

Paul Meets Jesus

Valleys Family Church Sermon (family service)
Stuart Wheatman, Sunday 21st July 2012

Based on various passages in scripture:

Paul's Background- Acts 21:39; 22:3; 23:34; 2Cor 11:22; Rom 11:1; Phil 3:4-5

Paul's Education- Acts 22:3; Acts 23:6; Acts 26:4-5; Gal 1:13-14; Phil 3:5

Paul's Character- Phil 3:6; 1Tim 1:12-13; 2Tim 1:3

Paul the Persecutor- Stephen- Acts 7:57-58; 8:1-2; 22:20; *The Church-* Acts 8:3-4; 22:4,5,19; 26:9-11

Paul's confession in the epistles- 1Cor 15:9; Gal 1:13, 22-24; Phil 3:6; 1Tim 1:13

Paul's conversion- Damascus road- Acts 9:1-9; 22:5-11; 26:12-20

Paul & Ananias- Acts 9:10-19; 22:12-16

etc.

Intro-

- Do you know what your name means? Do you know what language it comes from? My name means 'Steward' as in a pig-steward. My surname is Old English and means 'brave friend'.
- Story of Paul, also called Saul. The name he was given at birth was his Jewish name Saul- pronounced *Sha-awl* and meaning 'asked-for'. He was probably named after the first king of Israel who was from the same tribe as him, the tribe of Benjamin. The first king of Israel was 'asked for' by the Israelites so that they could be like the other nations. Although this king looked good on the outside he was 'orrible on the inside, and in the same was the Saul we are going to hear about today looked good to some on the outside, but was not a nice person on the inside.
- In Acts 13:9 it says that Saul was also called Paul (some say it was changed here because he was witnessing at the time to Sergius Paulus). Paul comes from the Roman family name Paulus and means 'small' or 'humble'. Tradition has it that Paul was a small man. Later on he would always be referred to as Paul.

Volunteer to be Paul

Good people need Jesus

- Paul was very religious before he became a Christian
- *Volunteer to walk with head held high.*
- Paul was 'one of the good guys'- he was a 'do-good'er, are you?
- Paul was Jewish- a descendent of Abraham and follower of God. Circumcised on the 8th day of his life (rather than only following Jewish customs later in life).
- He was born in Tarsus- a Roman colony and inhabitants of Tarsus were honoured to be Roman citizens. Tarsus was 'a grand city with palaces, marketplaces, roads and bridges, baths, fountains and waterworks, a gymnasium on the banks of the Cyndus, and a stadium' (wikipedia)
- Paul was a Hebrew of Hebrews- this means he was born and bred Jewish and spoke Hebrew. He didn't, like some, have to read a translation of the Bible into the common language of Greek- he could read direct from the Hebrew. (*Give example passage*)
- Paul was a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee- they were the 'good people', the name Phasisee means '*pure ones, set-apart ones*'. It referred to their devotion to God. The Pharisees fasted twice a week- on Mondays & Thursdays, and prayed three times a day 9am 12pm 3pm. Pharisees tried to make a 'hedge' for God's laws in case they broke them. Therefore if God had said 'do such and such in the morning' they would do it the night before. If the bible said 'don't do work on God's day' they would not only make sure they didn't grind their wheat to make bread- they would make sure they didn't even rub it in their hands- hence when they accuses Jesus of

working on the Sabbath.

- Paul studied under a man called Gamaliel. (*Act out moving to Jerusalem & volunteer to be Gamaliel & Paul follows him*). Gamaliel was the grandson of the most famous rabbis in history- Hillel. Hillel said some similar things to Jesus:

Hillel said: "That which is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow. That is the whole of the Law (Torah)" Jesus said: "Do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets." (Matthew 7:12)

Hillel said: "Pass not judgment upon thy neighbor until thou hast put thyself in his place." Jesus said, "Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned." (Luke 6:37)

Hillel said: "Whoever would make a name loses the name... whoever makes use of the crown perishes." Jesus said: Whoever tries to keep his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it." (Luke 32:33)

