

## Installment #4

### **Before the Gentiles, Before the People**

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Samuel Porter Jones was a popular Methodist evangelist in the Deep South. A unique character, Sam sported a fancy moustache, a classy suit, and a gentleman's cane. He was noted for his straight forward, colorful preaching and his "quotable quotes." Converted and called to preach soon after his little girl drowned, Jones' experience became another example of triumph following tragedy. He discovered God's love and comfort, and in his own unique way told others about it.

Once Jones was preaching a crusade in St. Louis and after several days the crusade committee came to see him. "We brought you here to preach to sinners, but all you have done is pitched into us." "Never mind," replied Jones, "I will get to sinners. I never scald hogs until the water is hot."<sup>1</sup> I imagine that today urban persons under forty would have little or no idea what scalding hogs was about. It was part of the process of preparing hogs for market. Jones used it as a metaphor for evangelism; first you preach to get the church ready and then you preach to the unchurched. As his ministry expanded, Sam Jones reflected, "When I started preaching I was afraid I would hurt somebody's feelings; now I am afraid I won't." Sam Jones was a man possessed; across the years he has had many fellow travelers on the way to Zion, including Saul of Tarsus.

#### **Getting the water hot...**

In more than fifty years of ministry I have talked with many ministers about their call to God's full-time service in the church. Occasionally some of them would say that they were converted and called to preach at the same time. Having received Christ, they knew they were to follow Him wherever He led. Such was Saul of Tarsus. So far in our study, we have touched only on Saul's remarkable conversion. But at the same time Saul was converted, God said: "This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel."<sup>2</sup>

*Even though you have read it now many times, please reread Acts 9:1-3 and then Romans 1:1-7, focusing your attention on anything that may shed light on the nature and extent of God's call to Saul. Always remember that you cannot read the Bible too much.*

---

<sup>1</sup> Quotes on Jones are from the "Great Pulpit Masters" series, Sam Jones, 1960.

<sup>2</sup> Acts 9:15b, NIV.

*It is a principle of revelation that there are always hidden gems in the Scripture. Find them!*

At the same time that Saul was listening to God, God spoke to Ananias in Damascus and gave him a job to do. You remember that Ananias was hesitant about going to Saul and laying hands on him. The Lord told Ananias to go ahead, he would be safe. Why? Now Saul, like Ananias, was under God's control, both were now brothers in the faith. The Lord told Ananias about Saul's ministry, that he would proclaim the gospel "Before the Gentiles, Before the People" of Israel (the Jews). Gentile and Jew, the one gospel for all people, making all of the various people one people in the Lord.

Do you remember that in the last lesson I indicated that Paul was both converted and \_\_\_\_\_? The missing word was called [by God to preach, to help, and to suffer]. When I was ordained, the Bishop recognized in me a call to preach, to serve the sacraments, and to teach the Bible, but no word was mentioned about suffering!

### **Called to proclaim!**

"But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel."

I do not know what you think when you read that God called Saul to be His spokesman to the Gentiles. There is no question but that he felt a divine leading to preach Christ crucified and risen to the vast Gentile peoples all around him. The Book of Acts is crucial to our understanding here. More than just a history book, Acts shows us that Jesus' mission on earth was for *all the earth*, not just the Jews. Had Jesus come only for the Jews, or even *primarily* for the Jews, Jesus could be dismissed as another messiah-figure of little or no relevance for Gentiles. They had plenty of gods and goddesses as it was.

As the Lord approached what was for Him His final Passover, he attempted on many occasions to tell His disciples that He must die in Jerusalem. They did not expect death for Him but rather cheers and roars of approval. In all the gospels the great mistake made by Jesus' disciples was that He would be welcomed by all the people as their new leader. Yet He was tortured and murdered! And Acts tells us the same thing awaited His

apostles. They should not have been surprised because Jesus tried to tell them many times that they would suffer as one reaction to their ministry.

### **Called to suffer!**

”I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.”

