

- **\*READ II Timothy 4:6-8\*** There are many stories of the lives of many different people that are recorded for us within the inspired Word of God, and yet there are not many that stand out in my mind like that of the Apostle Paul. This man sure had fought a long fight, he had ran a long race, and he most certainly did keep his faith until the very end. He is a man that can teach us much, and for that reason his life and more specifically his preaching journeys are going to be the focus of our VBS studies for this week. I trust that the young people experienced very uplifting classes this morning during our Bible Class hour, and it is certainly our prayer that those efforts will continue to be successful throughout the week. We are also looking forward to having four guest speakers, starting this evening at our evening worship assembly, come to teach us on the same lesson themes as the young people are considering this week.
- While we rejoice at the great hope that he possessed at the end of his life, we recognize that Paul's life was not always in line with the will of God. In fact, the beginning of his life was nearly the polar opposite of what we read in **II Timothy 4**. To set up our studies for the next few days, we are going to use our time of study this morning focusing on the life of the Apostle Paul by taking a 10,000 foot look at Paul's journey through this life. We will take a look at a few snapshots throughout Paul's life, and then we will conclude by looking at four lessons that Paul teaches us through the example that he put forth to us in the way that he lived during his journey through this life.

## I. Snapshots of Paul's Life

### A. Early Life (Philippians 3:5,6)

1. Paul is very upfront and honest about this background in **Philippians 3:5,6**, and we learn from this text that Paul was the type of Jew that almost any Jew wishes they could've been. He was of the tribe of Benjamin, circumcised on the eighth day, and he belonged to the sect of the Pharisees. We even learn in **Acts 22:3** that he was educated at the feet of the renowned Jewish rabbi, Gamaliel.
2. Paul was by no means a run of the mill Jew. Instead, he was at the top of his class as Saul of Tarsus, and his zeal for his Jewish faith led him to even set out to persecute those who belonged to the upstart movement known as Christianity.

### B. Prior to Conversion (Acts 7:58; 8:1-3; 9:1,2)

1. In the Book of Acts, we first read of Paul while he was still known as Saul in **7:58**. It is in this text that it is recorded that those who stoned Stephen to death were laying their cloaks at the feet of Paul. This man would go on from there to become one of the chief persecutors of the church.
2. This persecution focused on the Christians in Jerusalem, but Paul wasn't satisfied with only seeking to arrest and even kill those in the City of David. Instead, we read in **9:1,2** that Paul requested from the high priest that he be allowed to go to Damascus in order to arrest more belonging to the Way so that he might bring them back to Jerusalem to answer for their supposed rebellion against the ways of God.

### C. Conversion & Early Days of Discipleship (9:1-30; 11:27-30; 12:25)

1. Paul was granted permission to do as he desired, and he set off for Damascus. It was on this trip that he came in contact with Jesus. Our Lord spoke to Paul about his becoming a chosen instrument for Jesus to promote the Gospel. Paul was blinded, but after meeting and speaking with Ananias, he was baptized into Christ and received his sight.
2. Following his conversion, Paul spent some time in Damascus and Jerusalem. He was speaking badly to the point that the Hellenistic Jews wanted to kill him so he was sent off to Tarsus. Some time later, Barnabas was sent to encourage the brethren in Antioch, and following that visit he went on to Tarsus to bring Paul back to Antioch. They were charged with taking aid to those who were suffering a famine in Judea, and we see this task completed in **12:25**.

#### **D. 1st Preaching Journey (Acts 13:1-14:28)**

1. From there, we see the church in Antioch, prompted by the Holy Spirit, appointing Paul and Barnabas for the work of going abroad from that city taking the Gospel. They first arrive in Salamis and Paphos (where Paul had his name change) where they are able to stop a false prophet named Bar-Jesus while also teaching the proconsul who was named Sergius Paulus. **(13:4-12)**
2. From there, Paul and Barnabas go to Pisidian Antioch where they give much teaching concerning the resurrection. Unfortunately, many of the Jews withstood Paul's teachings to the point that Paul and Barnabas turn from the Jews to the Gentiles as the main focus of their teachings as they went from town to town. **(13:13-50)**
3. This trip continues on through Iconium and Lystra before the preachers double back around so that they might be able to encourage and strengthen the new disciples while also appointing elders in these churches. **(14:1-23)** Paul and Barnabas also make their way through Pisidia, Pamphylia, Perga, and Attalia before sailing back to Antioch which concludes the first preaching journey of the Apostle Paul.