- Paul described himself as 'blameless'- i.e. On the outside he appeared blameless, but on the inside he knew he fell far short of God's standards- he secretly coveted what was not his. We can appear holy to others, but God knows what we are all like on the inside.
- Q. What are you like when you step in dog-poo? When Paul met Jesus he came to realise that his good deeds and former lifestyle before he became a Christian was like ...dung really (σκύβαλα) Phil 3:8 compared to knowing Christ and having Christ's goodness given freely to him. Have you come to experience Christ's goodness yourself?
- **Application:** Good works don't get us into Heaven. Many people think, or hope, that they will get to Heaven because of their works. They won't. Paul didn't- he had to come to Jesus, like us. We won't ever be able to live on the level that Paul lived prior to knowing Christ, but the good news is that we don't have to. Jesus given righteousness to us as a gift. People hope they will get to Heaven through Church attendance, reading the Bible, praying, evangelising, getting baptised etc. These things are good when done for the right reasons, but there is only one thing which gets us to Heaven- trusting in Jesus.

Bad people need Jesus

- Paul was a real terror before he became a Christian
- (*Act out: Stephen falsely arrested & brought before the Jewish leaders (Sanhedrin) & his face looks like an angel as he gives a sermon to them on how they have resisted God and should repent. They don't listen and scream at the top of their voices as Stephen has a vision of Jesus. They take him out and stone him to death. Paul isn't old enough to be in the sanhedrin, but wants to help so he looks after the coats of those who stone Stephen to death and also gives his consent to the death. As Stephen is dying he prays his last ever prayer, and what a prayer- that those who do this would be forgiven by God- for Paul this was going to be amazingly answered later, after Stephen had been dead for some time -some prayers we pray may be answered after our lifetime, but still answered- quite a thought! Godly men come and bury Stephen*).
- (*Act out: After Stephen died a great persecution broke out against the believers and all except the Apostles were scattered throughout the region of Judea and also Samaria. Paul it says 'made havoc' of the Church- the picture here is the strongest possible; the Greek word for 'made havoc' is not used anywhere else in the New Testament but in the LXX and in classical Greek it is used of wild boars which uproot a vineyard*).
- *There are 8 different New Testament passages which speak of what Paul was like at this point and only by looking at them all do we get the picture as to how bad he was. Paul decides to go from house to house looking for Christians, both men and women and arrests those he finds, binding them and having them thrown into prison and face punishment for being Christians. He punishes them in every*

synagogue he finds them in. He tries to force them to blaspheme, some of them are put to death because of him.

- *Paul still isn't satisfied. He goes to remote towns and villages looking for more Christians. He's mad. He even wants to go to another country- Syria to see if there are Christians there. First he gets a letter of permission to go and arrest the Christians from the High Priest and Chief priests and then he leaves with a group of men, on his way to the capital of Syria, Damascus.)*
- Paul wasn't just a good man- he was the extremes of both good and bad.
- Why was he so bad? He hated Christians and persecuted them, maybe deep down he was jealous of something they had which he had worked so hard for and didn't have- assurance of salvation. He was a bully. He thought he was doing what God wanted but only later realised that He was doing the opposite
- In fact he was so bad he called himself later 'the chief of sinners'- 1Tim 1:15. The amazing thing is that Paul came to be forgiven by God and became the most well known example of how God can forgive any sin.
- **Application:** What sins are you struggling with? Are there things you have done that you can't forgive yourself for, and think that God will never forgive you? They are probably not as bad as those Paul committed against Jesus. God wants you to take courage today that if He is prepared to forgive the Chief of sinners He is also prepared to forgive you. If He can forgive Peter for denying Him three times, and calling down curses upon himself if he even knew Jesus, He can forgive you.

