

29. The Lord Stopped Saul on the Road to Damascus

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to help people come to an understanding of repentance and faith through evangelistic Bible studies. We saw that as we help our children learn to explain the Word of God that God will work through his Word to bring people to faith in Christ. Today, we are going to see how Christ stopped Saul as he was on his way to the city of Damascus to arrest and imprison any followers of Christ that he found in that city.

We saw in chapter 6 through the first part of chapter 8 that Saul was doing everything possible to try and persecute those who followed Christ. We saw that he was the one who held the coats of those who stoned Stephen to death. We also saw that Saul began to do everything possible to stop the development of the church. Today, we begin our topic by seeing that Saul made plans to spread that persecution to other cities. Acts 9:1-2 says, “Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.” Here, we see that Saul was ready to arrest and kill additional followers of Christ in an effort to try and stop the development of the church.

We see that Saul was still breathing threats and murder. Paul described his actions in 1 Timothy 1:12-13 where we read, “And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting *me* into the ministry, although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief.” Paul said that before he met Christ he was a blasphemer, a persecutor and a man filled with pride and treated others with shame. Christ completely changed and transformed his life and Christ gave him a great ministry for many years.

In his efforts to try and stop the followers of Christ, Paul went to the Jewish high priest and asked for letters to the leaders of all of the synagogues in Damascus giving him permission to arrest and bring to Jerusalem any men or women that had become followers of Christ. Many years later when Paul gave his testimony to the Jews in Jerusalem, he said in Acts 22:4-5, “I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women, as also the high priest bears me witness, and all the council of the elders, from whom I also received letters to the brethren, and went to Damascus to bring in chains even those who were there to Jerusalem to be punished.” Paul said that he was heavily involved in the arrest and even the death of followers of Christ.

However, we see that Jesus stopped Saul as he traveled to Damascus to arrest additional followers of Christ. Acts 9:3-6 says, “As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?’ And he said, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ Then the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’ So he, trembling and astonished, said, ‘Lord, what do You want me to do?’ Then the Lord *said* to him, ‘Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.’” Here, we see that Jesus suddenly stopped Saul with a bright light that shone around him from heaven.

As Paul fell to the ground, he heard a voice speaking to him from heaven. The voice said, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” Here, we see a key statement. The voice said that the persecution by Saul of the church was a personal attack on the One who was speaking. That caused Saul to ask a question. Paul said, “Who are you Lord?” Paul recognized that since the voice was coming from heaven it had to be God speaking to him. As a result, He addressed God as Lord. The word translated “Lord” is most commonly used to refer to God or the Messiah. Christ answered Saul by saying, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads.” Here, we see that Christ personally identifies with all those who suffer for His sake. That means that an attack against a Christian is actually an attack on Christ.

Jesus told Saul that He was Jesus, the One that Saul was persecuting. The word translated “goads” is a word that was used to speak of the stick or the metal bar that was used to keep oxen and other animals moving as they worked. It led to the development of the proverb “to kick against the goad”. An ox that was poked with a stick or metal bar to keep it moving also had a yoke around his neck so that it was impossible for the ox to fight against the one who was poking him with the goad. The ox would only hurt itself by trying to fight. Jesus was telling Saul that it would be impossible for him to try and fight against Christ any longer. To do so would only hurt Saul.

Suddenly, Saul realized that in his attacks against the followers of Jesus he was actually fighting against God, the very person that he claimed to serve. Suddenly, his whole body began to tremble and shake in fear. He was filled with amazement. Since he suddenly recognized that he was fighting against God, Saul asked a second question, “Lord, what do You want me to do?” We said that “Lord” usually refers to God or the Messiah. This question of Saul showed that his heart had been transformed in a moment. He now recognized that Christ is God and that everything that he had heard about Christ was true. Saul immediately wanted to know what Christ wanted him to do. Christ had said in Luke 6:46, ““But why do you call Me “Lord, Lord,” and do not do the things which I say?”” In contrast, we see that Saul was immediately ready to do what Jesus said to do.

Jesus did not answer the question of Saul immediately. Instead, Jesus told him to go into the city and there he would be told what he was to do. Here, we see that Christ knew Saul needed time to think through all that had happened. He also needed to become identified with the church since he had actually come to destroy the church. As a result, Christ let Saul think for three days and then he sent Ananias, one of the leaders of the church in Damascus, to visit him. Acts 9:17 says, “And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, ‘Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.’” We will study more about Ananias in a future topic but here we see that he recognized Saul as a new brother in Christ.

Acts 9:7-9 goes on to say, “And the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice but seeing no one. Then Saul arose from the ground, and when his eyes were opened he saw no one. But they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank.” There was a whole group of men traveling with Saul to arrest the followers of Christ in Damascus. Suddenly, these men became speechless and could not say

anything. They were unable to speak because of the fear that filled their lives.

Meanwhile, Saul got up from the ground where he had fallen. However, he suddenly realized that he could not see. Paul described this event in Acts 22:10-11, where he said, ““So I said, “What shall I do, Lord?”” And the Lord said to me, “Arise and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all things which are appointed for you to do.” And since I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of those who were with me, I came into Damascus.”” Paul had seen the glory of Jesus when that bright light from heaven had shown upon him. That was an experience that he would never forget.

Later, Paul described this same event to King Agrippa. Acts 26:15-19 says, ““So I said, “Who are You, Lord?”” And He said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you. I will deliver you from the *Jewish* people, as well as *from* the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, to open their eyes, *in order* to turn *them* from darkness to light, and *from* the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.”” ‘Therefore, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision.’” On the road to Damascus, Saul had his physical eyes blinded so that he could open the spiritual eyes of others and turn them from spiritual darkness to the Light of Christ.

Since the eyes of Saul were blind so that he could not see, the men that were traveling with him led him into the city of Damascus and brought him to a place to stay. For three days, Saul did not see anything, did not eat anything and did not drink anything. This gave him a lot of time to think so that he could understand all that had happened to him. It gave him three days to meditate on all that he knew from the Old Testament. Joshua 1:8 says, ““This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.”” Saul had three days for uninterrupted meditation on the Word of God. Since he now knew that Christ is God, Saul could think about everything that he knew from the entire Old Testament from a different viewpoint.

In the same way, we want to help our physical and spiritual children understand that the entire Bible will only come alive in their lives when they understand that Christ is taught from Genesis to Revelation. The Holy Spirit will guide them as they learn to meditate on the entire Word of God and what it teaches about Christ. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your children how Christ makes the whole Bible come alive.