

One Man, Two Cities, Three Things Acts 9:19b-31

Saul had planned to enter the synagogues of Damascus and arrest those who called on the name of Jesus, but instead he proclaimed the name of Jesus in the synagogues in Damascus. This dramatic change was the result of seeing the resurrected Jesus just before arriving in Damascus and becoming a believer. Immediately after believing, Saul entered Damascus and later left Damascus and went to Jerusalem. Our passage today is about one man, Saul, in two cities, Damascus and Jerusalem, and three things that happened in both cities concerning Saul.

The first thing we see in both cities is his presence among Christ's disciples. Saul immediately became deeply involved in the church in both cities. Because of his hostility toward the church before encountering Christ on the Damascus road, there was a reluctance in the church in both cities to believe that he was really a disciple of Jesus. Yet, they came to accept him, and he was among them. This is important because we see in Saul that a relationship with Jesus and fellowship with the church are connected. Christianity is personal but not private. It is corporate. Consider these questions in light of this: Are you regularly absent a couple of Sundays a month from the church's worship gathering? Do you integrate your Monday-Saturday life with the lives of other believers in your church? Do you realize the Bible establishes the church as a critical part of your discipleship? The writer of Hebrews warns Jewish believers that they must not be guilty of "neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some". Is meeting together with other believers for worship, fellowship and discipleship the priority it should be in your life?

The second thing we see about Saul in both Damascus and Jerusalem is his proclamation of Christ's name. In Damascus we are told that he proclaimed that Jesus is the Son of God and the Christ. To proclaim Jesus was the Son of God pointed to three things. 1. His unfailing representation of God (The nation of Israel was called the Son of God but failed to be God's intended representative in the world.) 2. His ultimate rule for God (Israel's king was called the Son of God, but all failed to rule righteously for God.) 3. His unique relationship with God. (This title along with Jesus calling God his own Father indicated to the Jews that Jesus was equal to God, according to John 5:17-18.) It is likely that Saul focused on who Jesus was because he believed if Jews were convinced Jesus was the Christ and Son of God, they would also believe the rest of the gospel about what he did on the cross and his resurrection.

The third thing we see in these two cities is his persecution for Christ's sake. In Damascus there was a plot to kill Saul, but his disciples helped him safely escape and leave the city. In Jerusalem, the Hellenist also intended to kill Saul. He is again able to escape, being escorted by the brothers to Caesarea and then sent by ship to Tarsus. The hostility toward Saul and the threats to his life from the beginning continued to the end. In light of this, he wrote at the end of his life "all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted."

The last verse of our text is an update on the State of the Church in the three regions throughout which it had spread at this point. The church had peace from persecution and was being built up and multiplied, meaning it grew stronger and larger. This kind of growth was connected to two things that were characteristic of the church: It was walking in the fear of the Lord and the comfort of the Holy Spirit. "Fear" and "comfort" seem to be emotions and experiences that are incompatible. The combination of these two, however, indicates the effect the gospel should have on believers. The gospel should cause believers to walk in the fear of the Lord, because it reveals the ugliness of sin and kindness of God. These realities will create a hatred for sin and a love for God that will cause disciples to dread the thought of displeasing God through sin. Gospel disciples desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus. Along with this, the gospel should cause believer's to be comforted by the Spirit-sustained knowledge that God's grace is greater than all our sin. He will never disown us when we sin. The gospel leads us to fear grieving the Spirit of God by sinning, but the Spirit also gives us comfort in knowing that when we do sin we are not and will never be forsaken by God. When the church is walking in these ways, it will grow in these ways: stronger and larger.