

Sermon 3-14-18 God's will and my worldview Acts 9

Dear Living Ones in the Lord:

Have you ever experienced deep darkness? Have you ever been in a place where complete darkness covered you?

Has anyone here been to Mammoth Cave in Kentucky? I have been told that when you go into the cave and get to a certain point the tour guide turns the light off and you find yourself surrounded in complete darkness. From people who have experienced this I have been told that it is an overwhelming and scary feeling.

There is an element of fear when covered completely in darkness. When the power goes out in our homes and it is in the middle of the night we experience complete helplessness trying to find our way around our own home in the dark.

Now imagine if you had to trust someone else to lead you in the darkness. Think of the trust you need in that person to take you by the hand and lead you.

This happened to the Apostle Paul. Remember Paul's background?

- Originally named Saul after Israel's first king
- Born into a Hebrew Jewish family
- Studied under Gamaliel a leading Jewish scholar
- Became a leader among the Pharisees
- Became a Roman citizen through his father

Before Paul was converted by the Lord Jesus to the faith, he was a persecutor of Christians. Before Paul saw the light of Christ he says he was....

- Of the tribe of Benjamin
- A Hebrew of Hebrews
- In regard to the law, a Pharisee
- As for zeal, persecuting the church
- As for legalistic righteousness, faultless

If anyone kept the Old Testament law of the Jewish faith it was Paul. But Paul realized that he was in the dark during this time of his life. After he was led out of the darkness, Paul says: "But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ." Philippians 3:7

Listen to how Paul describes God's mercy upon him: "Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy...The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly..." I Timothy 1:13f

Paul was in the dark because of his unbelief. But Jesus appeared to him while Paul was on the way to Damascus to persecute more Christians.

In Acts 9 Jesus appear to Paul and says to him: "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" Saul replies: "Who are you, Lord?"

Jesus says: "I am Jesus, who you are persecuting. Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

Saul, Paul, got up from the ground and discovered he was blind. Those with him led him by the hand into Damascus. For 3 days Paul was blind and did not eat or drink anything.

While in Damascus the Lord calls upon the leader of the church there a man by the name of Ananias to go to the house where Paul is staying to bless him.

Can you imagine the fear of Ananias? Paul was well known as an enemy of Christians. Ananias had heard about Paul's activities and that he had come to Damascus to do more harm to believers. But the Lord tells Ananias: "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles..."

Ananias does what the Lord commanded him to do.

- He blesses Paul and Paul receives his sight back
- Paul was baptized and spent several days with the believers
- Then Paul began to preach in the Jewish synagogues in Damascus

Acts 9 says: **"Yet Saul (Paul) grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Christ."**

When Paul enters into darkness it becomes for him an experience of God, a God who is too big to comprehend, but nonetheless, a God of grace.

Martin Luther says: "Accordingly, when your conscience is terrified by the Law, and you are wrestling with God, the Judge, do not consult your reason or the Law, but take your stand alone on the grace of God and His Word of consolation...Enter into that darkness where neither Law nor human reason gives its light, but only the dark word of faith....thus the gospel leads us into the darkness of faith, where the Law and reason exercise no authority"

What does Luther mean? He says that according to human reason people think they are living in the light by thinking that being a good person and following all the rules and regulations will get them to heaven. This is what Paul thought before he was converted.

But it is the darkness of faith that actually leads to the light of truth. The truth is hidden in Christ and His Word. The truth is hidden in the mystery of the Lord's Supper that Jesus gives us His body and blood in, with and under the bread and the wine.

In a sense we believers are in the dark like Paul was at his conversion because as the Bible says:

"We walk by faith, not by sight." II Corinthians 5:7

Look at Jesus.

- The cloud at Jesus' baptism
- The cloud that overshadowed the mountain at his transfiguration
- The darkness of the cross

At the foot of the cross, the light of the law and human reason has no place. In that darkness we find a promise of grace, received by faith not by sight.

Look at your life.

- We walk as children of the light, yet the deeds of darkness still cling to us
- As we walk the life of faith, the Law can light our path
- But when the Law points out our sins, may we not try harder to stay on the path of Law.
- May we not pretend we can find our way to God on our own.

Like Paul we enter into the holy darkness of God's presence and hold onto the dark word of faith, where reason and the Law have nothing to say about our righteousness before God.

There, in the dark, Jesus takes our hand and invites us to trust, not something we can see, but a promise, given by grace, received by faith.

According to human reason there was no way a man like Paul would have been converted to the Christian faith. Before his conversion in Acts 9 it says: "Saul (Paul) was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples."

Yet, Paul became blind by the Lord so that he could see the light of the Gospel. The Holy Spirit...

- Convicted Paul of his sin
- Convinced Paul of the Lordship of Jesus
- Transformed Paul and dwelt in him

Jesus personally chose Paul and commissioned him. Paul said: “For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect.” II Corinthians 15:9ff

Even those who have rejected the Gospel in the past are not outside of God’s power or God’s plan.

“Now is the time of God’s favor, now is the day of salvation.” II Corinthians 6:2

“We walk by faith, not by sight.”