

Breaking the Spirit of Pride

The Life and Ministry of Paul—part 3

July 10, 2016

Theme: God's merciful plan to break your stubborn spirit of pride.

DAY 1: Let Down Through a Fish Basket

1. Human nature is deeply, stubbornly committed to its independence. We live in a world that does not want to hear the gospel of Christ because the gospel assumes human nature has gone wrong, and people are too proud to admit that they are moving in a wrong direction.

2. For the first time in his life Saul found himself forced to be dependent on others, needing the assistance, not just of the “important people” but of the NAMELESS.

Acts 9:19 ...and after taking some food, he regained his strength. Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus.

²⁰ *At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God.*

²¹ *All those who heard him were astonished and asked, "Isn't he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn't he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?"*

²² *Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Christ.*

²³ *After many days had gone by, the Jews conspired to kill him,*

²⁴ *but Saul learned of their plan. Day and night they kept close watch on the city gates in order to kill him.*

²⁵ *But his followers took him by night and lowered him in a basket through an opening in the wall.*

3. Saul was certainly a brilliant man, gifted in public speaking, and fiercely determined. But no one saw this Christian-killer-turned-evangelist coming! The Jewish leaders, who had wildly applauded him onward were suddenly threatened. They put out a bounty on his head (v. 23).

4. The plot was more than getting a “hired gun.” Read v. 24. They had guards planted at all the city gates. Saul was like a caged lion. There was no escape, and there was to be no escape.

5. This must have been what I think of as a “mirror moment,” where you get to clearly see what you have been. This must have been a deeply humbling time for the once fiercely independent and proud Saul.

6. The once proud mover and shaker (1) Escapes in the stealth of night (2) through a crack in the city wall, (3) in a basket, (4) tied to a rope.

7. Imagine you are Saul. You go out to “change the world for Jesus” and run into fierce opposition and barely escape with your life! What would be your response?

DAY 2: Being a Barnabas

Theme: God's merciful plan to break your stubborn spirit of pride.

1. When a seminary graduate takes on his first church, he's got his file cabinet filled with three years' worth of class notes. He's read hundreds of books, written scores of papers. He believes he's as prepared as he could be. At the end of his first two years at his first church, there is never a time of greater humility and teachability as that moment.

2. This is Saul's first evangelistic preaching experience, and his audience is ready, not just to run him out of town, but to lynch him!

3. He is rescued by a few *nameless* Christian friends. How is your attitude in serving when you are "nameless"?

4. Saul heads to Jerusalem.

Acts 9:26 When he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple.

5. You've heard the famous line, "Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me." When the disciples in Jerusalem saw the blood-thirsty Saul back in town, they were ready to head for the catacombs! Some of them probably had dear friends killed by Saul. Some of them may have lost a spouse, a child, or a parent.

6. Saul could understand their fear, and once again, had a "Mirror Moment." "Was this the affect I had on people?"

Acts 9:27 But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus.

7. Instead of the ministry of the NAMELESS, we have a name: Barnabas. There come times in everyone's life where just about everyone seems to have given up on you, and maybe you have too! There is the incredible ministry of someone who does not walk away when everyone else does.

8. Barnabas's name means "son of encouragement."

9. The encourager has eyes to see the underdog, the one who has tasted the bitter taste of defeat, the kid no one wants on their team, and the one who's publicly failed and is humiliated and ashamed.

10. Are you an encourager? Or do you find yourself being more critical?

11. Is there someone in your life that needs your encouragement?

DAY 3: The “Ministry” of Obscurity

Acts 9:28 So Saul stayed with them and moved about freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord.

1. Would you be willing to walk around Jerusalem when a bounty was out on your head?

Acts 9:29 He talked and debated with the Grecian Jews, but they tried to kill him.

³⁰ *When **the brothers** learned of this, they took him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.*

2. Another round of persecution erupts, and our redeemer God uses it in theme we see emerging in Saul’s growth: **God’s merciful plan to break your stubborn spirit of pride.**

3. The ministry of the NAMELESS appears again! What do his newfound brothers in the faith do for Saul?

4. Who are “the brothers”? We’re not told. It’s the same theme repeated. Can you think of a good reason why “the brothers” go unmentioned by name?

5. Why does God lead Saul back to Tarsus? We aren’t told, but I have my suspicions.

6. What’s it like going back to your hometown, where people know the “former” you? I went to high school in Houston, and my first two and a half years at Baylor, just three hours up the road, were littered with “Seth stories,” stories of my foolishness, self-centeredness, wasting of almost six years of my life. Trash mouthed, drunk-driver, trying to be a big-shot, center-of-attention wannabe.

7. Then suddenly, “Hey Seth, are you now some kind of ‘Jesus-freak’? Do you do anything fun, anymore? Do you spend all your time at *bible studies*? Are you trying to be some kind of *goody-two-shoes*?” I certainly didn’t experience death threats, but going “home” was quite different for me. It involved **a lot of humility**, **eating humble pie**, and **asking about ten people to forgive me** for how I had treated them.

8. If you run a time line on Saul, it’s possible that Saul would live in Tarsus for four or five years before he ventured out in missions, again. The “famous” Saul, now living in obscurity, as a virtual unknown.

9. What happens to someone when they go from “famous” to living in obscurity? What is God doing instead?

DAY 4: On the shelf?

1. Paul is back in Tarsus. It's been said, "You can't go home again."
2. While Saul is in Tarsus, the gospel explodes in Antioch!

Acts 11:19 Now those who had been scattered by the persecution in connection with Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, telling the message only to Jews.

²⁰ *Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to **Antioch** and began to speak to **Greeks** also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus.*

²¹ *The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.*

3. Persecution of in Jerusalem scattered believers across Samaria and into the Gentile world. Christianity began to take hold in areas even Jewish Christians thought unthinkable! The gentiles! The center of that movement was Antioch, a city north of Jerusalem by about 250 miles.

4. Meanwhile, Saul is languishing in Tarsus, his skills "on the shelf." If you had seen God work in your life, and then, you were "on the shelf" while others led out for God, how would you be tempted?

Acts 11:22 News of this reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch.

5. Church in Jerusalem: commissioned Barnabas to go to Antioch.

Acts 11:23 When he arrived and saw the evidence of the grace of God, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts.

²⁴ *He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord.*

6. Meanwhile, Saul was back in Tarsus between five and six years. He was about forty-five years old, right in the "sweet spot" of mid-life crisis. In mid-life, it's easy to feel like life is passing you by, that your opportunities to make a real difference with your life are slipping away.

7. These are times that are confusing to us, while God uses the "waiting" to build our character.

DAY 5: Off the shelf!

1. When Barnabas got to Antioch and saw the explosion of the gospel among the Gentiles, he knew he needed help teaching the new believers!

*Acts 11:25a **Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul,** ²⁶ and when he found him, **he brought him to Antioch.***

Acts 11:25b So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.

2. Saul didn't go in order to repair his reputation, to make a new name for himself, to prove something to those who mistreated him or doubted him.

3. As we close this week's studies, I am struck by several important principles.

a. Don't be surprised by times of waiting, as God prepares you for ministry.

b. God shows us we are not indispensable.

c. Humility is valuable.

d. Knowing God more deeply is our highest pursuit.

e. When God does call you to step up, don't be surprised if you feel unqualified and unworthy.

4. God worked mightily in Saul's life in his early Christian years to break his proud spirit from his old life, and to build in its place a deep humility. Don't be surprised if God does this in your life, as well.