***Colossae and the Apostle Paul

Colossians 1:1-2

Col-002***

**The church at Colossae**

Turn in your Bible now to the book of Colossians 1:1-2. Our subject is The Salutation, segment number two. The apostle Paul was not the founder of the church in the city of Colossae, nor had he visited it at the time that he wrote to it. This church was founded somewhere between 52 and 55 AD during Paul's three-year ministry in Ephesus on his third missionary journey. It was founded by some convert out of that period of ministry, probably a man named Epaphras who was from Colossae. And the book was written 7 to 10 years after that. The church was founded 7 to 10 years before the book was written to the church. This period of extensive evangelistic outreach in Asia by Christians, while Paul operated from his base in and Ephesus, affected the three cities which were in close proximity in the Lycus River Valley, the cities of Laodicea, Hierapolis, and Colossae once more. Here they are on our chart.

The territory here is Asia Minor, and Hierapolis, Laodicea, and Colossae are here in a tri-city area. This is part now of modern Turkey. All three of these cities were extensively affected by the period of great evangelistic outreach when Paul was operating from Ephesus. Acts chapter 19:10 refers to this when we read, "And this took place for two years, that all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks." This is referring to Paul's teaching ministry from a certain home, a school of Tyrannus for two years, having previously been in Ephesus for one year. His last two years he's running this school. And the outreach is enormous throughout Asia from those who are taught and those who are converted. And Colossae and her two sister cities were in the Lycus River Valley in the territory of Phrygia, which was an area of the Roman province of Asia.

**The City of Colossae**

The ruins of Colossae were found in 1835. Colossae was located on the right bank here on the South Bank of the Lycus River, which is a tributary of the Meander River. These are sizable waterways of the time. And Colossae is 100 miles east of Ephesus, which was the base from which Paul operated relative to these three cities. The city of Colossae was 10 miles from Laodicea, the one to which one of the books of the letters of Revelation were written, and it was 13 miles from Hierapolis. The word Hierapolis means "holy city," but it was anything but holy. I stress all this is to point out to you that Colossae was a real geographic place. It actually existed on the face of the earth. It actually came into being. It actually had human beings. They actually functioned. They actually carried on their lives and, in time, the city degenerated and now very little even in the way of ruins is left there, but it was an actual city on the face of the earth.

**The Book of Mormon**

This is unlike for example, the geographic references in the Book of Mormon, all of which are made up by Joseph Smith. And to this day, nobody has ever been able to find the places to which Joseph Smith refers in the supposed book of Mormon from the golden plates that were delivered to him. And the reason they can't find them is because they never existed. Now, if there was ever a place that you could prove that a document was false, you would do it with geography. And the Bible consistently talks to us about geographic locations that are actually there. Archeologists go and they uncover what once was there. These are real places on the real face of the earth. But in the case of Joseph Smith in the Book of Mormon, these places never existed. And therefore, it indicates that the Book of Mormon is a false book. It is not from God. It is a book simply made up by man and we're not going to apologize for that because the Mormon Church itself knows that it has a problem with geographic locations. And its most recent conclusion was that they must spiritualize these places. When Joseph Smith refers to a place called the Beautiful Land, they just have to spiritualize it because they can't find any place on the face of the earth for that. They have sent some of their young bright scholars to universities around the country to learn to be archeologists for the explicit purpose for trying to find where on earth these places are that the Book of Mormon refers to. This is no problem with the Bible. We know almost all of these places very accurately and consistently. Archeology has confirmed what the Bible says. So I tell you that for your encouragement, the Bible is a true book; it is a book written by God; and, it could have been tripped up very easily on geographic references. In time, the city of Colossae was overshadowed by Laodicea and Hierapolis in the tri-city area.

**Epaphras**

The trade roots moved north to Laodicea; and, the pleasure center moved to Hierapolis with its sexual temple worship. Epaphras, who was from the church in Colossae, informed Paul in Rome about some herd teachings that were now taking root in among the Christians in Colossae and in the Lycus River Valley. 2 Timothy 1:15 seems to refer to this when Paul says, "You are aware of the fact that all who are in Asia turned away from me, among whom are Phygellus and Hermogenes." Paul refers to this very thing - that there was a heresy beginning to move through these churches here in Asia that were the offspring of Paul's ministry indirectly.

