

## The Call Of Saul Of Tarsus To The Apostleship.

Text: Acts 9:15-20

1) The wisdom of the choice

Suggested Hymns:

2) The manner of the call

236, 218, 227, 290, 269

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Acts 9:15-20, <sup>15</sup> *But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. <sup>16</sup> "For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake."*

<sup>17</sup> *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."* <sup>18</sup> *Immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized.*

<sup>19</sup> *So when he had received food, he was strengthened. Then Saul spent some days with the disciples at Damascus. <sup>20</sup> Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God.* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

The Gospel lesson for today tells of the disciples' miraculous catch of fish. Overcome by the flash of divine glory issuing from the humble Son of Man, Simon Peter fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, *"Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!"*<sup>1</sup> But the miracle was the forerunner of something far more important, the call to apostleship, *"From now on you will catch men."*<sup>2</sup>

In our text we also have such a manifestation of God's glory on the occasion of the calling of Saul of Tarsus to the Apostleship. This is similar to God calling Moses from the burning bush in the Old Testament.

When Christ began His public ministry, He chose twelve men who were to be His special witnesses before the world. These were men who knew the thoughts, the feelings, and the ways of the common people. They were men who, accordingly, could adapt themselves, as well as their message, to the level and the needs of the average human being.

After the Saviour's ascension into heaven the need arose for another type of man, a man who would be qualified to work among the Gentiles. This was to be a man whose learning and eloquence would enable him to confront the intellectual world. He was to be a man whose Roman citizenship would help him to move about with greater ease and freedom in the Roman Empire.

Such a man was Saul of Tarsus, regarded by some as one of the six greatest minds in the history of the world. Let us today, with the help of God's Holy Spirit, give special thought to *The Call of Saul of Tarsus to the Apostleship*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

### **1. The Wisdom Of The Choice**

Our text says, *for he [Paul] is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel.*

It is said of the police that they always get their man. However, this may or may not be. What is certain is that God never fails. He always gets His man. Our Saviour was not at a loss in selecting twelve men for His immediate discipleship. He knew just the type of men He needed.

Now when the need arose for another type of man, a man who was to serve as the Apostle to the Gentiles, the Saviour knew just where to go. The entire subsequent history of Saul of Tarsus shows the wisdom of God's choice. Saul of Tarsus, after his conversion, laboured more successfully and suffered more abundantly for Christ than any other Apostle, more even than the energetic and zealous Apostle Peter.

If you and I had been living at the time and had been called on to select candidates, would we have chosen Saul of Tarsus? Would we have chosen a man with a record like Saul's? Would we have had the wisdom and the courage to go into the enemy's camp and select the ring-leader of the opponents of Christ, the most relentless and unyielding, the most merciless and cruel person of them all, and ask him to become a special missionary for Christ?

When we pick candidates for office, ordinarily, we lay down certain requirements as to the qualifications needed. In choosing a candidate for special mission work among the Gentiles, we would require that the man be a Christian himself, that he be willing to work for Christ, and, finally, that he have the necessary education.

Saul of Tarsus would not have met even our first condition as to qualifications, that of being a Christian, because he was a violent enemy of Christ. Nor would he have met our second requirement, that of being willing to work in the Kingdom of Christ, because he was engaged in working against Christ. He was actually persecuting the Christian Church. Furthermore, he was not content to limit his persecution to Jerusalem, but he secured letters from the high priest granting him license to extend his hostile operations to Damascus.

If anyone at that time would have approached Saul of Tarsus with the suggestion to drop his opposition to Christ and to become a missionary for Him, Saul of Tarsus might have struck him down right then and there.

Neither could Saul have met our third requirement as to qualification for the office of a Christian missionary, that of learning and education. By this we do not mean that Saul of Tarsus was not educated. He was a highly educated man. He could quote prose and poetry in three different languages, in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin.

In his youth he studied under the great Gamaliel and became well versed in the traditions of the fathers and in the requirements of the Mosaic Law. At the same time he was very conscientious, so that he could refer to himself later as blameless as far as the traditional practices were concerned.

His education and training, however, had led him away from Christ. A man of such training we would never have chosen as a special missionary for Christ. Neither did Ananias at first favour him. Yet this very man, this cruel, merciless, fearless, deliberate antagonist of Christ, God chose as His special Apostle to the Gentiles.