As we read Paul’s letters to the churches in Asia Minor and Rome, we are faced with a litany of pain. In Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians, he compares his ministry as a “true apostle” with the false apostles accusing him of hypocrisy. Of himself he says,

*.... with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless floggings, and often near death. Five times I have received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I received a stoning. Three times I was shipwrecked; for a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from bandits, danger from my own people [the Jews], danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers and sisters; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, hungry and thirsty, often without food, cold and naked. And, besides other things, I am under daily pressure because of my anxiety for all the churches.*<sup>3</sup>

Paul had not seen the worst of it either. Tradition tells us he was beheaded on the Appian Way, a road leading to and from Rome, the Eternal City. These were the rewards of an Apostle of the Lord. Of course there were cheers and rejoicings from some, though not many, whose lives were changed by Paul’s ministry. Sins were forgiven and reconciliation was established between people and the Lord God. But first there was a frank confession of sins committed and restitution made where possible.

### **The Message of a True Calling!**

In his famous commentary on The Book of Romans, Karl Barth gives us insight into the true nature of what it means to be called by God for this unique ministry of apostleship.

The importance of an apostle is negative rather than positive. In him a void becomes visible. And for this reason he is something to others; he is able to share grace with them, to focus their attention, and to establish them in waiting and in adoration. The Spirit gives grace through him. Possessing nothing, he has nothing of his own to offer, and so, the more he imparts, the more he receives; and the more he receives, the more he imparts.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> 2 Corinthians 11:23-28, NRSV.

<sup>4</sup> P. 33.

What is Barth saying about being a true apostle?

1. The preaching of an apostle is negative before it is positive. The same is true of the Old Testament prophets. The apostle must help us confess the sins of our nation or group before we can hear the good news of redemption, the promise of forgiveness and eternal life.
2. Through the apostle we see a “void” in ourselves, that is, we see sin in our own hearts. The apostle is willing, even eager, that he be a mirror of our lives. The apostle is humble, not proud.
3. But because we see sin in ourselves, we also see God’s grace made available through Christ. The apostle’s message revolves around Christ the Lord, especially *His crucifixion and resurrection*. The apostle wants us to see Jesus, not himself.
4. The apostle receives grace too because the Spirit reminds him that what he shares with others comes from God and not from his own gifts and graces. The preaching of the apostle can be summed up in two words: *God alone!* There is no works-righteousness! Paul insisted that his message came from God, not from human beings, even those who had been disciples. Each of us must learn to listen to God for the content of our teaching.

Modern ministry is supposed to be an extension of that of the prophets and apostles. In our tradition hands are laid upon the heads of those ordained as ministers as an indication of the continuation of God’s message of salvation for the world. Your minister participates in this line of authority and humility. He or she is supposed to be a reflection of Barth’s four insights on the nature of Gospel ministry. For example, how does the minister of your church stack up against these four criteria?

1. My minister’s message reflects God’s judgment and God’s grace.
2. My minister’s message helps me see myself as I really am.
3. My minister’s message points me to Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.
4. My minister’s message makes it clear that I cannot earn my way to heaven; heaven is received as a free gift of God’s grace.

### **Who is Lord?**

Do you remember that at the beginning of 1 Corinthians the Apostle Paul chews the people out because they were claiming special privileges since some claimed to be “of Peter,” others “of Apollos,” still others “of Paul,” and, naturally, the true ones say

they are “of Jesus.” So Paul asks, “Is Christ divided?” “Was Paul crucified for you?” In Corinth there were these little groups, each claiming to be the true church, so to speak. “No way!” says Paul. An apostle is a conduit through which the Holy Spirit channels His grace, nothing more. In the 17<sup>th</sup> chapter of John’s gospel, our Lord forbids what Paul faced in Corinth. Christians are to be one people. We are to promote whatever binds us together and turn away from whatever tears us apart.

--Jerry Mercer

--July 24, 2008

### **What do we learn from our passage?**

1. We learn that the word “call” has many meanings. Does the word “call” have a special meaning for your understanding of Christian life?
2. Would you say your minister is a “Gospel preacher?” Why do you give the answer you do?
3. Have you known anyone who formerly hated the Gospel but now embraces it? If so, do you see Saul of Tarsus in that person? In what way?

### **A thought for your prayers**

“We must be content to live without watching ourselves live, to work without expecting an immediate reward, to love without an instantaneous satisfaction, and to exist without any special recognition.”<sup>5</sup>

**Note:** From this point on we will refer to Saul as Paul. Why do you think his name will be changed (cf. Acts 13:9)?

---

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Merton, No Man is an Island, p. 121.