**Wolves will eat up the Flock**

This may also be the background of Paul's warning to the Ephesian Christians - to be on guard against false teachers. Paul was very much aware of the fact that false teachers would follow him. So in Acts 20, as he was departing from the believers in the Ephesian congregation and the churches in the city of Ephesus, in Acts 20:29-30, Paul says, "I know that after my departure, savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. And from among your own selves, men will arise speaking perverse things to draw away the disciples after them." So Paul says, "Be on your guard." He's talking to all the pastor-teacher elders that have met with him at the seacoast to bid him a Godspeed on his journey to Jerusalem. And he says, "This is going to happen. They're going to follow. The false teachers are going to come in, and there are wolves to eat up the flock."

What he meant to these pastors was: "It is your duty to protect your flock from false doctrine, and you take care of the bozos that come in to teach false doctrine." And there've been an occasion or two where I've had false doctrine teachers here at Berean church, and I've stood at that very door and said, "You are seriously in error. That is a heresy that you have been discussing and teaching in a Sunday school class, and don't come back again." And I meant it. And we don't expose the flock to ignorance of those who have their own agenda. So this was a serious matter. The apostle Paul did not take it lightly. When Epaphras comes and says that some terrible things are being taught back in the tri-city area of the Lycus River Valley, and Colossae is being hit with these ideas, these false teachers were actually teaching things that were countering what the apostle Paul had taught them.

**Equalization of the Religions of the World**

Among the things that they were, in short, teaching was (to summarize it): they were simply teaching these people not to be the right-wing fundamentalist. Putting it in our terms today (where Paul was) - they were telling them to have a broader view and a more expansive, sophisticated outlook. They urged them to broaden their intellectual horizons and to accept the equally valid beliefs of other religions. The United Nations today is now pursuing a course in one of its programs - its conventions of bringing about an equalization of the religions of the world. Now, if that doesn't make goosebumps pop up on your neck, then you're half dead, and please see your doctor immediately. That is because this is exactly the world religion that we've all been taught about in scripture. And here the United Nations is laying the groundwork for the false prophet to have one united world religion. And what they're doing is to say, "We must stop these things that one religion teaches which are a criticism of another religion."

**False Teachers**

We cannot have one religion telling another one that it is false. Yes, we can. The attack on Paul's ministry focused specifically on Jesus Christ by these false teachers because Jesus Christ made Christianity a very restricted religion. With Jesus there was no way to heaven except through Him. There was no way except His way. You could not be born again. You could not survive in the devil's world except through Christ. He was the way, the life, and the truth. And that is still true today. In every religious system, and every cult, and every great denomination, some of whom were once true, but now are falsely deviated from the very ground of their founders integrity to the scriptures, those people are out of sync with the Word of God. They're false teachers, and they call themselves Christians, and they run church programs, and they have offering plates, and they have everything the church is supposed to have, and they do not have the insight of the Word of Truth because they have deviated from the centrality of Christ, the preeminent one in the program of God.

**Mystical Religions**

Consequently, when we read Colossians, as you will see, this is the most crystal centered book that Paul has written. This is the book that centers on Jesus Christ more than any other of his epistles, because that was the focus of the attack. The heresy in Colossae included several features. It had a human viewpoint philosophy, claiming superior wisdom to that which was found in Christian doctrine. This was the Greek influence. This was possessed supposedly by only an elite group enlightened by the masters of wisdom who in fact were demons. Salvation was not through faith but through secret superior knowledge. And interestingly enough, these people were teaching that you did not get this superior knowledge through your intellect, but you received this by a mystical experience, not the objective standard of a revelation from God like the Bible, but from a subjective how you feel about it situation.

**Superior Knowledge**

Who do you know today that centers on that kind of approach to knowledge? The charismatics. How they feel subjectively is what determines truth to them, not what the Bible says. And they are not hesitant to say, as I heard Pat Boone one time on television speaking with another Charismatic saying, "Isn't it wonderful that we now have an experience with Jesus? Before, all we had was Bible doctrine." He had it before, but he's lost it now, and he doesn't know it. And in that circle, no one's going to sound an alarm and say, "Wait a minute, you're undermining your eternity, and you'll be saved by the skin of your teeth. But boy will you ever have a poor and poverty-stricken eternity." This superior knowledge is not by the Word, but some mystical experience. And only the elite in know how to could guide you to this superior wisdom about God and about heaven.