It's wise to listen Jesus

- Everything changed when Paul truly heard the voice of Jesus.
- Paul continues to Damascus with his group of men. We don't know how he travelled. But we know he was getting near Damascus and it was about 12pm midday when a blinding light brighter than the sun appeared all around him!
- Paul's men saw the light and both Paul and his men fell to the ground. One passage says the men stood there, but this could mean they later stood, or the words can also be translated they were 'rooted to the spot', meaning they fell and stayed where they fell out of fear.
- A voice spoke to Paul. It was the voice of Jesus and He spoke in Hebrew (or possibly Aramaic), which Paul understood, but it appears the men didn't. Again an apparent contradiction it says in one place they heard the voice and in another it seems they didn't but in the one passage it means they didn't hear in the sense of understanding what it was saying.
- The voice said 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is useless for you to fight against my will. "Who are you, lord?' Paul asked. And the Lord replied, 'I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting. Now get to your feet! For I have appeared to you to appoint you as my servant and witness. You are to tell the world what you have seen and what I will show you in the future. And I will rescue you from both your own people and the Gentiles. Yes, I am sending you to the Gentiles to open their eyes, so they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God. Then they will receive forgiveness for their sins and be given a place among God's people, who are set apart by faith in me.'
- It was a wake-up call for Paul. First Jesus puts a mirror to Paul and shows him what he's really like- Paul is actually persecuting God! Jesus will point out the things in our lives we have been trying to ignore for years- these are the things He wants us to surrender to Him.
- Jesus then literally accused him of 'kicking against the goads'- this is where a farmer uses a sharp prod to get the cattle to go in the right direction. If the cattle kick against this it is going to get very painful for them. When the Police surround

someone they say 'You can either come the easy way or the hard way' -it makes sense to go the easy way.

- **Application-** At times God clearly speaks to us about what needs to change in our lives- He prods us- it's best to respond when it's a gentle prod than be like Paul was- kicking against those prods.
- What is God saying to you now? What has He been saying and have you been listening?

It's wise to do what Jesus says

- Paul could only be used by God when he was surrendered to Him
- Jesus had to temporarily incapacitate Paul for his own good, just like when the angel of God had to dislocate Jacob's hip. Paul was blinded by the heavenly vision and needed his friends to lead him into Damascus. He was blind for 3 days and even completely lost his appetite.
- A certain disciple called Ananias heard Jesus say to go to Straight Street and ask at the house of Judas for Paul/Saul of Tarsus and pray for him to receive his sight back. Imagine how scary that must have been for Ananais- he knew Saul was killing Christians. Ananais was just an ordinary Christian and yet he heard Jesus and surrendered to his voice and saw great things. We will too if we surrender ourselves to do God's will, even if it is a bit scary at times.
- Ananais does as Jesus says and finds Paul as Jesus said and prays for him to be healed. Scales fall from his eyes and he can see! He then prays for the Holy Spirit to fill Paul and God fills him. He then baptises Paul and finally Paul has something to eat.
- Paul finally starts telling people in Damascus about Jesus! He says 'I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision' (Acts 26:19). This is the OPPOSITE of what he came to do! Experiencing Jesus' love changed Paul's hatred for others into love- we can experience this too if we are prepared, like Paul, to obey Jesus' voice!
- What a change in a day- healed, filled, baptised, fed and sent- not bad for a day's work- all because he surrendered to God. God wants to fill us and use us- we don't need to wait- the promise of the Holy Spirit is for us today because Jesus is glorified- we don't have to plead with Him to fill us- He loves to. We simply need to surrender in child-like faith as Paul did here. We simply need to make ourselves available, be flexible, and God will use us powerfully for His glory.
- Paul went all over the world sharing the Good News- what an amazing change. As we are obedient to God in the small He will entrust us with more- this is a biblical principle.
- **Application-** What are the small steps of obedience God is calling you to take right now? Rome wasn't built in a day, and Paul's job of taking the gospel around the world would take a lifetime to fulfill but it started with the first day's obedience- what is God calling you to do *today*? Although Paul was changed by an encounter with Jesus what really equipped him was being filled with the Holy Spirit when Ananais prayed for him- have you been filled? Why not ask Him to fill you now? Paul didn't put baptism off but was baptised that day. Have you been baptised? Paul was willing to go to others with the gospel, have you shared Jesus with anyone recently? Could you today/in the next few days?

Summary

- Good people need Jesus
- Bad people need Jesus
- It's wise to listen Jesus
- It's wise to do what Jesus says

Song: *All I once held dear*

‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is useless for you to fight against my will.

(“Who are you, lord?” Paul asked.)

‘I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting. Now get to your feet! For I have appeared to you to appoint you as my servant and witness. You are to tell the world what you have seen and what I will show you in the future. And I will rescue you from both your own people and the Gentiles. Yes, I am sending you to the Gentiles to open their eyes, so they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God. Then they will receive forgiveness for their sins and be given a place among God’s people, who are set apart by faith in me.’