

Title: WE CAN STILL "SEE THE LIGHT" ACTS 9
(Chatham, NJ; 04/17/16, AM) [Pc – Narrative Commentary]

Theme: Though the Apostle Paul saw the light of Christ in a unique way, we can still "see" it when we believe the Gospel.

Purpose: By studying the conversion of Saul of Tarsus we catch a glimpse of what happens when anyone "sees the light" of the Gospel.

Introduction:

1. Our story begins in chapter 7 where we see that Stephen's speech aroused the wrath of the Jews: "You always resist the Holy Spirit," he tells them (7:51).
2. Saul receives the garments of the executioners, 7:58, in approval, 8:1.
3. He persecuted the church, 8:3 – something he never forgot, 1 Timothy 1:13.
4. Between Acts 8:1-3 & 9:17-19, a dramatic, heavenly intrusion disrupts Saul's life.
5. Saul "saw the light." Can we get this same experience today?

I. The Gamaliel Connection

- A. Gamaliel: voice of moderation in Acts 5:33
 1. A great teacher
 2. A man honored by all
 3. While the rage of the Sanhedrin was in full throat, he stepped in
 4. Spares the lives of the Apostles, 38-39
 5. Did he, in fact, recognize God at work in the Apostles?
 6. We never find out though he recognizes something.
- B. His star pupil: Saul of Tarsus
 1. Born in Tarsus: thus a Roman citizen
 2. Brought up in Jerusalem, educated under G. (Acts 22:3)
 3. Lived as a Pharisee, the strictest sect, Acts 26:5 & Phil. 3
 4. He didn't have Gamaliel's moderate tendencies, demonstrating extreme zeal for the Law, dragging Christians from the synagogues, slapping them in chains
 5. Though the Jewish leaders saw Christianity as incompatible with the Law, the converts saw in Christ its fulfillment

II. Seeing the Light (literally), Acts 9 – A truly divine intervention

- A. On the road to Damascus with approval for the arrest of Christians
 1. A light flashed, 3; he heard a voice
 2. "Who are you, Lord?"
 3. "I am Jesus," 4-6
 4. The light caused his blindness, 22:11 (eyes caused him suffering, Gal. 4:13-15)
 5. A brief but dramatic encounter: he is lead to Damascus, the afflicter now the afflicted
- B. What happened to those who were with him?
 1. They were speechless, 9:7
 2. Saw the light, but not understand what was said, 22:9
 3. All fell, 26:13
 4. It seems there was a lot of confusion (often what happens to your friends when you tell them you are going to take Christianity seriously)
 5. No one could deny that *something* had happened
- C. We can still "see the light"
 1. Jesus is still the light we can see without experiencing as Saul did

2. Our "sight" comes with an awakening of faith
3. Saul spent three agonizing days trying to process the vision
4. His life had been turned upside down "in a flash"
5. His momentary blindness caused him to see things differently
6. How agonizing is it for us when we realize life has taken a different direction? Or that we have to change things we have grown comfortable with?

III. New Mission/New Life

- A. Ananias baptizes him
 1. Another surprise visit from Jesus, 10-16
 2. Surprised by what he is commanded to do
 3. Saul has also seen a vision of Ananias
 4. He will be God's chosen instrument to the Gentiles (15-16; 26:17-18)
 5. The healing and baptism take place immediately, 18

- B. Saul begins proclaiming that Jesus is the Son of God, 20, much to the chagrin of the Jews and the surprise of the Christians
 1. Gaps in time: 19, "for some days," 23, "when many days passed"
 2. Paul will speak later about a journey to Arabia, Gal. 1:17, and though we don't know exactly when that was, it seems to have been around this time
 3. 23, he escapes a plot against him
 4. In Jerusalem, he is like a leper, but Barnabas speaks up for him
 5. He spoke boldly and once again gets into a conflict, this time with the Greek-speaking Jews
 6. These conflicts will dog him the rest of his life
 7. Yet he doesn't whine about what God has ordained for him

Conclusion:

1. As so we have a great tale about one of the greatest conversions of the early church.
2. The church's greatest adversary has become one of its greatest advocates.
3. God also gave the church a period of rest and growth, 9:31, at least until the mission to the Gentiles, which Paul was called to, will begin
4. Though we will likely not "see the light" in so dramatic a fashion, it still shines for us to see and believe.
5. Saul changed (repented), and so must we.
6. He was baptized, and so must we be baptized.
7. He accepted what God wanted for him, though it may have been different from others.
8. We offer the light today to all who will see, believe, be baptized, and be faithful.
9. It still shines for all to see and believe.