brightness that will emanant from the Lord Himself.**

**Or you may recall on the Mount of Transfiguration, when Peter, James and John receive a brief glimpse of Jesus’ glory. We read that as Jesus was praying, His appearance on His face changed and His clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning.**

I trust that no amount of eye black could prevent Saul of Tarsus from the light of Christ’s presence that suddenly appeared to him, as he was traveling to round up more Christians and bring them into custody. The Christians were not yet referred to as Christians, but as followers of The Way, because Jesus said that He is the way, the truth, and the life. It was a bit later that followers of The Way would be called Christians, meaning little Christlike ones.

One other item before we turn to today’s text. I want to let you know that Saul, whom we will be reading about, and Paul the Apostle - they are the same person. Saul was his Jewish name and Paul was his Roman name. Saul was not his pre-Christian name. But he refers to himself by Paul, his Roman name, when he was called to preach to the non-Jewish people.

Today, I will use the names interchangeably.

Our text is located in Acts 9:1-20

**9:1 Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord’s disciples. He went to the high priest 2and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. 3As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. 4He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?”**

**5“Who are you, Lord?” Saul asked.**

**“I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,” he replied. 6“Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.”**

**7The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. 8Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. 9For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.**

**10In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, “Ananias!”**

**“Yes, Lord,” he answered.**

**11The Lord told him, “Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. 12In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight.”**

**13“Lord,” Ananias answered, “I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem. 14And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name.”**

**15But the Lord said to Ananias, “Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. 16I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.”**

**17Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” 18Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, 19and after taking some food, he regained his strength.**

**Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. 20At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God.**

Wow! It was because of this encounter that we eventually would have much of the New Testament. This Paul would eventually write 13 letters found in God’s inspired Word and much of the book of Acts follows Paul’s ministry.

As we have been looking at supernatural moments found in the Book of Acts, there were actually 2 described in this scene. First, there is the obvious blinding vision that Saul experiences as our glorious Lord appeared to him. And second, this man Ananias has a vision of Jesus as well.

***As we seek to unpack this passage today, I would like us to focus on the theme of how the Lord enables us to see.***

Saul thought that he had perfect vision. He thought he understood God rightly. He thought the followers of The Way were deceived and were a dangerous threat that must be dealt with. He thought he was living a life that was pleasing to God.

But this all changed that encounter on the road to Damascus. Jesus appears to him and the brightness of His presence actually blinds Saul.

And Jesus’ first words to him are **‘Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?’**

Saul doesn’t know who is speaking or how he could be persecuting this figure that was blinding him.

And he asks him “Who are You, Lord?”

He recognized that whoever this Person is, He must be greater than himself, for he calls him Lord or Master.

And Jesus says, **“I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.”**

Brothers and Sisters, think about that for a second. Jesus had ascended into heaven by this time. Christ tells Saul that he is persecuting Him. This teaches us that Jesus sees persecuting Christians as if someone is persecuting He Himself. Jesus so connects himself with His followers.

So please know that as followers of Christ, when we are suffering, He is there with us and suffers as well.

He rejoices with us in our rejoicing and He suffers with us in our suffering. For He is with us always.

Jesus has helped Paul to see. In this vision, Christ was helping him to see his own sinfulness, to see his own need for forgiveness and salvation, to see Jesus as the true savior of the world.

Even though this vision temporary blinds Saul, Saul was being enabled to see more clearly than he had ever seen before. In fact, Saul was so undone by this experience that he did not eat or drink for 3 days. It was like his whole world was being turned upside down, but in a very beautiful way.

In the second vision, we see Jesus appearing to Ananias and giving him instructions to go to pray for Saul in order that God would help Saul to see again.

Similar to Saul, Ananias was being enabled to see more clearly as well. To see Saul not according to his past history, but according to his new life in Christ and God-given destiny.

Moreover, Ananias was learning that God loves to minister through people. Could the Lord have healed Saul of his blindness without Ananias? I believe He certainly could.

But God wanted to bring Saul into the Christian community.

And Ananias goes in obedience. And Saul is baptized and healed and brought into the Church through faithful Ananias.

And by the end of the story, we see how Saul was transformed. At the beginning of the chapter he was breathing out murderous threats and by the end of the reading, Saul was preaching the good news that Jesus is the Christ.

So besides simply appreciating this story for reminding us of how Saul & Ananias were enabled to see and follow the way of Christ, it is always good to ask the question, so what? So what is the significance for me?

And it is simply this. Christ enables us to see more clearly. He does this through His Holy Spirit and He does this in all different ways.

Who wants to see more clearly today? I know that I do.

**First, the Lord wants us to see Him more clearly**. To see His love, to see His holiness or see His mercy and compassion. To see His plan of salvation.

Friends, this happens in different ways. The biggest way is through reading or hearing His inspired written Word, the Bible. But we can see God more clearly in the words that He has made as well – His ordered creation, His beauty revealed in nature.

Please know that God’s biggest desire is that we get to know him and that we see Him better every day.

When we invite God to help us to see Him more clearly, we can trust that He will do it.

**Second, the Lord wants us to see ourselves more clearly.** Saul had a diluted view of himself. Jesus was helping him to see his own need. His own sin. His own brokenness. His own need for mercy and grace. Our Lord convinced him through this encounter.

Like Paul, Jesus will lovingly convince us of our own sin and our own need for God’s mercy. Humbly reading the Bible will do this for us.

And he also is there to remind us that when we respond to the gospel in faith and in submission to Jesus, His grace is enough. For if Christ received Saul as a follower, the invitation is open to everyone.

And third and finally, the Lord wants to help us to see others more clearly and to use us to bless others in His Name. We see this again through Ananias’ journey.

How has God prompted you to bless in Jesus’ Name? Perhaps it is someone going through a challenging time or perhaps someone we would be nervous to reach out to, like Saul was to Ananias.

A great prayer is “Lord, help me to see this person through Your eyes. Guide me to be Your voice and Your hands and feet to them.”

When it comes to the light of Jesus Christ, let us not choose to put on spiritual eye black, but rather, to walk in the light. Or as John wrote in 1 John chapter 1

**This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. 6If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. 7But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.**

Resources:

BibleGateway.com

Notes from English Bible: Acts course – Fall 2020 – Dr. H. Douglass Buckwalter