

**Text: Ac 22.6-13**

Last week I emphasized the Jewishness of Paul's defense before the mob in Jerusalem, where Paul took pains to show that his hearers were just like him in many ways.

My big point in that message was that we should likewise identify with our hearers when we give the gospel. The truth is that we are all in the same boat, and are very much like one another in our spiritual condition.

We will see Paul continue somewhat in this theme, he clearly shapes his defense to his audience. One commentator said,

“The three accounts [Acts 9, 22, 26] are parallel in their essentials but differ in small details. The most striking differences are to be seen in a comparison between the two accounts given in Paul's defense speeches. These are very much adapted to the audience to whom they were addressed.”<sup>1</sup>

However, today we will highlight a different theme, the gospel itself.

We are going to do this in two parts, first in the morning message and then we'll pick it up again in the afternoon message.

This morning our theme is *the light of the gospel*.

*I Have Come from the Darkness to the Light*

Read Ac 22.6-16, text 6-13

The first time we hear this story in Acts is chapter 9. We were there way back in March of 2018. I had eight sermons from Acts 9.1-17.

In that sense, we are very familiar with Paul's conversion story. You probably don't remember all eight... or any of the eight. I had to go back and look them up myself!

In addition, if you have followed the Lord for any length of time, you have heard the story of Paul's conversion several times.

You are very familiar with it in that sense also.

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<sup>1</sup> John B. Polhill, *Acts*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 459.

But notice: Luke records the story in three different passages in the book of Acts.

- When it happened (Ac 9)
- When Paul defended himself to the Jews (Ac 22)
- When Paul defended himself to Festus and Agrippa (Ac 26)

The Lord himself intends for us to be very familiar with this story.

**Proposition:** You are either in darkness or in the light. It all depends on your reaction to Jesus the Nazarene.

## I. The darkness

### A. Paul's darkness put him on the road to Damascus

1. His zealousness for the Law led him to "persecute this way" (4)
2. He obtained authority from the Council reaching to Damascus (5)

### B. Paul's companions "saw the light, heard the sound, understood nothing" (9)

1. These were cohorts in the persecution business (deputies, assistants, co-conspirators)
2. They, too, witnessed something of the phenomenon that stopped Saul in his tracks
  - a. They saw, but they didn't see
  - b. They heard, but they didn't hear
  - c. In other words, they remained in darkness

### C. Darkness is an apt metaphor for the lost condition

Jn 1.5 The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

Jn 3.19 "This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil.

1 Jn 2.11 But the one who hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

1. The “inadvertent” effects of darkness
  - a. You can’t see where you are going
  - b. You stumble over little obstacles that would be no problem in the light
2. The “advertent” effects
  - a. Evil men love darkness to commit evil deeds in secret
  - b. We love darkness to hide our secret sins

We could wax eloquent here, but let’s move on

## II. The light

### A. The intervention of the light

1. Paul wasn’t seeking the light, the light sought him (6)
  - a. Paul was in darkness
  - b. He was quite happy continuing in darkness
2. On the way to Damascus, about noon, the light got in his way

The language emphasizes the brightness of the light

- a. So bright, it overcame the light of the noonday middle-eastern sun
- The time of day is a new detail in the narrative
- b. The light appeared suddenly, surrounding Paul
  - c. It stopped him in his tracks
3. As he fell to the ground, he heard a voice (7)
  4. He answered back (did he look up?) “Who are you Lord?” (8)

- a. The use of the term “Lord” here is only as a term of respect – he doesn’t know who is talking to him
- b. Jesus identifies himself in the light, “I am Jesus the Nazarene, whom you are persecuting”

The word, “the Nazarene” is another new detail

5. Some details especially for the Jewish audience
  - a. God intervened – Paul didn't manufacture this
  - b. Jesus the Nazarene – the man who the Jews crucified twenty years before, but one of them