**Aestheticism or Libertarianism**

It was the cult knowledge. That's why it dealt with astrology. It dealt with magic. It dealt with superstitions, and all this was coming into the Christian church. Epaphras says, "It's terrible." There was another thing. They placed great emphasis on performing religious rituals. This was a Jewish influence: circumcision; dietary laws; and, holy days. So this book is going to talk about keeping holy days and dietary laws and all that. And Epaphras says, "You can't believe it. Here are these Christians, in their Christian freedom, just itching to get back under the restrictions of the Mosaic Law as if this were going to appeal to God for blessing in some way. This system also stressed aestheticism to control the human body, which was viewed as inherently evil. Aestheticism means that you crucify yourself in all the ways that you can. They said that all matter is evil. And this led to aestheticism, or, on the other hand, it led to libertarianism. Some said, "Don't let the sin nature do what it wants to do. Restrict your body. Punish it." Others said, "Wear the sin nature out. Do everything it wants to do until it's exhausted. Then you'll be free of evil.

Furthermore, Epaphras told Paul, "They're beginning to worship angels." They think that angels, by the Greek philosophy, are things they call emanations from God. These holy emanations in the Greeks in the Greek world were called "eons." They were supposedly created by God. Jesus was an early first emanation, and because He was near God, He was a Holy One. But as these "eons" (these emanations) recreated another one and another one, the farther they got from God, the more evil they become. And the result was that they created material things, and that's how what they created was evil. All of this is human viewpoint speculation. They had to explain how there is evil in man, and how there are these terrible things that take place among societies. And so they made it all up. And these creatures were angel-like creatures. They had to be appeased, and they had to be placated. Therefore, they had to be worshiped if there was to be any salvation.

The primary attack, as I say, of these false teachers was against Jesus Christ because He was an emanation created by God. He was not God. He was just one of the angelic "eons." They denied that the physical body of Jesus ever exists because Jesus was holy, and His body would be made of material matter. Therefore, it would be sinful. And, therefore, He had no body. You say, "Well, the people saw His body." Yes, but they said that if you went up and grabbed his hand, your hand would go right through it. If you went and touched Him, your hand would go right through Him. And this was superior knowledge. Ephesus says, "I can't believe this stuff is being believed even by some of the people in our church." Well, how did they explain Christ? And while He was just disguised as a man (a spirit being disguised as a man), they denied the sufficiency of Jesus Christ to provide salvation through His death on the cross. They required human works as well.

**Jehovah's Witnesses**

Now all of these things are still with us today. They're all in these cults and religious systems in one way or another because Satan is the inventor of them. So they keep cropping up. Well, what do Jehovah's Witnesses say? The Jehovah's Witnesses say that Jesus Christ was a man. He was just an ordinary human being Man. At one time, at His baptism, the spirit of God came upon Him. Now he became a special man of God. When they crucified Him, the spirit of God left Him. Christ's Spirit left Him, and He was just an ordinary human being up there: the sin nature and all, on the cross. That's exactly the kind of speculations that these people were teaching. So, these Colossian Christians who had salvation had been freed from this conglomeration of Judaism and Greek paganism. And Paul challenges them in this book for their foolish willingness to give up their freedom, their security, and their peace in Christ. And we must confess that we are amazed to this day that people will go back into the most insane opinions about God and spiritual things, even when they have been within the security of God through salvation; the freedom that comes from knowing Him; and, the Word of God.

**The Apostle Paul**

The Apostle Paul deals with the Colossian heresy by giving the Colossians a firm understanding of the doctrine of Christ. And that's why the doctrine of Christ is a big doctrine in this book. The writer of Colossians is the Apostle Paul. Paul is the man who had watched the execution of Stephen with complete approval. Paul is the man who had never met Jesus but was convinced that he was still dead, and that He was not God or the Messiah. Paul himself was really angered by the accusation of Steven that the Sanhedrin and the Pharisees were blind spiritually, and trying to create some reality of their own about Jesus Christ. When the Bible declares something is true, that's reality. And to pretend that it is false does not make it does not make it so. But the consequences are horrendous. Reality is reality. And electricity at a certain level, and a certain power, and a certain voltage will blow you to kingdom come.