#### **E. Paul participates in Jerusalem Meeting (Acts 15:1-39)**

1. Before Paul sets out on another preaching journey, there is a great debate on what was required of the Gentiles in order for them to be pleasing to God. Many Jews were holding to the belief that they needed to following the ordinances of the Law, so the Apostles and elders came together in Jerusalem so that they might come to a proper understanding of God's will.
2. After much discussion and considering of the evidence put forth by the Apostles, it was determined that no matters of the Law would be hung over the Gentiles. The Holy Spirit was satisfied with these determinations, and Paul and Barnabas (along with Judas, Silas, and others) were sent to Antioch to deliver this message. Many of these men returned to Jerusalem, but Paul and Barnabas (along with others) stayed in Antioch to continue on the work of the Lord.

#### **F. 2nd Preaching Journey (Acts 15:40-18:22)**

1. It was while in Antioch that Paul expressed his desire to go out on another preaching journey, but Barnabas wanted to bring John Mark along. Paul refused since he had left them in the middle of the last journey, so these men split up going their separate ways. Barnabas took John Mark to Cyprus, and Paul took Silas through Syria and Cilicia.
2. This trip seemed to have a strong emphasis on going everywhere they could to share the news of what had been determined by the happenings in Jerusalem. On this trip alone, Paul and Silas travelled through Derbe, Lystra, Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Corinth, Syria, Ephesus, and Caesarea before returning to Jerusalem and Antioch. This trip was certainly eventful for it was on this trip that they met Timothy, received the Macedonian call, met Lydia, and healed the slave girl before being thrown in and rescued from jail. They were also persecuted multiple times, and even had the opportunity to teach at one of the most well known places of religious gathering at the Areopagus in Athens. There was no shortage of happenings on this second preaching journey.

#### **G. 3rd Preaching Journey (Acts 18:23-20:38)**

1. Paul's third journey didn't take to long to get underway. After spending just a little time in Antioch, Paul again sets out for the regions of Galatia and Phrygia. Paul then goes from there into Ephesus where he sets up shop for quite some time while he is teaching in the school of Tyrannus. Unfortunately, the locals rise up against Paul and the Gospel, so he is forced to flee.
2. However, Paul's effort are not hindered for he goes on from Ephesus to Macedonia, Greece, back to Macedonia, and then onto Troas. From Troas, Paul is hurrying to Miletus so that he might make it back in time for Pentecost, but he wasn't going to go for good until he was able to share his emotional goodbye with the elders who were shepherding the flock in Ephesus.

## H. Arrests, Imprisonments, & Trials (**Acts 21:1-28:31**)

1. After spending some time in various places in **21:1-9**, we find Paul coming in contact with the prophet Agabus. He predicts that Paul would soon be bound by the Jews upon arriving in Jerusalem. The people with Paul plead for him not to go, but Paul remained determined to go where he felt he needed to be. *"What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus. Since he would not be persuaded, we said no more except, "The Lord's will be done." (21:13,14)*
  2. Sure enough, upon arriving in Jerusalem Paul is told of possible issues that would arise from the time that he had spend among the Gentiles. The elders in Jerusalem ask him to take a vow, which he does, but the Jews still stirred up a mob that resulted in Paul being bound just as Agabus had predicted back in Caesarea.
  3. From this point on, Paul finds himself before a wide range of individuals and groups. Yet, there is one constant that remained with Paul...he continually shared his story and the impact the Gospel had upon him. Whether it was before fellow Jews, the Sanhedrin, Felix, Festus, Agrippa, or anyone else...Paul was also going to share with them the good news of Jesus.
- ### I. The Final Years (**I Timothy, Titus, & II Timothy**)
1. Paul spent at least two years in Rome under house arrest, and during this time he is believed to have written Philemon, Colossians, Ephesians, and Philippians. Following these two years, many believe that Paul was released, and some even contend that he completed another journey like his previous three.
  2. We don't have any Biblical evidence to this fact, but we do have reason to believe that around 65 or 66 Paul was imprisoned once more. It is during this imprisonment that it is believed that he wrote the second letter to Timothy in which he announces his belief that he would soon be put to death. With that letter ends an approximately 60 year life and approximately 30 year journey of faith for the man we know as the Apostle Paul. So what can we learn from his journey?

