

Yahweh, the Almighty God of Israel, is with us
"Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet,
and shew my people their transgression,
and the house of Jacob their sins." Isaiah 58:1

Famous Believers

The Apostle Paul

Reading:

2 Corinthians 1: 22-33 & 12: 1-10

1. Introduction

Greek *Paulos*, meaning 'small.' Paul is undoubtedly one of the greatest of early Christians. Though small in stature his effect on believers through the ages has been enormous and his accomplishments for the truth - incalculable. Let us briefly consider the life and work of this 'small/big man' who came to understand the purpose of suffering as few others do.

Paul studied at the feet of Gamaliel, a member of the Jewish Sanhedrin and renowned teacher of Yahweh's law. (Acts 22:3, Acts 5:34-39)

Paul (Saul of Tarsus) was a Roman citizen (Acts 9:11, 21:39, 22:3, 16:37, 22:25-26).

Every Jew is taught a trade as a boy, so that he may become self-supporting. **Paul was a maker of tents.** (Acts 18:3) It is important to remember that the early apostles all supported themselves. Modern leaders who totally depend on a church organization for their livelihood are less able to preach - or even accept - testing truth. Always there is in the back of their minds the thought 'What will I do if I am dismissed from my job? What about my family, my house, my car?'

2. Misguided Zeal

effective in Yahweh's work unless he/she is under the direct supervision of the Holy Spirit. Paul's background and knowledge of Yahweh's law, great though it was by human standards, was, nevertheless, not enough. Before his conversion he reasoned like an **unconverted man**; and his decisions resulted in misery and death for many true believers. It was necessary for Paul to be converted, to respond to the Spirit of God, to yield to the Saviour. Until that process was complete, Paul's understanding of spiritual concepts and values was limited. Consider Yahweh's mercy to **Paul the Persecutor** who by his own admission wrought havoc in the church.

Acts 7: 58: *"And cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was **Saul**.*

59: And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."

Acts 22:

4: "And I persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women.

5: *As also the high priest doth bear me witness, and all the estate of the elders: from whom also I received letters unto the brethren, and went to Damascus, to bring them which were there bound unto Jerusalem, for to be punished."*

Acts 22: 20: *"And when the blood of thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him."*

Acts 26: 9: *"I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.*

10: Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them.

*11: **And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities."***

Galatians 1: 13: *"For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews' religion, **how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it."***

3. Conversion & Commission

The turning point in Paul's life was his conversion. It was spectacular to say the least. He actually saw and heard Jesus Christ at about noon on the road to Damascus. And from **Yeshua the Messiah of Israel**, Paul received his commission. Consider their meeting.

Acts 9: 1-9 Read this passage through.

Acts 26: 14: *"And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.*

15: And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest.

16: But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee;

17: Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee,

*18: **To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me."***

Important directions Paul received:

- I have appointed you for a purpose: to be my servant, a witness.
- I will rescue you from this people and from the Gentiles.
- I send you to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, from the dominion of Satan to God, so that by trusting in me they may obtain forgiveness of sins and a place with those whom God has made his own.

NOTE: Here are lessons for every preacher, particularly those of us who are of small account in men's eyes, to go and do likewise. The Saviour's commission to his ministers is:

Matthew 28: 18: *"And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.*

*19: **Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:***

*20: **Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen."***

4. Historical Record

I quote a few facts about the apostle Paul from the Westminster Dictionary of the Bible:

Death, resurrection and ascension of Christ: **AD 30**

Conversion of Paul: **AD 35**
 Paul's First Missionary Journey: **AD 46-48?**
 Paul's Second Missionary Journey: **AD 51-53**
 Wrote 1 and 2 Thessalonians: **AD 52-53**
 Paul's Third Missionary Journey: **AD 54-58**
 Wrote the epistles to the Galatians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Romans: **AD 55-58**
 First Roman imprisonment: **AD 61-63**
 Wrote epistles to the Colossians, Philemon, Ephesians, Philippians: **AD 62-63**
 Release from first Roman imprisonment: **AD 63-64**
 Wrote 1 Timothy, Titus, 2 Timothy: **AD 64-67**
 Death of Paul: **AD 67-68**

5. Paul's Sufferings

Paul suffered more than most believers ever will. But in his sufferings he learned a lesson very few learn:

- That **Yahweh's strength is made perfect in weakness**. This implies that human wisdom, wealth, fame, talent and strength generally get in the way of Truth if they are not sanctified by the Holy Spirit.
- That the insignificant believer who realizes his/her own smallness and lack of strength can go on to harness the mighty power of God!

Suffering is the lot of all mankind, **believers included**. They suffer like other people. The difference is that when a true believer suffers he/she has the comforting assurance of faith that **suffering has a divine purpose and will one day end**. One day we shall all fully understand why God allowed us to suffer. It's so easy to complain when suffering strikes home and family; but before you begin to complain, think on these verses:

2 Timothy 3: 12: ***"Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution."***

2 Corinthians 11: 22: *"Are they Hebrews? so am I. Are they Israelites? so am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? so am I.*

23: Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft.

24: Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one.

25: Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep;

*26: In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, **in perils among false brethren;***

27: In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.

28: Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches.

29: Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not?

*30: **If I must needs glory, I will glory of the things which concern mine infirmities.**"*

2 Corinthians 12: 7: *"And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.*

8: For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me.

*9: And he said unto me, **My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.** Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.*

10: Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong."

6. Paul's Letters

Paul left this world a heritage in letters second to none. He documented for future generations some of the greatest truths the human mind has been privileged to ponder. He analyzed human motives, examined the spiritual parameters of repentance, mercy, faith, grace, humility and love. He charted a course which every believer should study. Paul's letters are often difficult to understand; and some believers think that he swept aside the commandments of God. But they are mistaken, because:

Paul never contradicted the writings of Moses or any other Bible prophet.

He went deeper than most in explaining spiritual concepts, but he **never, never contradicted the message of the rest of Scripture**; and in no way did he intend his writings to be placed above the laws which the Almighty gave through His servant Moses. **Many Christians misunderstand this fact to their own hurt.**

2 Peter 3: 15: *“And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you;*

*16: As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are **some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction.***

17: Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness.”

7. Summary

All too soon we reach the end of the road. The years fly by at what seems a frightening pace; and before we realize it we are at the finishing post. For many it is a time of painful regret: wasted years, wasted money and wasted opportunities. For others it is a time to look back and take stock of how one has done. The apostle Paul did this and here is his testimony of his own life:

2 Timothy 4: 5: *“But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry.*

6: For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand.

*7: **I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith:***

*8: **Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.”***

AMEN!

In the Son's Name - For the Father's glory.

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