

Acts 9: 10-20; “A Chosen Vessel of Mine”, Sermon # 40 in the series – “Laying the Foundations”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on February 12th, 2017, in the Morning Worship Service.

Saul of Tarsus has been saved! He has had a revelation of the living, risen, Lord Jesus Christ to his mind and heart on the road to Damascus. He has heard the Lord Jesus speak directly to him out of heaven. The eyes and ears of his heart have been spiritually opened. His will has been changed so that he now wants to do the Lord's will. A glorious work of grace has begun in him. His whole life pivots at this point. He once was a legalist and a Christian hater. He will now become a preacher of the faith he once tried to destroy. By grace he will become an apostle. He will be a gift to all the Church, in all generations. He will eventually write 13 letters to the churches which will become a part of the canon of Holy Scripture. He will, in his career, labor more than all the other apostles, as he would say in his first letter to the Corinthians chapter 15, verse 10 – “By the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.”

And so, this morning we want to think together about the grace of Christ as it was working in Saul of Tarsus shortly after his dramatic conversion to Christ. He was a chosen vessel of Christ. He would receive the precious treasure of the truth of the gospel into his own heart, and he would pour it out to others. At this hour, we want to look more carefully at what the grace of Christ accomplishes when it is working powerfully in a man. What kind of effects does it have, both for the man himself, and in relation to the people around him? I see three effects of the powerful working of grace here in our text. 1st of all, when the grace of God is working powerfully, Christian people are humbled to give and to receive spiritual help from each other. (verses 10-12) 2nd – When the grace of God is working powerfully, people are forced to consider more carefully the doctrine of election. (verses 12-16) And 3rd – When the grace of God is working powerfully God Himself will open the door, for service to Himself, to begin. (verses 17-22) I pray that each of us will receive this word to ourselves this morning, as what it really is, the word of God which will perform a work in those who believe.

1st of all – When the grace of God is working powerfully, Christian people are humbled to give and to receive spiritual help from each other.

(verses 10-12)

Saul could not, at this point, come to the church, but the Lord Jesus could send a representative of the church in Damascus to him. And this is why He called upon Ananias in this vision. Let me ask you, are you willing to help others on to a better knowledge and understanding of the Lord's ways? Verse 10 says: “There was a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and to him the Lord said in a vision, ‘Ananias.’” “And he said ‘Hear I am Lord.’” “So the Lord said to him, ‘Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he is praying.’” Let us ask ourselves whether we are willing to help in the work of the Lord. This man Ananias did not have to preach to Saul; he only had to convey a message. This is where you might be of great service to your Master, dear Christian. There are no doubt many people out there, in the area in which you live, who only have the basics of the Bible in their minds. They need help in understanding. Will you give it to them?

The Lord no doubt will cause you providentially to come into contact with them if He would have you to help them. Verse 12 says: “In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias coming in and putting his hand on him, so that he might see.” This was how the Lord ordained it to be, for both Saul and for Ananias. Saul was now physically blind, and the Lord appointed Ananias to go and put his hand on him so that he might see. There may be a person who you know, dear

Christian, who the Lord would have you to go to, and speak to him about his soul, so that he might spiritually see. These things do not happen every day, but we must be sensitive to the Lord's leading. We do not see visions, or dream revelatory dreams, or hear voices out of heaven, but we have a God who, according to His eternal purpose, loves to bring the mature Christian to the one who needs instruction. And if they are one of God's elect people, His purpose is that they will receive spiritual healing by the grace of Christ. Will you not pray to be a sensitive, wise, and discerning Christian; one who is able to go to a needy brother, when the Lord by His Spirit providentially directs you?

What is it that the young Christian needs to learn? Well, many people, when they first become Christians, do not grasp the idea that one of first lessons which God would have them to learn is that they need spiritual help from Him; and, that they need spiritual help from other Christians to better discern God's will for their life. God Himself will be working providentially to see that this lesson will be taught to them, and He will see to it that it will be received by every true Christian if they would be useful in service to Him. Saul was taught this lesson right out of the gate, in the midst of his conversion. The Lord providentially ordered it as a part of his conversion experience; He struck Saul with physical blindness, with the light that He shone on him, on the road. It does not say that all the men who were with him on the road to Damascus were struck blind; only, that he was struck blind by the light. Only he, out of all those men, was saved that day. And, we know, that the Lord obviously does not do this with all Christians when he saves them, but Christ did this with Saul so that he might learn this very important lesson, and that we might also learn it as well, as we hear of his experience.

