

## Features of Service

Acts 9: 1-8; Acts 11: 27-30; Acts 13: 14-16; Acts 19: 8-12; Acts 20: 32-35; Acts 28: 1-5 Galatians 6: 11 & 17.

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These Scriptures refer to the service of the apostle Paul. You will have noticed that in each Scripture his hand is mentioned. We have spoken often together of hands being filled, and whilst the primary thought of the filling of the hands is service Godward, yet it would be true to say that the precious ingredients which fill our hands in service to God are also the ingredients which should fill our hands in service to men. We serve God in the sanctuary as we present to Him the appreciation which we have of Christ, and as serving in relation to the saints, we would surely desire to present to their hearts the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ. We read in Proverbs 29: 18, "where there is no vision, the people perish," and it would seem that no service can be fruitful in preserving the affections of the saints, unless the one who serves has had a vision. Paul is introduced, as Saul of Tarsus, as a man who had a vision, a vision of Christ in glory. He had a vision which, for the moment, blinded him to everything on earth, but which opened his heart, as well as his eyes, to the glory of that blessed Person at God's right hand. The glory of God stands related in a very unique way to the calling and to the commissioning of the apostle Paul. On two occasions we have the expression in Scripture "the God of glory." It is mentioned in Acts 7 in relation to the call of Abraham, and also in the 29th Psalm, If Psalm 29 is read carefully many details will be seen which have a moral bearing upon the call of the apostle Paul.

At the end of the chapter in which Stephen uses the expression "the God of glory," Saul of Tarsus is mentioned for the first time, and it would appear he himself received at that time an impression which remained with him. No one gives us the preciousness of the title "Lord Jesus" as Paul does. It would seem to be something peculiar in the way of possession to the assembly, Lord Jesus, speaking of His supremacy, and also of the charm of His holy Person. Paul heard that expression first from the lips of the martyr Stephen. He himself refers to that incident later, showing that it left an impression upon him. He was *called* by glory, and as he moved towards Damascus the glory of that blessed Man shone into his heart. The word used there for shining is the same word that is used in Luke's gospel, when it speaks of the lightning shining from one end of the earth to the other, and it would seem to suggest that the whole pathway of Saul from that moment was trodden in the light that shone from the face of a glorified Christ.

This is one of the essentials to service; this is what we each need, the vision of a blessed Man at God's right hand; and unless we have that vision in our souls, we shall not serve in freshness or in power.

The first feature we notice in relation to the hand of Paul (or, Saul) is that it was brought under the control of another; he was led by the hand. This man, whose hand had been furnished with the authority of the Sanhedrim in opposition to the Name of Christ, is now seen as subjugated to the will of another; an important matter for us to observe. If we are to serve we must know what it is to have our wills subdued. We cannot serve well with a weakened appreciation of the Lordship of Christ. We need to see the moral bearing of these incidents in the history of the apostle. Here is a man who was previously marked by violent opposition to Christ, now "led by the hand." The hand is the symbol of service. In Mark, the gospel of the perfect Servant, we read in verse 41 of the 1st chapter that "Jesus,

moved with compassion, put forth His hand." In that same gospel we are told that "He hath done all things well." How blessed to be controlled in our service by the One whose every act brought blessing to men and praise to God.

As led by the hand Saul is found in "the street which is called *straight*, and . . . in the house of Judas." This is of deep significance. The word used for "straight" is that which is used in Matthew, Mark and Luke as referring to the way of the Lord, and at the commencement of his service the apostle is found in a pathway of righteousness and of truth, a pathway in which the crookedness of the mind of man has no place.

It was a pathway, too, which would yield for the praise of God, as the name of Judas (or, Judah) suggests. Here this chosen vessel is visited by Ananias (the grace of God). He was later to learn the precious link of grace with his apostleship, (Romans 1: 5), and also that that same grace was sufficient for all his needs. From the very commencement of his service his heart was captivated in relation to the excellency of the Person of Christ, and "straightway he preached . . . that He is the Son of God."

In Acts 11 Agabus the prophet tells of an approaching dearth, and the saints, affected by the prophetic word "determined to send relief unto the brethren." They sent it by the hand (the letter "s" should not be there), of Barnabas and Saul. Later on we read Paul and Barnabas, but here in the commencement of his service, he is content to be named last. It is a good thing not to seek pre-eminence in our service. There is a Secundus in Scripture; a Tertius; and a Quartus, but the first place must be Christ's. Content with the second place, Saul is moving in fellowship with Barnabas. The service here was in relation to temporal matters, but one has discerned that those who minister spiritual help to the saints are those not moving on independent lines, but in fellowship with their brethren. I grant you fully and simply that our service is individual, it is to our own Master we stand or fall, but I would not like to undertake any service in which I felt I had not the fellowship of my brethren.

