

LOOK! SAUL IS PRAYING!

*“And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and to him said the Lord in a vision, **Ananias**. And he said, **Behold, I am here, Lord**. And the Lord said unto him, **Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and enquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth, And hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight.**”*

*Then Ananias answered, **Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem: And here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name. But the Lord said unto him, **Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake.****”*

*And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, **Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost. And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized”** (Acts 9:10-18).*

Ananias was possibly one of the seventy disciples, as strong tradition alludes (see Luke 10:1,17). His name is the same as the Hebrew name *Hananiah*, and means “Jehovah is gracious.”⁽¹⁾ Ananias is a devout believer, and as such he may well have heard from the Lord directly at other times. But this time he was shocked, and even questioned the Lord. Ananias had likely heard that Saul was among those who killed Stephen, the first Christian martyr. He also knew that Saul had received authority from the high priests to arrest any **“found in this way”**(Acts 9:2). *“This is the first time in Acts that Christians are described as belonging to **the Way** (Gk. *hodos*, “road, highway, way of life”), meaning either *the way of salvation* (Acts 16:17); Christ (compare Jesus' teachings in Matt.7:14; John 14:6) ; or the true way of life in relation to God (cf. Acts 18:25–26; cf. Ps. 1:1, 6; 27:11).”* Perhaps even a combination of these things. (2)

Jesus Christ gave Ananias a quick answer regarding Saul of Tarsus. He said **“He is a chosen vessel to me.”** Ananias did not argue. When Christ changes someone, they are changed! God was not through changing Saul of Tarsus yet. He was still blind. He was still stumbling around, but Saul *was* praying. Had he never prayed before? Undoubtedly he had, for we are told this by his own voice: **“Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee. Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless”** (Philippians 3:5-6). Charles Spurgeon said about him: *“Saul was a Pharisee, and therefore a man who habitually repeated prayers. Pharisees boasted of the regularity, number, and length of their prayers. [Probably] there had never been a day in Saul's life from the time in which he was conscious in which he had not gone through his prayers.”* (3)

His praying was now different. Not learned prayers of a Pharisee; or recited prayers; copied prayers; long prayers; prayers of any preset time; in other words not *ritualistic* prayers that

Pharisees were likely to pray. Remember the teaching of Jesus on the Pharisee and the publican? ***“Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess” (Luke 18:10-12).*** We Christians today may think that was a very unique and rare prayer. It was not. Pharisees were self-righteous and often prayed that way. I am sure Saul had prayed similar prayers. John Gill relates *“It is a tradition of R. Juda, saying, three things a man ought to say every day ‘Blessed be thou, that thou hast not made me a gentile; blessed art thou that thou hast not made me an unlearned man (or one that is vain and foolish, uncivil and uncultivated); blessed art thou that thou hast not made me a woman.” (4)*

Remember that as the light shone from heaven, and Saul was knocked down, and the voice came saying ***“Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?”*** Saul first asked ***“Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.”*** Saul was trembling and astonished and said ***“Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?”*** ***And the Lord said unto him, “Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do” (Acts 9:4-6).*** While not generally thought of as prayer, Saul was conversing with God, and God was conversing with him. Later when Christ told Ananias ***“Behold he prayeth”***, what was Saul praying about? During this time as the living Christ was revealed to Saul, he was doing his first serious praying of his life. *First*, I believe he was praying prayers of repentance. He had been so wrong, and thinking he was right. He had to be asking Christ to forgive him. *Second*, he was praying for guidance. His whole life had just been rearranged (that always happens when you truly are saved). So Saul had to know where to go, and what to do. He needed instruction. He had already when on the road to Damascus said ***“Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?”*** The Lord had already answered that question by directing him to rise up, go into the city. There, as promised, Saul was shown what to do. He was given the vision of Ananias putting his hand on him that he might receive his sight. *Third*, Christ was showing him, as he prayed, what things he must suffer for His name’s sake. Would **you** like to know in advance of **your** suffering?

After this, the scales fell from his eyes. He was now a Christian with open eyes, and an open heart, never to be the same again. He was baptized (not to *literally* wash away his sins), but as always is the case, to show publicly that they had been washed away and that he was now a follower of the Lamb. He spent time in Arabia, being taught of God. I am sure he was praying there.⁽⁵⁾ He then spent some time in Damascus where he got his first taste of persecution, and had to be let down in a basket to escape. Then on to Jerusalem where they were all afraid of him, except Barnabas. He went back to Tarsus for a time, then Barnabas went after him, Then they were sent out by the Holy Ghost through the church at Antioch, and now Saul (soon to be known as Paul the apostle), and Barnabas, began the church’s greatest mission work .

Behold! He prayeth! What powerful words uttered by Christ Himself. He said that about his chosen vessel. Can He say that about **you**; and **me**? What more important thing can we do. It is said that Satan laughs when we teach. Laughs when we witness. Laughs when we preach. But he **trembles** when we pray!

Behold! He Prayeth! Our prayers must be genuine. Our prayers must be sincere. Our prayers must be earnest. Our prayers must be spiritual. Our prayers must be repentant. Our prayers must

not be vain words. Our prayers normally should be to the Father; in the Spirit; In the Name of Jesus Christ. I am sure Saul's prayer was all this, and then some. They can be long (as Daniel's prayer in Daniel 9:3-21). They can be short (as Simon Peter's prayer; "**Lord, save me!**" in Matthew 14:30. Before God will hear our prayer, there is always a prayer of repentance, which God Himself leads us to. You can be on your knees; on your bed; standing with head bowed; prostrate on the floor; in the woods; in your church; in your car, but you had better pray someplace, some way.