That is reality. And you can say, "Not in my case, I have a great spiritual quality, it'll go right through me." But that reality will still kill you. Two years ago, Irwin Moon from the Moody Bible Institute Science Department made those splendid movies on science. I had seen him personally in San Antonio, at one of his demonstrations of science he would take about the country. He would come to a high point of his meeting after demonstrating awesome things from science, and he would get up on a little platform, and it would shoot voltage through his body, and on the ends of his fingertips, he had metal tips, and he'd hold his hands out there, and when they'd give him the nod, they'd turn on the current and electricity was flying all over that auditorium, and over his head like lightning bolts. And on this particular occasion, he was standing on a platform, and somebody asked him something, and he said, "Well see, if it is set on number so-and-so something." And a lady next to me said, "Oh, go and check it yourself because if it were wrong, he would be out of sync." The reality is that if it were in a proper relationship to the human body (in sync with the body), you can take these vast jolts of voltage of electricity through you, and zip, and it'll come out of a metal piece, and make quite a display. Somebody asked him, "Do you ever have any aftereffects?" He said, "It keeps me a little awake, and hard to fall asleep after the meeting," but otherwise, it didn't hurt him at all because he was coordinated with it. But if he had ever set the thing wrong, he would never make another show because he'd have died on the spot. That's the reality of electricity in the wrong relationship to the human body.

So, the apostle Paul said, "You people are saying that something is real. It is not real, and your pretense that it's real will not make it so." Paul was driven therefore to imprison; to punish; and, to execute these Christians that he so despised. Paul was simply not pleased with the claims of Stephen - that Jesus of Nazareth was the long-awaited Messiah of Israel. The idea that Jesus was raised from the grave when, in fact, the disciples had stolen his body, made Paul mad. That salvation was not by keeping the works of the Mosaic Law as the Jews believe to this day, but by a grace gift from God through faith in Jesus Christ Savior - that really irritated Paul.

It had first made Paul mad that so many Jews believed Stephen's message, and they were trusting in Jesus. Paul, therefore, approved of the arrest of Stephen on the charge of blasphemy. Stephen met the charge by accusing the Sanhedrin court of murdering Israel's innocent Messiah savior Jesus. And Stephen called the leaders a bunch of hypocrites who did not obey the spirit of the Mosaic Law. They were blind to spiritual reality while claiming to know spiritual reality. They went about creating their own reality which really did not exist. Stephen declared his vision of Jesus Christ in heaven standing at the Father's right hand, waiting to receive Him. At that point, the Sanhedrin went wild with the accusations of blasphemy, and the apostle Paul joined them in that attack. So this man Paul is extremely significant. He is probably the most influential human being in all of human history after Jesus Christ. Nobody has had greater influence than Paul, and nobody has a greater problem with the Jewish people today. They cannot blow this guy off. And that's why, when we begin this study of Colossians, we begin with the word, "Paul, the Apostle of Jesus Christ." Who is this man? Well, he was born somewhere between 1 and 10 AD in the city of Tarsus in the Roman province of Cilicia. Tarsus was located right about there (see maps) in the province of Cilicia.





**Tarsus**

So, this was the proximity here of our three cities in Lycus Valley. Paul was born here. Here is Antioch that became his base of operation down here at Jerusalem. So the apostle was born in the city of Tarsus, and we have this recorded for us in Acts 22:3. Tarsus was on the swift crystal-clear Cydnus River, which was 10 miles inland from the Mediterranean Sea. Cleopatra sailed on this river in her barge in 38 B.C. to meet Anthony in Tarsus. Alexander the Great swam in the Cydnus River and, when he was overheated, he became so chilled that he almost died. Tarsus was the capital of the province of Cilicia in which it was located, and it was at the crossroads of the ancient trade routes from east to west. And it was the center of commercial enterprise and a political power. It was the jumping off point of the caravans.

