*DEVOTIONAL*

April 16 - 21

*Paul’s Conversion*

**Monday, April 16 Acts 21:37-40**

*“Please, let me talk to these people”*

 The mob in Jerusalem had been stirred up by Jews from Asia who, having opposed Paul there, now accused him of bringing a Gentile into the temple, an offense punishable by death. The mob was not content with merely shouting their anger at Paul; they sought to kill him. The local Roman commander and his soldiers took Paul into custody, the crowd all the while shouting that he should be taken away and killed.

 The commander originally thought that Paul was an Egyptian who had tried to lead some people in revolt against Rome. According to the historian Josephus, this Egyptian took a large number of people to the Mount of Olives, promising them God’s intervention, but the revolt was crushed by Governor Felix with the loss of much life but the escape of the Egyptian. Upon learning of Paul’s ability to speak Greek and his being a citizen of Tarsus, the commander gave him permission to speak to the crowd. When the crowd finally quieted, Paul spoke to them in Aramaic, the language of the common people.

*In the midst of strong opposition, Lord, your Gospel still needs to be shared. Amen.*

**Tuesday, April 17 Acts 22:1-5**

*“Listen now to my defense”*

 Paul began his address respectfully, calling his audience “brothers and fathers,” just as Stephen had addressed a similar audience (Acts 7:2). Paul’s first point demonstrated his excellent credentials: “Educated at the feet of Gamaliel according to the strictness of the ancestral law,” that is, he had thorough training as a Pharisee under the most revered Jewish teacher of the era. The description of his activity as a persecutor of Christians opened the way for him to describe his conversion.

 Here is a dramatic “before-and-after” account of the transformation of a human being. It is witnessing at its very best. Paul described the man he was and the man Christ had enabled him to be. At each stage of his evolving witness he clarified that it was Christ who had changed him. Paul’s first person description of his life before he met Christ, how he had persecuted the followers of the Way through arrest and even death, matches closely these events as told us earlier through Luke’s third person account in Acts 9.

*Thank you, Lord, for changing me into the person you created me to be. Amen.*

**Wednesday, April 18 Acts 22:6-16**

*“The God of our ancestors has chosen you”*

 Paul’s report of his conversion here is similar to that in chapter 9, but there are some interesting points that complement the earlier version. This account has a greater emphasis on light than Acts 9. Paul specifies that it was around noon when he saw the light, which would make it a very strong light indeed. The first account reports that the men with Paul heard the sound. Here Paul says that his companions saw the light but did not understand the voice speaking to him.

 Paul does not mention Ananias’ dialogue with the Lord, where he was commanded to go to Paul, but he adds a new point, important to his audience about Ananias’ being “a devout observer of the law and highly respected by all the Jews” in Damascus. Paul is telling his fellow Jews that a respected Jew had shared the vision of his future ministry with him. Also new is the word from God communicated by Ananias that Paul was to be a “witness to all men” and that he must be baptized.

*You reveal yourself to us, Lord, and we follow you. Amen.*

*DEVOTIONAL*

April 16 - 21

*Paul’s Conversion*

**Thursday, April 19 Acts 9:1-19**

*“Saul! Saul! Why are you persecuting me?”*

 The story of Paul’s conversion makes clear the necessity of divine initiative in salvation. Thus, our inability to do anything to cause our salvation should cause us to be humble; no genuine Christian has any reason for arrogance. When someone asked Mahatma Gandhi what he thought about E. Stanley Jones, Gandhi replied: “He’s a good man, but he’s too proud of his religion.” When Jones was told about this, he said that Gandhi was right according to his own convictions. To Gandhi salvation was the result of hard work. Therefore, anyone who says that he or she is assured of salvation will be justly called arrogant.

 But according to the Christian faith, salvation is a gift of God; we do not deserve it and it is freely given to us by God, who takes the initiative by seeking us and bringing us to himself. In other words, we have no grounds for feeling superior to anyone. This truth we must demonstrate in an age when Christian belief about full assurance of salvation is considered arrogant by those who see the pursuit of salvation as something generated from within.

*It is by grace, Lord, that we have been saved. It is not of ourselves. Amen.*

**Friday, April 20 Acts 22:17-23**

*“I saw a vision of Jesus saying to me”*

 New to this account of Paul’s conversion, when compared to Acts 9, is his description of a vision he had while praying in the temple at a later time, where God told him to leave Jerusalem. Paul had expressed to God his personal desire to stay in Jerusalem and witness to the Jews, a realistic assumption considering his unique background as a Pharisee trained by the great Gamaliel. The Jews listening to Paul should have accepted the validity of his message based on his temple prayer and vision, but did not because of the stubbornness of their hearts.

 Paul’s statement that the Lord had decided to send him to the Gentiles served as a trigger for another outburst from the Jewish crowd. They shouted for his death, threw off their cloaks, and flung dust into the air. The latter two actions expressed both their frustration and their horror at blasphemy, possibly through their connecting the word “Gentiles” with Paul’s alleged desecration of the temple which had caused the initial furor of the mob. The prejudice of the Jews against the Gentiles caused them to stop listening and to return to hating.

*May our prejudices, Lord, not cause us to stop listening to you. Amen.*

**Saturday, April 21 Acts 22:24-29**

May we

 *“I am a Roman citizen by birth”*

 The crowd was too unruly for anything constructive to take place, so the commander had him taken into the barracks in order to give him third-degree treatment – questioning through torture with hope of getting to the bottom of the wrong that Paul had committed about which the Jews were so angry. The planned flogging was probably the Roman brutal scourging with a whip that had thongs weighted with rough pieces of bone or metal. It could cause great harm and even leave people crippled for life.

 As Paul was about to be flogged, he told the centurion that he was a Roman citizen. Though Roman citizens who had been convicted of a crime could have scourging decreed as a punishment, they were exempt from it as a method of inquiry before trial. The commander was therefore saved from breaking the law any further, for he was wrong to even have ordered the flogging. Thus, his alarm was understandable. He spoke of the bribe that he had had to pay to acquire Roman citizenship, while Paul said he had inherited his citizenship through birth.

*May we encourage the authorities, Lord, to act justly for the good. Amen.*