

A NEW MAN

Acts 22:1-16

What a scene! On the stairs, midway between the temple court and the fortress, stood Paul in chains, his person showing the effects of the beating he had received. Surrounding him were Roman soldiers fully armed, and below him, a murderous mob who itched to get their hands upon him and tear him to pieces. Can't you see their up-turned faces of fury, and hear the rumblings of hate issuing from their unsanctified lips? Sensing their antagonism, and evil intentions, and his pain-racked body testifying of their diabolical design, he would here speak tenderly to them.

Facing the multitude, Paul beckoned his hand to the people and brought them to silence. Then in the Hebrew language, with which they were thoroughly acquainted, he delivered his defense. If Paul had been less wise, he would have used the Greek language, it being the one of culture. Instead, he appealed to their hearts as well as their heads by addressing them in their own mother tongue, the Hebrew. This had a soothing effect upon his listeners, for we are informed upon hearing that, "they kept the more silence" --all heckling having temporarily subsided.

Many times Paul had been in the courts, and many times he had been given an opportunity to speak for himself. Instead of defending himself as one normally would, he invariably told his experience on the Damascus road. It always had a most telling effect. It was better than any argument. It made witnesses forget to testify against him and made judges tremble on their benches, and even wicked rulers were all but persuaded to become Christians by hearing his experience.

I. Consider The Prisoner.

1. He was a man without political influence.
He did not have any friends at court or in any high position.
2. He was a man with an experience--a strange and electrifying experience. This experience was his refuge, his hope, his sole defense. An experience is the greatest part of Christianity. Witnesses who testify for the Lord must have an experience to tell.
3. He was a man who had the ear of God.
He may not have had influence with the court, but he had influence with God. This is better than to be able to sway the court. He was a preacher without a pulpit. His pulpit was a stairway to the pulpit. His audience was an infuriated mob. The music of his service was the curses of vicious criminals. The spirit of the meeting was one of hate, prejudice, ridicule, and bitterness.

II. Consider The Defense.

1. The spirit of it.
It was not done in the spirit of retaliation. Paul said, "Men, brethren, and fathers." Who could match that for kindness and courtesy? Christianity was magnified by such a spirit. His first word, you will note, was not "friends," for that would not have been true, and very likely would have provoked an outcry of protest on their part. So far as Paul was concerned, he was their friend, but his feeling was not reciprocated. Since his audience consisted predominantly of men, the term, "men," was a correct one. "Brethren," indicated their racial tie, was likewise a correct term. "Fathers," an expression of respect, was also an appropriate one.

2. The tactfulness of it.

With consummate skill he made contact with his audience in a way calculated to produce sympathy. He proceeded to tell them of his genealogy. He too was a Jew. While he was born in Tarsus, he had been educated in their city, Jerusalem, under the tutelage of Gamaliel, one of the greatest teachers of his day. He had been "taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the (Jewish) fathers." Paul then paid them a glowing compliment for being "zealous," and thus included them in his own class, "and (I) was zealous toward God, as ye all are this day."

To the Jews he proved himself one of them, well-born, well-trained, well-instructed, and well-behaved. To the Romans he showed himself free-born, superior to many of them, a devout supporter of the Caesar whom they obeyed. To the Gentiles, he declared himself to be their friend, a messenger sent from God with a message of life and liberty to everyone. To the few defeated Christians, he gave assurance that he knew their Christ in a personal experience and was ready to defend Him with his life.

3. The simplicity of it.

There was no attempt at oratory. There was no display of unnecessary noise. The cries of the mob could have drowned him out easily, but the forcefulness of his simplicity silenced them.

4. The truthfulness of it.

It was a straightforward story, one that could be verified by the people to whom he spoke. It was not artificial--it was historical. It was not theoretical--it was Scriptural. The Jews knew it well. There was a note of shame when he related his part in the death of Stephen, but it made the story of his conversion more real, more difficult, and more significant.

5. The tragedy of it.

There was the tragedy of having his whole life blighted by a wrong conception of things, by wrong teachings in early life. There was the tragedy of having to unlearn and undo so much in his life before he was ready to really live. There was the tragedy of the unforgettable part of his life--things that rose up out of the past to shame him.

Paul was born a religionist. He was a Jew, one of God's chosen people. He was a product of the best religion of his day. He was a religionist by birth, by nature, and by inheritance, yet he was not a Christian. He was a religionist without God and without hope. He was a religionist by zeal and enthusiasm. He was ready to die for his theory. He persecuted even to death any who dared to oppose his views about God and religion, but his zeal was no substitute for faith, for Christ, and for experience.

Christianity is miraculous. It is the work that cannot be done by one's self nor by any natural process. It is revolutionary. Paul's experience with Jesus on the road to Damascus completely transformed him. It remade his spirit and his life. He was never the same man again. Christianity is personal. Everything in it is personal, individual, and voluntary. Not one thing can be done by proxy, nor can it be done by force. One cannot know the Lord except by his own personal experience.

Paul said, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" This meant he had yielded all to the will of God. All arms had been stacked. All rebellion had ceased. All

was laid upon the altar for God. Paul arose in the night and was baptized. This was his first duty as a Christian.

III. Consider The Conversion Of Paul.

1. What Paul heard.

- (1) He heard a voice.
It was audible, but to him only.
- (2) He heard his own name called.
He could not escape the issue, which was as clear, definite, and personal as any issue that had ever come to him.
- (3) He had a firsthand introduction to Jesus Christ.
It was a holy meeting between a Saviour and a sinner.
- (4) He heard his sins openly denounced, and he was informed that in persecuting Christians he was literally persecuting Christ Himself.
- (5) He heard his duty clearly told and full interpretation as to what to do and how to behave himself and to what extent he should yield his life.

2. What Paul saw.

He saw a great light. It was brighter than the noonday sun. That light was the expression of the presence of God, who is the Giver of all light. It was a light that shut out all else in the life of Paul. It was so consuming that he had no eye, nor ear, nor interest for anything else beyond that light. That light blinded Paul to the world about him. He could no longer see its glory, nor its pride, nor its pomp, nor its pleasures. It blinded Paul to his own prejudices and preconceived opinions. It blinded Paul to his own greatness. It blinded him to his former companions. When he arose, he saw no man. Jesus only stood before him.

3. What Paul did.

- (1) He fell to the ground.
He was physically overcome.
- (2) He yielded to that light and to that voice.
Although it called him to reverse himself, he denounced all he had ever believed, and yielded to that irresistible power as the guiding voice of his life.
- (3) He was willing to follow it wherever it led him.
He never wavered from the high resolve of that will.

4. What Paul experienced.

- (1) Paul rediscovered himself.
His boasted Roman citizenship had been lost in a larger citizenship. He then and there swore allegiance to a new king and pledged full obedience to the dictates of a new Ruler.
- (2) Paul rediscovered truth.

He translated his vague ideas into living realities and found a new use for knowledge, dynamic personality, and dauntless spirit.

(3) Paul rediscovered the meaning of loyalty.

He discovered that there was no conflict between enthusiasm and common sense, between truth and duty. He found a new high level for emotion and dedicated his natural achievements to a new service.