The lesson is, that by grace, God would have you to become a humble, teachable person as a Christian. You remember how Saul was before his conversion. He thought that he knew it all when it came to spiritual things. He thought that he knew God, by being circumcised and outwardly keeping the commandments of God. He was a very self-justifying, proud and angry person. He thought that he knew God when he had murder in his heart. He did not realize that He needed grace. He needed God's favor to be shown to him, and He needed God's enablement by the Spirit to be able to do God's will. He certainly did not think that every person needs to be changed in their heart in order to know God. He certainly did not believe in the absolute necessity of grace. He did not understand what it meant to be born again, or why he must believe in Jesus Christ to be saved from his sins. But now the Lord had come to him, and He was a willing learner. The lesson is, that by grace, Saul was humbled to see himself rightly. Each of us must ask ourselves whether this is true of us. Do you see yourself rightly? Have you seen how spiritually blind you are by nature? Do you understand that it took a divine and supernatural light shining into your mind to convince you that you were a sinner who needed the Savior – Our Lord Jesus Christ? Saul was so spiritually blind that the Lord thought it good to blind him with the light of His glory, for a few days, so that he would remember how great his spiritual blindness was before his conversion. Sometimes even Christians do not realize how much they need to pray for light upon their path.

I am not sure how many Christian people carefully consider the truth that I am trying to bring to you now. The Lord knows that there are many people who He saves, who are really very independent people. He knows how He made them; how He put them together, both physically and in their soul and spirit. He is well aware of the fact that they may not really think that they need to be taught the lessons of humility. He is aware that some will even go so far as to say that they do not need to come to church and learn the way of the Lord. They can figure it out for themselves. But the Lord certainly did not let Saul think this way. And, truly if you want to be taught by Christ, you will not think this way either. We read in the Bible that God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble. (Proverbs 3: 34) In fact in 1st Peter 5: 5, it says: "Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders." "Yes, all of you be submissive

to one another, and be clothed with humility, for God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble. What a command, and what a statement; that younger people should submit themselves to their elders. And that all of us should be submissive to one another, and clothed with humility. What for? So that we might all learn to do the will of God in our lives. To clothe yourself with humility requires that you see that humility only develops in your mind by your improving upon grace bestowed. We should not receive the grace of God in vain. We begin to see that we do not learn true Biblical humility on our own, but in relation to the working of Christ's grace, and our interacting with many other brethren in the context of the local church.

Now 2nd – When the grace of God is working powerfully, people are forced to consider more carefully the doctrine of election. (verses 13-16)

In verse 13, we find Ananias protesting to the Lord saying, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem." "And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name." "But the Lord said to him, 'Go, for he is a chosen vessel (instrument) of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel.'" "For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake." The words, "he is a chosen vessel" can literally be rendered "a vessel of election". John Gill says this: "Saul was, to render the words literally, "a vessel of election"; both an instrument gathering in the election, or the elect of God, through the preaching of the Gospel; and was himself chosen of God, both to grace and glory, a vessel of mercy, and of honor prepared for glory; and was separated, predestinated, and appointed to the Gospel of God, to preach it among the Gentiles."

Now, as we think about the words of God to Ananias, we dare not say that God did not want this important and comforting doctrine to come out at this very time following Saul's conversion. Because we know that it was written down for our instruction in the Scriptures. It was deliberately placed here for our instruction, our comfort, and our edification. God does not want any Christian to be ashamed of the doctrine of election, or to think that since it is true, that men do not have the responsibility to believe in Christ. The only way that Saul ever would have believed in Christ is if the Lord would have chosen him to it. And God wanted to give every assurance to Ananias that he was doing the right thing in going to Saul and encouraging him in his young faith. Even though Saul had been such a persecutor and blasphemer, God had had mercy on him and saved him, according to His eternal purposes in election.

Many people when they come to Christ want to continue to consider themselves self-made people. They think of themselves as self-sufficient people. When they first come to Christ, they wrongly believe that they have figured out this whole matter of salvation, on their own. O yes, they did hear the gospel from someone. They may have gone to church and heard it preached, or they may have heard it from a family member. They believed in Jesus, but they do not realize just how much God is personally involved in their salvation, and in their subsequent sanctification. They really do not understand how much they need to learn theologically and doctrinally, as well as practically. This is the reason that there is an office of pastor-teacher in the local church. And this is the reason that Christ has put so many wise and mature men in a Bible-believing local church. If all the persons in the church believe that they have much to learn from God and much to learn from each other, this has come about because Christ has worked in them a spiritually humble attitude. Lord, I want to be taught your will and your ways. I truly want to love and help other Christians.