You say you are a Christian and you **never** pray? Let me read Mr. Spurgeon's sobering words to you. "*Beloved, has this ever been the case with you, that you could draw the attention of the great God to yourself? I am afraid there are many of whom it would have to be said, "**Behold, he never prays!**" What a sight upon earth!—a man created by his Maker who never worships his Creator, a man who is daily fed by God's bounty, and never worships him! Sir, you are a **monster**, you are a creature among men most **loathsome**. A man that lives without prayer ought not to live. It is a wonder that the earth does not open her mouth and swallow up such a wretch. And yet when he does pray, God makes a wonder of it.*" (6); (emphasis mine; cw)

In the Bible the second mention of Paul's praying, and many others of the apostle, are discussed in Arthur W. Pink's book *Gleanings From Paul* (new edition by Banner of Truth). This is possibly the finest exposition of Paul's prayers available. For reading about Paul's life, I recommend *The Life Of Paul* by James Stalker. You can find used copies in the Revell edition, or pay the ridiculous price of \$30 for the newest edition of this small, but worthy, book..

We only have space to look briefly at two of these later prayers from Paul. Let's look at First Corinthians 1:5-8: "***I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ; That in every thing ye are enriched by him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge; Even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you: So that ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall also confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.***"

This is not so much a word for word reciting of his actual prayer here, but a relating to the Corinthians, and us, about his prayer for their growth in God's grace. Paul loved the believers in this church regardless of their failures, and shortcomings, as he did in all the churches. He even spoke of Christ's testimony being visible in them. This was early in his dealings with a church that had many problems. It is always fascinating to see later in the second epistle how far they did actually come. More fascinating to me is how this crusty Pharisee was so changed by Christ that he now radiated a love for Jesus Christ, and His church. After all, Jesus had told Saul "Why are you persecuting Me" To persecute His church is to persecute Him. Don't *ever* forget that.

Also this "***I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, Always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy, For your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now***" (*Philippians 1:3-5*). As many of you know, I covered some of this in my sermons on Philippians. You can listen to them at our *Sermon Audio* site. The outstanding thing in these verses is once again the love, and the patience, Paul expresses for the church at Philippi. Philippi was from the beginning a much more disciplined, and orderly church than the one at Corinth. Paul shows love for them both. He longed to be again among the brothers and sisters at Philippi. Do

not think of Paul as just an apostle, as great as that is; but think of him as a Christian, desiring fellowship with other believers. This is one thing that we all have in common; the need for fellowship. Satan has worked to destroy that great need, replacing it with other things. Too many professing believers are involved in activities that do not honor God. This is even in the churches today. Uh oh, here I am I am *hammering* again; **let's go back to the old paths!**

One of the only things we find Paul praying for himself is found in Ephesians 6:19-29 ***“And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel, For which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.”*** This transformed man truly had a burning desire to serve God to the uttermost, which should be the desire of **our** hearts. **Follow Paul as he followed Christ!**

notes

(1) **A certain disciple - named Ananias** - “A general opinion has prevailed in the Greek Church that this Ananias was one of the seventy-two disciples, and that he was martyred; and they celebrate his martyrdom on the first of October. It has been farther stated that his house was turned into a church, which remains to the present day, though now occupied as a Turkish mosque; but even the Mohammedans have the tradition, and treat his memory with great respect. However this may be, from Acts 22:12, we learn, what is of more importance, that he was a devout man according to the law, having a good report of all the Jews that dwelt there.”

From *Adam Clarke's Commentary* on the book of Acts chapter 9.

(2) Note from *ESV Study Bible* on Acts 9:2; copyright 2008, Good News/Crossway, Wheaton, IL

(3) Charles H. Spurgeon, “Behold, He Prayeth,” , sermon # 1860, *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, 1885; volume 31, p. 506, Pilgrim reprint, 1973

(4) I do recall, many years ago, getting this from Baptist pastor, John Gill, who was a Hebrew scholar. It is from a footnote in his commentary on Luke 18:11. The Torah *definitely* supports this prayer, though modern Jewish scholars insist that no insult is meant to the goyim, the unlearned ,or women.

(5) Not being satisfied how Arabia (Galatians 1:17), fit in these verses, I did some research. C.I. Scofield in the *Scofield Reference Bible* note on Acts 9:22 seemed to have the best answer “ *It seems probable that (Acts 9:22-25) refers to Paul's labours in Damascus after his return from Arabia” (Galatians 1:17). “The ‘many days’ of verse (Acts 9:23) may represent the ‘three years’ of (Galatians 1:18); which intervened between Paul's return to Damascus and his visit to Peter.”*

(The *ESV Study Bible* has a similar, satisfactory, answer on this order of events, pointing out that some Arabian territory of that time was very near Damascus.)

(6) Charles H. Spurgeon, “Behold He Prayeth.”, Sermon # 1860; *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, 1885; Volume 31, p. 515.; Pilgrim reprint, Pasadena, TX, 1973

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