Tarsus was a Roman town, and therefore it was given the honored name, the title of Metropolis, and it was a free city with a Jewish colony. The Tarsens were enthusiastic for learning and for philosophy which surpassed even that of Athens and Alexandria. Tarsus University was not superior to other universities, but it certainly was more zealous. The University of Tarsus, furthermore, was made up of its own provincial inhabitants. Other schools were filled with foreigners. The students from the University of Tarsus began their studies there, and then they went abroad to complete their education. This was the pattern that Paul followed. The Tarsen grads were famed for their ease and their fluency in speaking. So Paul was very proud of his relationship to Tarsus. He referred to it as being a citizen of no mean city in Acts 21:39. He had a certain patriotic satisfaction and pride.

Paul's father, we are told in Acts 22:28, was a Roman citizen. And so Paul was freeborn, and thus was a Roman citizen. Paul grew up, therefore, in a big city. He was not a country boy. And maybe this is the reason that in his writing he makes little use of the beauties of nature. Paul left Tarsus at an early age, and he was reared in Jerusalem. Acts 22:3 tells us that. In cosmopolitan Tarsus, Paul received the background that enabled him to make the Christianity of the Jewish race intelligible to the Greek and Roman world. It was the source of many comparisons that he used. In Tarsus, Paul learned to speak the Kione Greek. This is the common Greek language - the language of trade in which the New Testament was written. He had an ease and he had a swing that was unique among New Testament writers in the use of the language.

**Tent-Making**

He also spoke Hebrew and Aramaic, the common language of the people of Palestine of Israel. Paul learned his trade of tent-making from his father In Tarsus. Tarsus was a city which was noted for its woven cloth. All Jewish boys to this day, in an Orthodox Jewish home, no matter if they're a doctor or lawyer or whatever they are, they must learn a trade. They have to learn how to make candles. They have to learn how to be a craftsman. They have to learn how to be a carpenter. They have to have a trade. So if their profession goes down, they still have a means of livelihood. In Paul's case, as a Jewish boy, while he was highly educated, he had to learn the trade of his family, which was tent-making. Tents were important for caravans; for the nomads; and, for armies. And this industry that he participated in is referred to in Acts 13.

In Acts 18:3, the religions of the world all met in cosmopolitan Tarsus. And that gave Paul a real insight into hedonism as a Jewish family. They would not be in too much social relationships with the hedons of Tarsus, but they would have it at close hand to observe Tarsus school, the future apostle to the Gentile in his social; his political; his intellectual; his moral; and, his religious life. And he had at least one sister. Nothing is known about his mother.

Now, his religious training was also important. He studied Judaism in Jerusalem under the famed Rabbi Gamaliel. Acts 22:3 tells us he did this for about five or six years. And we were told that Paul was a youth who responded zealously to his religious training. And how pleasant that is to find some kid who grows up in a Christian home, and has good training, and he goes positive to it instead of being a thunderhead and blowing it off.

Acts 26:4-5: "So then, all Jews know my manner of life from my youth up, which from the beginning was spent among my own nation and at Jerusalem. Since they have known about me for a long time previously, if they're willing to testify, that I lived as a Pharisee according to the strict sect of our religion." And so Paul says, I was a very devoted Pharisee. What my religious training had - the religious training I had been given, I responded to.

One of our young men this past week has talked to me about his disgust in the associates who are in his area of contact of his generation (his peers), and what they think is fun, and what they think is a significant thing to do with life. One of the things they were shocked at was that he was going to be a counselor in summer camp for two weeks, and they want to know: "Why would you do that? How can that be any fun?"

Now that is an insane question. If there's anything that's fun, it is to be a counselor in summer camp. The only thing that possibly is more fun is to come to a church banquet. But summer camp is hard to beat when you talk about fun and what an impact on the lives of the people we deal with. And not only those campers but ourselves as well. And this young man says, "Hey God, this is a ministry for God, and this is my calling, and I'm happy to respond to it." And then he was just beside himself. I thought I was going to have to try to calm him down as he became outraged, as he'd think about the things that his generation thinks are the wonderful things to do. Well it's very nice to know that here this kid sat in our nursery, and now he is a young adult, and he responds to the background of Christian training that had been given to him. That shows a lot of smarts.