This humble attitude is related to the doctrine of election. If God chose you, you know that it is true that every good thing that you have, you have received from God. Listen to 1st Corinthians 4: 7. "For who makes you differ from another?" "And what do you have that you did not receive?" "Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you glory as if you had not received it?" When God's grace is working powerfully, you will find this a truth to glory in; that

everything good in us that has made us to differ from another, we have received it from God. It is grace which makes us to differ. Saul was a chosen vessel of Christ's, to bear His name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel, and Christ would show him just how many things he must suffer for His name's sake. This is the other truth of that verse that I gave to you a few minutes ago from Philippians 1: 29 – "It has been granted unto you, not only to believe, but also to suffer for My name's sake. All the sufferings which Paul would ever endure were granted to him by God and Christ. And all the sufferings that you will ever endure, dear Christian, are granted to you according to will and counsel of God.

Let us pause and ask ourselves: Why is it important that you believe in the doctrine of election, the doctrine that God has an elect people whom He chose before time began. Why is it so important to believe, that if you are one of His elect people, He has chosen you first, long before you ever began to think of choosing Him? Well, I believe that it is important to the way that you will live the Christian life. Let me see if I can explain this. It is true that there is indeed a choice that is made, on the part of the sinner, when they believe in gospel of Jesus Christ. You must indeed choose to believe in Him for salvation. But you should understand, that if you have chosen to sincerely receive Christ in the gospel, it is only because God has first chosen you. It will be very helpful to your growth, and the stability of your faith, for you to understand that God has ordained all the means for His saving of you as a sinner, and that it is His full purpose and intention to make of you into one of His saints, by His glorious working and power. He is going to do this if you are one of His elect for He has granted you saving faith.

In Acts 13: 48 it says: "Now when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord." "And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed." This is a glorious and a precious truth indeed! Since this doctrine is plainly set forth in the word of God for you to believe, it is therefore important for you to know, even from the start of the Christian life, that salvation is all of the Lord. All the blessings of salvation that are bestowed upon you, the believer; the forgiveness of sins and a new heart, and imputed and imparted grace, all these are given according to God's eternal and electing purpose. Their being conveyed to you is based upon what God actually has done and accomplished for you already, through the finished work of His dear Son. And this work is then applied to each elect person, most deliberately and definitely, by His Holy Spirit. He has reconciled you to Himself through Christ. And He will work with you, and in you now, to bring His own work to an entire completion in the future.

It was the Father's purpose from before the foundation of the world, that He ordained you to eternal life. Your responsibility as a sinner is to believe in the gospel. But when you have believed in Christ, and you are reading in your Bible, you may come across these words in Philippians, chapter 1 and verse 29: "For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake." This is what has been granted to you – to believe. It is like you are looking at the doorway of salvation, and on it, on the casing above it, it says, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved." And then you go through that doorway, which is Christ and His finished work, and after you have gone through it, you turn and look back at the casing on the other side, and it says, "Chosen from before the foundation of the world." All the blessings, not only of justification, but also the grace to be sanctified, will be faithfully conveyed by God to you in the right time, and in the right way, so that you will grow up into Christ.

When Christ's grace is working powerfully, many Christians begin to see the great importance, and the great sweetness of the doctrine of election. Sometimes young believers do not understand this. Sometimes older believers do not understand it either. This because they think that God has only provided the possibility of salvation through Jesus Christ. They do not believe that He has ordained, that the certainty of it, and the definiteness of it, would be applied to them. They believe that Christ really did accomplish the work of redemption by His sufferings

on the cross. But then they conclude that it is up to them to apply the grace of Christ to themselves, and to live it out by striving to be diligent in committing themselves to the disciplines of the Christian life. I mean that they become zealous for Bible reading, prayer, witnessing, and doing good works. All of these things are good. But they engage in these good things as though their obedience and their perseverance in faith depended upon themselves, and not upon Christ's enabling grace. It is true that these disciplines are essential for living your Christian life to the glory of God. But living them out in the power of your own fleshly strength may sometimes lead you to question, on a day where you have not done well spiritually, whether God is really with you or not. You may begin to question whether you will be able to persevere to the end of your life in faith. In this, you are looking at your obedience from the standpoint of fleshly wisdom and not God's wisdom. This is something which can be avoided.

You will not find this kind of uncertainty in the way that Paul wrote his letters. Philippians chapter 2, verse 12 says, "Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure." There it is; there is your solemn responsibility, to work out your salvation, and to obey the word of God. But as you do go about to do so, you are to remember that it is God who is working in you both to will and do for His good pleasure. O that you may receive this precious truth today, and come to believe that you as a Christian are a chosen vessel of God whom He will pour the riches of His precious grace into your heart day by day, all the way to glory.