#### B. The immediate effects of the light

1. It revealed the wickedness of Paul's purpose in going to Nazareth
2. It revealed the evil of Jewish opposition to Jesus the Messiah
3. It proved the deity claims Jesus made throughout his ministry
4. It put the sacrifice on the cross in an entirely new light
  - a. Not the death of a deluded fanatic
  - b. Something else entirely in the plan of God

In a partly pithy and partly obtuse comment, F. F. Bruce says,

"That convicting word, 'I am Jesus of Nazareth,' imposed on Paul a lifelong allegiance to the one whom in ignorance and unbelief he had hitherto withstood."<sup>2</sup>

5. But note: those who were with him didn't see and didn't hear — the light simply astonished them

### III. The sight

#### A. What shall I do, Lord?

1. This question, another new detail, indicates Paul's submission
2. No longer "my will" but "thy will" be done
3. Now "Lord" means "My Lord and my God" (as Thomas had said)

The word "appointed" in the answer is in the perfect tense — God had a role for Paul to fulfil, even before Paul submitted to believing in the Lord

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<sup>2</sup> F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of the Acts*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 416.

## B. Paul got up, seeing, but not seeing

1. He was now seeing clearly in his spirit
2. But he was blinded by the light in his eyes
3. The word “brightness” = “glory,” *i.e.* his gaze was on the shekinah glory of God, the glory Moses saw on the Mount
4. Consequently, Paul, who now saw, had to be led by the hand

## C. Ananias brought more “light” (12-13)

1. Notice his description
  - a. Devout by the standard of the Law
  - b. Well spoken by all the Jews

Acts 9 tells us Ananias was a believer in Jesus, but here Paul emphasizes his Jewishness (remember his audience)

2. Ananias comes and commands him to receive his sight: and immediately Saul sees!
  - a. Note that Ananias refers to him as “Brother”
  - b. Saul looks up, and he sees

Verses like this call to mind the salvation of Charles Spurgeon. His story meant a lot to him, as Spurgeon repeated it over 280 times in his sermons.

*Christian History* magazine published a collation of Spurgeon’s account in a 1991 article

Charles Spurgeon was a fifteen-year-old lad. He describes his mood this way:

“I was years and years upon the brink of hell — I mean in my own feeling. I was unhappy, I was desponding, I was despairing. I dreamed of hell. My life was full of sorrow and wretchedness, believing that I was lost.”

The article goes on:

Despite his Christian upbringing (he was christened as an infant, and raised in the Congregational church), and his own

efforts (he read the Bible and prayed daily), Spurgeon woke one January Sunday in 1850 with a deep sense of his need for deliverance.

Because of a snowstorm, the 15-year-old's path to church was diverted down a side street. For shelter, he ducked into the Primitive Methodist Chapel on Artillery Street. An unknown substitute lay preacher stepped into the pulpit and read his text — Isaiah 45:22 — “Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is none else.”

Spurgeon's *Autobiography* records his reaction:

“He had not much to say, thank God, for that compelled him to keep on repeating his text, and there was nothing needed — by me, at any rate except his text. Then, stopping, he pointed to where I was sitting under the gallery, and he said, ‘That young man there looks very miserable’ ... and he shouted, as I think only a Primitive Methodist can, ‘Look! Look, young man! Look now!’ ... Then I had this vision — not a vision to my eyes, but to my heart. I saw what a Savior Christ was.... Now I can never tell you how it was, but I no sooner saw whom I was to believe than I also understood what it was to believe, and I did believe in one moment.

“And as the snow fell on my road home from the little house of prayer I thought every snowflake talked with me and told of the pardon I had found, for I was white as the driven snow through the grace of God.”<sup>3</sup>

## Conclusion:

**Proposition:** You are either in darkness or in the light. It all depends on your reaction to Jesus the Nazarene.

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<sup>3</sup> Mary Ann Jeffreys, “Spurgeon's Conversion,” *Christian History*, 1991, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/history/issues/issue-29/spurgeons-conversion.html>.