This was the nature of the Apostle Paul. He was one who was responsive (and zealously responsive) to his religious training. He was proud of his Jewish lineage, and he boasted of it in 2 Corinthians 11:22 and Philippians 3:5-6. His family in Tarsus preserved the Jewish traditions, and Paul attended the synagogue faithfully because his father was a faithful Pharisee. Paul took his ideals and his convictions from the training of the Rabbis, not from his contemporaries. And that's what is so hard to do. We see this in the academy. These kids get up to the upper grades and they get itchy. They can't wait to get to the public school where it's at. And because parents are now not in charge of their children, but parents are subject to the whims and demands and the opinions of their children, they let them go to the public school.

I'm going to write a letter to all of our parents who have kids in the upper grade. I'm going to give them a personal warning that some of them are under pressure to get out of the godly restraint, and climate, and observation, and training of a school like BCA. And if you do it, you're opening yourself to a lot of grief because your kids are itching. If they don't like this school, they're itching to get out there to the world system. It will corrode them; and, it will destroy them. And the apostle Paul was someone who said, I don't look to the kids of my generation. I look to the training of the Word of God, which I receive from my mother from my father as a strict Pharisee in our home. In Galatians 1:13-14, that we just read, was the very thing that Paul is stressing - that he has taken his signals from his family background.

In verse 13, he says, "For you have heard of my former manner of life in Judaism. I used to persecute the church of God beyond measure and try to destroy it. And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries; among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions." Paul was reared and he lived a strict Jewish Pharisee home (Acts 23:6, Acts 26:5). Paul's Roman citizenship and his Greek culture background never overshadowed his heritage as a Jew. That spiritual guidance was the main fact of his life. We see kids who grow up here, and they become big in body, and small in mind, and they turn to the world system. They just think that's where it's at: "Boy, look at what the world does. I just love that." They didn't stand on the side, as Paul did and said, "You guys are a bunch of clods, you're spiritually blinded. You think something is great, and you're going to find that all you've done is turned yourself into an animal."

The apostle Paul was not afraid to stand alone. The main influence on his life was the Word of God. His sincere conviction of the truth of Judaism and the heresy of Christianity expressed itself in the persecution of Christians because he was zealous for the truth. He was willing to persecute Christians that he felt were blasphemos. Paul had religion with rituals, and he had human good works, but he lacked eternal life in Christ the Messiah Savior. That was the difference. He could stand up and tell you (look you in the eye and say), "I keep all of the Mosaic Laws." The 10 commandments is what he meant. And then one day he said, "I discovered the worst kind of sins were not overt, because I got hit by the commandment that says, 'Thou shalt not covet." When I came to the 10th commandment, I realized that this was something on the inside of me, and I realized that there were all kinds of mental attitude sins up in my mind. I didn't do it overtly, but in my mind I ran through the sins that I was engaging in then." And Paul said, "Then I saw that I was crushed - I, who was assured that I was right with God. I now saw how terrible my condition was."

So the Apostle Paul took his training seriously - his instruction at home, and his instruction with rabbis. And he was a man who had all the ritual and religion, but he did not have salvation through the Messiah. The reason for such insanity of religion is that he was negative towards sound doctrine. He was negative to what the Christians who knew better were telling him.

Why is it that Christians were always hated for being right? Why is it that Christians are always getting the back of somebody's hand as if we were the threat to society, when we are the salt and the light of society? We are the ones that are going to be caring for society. And how do we do that? Through the Word of God.

This Tuesday, Plymouth Park Baptist church is going to give me the award of the month that they do every month. They call it the light and salt award. That award means that if you have been a former marine salt, and you have some enlightenment, you get an award. No, it doesn't mean that what they're doing is playing on the Word of God. The Word of God says Christians are to be the light of the world, reflecting Christ. We are to be the salt of the preserving of human society by being the salt of the world.

But no matter who gets an honor like that, if it's true, it is only true for one thing. For reason. That is because that person is sounding forth the Word of doctrine. That's all. If he's not sounding forth and practicing the integrity of the Word of doctrine, he's neither a light, nor is he any salt.

**Noah**

Who made the all-time great salt? Noah. He was the real light of his generation. He kept telling him the truth about salvation. He kept telling him the truth about the prophetic future that they all had, that God told him he believed: "That you're all going to be drowned in 120 years." And then the clock kept ticking down, He was not only the light, but he was the salt. He preserved part of that human society in his family. And the day they got on the Ark, there was only one other believer in the whole world. It was one week's time before departure time. And that believer died that week.