In our next Scripture we find Paul, his will subdued and he in fellowship with his brethren, responding to the expressed desire for a "word of exhortation." The setting of the incident does not suggest that *he went to give a word*, but the occasion itself brought to light the fact that he had the word and the substance for the moment. Notice, beloved, that he does not refer to himself individually in this word; he speaks of *God*, His movements towards the people, and His movements and testimony regarding Christ. There were those who opposed the word, but verses 42, 43, 44, 48, 49, and 52, of Acts 13 show the evident blessing and encouragement which resulted from it. Are there not important lessons for us in these incidents? How pleasurable to God and how helpful to the saints would be the service of one marked by these features.

In Acts 19 we read, "God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul," or as the New Translation, "And God wrought no ordinary miracles by the hands of Paul." We would expect something specially given by God from such a servant. The very atmosphere he brought in was so spiritual that the evil spirits *went out*. The words "of them" have been added. It was not so much that the evil spirits went out from those in whom they had taken their abode, but they *went out*. The atmosphere that Paul brought in in his ministry was of such power that there was no room for the activities of the devil. Let us each seek help that our service may be so marked by the power of the Holy Spirit that God might use it for the exaltation of Christ in the affections of His people, and hence for the defeat of the efforts of the enemy.

In Acts 20, Paul in speaking to the elders of Ephesus, recounts the features of his ministry amongst them. He had testified "both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ." He had testified, too, of "the gospel of the grace of God;" he had

gone among them "preaching the kingdom of God," and he had declared to them "all the counsel of God." What a universal character there was in his ministry! But Paul is not content only to speak of these things, he could say "Yea, ye yourselves know, that *these hands* have ministered . . . to them that were with me. I have *shewed* you all things." His example was to affect their "labouring" — and in their service, as in his own, there was to be a reflection of the love of Christ as they remembered "the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said, It is more blessed to give than to receive." We are not told when, or where, these words were said by the Lord, but they are a wonderful epitome of His whole service, in which He so blessedly revealed the heart of the giving God. When asked by the Jews, "Who art Thou?" the Lord answered "altogether that which I say unto you," (John 8: 25, New Trans.). What grace was given to the apostle as he referred to the knowledge these elders had of his actions being in accord with his ministry. Again he could write to his son Timothy, "Thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life," etc. (2 Timothy 3: 10).

We may be assured that Satan will oppose such a servant and such service. The concentrated fury of the enemy is seen in the viper as it fastens on the *hand* of Paul. Satan hated those hands; hands that would remind us in their service of Christ will be hated by the enemy. But those hands had been engaged in a service of lowliness and love to the brethren (following again the example of his Lord as seen in John 13) and the attack of the enemy was negatived in the very atmosphere of warmth that his service had produced.

The enemy says, "I cannot kill him, I will put him in prison," and we have received more ministry from the hand of Paul in prison, than ever before. Think of those choice epistles, Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians; of that wonderful letter to the servant who was to follow him. Paul, about to be emptied, says, "the time of my release is come," (2 Timothy 4: 6, New Trans.). A vessel about to be emptied, and he says to Timothy, "fill up the full measure of thy ministry." How much we should value the choiceness of the ministry of this great servant of Christ — "The prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles," (Eph. 3: 1).

In our last Scripture Paul says "From henceforth let no man trouble me; for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus." The word "marks" is really "stigma." It is an incision made upon the body to indicate the ownership of a master. The Hebrew servant in Exodus 21, as having the mark of the awl in his ear, became a servant "for ever." The Lord said of Paul, "I will shew him how great things he must suffer for My Name's sake," (Acts 9: 16). He becomes the willing bondman of Christ, completely devoted to His interests, and content to bear His reproach in this world.

Beloved brethren, "Unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for His sake." Every bit of true service will involve suffering, for it will involve displacement of the flesh, and it will involve the opposition of every influence in this world which is against Christ. In the 11th chapter of Matthew, when the cities in which His great works had been done had all turned from Him, Jesus said "I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth . . . Even so, Father; for so it seemed good in Thy sight."

As seeking, in our measure, to serve in lowliness and in fidelity to Christ, let us be content with the consciousness of divine approval, in the joy of which we shall, in some small degree, be enabled to bear the reproach attached by men to the Name of Him whom we serve.