## II. What do we learn from Paul's incredible journey?

### A. Humility to Change

1. While I have a great deal of respect for all of those who make the commitment to follow Jesus as disciples, I must admit that I have a particular fondness and high level of respect for those who do so after not having been raised in home where the expectation was for them to be baptized into Christ and live lives faithful to him. While even those who are raised in Christian homes are not guaranteed to become Christians, we must admit that those who are raised in such homes have a tremendous blessing in parents who are training in the instruction of the Lord from an early age. Those of us who fit this description know right from wrong very early on, and we know what God expects of us.
2. Yet, this isn't so for all people. Some people grow up never knowing anything about God or the truth of his word. There is no expectation for them to be disciples of Jesus, and that was true for the Apostle Paul. Sure he was raised to love God, but that love was misapplied in his persecution of the church. Yet, when confronted about the truth of Jesus, we find Paul displaying a true willingness to not just change his ways, but he was willing to go all in with the change that Jesus demanded in his life. He wasn't just go to stop persecuting Christians, but we read in **Acts 9** that *"Immediately he began proclaiming Jesus in the synagogues: "He is the Son of God."* Not many people would be willing to do such an 180 degree life turn, but Paul was humble enough to admit his wrongs and immediately start doing that which was right.

### B. Courage & Conviction

1. Building off this idea of Paul's change, he didn't just superficially change, but he changed in the greatest ways possible. He went from being the one who was doing the persecuting to be the one who was being persecuted because of his faith. Many might be tempted to sit back and coast through life, but Paul was always out on the front foot sharing the Gospel of Jesus with any who would listen.

2. Through my reading and notes, I found at least twelve times during his preaching journeys where Paul was noted as either being flat out rejected or even persecuted himself for the message that he was preaching. And yet, what do we see Paul continually doing? We see him continually picking himself up, dusting himself off, and simply going to the next place where opportunities to teach were awaiting him. What a great example Paul sets for us as a man who's conviction produced courage that allowed him to even endure persecution before of the message that he was delivering concerning Jesus. Are we willing to live with such conviction & courage?

### C. Ability To Make Proper Judgements

1. It is astounding to me the number of times that Paul seemed to say the exact right thing at the right moment which led to opportunities for the message to be taught, believed, and obeyed. Paul came across a very wide range of individuals, and yet he seems to always know just what to say and I would suggest that much of this was a result of Paul keeping his emotions and attitude in check in the moment.
2. Paul, being a well-versed Jew, was obviously aptly equipped to be able to go into the synagogues (as was his custom) and teach his Jewish brothers from the Scriptures. However, I am all the more impressed by Paul's ability to relate to those who are outside of that Jewish framework. This can be easily seen in **Acts 17:16-34** as he stands before the Athenians and preaches God to them from the standpoint of even their own poets! He spoke to them in a way that they would understand, and it paid off great dividends for many believed and joined him. We would do well to try our best to know our audience and to be able to judge the best way to be able to approach them for where they currently are in life. Paul did this to his advantage and great success, and I think we would experience the same satisfaction in building those connections with those we desire to teach.

### D. Continual Focus On God No Matter The Circumstances

1. In **13:42-52**, Paul and Barnabas are rejected by the Jews for their preaching of the Gospel message. And yet, instead of taking personal offense, Paul simply states, *"It was necessary that the word of God be spoken to you first. Since you reject it and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, we are turning to the Gentiles. For this is what the Lord has commanded us..."* It could have been so easy for Paul to go off on his countrymen, but instead, he kept his focus on what the Lord would have him to do in his efforts.
2. This focus on God seems to be what even got Paul through the many difficulties that he faced as an Apostle. He faced all sorts of poor circumstances...even to the point where the brethren abandoned him! And yet, we see him, even at the point of death, giving God's glory, praise, and gratitude for always being there with him. *"At my first defense, no one stood by me, but everyone deserted me. May it not be counted against them. But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that I might fully preach the word and all the Gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion's mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil work and will bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever! Amen."*  
(**II Timothy 4:16-18**) If Paul could keep his focus on God even through this level of difficult trial, then I am confident that the Lord will strengthen us to do the exact same thing no matter what difficult trial or situation we find ourselves in.

What a ride the Apostle Paul went on during his life! A complete change in lifestyle, faith, and even name and yet we find him at the end stages continuing to glorify God for everything He had done through him. There are many other lessons that the Holy Spirit teaches us through Paul in what is found in the story of his life in the Bible, and it is my hope and prayer that each of us will be encouraged and uplifted by our studies in these things over the next few days. May Paul's journey help us as we travel our own journey through this life as disciples of Jesus Christ.