Methuselah, the oldest man that ever lived, died one week before the rain started. So they buried Methuselah with honors, and then God said, "Get in. It is shipping time now. It is departure time. The journey is to begin." And because people believed the Word of God in Noah's circle, they were saved. He was a light and he was a preserving salt, because he gave him the Word of God.

So the Apostle Paul was not a light, and he was not a preserving salt to society because he was actually rejecting the Word of God. Today, the world wants to silence the Christians. They want to silence the voice of the people who sound forth against the evils of our world. And they want to become angry because we tell them that there's no way to heaven except Jesus Christ, and that we tell them that the lusts of the sin nature are wrong.

Religion and faith in Christ are not the same thing (Philippians 3:4-7). What Paul needed was doctrine - the doctrine of salvation by grace through Christ Jesus, and positive volition to be able to believe that, and thus to serve God. The day came when a tremendous change came in the life of this man that is so important to all the human race. Paul, in his twenties, returned home from Jerusalem where he had been studying with Gamaliel. He returned to the family business of making tents. At about the age of 30, he went back to Jerusalem. He may have come with a wife, or he may have been a widower. The Bible doesn't tell us. There's no mention of it. Normally a Pharisee, by the age of 30, is married or he cannot have a position with the Sanhedrin.

So we have good reason to believe that Paul was married. Now his wife was with him, or he was a widower. He apparently had no children, or if he had, they had died. Paul came and took on the role of a persecutor. He turned to a systematic extermination of the Christians as a representative of the high priest. He was authorized to try and to punish Christians. Christians gave testimony about Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit, which made Paul very uneasy. Christ's miracles and divine power had been demonstrated to many people, and that tradition was widely spread. That was a problem for Paul. Paul threw these people into prison. He beat the Christians bloody. He voted for their deaths as blasphemers, he tells us in Acts 3. Christians fled to other cities to escape Paul. But when they fled, they carried the gospel message in, Acts 8:4 says. They spread it everywhere.

Paul, in an arrogant self-righteous rage, pursued these fleeing Christians then to return them in chains to Jerusalem for trial. Paul was certain that Jesus Christ had been a blasphemous imposter; that He was still dead; that His body had been stolen from the tomb by the disciples; and, that to persecute the followers of Jesus was to serve God. Paul was very certain of that. He points that out to us in Acts 26. This was spiritual blindness that he thought was really speaking the mind of God.

Acts 26:9: "So, then I thought to myself that I had to do many things hostile to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And this is just what I did in Jerusalem. Not only did I lock up many of the saints in prison, having received authority from the chief priest, but also when they were being put to death, I cast my vote against them, and as I punished them often in all the synagogues. I tried to force them to blaspheme. And being furiously enraged at them, I kept pursuing them even to foreign cities. While thus engaged, I was journeying to Damascus with the authority and the commission of the Chief Priest."

So the apostle Paul gives us a little insight here of how brutal he could be. We think about Paul, and I'm trying to give you a picture that this man came out of some really terrible treatment of other human beings.

**Hitler**

Yesterday was VE Day, Victory in Europe Day. And one of the things that happened near the end of the war in Europe was that they finally overran the concentration camps. And finally all the world could see what the Nazi Germans had done to millions of human beings - what they had done on a day-by-day basis to men, women, and children. And you wonder: "How could anybody have been so heartless? How could anybody had the stomach to do what we saw here in the things that were being done to these human beings just because they were Jews?" And when the highest echelon (Patton and Bradley and Eisenhower, and the rest of them) came through the camps to see it for the first time, they were enraged. It was unbelievable to them that this kind of inhumanity had been had taken place.

**Religion**

Well, in fact, Hitler was a religious man. Hitler's the one who said that he is doing the Lord's work by dealing with the Jews who rebelled against Christ. And here's Paul, a religious man doing these brutalities to human beings. Put yourself in his place. How many people can you comfortably beat up? How many people can you bloody up? How many people can you put into agonies? How many people can you vote to put to death because they disagree with you and your religious views? This man was an agent of Satan, plain, pure, and simple, but religious to the core.