Why did God chose Saul? God knew exactly what was in this man and what He could make of Him. He knew that the zeal and courage which Saul showed against Christ could later be used for Christ. God knew that Saul of Tarsus could

be made a willing worker for Christ, single-handedly if necessary, and even to give his life for Christ.

What was wrong with the man and at the bottom of all his evil activities was that he had been trained by his Pharisaic teachers and associates to believe that Jesus of Nazareth was not the promised Messiah, not the Son of God. They believed that Jesus performed His miracles not with the help of God, but with the help of Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons.

They believed that Jesus had not risen from the grave nor ascended into heaven. It was their opinion that the followers of Jesus were spreading falsehoods which ought to be rooted out.

We are not surprised to find that Saul of Tarsus with such information and with a conscience which was ready to go the limit in the service of God, persecuted the Christians. He himself later explains in Acts 26:9, <sup>9</sup> ***“Indeed, I myself thought I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.*** He thought that by persecuting the Christians he was actually doing God service.<sup>3</sup>

In order to get the courage, the zeal, the loyal, the conscientious service of this man, even to the extent of willingness to face death, God therefore offered him the right information, put him on the right track, changed the direction of his zeal by turning the unbeliever into a believer. God proved to him that Jesus of Nazareth was not an impostor, but the true Messiah, the Son of God, who died, was buried, rose again from the grave, ascended into heaven, and was now sitting at the right hand of God, directing and ruling all things.

## **2. The Manner Of The Call**

To bring about this change required strong measures. God resorted to extraordinary methods to bring about the conversion of Saul of Tarsus. As Saul was on his way to Damascus to persecute the Christians, Christ Jesus appeared to Him from heaven, saying: ***“Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?”*** <sup>5</sup> ***And he said, “Who are You, Lord?” Then the Lord said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.”***<sup>4</sup> What an eye opener that was!

That voice came from heaven. Was it really true that Jesus of Nazareth is what He claimed to be, the Son of God, the promised Messiah, the Saviour of the

world? Were the Christians, after all, preaching the truth? Is it really true that Jesus rose again from the grave and ascended into heaven?

It must be true; else Jesus could not be speaking to him from heaven. Saul was sent to Damascus for further information. To Damascus he went, not to persecute the Church, but to meditate and to pray and to wait for the information that was to be given to him.

Ananias hesitated when he was told to go to Saul. He said, *“Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem. <sup>14</sup> “And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name.” <sup>15</sup> But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel.*

Ananias obeyed and went his way and entered into the house and, putting his hands on him, 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.” <sup>18</sup> Immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized.*

Do you think that Saul was a fit candidate for Baptism? There was no undue haste with the Baptism of Saul. He was well acquainted with the Law and the Prophets. He had studied them from his youth. He knew the many Messianic promises and, like many other Jews, expected a Messiah and looked forward to His coming.

But He had not believed that Jesus of Nazareth was this promised Messiah. As soon as, however, Saul believed the Gospel of Christ as taught by the Christians, repented of his sins, and believed in the resurrected Saviour as his personal Redeemer, he was a fit candidate for Baptism. Ananias baptised him in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ for the remission of his sins.

*Then Saul spent some days with the disciples at Damascus. <sup>20</sup> Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God.<sup>5</sup>*

The conversion of Saul of Tarsus and his call to the apostleship are wonders of God’s grace. They show us also that we should never hesitate to offer the

Gospel to seemingly unworthy persons. There was grace for Saul; there is grace for all penitent sinners and believers.

Let us never grow weary of presenting the Gospel to all who will listen. Nor need we be discouraged if the seed of the Word does not always bring forth fruit at once. At times it may lie dormant a long time in the heart of a person before it is roused by some thought-provoking experience, and begins to grow and bear fruit.

Hence let us continue to preach the Gospel and to teach it in Sunday school, in confirmation classes, in the Christian day schools, resting assured that God's Word does not return void, but accomplishes that for which it is sent.

May the Lord Jesus Christ, who appeared to Saul of Tarsus on the way to Damascus, who showed grace to the penitent thief on the Cross, who gave His life on the Cross also for your sins and my sins, and who said, "*the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out*"<sup>6</sup> — may He be gracious to us, guide us, and keep us as long as we live. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 5:8

<sup>2</sup> Luke 5:10

<sup>3</sup> John 16:2

<sup>4</sup> Acts 9:4-5

<sup>5</sup> Acts 9:19-20

<sup>6</sup> John 6:37