Listen to another verse which will confirm the truth of what I am saying to you. 2nd Corinthians 4: 7 – "We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the surpassing power, (the excellency of the power) may be of God and not of us." It has been my observation that when Christians do not believe that the surpassing greatness of the power for living the Christian life is not of God; rather, that it is of themselves, that it sometimes can lead them to admire the fleshly strength and wisdom, even of unbelieving people, more than to pray for, and to desire to know, the spiritual strength and wisdom which comes from Christ alone. Sometimes it seems too hard to learn to pray and to ask God for wisdom and strength. It is possible to become more concerned about thinking your own thoughts, so much so, that you forget that you have the mind of Christ in the Bible, and His Spirit to help you apply it to your mind. But how good it is when you realize that Jesus is alive, and He is your wonderful counselor. He is right there with you. But you must avail yourself of His strength and wisdom. When you incline your heart to this truth, then you will begin to think about what Christ would have you to consider in every situation. And if you are wise you will begin to seek fellowship with Him in your spirit by means of prayer.

But we need to ask this question: Will it really be possible to live the Christian life by the strength of your own determination, or according to your own wisdom? No, not in a way that you will be making progress in what God wants you to learn. He wants you to learn in a different way from the world. Listen to Paul in 2nd Corinthians 1: 12-20. "For our boasting is this: the testimony of our conscience that we conducted ourselves in the world in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom but by the grace of God, and more abundantly toward you." "For we are not writing any other things to you than what you read or understand." "Now I trust you will understand, even to the end (as also you have understood us in part), that we are your boast as you also are ours, in the day of the Lord Jesus." "And in this confidence I intended to come to you before that you might have a second benefit – to pass by way of you to Macedonia, to come again from Macedonia to you, and be helped by you on my way to Judea." Therefore, when I was planning this did I do it lightly?" "Or the things I plan, do I plan according to the flesh, that with me there should be Yes, Yes, and No, No?" "For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us – by me, Silvanus, and Timothy was not Yes

and No, but in Him was Yes.” “For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us.”

You can see from these verses that the world’s way, and sometimes our own way, is called fleshly wisdom in the Scriptures. If we are trusting in our own fleshly wisdom we will not as easily come to know the reality of God Himself leading us into the truth, in accordance with His word. We will be living according to the strength of our own self-oriented logical reasoning, and in doing so there will be many disappointments. God’s Providential ordering of things does not make sense to us, sometimes, and so we become discouraged, and we wonder if we will ever make progress in righteousness and holiness; whether we really will become mature in the faith. But when we believe that God has chosen us to salvation we are able to rejoice every day in what He is showing us, what He is doing in our lives, and what He is leading us into, by His Spirit. For then we are relying on His faithfulness, His love, His care, and His abounding grace to us to teach us and to assure us that He is with us, He is for us, He is helping us to do His will. We really are living by faith. “But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (2nd Thessalonians 2: 13 and 14)

And then 3rd – When the grace of God is working powerfully God Himself can open the door, for service to Himself, to begin immediately. (verses 17-19)

Verse 17 says: “And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, ‘Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.’ “Immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized.” “And when he had received food, he was strengthened.” “Then Saul spent some days with the disciples at Damascus.” “Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God.” Truly, it is amazing how quickly things came together so that he could begin to serve the Lord. After Ananias came and laid his hands on him, he immediately received his sight, he was immediately baptized, and within a very short time he immediately preached Christ in the synagogues. I want you to remember that our God is the God of the immediate as well as He is the God whose purposes sometimes unfold very slowly for us. We need to remember that our times are in His hands; all of our days are numbered and given to us in the sequence that He desires.

If this is the case, for those of you who may be impatiently waiting to know what God has for your life, will you not remember that God is well able to change what needs to be changed in a moment of time if it is His purpose? You may want more than anything else to serve Him and to be useful to Him, and He has not yet opened the door. Saul was given his sight, and he was filled with the Holy Spirit immediately, and yet you may feel that everything related to your future has been put on hold. Will you not remember that God is perfectly wise and holy in all of his dealings with all people everywhere. Will you not learn to be content in whatever state that you are in, realizing that the greatest part of knowing the Lord is the realization that He is with you and He is teaching you in particular what He knows would be good for you to learn? He is the giver of every good and perfect gift. He is the One who opens and no man shuts, and shuts and no man opens. He is the One who can teach you how to be abased and how to abound; how to learn to be full and how to learn to be hungry. But when all is said and done, He would bring you to the place where you can say: “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” When God’s grace was working powerfully, Saul immediately preached Christ in the synagogues. May God’s grace work so powerfully in us so that we will share Christ with others and help others in name of Christ so that He will be glorified in us.