**Damascus**

Damascus was a city which was north of Jerusalem. It was north of the country of Israel, and it was a prime target for persecution. So Paul set his eyes on persecuting the Christians who had fled to Damascus. Paul approached the city with his caravan on a clear pleasant day. He was pushing hard to get to the city so they could all rest. Suddenly at midday, a brilliant light flashed from the sky around Paul and his companions, and he all fell to the ground in terror. Paul then heard a voice from heaven asking why he was persecuting Him. Not all the people in the party understood the words. Some of them heard the words, and some of that said that it sounded like thunder. But Paul, it seems, alone, was the one who understood the distinctive meaning of the words. He heard this voice asking why he was persecuting Him.

**Jesus Christ**

Paul looks up and he sees someone in this brilliant light. Paul asks who the speaker was, and he gives a clue of who he suspected it was because he used the word, "Lord." He says, "Lord, who are you?" To use the word "Lord" is to indicate deity. So he knew that he was dealing with some deity. And he says, “Who are you?" The speaker said that he was Jesus, whom Paul was persecuting by attacking His body, the church believers. Paul was warned that his attacks were pointless since he was kicking against the sharp blade of reality.

**Reality**

And here we are again to the point of reality. This is the difficulty with people today. If you are a young person in this church, you have been reared with reality in the instruction. If you turn your back upon the instruction you have received here; if you take it lightly; and, if you are indifferent to it, then you are kicking against reality, or doing exactly what the apostle Paul did.

Scripture is reality, folks, and anyone who resists what the Bible says is out of touch with reality. And you cannot change reality. Those who are out of touch with spiritual reality are spiritually insane. And they reflect that insanity in their destructive conduct. Because Paul was spiritually insane, he was out of touch with spiritual reality. That's why he was such a brutal beast to all the Christians that he could get his hands on. Now he never got over that. After he became a Christian, he grieved at this; he set it aside; he confessed; he put it behind him; and, he could refer to it to show people how deeply involved he was in this terrible action against Christians while he thought he was serving God. And his point was: "If you don't follow the doctrines of scripture, you're going to go far astray." Well, in an instant on that road outside of Damascus, Paul came to spiritual reality. And out of the spiritual insanity which had been driving him, he realized that his cherished religion of Judaism, which rejected Jesus Christ, was false.

It was an anti-God religion. And that's very hard to do. Some of you ask us to continue to pray for your parents; your grandparents; or, your relatives who are not believers, even though they are religious people. And the older they get, the harder it will be for them to say, "I was a stupid dumbbell. The religion I've been pursuing is just as false crazy as it could be. How could I believe that?" And you want them to admit they're wrong. The older they are, the harder it is to do. And for the apostle Paul here, such a deputy of Judaism, head-and-shoulders above his peers, and all of his life devoted to what he had been taught, to say, "What I had believed was wrong," was a tremendous soul-wrenching experience. Paul had seen Jesus Christ alive. He knew he was the Messiah God-Man, and he trusted Him for salvation as his Lord, and as his God. Upon being born against spiritually. Paul asked Jesus what he should do now. And the Lord tells Paul to go into Damascus. And then Paul stands up and finds that he's blind. He's groping along, groping around, trying to get the feel for the animals that were with him that he'd been riding, and the people who were in the party with him, taken by the hand. And the silent procession moves toward Damascus. This caravan is odd.

Paul is told to go to Damascus, to the home of a disciple, a man named Ananias, who is a representative of the Sanhedrin on the street (which was named "Straight.") Paul is inwardly thrilled by the illumination of the spiritual reality of his experience. And now he is totally subject to Jesus Christ as he once was totally subject to his religious Judaism. What a change, and what an experience! And now he goes up into the guest room in the house of Ananias. Ananias is somewhat amazed. He has a consternation: "What happened, Paul? We've all heard about you. You are famous up here in Damascus as you are down in Jerusalem. We've all been waiting for you, to help you with the persecution of these confounded Christians that are spreading their hearses and are blessed to be about this Jesus of Nazareth. And we are all waiting to hear from you. The religious leaders of the city are waiting to meet with you." And Paul says, "I've got to go up to the room. And he goes up to the guest room and closes the door, and he sits there in the blindness of his eyes trying to put together what has happened, trying to put together where God is taking him.

And this blind penitent then has an experience that even tops the one that he had on the Damascus Road, and we'll tell you about that and his consequences next time.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1995

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